

## *Interview with Celia Rabberg, author of Do You Get the Feeling*

### **Do You Get the Feeling?: A handbook to facilitate emotional awareness and communication 150 ways to express yourself**

*Celia Rabberg*

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Reviewed by *Paige Lovitt* for Reader Views (3/08)

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to be joined by Celia Rabberg, who is here to talk about her new book "Do You Get the Feeling? A Handbook to Facilitate Emotional Awareness And Communication. 150 Ways to Express Yourself."

*Celia Rabberg is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) who resides in Brooklyn, NY. She works as a psychotherapist in clinical and private practice, has taught in undergraduate psychology programs and high school. She enjoys the unique blend of working in the mental health and educational professions. Celia's experiences with children, teens and adults of varied backgrounds have cultivated her finely tuned sensitivity to the inner psyche. In addition to her clinical practice and teaching, Celia spends her free time working with art and music as ancillary mediums of self-expression. The book, "Do You Get The Feeling?" is the first of Celia Rabberg's literary tools for the mental health practitioner and educator.*

**Tyler:** Welcome, Celia. I'm glad you could join me today. To begin, will you tell us just what made you decide to write "Do You Get the Feeling?"

**Celia:** Truthfully, this book has a story behind it. The original version of this book was written about 7 years ago. I actually wrote it when I was job searching. I had graduated from Graduate School of Social Work in May, 2000. I had such a hard time finding a job and had contracted with some agencies, only to discover that they were audited and shut down. So I was pretty despondent. I was literally walking the streets, waiting for an interview. Seven months into the job-search, I told myself, "You are not going into the depression hole! Write a book in your spare time! Do something with yourself!" I began writing. The book was originally 99 Ways To Express Yourself. At a later point, I added more write-ups, upon suggestions of friends and colleagues. The first version was based on my own self-created dead-line. I told myself that I had to be done by the first day I started a new job. I began in December, 2000, was interviewed in January for my present job, and was done by my first day of work, February 27, 2001. I felt great—to have a job, and to have completed a book.

My first experimentation with this was a young woman whom I worked with. She would sit in complete silence, bottled up and unable to answer the most basic of questions. It was frightening to see. I began to bring her some pictures and write-ups of feelings. It gave her a language to open conversation. It gave her words to express herself to her husband.

Then I knew I was onto something. I knew I had to carry the project through.

Sometimes, when I speak to someone who is really depressed and hopeless, or jobless, I hold up the book and say, "This is testimony to someone who has been there and felt that. Don't give up on yourself. Use your time that you have. Make something out of your situation."

**Tyler:** You divide the book, or at least our emotions, into 150 sections subdivided into 32 different groups of emotions. Will you explain a little bit about how you came up with these categories or divisions?

**Celia:** Originally, I just wrote and wrote about every feeling that I or my friends could think of. But as I honed and toned the book, I realized that there were so many feelings, you couldn't find anything without a system. It got confusing and overwhelming to locate the feeling among 149 others. So this system has many tricks. It's colorful, it's pictorial, and it's numbered in groups and write-ups. The groups are very carefully laid out. I placed painful, negative feelings close by to nurturing, positive feelings. I was concerned that someone reading this book without a professional nearby would get so angry or down, they might do something foolish. I wanted the help, the antidote close enough for the reader to follow. You will note that in each group, the write-ups get more and more intense. That helps the reader identify just how strong or severe the feeling is.

Some people don't even do the reading – they just go straight to the pictures. For them, the faces alone speak thousands of untold feelings!

**Tyler:** How will using this book help a person learn to express his or her emotions?

**Celia:** When times are good, it's easy just to say, "I feel happy today." Or, "I appreciate you." Or, "I'm proud of myself." Often, when we are down, we lose our words. From observing other people, I notice that negative feelings such as anger, self-rejection, fear and depression get confused and all tangled up as one. It's in those moments that this book breaks down the emotion for you. It helps you unmask the root of your feelings and understand where all the sadness or anger is coming from. That is really emancipating to people. It is also an amazing way to change your feelings and visualize a hopeful future.

**Tyler:** Celia, a minute ago you mentioned the write-ups in the book. Will you explain more about what you mean by "write-up" and give us an example of one?

