



North Raleigh Community Church
DOWNTOWN

SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-DISCLOSURE WORKSHEET

RETHINKING THE ANCIENT PRACTICE OF CONFESSION

To Know Thyself . . . Is the Beginning of Wisdom
- Socrates

SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-DISCLOSURE WORKSHEET

INTRODUCTION

This worksheet will guide you through the ancient practice of confession. Since the word, “confession” has picked up so much baggage through the centuries, a quick definition: It is the rigorous practice of understanding ourselves, and then sharing what we learn with a trusted spiritual friend (*Part 5 below will explain a bit more about spiritual friendship*).

A few introductory notes...

1. Guard confidentiality carefully. It is essential for this process to unfold.
2. This is a difficult practice. It rewires deeply established brain patterns. Give yourself time. Start with small episodes to help you learn the practice. We’re rewiring our brains!
3. The *Community Care* and *Conflict Resolution Teams* have been doing the practice a while. If you get stuck on the worksheet, text or leave a voicemail at **919-762-6722**. Include your name, contact info, and the word “worksheet.” Team members will share their experience with the process.

PART 1: WHAT HAPPENED?

Choose A Single, Afflictive-Emotion Episode

- Q. What happened that caused your afflictive emotion?
Keep it to a single episode that happened on a day, at a time. Be **specific and objective**.
Recount the episode in 2-3 sentences, as if you were a third party witnessing it.
- A. *I was in a meeting at work with two supervisors present. A colleague implied that I do not do my job well. She implied that I knowingly put children’s health and well-being at risk due to my incompetence.*

PART 2: THE STORY I TELL MYSELF (DATA DUMP)

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

- Q. What does this episode mean to me?
What is the story I am telling myself about it?
Why is it about this episode that has me worked up?
- A. *I tell myself a story that my work colleague thinks I would avoid work – even if by doing so, I would harm children.*

Also, now not only does she believe it, but now that she has stated it out loud, my other colleagues might believe it. My boss (who also heard her statement) might also believe it.

I am telling myself the story that this woman could cause the people I work with and for, to lose respect or trust for me. They could begin to believe I am not competent or capable.

- Q. Presumably, since the emotion is afflictive, your story is that something bad happened. Carefully explore what is bad about the situation.
Did someone do something bad to you? If so, why do you think so?
What motive or intent are you assigning to this person?
Or, did *you* do something bad? Did *you* create this bad circumstance?
If so, why? What were the forces in play? The reasons? The causes?
- A. *Yes! I tell myself a story that this person did do something bad to me. She maligned my reputation with my work colleagues and boss. She planted a seed in their minds, that I do not do my job well. She made me look like a bad person in front of people I really want to impress.*

Even worse, she made me doubt myself, and question whether I am doing a good job protecting children.

I am right now, telling myself a story that her motive is to deflect attention from her own incompetence and her own unwillingness to do her job. I don't know that is true, but it's my current interior story.

- Q. In the story you tell yourself, what further bad thing(s) will this episode cause you?
Now that this has happened, what future threat does it pose?
To your environment? Your prospects? Your relationships?
- A. *I am telling myself that there is no a risk that my colleagues will question if I*

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

am able to do a good job. I tell myself they are now (or could be) wondering if I am a valuable asset in our company. I tell myself they are, or will question if I am a good person. This may affect my standing at the company. It may affect future assignments that might go to others instead of me.

Her comment has also brought up self-doubts. This uses up system bandwidth I could be applying to the job. Instead of thinking more creatively about our clients, my brain is spinning with questions about whether or not I'm doing a good job. Am I trying my hardest? Are children at risk because I am not thorough enough?

My place in our company is/could be threatened, I tell myself. My reputation is/could be diminished. I might not have as promising a future as I once had (again, I tell myself).

- Q. How is *this* bad thing like some *other* bad thing that has happened in your past? Does another similar experience come to mind? Another episode like this one? Remember it. Picture it. What parts are similar to this episode? What parts are different?
- A. *This episode reminds me of another, very similar episode. At a previous job, a colleague (who, I tell myself was also insecure) regularly told people behind my back that I didn't know what I was doing. I'm assuming this made herself look stronger than me. I didn't know how to respond to these people because I wanted to be liked. I didn't want to be seen as self-defensive, but neither did I want her accusations to stand. I was kind of frozen.*

But at a deeper level, this episode brings back memories of childhood bullies, other children saying I was stupid or ugly.

