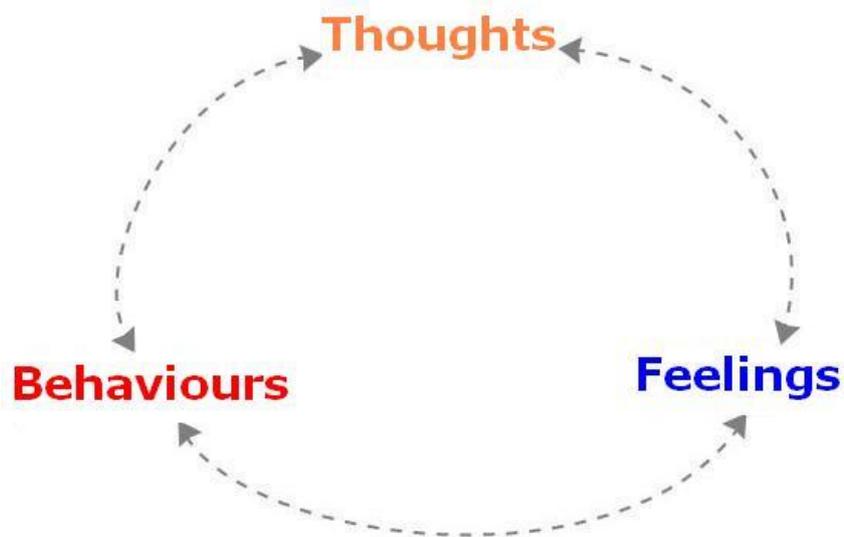


**An Introductory
Self-Help Course
in
Cognitive Behaviour Therapy**



www.get.gg

www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Carol Vivyan

2009

***This mini 7-step self-help course includes an introduction to techniques which could be useful for all, but professional help should be sought for complex or long-standing problems.
The course is also available online at www.getselfhelp.co.uk***

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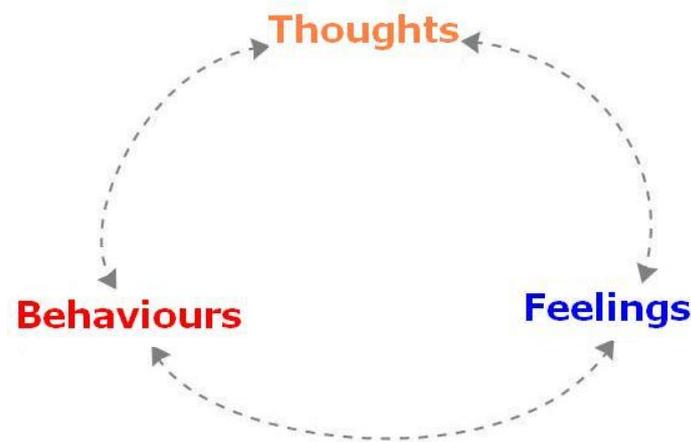
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Further copies of this guide, and of additional worksheets and leaflets in italics above, can be downloaded freely (in Adobe document format) from
www.getselfhelp.co.uk/freedownloads.htm

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy - how it can help

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that talks about

- How you think about yourself, the world and other people
- How what you do affects your thoughts and feelings



CBT can help you to change how you think ("Cognitive") and what you do ("Behaviour)". These changes can help you to feel better. Unlike some of the other talking treatments, it focuses on the "here and now" problems and difficulties. Whilst it is often useful to discuss the past and understand how our pasts have influenced our lives and how problems have arisen, CBT mostly focuses on looking for ways to improve your mental wellbeing **now**.

CBT says that it's not the event which causes our emotions, but how we interpret that event - what we think or what meaning we give that event or situation.

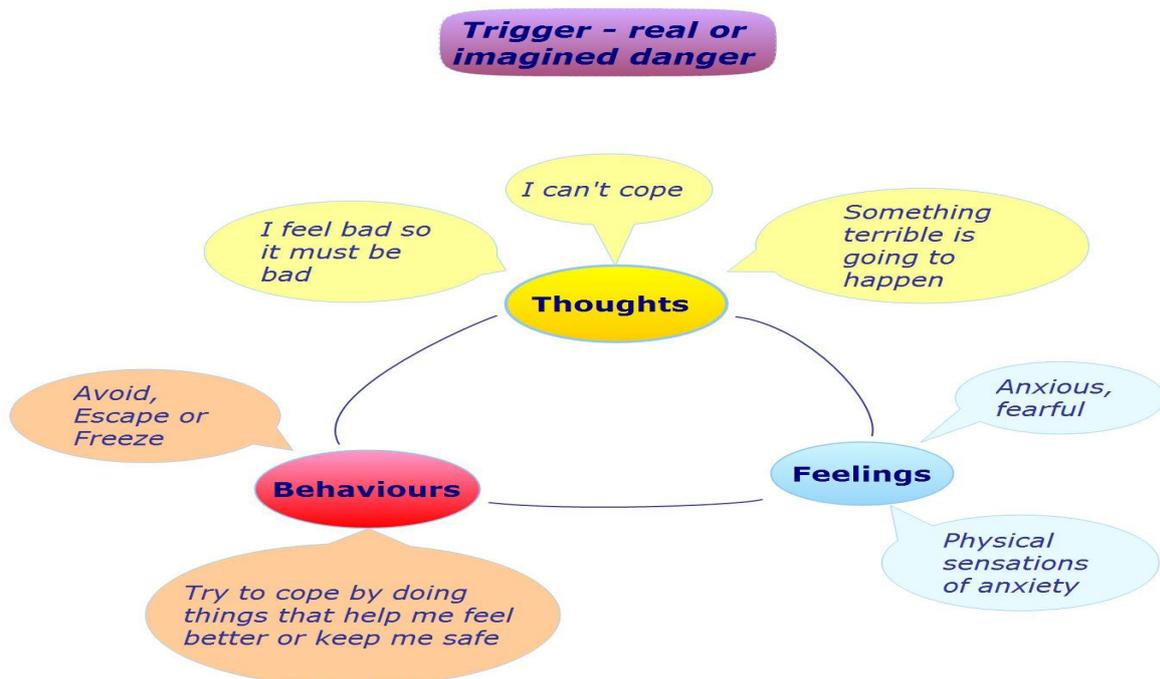


For instance, if someone you know passes you in the street without acknowledging you, you can interpret it several ways. You might think they don't want to know you because no-one likes you (which may lead you to feel depressed), your thought may be that you hope they don't stop to talk to you, because you won't know what to say and they'll think you're boring and stupid (anxiety), you may think they're being deliberately snotty (leading to anger). A healthier response might be that they just didn't see you.

Another example may be someone who's depressed might wake up in the morning and think: "This is going to be another awful day", "I'm going to mess up again", or "What's the point of anything?", which will make them feel even more depressed (feelings), and may prompt them to pull the covers over their head and stay in bed (behaviours). It's very likely that this will increase their negative thoughts, which in turn will increase the feelings of depression, and make them even less likely to get out of bed. A vicious cycle is the result - continuing to think and act the same way will help maintain our depression (diagram below).

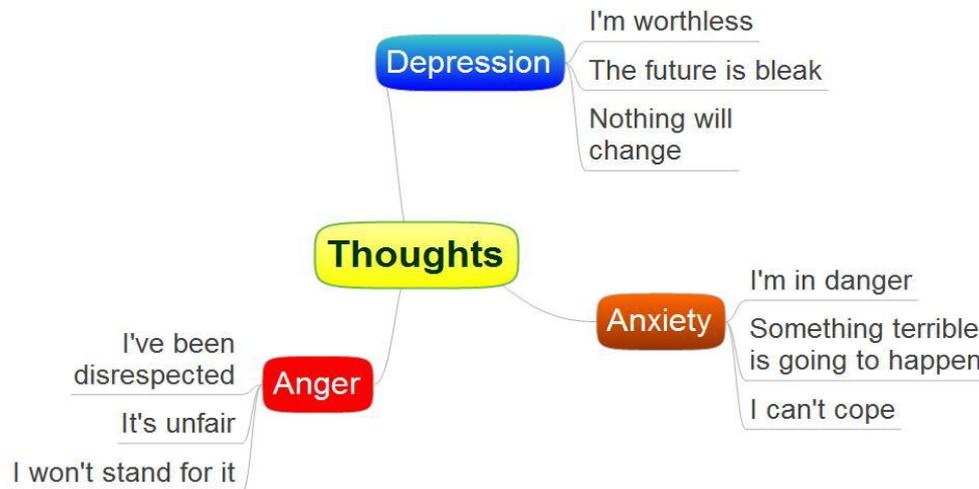


A vicious cycle of Anxiety might look something like this:



CBT can help you to break these vicious cycles of negative thinking, feelings and behaviour. When you see the parts of the vicious cycle clearly, you can change them - and therefore change the way you feel. It can also be useful to look at the way our thoughts and feelings affect our bodies, and the physical sensations we can experience

Different emotions are often associated with particular types of thoughts:



CBT aims to get you to a point where you can "do it yourself", and work out your own ways of tackling problems. CBT has often been described as guided self-help, and this self-help course will help you learn how CBT can help you.

The following self-help steps will enable you, with or without the help of a therapist or mental health professional, to gain some useful insights and begin to address and work through your problems.

There are many more resources available on the website .

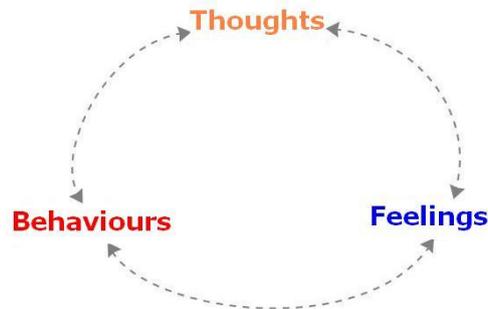
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Step 1

Identifying Thoughts, Feelings & Behaviours

Now we can start to look at what's helping to keep your problems going.



Let's use a recent example, when you've been distressed - perhaps something has happened in the past week or so when you've felt particularly anxious, angry, or depressed.

What was the situation? What happened? When did it happen? What else was going on? Was it a situation that you often find yourself in? Who were you with?



What thoughts or images went through your mind just before or during that time? What disturbed you? If you had that thought, what did that mean to you, or what did that say about you or the situation? If your thought was a question, try to answer it.





What distressing emotion/s did you feel? What else?

E.g. Anger, anxiety, terror, rage, depression, frustration, guilt, shame, irritable.....

What did you notice in your body?

E.g. In anxiety and anger (and excitement) the body's adrenaline can result in us feeling physical sensations which can include: heart pounding or racing, palpitations, rapid breathing, difficulty breathing, light-headed, dizzy, shaky, sweaty, hot, red, pins & needles, tense or sore muscles, urge to go to the toilet, butterflies in the tummy, warm uncomfortable feeling in the abdomen or chest, difficulty concentrating, lump in throat. This is the fight & flight response - the body's survival mechanism which helps us escape or to stand up to the threat at times of real danger. The body is unable to differentiate between a real or imagined danger, so the alarm signal is pressed and activated regardless.



In depression, we can feel tired, lethargic, exhausted, experience appetite and sleep changes, aches and pains, headaches, digestive changes (e.g. constipation), agitation and feel unable to settle, experience lack of interest in sex, and have slow movement or speech.

What did you do? What didn't you do? How did you cope?