**Celia:** I thought to myself, how would a feeling feel like? What could it be compared to? What sounds, smells or physical sensations are associated with it? Mix a blend of metaphors, onomatopoeia, euphemisms and you get a feelings write-up.

For example, Selfish is the guy snoring in his sleep, Disappointed is the image of the ice-cream that melted on a hot day, Helpless is the scarecrow blowing in the wind with all his straw hanging out, and so on...

The language is very real, as if you could hear yourself saying it. Here's a sample:

"Annoyed":  
I am soooo  
Hhhhhh!  
This is the most nerve-wracking  
Frustrating  
Annoying  
Bureaucratic thing to happen  
What am I wasting my time  
Killing myself to meet deadlines  
Standards  
Plans that capsized  
Why can't something go smoothly  
Instead of  
Getting stuck in all this red tape...

Or: "Fragile":  
Be careful!  
It you push me too far  
I might  
Crumble  
Break  
Disintegrate  
Shatter into smithereens  
Melt into a puddle on the floor

Try this one: Group 8: “Cheap”: Close your eyes and remember the last time you felt embarrassed or inadequate:  
Ugh!  
This is so not worth it  
Cheap  
Like that paper bag  
With hot, oily fast-food  
Stuffed into  
Some makeshift  
Plastic junk  
Soggy  
Full of holes  
Dripping and  
Disintegrating  
Leaving behind a wet trail  
As I walked  
I hurried home  
Ashamed of the  
Torn mass  
Dirty hands that attempted to  
Salvage  
My supper  
My pride.

Sometimes I feel  
Like that  
Paper bag.

I like that one. I just see the oil dripping out on the street and the bag ripping. It goes well with feeling dumb or cheap and out of place.

**Tyler:** On your website, you refer to “Do You Get the Feeling?” as a recipe book for emotions. Why would you equate it with a recipe book?

**Celia:** It’s kind of, follow the table of contents or the CBT exercises and land on your page. It’s the ingredients of how a feeling feels put down in words or images and metaphors. It’s words ready to go.

**Tyler:** Celia, will you explain to us how the book is based in cognitive behavior therapy?

**Celia:** CBT, or cognitive behavioral therapy, is the skill of taking a person’s negative or irrational thoughts, sorting them through, and reconstructing or replacing them with positive thoughts. It also involves a behavioral piece, whereby doing exercises or practice in real-life and seeing success, you naturally think and feel different about yourself as a whole.

I would say that all therapists use cognitive restructuring at some point during the therapeutic process. It’s impossible to arrive at change or improved mood unless you’ve cleaned out a person’s distorted feelings and thought patterns.

This book, in particular, enhances a CBT session, because the therapist can stop a client and say, “Hey, what exactly are you thinking and feeling?” They can read out loud the write-ups, discuss, evaluate and improve those feelings and thoughts by moving to reconciliatory feelings pages. Besides, sometimes, CBT alone can be rigid and even boring. This book is never boring! Honestly, it wakes up the therapist, not only the client!

**Tyler:** For example, let’s say a boy wants to ask a girl out, but he is afraid that she will laugh at him and turn him down. How would your book help this young man to express his emotions?

**Celia:** Great question. I presented this exact scenario at a recent training with therapists for use of the handbook. We had a great time with this poor fellow. I would say that his core issue is fear of rejection, of being unloved by

this girl because he isn't going to ask her out in the "perfect words etc." He's also afraid to be abandoned, all alone, have to go solo and start all over again etc. But let's choose the root of rejection, which is a form of fear.

So first, we would identify the primary feelings of worry and nervousness. We might read those write-ups, but that's not helpful. This is because worry masks the underlying feelings of fear. I would guide the fellow to read out loud some selections from the group on Fear. The analogies are pretty funny and the language (such as the description of the imagined monster looming in front of him) might actually make him laugh at himself and his overdrawn cowardliness. Laughing is great. That usually eases up the tension and releases the feelings of nervousness.

Then, I would talk not so much about what she might do, but rather, prepare him for either rejection or acceptance by focusing on the need to love HIMSELF in his imperfect way. After all, she has to agree to go out with this coward, so he's expecting HER to love him for being a chicken! I would move him to the group, Loving and read out loud "Loving I." It would help to have him read it out loud to himself and put in I and Me as pronouns. The image of a well-worn, wrinkled but beloved picture is a touching and common symbol of legacy and family. I think it would help him like himself and his "beauty marks" a bit more. It might boost his courage to go and try his best to suggest a date to the lovely gal.

