

Emotional Constriction is a simplistic way I have a viewing our range of feelings and what happens when we emotionally shut down.

Imagine your feelings as if they are along a number line, like this:

-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6 +7 +8 +9 +10

Imagine that the feelings on the left are those that you feel uncomfortable with (“negative”) and those on the right as feelings that you really enjoy (“positive”). If you think of intense anger as a -10 (because you don’t like it, or it’s been trained out of you) and you constrict down to a -9 in order to shut down the experience of it, what happens is that you also eliminate your ability to feel pleasurable experiences on the far right, because the far right now has a maximum of +9. So, let’s say you also cut out some sadness you feel discomfort with, then suddenly, your ability to feel good constricts down to a +8, and your life experience is now this:

-8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6 +7 +8

If you keep this up, you get neutral, numb, constricted, and powerless.

The secret to remaining healthy and not constricted is to allow for all experiences of all feelings at all levels. As long as you are not harming yourself or someone else, you can avoid constriction -- on both ends.

© 2002 Russell Wilkie, MFT