Also, as I've been reflecting on my current afflictive emotion, memories have come up of my mother often telling me, when I had a different opinion from hers, that I had hurt her (implication: "you are bad").

I guess the connection, is that when I was growing up, I somehow I got the idea that it was my job to be careful about, and to protect other people's feelings, but that I should keep my own in second place. I began to tell myself early on, that it was my job to protect Mom's feelings (she would withhold affection if I didn't).

Having my own feelings hurt, while at the same time taking care of others, was to be taken in stride, taken as normal. The story of my diminished

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

importance became “just the way things are.”

- Q. Does this episode affect your sense of personal empowerment? If so, how?
Does it diminish the control you need to make your life work? If so, how?
Does it make you feel weak? Powerless? Impotent? If so, how?
- A. *I’ve been telling myself, that the reason my co-worker implied I don’t do my job well is because she is insecure about her abilities. I’ve been telling myself she suffers from such fear and anxiety she is willing to throw me under the bus to protect herself. I’ve seen her avoid work. I’ve seen her create elaborate excuses to do so.*

I really do think she is doing this to deflect attention from her own shortcomings. I realized when I started to think this through, that she does other things as well. She is often looking for a way to undermine me. When something goes wrong at work, she tries to involve me, even if I’m not involved. If she has information I need to do my job, she hides it away rather than sharing it with me.

I think her intent is to make me look weak.

So yes, this episode does diminish my personal sense of power. I don’t have the control I need to flourish on my job. I have a constant threat to my well-being lurking in the wings, just waiting to attack.

This too, is part of the story I tell myself.

- Q. Does this episode leave you feeling less secure? Less safe? If so, how?
Do you feel more vulnerable than you did? If so, how?
Do you feel more in danger than you did? If so, how?
- A. *I think the reason I’m feeling insecure, is that I worry about being unable to address things I don’t know about. If I don’t know what she is saying behind my back, I don’t know how to counter it and guard my reputation. If she conceals things I need to know, I can’t do my job.*

And (the story I tell myself), if I’m not doing my job well, my future, my security, even my value (the next question) are at threatened.

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

- Q. Does this episode diminish your sense of worth? If so, how?
Do you feel you need to fight harder to feel your own goodness? If so, how?
Is guilt in play? Shame? Disappointment in yourself? Again, how?

- A. *When my co-worker undermines me, my job performance suffers.*

When my job performance suffers, I don't help people as well as I could (I'm in a helping profession).

When I can't help people, (my personality's strategy for feeling worth and value), then of course, my sense of worth is diminished, and my sense of what people think of my worth is diminished.

A common trap I fall into, is to define my worth by how well I'm helping others. So yeah! This woman is messing with my inner strategy for boosting my self-worth.

(Even as I write that, I already see the "is it true" question coming. No. It's not true that my worth as a human being is tied to my ability to help people.)

- Q. When you strip this current episode down, what is the thing that most disrupts your inner peace, your sense of well-being?

- A. *Maybe I am not good at my job! That's a big fear.*

Maybe I don't protect children well.

Or, maybe I'm just too weak to stand up to this she-bitch, confront her, and defend myself.

(All three of those stories lurking in my mind give me plenty of fuel for self-condemnation. Damn! I hate seeing myself doing that.)

PART 2: THE STORY I TELL MYSELF (SUMMARY STATEMENT)

High-Level Summary

- Q. Try to put into words, the essence of the story you tell yourself.
Remove some of the detail. Try to see the crux of the story.
Use more abstract words – try to capture the heart of the story.

NOTE: This part is difficult when we first start. It may help to check out examples in the case studies on our website. Find them on the "self-awareness, self-disclosure" page under the "resources" tab.

High-Level Summary

- A. *I am telling myself an unconscious story...
That am only as valuable and worthy of love as my ability to help people.
I am only valuable and worthy of love when people like and respect me.
This woman is undercutting my ability to be valuable and worthy of love.
(Again, I can already pick apart the “is it true” part.)*

PART 3: UNEARTHING THE FEELINGS I FEEL

Naming the Emotions this Episode Has Evoked

Our culture has trained us to ignore emotion. Consequently, we tend to settle for “mad,” “irritated,” or “frustrated” to describe afflictive emotions. However, anger is often a meta-emotion – a kind of “circuit-breaker” emotion. When an underlying feeling has been ignored long enough, it eventually bubbles up, and “breaks the circuit,” surging up inside us, and coming out as anger.