At the end of session, I might tell him to create a sentence with this new positive feeling such as "Even though I might be scared to ask this girl out, I will love (accept) myself for who I am." Or, "Even though I am not perfect, there is a lot in me that she can love." I might also send him off with a copy of this write-up to read over the week and support him.

**Tyler:** Thanks, Celia. That makes a lot of sense. I think people often worry so much about what could happen in a situation, but it sounds like you are suggesting they figure out how to be prepared for either way that a situation could turn out. Is that correct? Does understanding the feeling help one to transcend the feeling?

**Celia:** You know, the best feeling that you can have is to be validated and understood. No matter how awful the feeling page is, when someone finds their page and the words are satisfying, there's a sense of relief – I've found myself. That's half the solution. The other half is working through or beyond a distressful or painful feeling such as worry or fear or indecision, until it passes. Eventually, a fresh feeling of confidence or peace or pride etc. takes its place. That's ultimately our goal.

**Tyler:** Would you share with us a passage from "Loving I" which you used in the example above of the young man afraid to propose?

**Celia:** Sure. Here it is. It's entitled, Loving I (level I), and it comes from Group 9: "Loving Others": In this case, I would have the guy read it and place the pronouns, "I and Me" in it, but for now, I'll read the original as is:

It's okay to make mistakes  
Nobody's picture perfect  
Even pictures  
They get scratched and faded  
Over time  
And dirtied by little fingerprints  
That walk all over them  
Enjoying them but  
Leaving behind a mess  
But they're still beautiful  
You can make out the color  
The original luster  
The fantastic moments  
Captured in a great shot  
I sort of like the feeling of a  
Well-used photograph  
Handled a million times over  
With torn, frayed edges  
to show for it

Yes, I see the scratches and I know the  
Imperfections  
What you call blemishes  
And I call beauty marks  
It's the full picture  
But that's what I love  
All of it  
Endears you to me  
And I think that if I woke up one day  
To find you touched up  
Like a computerized print of  
Some glamorous model  
I'd sorely miss the old you  
Your little quirks and idiosyncrasies  
That we all have  
I've gotten used to them  
Like old cronies  
I kind of look for your  
Beauty marks and hidden dimples

Signs of a vibrant lifetime  
I am fortunate to have a close-up shot  
Of you  
Of what really goes on in your life

And I actually enjoy those  
Wrinkled lines  
That human quality  
That makes you  
You.

See. It's about loving himself, or believing that she could love him as he is.

**Tyler:** Besides learning to express their emotions, I imagine people will feel more comfortable with their emotions and gain confidence in themselves. What other benefits would a person gain from reading “Do You Get the Feeling?”

**Celia:** Interestingly enough, I've had a drama lover buy the book. She's majoring in theatre and found this phenomenal practice to study human nature. She had a grand time reading out loud the various emotions to her friends and family, and actually did a recital at her church using my write-ups.

The book is an interesting piece for literary and poetry lovers. It can build vocabulary for ESL learners and it can be very helpful for stroke victims who are regaining their speech. It is also a tool for anyone who has a deficit in social skills or emotional awareness, such as those with diagnoses of Asperger's Disorder or high-functioning Autism / PDD.

But truthfully, the book is meant to be applied in many social settings—schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, support groups, shelters, and anywhere that relationships or feelings are discussed. It is not merely for the “individual” as you say, to learn about him or herself; this is a great way to teach families, couples, parents, teachers etc. to empathize and understand each other!

**Tyler:** Celia, why did you decide to use poems as the format for the book?

**Celia:** Actually, the write-ups are in prose form. They intentionally do not rhyme. It helps the page flow better. I wanted the language to be beautiful, painful, touching and real. You'll see the spaces between the lines, which indicate how it would be read out loud. That's where the reader should pause. I want the words to rise out of you. Then it can truly reflect you and release the emotion from your mind, heart and body.

**Tyler:** Celia, Reader Views had both an adult and a teenager review “Do You Get the Feeling”? What age group do you think the book is appropriate for?