Examples include:

(Anxiety): Stayed home, left wherever you were or felt the urge to leave, didn't talk to anyone, avoided eye contact, fiddled with a pen, sat in a corner, didn't go out, chose to shop at less busy times, went to local corner shop instead of the big supermarket, distracted yourself (TV, radio, kept busy etc), urge to go (or went) to toilet, looked for reassurance, drank more, smoked more, ate more (or less), disturbed sleep.

(Depression): Stayed in bed, pulled covers over your head, didn't go out, sat and stared, watched television, didn't answer the phone, turned down an invite from a friend, didn't go to work, ate more (or less), slept more (or less), paced around, kept starting to do things but couldn't finish, no interest in others, no interest in sex, no interest in anything.

(Anger): shouted at someone, hit out, screamed, had a go at someone, sulked, criticised others (or had urge to do those things), used put-downs and threats, bottled it up, lost control.

Practise noticing these thoughts, feelings and behaviours - the more you practise, the more you will notice them. The more you notice them, the more you will be able to make helpful and effective changes.

This 5 Aspects' (of life experience) form will help you practise. Photocopy the form (or download more copies from the website) and write down at least one situation every day for the next few days.

❖ 5 Aspects Form

Situation

Where? When? Who with? What happened? How?

**5 Aspects
of life experience**

Padesky 1986

Thoughts & Images

What went through my mind at that time? What disturbed me? If I had those thoughts/images/memories – what did that say or mean about me or the situation?

Body / Physical sensations

What did I notice in my body? What did I feel? Where did I feel it?

Moods / Emotions

What emotion did I feel at that time? What else? How intense was that feeling? (0 – 100%)

Behaviours / What I did or didn't do

What helped me cope and get through it? What didn't I do or what did I avoid doing? What automatic reactions did I have? What would other people have seen me doing?

Step 2

Understanding the Links between Thoughts, Feelings & Behaviours

So far, we have looked at vicious cycles and learned how thoughts, feelings and behaviours are linked and each one affects the others.

If we use the depression example from that page, we see that on waking in the morning, 'Dave' had thoughts that included "There's no point", and "I'll only mess up again". If we think those thoughts and believe them, there is every chance that we are going to feel depressed. If we think those thoughts and feel depressed, then it's likely that we would be sorely tempted to pull the covers over our head and stay in bed.

How does doing that affect the way Dave feels and thinks? Hmm. Staying in bed might mean that his thoughts get carried away and he continues to think that way, making him feel even worse, and even more likely to stay in bed. A vicious cycle.



Depression



Depression can happen to anyone - and does happen to one in four of us over our lifetimes. Different factors that make it more likely to happen, include biological make-up, upbringing, or reaction to life events. What keeps it going though, is how we deal with those things. The way we think and what we do affects the way we feel.

Depression is often accompanied by other feelings such as guilt, shame, anger and anxiety.

Thoughts that occur in Depression

People who are depressed tend to think very negatively about themselves, the future and the world around them. It can be like seeing life through "gloomy specs".

- Everything is hopeless - nothing can change
- I'm useless, worthless
- It's all my fault
- The world is a terrible place - everything goes wrong



We can dwell on these thoughts repeatedly, mulling over things, asking ourselves why, thinking regretful things about the past, what we should or shouldn't have done.

Physical Sensations & Depression

- Tiredness, fatigue, lethargy
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Sleep changes (sleep more or less)
- Eating changes (eat more or less)
- Lose interest in hobbies, activities, sex



Behaviours & Depression

Because of the tiredness, difficulty sleeping and eating, and negative style of thinking, we tend to do less and less. We stop doing the things we used to do and enjoy. It could get so bad that we can't even go to work, or do things at home. We want to stay in bed, or stay at home doing very little. We might isolate ourselves from friends and family.

Anxiety



Anxiety is the body's way of responding to being in danger. Adrenaline is rushed into our bloodstream to enable us to run away or fight. This happens whether the danger is real, or whether we believe the danger is there when actually there is none. It is the body's alarm and survival mechanism. Primitive man wouldn't have survived for long without this life-saving response. It works so well, that it often kicks in when it's not needed - when the danger is in our heads rather than in reality. We think we're in danger, so that's enough to trigger the system to go, go, go! People who get anxious tend to get into scanning mode - where they're constantly on the lookout for danger, hyper-alert to any of the signals, and make it more likely that the alarm system will be activated.

Thoughts that often occur in Anxiety include our overestimating or exaggerating the actual threat, and underestimating or minimising our ability to cope:

- I'm in danger right now
- The worst possible scenario is going to happen
- I won't be able to cope with it



Physical Sensations - The Adrenaline Response

When there is real, or we believe there is a real, threat or danger, our bodies' automatic survival mechanism kicks in very quickly. This helps energise us to fight or run away ('fight or flight response'). We will notice lots of physical sensations, which might include:

- **Heart racing** - This helps to take the blood to where it is most needed – his legs so that he can run faster (flight); his arms so that he can hit out (FIGHT); his lungs to increase his stamina. At the same time blood is taken from the places it is not needed for example fingers, toes and skin. These changes cause tingling coldness and numbness.
- **Breathing gets faster** - This helps the bloodstream to carry oxygen to the arms, legs and lungs. This will give him more power. The side effects may include chest pain, breathlessness and a choking feeling. As there is a slight drop in the blood and oxygen being sent to the brain he may feel dizzy or light headed, he may experience blurred vision.
- **Muscles tense and prepare** - The large skeletal muscles tense and create power, this may cause pain, aching and shaking.
- **Sweating** - Sweating helps to cool the muscles and the body. It helps to stop them from overheating. Sweating can also make us more slippery to our enemies!
- **Pupils dilate** - This lets more light into his eyes so his overall vision improves. Side effects may include sensitivity to light or spots before his eyes.
- **Digestive system slows down** - These are not important while in danger and so are slowed down then the saved energy goes to where it is most needed. Side effects may include nausea, butterflies and a dry mouth.
- **More alert** - He will be concentrating on looking for danger, much less able to concentrate on anything else. He will be waiting for something to happen. This is the basis of the way we worry.

Behaviours might include:

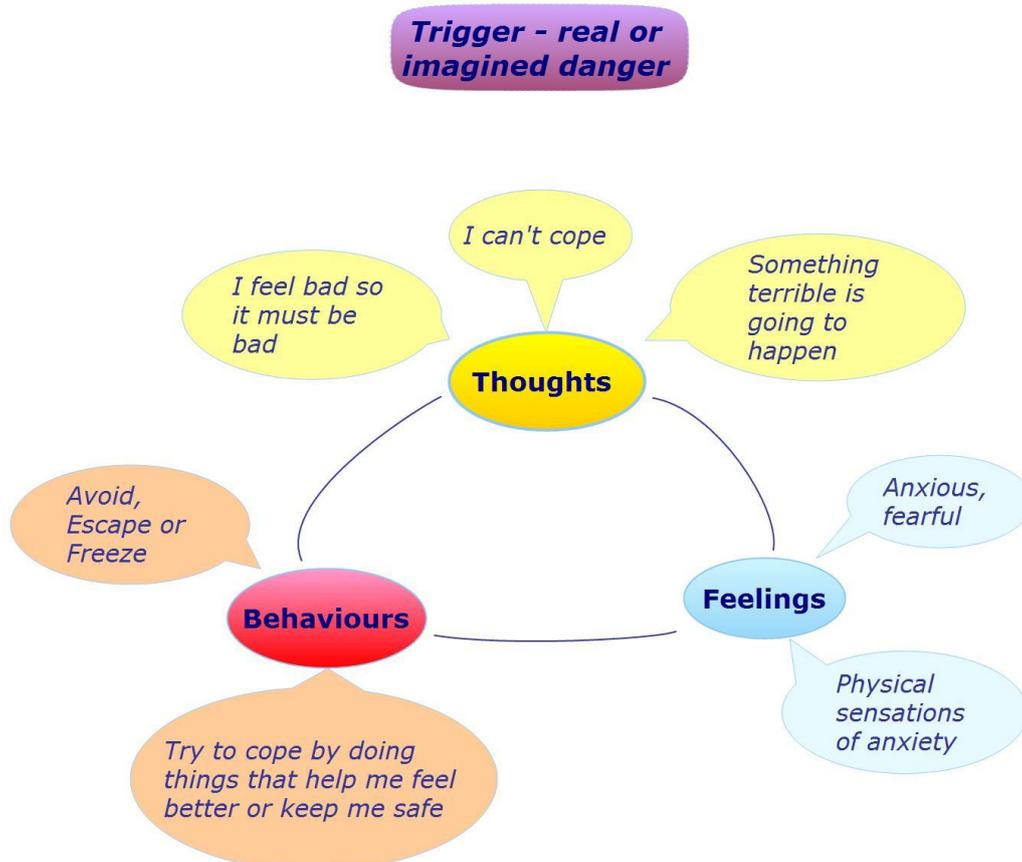
- Avoiding people or places
- Not going out
- Going to certain places at certain times, e.g. shopping at smaller shops, at less busy times
- Only going with someone else
- Escape, leave early
- Go to the feared situation, but use coping behaviours to get you through: examples include: self talk, holding a drink, smoking more, fiddling with clothes or handbag, avoiding eye contact with others, having an escape plan, medication. These are called 'safety behaviours'.



Safety behaviours can also help to keep your anxiety going. Whilst you depend on them to help you cope, you don't get to find out that without them, the anxiety would reduce and go away on its own.

Whilst avoiding people or situations might help you feel better at that time, it doesn't make your anxiety any better over a longer period. If you're frightened that your anxiety will make you pass out or vomit in the supermarket aisle, you won't find out that won't actually happen, because you don't go. So the belief that it will happen remains, along with the anxiety.

Vicious Cycle of Anxiety



We all feel anxious some times. A certain amount of anxiety helps us to be more alert and focused. For example just prior to an exam, a few exam nerves have a positive effect - motivating us, helping us focus our thoughts on the job in hand, making us more alert. Too much anxiety, or constantly being anxious, is unhealthy and detrimental to our lives and relationships.

Anger



What is Anger?

Anger is a result of thinking that we have been unfairly treated or disrespected, or that others have broken or fallen short of our rules, standards or expectations, and we won't stand for it.

Thinking this way leads us to feel angry, which stimulates the body's adrenaline response which is our body's way of helping us to cope with either fighting, or running away ('fight or flight' response). We respond to those thoughts and feelings, by acting, or feeling an urge to act, in threatening or aggressive ways.

Thoughts that often occur:

- I'm being treated unfairly
- I'm being disrespected
- They're breaking a rule or standard
- I won't stand for it



Physical Sensations - The Adrenaline Response

When there is real, or we believe there is a real, threat or danger, or we believe we need to defend or stand up for what we believe, our bodies' automatic survival mechanism kicks in very quickly. This helps energise us to fight or run away ('fight or flight response'). We will notice lots of physical sensations, which might include:

- heart racing or pounding - enabling good blood supply around our bodies
- breathing quickly - allowing more oxygen around the body
- tense muscles - a state of readiness to fight or flee
- shaking
- hot, sweating
- light-headed
- stomach churning or butterflies
- fist or teeth clenching

Behaviours might include:

- staring & angry facial expression
- aggressive body posture
- attacking
- hitting out (or urge to hit out)
- arguing
- shouting or snapping at others
- running or storming away
- staying silent (maybe inwardly seething)
- sulking



The Angry Cycle



We all feel angry some times. Some people tend to become angry easily (a "short fuse"), and some have problems controlling their anger. Anger has consequences, and they often involve hurting other people - more usually their feelings, but sometimes physically. Anger can cause problems in our personal lives, and affect work and study. After an angry outburst, we can think very critically of ourselves and our actions, leading us to feel guilty, ashamed and lower our mood, which might result in our withdrawing from others, not wanting to do anything (see depression cycle).

