CBT Skills Groups

CBT SKILLS FOUNDATIONS WORKBOOK

SharedCare Partners for Patients

mind space SKILLS FOR WELLBEING

Divisions of Family Practice
An FPSC initiative

An initiative of Mind Space and the Shared Care Committee
(a collaboration of Doctors of BC and the B.C. Ministry of Health)
in partnership with the Victoria and Vancouver
Divisions of Family Practice

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At Mind Space, formerly called the CBT Skills Groups Society of Victoria, we are grateful to have first launched our health care initiatives on the traditional and ancestral territories of the Lkwungen-speaking Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. Our office is now based in the traditional and ancestral territories of the K'omoks Nation. Our participants and collaborators operate from traditional and ancestral territories of many Nations across what is known by the colonial name of British Columbia.

In line with our goal to provide accessible mental health, recognition of the relationship and history with our host Nations is essential. Systemic colonialism, past and present, is one of the most significant root causes of mental health concerns to the Indigenous people of this and other lands. We aim to work in solidarity as partners, and have committed to focusing on humility, cultural safety, continuous learning, and meeting the needs of Indigenous clients as whole people.

Welcome to the CBT Skills Foundations Course. This program offers you an opportunity to grow awareness, to connect with others, and to develop a friendlier relationship with yourself.

The Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Foundations Course is a proven program that draws from neuroscience, mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy, emotion regulation strategies, and cognitive behavioural therapy. Designed by British Columbia psychiatrists and taught by physicians, the CBT Skills Foundations Course supports people with mild-to-moderate mental health challenges with the goal of providing an inclusive, empowering learning experience.

The program gives you a chance to learn evidence-based skills and concepts as well as to connect with others in a group. You will learn about how the mind works, the nature of thoughts, the function of emotions, and the interconnection of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. You will practice various skills that help you to remain in the present moment, where you can respond thoughtfully more often, and in ways that support your wellbeing. With awareness, you can discover new ways to relate to your thoughts and feelings, and choose thoughts and behaviours that support your mood. Focusing on your present-day life, you will experiment with approaching challenges in ways that are more flexible, and that are more likely to bring about desired changes.

As we seek to make our offerings more diverse, inclusive, and equitable, we acknowledge that CBT and other western models do not reflect everyone's experience. The CBT Skills Foundations Course may not be beneficial for everyone. If you feel like this program is not a fit for you, we encourage you to listen to your instincts and to explore other options for your wellness. We aim to recognize you as the expert of your own experiences, both inside and outside of CBT Skills Group.

This *Workbook* is loaded with a broad range of information and skills. There is no expectation that you will benefit from every skill included. Listen to both your mind and your body to determine which skills feel good for you, which to practice, and which to move beyond. As you experiment, build a regular practice around those skills that make the most sense for you.

This *Workbook* is used in British Columbia, Canada, in the CBT Skills Foundations Course. This group program has been shown to help people with mild-to-moderate depression and anxiety gain confidence and skill in better managing their mental health. The CBT Skills Foundations *Workbook* is a resource that assists group facilitators in delivering this program, and is intended for use within this facilitated setting.

Acknowledgments

This *Workbook* was assembled originally by a team of psychiatrists and family physicians in Victoria, B.C.: Marjon Blouw, Bill Bullock, Erin Burrell, Joanna Cheek, Wanda Crouse, Lauren Dake, Melissa Gansner, Oona Hayes, and Karen Palmer, along with project leader Christine Tomori. The authors of the current version are Erin Burrell, Oshin Maheshwari, and Joanna Cheek. Crystal Sawyer has provided both editing and design since inception.

Funding for the 2015 program launch was provided by the Victoria Division of Family Practice and the Shared Care Committee (a collaboration of the Doctors of BC and the British Columbia Ministry of Health). Anya Philip advised on revisions and the Vancouver Division of Family Practice funded the current edition in part. The new edition better reflects our values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as a trauma-informed perspective.

Mind Space, formerly the CBT Skills Groups Society of Victoria, is a non-profit society created in 2018 by the founding physicians to sustain and administer the group programs.

This *Workbook* is a compilation of several therapies and psychological approaches to mental health. The physicians are indebted heavily to the clinicians, authors, researchers, and teachers who have developed and shared their research and wisdom in neuroscience, mindfulness, and cognitive behaviour therapy. Many concepts and skills in this book are derived from these dedicated and innovative thinkers.

In particular, the team wishes to acknowledge:

- *The Cognitive Behavioural Interpersonal Skills (CBIS)* manual, developed through Island Health in B.C. by Rivian Weinerman, Helen Campbell, Magee Miller, Janet Stretch, Anne Corbishley, and Nadine Groves.
- Aaron Beck, Judith Beck, David Barlow, Christine Padesky, David Greenberger, and David Burns for their lessons and work on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

Acknowledgments

- Marsha Linehan for developing Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, and Christine Dunkley for her work focused on emotion regulation skills.
- Jon Kabat-Zinn for Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction.
- Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale for Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy.
- Russ Harris, Steven Hayes, Kirk Strosahl, and Kelly Wilson for Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.
- Ruth Baer for her synthesis of mindfulness and dialectical behaviour therapy approaches.
- Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer for their work on self-compassion.
- Brené Brown for her work on vulnerability and shame.
- Dan Siegel for his work on interpersonal neurobiology.

Please see the Works Cited section for citations from these authors, and Resources at mind-space.ca for other publications.

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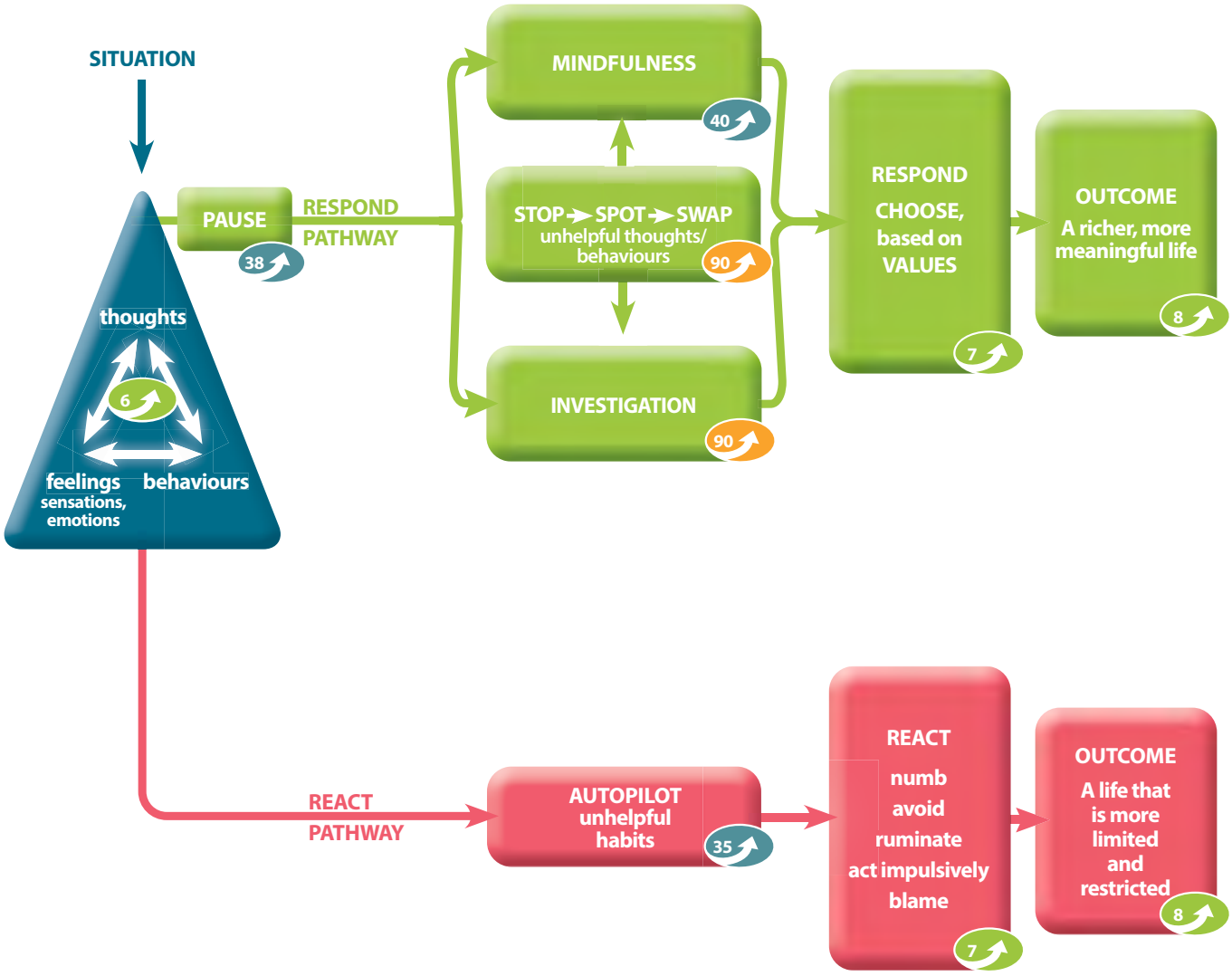
RESPOND vs. REACT



Guidelines for Participation in the CBT Skills Group

1. Please keep the names and identities of fellow group members confidential: do not speak outside the group about people's struggles or mention their names. While facilitators maintain confidentiality, they cannot guarantee that other group members will do the same; therefore, please consider what you choose to share accordingly.

2. As a group, we share responsibility for creating a safe and brave space. We ask you to respect others by giving them your full attention when they speak (e.g., in the Go Around), and by valuing diverse viewpoints. Please avoid interrupting, side conversations, and providing advice.

3. Practice non-judgment and compassion with yourself and with other group members.

4. Arrive on time and attend all sessions if possible. You will benefit from understanding how the materials build upon one another. The group benefits from having a reliable group of people to learn alongside.

5. Challenge yourself to engage with the course to the best of your abilities, honouring your efforts and acknowledging that you have other demands. Many participants benefit from reading the chapters (before or after the sessions) and from completing home practice exercises. Others integrate the lessons through journalling, conversation, art, or other means. Experiment to see what is effective for you, knowing you have this *Workbook* for future reference.

6. Support yourself to pay attention as best you can, while minimizing ways your activity may be distracting to others. Please keep your phone off or on silent mode and refrain from texting during the sessions unless urgent. If you are participating in a virtual group, close other browsers and focus on the session, recognizing that it affects others in the group when your attention is elsewhere. If you need to engage in behaviours such as moving around, doodling, or stimming to help you engage and participate meaningfully, please do so, and contact the facilitator to discuss other things that may support you in this environment. Using presenter view in virtual groups will allow you to view only the person talking, which may reduce distractions.

7. Trauma impacts one's mental health deeply. While processing trauma is extremely important, please refrain from speaking about specific details of trauma in these CBT Skills groups; the information could be upsetting for another group member. Working one-on-one with a psychotherapist, counsellor, or doctor or in a trauma-specific group can be helpful.

8. Be cautious about what you share to avoid triggering others. For example, if you wish to ask questions about suicide or self-harm behaviours, we ask that you refrain from describing these actions in detail. For conversations about substance use, you could choose to use 'drug of choice' as a general term. Please reach out to your facilitator if you are unsure about wording that is appropriate for this group setting.

9. As an organization, we prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusivity. Our facilitators welcome and appreciate feedback about any negative impact that their words or actions may cause so that they can apologize for the harm, learn from the situation, and grow. You can provide feedback directly or through anonymous surveys at the midpoint and end of the group series.

10. For in-person groups, please refrain from wearing perfumes or strong-smelling cosmetics to avoid allergic reactions in others.

The Triangle of Experience

Pearls for this Chapter

- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)** is based on the premise that what we *think* and how we *behave* affects how we *feel*. We can influence feelings of depression, anxiety, and other painful states by changing how we *think* and *act*.
- A first step is to notice the **Triangle of Experience**—interconnected thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that arise in response to situations, or to specific life events.
- Over time, we develop patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, which become habits.
- Emotions are very useful signals to communicate to ourselves and to others, and to motivate action.
- Emotions serve us most effectively when they are in the middle of the **Dial of Activation**, in what we call the **Zone of Workability**. When our level of Activation is too low, we miss out on the valuable signal of the emotion. When it is too high, we can't use the signal to act effectively. **DIAL Skills** are body-based skills we can use to regulate emotions when they are outside the **Zone of Workability**.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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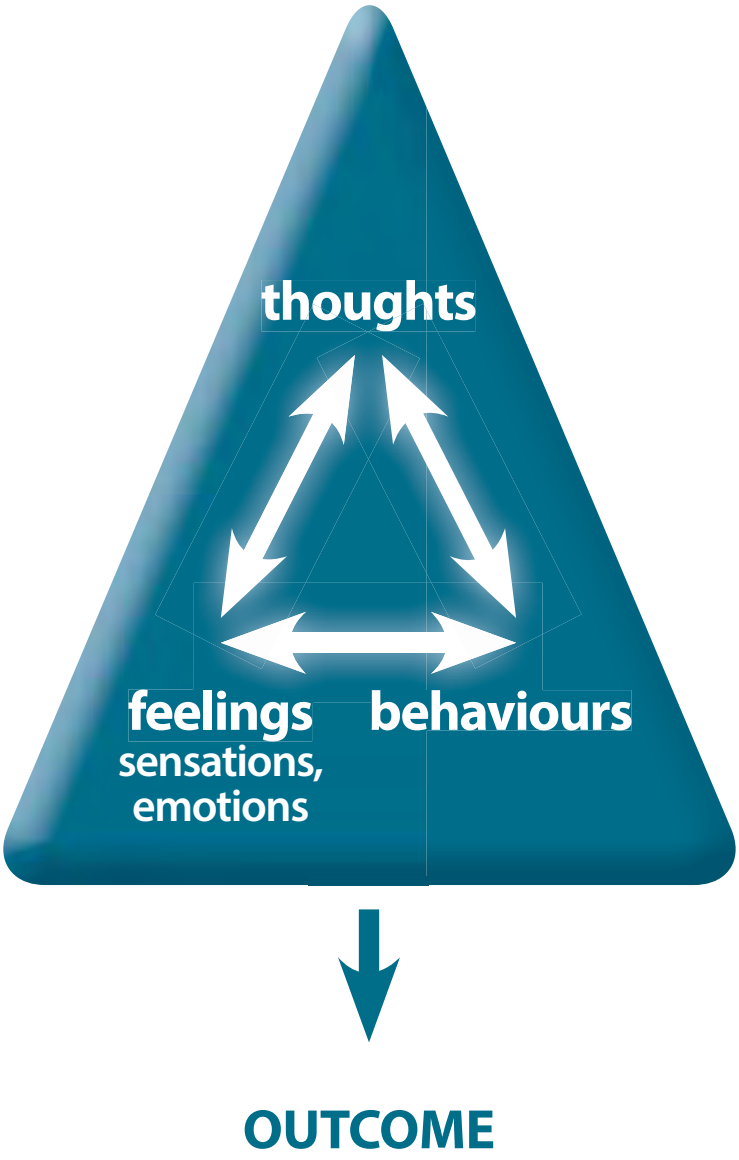
Awareness of the Triangle of Experience



6 Awareness of the parts of the **Triangle of Experience** is the first step toward change.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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One Breath Skill

Techniques to help us relax do not have to be complicated or difficult to learn. Taking **one breath** is a good example.

Sometimes, noticing our breath can make us more anxious. If this feeling can be true for you, you may want to start with a different skill until you build more comfort around noticing the breath.

The act of taking a deep breath can sometimes produce feelings of tightness and discomfort in the chest. When we feel more tense or anxious, we may hold our breath. In this situation, inhaling deeply may actually increase our anxiety. Instead, it can be helpful to start with an exhale.

One simple step may help: before breathing in, *breathe out*. Slowly and gently, breathe out. Breathing out through the mouth can help to slow down the process. As you breathe out, let your shoulders and upper body relax downward. At the end of the breath, breathe in, slowly and gently, through the nose. And finally, exhale again, slowly and gently, through the mouth.

Slowly and gently, breathe out. Breathing out through the mouth can help to slow down the process.

As you breathe out, let your shoulders and upper body relax downward.

At the end of the breath, breathe in, slowly and gently, through the nose.

Finally, exhale again, slowly and gently, through the mouth.

The **One Breath Skill** does not necessarily require any additional steps, such as counting, or belly-breathing. Learning to take one breath—just one, only one—is all that is suggested for this exercise.

The breath is always there with you. Take one breath whenever you think of it, multiple times each day. You can even do it even when you're feeling okay. That way, when you most need to use it, you will have more confidence in your ability to make it work.

What is CBT?[1]

The key idea behind cognitive behavioural therapy **(CBT)** is:

What we THINK, and what we DO, affects the way we FEEL.

The key behind cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

CBT examines thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in the present moment. Differentiating between each of these three components allows us to analyze situations in order to better manage our problems.

Sometimes, through no fault of our own, we get stuck in vicious cycles: the things we think and do while trying to solve a problem accidentally make that problem worse. CBT is about finding out what is keeping us stuck, and about making changes in our thoughts and actions to improve the way we feel. CBT is about recognizing where we have choices.

What is the Evidence for CBT?

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) was developed by Dr. Aaron Beck in the 1960s, and is now a well-known evidence-based therapy. Hundreds of clinical trials have been conducted showing that it is effective for many different problems, and its principles are often taught to help people build wellness practices in mental health settings, schools, and workplaces.

Research trials are showing CBT to be helpful for people with depression, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, among others.[2] CBT can be utilized on its own, or combined with medication. A combined approach is especially useful when symptoms are more severe.

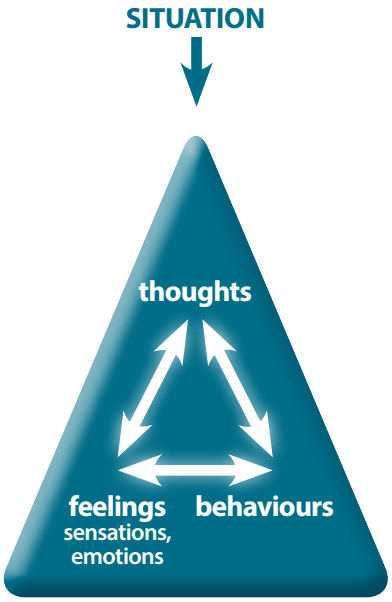
When people practice CBT techniques, they are less likely to fall back into depression once they recover.[1]

You will learn a wide variety of CBT skills in this program, with no expectation for you to love all of them. Experiment to find a few tools that work well for you. Consistent practice will help you to better manage stress and emotional pain, and will free up your energy for the things that are important to you.

1 Adapted from psychologytools.com

2 Butler, A. C., Chapman, J. E., Forman, E. M., & Beck, A. T. (2006). *The empirical status of cognitive-behavioral therapy: a review of meta-analyses.* Clinical psychology review, 26(1), 17–31.

1 Segal, Z., Vincent, P., & Levitt, A. (2002). *Efficacy of combined, sequential and crossover psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy in improving outcomes in depression.* Journal of psychiatry & neuroscience: JPN, 27(4), 281.



The CBT Triangle of Experience

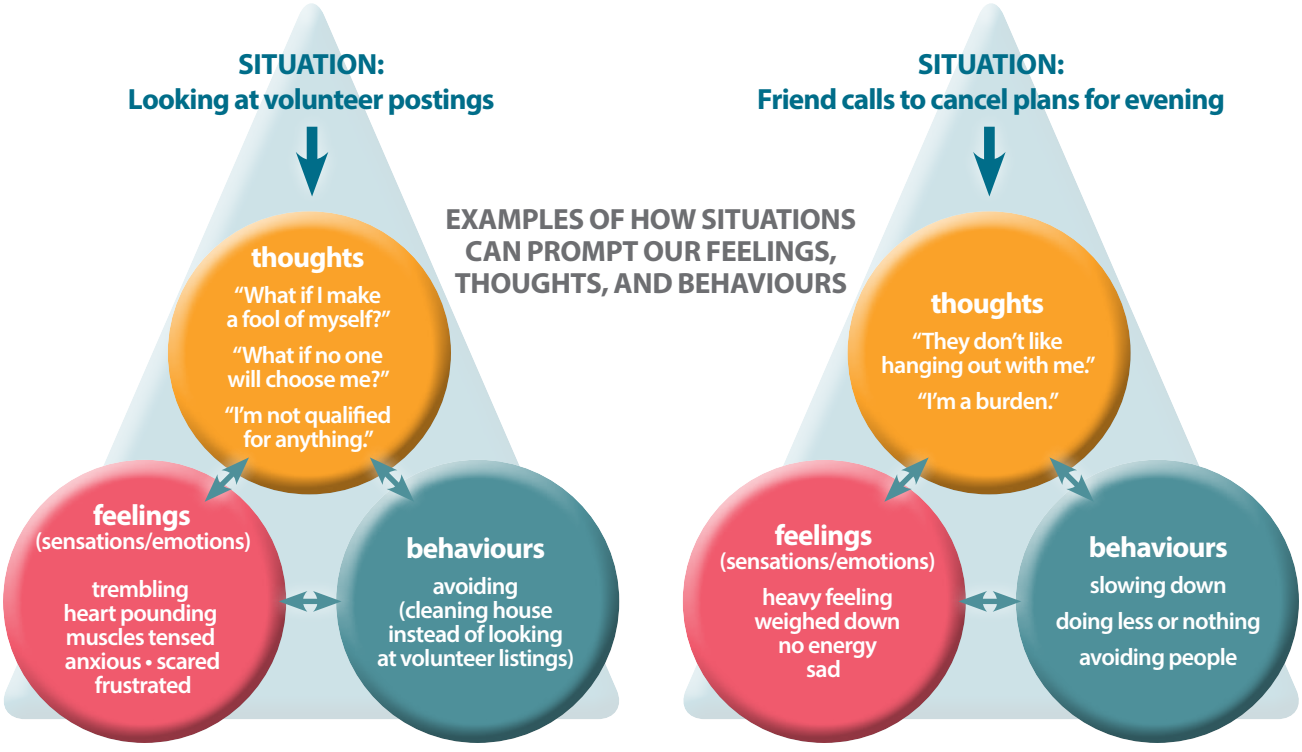
Our experience when we encounter a situation is made up of three main parts:

1. **Thoughts:**
   Mental events made up of words or images.

2. **Feelings:**
   Sensations (how I feel in my body) and the *emotions* I have.

3. **Behaviours:**
   What I do, or what others can see me doing. An *urge* is what I feel like doing.

Before we can make changes, we need to be able to differentiate these parts. Breaking an experience down into its thoughts, feelings, and behaviours can also help our experiences to feel less overwhelming.



IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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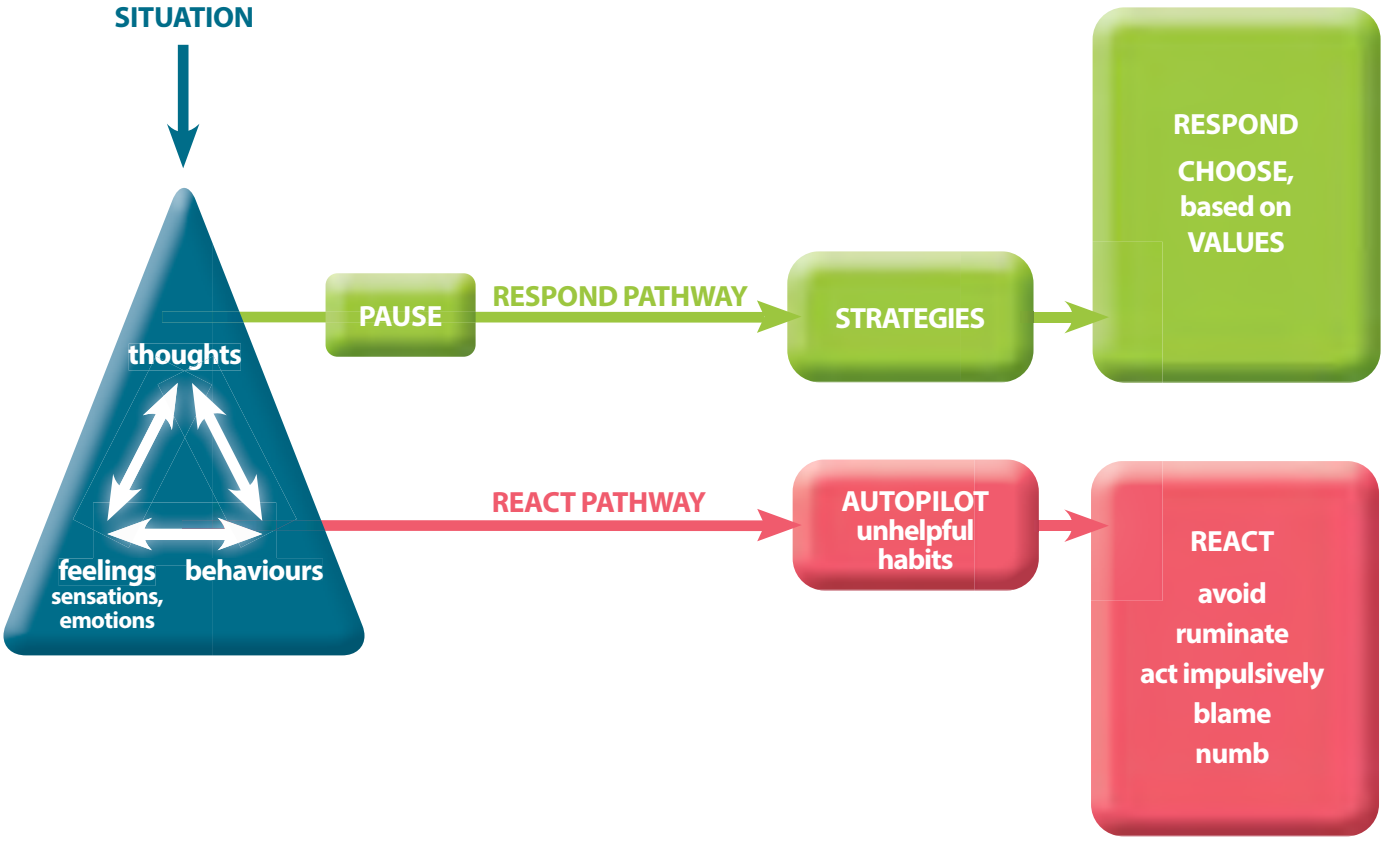
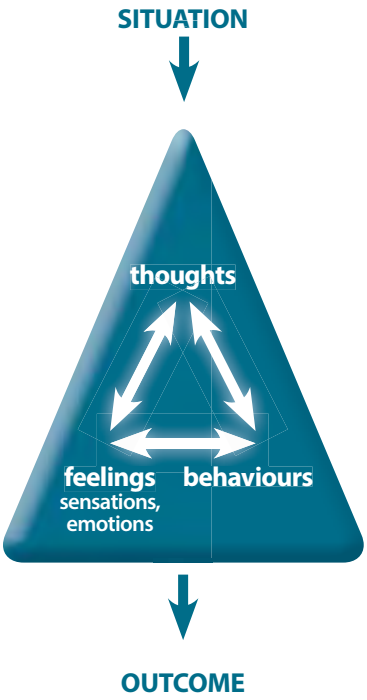
RESPOND vs. REACT?

The overall goal of the **CBT Skills** course is to help us recognize what we have a *choice* about. While we often can't control what comes into our lives, we can learn to **RESPOND** thoughtfully to circumstances, rather than to **REACT** with unhelpful habits. An important first step in this process is the ability to **PAUSE** and notice what is happening in the **Triangle of Experience**.

5 38 6





Noticing How the Triangle Leads to Outcomes

6 As we become more familiar with the elements of the **Triangle of Experience**, we will begin to notice how thoughts, feelings, and behaviours feed each other. Many triangles can arise in a matter of moments.

To illustrate this lesson, consider Jayden, who is fearful of having panic attacks. The diagram on the next page shows the sequence of triangles (thoughts, feelings, and behaviours) that arise when she's exposed to a hot environment.

Outcomes

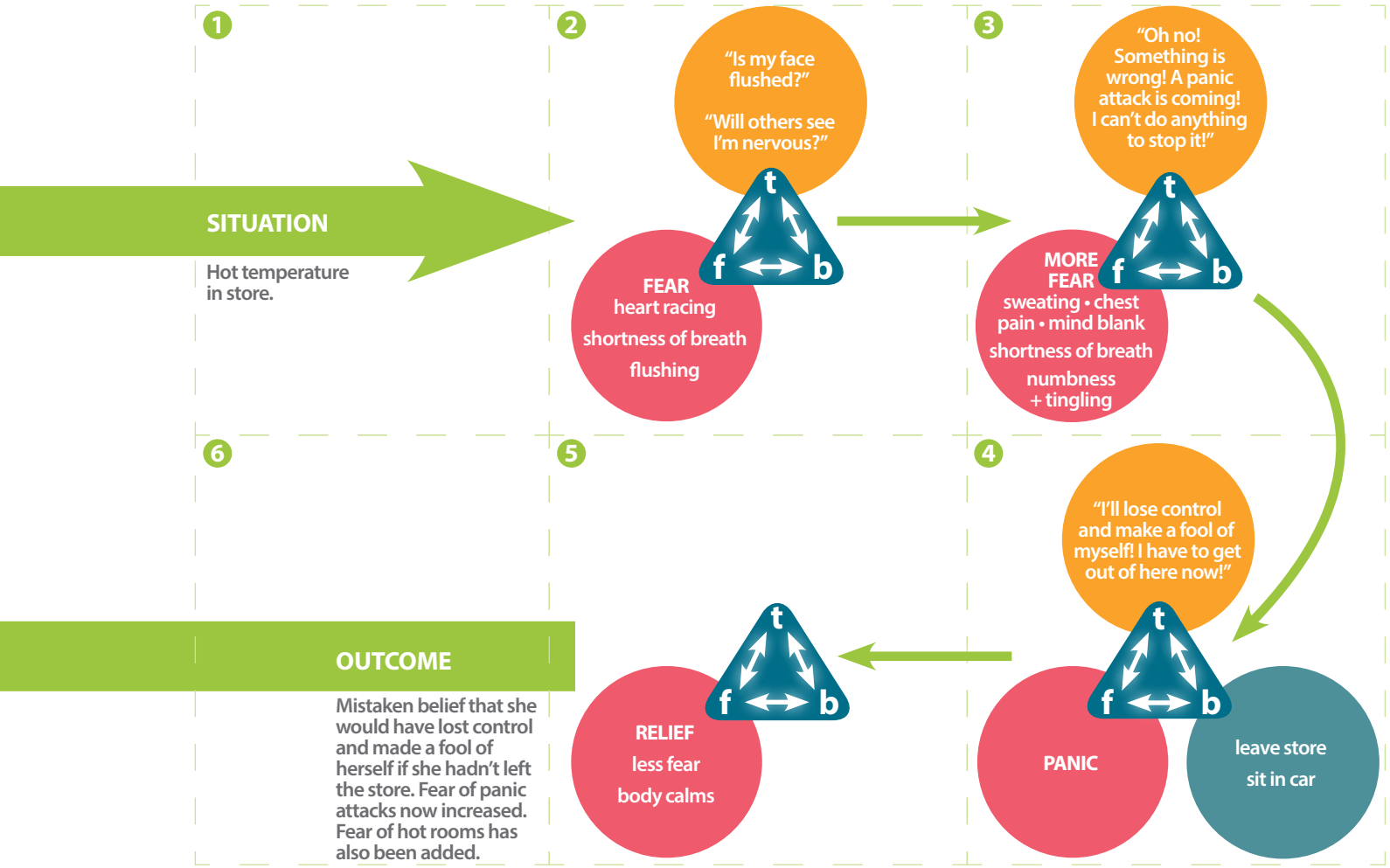
In addition to noticing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in the Triangle of Experience, we also want to practice noticing the *outcomes*. The ultimate outcome of Jayden's sequence is that she now believes that if she had not left the store to hide, she would have lost control and made a fool of herself in front of everyone. In the future, she will likely be afraid of any hot room, and may start avoiding. The outcome is that her original fear is amplified, so that now she is not only afraid of having a panic attack, but also of hot temperatures. This example illustrates how our response to an anxious feeling often makes it worse: the vicious cycle of anxiety.

t = thoughts

f = feelings

b = behaviours

THE TRIANGLE OF EXPERIENCE LEADS TO OUTCOMES



Emotions vs. Moods: When an emotion is fueled, and persists for days, it becomes a mood.

Unlike emotions, a mood may last for months.

Depression is a mood, but sadness is an emotion. Mood states like depression also include nervous system changes that show up as changes in physical health (e.g., low energy, altered patterns of eating and sleeping) and thinking ability (e.g., concentration ability, short-term memory).

Why Do We Have Emotions?

Although emotions can be uncomfortable, they are essential to survival and to everyday functioning. When a situation sets off an emotional response, we not only feel differently, but also our physiology, thinking, posture, facial expression and behaviour change to adapt to the situation.

Emotions Have Important Functions[1 2 3]

Signal Important Information

According to psychiatrist Randolph Nesse in his book, *Good Reasons for Bad Feelings*[4], emotions are not the problem: they alert us to the problem. Like a fever or physical pain, emotions function to signal information about the situation we are in. Rather than trying to eliminate uncomfortable emotions, we can learn to understand the information they offer.

Anger may signal that we have been wronged, fear signals a potential threat, and guilt signals that we may have wronged someone else. These signals give us necessary information to respond effectively to the situation.

Similarly, we can guess at other's emotions by observing their facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and actions. An angry expression allows us to see that someone may have experienced a violation or an injustice, while a sad expression helps us to recognize that someone may have experienced a loss. These signals help us to attune and respond more effectively to each other's needs. Our own emotions communicate our internal state to others without our having to say a word.

1 Baer, R. (2014). *The Practicing Happiness Workbook: How Mindfulness Can Free You from the Four Psychological Traps That Keep You Stressed, Anxious, and Depressed.* New Harbinger Publications.

2 Linehan, M.M. (1993). *Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder.* New York: Guilford.

3 Barlow, D. H., Farchione, T. J., Fairholme, C. P., Ellard, K.K., Boisseau, C. L., Allen, L. B., & May, J. T. E. (2010). *Unified protocol for transdiagnostic treatment of emotional disorders: Therapist guide.* Oxford University Press.

4 Nesse, R. (2019). *Good Reasons for Bad Feelings.* Penguin Random House: New York.

Motivate Action: Aaliyah

Each emotion motivates actions to respond to situations. For example, anger activates us to fight, fear urges us to flee, sadness slows us down and motivates us to reach out for support, while guilt pushes us to repair.

Aaliyah noticed defensiveness (a form of anger) arising when she posted a social media comment and someone responded harshly, saying she was narrow-minded and uninformed. She found her mind retorting with angry thoughts: this person doesn't know her, and misinterpreted what she had said. Her defensiveness signalled to her that something unfair was going on, and motivated her to stand up for herself. She practiced some **grounding**, then drafted a response to clarify her position. Rather than post right away, she gave herself time to revisit her intentions and to ensure that she had considered her response fully. Ultimately, she posted a thoughtful and assertive comment. She felt proud of herself for standing up to being misunderstood and attacked. At the same time, the experience made her question whether the social media platform was a safe place for sensitive posts. Her anger alerted her to the need for boundaries around sharing vulnerable thoughts in safer settings, such as in person interactions.

In general, if we handle our emotions constructively, they can protect us from harm, energize us to accomplish important goals, and help us to maintain our relationships.

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Naming Emotions

It takes practice to differentiate feelings from thoughts, and many times we aren't really aware of what we are feeling. We may also have multiple feelings simultaneously. The more we become aware of our feelings, the better our chances of working skilfully with them.

In this course, we consider both emotions and bodily sensations when we use the word *feelings*, and we encourage you to practice awareness of both. For naming emotions, it can be helpful as a first step to simply name the broad category.

JOY			DESIRE	ANGER		
Playful	Delighted	Elated	Affectionate	Irritated	Hateful	Defensive
Proud	Amused	Happy	Romantic	Frustrated	Vengeful	Hostile
Enthusiastic	Satisfied	Eager	Sentimental	Aggravated	Spiteful	Outraged
Excited	Content	Gleeful	Longing	Exasperated	Enraged	Resentful
Blissful	Peaceful	Connected	Tender	Furious	Aggressive	Annoyed
Triumphant	Accepted	Relaxed	Fondness	Grouchy	Bitter	
Cheerful	Confident	Exhilarated				

FEAR			SADNESS			GUILT	
Afraid	Worried	Uneasy	Depressed	Agonized	Neglected	Regretful	Blameworthy
Threatened	Frightened	Nervous	Apathetic	Defeated	Sorrow	Remorseful	Sorry
Anxious	Panicky	Helpless	Disheartened	Despair	Isolated	Liable	Self-reproachful
Scared	Apprehensive	Powerless	Disappointed	Gloomy	Lonely	Culpable	Contrite
Rejected	Dread	Overwhelmed	Grieving	Hopeless	Disillusioned		
Weak	Jumpy	Exposed	Hurt	Miserable	Abandoned		
Insecure	Terrified						

SHAME		SURPRISE		DISGUST
Ashamed	Cringe-worthy	Stunned	Moved	Disapproving
Sheepish	Self-loathing	Confused	Perplexed	Repelled
Mortified	Discomposed	Amazed	Shocked	Horrified
Abashed	Disgraceful	Overcome	Startled	Revolted
Chagrined	Ignominious			Appalled
Humiliated				Judgmental
Embarrassed				Contemptuous

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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The Dial of Activation

Naming emotions helps us to get more familiar with them. Another important aspect is noticing the body sensations that accompany emotions. All emotions are felt within the body: usually in the face, neck, chest, and abdomen. Sometimes, an emotion can make our hands shake, make us weak in the knees, or cause a pit in our stomach. In this program, we use the term *feeling* to include both the bodily sensations and the label. For example, the feeling of fear may include experiences such as heart pounding, palms sweating, and the label *Fear*.

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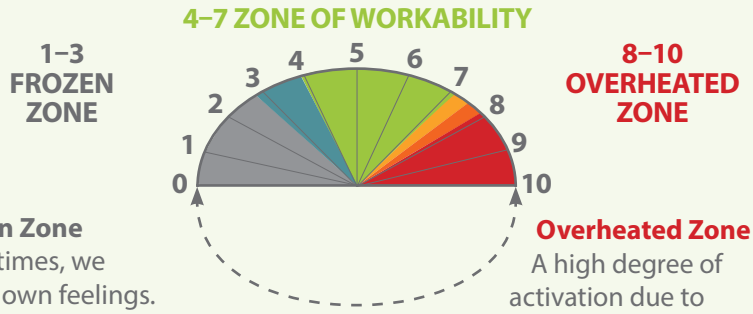
The Dial of Activation



Frozen Zone
Sometimes, we shut down feelings. It is natural to avoid pain, so we may distract ourselves with activities or armour up with defences against emotion (such as denial, intellectualizing, or focusing on others). This shutdown can protect us by helping us to survive unrewarding environments or overwhelming stress. However, being in this state often or for prolonged periods can make us feel emotionally and physically numb, and disconnected from others or from important signals about what we need, want, and care about. It can also promote low energy and little motivation.

Overheated Zone
A high degree of activation due to emotion causes the blood flow within our brains to change, and it can be challenging for us to think clearly and to connect meaningfully with our internal experience. We may not be able to put our experience into words, may have more reactive thoughts and actions, and may be unable to **PAUSE** and respond. While high activation can alert us to important information and even save us in life-threatening situations, being in the Overheated Zone in day-to-day situations makes it difficult for us to take perspective and to be skilful.

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The goal is not to get rid of uncomfortable emotions. In fact, in order to work with the thoughts and behaviours associated with certain **Triangles of Experience**, it is sometimes helpful to feel uncomfortable emotions. Emotions are signals that give us important information.

6

Our goal is to raise awareness of all emotions—especially those that we react to with unhelpful habits.

We will practice seeing an emotion for what it is in the moment, not mingled with thoughts of the past or the future. We will also practice skills to help us be with uncomfortable emotions.

"We cannot selectively numb emotions; when we numb the painful emotions, we also numb the positive emotions."

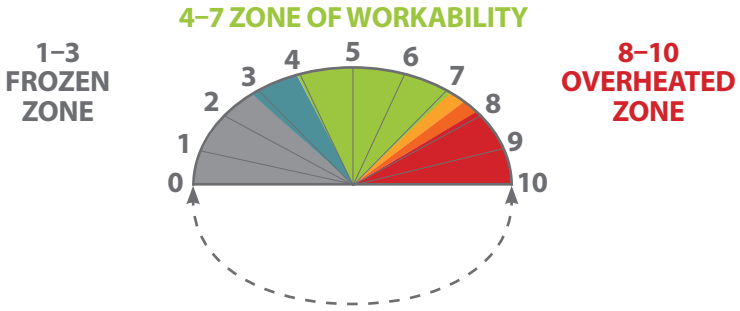
Brené Brown

Emotions can activate the nervous system, affecting both body and mind. Our emotion-triggered survival response may have us in a high state of activation, or, alternately, suppressing an emotion's expression, depending on the situation and on our wiring. Think of the intensity of activation as measured on a dial, just like temperature. It's helpful to be aware of where we are on the **Dial of Activation**, because we are capable of different skills in different zones.

Within the **Zone of Workability**, we have the greatest capacity to observe ourselves, to take perspective, and to experiment with a range of skills.

In the **Overheated** or **Frozen** zones, we may want to use skills to adjust the amount of activation so that we can increase our capacity to **PAUSE** and learn from our emotions. With awareness of being in a low or high state of activation, we can also respond to ourselves with sensibility and kindness, knowing that our nervous systems will be restricted to a narrower range of options for how to act.

DIAL and Healthy Distraction Skills



Why use DIAL Skills?

DIAL Skills can decrease the stress response physically: they prevent the nervous system from becoming activated further and may move us into the **Zone of Workability**. They work quickly, in seconds or minutes, and are based on things we do instead of requiring us to think or analyze. DIAL Skills use the body to calm the mind. They are helpful tools for the Overheated Zone and may also help in the Frozen Zone, where we have less capacity to use other **CBT Skills**.

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To move toward the **Zone of Workability**, **D-I-A-L**.

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5

How do DIAL Skills Work?

DIAL Skills refer to four techniques inspired by the work of Marsha Linehan[1]. They influence the autonomic nervous system, which is the component that regulates involuntary functions like breathing and heart rate, and that determines our level of activation. This nervous system has different parts:

- **The sympathetic nervous system (SNS)** accelerates the stress response, mobilizing energy for **fight or flight**. The next page describes the fight or flight system controlled by the SNS in more detail.
- **The parasympathetic nervous system (PNS)** is the brake of the stress response. One aspect of the PNS initiates the relaxation response (rest and digest) and supports us in feeling calm and connected to self, others, and our surroundings.

DIAL Skills specifically stimulate the PNS, which decreases the stress response, or at the very least prevents ongoing activation.

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1 Linehan, M.M., 1993). Cognitive Behavioural Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder. New York: Guilford.

Fight or Flight Response[1]

Often, when faced with a life-threatening danger, it makes sense to flee, or (if that is not possible), to fight. The **fight or flight (SNS)** response is an automatic survival mechanism that prepares the body to take these actions. While all of the bodily sensations produced occur for good reasons (to prepare our bodies to run away or to fight), they may be experienced as uncomfortable when we do not know why they are happening.

THOUGHTS RACE
Quicker thinking helps us to evaluate danger, and to make rapid decisions. It can be very difficult to concentrate on anything apart from the danger (or escape routes) when the *fight or flight* response is active.

VISION CHANGES
Vision can become acute, so that more attention can be paid to danger. We may notice tunnel vision, or vision becoming sharper.

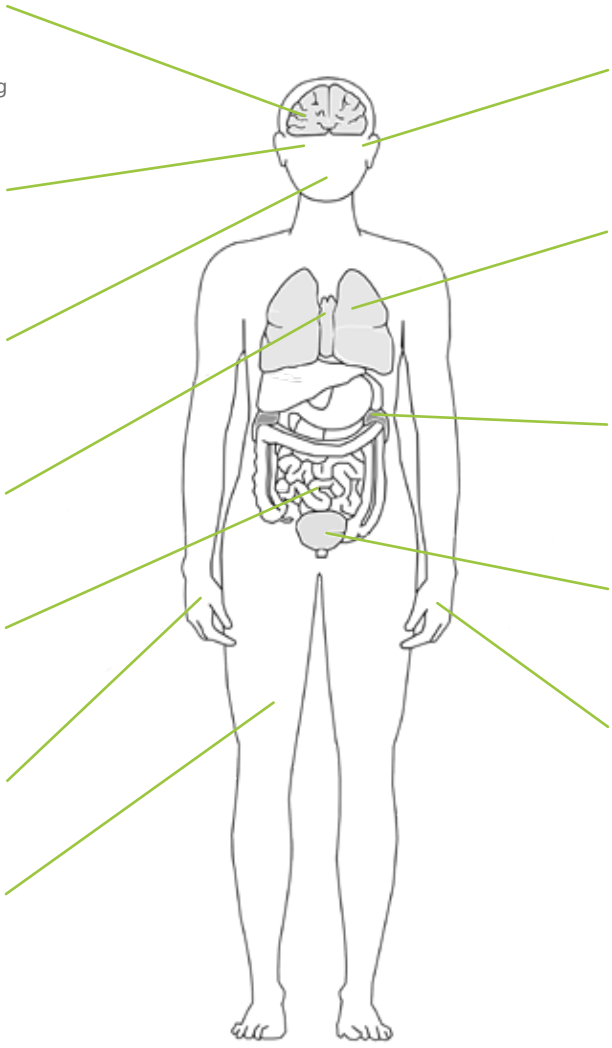
MOUTH DRIES
The mouth is part of the digestive system. Digestion shuts down during dangerous situations, while energy is diverted toward the muscles.

HEART BEATS FASTER
A faster heartbeat feeds more blood to the muscles, and enhances your ability to run away or to fight.

STOMACH FEELS NAUSEOUS AND HAS BUTTERFLIES
Blood is diverted from the digestive system, which can lead to feelings of nausea or butterflies.

HANDS GET COLD
Blood vessels in the skin contract to force blood toward major muscle groups.

MUSCLES TENSE
Muscles all over the body tense in order to prepare us to run away or to fight. Muscles may also shake or tremble—particularly if we stay still—as a way of staying ready for action.



HEAD FEELS DIZZY
If we don't exercise (e.g., run away or fight) to use up the extra oxygen, we can start to feel dizzy or lightheaded very quickly.

BREATHING BECOMES QUICKER AND SHALLOWER
Quicker breathing takes in more oxygen to power the muscles. This process makes the body more able to fight or to run away.

ADRENAL GLANDS RELEASE ADRENALINE
Adrenaline quickly signals other parts of the body to prepare to respond to danger.

BLADDER EMPTIES
Muscles in the bladder sometimes relax in response to extreme stress.

PALMS BECOME SWEATY
When in danger, the body sweats to keep cool. A cool machine is an efficient machine, so sweating makes the body more likely to survive a dangerous event.

1 Adapted from psychologytools.com

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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DIAL Skills

DUNK YOUR FACE:

This skill uses the mammalian dive reflex to trigger the relaxation response. When we dive into cold water and hold our breath, the dive reflex turns up the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), slowing the heart rate and redirecting blood from the extremities to the core organs. You can mimic this response when you are activated to the Overheated Zone to bring more blood flow to the brain, to help you think, and to slow your heart:

1. Bend over (as though you are diving).
2. Hold your breath.
3. Put your face (up to your temples) in a bowl of ice-cold water for as long as you can tolerate, up to a maximum of 60 seconds. You may also place an ice pack, frozen cloth, or zip-lock bag containing water and ice on the middle part of your face, below your eyes.
4. The stimulated PNS response usually lasts a few minutes. You may need to repeat or move on to another skill.

Other ways to conduct this activity include using a sink or shower, or submerging yourself in a body of water like a river, lake, or ocean.

Note: This exercise can decrease your heart rate quickly. If you have heart problems, eating disorders, or other serious medical conditions, check with your primary care provider for permission to do this exercise.

INTENSE ACTIVITY:

Emotions prepare us for action, such as defending, attacking, or fleeing; restraining this energy can be very challenging when we are overheated. Doing something intense can redirect this energy to help us achieve a less activated state. For example, intense exercise activates the relaxation response and helps to improve **mood** and anxiety. To achieve this response, exercise for 15 minutes or more by getting your heart rate up to 55–70 per cent of your maximum heart rate (search online for 'calculating maximum heart rate'). Or, add a burst of activity that feels more intense than usual. Exercise is not our only option. We can engage in any intense activity, such as vigorous cleaning or dancing, to experience this benefit. Moving in ways we enjoy increases the mental health benefits.

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Note: If you have health concerns that may be exacerbated by intense activity, please discuss potential use of this skill with your primary care provider before trying it.

D: Dunk your face
I: Intense activity
A: Abdominal breath
L: Let go of tension

17 ABDOMINAL PACED BREATHING

Place one of your hands on your chest, the other on your belly. Notice which hand rises the greatest with each breath.

Now, try to breathe from your belly or abdomen, so that the hand on your belly moves much more than that on your chest. When we are anxious, we tend to breath from our chest. When we breathe from our abdomen, we move the diaphragm, stimulating the vagus nerve, which is associated with the PNS.

To dial down an Overheated nervous system, slow down the pace of your breathing, and emphasize the out-breath. Try to breathe *out* more slowly than you breathe *in* (for example five seconds in and seven seconds out). These numbers are a guide: it is important to find a pace that is comfortable for you. The SNS is activated with each breath in, and the PNS with each breath out. Therefore, if we breathe out longer than we breathe in, we can activate our PNS and bring down our stress response. To dial up from a Frozen state, try breathing at a moderate pace with a relatively equal duration of inhalations and exhalations.

Sometimes, noticing the breath can make us more anxious, as it might feel like we're doing it wrong or not getting enough air in. If this feeling is true for you, you may want to start with a different skill—especially if you are high on the ***Dial****—until you gain more comfort with the breath.*

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Suggested app: Breath Pacer

LET GO OF TENSION

There are a few ways we can let go of tension. On the next page, you'll find instructions for **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**. Work your way through this practice to stimulate your PNS and relaxation response.

Suggested app: Mindshift (Anxiety Canada), or find guided meditations on the Anxiety Canada website

Progressive Muscle Relaxation[1]

Our bodies react automatically to stressful thoughts or situations by becoming tense. The opposite relationship also works: a helpful way to relax the mind is to relax the body. In progressive muscle relaxation, we tense each muscle group, hold, then release the tension. This strategy relaxes our muscles and lets us notice the contrast. When we are in the Frozen zone, it can be helpful to move or shake a muscle group intentionally, then relax and release it. If you have physical limitations, try skipping the associated muscles, or noticing existing tension and easing into relaxation with an exhale.

Preparation: Lie flat on your back, on a firm bed, a couch, or the floor. Support your head and neck with a pillow or cushion. Alternatively, sit in a comfortable chair with your head well-supported. Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so.

Exercise continues on the following page.

The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was once asked by a student if he experiences anger.

"Why yes, of course," he replied.

His student then asked, "What do you do with it?"

The spiritual leader replied, "I watch it arise, and I watch it pass."

1 Adapted from psychologytools.com

Tense and release each muscle group in sequence

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Instructions: Focus your attention on different parts of your body in sequence. **Note:** You can conduct progressive muscle relaxation in any order, or adjust the exercise to feel right for you; there is no correct order.

1. **Tense & Release:** Tense the body part, hold for a few moments, then relax.
2. **Lightly Tense & Release:** Tense the body part with just enough tension to notice, then relax.
3. **Release Only:** Pay attention to each muscle group and decide to relax it.

Possible Sequence

1. **Right Hand + Arm**: clench the fist and tighten the muscles in the arm
2. **Left Hand + Arm**: clench the fist and tighten the muscles in the arm
3. **Right Leg**: tense the leg, lifting the knee slightly
4. **Left Leg**: tense the leg, lifting the knee slightly
5. **Stomach + Chest**: tense the stomach and chest
6. **Back Muscles**: pull the shoulders back slightly
7. **Neck + Throat:** push the head back slightly into the pillow/surface
8. **Face:** scrunch up the muscles in your face

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Healthy Distraction Skill

17 13

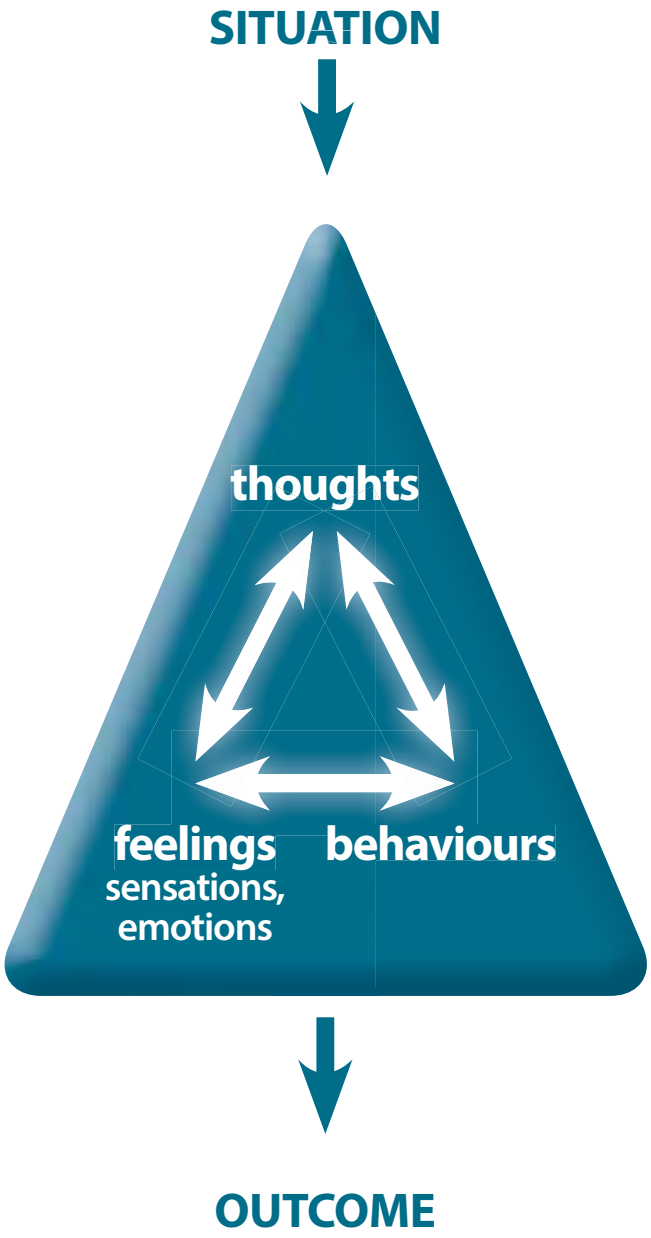
In addition to **DIAL Skills**, we can also WAIT for our activation level to move from an intensity level of 10 down into the **Zone of Workability**. Emotions pass through us like a wave. The skill of **healthy distraction** is choosing to leave the situation alone while allowing our mind to become involved with something else.

Distraction is different than avoidance. With distraction, we return to the situation that is creating an uncomfortable level of intensity once time has allowed the intensity to decrease and we are more able to think in a balanced way.

Some ideas to keep the mind and body busy

- Talk to a friend, keeping the conversation light. Talking about the situation that activates the emotion may increase that emotion.
- Read an interesting book.
- Listen to a podcast or watch YouTube videos.
- Play a game, or do a jigsaw or crossword puzzle.
- Do a household chore that requires concentration.
- Listen to a guided relaxation exercise (e.g., Mindshift app: Tense and Release).
- Do crafts or hobby work.
- Garden or connect with nature in some other way.
- Move briskly around your neighbourhood, and concentrate on what you see around you.
- Practice gratitude or an appreciation exercise: Research shows that experiencing a pleasant emotion can dampen the intensity of distressing emotions. For example, notice three things you feel grateful for, no matter how small.

Chapter 1 Home Practice



Practice Table: Notice the Triangle of Experience

Practice noticing the **Triangle of Experience** in some everyday situations. Notice the *thoughts* that come up, the *feelings* (both emotions and bodily sensations), and the *behaviours* that followed (what you did). Also, reflect on the *outcome*, perhaps noticing if it represents a **RESPOND** or **REACT** pathway. Choose very specific situations, such as, "On Tuesday at 5pm, when I arrived home, I couldn't find my keys." Start with low-key, everyday situations.

SITUATION	THOUGHTS Sentences, Images, Memories	FEELINGS Sensations, Emotions	BEHAVIOURS	AFTER-EFFECTS/ OUTCOME
What happened? When? Where? Who? What?	**What was going through your mind?**	**What sensations were strong in your body? What feelings came up?**	**What did you do? What could others see if they were watching you?**	**What happened after? What do you notice now, while you're writing, about the outcome?**
Monday night. Going to class. 10 minutes late.	"Oh no! Everyone is going to think I'm incompetent!" "Why can't I get it together?"	Heart pounding Flushed face Frustrated Embarrassed	Gave up, turned around. Rushed during commute. Irritable with others in my way.	I feel mad at myself for missing the session. I was irritable with my family.
While I was talking about something that's important to me, my friend interrupted with something unrelated.	"They don't care about me!" "They find me boring." "What happens in my life isn't that important. Maybe I don't need to share."	Agitation Furrowed brow Angry Sad Lonely	Cancelled plans. Complained to a different friend about what happened.	Couldn't fall asleep. Mind was racing.

SITUATION	THOUGHTS Sentences, Images, Memories	FEELINGS Sensations, Emotions	BEHAVIOURS	AFTER-EFFECTS/ OUTCOME
What happened? When? Where? Who? What?	What was going through your mind?	What sensations were strong in your body? What feelings came up?	What did you do? What could others see if they were watching you?	What happened after? What do you notice now (while you're writing) about the outcome?

SITUATION/	THOUGHTS Sentences, Images, Memories	FEELINGS Sensations, Emotions	BEHAVIOURS	AFTER-EFFECTS/ OUTCOME
What happened? When? Where? Who? What?	What was going through your mind?	What sensations were strong in your body? What feelings came up?	What did you do? What could others see if they were watching you?	What happened after? What do you notice now (while you're writing) about the outcome?

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Practice a DIAL or Healthy Distraction Skill

What did you notice? _____

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What situations lead you to experience Overheated zones on the **Dial**? Write them down here so that you can try out a **DIAL Skil**l or **Healthy Distraction** when these situations occur in the future (for example, conflict with others, having to stay late at work, or feeling trapped, overtired, or hungry). _____

Mindfulness of Feelings by Naming Them

For each emotion in the left column, put a check mark in the box on the days you notice you have these emotions. You can add other emotions too, if other words work better for you. Remember that all emotions have their place; as you complete this exercise, cultivate curiosity as best you can.

Track your emotions, without judgment, as they arise throughout the week.

	Emotions	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
JOY	Happy							
	Interested							
	Excited							
	Satisfied							
	Proud							
SADNESS	Sad							
	Hurt							
	Down							
	Disappointed							
	Despairing							
ANGER	Irritated							
	Angry							
	Resentful							
	Contemptuous							
	Annoyed							
	Vengeful							
	Frustrated							
	Exasperated							
	Defensive							
	Furious							

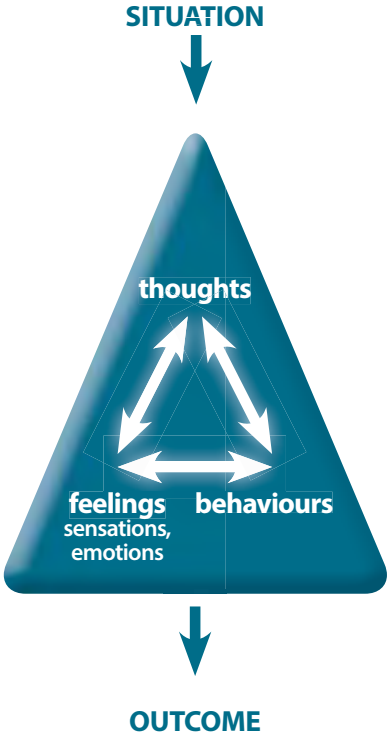
Exercise continues on the following two pages.

Notice what other emotions come up for you throughout this week and track them here.

	Emotions	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
FEAR	Afraid							
	Nervous							
	Anxious							
	Worried							
	Edgy							
	Dread							
	Uneasy							
SHAME	Embarrassed							
	Humiliated							
	Sheepish							
	Self-conscious							
	Mortified							
GUILT	Regretful							
	Guilty							
	Remorseful							

Notice what other emotions come up for you throughout this week and track them here.

	Emotions	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
OTHER	Affectionate							
	Loving							
	Compassionate							
	Grateful							
	Confident							
	Caring							
	Disgusted							
	Envious							
	Jealous							



6 Practice Identifying Parts of the Triangle

For each of the following, label:

- **T** for a thought
- **S** for a sensation
- **E** for an emotion
- **B** for a behaviour or urge

Examples:

__S__ Hot face

__E__ Disappointed

__T__ They're rejecting me

__B__ Lie down

____ I'm late

____ Sweaty

____ Affectionate

____ I can never get started on that task

____ Warmth in chest

____ Thrilled

____ Impulse to hug someone

____ I shouldn't get so emotional about this

____ Temptation to cancel outing

____ Overwhelmed

____ I'm pleased with how this dish turned out

____ Eating a muffin

T for a thought
S for a sensation
E for an emotion
B for a behaviour or urge

_____ Urge to scratch

_____ What's the point?

_____ Annoyed

_____ Impulse to check messages

_____ This line-up is ridiculous

_____ Saying yes when asked to take over a job for a colleague

_____ Telling my friend I need help

_____ Frustration

_____ Shaky in legs

_____ Am I messaging them too much?

_____ Grateful

_____ Pit in stomach

_____ Dread

_____ Heart pounding

_____ This situation is really hard

_____ It is understandable that I feel this way

_____ Ask for a meeting

Notes

Encouraging a Curious and Compassionate Awareness of Experience

Pearls for this Chapter

- When we are on **autopilot**, our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours often reinforce each other to keep us stuck in unhelpful habits.
- **Mindfulness** is a practice that allows us to move out of autopilot. This practice involves cultivating conscious attention: being aware of what we do while doing it, without trying to change or fix it.
- When mindful, we are in the observer position: watching what arises but not identifying with it—like a mountain observing the weather.
- We can practice mindfulness by observing consciously with the five senses, or by noticing and naming thoughts, feelings, and urges as they come into awareness. We can practice noticing internal and external present-moment experiences without judgment or criticism.
- With mindful awareness, we can move from **REACTING** on autopilot to **RESPONDING** skilfully, even in stressful situations.
- Mindfulness puts us in the position to practice **self-compassion**, which is being a kind friend to ourselves, especially when we are in pain or distress.

Automatic Pilot: The Opposite of Mindfulness

Have you ever arrived somewhere and realized you weren't aware of the journey? Have you ever paused in the shower to ask yourself whether you have already rinsed your hair?

These examples of **automatic pilot (autopilot)** are times when we function without being aware of what we are doing. Our minds can be focused on something entirely different than what we are experiencing in the present moment. Autopilot helps us to save energy by not needing to pay conscious attention when planning every moment of the day. Imagine if you had to be aware of every breath or step you take!

Autopilot also lets our brain focus on staying alive by avoiding threats. Imagine that our brain assesses the present moment as not threatening (characterized by neutral or pleasant moments). In that case, it will move into autopilot, which allows it to scour past and future thoughts for threats. This system is called the **default mode network**. We have evolved to survive, rather than to be happy or calm.

One side effect of autopilot is that we miss out on many moments that could be relaxing or pleasant because we focus instead on threats. Autopilot helps our brain to take shortcuts based on past learning, which may not be helpful in the present situation.

We can think of autopilot as yesterday's solutions to today's problems. When faced with a new or complex situation, it can be helpful to step out of autopilot and to respond skilfully using all the information in front of us.

We are always experiencing related sets of thoughts, feelings, and behaviour urges (remember the **Triangle of Experience**), although when we are in **autopilot**, we may be barely aware of them. In fact, we can go through a whole sequence or spiral of thoughts, feelings, and urges to act (one after the other) without awareness, while creating patterns or habits. Then, in a heated situation, we do not consider our options consciously, but rather **REACT** according to an autopilot habit. Our actions can be very different than what we would have intended or chosen, if we had been aware.

Example

Kim is having coffee with a friend, who pulls out a phone and starts texting someone. On autopilot, Kim thinks, "She isn't really interested in what I'm saying." This thought is accompanied by an emotion of shame, and physical sensations of crumpling inwardly. Kim's eyes go down, and they remember an event last week where a friend was also distracted during a conversation. This thought leads to a feeling of despair, and a clenching in the chest. They now think, "I don't have anything to offer as a friend." Loneliness wells up; they want to leave the café and not feel this way any longer. In only moments, autopilot has moved Kim from an everyday situation with a friend to a state of strong despair and loneliness.

"When we lose ourselves in thought, thought sweeps up our mind and carries it away; in a very short time we can be carried far indeed.

We hop on a train of association, not realizing that we have hopped on, and certainly not knowing the destination.

Somewhere down the line, we may wake up and realize that we have been thinking, and that we have been taken for a ride.

When we step down from the train, it may be in a very different state of mind from where we jumped aboard."

Joseph Goldstein[1]

1 Goldstein, J. (2003). *Insight Meditation: A psychology of freedom*. Shambhala Publications. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boulder, CO. shambhala.com.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Pausing helps us **RESPOND** to a situation skillfully—in line with our **values** and reflecting the person we wish to be— rather than **REACT** in **autopilot**.

Finding the Pause

Thoughts and feelings like Kim's (in the last example) can be painful. Naturally, we try to avoid these painful feelings, but attempts to escape them make things worse. We may ruminate, avoid, engage in impulsive behaviour, or blame ourselves. The results of these strategies aren't great for us: less sleep, damaged relationships, poor self-worth, or emotions that are even more painful than the original feelings.

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If we **PAUSE** these futile efforts to eliminate the negative thoughts or feelings, we can discover a new perspective. We can get off the train of associations and watch from the platform as thoughts, feelings, and urges travel down the tracks. From this vantage point, we can choose which thoughts we listen to, and which urges we act upon.

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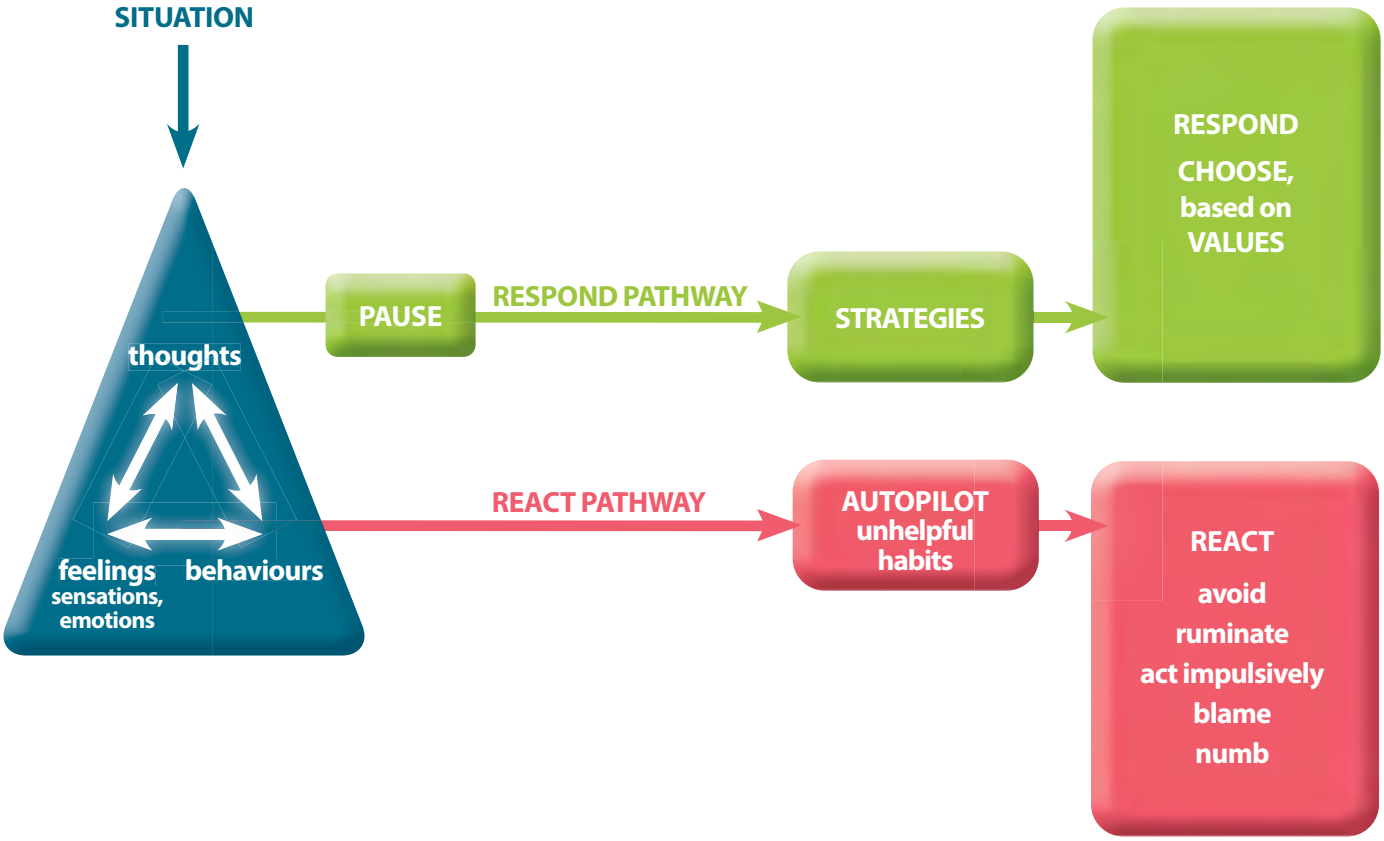
6

Once we have paused, we can see the **Triangle of Experience** more clearly, and how the situation caused specific thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

Writing down situations and their ensuing thoughts, feelings, and behaviours helps us to clarify the elements in the Triangle of Experience. Noting these elements also helps us to notice the outcomes of our actions, which can help to inform our choices next time.


SITUATION
thoughts
feelings
sensations,
emotions
behaviours
PAUSE
RESPOND PATHWAY
STRATEGIES
RESPOND
CHOOSE,
based on
VALUES
REACT PATHWAY
AUTOPILOT
unhelpful
habits
REACT
avoid
ruminate
act impulsively
blame
numb

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Mindfulness Skills

Mindfulness is defined by teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn as the awareness that emerges through:

- paying attention
- on purpose
- in the present moment
- non-judgmentally

Mindfulness is noticing *what* we are experiencing, *while* we are experiencing it.

It involves our intention to maintain a moment-by-moment awareness of both the inner world (thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and urges to act), and the surrounding environment. We tune in to what we're noticing in the present moment, rather than rehashing the past or predicting the future.[1]

Mindfulness is often associated with meditation. Some meditation practices can help to cultivate mindfulness, such as **Vipassana** or **insight-oriented meditation.** However, we can also be mindful in day-to-day life, whether we meditate or not.

Bringing curious, non-judgmental attention to noticing *what* we are experiencing, *while* we are experiencing it, can be done while walking, brushing our teeth, making the bed, or even observing our own mind. We can strengthen our bodies formally through structured exercise sessions, or informally by moving our body throughout the day. Similarly, we can practice mindfulness formally by doing committed mindfulness practices, or informally by paying attention to daily experiences.

Many benefits have been associated with the practice of mindfulness, such as improved control of attention, enhanced ability to tolerate emotion, and increased **self-compassion**. Perhaps ultimately and most importantly, mindfulness practice leads to recognizing that *we have choices.*

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1 Greater Good in Action: greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness

Mindfulness involves **investigating** experiences moment by moment with curiosity, and observing each experience as it unfolds. This practice involves:

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- Noticing or observing sensations or thoughts as they come and go. For example, tuning in to the sensation of sound around you, or to the feeling of breath moving in and out of your nose.
- Naming or putting words to experiences, such as naming a sensation as itchy or a thought as planning.

Example of *Observing* Sensations

If we go outside, we may notice the sensations and temperature of air against our cheeks, the sound of wind or vehicles, the smell of our surroundings, and details in what we see.

Example of *Naming* or Putting Words to an Experience as it Happens

Consider mindful attention to the bodily sensations of anxiety: "I feel my heart beating, I feel my cheeks getting hot, I notice my knees feeling shaky, I have the urge to run, and I feel a clenching in my chest."

Mindfulness is a powerful practice that helps us to become aware of thoughts, emotions, and unhelpful habits that happen during **autopilot** and that often go unnoticed. This awareness is a vital first step toward change.

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Bringing awareness to painful areas of life can be difficult. Often, we avoid awareness of complex thoughts, emotions, and situations because of the pain. When practicing mindfulness, we cultivate acceptance intentionally and pay attention to thoughts, feelings, and urges without judging them as right or wrong. This acceptance is not an approval of harmful or painful things in our lives, but rather an active exploration of both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of our experiences. The attitude we cultivate in mindfulness is curiosity, non-judgment, and friendliness toward experience. About these noticed thoughts and feelings, it is as though we say, "Whatever they are, they are already here, and I can become aware of them." This attitude allows us to see things more clearly without becoming bogged down by reactions of shame and blame.

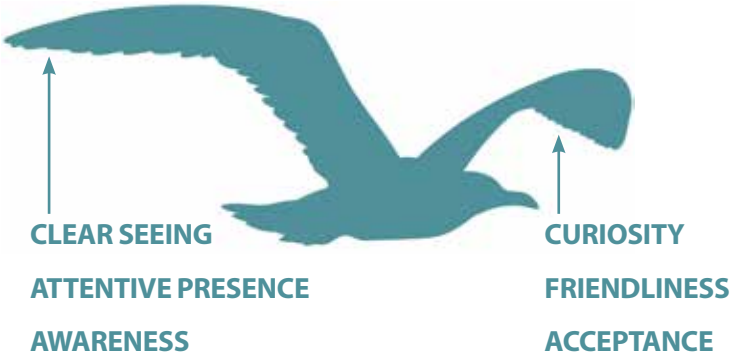
Example

If you notice a negative thought arising, such as, "I am simply no good at this," you practice noticing that thought with curiosity and friendliness: "Oh there's that thought again! How interesting," rather than criticizing yourself with thoughts such as, "I shouldn't be thinking such things."

Mindfulness encourages us to be present to our lives in the moment, and emphasizes that the moment is all that actually exists. This presence puts us into an advantageous position. If the moment is pleasant, we will experience it fully, and we will live a richer life. If the moment is unpleasant or painful, we will be in a better position to discern what is happening and to take skilful action.

Mindfulness teacher Tara Brach[1] explains that mindfulness is like a **bird with two wings:** the wing of awareness and seeing clearly, and also the wing of non-judgmental acceptance. The bird cannot fly without both of these wings.

The Two Wings of Mindfulness



1 Brach, T. (2013). *True refuge: Finding peace and freedom in your own awakened heart.* Bantam.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Mountain and Weather Metaphor

We each have a part of the self that is able to observe what is happening. This part notices, *"Oh! I'm thinking about the past again,"* or, *"Oh! I wasn't paying attention."* When we stop operating on **autopilot** and notice what is going on in the mind and body, we are this observing self.

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It can be useful to think of this observing self as a mountain.[1] A mountain can be thought of as a solid, immovable mass enduring all sorts of change, such as seasons and storms, over time. Through the changes of day and night, summer, winter, spring, and fall, the mountain itself is unmoved, strong, and stable.

Wild storms may visit it, snow may blanket it, sun may warm it, clouds may cloak it. Through it all, the mountain continues to sit, bearing all types of weather, but not injured by what happens on its surface, or by the unpredictable, moment-to-moment changes. Even when storms are violent, or when the sky is completely overcast, the mountain continues on. It can experience all of these things while remaining its essential self. And sooner or later, the weather always changes.

In the same way, we can be aware of the weather moving through our minds: the thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and urges to act. *We do not have to be the weather.* By practicing **mindfulness**—noticing these events of the mind with a kind and curious awareness—*we can be the mountain—the observing self—that watches the weather.*

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A mountain is a solid, immovable mass, enduring all sorts of change over time.

Through the changes of day and night, summer, winter, spring, and fall, the mountain itself is unmoved, strong, and stable.

By practicing **mindfulness** we can be the observing self— the mountain, not the weather.

1 This analogy was inspired by similar metaphors outlined by Dr. Russ Harris in his recommended book, *The Happiness Trap.* (see Resources at mind-space.ca).

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Self-compassion is extending the same kindness and regard to yourself as you would toward a dear friend.

Scientific studies are showing that the practice of self-compassion is associated with better mental health, improved relationships, and stronger motivation.[1]

1 For more information, see Dr. Kristin Neff's work at self-compassion.org

Self-Compassion Skill

Mindfulness also puts us in a position to bring a sense of kindness toward ourselves: to practice **self-compassion**. Self-compassion recognizes that we (like all humans) have pain, and have minds that sometimes repeat unhelpful patterns. When we have pain in our physical bodies, we treat the area with gentleness and care, giving it time to heal. The compassion we cultivate with mindful attention is extending a similar kind of awareness to our emotional pains.

The following exercise will be completed in class.[1]

Think about a time in your life when a close friend of yours was suffering in some way (e.g., experiencing failure). What types of things did you say to them? What tone did you use? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Think about a time in your life when you were suffering in some way (e.g., experiencing failure). What types of things did you say to yourself? What tone did you use? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What did you discover? _____

_____

_____

_____

1 This exercise is one of the self-compassion practices on Dr. Neff's website: self-compassion.org/exercise-1-treat-friend.

Examples of kind, self-compassionate thoughts:

- It is hard to be in this kind of situation. Anyone would feel this way.
- Painful experiences are part of life. Everyone has bad days.
- I am a work in progress, just like everyone else.
- Failure is part of the process of learning.
- I am learning and growing, I can't know or do anything that I haven't practiced before.
- If things don't go my way I can accept it. Life will go on.
- I have many resources available to me.
- I have supportive people in my life, and I can ask for help when I need it.
- I won't be hard on myself for having worries; everyone has them.
- I extend to myself the same kindness I would offer others in this situation.
- I'm here with you.
- I care about this suffering.
- What do I need right now?
- How can I make this a bit easier for myself?
- How can I show myself the same love that I imagine my ancestors would give me in this moment?

44 Dr. Kristin Neff is a self-compassion psychologist and author of the books *Self-Compassion* and *Fierce Self-Compassion*.

Dr. Neff's TEDx talk is available online.

The Difference Between Self-Esteem & Self-Compassion

as taught by Dr. Kristen Neff (and discussed in her TEDx talk)

For a long time, psychology was focused on helping people to build self-esteem, BUT:

- Self-esteem is based on social comparison: "I'm better than others." On average, not everyone can be better than others.
- It does NOT lead to many positive outcomes, such as improved performance or relationships.
- It *can* lead to repelling people with self-absorption, bullying to build esteem, and lack of concern for others.
- It is very resistant to change (i.e., hard to build or practice).

Self-compassion is based on the recognition of common humanity, and that all people experience pain, suffering, and failure. It unites rather than isolates people.

- Practicing self-compassion is linked to many positive outcomes.
- It can be developed with practice and grow over time.
- Self-compassion leads to compassion for others. Once we learn to be gentle and kind with our own flaws, failures, imperfections, and pain, we can accept the same struggles in others more easily.

Self-Compassion: More Helpful than Self-Esteem

By Dr. Joanna Cheek

For years, boosting self-esteem dominated the mental health scene as a popular pursuit on the path to wellness. Intuitively, we believed that high self-esteem—defined as our perception of our own value—related to an improved quality of life. Many studies did link high self-esteem with happiness, improved initiative and persistence after failing.[1, 2] Similarly, low self-esteem can relate to depression, low motivation and suicidal thoughts.

Yet surprisingly, despite widespread enthusiasm for improving self-esteem in schools, workplaces, and counselling, reviews of interventions to improve one's self-esteem haven't panned out.[2]

Firstly, studies show that self-esteem is highly resistant to change, so it's very hard to raise your self-esteem. Secondly, high self-esteem falls short in many important areas of life. A review of studies on self-esteem shows that self-esteem doesn't improve work or school performance; rather, high self-esteem is simply the *result* of good school or work performance.[2] While people with high self-esteem may perceive themselves to be more likeable and have better relationships, there is no relationship between self-esteem and the quality or duration of their relationships in reality.[2] In fact, high self-esteem can lead to increased focus on the self and decreased concern for others, which may push people away.[2]

Similarly, studies show that high self-esteem doesn't discourage people from engaging in unhealthy behaviours (like smoking, drinking, recreational drugs, or high-risk sex) as previously believed.[2]

The problem with self-esteem is that it involves comparing ourselves to a social standard (e.g., 'How good am I compared to everyone else?')[3] Statistically speaking, though, most people can't be better than everyone else, especially not all the time.

Failures, flaws, and pain are inevitable for everyone at different points in our lives. Additionally, since self-esteem involves perception versus actual reality, the need for high self-esteem may cause people to see the worst in others in order to compare themselves more favourably.[4] People who inflate their self-esteem in this way may be more prejudiced toward others, which can result in more aggression[5] or hostility[6] toward others to protect against perceived threats to their self-esteem.

However, having a healthy relationship with ourselves is still very important to our wellness. That's where the concept of self-compassion comes in. Self-compassion is an expression of the desire to alleviate our own suffering, and to express kindness to ourselves when we are healing. It involves cultivating an attitude of non-judgment and kindness toward ourselves, our pain, our flaws, and our failures, and seeing our experiences as part of a larger common human experience.[6] Rather than needing to compare ourselves to others to establish self-worth, self-compassion practices seeing our struggles as part of the common human condition.

It's not personal: while we all have different stories, we all suffer, and we all have flaws. So instead of needing to feel better than everyone else to maintain our self-esteem, we can take comfort in knowing that we are just like everyone else in our suffering and imperfection. Unlike the slippery slope of high self-esteem with self-absorption or devaluing others, compassion toward ourselves leads to compassion toward others. When we can accept our own flaws and struggles with non-judgment and kindness, we find ourselves doing the same to those around us: it's all part of the imperfect human condition.[6]

Self-compassion doesn't imply passivity; in fact, rather than criticizing or shaming ourselves to change (which can be debilitating), acceptance and non-judgment toward that within ourselves that we'd like to change makes it easier to pay attention to what needs to change, and effectively to change it.[6] By comparison, an inflated sense of self-esteem does not acknowledge that we may have behaviours that are unhealthy, and that we need to change for our own wellness.[6]

Self-compassion has been shown to help people suffer less and live well.[7] In particular, reviews of the research show that self-

1 Baumeister, R. F., Campbell , J. D., Krueger, J.I., & Vohs, K.D. (2003). *Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, or healthier lifestyles?* Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 4 (1), 1–44

2 Seligman, M. E. (1995). *The optimistic child.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

3 Neff, K (2003). *Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself.* Self and Identity, 2: 85–101.

4 Aberson, C. L., Healy, M., & Romero, V. (2000). *Ingroup bias and self-esteem: A meta-analysis.* Personality & Social Psychology Review, 4, 157–173.

5 Baumeister, R. F., Heatherton, T. F., & Tice, D. M. (1993). *When ego threats lead to self-regulation failure: Negative consequences of high self-esteem.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64, 141–156.

6 Damon, W. (1995). *Greater expectations: Overcoming the culture of indulgence in America's homes and schools.* New York: Free Press.

7 Barnard, L. K. & Curry, J. F. (2012). The relationship of clergy burnout to self-compassion and other personality dimensions. *Pastoral Psychology, 61*(2), 149–163.

Kristin Neff's Self-compassion Break[1]

Three Steps to Self-compassion: A tool for validating thoughts and feelings in difficult situations

1. