

LIVING WITH THE CAT

What to do when "just feel your feelings" makes everything worse

FIRST: WHO THIS IS FOR

This is for you if:

- You've tried to "just feel it" and it made things worse
- You've been told you're "too much" or "too sensitive"
- You've numbed out and don't know how to come back
- You understand your patterns perfectly but nothing changes
- You're tired of the cycle but don't know what else to do

This is **not** for you if:

- You're currently in crisis (go [here] first)
- You're actively unsafe (go [here] first)
- You need someone to talk to right now (go [here] first)

If you're stable enough to read, keep going.

WHAT THIS DOCUMENT IS ABOUT

You have emotions. Sometimes they're too big. You've developed ways of handling that.

Those ways probably fall into two categories:

1. **Suppress it.** Push it down. Stay busy. Don't think about it.
2. **Analyze it.** Understand it. Talk about it. Keep it at arm's length.

Both work. For a while. Then they stop working.

This document is about a third option: **coexistence**.

Not controlling the emotion. Not understanding it to death. Just... being in the same room with it.

It's harder than it sounds. It's also the only thing that actually works long-term.

THE CORE IDEA

Here it is, plain:

Emotions are not problems to solve. They're experiences to survive.

You don't "fix" an emotion any more than you "fix" a rainstorm. You wait. You stay dry if you can. You get wet if you can't. It passes.

The goal isn't to stop having difficult emotions. The goal is to stop being destroyed by them.

HOW EMOTIONS ACTUALLY WORK

When something triggers you, your body responds before your mind does. Chemicals release. Heart rate changes. Muscles tense.

This is not optional. You can't think your way out of it. It's biology.

What happens next is where you have choices.

Option A: Suppress

You clamp down. Distract. Numb. Push through.

What actually happens: The physiological arousal doesn't discharge. It stays in your system. If you keep suppressing, it accumulates.

Accumulated suppression looks like:

- Irritability that doesn't match the situation
- Exhaustion that sleep doesn't fix
- Numbness that creeps in
- Reactions slightly too big, slightly too often
- Sometimes: explosion. The pressure exceeds your capacity to contain it.

Suppression isn't wrong. It's expensive. You're borrowing against a future you'll eventually have to pay.

Option B: Analyze

You think about it. Journal. Therapy-speak. Understand your attachment style, your triggers, your patterns.

What actually happens: You create distance between you and the feeling. You can describe it perfectly. You never actually feel it.

Analysis without feeling looks like:

- Knowing exactly why you're broken, staying broken
- Talking about emotions without your body changing
- Understanding as a defense against experiencing
- Insight that doesn't translate to change

Analysis isn't wrong. It's incomplete. Understanding is not the same as integrating.

Option C: Coexistence

You let the feeling be there. You don't push it away. You don't climb inside it and let it drive. You sit in the room with it.

What actually happens: The physiological arousal moves through you. It peaks. It passes. You're still there.

Coexistence looks like:

- Feeling the wave without drowning
 - Knowing you're upset without becoming "an upset person"
 - Letting it be bad without making it mean something
 - Surviving, then continuing
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THE THREE STATES

These aren't stages you graduate from. They're modes you move between. You might use all three in a single day. The goal is to spend more time in the third one.

STATE 1: THE CAGE

You lock the feeling away.

When it's useful: Emergencies. When you need to function and can't afford to fall apart. Short-term survival.

When it costs you: Always, eventually. The pressure builds. The lock weakens. The longer you cage, the bigger the eventual release.

How to notice you're doing it: You feel nothing when you should feel something. You're "fine" in a way that's slightly too flat. You're busy in a way that's slightly too urgent.

STATE 2: THE GLOVE

You handle the feeling through thick layers of analysis.

When it's useful: Making sense of patterns. Communicating with others. Not being completely overwhelmed.

When it costs you: When understanding becomes a substitute for feeling. When you can describe your trauma perfectly and it still runs your life.