Summary

In CBT, we aim to break those cycles by changing something - what we think or what we do. We might start by looking at what might be easiest to change. Perhaps in this case, it might be easiest to change what we do.

How would Dave have felt if he had got up anyway, in spite of how he was feeling. Maybe ate some breakfast, had a shower, got dressed, and perhaps went out for a walk. How would that affect his depression? What would that do to the way he was thinking?

It's very likely that his mood would have improved, and that he would have started to think a little more realistically. He might have even enjoyed his day, or got a sense of achievement from having done **something**.

Have a look at what you've written down on your sheets of several examples of distressing situations (Step 1 practice). What links can you see between what **you** think and what **you** do, and how they affect the way **you** feel.

In the next step, you'll be starting to make some changes that will work for **you**.

Emotions and their associated thoughts, body reactions and behaviours

Emotion	Thoughts	Body reaction	Behaviours
<p style="text-align: center;">Angry</p>  <p>frustrated, irritated, impatient, resentful, enraged, peed off, fury, insulted</p>	<p>Assume the worst Problem is enormous Others are unfair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ I've been disrespected, treated unfairly, used ❖ I've been let down ❖ It's not fair! ❖ I won't stand for it 	<p>Adrenaline response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tense ❖ Fired up ❖ Energised, breathing and heart rate increase ❖ Difficulty concentrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fight ❖ Confront ❖ Argue ❖ Make lots of noise! ❖ Sulk ❖ Snap, swear, shout ❖ Sarcastic, patronise ❖ Put downs
<p style="text-align: center;">Anxious</p>  <p>nervous, on edge, apprehensive, scared, frightened, panicky, terrified, petrified</p>	<p>Threat: Overestimate danger Underestimate ability to cope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ I'm in great danger right now ❖ The worst possible thing is going to happen ❖ I won't be able to cope with it 	<p>Adrenaline response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tense, shaky, sweaty, hot, ❖ Energised, breathing and heart rate increase ❖ Difficulty concentrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Avoid people or places (in order to avoid feeling anxious) ❖ Fidget ❖ Escape / run away ❖ Coping or safety behaviours
<p style="text-align: center;">Depressed</p>  <p>sad, down, despairing, hopeless, gloomy, miserable, sorrowful, unhappy, dismayed</p>	<p>Negative focus. Themes of loss, hopelessness, negative view of self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ I'm worthless ❖ Nothing's going to change ❖ I've lost.... 	<p>Slowed down or agitated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tired, lethargic ❖ Constipated ❖ Memory & concentration problems ❖ Appetite & sleep changes ❖ Loss of interest: hobbies, sex ❖ Restlessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Do less ❖ Talk less ❖ Eat less or more ❖ Sleep less or more ❖ Isolate and withdraw ❖ Ruminates on negative thoughts

Step 3

Making Changes - Behaviours

Changing what we normally do can greatly affect the way we feel and think.

When you look at your '5 Aspects' sheet where you wrote down your thoughts, emotions, behaviours and physical sensations, notice particularly what you wrote for 'behaviours'. Very often we react automatically, without considering our actions or the consequences of them.



- What helped you cope and get through it?
- What didn't I do or what did I avoid doing?
- What automatic reactions did I have?
- What would other people have seen me doing?
- What were the consequences of what I did? What happened later because of it? Did it affect the way I felt later?

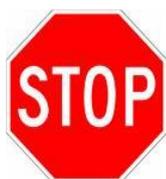
Now ask yourself, what could I have done differently?

- What would someone else have done in that situation? (it might help to think about particular people that you know, and what they might have done differently)
- Have there been times in the past when I would have done something else?
- If I had paused, and taken a breath, what would I have done?

Write down several options that you might have done differently if it had occurred to you, then ask yourself:

- If I had tried that, how would the situation have been different?
- How would it have affected what I felt?
- How would it have affected what I thought?
- Would it have been more helpful or effective for me, another person or for the situation?
- What would the consequences have been of doing something differently?

Dealing with Distressing Situations:



Practise and learn to **STOP** and take a breath before considering what action to take. Just simply pausing and taking a breath when feeling distressed can help us to see the situation more clearly, and help us decide what action to take.

Choose to do what works!

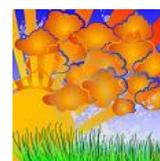
When considering your options, ask yourself:

- Will it be effective and appropriate?
- Is it in proportion to the event?
- Is it in keeping with my values and principles?
- What will be the consequences of my action?
- What is best for me and most helpful for this situation?



Some suggestions for coping with crises and distressing emotions:

- Do something different (to what you normally do)
- Pause, take a breath
- [Mindfulness - learn Mindful Breathing](#) (pages 40-44)
- Focus your attention fully on another activity - [Mindful activity](#) (page 41)
- [Relaxation techniques](#) - try lots and find one that works for you (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/relax.htm)
- [Put on some music](#) - sing and dance along, or just listen attentively (use music that is likely to help you feel your desired emotion – avoid sad songs if you're depressed) (www.cwgsy.net/private/get/music.htm)
- [Meditation](#) or Prayer (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/meditation.htm)
- Help others
- Be with others - contact a friend, visit family
- Talk to someone
- Grounding techniques - look around you, what do you see, hear, smell, sense? Hold a comforting object.
- Physical exercise - walk, swim, go to the gym
- Engage in a hobby or other interest - if you don't have one, find one! What have you enjoyed in the past? What have you sometimes thought about doing but not got around to?
- Write down your thoughts and feelings - get them out of your head
- Just take one step at a time - don't plan too far ahead
- Pamper yourself - do something you really enjoy, or something relaxing
- Positive self-talk - encourage yourself, tell yourself: I can do this, I am strong and capable - find an affirmation that works for you (even if you don't believe it at first!). Write it down and memorise it for when you need it. See [Affirmations](#) on page 36
- Do something creative
- Use Safe Place [Imagery](#) (page 49)
- Tell yourself: "This will pass, it's only temporary". "I've got through this before, I can do it now". When we're going through a tunnel and become fearful of being trapped, there's no point in stopping - we just have to carry on in order to reach the end of the tunnel. That light is there, and waiting!



Activity & Physical Exercise

- Makes us feel better
- Makes us feel less tired
- Motivates us to do more
- Improves our ability to think more clearly
- Uses up the adrenaline resources created by anxiety and anger
- Increases motivation
- Makes us generally more healthy



When we're depressed, we can feel particularly tired and lack any motivation to do anything. Just increasing our activity and exercise levels can make an enormous impact on our mood as it stimulates the body to produce natural anti-depressants.

Use either or both of these sheets to record what you do and how it affects your mood.

- ❖ **Activity Diary**
- ❖ **ACE Log**

Use the Treatment Plan to help you plan what you need to do more of or start, or what you can do less of or stop:

- ❖ **Treatment Plan**
- ❖ **More information at** www.getselfhelp.co.uk/links3.htm
- ❖ **Communication Styles**



Breathing and Relaxation helps to combat the body's adrenaline (fight & flight) response that occurs in Anxiety and Anger, and the agitation and ruminating thoughts of Depression. Try different relaxation techniques - some will work better for you than others.

You will find Mindful Breathing techniques on Page 42

See the links at bottom of this webpage for more information about behaviours and other relaxation techniques: www.getselfhelp.co.uk/cbtstep3.htm

Activity Diary

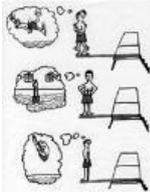
Write briefly in each box: **What you did** (brief description), one word that describes your **Mood**, and rate the intensity of your mood on a scale of 0 - 100%, your sense of Achievement for the activity on a scale of 0-10 (A0 - 10) your sense of Closeness to others (C0 - 10), and sense of Enjoyment (E 0-10). An activity may be sitting down, or lying in bed, not only washing dishes, walking etc.

(Write in each box) Example: Watching TV with son, Sad 60%, A0, C7, E4

Day → Time ↓							
6 - 8 am							
8 - 10 am							
10am - 12noon							
12 - 2pm							
2 - 4pm							
4 - 6pm							
6 - 8pm							
8 - 10pm							
10pm - 12mn							

After completing the diary, you might notice patterns in your mood variations, and how particular activities affect your mood. You will then be able to plan a more healthy range of activities which give you a sense of Achievement, Enjoyment and Closeness (using the same form if you want to).

Multimodal Treatment Plan

Modality	Problem	Plan
<p>Behaviour Actions, coping strategies, reactions, what I do, what I avoid doing</p> 		<p><i>Do less of, or stop:</i></p> <p><i>Do more of, or start:</i></p>
<p>Affect / Emotions What I feel emotionally E.g. depressed, angry, anxious, stressed, sad.</p> 		<p><i>Do less of, or stop:</i></p> <p><i>Do more of, or start:</i></p>
<p>Sensation See, hear, taste, smell, touch, pain, tension, sexuality</p> 		<p><i>Do less of, or stop:</i></p> <p><i>Do more of, or start:</i></p>
<p>Imagery Thinking in pictures, self image, fantasies</p> 		<p><i>Do less of, or stop:</i></p> <p><i>Do more of, or start:</i></p>
<p>Cognition Thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, values, opinions, thinking styles</p> 		<p><i>Do less of, or stop:</i></p> <p><i>Do more of, or start:</i></p>
<p>Interpersonal Communicating and being with others, Relationships</p> 		<p><i>Do less of, or stop:</i></p> <p><i>Do more of, or start:</i></p>
<p>Drugs / Biology Physical exercise, health, diet, sexual health, alcohol, weight, smoking, caffeine etc</p> 		<p><i>Do less of, or stop:</i></p> <p><i>Do more of, or start:</i></p>

Communication Styles

Passive

Assertive

Aggressive



General

Compliant, submissive, talks little, vague non-committal communication, puts self down, praises others

Actions and expressions fit with words spoken, firm but polite and clear messages, respectful of self and others

Sarcastic, harsh, always right, superior, know it all, interrupts, talks over others, critical, put-downs, patronising, disrespectful of others

"I don't mind...that's fine....yes alright"

"That's a good idea, and how about if we did this too..." or "I can see that, but I'd really like..."

"This is what we're doing, if you don't like it, tough"

Beliefs

You're okay, I'm not

I'm okay, you're okay

I'm okay, you're not

Has no opinion other than that the other person/s are always more important, so it doesn't matter what they think anyway

Believes or acts as if all the individuals involved are equal, each deserving of respect, and no more entitled than the other to have things done their way

Believe they are entitled to have things done their way, the way they want it to be done, because they are right, and others (and their needs) are less important

Eyes

Avoids eye contact, looks down, teary, pleading

Warm, welcoming, friendly, comfortable eye contact

Narrow, emotion-less, staring, expressionless

Posture

Makes body smaller – stooped, leaning, hunched shoulders

Relaxed, open, welcoming

Makes body bigger – upright, head high, shoulders out, hands on hips, feet apart

Hands

Together, fidgety, clammy

Open, friendly and appropriate gestures

Pointing fingers, making fists, clenched, hands on hips

Consequences

Give in to others, don't get what we want/need, self-critical thoughts, miserable

Good relationships with others, happy with outcome and to compromise

Make enemies, upset others and self, feel angry and resentful

Step 4

Making Changes - Thoughts?

When we look at your completed "5 Aspects" sheets from Step 1, how did your thoughts (or images or memories) affect what you felt and what you did? It's easy to think that we can't change the way we think - that thoughts just happen and that we have no control over them. That last bit is certainly true. We cannot stop our thoughts, and we can't control them. Whatever we do, the thoughts are going to happen anyway. But we can choose how we react to them.

Thoughts are generated randomly, automatically, messages from our brain. They are not necessarily true, and not necessarily helpful. We can learn to react to thoughts differently.

Let's use an example from primary school.

The Playground Bully Metaphor



School playgrounds tend to be secured with high fencing to protect the children from outsiders, to stop the children wandering off, and maybe to stop balls being lost. All good things. But it does mean that within this secured playground, all the children have to be together, whether they get on or not. Most if not all primary schools have a playground bully. You know the type. This particular bully is all talk, he (or she) threatens violence, but he just uses name calling, spiteful, horrible nasty stuff. He has a gang of mates around him, who encourage him and join in with him. For the victims of course, it's all very upsetting and humiliating. Or need it be?

The bully laughs and shouts, pointing and humiliating each victim in turn, "You're so stupid" and the like. Maybe much worse. Consider these three victims:

1. **Victim number 1** hears the abuse, becomes upset and runs away crying. How does the bully react? Right - it's great entertainment, what a laugh! It's likely the bully will carry on targeting this young victim. 



2. **Victim number 2** hears the bully, thinks about it, then responds with, "Hang on a minute. I got 8 out of 10 in my spelling test this morning, and you only got 4. I'm not stupid!" How does the bully react? Taken aback maybe? They might carry on and have another go, but eventually, the bully will give up on this one.

3. **Victim number 3** hears the bully, looks at him (acknowledges him), doesn't react at all, and just walks away to go and play football with his friends. The bully's reaction? No entertainment to be had here. Might as well give up. 

It can be like that with our thoughts. If we imagine our thoughts as our own internal bully, then maybe we have similar options that we can use to respond to our bully.

At the moment, we believe the thoughts (the bully). We're being upset by the thoughts, and reacting to them automatically. The thoughts keep on coming, and we continue to believe and be upset by them. Just like victim number 1.

Victim number 2 challenged the bully - the bully got his facts wrong. Victim number 2 isn't stupid at all; he did better than the bully in the spelling test! We can learn to challenge our thoughts. We can ask ourselves whether the thought is accurate or not - and we can look for hard evidence to check that out, like the spelling test. We'll be learning to challenge thoughts in Step 5 - the next step.

Victim 3 didn't react to the bully at all. He acknowledged him, then walked away, and moved his focus of attention elsewhere. We can learn to do that with our thoughts. Learn to just notice and acknowledge them - "Oh there's that thought again!", realise that it is just a thought, choose not to believe it, dismiss it and move our attention onto something else. We'll be looking at that in Step 6.

Read the following sheets to learn more about thoughts:

- ❖ **About Automatic Thoughts**
- ❖ **Unhelpful Thinking Habits**

- **Print out the handout, and tick the Unhelpful Thinking Habits that you recognise that you do most often. Use the Finding Alternative Thoughts handout, to help you learn to think differently.**

- ❖ **Finding Alternative Thoughts**
- ❖ **Different Perspectives**

About Automatic Thoughts

Our thoughts are constantly helping us to interpret the world around us, describing what's happening, and trying to make sense of it by helping us interpret events, sights, sounds, smells, feelings.

Without even realising it, we are interpreting and giving our own meanings to everything happening around us. We might decide that something is pleasant or nasty, good or bad, dangerous or safe.



Because of our previous experiences, our upbringing, our culture, religious beliefs and family values, we may well make very different interpretations and evaluations of situations than someone else. These interpretations and meanings we give events and situations, result in physical and emotional feelings.

Something happens or we notice something, which triggers a thought. Particular types of thoughts tend to lead to particular emotions.

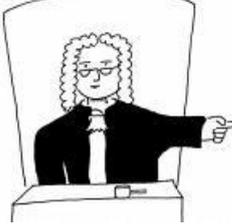
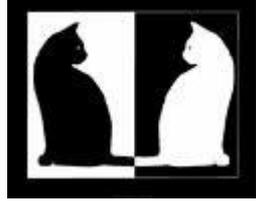
Thoughts	Emotion
I'm in danger and I won't be able to cope with it	Anxiety, Fear 
I'm being treated unfairly and I won't stand for it	Anger, Frustration 
Everything is hopeless – I'm totally worthless, no-one likes me, and nothing can change	Depression 

Automatic thoughts...

- ❖ Can be words, an image, a memory, a physical sensation, an imagined sound, or based on 'intuition' – a sense of just 'knowing'
- ❖ Believable – we tend automatically to believe our thoughts, usually not stopping to question their validity. When another driver cuts me up, I might judge that he's a selfish thoughtless toad, but in fact, he might be taking his wife to hospital as she's about to give birth. Thoughts are not necessarily true, accurate or helpful.
- ❖ Are automatic. They just happen, popping into your head and you often won't even notice them.
- ❖ Our thoughts are ours – they can be quite specific to us, perhaps because of our present or past experience, knowledge, values and culture, or just for no good reason at all. Some thoughts are so out of keeping with all those things, and that can make them seem all the more distressing – because we add some meaning about why we had them (I must be a bad person!)
- ❖ Habitual and persistent – our thoughts seem to repeat over and over, and the more they repeat, the more believable they seem, then they set off a whole chain of new related thoughts that lead us to feel worse and worse. They can follow themes, for short periods, or very often, throughout years and decades.

Unhelpful Thinking Habits

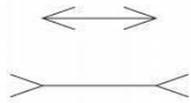
Over the years, we tend to get into unhelpful thinking habits such as those described below. We might favour some over others, and there might be some that seem far too familiar. Once you can identify your unhelpful thinking styles, you can start to notice them – they very often occur just before and during distressing situations. Once you can notice them, then that can help you to challenge or distance yourself from those thoughts, and see the situation in a different and more helpful way.

 <p>Mental Filter When we notice only what the filter wants or allows us to notice, and we dismiss anything that doesn't 'fit'. Like looking through dark blinkers or 'gloomy specs', or only catching the negative stuff in our 'kitchen strainers' whilst anything more positive or realistic is dismissed</p>	 <p>Judgements Making evaluations or judgements about events, ourselves, others, or the world, rather than describing what we actually see and have evidence for</p>
<p>Mind-Reading Assuming we know what others are thinking (usually about us)</p> 	<p>Emotional Reasoning I feel bad so it must be bad! I feel anxious, so I must be in danger</p> 
 <p>Prediction Believing we know what's going to happen in the future</p>	 <p>Mountains and Molehills Exaggerating the good and positive aspects of others, but minimising our own positives</p>
<p>Compare and despair Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and comparing ourselves negatively against them</p> 	<p>Catastrophising Imagining and believing that the worst possible thing will happen</p> 
 <p>Critical self Putting ourselves down, self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not (totally) our responsibility</p>	 <p>Black and white thinking Believing that something or someone can be only good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in-between or 'shades of grey'</p>
<p>Shoulds and musts Thinking or saying 'I should' (or shouldn't) and 'I must' puts pressure on ourselves, and sets up unrealistic expectations</p> 	<p>Memories Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past, causing us distress right now</p> 

Finding Alternative Thoughts

Unhelpful Thinking Habit	Alternative more balanced thought
Mental Filter 	<i>Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? Am I wearing those 'gloomy specs'? What would be more realistic?</i>
 Mind-Reading	<i>Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What's the evidence? Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Is there another, more balanced way of looking at it?</i>
Prediction 	<i>Am I thinking that I can predict the future? How likely is it that that might really happen?</i>
 Compare & despair	<i>Am I doing that 'compare and despair' thing? What would be a more balanced and helpful way of looking at it?</i>
Critical self 	<i>There I go, that internal bully's at it again. Would most people who really know me say that about me? Is this something that I am totally responsible for?</i>
 Shoulds and musts	<i>Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?</i>
Judgements 	<i>I'm making an evaluation about the situation or person. It's how I make sense of the world, but that doesn't mean my judgements are always right or helpful. Is there another perspective?</i>
 Emotional Reasoning	<i>Just because it feels bad, doesn't necessary mean it is bad. My feelings are just a reaction to my thoughts – and thoughts are just automatic brain reflexes</i>
Mountains and molehills 	<i>Am I exaggerating the good aspects of others, and putting myself down? Or am I exaggerating the negative and minimising the positives? How would someone else see it? What's the bigger picture?</i>
 Catastrophising	<i>OK, thinking that the worst possible thing will definitely happen isn't really helpful right now. What's most likely to happen?</i>
Black and white thinking 	<i>Things aren't either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?</i>
 Memories	<i>This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me <u>feel</u> upset, it's not <u>actually</u> happening again right now.</i>

Different Perspectives



The probably familiar images of two straight lines (of equal length) and a candlestick (or two faces) show us that things are often not as they first seem, and there's almost always a different perspective.



When there's a traffic accident, police ask for witnesses to come forward to describe what happened. They like to have as many witness statements as possible, so they can build up a broader picture and a more realistic version of events. In a traffic accident, there will be many different perspectives on what happened. The driver will have one perspective, another driver, or a passenger will have yet another perspective. Each onlooker who witnessed the accident will have a slightly different perspective, depending on where they were, how far away they were, how much their view or vision was restricted, how much danger they felt they were in, what else was going on, how the accident affected them, what the accident means to them.



So it's the same principle with everything – each situation, event, conversation means something different to all those involved, and to those not involved. We give different meanings, according to our belief systems, and how we are affected by the event. We all have our own realities.

Anais Nin said: *"We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are"*

We look at situations, events, and interpret what other people say and do, according to our own set of past experiences, culture, faith, values, all of which help us form our beliefs about ourselves, about others, and about the world in general. The meaning we give events, the way we make sense of our world, is based upon our core belief system.

Our minds are constantly trying to make sense of our world, forming judgements and opinions about every situation, event, and interaction. Those judgements and opinions will be affected by our central or core belief system. It is as though we are looking at the world through distorted or coloured lenses – and everyone has their own personal prescription or colour for their glasses.

Core belief system
comprises:

- How I think about myself
- How I think about others
- How I think about the world



Our core belief system is formed and
influenced by:

- Past experiences
- Childhood upbringing
- Culture
- Faith
- Values
- Current circumstances
- Character traits, including genetic influences

Example:

Childhood Experience:
Bullied and hurt by others



Core Beliefs:

Others will hurt me.
The world is a dangerous place.
I'm useless and unlovable.
I must try to please others so they like and won't hurt me.



Lens: distorted perception



Situation or Event

See situations and events as threatening & dangerous

Interpret others words and reactions as critical or threatening.

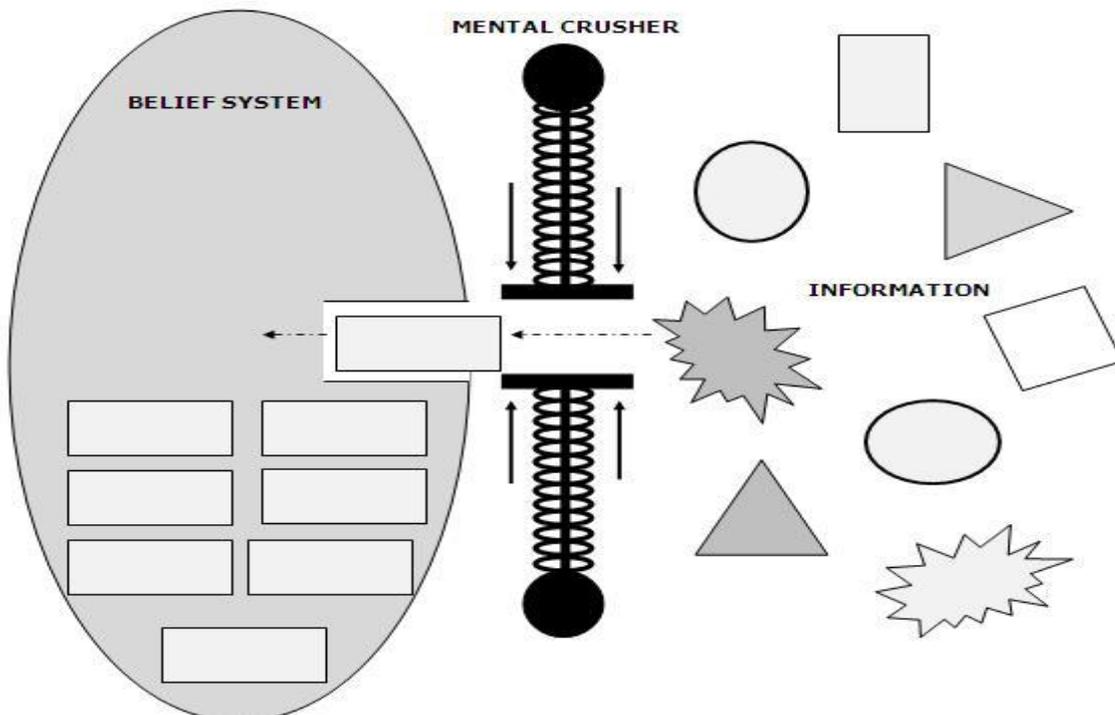


Behaviour: Passive, go along with what others want, don't talk, avoid eye contact

Emotions: Anxious, depressed, low self-esteem

Thoughts: I'm vulnerable, this is dangerous, I'm going to get hurt. I'm useless and stupid. No-one likes me.

In the example above, even situations which others find enjoyable and relaxing, this particular person will experience it very differently, and feel threatened by others. A look, word or gesture intended to be friendly and kind, may be interpreted as "They don't mean that. They're only trying to be kind to me because they pity me". Or even, "They mean to hurt me". Their mind is interpreting the situation with the bias of "I'm vulnerable, others might hurt me, this is dangerous, I'm useless and unlovable". The mind will work to make any contrary information, fit with those beliefs. This is shown by "The Mental Crusher"

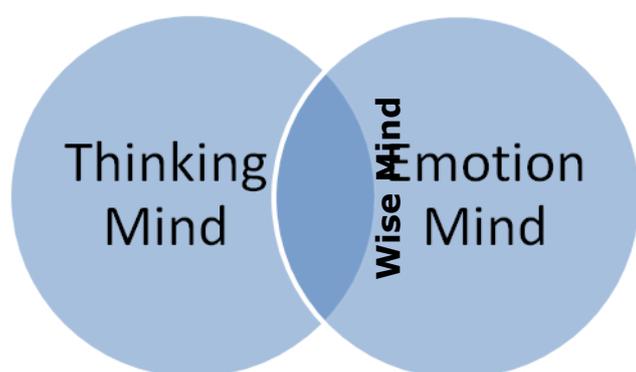


'The Mental Crusher' sits outside the entrance to our belief system, and only allows information or 'evidence' which fits with our own belief system to enter. Any contradictory evidence or information (any shape other than a rectangle) is rejected, or made to fit (crushed into a rectangle). In the diagram, the explosion shape is about to enter the Crusher. As it passes through (shown by the arrow), it becomes a rectangle – it's been crushed and distorted to fit. Therefore, our beliefs remain unchanged in spite of apparently contradictory evidence being out there. *Paraphrased from p. 58 of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Anxiety Disorders by Butler, Fennel & Hackman (Guilford 2008)*

In the case of our earlier example, the information that *a person looked at me*, is "crushed" and distorted ("they looked at me funny") to confirm that others dislike or mean to hurt me.

Learning to see things differently - 'The helicopter view'

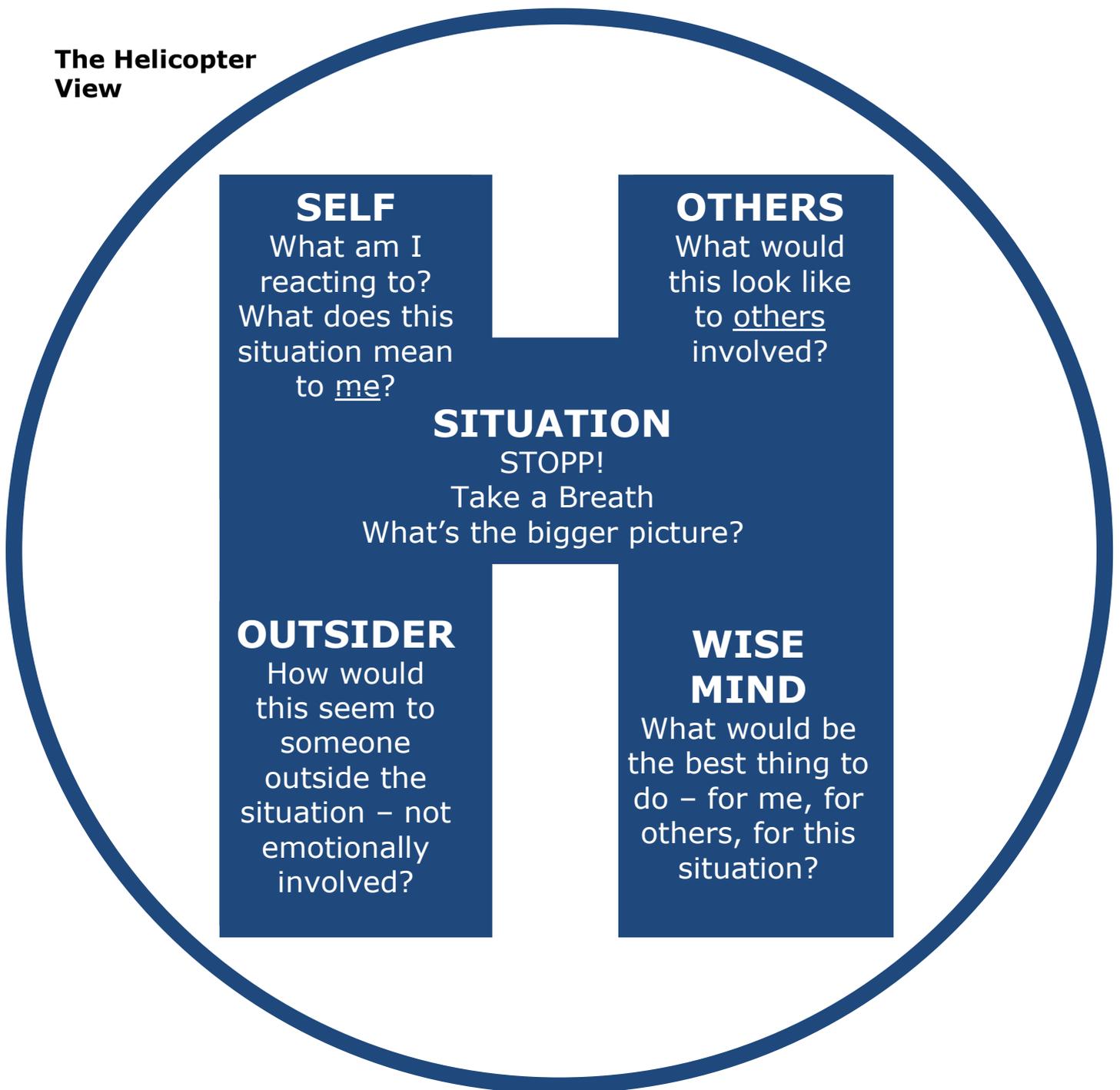
Sometimes it's useful to use a metaphor to help us consider the bigger picture. When something is distressing us, we're so close to it, involved with it, part of it – it's really hard to stand back from what's happening. It's like the well-known saying "We can't see the wood for the trees", or like Google Earth – we see the close up view but everything else is hidden from us. We can zoom out our view, and see the bigger picture. We could call this the helicopter view – as the helicopter takes off, getting higher and higher, it sees a bigger picture, and is less involved with the detail at ground level. *(diagram on next page)*



Wise Mind is the balanced part of us that comprises our inner knowledge and intuition, where thinking mind and emotion mind come together, the part of us that just "knows", that inner truth. Asking ourselves what 'wise mind' might make of this situation will help us to stand back and be more aware of the bigger picture, and help us respond in more helpful and effective ways.

Within any meeting of people all the individuals will of course have their own belief system, and will therefore have different perspectives – see and think about things differently - and this will affect the way these individuals interact with each other. We can learn to be more aware of how our own belief system affects us, and consider how others might see the same situation quite differently.

The Helicopter View



Seeing different perspectives will help to reduce distressing emotions, help us feel more confident, enable us to be more understanding and empathic, and improve communication and relationships. As we challenge our unhelpful thoughts and biased perspectives, and see things in a more balanced and realistic way, so we will discover that situations and people can be different to how we usually interpret things, which can lead us to modify our core belief system, and therefore bring about lasting positive change.

STOPP! (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/stopp.htm)

Step 5

Challenging our Thoughts



Having learned that thoughts are just thoughts, that they're automatic, not necessarily true, habitual and just appear believable, then we can behave like Victim 2 in the previous step and learn to challenge our thoughts.

We can start by identifying which of our thoughts is the HOT thought:

Write down several thoughts from a recent distressing situation. What did those thoughts say about you, or mean to you? Of all those, which thought (or images) was the one that made you most upset?

Let's take that hot thought - THE thought that contributed most to making you feel distressed or depressed. Ask yourself the following questions about THAT thought:



- Is this thought a fact, or just a thought?
- What am I reacting to? What meaning am I giving this situation?
- Is there another way of looking at it?
- What would someone else make of it? It's often helpful to think about a particular person who you respect, and imagine what they would think about that thought, what meaning they would give it, and how they would react to it.
- What advice would I give someone else?
- Is this one of those [Unhelpful Thinking Habits](#)?
- Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event?
- How important is this really? How important will it be in a year's time?
- How am I reacting? When I think of that Playground Bully, am I like Victim 1 (believing and getting upset), or can I be like Victim 2 and challenge the bully?
- What if I tried to see this situation as an outside observer. How would that look? Would things be likely to have a different meaning?
- What evidence is there that this thought is true?
- What evidence is there that this thought isn't true (partly or totally)?
- What would be a more balanced way of looking at it?
- What is the bigger picture?