To help us relearn the subtle feelings that register in our bodies, we use a list of feeling words. Look over the appendix at the end of this worksheet, or one of the several resources online.

Feeling our feelings – and then wrestling them up from our guts and putting them into words... This is hard work. So give yourself time. Don’t hurry. Talk it over with a trusted spiritual friend.

- Q. What emotions did you feel?

Read through a comprehensive list of feeling words. When one of the words nudges you, write it down. You needn’t understand why it nudged you, just list it.

Then go over your list word by word. Why did that word ping you?
Does it capture what you are feeling/felt? Does it evoke a related word?

Again, take your time. We’re relearning to feel our feelings.

- A. *I feel inadequate. Either I don’t do my job well...
or, I don’t defend myself against this woman sufficiently.
Either way, my work is seen as insufficient, my self-defense abilities are
insufficient. Inadequacy feelings have been surging up.*
- I feel humiliated. My boss and co-workers are in the room when this woman
accuses me. Part of me has to assume they believe her. So I feel ashamed that
they would believe I haven’t done my best work.*
- I feel threatened. If this woman is believed by others, I may lose opportunity
and standing in my company. Goodness! I could lose my job.*
- If I respond to her accusations the wrong way (too strong, not strong enough)*

Naming the Emotions this Episode Has Evoked

I could lose standing in the company. If I defend myself too aggressively, people may think I'm not a team player, or that I don't want to grow. If I don't defend myself aggressively enough, people may think I'm weak, or may believe I'm inadequate. It's a hard balance to hit, and I fear there is no way to win.

I feel disrespected. I work harder than most – certainly harder than this woman. I am very good at my job – certainly better than this woman. However, her undercutting words don't give me the respect I deserve for my hard work, and the good work I do.

(But I had to dig pretty deeply to find that, because on top of that, there are very powerful feelings of shame and inadequacy.)

I feel slandered. That one is obvious. The woman is a lying %\$#@%! (smile).

- Q.** Now, go over your list again and explore the link between each feeling you listed, and the story you tell yourself (part 2). How did you get from your story – to that feeling?"

Often, we can't find the link. Which doesn't mean the emotion isn't valid. More likely, it means we haven't found the deepest version of story we tell ourselves. It invites more work on our story.

Assuming the emotion on your list is valid, begin to backfill your story. What story are you telling yourself about this episode – that produces this feeling, this emotion?

- A.** *Done.*

PART 4: HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PATTERN BEFORE?

Self-Awareness and Recurring Life Themes

- Q.** *When we notice patterns in our thoughts and feelings, it gives a window into the unseen inner habits that run our lives. Thoughts are just thoughts. Feelings are just feelings. But we experience them as the one-and-true-truth about all reality. But when we see the scripts that run our daily lives, we begin to see their power over us. Simply seeing the patterns helps us dissociate from them. Seeing them, helps us step back from the power they hold over us.*

So...

Have you seen this pattern before?

If you remove the person or circumstance that precipitated this episode...

- Have you told yourself this story before?
- Have you felt un-empowered like this before? Insecure? Afraid of the same kinds of things?

Self-Awareness and Recurring Life Themes

- Have you felt invisible this way before? Or less important? Or un-wonderful?
- This configuration of thoughts, stories, and feelings . . . Have you seen it before?
- When? Where? In what circumstances?

- A. *As long as I can remember, I've struggled responding effectively to mistreatment. When I was a kid, my grandmother told me to ignore it, that it shouldn't bother me (but it does). My mother told me to tell people about my hurt my feelings, hoping they would care (they don't).*

When she mistreated me herself, if I fought back, she withdrew affection to punish me. (Another strategy that doesn't work.)

My default pattern has been just not to defend myself. Instead I work what works. My personality is really good at pleasing other people. So I double down on that.