How to notice you're doing it: You're talking *about* feelings without your body changing. You're insightful but stuck. You know everything and nothing shifts.

STATE 3: THE CAT

You let the feeling be in the room with you.

What it requires: Capacity. You need enough stability to not be destroyed by what you feel. (More on this below.)

What it feels like: Uncomfortable. Scary sometimes. Also: alive. Real. Like something is actually happening instead of being managed.

How to notice you're doing it: Your body is involved. You might cry, shake, breathe differently. You're not performing the emotion or analyzing it. You're just... in it. And it moves.

BEFORE YOU OPEN ANY CAGES

Coexistence requires capacity. If you don't have capacity, you won't coexist—you'll flood.

Flooding = the emotion takes over completely. You can't think. You can't distinguish past from present. You're not "with" the feeling, you *are* the feeling.

Before you try to feel something big, check the foundation:

Body audit:

- Have you eaten in the last 4 hours?
- Have you slept enough?
- Have you had water?
- Is your environment safe and calm enough?

This isn't about "curing depression with a sandwich." It's about not trying to process grief while your blood sugar is crashing.

Capacity check:

- Do you have time and space to fall apart if needed?
- Is there someone you could call if it gets too big?
- Are you already at your limit from other stressors?

If the foundation is weak, shore it up first. The emotion will still be there later.

HOW TO ACTUALLY DO THIS

Step 1: Notice you're having a feeling

Sounds obvious. It's not. Most of the time we skip straight to reacting, suppressing, or analyzing.

The feeling shows up in your body first. Tightness. Heat. Heaviness. Hollowness. Notice the sensation before you name the emotion.

Step 2: Check the foundation

Quick audit. Food? Water? Sleep? Safety? Time?

If the foundation is cracked, fix that first. Come back to the feeling when you're resourced.

Step 3: Stay in the room

This is the hard part.

Don't push the feeling away. Don't dive into analyzing it. Just... let it be there.

You might feel the urge to:

- Distract yourself
- Figure out why you feel this way
- Fix it
- Make it mean something
- Tell someone about it immediately

Notice the urge. Don't follow it yet. Stay with the raw sensation for a little longer.

Step 4: Let it move

Emotions are not static. They peak and pass. But only if you let them.

Suppression freezes them. Analysis pauses them. Coexistence lets them complete their arc.

You might cry. Shake. Need to move. Need to be still. Let your body do what it wants to do.

Step 5: Don't let it drive

The feeling gets to exist. It doesn't get to make decisions.

You can feel rage without sending the text. You can feel despair without believing the thoughts. You can feel the urge without taking the action.

The feeling is real. The story it tells you might not be.

Step 6: It passes

It will. It always does. Not immediately. But eventually.

And then you're still there. You survived. The feeling moved through instead of getting stuck.

That's the whole thing.

THE PART NOBODY TELLS YOU

You will relapse.

You'll do this successfully. You'll feel proud. You'll think you've figured it out.

Then you'll slam the cage shut again. Or reach for the glove. Or flood completely.

This is not failure. This is the actual pattern.

Growth isn't a line. It's a spiral. You return to the same places, but from a slightly different angle. Each time, you notice faster. Each time, the old patterns hold you less long.

The goal is not to never suppress again. The goal is to *choose* suppression consciously when you need it, instead of living there by default.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Not enlightenment. Not permanent peace. Not "healing" in the sense of the wound disappearing.

Just this:

Emotions arise. They move through. They leave something behind—sometimes insight, sometimes just space.

The mundane version:

You feel a pang of anxiety. You notice it. You check the foundation. You let it be there without building a story. It peaks. It passes. You continue making dinner.

That's it.

Not the absence of difficult emotions. The capacity to let them move.

ONE LAST THING

You don't conquer the cat. You don't defeat it, train it, or transcend it.

You learn to live in the same house.

Some days it scratches. Some days it purrs. Most days it's just there—alive, autonomous, part of the ecosystem of you.

That's not failure.

That's coexistence.

That's the whole thing.