Use these sheets repeatedly to learn to challenge your thoughts successfully (photocopy the sheets and use them at least once daily):

- ❖ **The Court Case OR the Thought Record Sheet**
- ❖ **Positive Affirmations**
- ❖ You might also find **The Worry Tree** helpful

The Court Case



Write down your thought/s – put the really troublesome (hot) thought (not you!) in the “dock”, the thought that makes you feel really bad or upset. (To help identify this thought, ask yourself questions such as: What’s the worst that could happen? What does that say about me?)

Look for evidence to support the accuracy of the thoughts – what tells you this thought is true? What would a barrister / lawyer / advocate for the defence say? (Remember this is a “court case” and evidence should be able to stand up in court as facts)



Look for evidence against the thoughts – what tells you this thought is not totally true, all of the time? What would a barrister / lawyer / advocate for the prosecution say? What factual evidence is there? Consider what others would say (witnesses) etc.

Sum up all the evidence and come to your own conclusions – **find a closing statement that is based on the evidence, a summing-up statement that is realistic, rational and balanced.** Rephrase the original thought in a way that includes the evidence. (You might start with: “Even though I.....”)



Thought Record Sheet

Situation	Emotions / Moods (rate 0 – 100%)	Physical sensations	Unhelpful Thoughts / Images	Alternative / realistic thought More balanced perspective	What I did / What I could do / Defusion technique / What's the best response? Re-rate Emotion 0-100%
<p>What happened? Where? When? Who with? How?</p>	<p>What emotion did I feel at that time? What else? How intense was it?</p>	<p>What did I notice in my body? Where did I feel it?</p>	<p>What went through my mind? What disturbed me? What did those thoughts/images/memories mean to me, or say about me or the situation? What am I responding to? What 'button' is this pressing for me? What would be the worst thing about that, or that could happen?</p>	<p>STOPP! Take a breath....</p> <p>What would someone else say about this situation? What's the bigger picture? Is there another way of seeing it? What advice would I give someone else? Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event?</p>	<p>What could I do differently? What would be more effective?</p> <p>Do what works! Act wisely. What will be most helpful for me or the situation? What will the consequences be?</p>

Positive Affirmations

Over the years, we tend to get into **unhelpful thinking habits**, and think negatively about ourselves and situations. Using positive statements can help us develop a new attitude to ourselves and our situations.



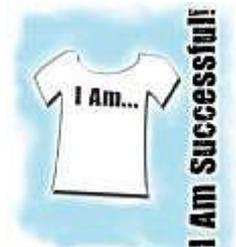
Choose a statement from those below, or make one that means more to you, and repeat, repeat, repeat throughout the day, every day, of every week, of every month. You might want to make or print out a card with your affirmation, and carry it with you. For the positive affirmations to work, you must use it whenever you notice you have that negative thought – immediately turn it around by using your affirmation.

Use a statement that starts with “I” and use the present tense. See the examples below – choose one, adapt one, or make up your own. Make it something broadly realistic, even if you don’t believe it right now.



- ❖ I am strong
- ❖ I have strength
- ❖ I am determined and successful
- ❖ I am a good and worthwhile person
- ❖ I am a unique and special person
- ❖ I have inner strength and resources
- ❖ I am confident and competent

- ❖ I hold my head up high
- ❖ I look good because I am good
- ❖ People like me – I am a likeable person and I like myself
- ❖ I care about others, I am needed and worthwhile
- ❖ I am a loving person
- ❖ I have a lot to be proud of
- ❖ I have all that I need
- ❖ I am in control of my life
- ❖ I can achieve anything I want to achieve
- ❖ I make wise decisions based on what I know
- ❖ I have set my goals and am moving towards them
- ❖ I accept myself as a unique and worthwhile person
- ❖ My life has meaning and purpose
- ❖ I am in control of my choices
- ❖ I am strong and healthy

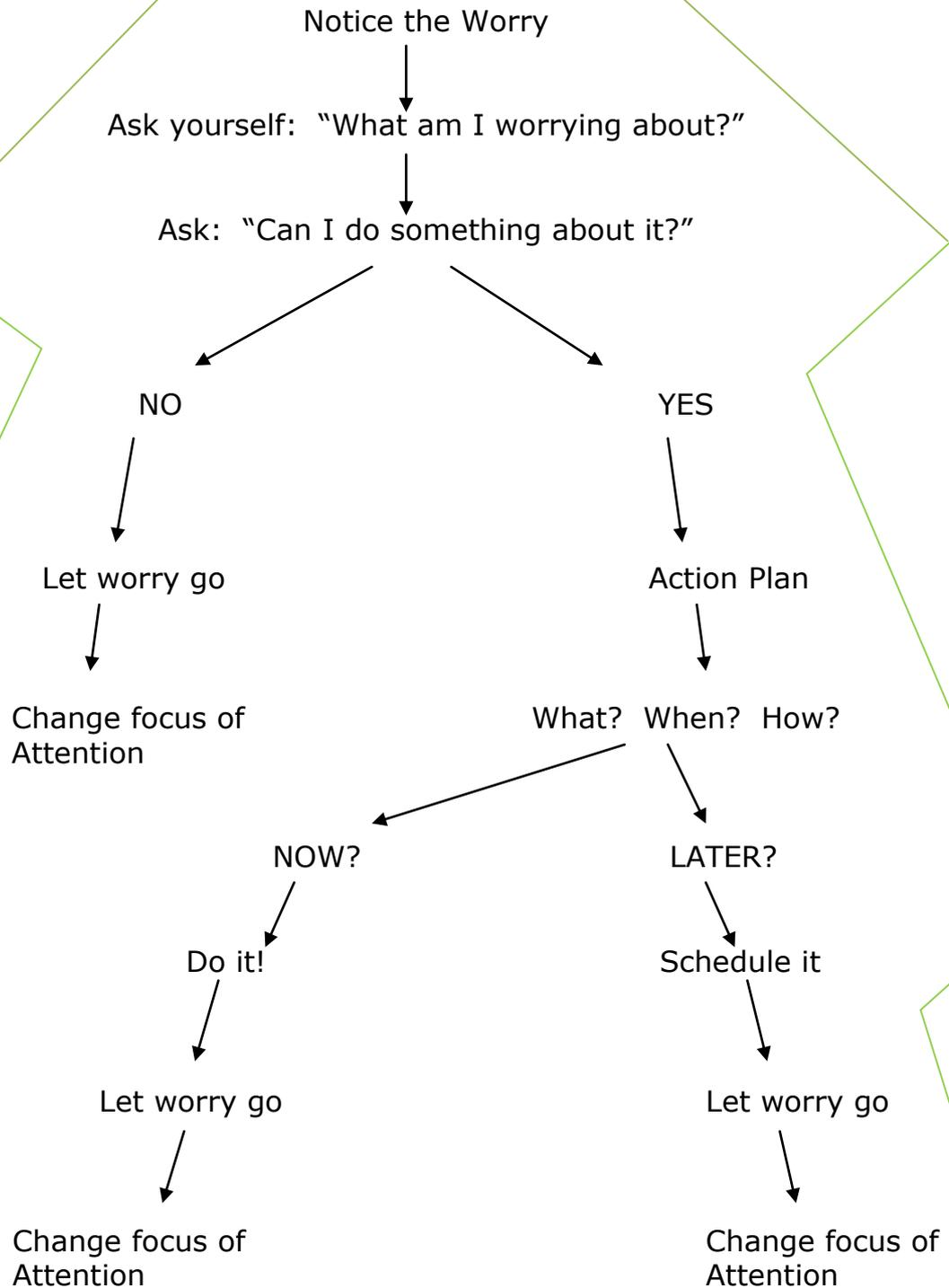


- ❖ I am calm and confident
- ❖ I have many options and can make wise decisions
- ❖ Everything is getting better every day
- ❖ I am calm and relaxed
- ❖ I am healthy and have all that I need
- ❖ Today is the first day of the rest of my life and I will take

notice of the many positive things this day has to offer

- ❖ I live a healthy and positive lifestyle
- ❖ I know I can master anything if I practise it continually
- ❖ I have my wise mind – I can seek inner guidance whenever I need to
- ❖ My life purpose can be whatever I choose it to be
- ❖ All is well, right here, right now

THE WORRY TREE



Step 6

Distancing or Defusing from Thoughts

Remember that Playground Bully? Victim 1 believed the bully and became upset. Victim 2 challenged back and the bully eventually loses his power and gives up. Victim 3 was quite different. He didn't react at all. He merely acknowledged the bully, then turned away and went off to play with his friends.



Defusing from our thoughts involves acknowledging the thought as a thought, not reacting automatically, then choosing to put our focus of attention elsewhere.

Thoughts can be described as 'passing streams of words', or passing images or sensations, rather than the statements of fact that we usually accept them to be. We can practise mindfulness techniques so that we can learn to observe those words, images or sensations, rather than engage with them, or buy into them.

Start with learning Mindful Breathing, and practise often, several times a day, just for 3-5 minutes at a time. The more you practise, the more effective it will be. You will be constantly distracted by intrusive thoughts, sounds, images, sensations - but that's ok. The only aim of mindfulness is to notice when your mind wanders, and repeatedly to bring your attention back to your breathing, or perhaps to an activity you are engaged in. [Practise the techniques on page 40-44.](#)



Earlier, we learned about noticing thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and asking ourselves questions in order to help challenge our thoughts.



STOP, take a breath, and ask yourself these questions which will help you defuse or distance yourself from your thoughts:

- What's happening right now? What thoughts, feelings and sensations do I notice?
- What am I reacting to? What meaning am I giving this event? How is this affecting me?
- What is the result of my believing this thought?
- What would be the effect of not believing this thought?
- Is this a thought, a feeling, or a sensation?
- Am I predicting what might happen in the future?
- Am I evaluating a situation? How might I describe it instead?
- Is this a memory from the past?
- Is this one of those [Unhelpful Thinking Habits](#)?
- Perhaps write the thought down, get it out of your head and onto paper
- Maybe repeat the thought in a strange or comical voice, or say it very quickly or very slowly - words can lose or change their meanings
- Can I use a metaphor for this situation? (examples on page 47)



Learn about

❖ Mindfulness

This worksheet is an alternative to the earlier Thought Record Sheet. Photocopy it (or print more from the website), try it out and see which one you prefer.

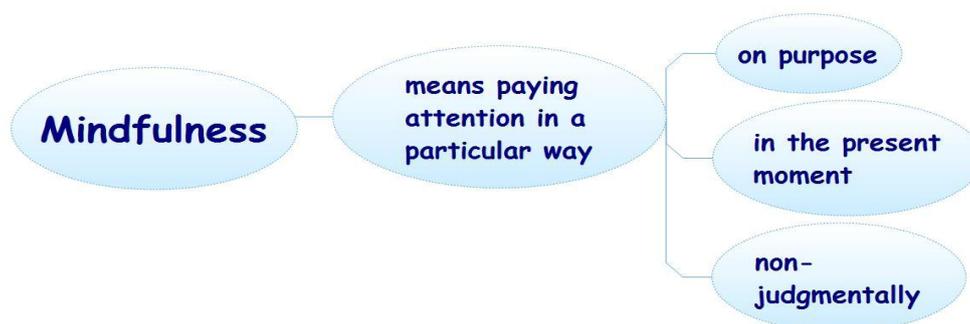
❖ ACT Worksheet

Photocopy these sheets (or print more from the website) and practise the techniques as much and as often as you can

❖ STOPP

❖ Defusion Techniques

Mindfulness



Jon Kabat-Zinn

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is an ancient Buddhist practice which is very relevant for our lives today. Mindfulness is a very simple concept. Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally.