**Celia:** I think you realize from my earlier answer that teens could use this book to find their own feelings and express themselves better. But I'd love to have a parent or counselor project what the teen is feeling and learn to be more sensitive and supportive! It works on both sides of the fence! And of course, since the language is rich and mature, the book works great with adults themselves! Like, I'd have a wife identify how her husband feels when she burns his favorite dinner and then blames it on his late homecoming. Hmm, what page would he be on?

**Tyler:** Tell me more, Celia, about how the book might be used to make families, couples, or groups better understand each other.

I play with the book. I find new uses for it all the time. Here are some basic suggestions of how it's used in different settings:

**Individuals:** Some like to find their own pages. Some simply like to find their feelings picture on the bridge feeling spread, or group selection, or Table of Contents. Some like to read their scripts out loud; others just whisper or read quietly to themselves and comment at the end. Some, who may have reading difficulties or learning disabilities, or whose first language is not English, prefer to be read to. Some enjoy the scripts as visualizations. They like to close their eyes and listen to the therapist / counselor / teacher's reading. I try to go with their flow.

**Parents/ Children:** You can use the book when meeting with parents to discuss their child. First, I always validate what the parents are going through by having them identify their own feelings (e.g. frustration, pride, love, compassion etc. Sometimes, it's helpful to ask a parent, “What do you want to feel? What would satisfy you in your relationship with your child?” Then, of course, I encourage parents to step into the shoes of their child by finding

the page that s/he would be feeling. What an eye-opener!

Now, it's a completely different experience when you use the book with a kid. It is quite powerful to see their response when you challenge them to see things from their parent's eye. A question like, "What do you think it feels to live with a son who blasts the music(or wanders in the door at) at four AM" might get some funny pages.

**Couples:** Work with couples is a bit more complex, because the therapeutic setup is a juggling act. So sharing feelings in session in front of each other must be done in a very supportive, non-judgmental setting. I would use the book to reduce conflicts by asking one spouse (e.g. wife) to identify the feelings her husband feels when she \_\_\_\_\_, or the underlying feelings which cause him to react with anger or avoidance etc. The book is great to develop empathy and cooperation by bringing a couple to a page they can both strive for. Ultimately, you need to get them on the same page!

**Groups:** This book is great for developing empathy among perpetrators of abuse. It can be applied as a projection tool to educate people about other's feelings. It is a wonderful way to normalize feelings related to loss, trauma, inadequacy, etc. in support groups. It is great for stirring group discussion, for beginning a group or for concluding a group with a poignant message to take leave with.

**High School / College Settings:** I've actually been asked to develop a small curriculum for use in high schools. I've thought about using one or two groups a week to teach teenagers about mental health issues such as depression and anxiety or abuse, how to express it in a safe way and how to help themselves. The book is also great to teach about relationships and what character traits spell danger on a date. I think that guidance counselors and teachers can use this book in discussion and offer structure to the chaotic feelings of teenagers.

Once again, the book is in its experimental stages, so I await more response from the creative uses of my readers!

**Tyler:** I understand the book is being used in professional trainings. Will you tell us what these trainings are like and how the book is being used to facilitate them?

**Celia:** The trainings, as I have found, make the difference between buying a cool book to read and knowing how to really use it to help someone else. I present for around 1.45 minutes. The first segment of the presentation is research on the theories behind emotional awareness or emotional intelligence. I've gathered fascinating, cutting edge material on how our emotional intelligence develops. We then talk a lot about alexithymia, a condition in which a person has difficulty identifying, expressing or managing feelings. We review the findings of neuroscientists like Giacomo Rizzolatti and Daniel Glaser who studied fMRI's of mirror neurons, the movement neurons in our brains that seem to be responsible for learning and for empathy. We look at amazing studies done on adult survivors of abuse, organic changes in the brains of people diagnosed with PTSD and more. Unfortunately, these categories of people have been found not to be in touch with their own feelings and often to misinterpret other's feelings.

It's really important to know that people who have suffered in their lives regress in their emotional capacity. They just lock up and don't express themselves, or cannot tune into others in the way that people who haven't gone through trauma and abuse would. Such people often avoid emotional situations, or overreact with anger. They don't have good models of normal affect regulation. They need to learn how to identify, express, understand and deal with their emotions in a healthy manner. That's where this book is so useful!

