Thinking is a mental process. Thinking takes place in the mind. Feelings and emotions are experienced as physical sensations and may affect the whole body. Thinking can stimulate feelings, and feelings can stimulate thought. Often we respond to strong painful emotions by trying to think or analyze a way out. This process can certainly help us avoid the problem in the future, but it does little to relieve the current emotional pain. For example, when guests drop by our house unexpectedly, and the house is a complete mess, one might feel quite embarrassed. One might think, "I'll never let the house get this bad again." That is a nice thought, but one would still be standing there embarrassed with a messy house for the time being. A more useful activity might be to acknowledge the embarrassment, and be as pleasant as possible under the circumstances. Yet sometimes people focus on thoughts like, "I can't believe they stopped by without calling." This type of thinking can lead to holding others responsible for our own feelings. The authors see this as blaming or rationalizing. This not only keeps us from dealing with the pain that will stay trapped inside us, but also leads to interpersonal conflicts with the people closest to us. When others constantly receive blame, whether deserved or not, they often start looking for ways to retaliate. Once this unwise process begins, both parties experience more and more pain.

Taking responsibility for our own emotions can be challenging. Thinking and feeling our own way through our own emotions is an important part of being a parent. Sometimes feelings of fear, disappointment, hurt, frustration or anger are so intense that parents develop rules that may serve their own need to feel better rather than the child's need to have a consistent, predictable environment in which to learn responsibility and decision making.

Embracing our emotions or feelings even when these feelings seem unpleasant or painful is helpful for our emotional and mental health. Learning a vocabulary with which to think about or accurately describe our feelings helps us stay aware of our emotions. While in touch with our feelings, it is appropriate to think about the situation in which the feelings arose without going to the extreme of blaming or rationalizing.

All feelings or emotions can be considered normal and healthy. **No one has control over feelings as they are happening. Yet we all must learn to control our behavior regardless of what we are feeling.** For example, if we were belittled or ridiculed in front of our family or friends, we might be embarrassed or even angry. That might be considered normal, even predictable. We might think how satisfying it would be to lash out and retaliate. Although there is nothing wrong with thinking and enjoying these thoughts, it would be inappropriate to behave in this way. It would be especially inappropriate if we value our relationships with others. This could be especially painful if the person's intent had been to give us useful criticism.

It is important to learn to notice that we are experiencing feelings or emotions. It is also important to learn to recognize the subtle differences between differing shades of feelings and levels of intensity. It is important to develop a wide and meaningful vocabulary to express these differences. As we learn these skills, we may find greater and greater strength to endure unpleasant feelings. We also find that when we recognize, name, or allow ourselves to experience these feelings, and we truly understand and believe they are not immature, crazy or stupid, we find that the feelings often pass very quickly. Finally, adults who develop these skills are in a very good position to teach them to their children. All of us have our "good days" and our "bad days." But in the long run, people either take responsibility for their feelings and help others do so, or they add additional pain to themselves and others.
Here are four steps that may be helpful in dealing with feelings:

1. **Tune Into Your Feelings**
   People can have feelings that affect their behavior and may not be aware that the feeling is there. Sometimes a person does not recognize a feeling until it gets so strong that the person seems to explode. Other times, a person may know that they are feeling something but are unable to put a name on it so that they can figure out where the feeling comes from and what they can do about it. It is helpful to work at recognizing and naming what we feel as a habit.

2. **Experience Feelings** (avoid the impulse to do something immediately)
   Feelings do not go away until they are fully experienced. Sometimes it is better to feel the feeling than to try to change the situation that led to the feeling. Later when the feeling has subsided, you will probably make better decisions about dealing with that type of situation in the future. For example, if you are angry because your child broke a promise, go ahead and feel your anger, and feel free to say, “I’m angry.” But do not try to discipline your child at the same time as you are experiencing the anger. After the anger subsides, you may wish to discipline your child in an appropriate manner.

3. **Affirm the Feelings and Yourself** (or anyone else feeling pain) It’s OK!
   Feelings are real; they are not simply products of imagination or fantasy. An emotion brings about chemical changes that may affect every cell in our body. People do not have feelings without a reason or cause. Even if you do not know the reason for a feeling, it is important to confirm for yourself that the feeling is there and that it deserves serious attention. Invalidating the feelings, or the person who has the feelings makes it harder to deal with both the feelings and the situation. Calling yourself stupid or silly for having any feeling is not healthy. Nor is it ever helpful to say that to others. The authors believe that feelings are always worthy of respect and attention.

4. **Then Make Decisions and Choose Behavior**
   When a person 1) recognizes and names a feeling, 2) experiences the feeling, and 3) affirms both the feeling and themselves for having the feeling, they are much more likely to be able to 4) choose an appropriate behavior for that situation. People who have difficulty dealing with feelings in this way are more likely to lose control of their actions and do something that they may regret later. Unrecognized and unvalidated feelings can also be the hidden motivations for impulsive (acting without thinking) behavior.

In any situation, it is possible and even likely that different people will have different feelings. This may be the result of individual body chemistry, personal experience, attitude, perception, belief, and mood. For example, one father may feel excited when his child expresses an interest in trying out for football, while another feels scared, another feels sad, and so on. Each feeling can be considered normal and appropriate.

It is important not to assume that your spouse or child will have the same emotional response to a situation that you do. This is especially true if they are on “the other side” of a conflict situation. But even when there is no conflict, someone else may have different perceptions and views of the situation that might lead them to a different feeling than you. You may find it difficult to understand their feeling and their point of view that led to it. In these cases it may be even more important for you to simply accept and validate the feelings they are experiencing.