Mindfulness does not conflict with any beliefs or traditions, whether religious, cultural or scientific. It is simply a practical way to notice thoughts, physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells - anything we might not normally notice. The actual skills might be simple, but because it is so different to how our minds normally behave, it takes a lot of practice.

We might go out into the garden and as we look around, we might think "That grass really needs cutting, and that vegetable patch looks very untidy". A young child on the other hand, will call over excitedly, "Hey - come and look at this ant!"

Mindfulness can simply be noticing what we don't normally notice, because our heads are too busy in the future or in the past - thinking about what we need to do, or going over what we have done.

Mindfulness might simply be described as choosing and learning to control our focus of attention.

Automatic Pilot

In a car, we can sometimes drive for miles on “automatic pilot”, without really being aware of what we are doing. In the same way, we may not be really “present”, moment-by-moment, for much of our lives: We can often be “miles away” without knowing it.



On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our “buttons pressed”: Events around us and thoughts, feelings and sensations (of which we may be only dimly aware) can trigger old habits of thinking that are often unhelpful and may lead to worsening mood.

By becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, from moment to moment, we give ourselves the possibility of greater freedom and choice; we do not have to go into the same old “mental ruts” that may have caused problems in the past.

Mindful Activity



If we wash the dishes each evening, we might tend to be ‘in our heads’ as we’re washing up, thinking about what we have to do, what we’ve done earlier in the day, worrying about future events, or regretful thoughts about the past. Again, a young child might see things differently, “Listen to those bubbles! They’re fun!”

Washing up or another routine activity can become a routine (practice of) mindful activity for us. We might notice the temperature of the water and how it feels on the skin, the texture of the bubbles on the skin, and yes, we might hear the bubbles as they softly pop. The sounds of the water as we take out and put dishes into the water. The smoothness of the plates, and the texture of the sponge. Just noticing what we might not normally notice.

A mindful walk brings new pleasures. Walking is something most of us do at some time during the day. Even if only for a couple of minutes at a time, we can practise mindful walking. Rather than be ‘in our heads’, we can look around and notice what we see, hear and/or sense. We might notice the sensations in our own body just through the act of walking, noticing the sensations and movement of our feet, legs, arms, head and body as we take each step. Noticing our breathing. Thoughts will continuously intrude, but we can just notice them, and then bring our attention back to our walking.

The more we practise, perhaps the more (initially at least) we will notice those thoughts intruding, and that's ok. The only aim of mindful activity is to bring our attention back to the activity continually, noticing those sensations, from outside and within us.

Mindful Breathing

The primary focus in Mindfulness Meditation is the breathing. However, the primary goal is a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them. This creates calmness and acceptance.



- ❖ Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.
- ❖ Direct your attention to your breathing.
- ❖ When thoughts, emotions, physical feelings or external sounds occur, simply accept them, giving them the space to come and go without judging or getting involved with them.
- ❖ When you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.

It's ok and natural for thoughts to arise, and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.

Breathing Meditation 1 (Kabat-Zinn 1996)



Assume a comfortable posture lying on your back or sitting. If you are sitting, keep the spine straight and let your shoulders drop.

Close your eyes if it feels comfortable.

Bring your attention to your belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in-breath and fall or recede on the out-breath.

Keep your focus on the breathing, 'being with' each in-breath for its full duration and with each out-breath for its full duration, as if you were riding the waves of your own breathing.

Every time you notice that your mind has wandered off the breath, notice what it was that took you away and then gently bring your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out.

If your mind wanders away from the breath a thousand times, then your job is simply to bring it back to the breath every time, no matter what it becomes preoccupied with.

Practise this exercise for fifteen minutes at a convenient time every day, whether you feel like it or not, for one week and see how it feels to incorporate a disciplined meditation practice into your life. Be aware of how it feels to spend some time each day just being with your breath without having to *do* anything.

Breathing Meditation 2 (Kabat-Zinn 1996)

- ❖ Tune into your breathing at different times during the day, feeling the belly go through one or two risings and fallings.
- ❖ Become aware of your thoughts and feelings at these moments, just observing them without judging them or yourself.
- ❖ At the same time, be aware of any changes in the way you are seeing things and feeling about yourself.



Using mindfulness to cope with negative experiences (thoughts, feelings, events)



As we become more practised at using mindfulness for breathing, body sensations and routine daily activities, so we can then learn to be mindful of our thoughts and feelings, to become observers, and then more accepting of them. This results in less distressing feelings, and increases our ability to enjoy our lives.

With mindfulness, even the most disturbing sensations, feelings, thoughts, and experiences, can be viewed from a wider perspective as passing events in the mind, rather than as "us", or as being necessarily true. (Brantley 2003)

When we are more practised in using mindfulness, we can use it even in times of intense distress, by becoming mindful of the actual experience as an observer, using mindful breathing and focussing our attention on the breathing, listening to the distressing thoughts mindfully, recognising them as merely thoughts, breathing with them, allowing them to happen without believing them or arguing with them. If thoughts are too strong or loud, then we can move our attention to our breath, the body, or to sounds around us.

Jon Kabat-Zinn uses the example of waves to help explain mindfulness.

Think of your mind as the surface of a lake or an ocean. There are always waves on the water, sometimes big, sometimes small, sometimes almost imperceptible. The water's waves are churned up by winds, which come and go and vary in direction and intensity, just as do the winds of stress and change in our lives, which stir up waves in our mind. It's possible to find shelter from much of the wind that agitates the mind. Whatever we might do to prevent them, the winds of life and of the mind will blow.



"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf" (Kabat-Zinn 2004).

The Visitor

This exercise helps to develop a mindful awareness of the environment, of the body, of the breath, and of thoughts and emotions. You can practice the exercise as a whole, or in parts – using any part of the exercise.



The Environment



As you're walking, or just sitting quietly somewhere, start to notice things as though you were a visitor to this place. As you look around you, notice sights, sounds and smells as though you had never seen, heard or smelled them before. You can imagine you are a visitor from another area or culture, or from a different species or even planet. Seeing or hearing things for the first time, from a completely different perspective. Spend a little time just looking and listening and noticing.

The Body

When 'Dr Who' regenerates, he immediately checks out his new body. As a newcomer or visitor, start to imagine being in your body for the first time. Notice what that feels like – what bodily sensations do you notice? How does it feel to move around, stretching those muscles, standing up or sitting down. What do those hands feel like as you move them about, stretching and wiggling those fingers, clenching those fists? As you start to walk, how is that? What do you notice about your legs – upper legs, feet and toes? Move your head around and notice what your neck and shoulders feel like. Bend, stretch and move about. What are those physical sensations? Spend a little time just noticing those bodily sensations, and imagine taking your body for its first ever walk, or any everyday activity.



The Breath



What would you, as a new awareness or visitor to this new body, notice about the sensations of breathing, as you breathe in, then out? Notice the sensations in the abdomen, the chest, the throat, the mouth and nose. You can notice how your attention wanders, as thoughts come in, sometimes crowding in, and your attention can follow those thoughts. Just notice as your attention wanders, then gently bring your focus back to your breath. Minds do wander, thoughts will come and thoughts will go, that is the nature of the human mind. As a visitor, you can stand back, notice those thoughts, feelings, sounds and sensations, and keep bringing your attention back to your breath.

Thoughts and Emotions

Then you can start to notice, as a visitor, the thoughts and images, feelings and emotions that come and go, in this your new body and mind. You're brand new to this body and mind, and there are no expectations for you to react to any thought, image or emotion – you can just notice them, and not respond. As a visitor, you can notice that they are just words and images, sensations, and feelings. Merely notice them as you would as a new visitor to this body and mind. Words and images, sensations and feelings: they come, and they go, and that's okay, because just what the human mind does.



ACT – ABCD Worksheet			
A Activating Event	B Believable Thoughts	C Consequences	
Notice a situation in your life that is difficult. This can be an event in the past, present, or future. It can be internal or external, real or imagined. Now briefly summarise the situation you are struggling with in the space provided. Be specific.	Please describe the difficult thoughts that show up for you in this situation.	<p>Consequences of Believing the Thought Pick a thought from B that you are likely to believe. Now write how you will behave and feel if you believe the thought.</p> <p>Balanced alternative thought-optional</p>	<p>Consequences of Not Believing the Thought How are you likely to behave and feel if you do not believe the thought?</p>
D Defusion		Examples of Defusion Exercises	
Defusion involves seeing thoughts and feelings for what they are (streams of words, passing sensations), not what they say they are (dangers or facts). Write down some defusion exercises you would like to practise.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice unhelpful thoughts. Say them slowly. Write them down. Say them in funny voices. • Label unhelpful thoughts and emotions, e.g. an evaluation, a prediction, a feeling, a sensation, a justification, a memory etc • Practise mindfulness so that you can better notice when you are in the present moment versus when you are stuck in your head in the past or future. • Use metaphors to help get a different view of your thoughts, feelings, and self evaluations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Passengers on the Bus, Playground Bully, The Beach Ball, The Shop Window, The River, The Thought Train • STOP, STEP BACK. OBSERVE (what you are feeling and thinking; how the other person is acting). 	

Adapted from Ciarrochi & Bailey 2008

STOPP



➤ Stop and Step Back

- Don't act immediately. Pause.



➤ Take a Breath

- Notice your breath as you breathe in and out.

➤ Observe

- What am I thinking and feeling? What are the words that my mind is saying? Are the thoughts descriptions or evaluations? Accurate or inaccurate? Helpful or unhelpful? What unhelpful thinking habit am I using (e.g. mind-reading, negative filter, thinking the worst)? Where is my focus of attention? What metaphor could I use (mountain, tunnel, playground bully, thought train, beach ball, passengers on the bus)?



➤ Put in some Perspective



- See the situation as an outside observer. What would a fly on the wall see? Is there another way of looking at it? What would someone else see and make of it? What advice would I give to someone else? What meaning am I giving this event for me to react in this way? How important is it right now, and will it be in 6 months? Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event? What's the 'helicopter view'?

➤ Practise what works

- Do what works and what helps! Play to your Principles and Values. Will it be effective and appropriate? Is it in proportion to the event? Is it in keeping with my values and principles? What will be the consequences of my action? What is best for me and most helpful for this situation?



Adapted from Ciarrochi & Bailey 2008

Defusion Techniques

Defusion involves seeing thoughts and feelings for what they are (streams of words, passing sensations), not what they say they are (dangers or facts).



- **STOP, STEP BACK, OBSERVE** (the thoughts and feelings, what's happening to/for the other person).
 - Notice what's happening – your thoughts, physical sensations, emotions, images, memories. Notice the way you're interpreting what they mean, and how that's affecting you.
 - Notice the unhelpful thoughts. What am I reacting to? Perhaps say the thoughts very slowly, or very quickly, in a squeaky or comic voice, or write them down.
- **Identify the emotion you're feeling, and label the unhelpful thoughts**
 - an evaluation
 - a prediction
 - a feeling or sensation
 - a memory
 - an unhelpful thinking habit: mind-reading (believing we know or what others are thinking), negative filter (only noticing the bad stuff), emotional reasoning (I feel bad so it must be bad), catastrophising (imagining the worst), the internal critic etc.
 - Learn more and practise **mindfulness** so that you can be aware of when you are in the present moment rather than being 'in your head' - perhaps the past or future. Notice what you don't normally notice – sights, sounds, sensations, thoughts, textures etc.
 - **Use metaphors** try to see things differently. For example:

Passengers on the Bus



You can be in the driving seat, whilst all the passengers (thoughts) are being critical or shouting directions. You can allow the shouting, whilst focusing on the road ahead.

