

The Attitude of Not Knowing

by Ann Weiser Cornell, PhD This article originally appeared in the January 1994 issue of *The Focusing Connection* ([Subscribe](#)). Be willing to approach your inner experience without thinking that you know all about it already. This is the attitude of not-knowing. Why would you listen to someone if you think you already know what they have to say? When you treat your felt sense this way -- e.g. "I already know why I'm afraid." -- you block your opportunity of finding out what it's really about. You might be asking, "But what if I do already know?" Let me say this: as long as there is still a felt sense there, wanting your attention, there is something about it that you don't know yet. As long as you are still experiencing tightness, or fear, or constriction, or stuckness, there is something that your body knows that it is trying to let you know. So be curious, open, and interested in your own felt senses. Be more interested in what you don't know yet than in what you already know. Try setting aside what you already know about an issue you're Focusing on. Not because it's wrong -- it might not be -- but because it might be getting in the way of sensing what is new and not-yet-known about you and your life. Our modern culture puts a great premium on clarity. We are taught that if we can't think or say something clearly, then it's not important. The winner in school is the one who gets "the answer" clearly and quickly. It's rarely acknowledged that there might be a valuable kind of knowing that would take time to access, and that would at first be vague and unclear. This bias toward clarity can lead to feeling uncomfortable in the face of something unclear and unknown. "How would I explain this to anyone? How would I defend it? What good is it?" Before you learned to honor and listen to felt senses, you might have dismissed them in just this way. Instead, enjoy them! When a felt sense first comes, you may not know what to call it, and you may not know what it is. Let that be OK! You will learn to delight in that not-knowing, to look eagerly for the parts of your experience that are not yet known, just as a treasure hunter is most excited by the treasure chests that have not yet been opened. It may not seem likely that there would be wisdom hiding in this fuzzy,

vague, hard-to-describe something that you feel in your body, but there is. That's exactly where the wisdom is: not in what is already clear and known -- that's old information -- but in what is emerging in you, the knowing that is coming into awareness right now. Learning Focusing is learning to value and even cherish the slow, subtle, and vague.