But that approach doesn't always work. In this situation, it would be giving away my own power. If I were to agree with this woman, she would be in the power position, and I would be weak. She isn't going to like. She isn't going to respect me. I can't use my "kill them with kindness" strategy here.

- Q. What title would you give the pattern?
If you take out the specifics of this episode, what would be a fitting name for the pattern?

NOTE: This part is tough too, but assigning labels to our unconscious patterns helps distance us from them. And again, if you'd like help, text or voicemail a team member (919-762-6722).

- A. *A title for this pattern...*

I am only worthy of love when I win the approval and respect of others. since I can't always do that, sometimes, I'm condemned to not be loved or approved. That sucks.

In fact, that would be a better title: "This sucks!"

PART 5: SELF-DISCLOSURE (TELLING YOUR STORY)

Sharing Your Self-Awareness with a Spiritual Friend

“Spiritual Friend” is an ancient term, full of meaning. It speaks of partners, intimately sharing the spiritual journey. Together, we create safe space for one another, to be exactly where we are on the journey, and to help each other keep stretching forward.

Spiritual friends hold one another’s self-disclosure in highest confidence. We do not speak about what has been shared with us. We just do not. Only in the case of imminent self-harm or harm to others, do we break a confidence, and even then, we inform one another before we do.

Doing this practice together is a powerful way to build a spiritual friendship. We start out tentatively. We may sanitize our stories until we begin to feel safe together. But over time, doing the practice forms deep, abiding, safe, and strong spiritual friendships.

Advice-giving is a normal and healthy part of friendship. However, when doing this practice, we don’t advise one another. We don’t try to fix one another’s problems. No. We simply listen and ask questions for clarification. We tell our partner what we heard, so they can hear their own words back. We simply understand, and create space for self-awareness, self-understanding.

Q. Who will be your spiritual friend to share this practice with?

*NOTE: While you are building your network of spiritual friends, our Community Care and Conflict Resolution Teams would love to do the practice with you. Text or voicemail **919-762-6722**.*

A. *Click or tap here to enter text.*

PART 5: SELF-DISCLOSURE (CHALLENGING YOUR STORY)

Is It True? Is It Helpful? Is It Necessary?

One of the gifts we give one another in spiritual friendship is the gift of not being inside one another's heads. When I hear your story, and you hear mine, we hear it from outside the emotion, and history, and fear, and hurt, and insecurity the episode has evoked.

Because we see one another's episodes differently we can ask probing questions that inform this last part of the practice – challenging the stories we tell ourselves. We do that with three questions.

Q. Is it true?

Is the story you tell yourself – the essential part of it – the part that is engrained in habit...

Is it true?

Are there other ways you could tell the story? Other truths that mitigate your truth?

A. *After meeting with my spiritual friend...*

It is not true that my worth as a human being depends on my ability to win the approval of others. It sure feels like that. It is a very old, and very well-established thought/emotion habit in my head. It's a story I've been telling myself for a very long time. I've been feeling the feelings that come with that story for a very long time.

But, I can see, it is not the truest truth.

Even though it feels true, I can see that human worth is just a given. I can see that when I measure the worth of my own children.

I can see that human value is just granted. It is a non-negotiable. I really do believe that.

Clearly, there is also a part of me that doesn't believe it (thus the afflictive emotion I'm having over this episode), but when I stand back and reflect on the truest nature of things, I really do believe it.

Human worth is not dependent on the approval and validation of others.

Q. Is it helpful?

When your thoughts and emotions follow these well-worn patterns... when your beliefs, and values, and inner narratives kick in...

Is it helping you? Is producing peace and well-being?

Is It True? Is It Helpful? Is It Necessary?

Is it deepening your relationships? Expanding your connection to others and to the Divine?

- A. *It sure isn't bringing me any peace, telling myself that I have to win people's approval to be good.*

I expend all my energy earning validation and approval so I can feel worthy of love, but damn! It's exhausting! There's not time or energy left over after all that to learn to know and connect with my deeper, truest self.

- Q. Is it necessary?

Do you *have* to tell yourself this story? Do you *have* to have the emotional reaction you do? Does your story contain such inviolate truth that you *must* continue telling it?

Because if not, maybe the next time a trigger like this comes up, you could challenge the pattern. You could recognize that thoughts are just thoughts, and feelings are just feelings. They are not the whole truth. If it's not necessary, maybe you could explore *other* interpretations, *other* stories, *other* truths, *other* responses.

- A. *I don't have to tell myself my story. I could have an alternate reaction. I could not take what she says personally, realize the conflict is within herself, and defend myself without being caught up in my own ego emotion.*

I see that I could do that... but given how deeply engrained my old habits are, I can't yet do that. Hopefully, the longer I do this self-awareness process, the sooner I'll be able to see – and react – differently.

PART 5: SELF-DISCLOSURE (WHAT DID YOU SEE YOU HADN'T SEEN?)

This Hurts! Why Do It?

This practice isn't about directly fixing our problems. In the long run, it is powerfully transformative, but sometimes it feels like we scrape off a scab but don't bandage it afterward.

The power of this process is in seeing the things that usually remain hidden under the surface of our awareness. The power of this practice isn't that it makes us feel better afterward. Sometimes it doesn't. But seeing things once hidden – this changes us. When we become aware of how

This Hurts! Why Do It?

powerfully our thought and emotion habits dictate our lives, we are prepared to question those automatic responses as they shape our responses in the future.

- Q.** Make sure your spiritual partner asks this question...
What have you seen in telling your story, that you had not seen before?
And having seen it, how could you live differently the next time you have this afflictive emotion?

- A.** *I have seen how much I try to earn the affection and validation of others by performing well at their expectations.*

I see how that prevents me from being aware of my own needs and desires and separates me from the love that is already there.

As Doug says, hopefully forewarned . . . is forearmed.

EPILOGUE: AFFIRMATION**Affirming what is Good**

As you realize by now, this practice is hard work. At the close of our time together, it is a good idea for the listener to note something good that emerged. Maybe an insight, perhaps a part of the story that wasn't easy to surface, perhaps simply the supportive role of community.

We look for the good – and acknowledge it together before we go.

APPENDIX: AFFLICTIVE EMOTION WORDS

Abandoned Abused Accused Accusing Afraid	Cautious Cheapened Cheated Childish Claustrophobic	Devalued Diminished Disappointed Disapproved of Disapproving	Fragmented Friendless Frustrated Grief Groveling	Judgmental Kept out Lacking Lazy Loathed Loathing	Pressured Punished Pushed away Regretful Rejected
Alienated Alienated Alone Ambivalent Ambushed	Clingy Clumsy Codependent Coerced Cold-hearted	Discarded Disdained Disempowered Disenfranchised Disgraced	Guilt Hard-hearted Hated Hateful Heavy	Lonely Longing Lorded over Manipulated Manipulative Mediocre	Rejecting Replaced Resentful Restless Revulsion
Anguished Anxious Ashamed Avoided Awkward	Common Concern Confused Conquered Constricted	Disgusted Disillusioned Disliked Disoriented Disowned	Helpless Henpecked Hindered Hopeless Humiliated	Melancholy Mistreated Mistrusted Mistrustful Misunderstood	Run over Sad Scapegoated Scared Scoffed at
Badgered Banished Beaten down Begrudged Behind	Contempt Contemptible Cowardly Criticized Cursed	Disrespected Distrusting Dominated Dread Dreading	Hurt Ignored Impotent Impugned Inadequate	Nagged Needy Negated Neglected Nervous	Scolded Scorned Scornful Self-conscious Set up
Beholden Below average Bested Betrayed Bitter	Damned Dead inside Deceived Deceptive Defeated	Emasculated Embarrassed Empty Envious Exasperated	Incompetent Indifferent Inept Inferior Insecure	Numb Outnumbered Outraged Overcome Overloaded	Shamed Slandered Sorrow Spiteful Stifled
Blamed Bored Bossed-around Boxed-in Boxed-out	Defenseless Defiant Deficient Demonized Dependent	Exhausted Exiled Exploited Fearful Fearful	Insufficient Insulted Invalidated Invisible Irresponsible	Overwhelmed Overworked Panicked Passed over Picked on	Stupid Subordinated Subservient Suspicious Uncertain
Browbeaten Burdened Burdensome Caged	Depressed Despair Desperate Despised	Floundering Foolish Forced Fragile	Isolated Jealous Jealous Judged	Pitiful Pity Powerless Powerless	Uncomfortable Vengeful Weary Worried