Playground Bully (our thoughts can be our own internal bully)

Victim 1 – believes the bully, gets upset & reacts automatically (bully carries on)

Victim 2 – challenges the bully (bully eventually gives up)

Victim 3 – acknowledges then ignores the bully, changing focus of attention.



The River



Items floating down the river – perhaps leaves or bits of mucky debris (thoughts, feelings, images) – instead of struggling to float, we can stand on the bank watching it all go by

The Beach Ball

We try to stop thoughts – we hold the ball under water, but it keeps popping up (thoughts). We can allow the ball to float around us, just letting it be.



Thought train



We can sit on the train, watching the scenery (thoughts, images, sensations) go by, or stand on the platform watching the thought train pass by – we don't have to jump on it.

The Tunnel

When we get anxious driving through a tunnel, the best option is to keep going rather than try to escape. This feeling will pass – there is an end to this tunnel.



The Mountain

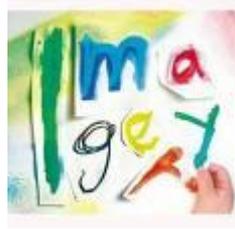


Whatever the weather, or whatever happens on the surface of the mountain – the mountain stands firm, strong, grounded, permanent. We can be like that mountain, observing thoughts, feelings, sensations, knowing inner stillness.

Step 7

Imagery

"Imagination is more important than knowledge" (Albert Einstein)



Imagery techniques and visualisation has long been used by most if not all cultures of the world, ancient and modern, and by most therapeutic approaches. Imagery is considered to be more effective when we are feeling relaxed.

Imagery can be used as a means to

- relax
- meditate
- improve future personal performance and development
- bring about future success
- gain confidence
- improve mood states
- reduce distress associated with traumatic memories
- gain understanding, insight, inner wisdom
- help overcome physical illnesses
- improve sports performance

Many of us think visually, or in pictures, and we can develop our perhaps natural imagery skills to benefit our mental health. We can practise situations in our imagination, or build our confidence, or maybe learn to relax using imagery.



Imagery for Self Help

Start each visualisation with relaxation by getting comfortable in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, and take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing. Close your eyes, then mentally scan your body and become aware of any area where there is tension, and let that tension go with each out-breath.

- ❖ All visualisations can be strengthened by ensuring you engage all your senses in building the picture in your mind's eye - it's more than just 'seeing'! If you notice any negative links or images entering your positive imagery, then abort that image and think of something else.

Finish each visualisation by taking a few moments to bring yourself back into the room where you are, opening your eyes and looking around, sitting up, and bringing yourself back to alertness in the 'here and now'.

Relaxing 'Safe Place' Imagery

- ❖ Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamt about going to, or maybe somewhere you've seen a picture of.
- ❖ Focus on the colours in your peaceful safe place.
- ❖ Now notice the sounds that are around you, or perhaps the silence.
- ❖ Think about any smells you notice there.
- ❖ Then focus on any skin sensations - the earth beneath you, the temperature, any movement of air, anything else you can touch.
- ❖ Now whilst you're in your peaceful and safe place, you might choose to give it a name, whether one word or a phrase that you can use to bring that image back, anytime you need to.
- ❖ You can choose to linger there a while, just enjoying the peacefulness and serenity. You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and being aware of where you are now.



Wise Inner Advisor

- ❖ If you're unsure about something, or need some guidance, then we all have some form of wise inner part of us which knows.
- ❖ Start with relaxing Safe Place imagery, then you can imagine walking along a path a little way and noticing a "Wise Inner Advisor" - this might be an older person, a representation of another being, perhaps a religious or spiritual figure, or some other being. Use whatever feels right for you.
- ❖ Make the image stronger by focusing on the scene, what you can see, hear, smell, touch.
- ❖ Spend some time just being with your Wise Inner Advisor, feeling peaceful and comfortable.
- ❖ Take the opportunity to ask your Wise Inner Advisor for general guidance or for advice on a particular issue. Don't expect an immediate answer, but be receptive to whatever comes up.
- ❖ Some people notice in the following hours, days or weeks that they've received their "answer", perhaps in a very unexpected way.

Confident, Competent, Content



- ❖ We can use imagery to help us feel better about ourselves.
- ❖ Think of a situation or event in the past when you have strongly felt this way. Or think of a person (real or fictional) who has the qualities you desire.
- ❖ Think about that time, or that person - what do you see? What do you hear? How are you/they behaving? What do you/they look like? What do you hear? What else do you notice?
- ❖ What feelings do you notice as you imagine yourself at that time, or being that person? What do you feel now?
- ❖ What physical sensations do you notice?
- ❖ Can you think of a word which describes this good feeling, a word you can use to bring back this feeling whenever you need it?
- ❖ Now focus on that word with the image, and notice the feelings
- ❖ You are now able to bring back this positive feeling, whenever you want or need to.
- ❖ You can combine this technique with "Goal Rehearsal" and imagine yourself in a situation, with these positive feelings.



Goal Rehearsal / Achieving Future Success

- ❖ Consider, in detail, the trait, skill or behaviour you would like to achieve, in what situation, with whom etc.
- ❖ Rehearse the situation in the imagination, using the desired behaviours, skills etc. Imagine seeing yourself in that situation, as you want to be - what you look like, how you sound - what you're saying and how you say it, how you see yourself acting
- ❖ Anticipate others' responses to this new you - rehearse them responding in different ways, sometimes negatively - and then rehearse those difficult scenarios with yourself responding in the way you'd like to respond
- ❖ If necessary, prepare a script of what you want to say (e.g. when planning to stand up to someone in authority)
- ❖ Use this imagery several times a day, for a minimum of 10 days. The more you practise, the easier it becomes, and the easier you will find the actual situation when it happens.

For example, apprehension about a job interview

- ❖ Enact a detailed scene in the mind
- ❖ Use different scenarios of the situation - see yourself being introduced to the interviewer, and also taking the initiative and introducing yourself.
- ❖ Imagine being asked likely questions, and rehearse your responses
- ❖ See yourself looking calm and confident - imagine what that looks like, what you'll be doing, how you'll be doing it

Image Manipulation

Sometimes we can get horribly distressing intrusive images that just pop into our heads, and we have trouble getting rid of them again. The image may be based on a real memory, or just some random terrible image. These images can trigger strong physical sensations, and intense emotions of fear, dread, anger or sadness.

We can learn to manipulate the image so that we reduce the distressing feelings:

- ❖ Imagine putting the image on a TV screen. Now with an imaginary remote control, make the image smaller, making it more distant, perhaps turn it into black and white, remove the sound or give it a different soundtrack.
- ❖ Imagine a plate or sheet of strong clear plastic and put it between your face and the image. Push that image away from your face, until it gets smaller and is further away.

Turning around a 'bad' feeling

Sometimes we can get a 'bad' feeling in our body. It's possible to turn this feeling around by using our imagination. Ask yourself (example in italics):

- ❖ Where is this feeling in your body? *Belly*
- ❖ If this feeling had a shape, what would it be? *Oval shaped*
- ❖ How big would it be? *Rugby ball sized*
- ❖ And what colour would it be? *Dark blue*
- ❖ What texture or consistency would it be? *Solid mass*



And now:

- ❖ For this feeling to be better, what shape does it need to be? *Round*
- ❖ How big? *Getting smaller*
- ❖ And what colour would it be? *Yellow*
- ❖ What texture or consistency would it be? *Warm, light, translucent*



Positive Imagery for Depression

- ❖ When we feel depressed, we get caught up in cycle of negative thinking and imagery, doing less, and consequently feeling more depressed. Whilst it can be difficult to change our negative thinking, people often find it easier to see themselves in their mind's eye, enjoying the activities they used to enjoy doing.
- ❖ Doing this 2 or 3 times a day can be helpful in lifting our mood, and help us start to change our negative focus. The activity we visualise need not be something we're planning to do in the future, the aim is simply to reactivate more helpful thinking and imagery.
- ❖ As with all other imagery exercises, it is helpful to strengthen the image by thinking about each of our senses, noticing even small details in what we can see and hear etc. It is also often helpful to use the other exercises described above.



What now?

Practice, Practice, Practice!

This is just the start of your journey. You have learned some skills, and now you need to keep doing them, repeatedly.



CBT is not a magic-wand therapy, it takes hard work and commitment, but you will be rewarded!

After a while, you won't need to write things down most of the time as you'll find yourself doing all the steps in your head, you'll get better at it, and be able to do it quickly.



If you start learning to play a musical instrument, there's no point in just going along to your lessons each week - you **HAVE** to practise repeatedly every day, in order to progress and improve. You can be taught how to play, but you won't play any better without putting the practice in. For the serious musician who puts in the practice, eventually, they learn to play pieces of music competently. Some will go on to master their instrument.

We too can become competent at making effective and healthy changes, that make a real difference to our lives and the lives of those around us.

Most of what we've looked at and practised is covered in the [STOPP handout](#). Photocopy it, or print another copy from the website at www.get.gg, put it on your fridge, or next to your computer, in your car, or in your pocket.

Remind yourself often to **PRACTISE!** Practise at times you don't need to practise, so that when you really need those skills, they'll come easier to you. Just like that practising musician expects to play for several hours a day to become competent before showing off her skills at a big recital concert, or before the big exam.



Maintaining Progress

- Consider the future - what future situations might be difficult for you? What can you do differently at those times?
- What have you learned that's been the most helpful?
- What hasn't helped?
- What has helped?
- What is worth continuing to practise?
- What can you do to help or remind you to practise?
- What support or help do you need?

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Remember and practise the helpful steps you have learned over and over, and even when you feel you can use them effectively, just carry on practising!



After a while, maybe after a great deal of practice, you will more easily notice your thoughts and reactions, realise what you are reacting to, and the meaning you are giving to situations. You will naturally start to question things, and then see things differently, seeing the bigger picture. In questioning and seeing different perspectives, so you will feel very differently, and much more healthily, from the way you used to react.

Use your "Maintaining Progress" (Relapse Prevention) worksheet to remind yourself of what helps most, and what you need to keep practising.

<http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/ccount/click.php?id=23>

Practise STOPP! as much and as often as you can – the more you practise, the easier it will be when you need it

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/stopp.htm

- ❖ **Stop!** Don't act immediately.
- ❖ **Take a breath**
- ❖ **Observe** – what's happening, what am I responding to?
- ❖ **Put in some Perspective** – pull back.
What's the bigger picture? What would someone else make of this?
Is there another way of looking at this? What would I say to a friend?
- ❖ **Play to your Principles** – Practise what works!
What's the best thing to do, for me, for others, for this situation?



Practise Mindful Breathing and be aware of where you are putting your focus of attention

- ❖ **Mindfulness**

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm

Continue to use your Treatment Plan to help you decide what else you need to do

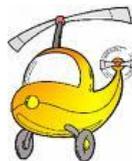
- ❖ **MMT Treatment Plan**

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/ccount/click.php?id=12

Imagery Self-Help Techniques will help you build on the skills you have learned

- ❖ **Imagery for Self-Help**

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/imagery.htm



Try not to act merely in the moment. Pull back from the situation. Take a wider view; compose yourself.

Epictetus (AD 55-135)