The second part of the presentation focuses on the book, "Do You Get The Feeling?" itself. Participants at this point have a great appreciation for the value and purposefulness of this fabulous textbook. I give a background of the writing of the book, how it can be used in multiple ways by counselors and therapists, and then, we actually play around with case studies. Everyone is given his or her own book to practice with. The participants are challenged to figure out the feelings of the case studies and help them work it out through use of the readings of the book. We then go around and present our findings. We read out loud and discuss. It's a very moving experience.

And then of course, I sell the book to whoever is interested. At that point, I hope that means everyone!

**Tyler:** You also mentioned that you give some instruction on how other counselors or therapists might use the book. How do you recommend they use it, and have you received feedback from any who have?

I generally guide them to use the book at three intersections: at the beginning of a session, to jumpstart a session, in the middle of a session, to educate a patient about a feeling, or to explore it more deeply, and at the end of a session, to conclude or strengthen the patient with supportive writings.

I've gotten some interesting feedback. I showed the book to Dr. Anthony Mannarino, head of the Department of Psychiatry at Allegheny Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA. He enjoyed the creativity in the writing and commented, "The book will be valuable for adolescents and adults. I recommend it highly."

A colleague of mine, Barbara Chalom, LCSW commented, "I love the book. It has a page for everyone. Especially for my patients who are highly resistant to treatment, the book was a terrific segue into the client's deepest thoughts and feelings. It helped them connect with themselves in a non-threatening approach."

Barbara gave me some examples of how she'd used the book. One patient she described as recently retired had been an active, successful businessman. He was also a talented artist. Since he had retired, he stopped doing what gave him pleasure. Barbara read out loud with him the write-up entitled, "Proud." This was a great catalyst to uncover some of his resistance to do artwork or other activities that made him proud. Barbara told me, "He totally connected to the description. The writings work well with visualizations. The imagery is so rich, so deep, it is welcoming and really invites the patients to concentrate on parts of themselves that they were previously afraid to notice and discuss."

**Tyler:** Both of our reviewers said the book would be helpful to people who want to keep a journal or a diary. Do you see it as a guide or a source for journaling—for helping people better to identify their feelings and then explore them through writing?

**Celia:** That's a great idea. The book is just a spring-board for people to journey into feelings. I think that once you are unafraid of facing and voicing your feelings, you can take to writing your own journal or diary.

**Tyler:** Celia, will you give us what you feel is your most successful example of using the book with a person you counseled and how it benefited them?

I can't think of my most successful usage, because each experience is so different from the next. You know, when someone reads a poem and releases a strong emotion of either laughter or tears, I know that the writing has been powerful.

One such example that touches me so is a client whom I shall call Cindy. Cindy is a single mother whose only child is an emotionally disturbed little girl of six who constantly gets aggressive and out of control. Cindy was so busy running after this kid, going down to school when she's in trouble, bringing her to doctors and all, she herself became depressed and anxious.

So one session, I stopped Cindy in middle of her talk about her child and asked her, "Cindy, how do you feel about all of this? Why don't you talk about yourself for a minute. I mean, you're a person too!" Cindy rummaged through the book and then came to Group 25: "Tired." "Tired, that's what I am. Of all of this." But as she read through the write-ups, she began to target just what type of tired she was. "I'm really emotionally drained. I'm my daughter's hero, but I'm sacrificing myself on the line." When she came to the poem, "Out of Touch," Cindy began to cry. "That's it. I feel like I don't know myself anymore. Like I'm not a person anymore."

That of course led to a discussion about how she could find some free time to do something of pleasure that would nurture her own needs. She left the session with a new recognition that getting out for an evening to date or spending money on herself was not something to feel guilty about but rather, a way to boost her energy.

I liked that session. I think that the book really helped her understand herself better.

**Tyler:** Thank you for joining me today, Celia. Before we go will you tell us about your website and what additional information can be found there about "Do You Get the Feeling?"

**Celia:** Absolutely! The book can be googled and found on thousands of websites such as barnesandnobles.com or amazon.com. But if you'd like to get the best price on it and check out reviews, blogs, case examples, tips, events, comments, glimpses of the inside book and more, you'd be best to visit my website. It is easy to remember: [www.doyougetthefeeling.com](http://www.doyougetthefeeling.com). That's right! The name of the book is the name of the website: [www.doyougetthefeeling.com](http://www.doyougetthefeeling.com).

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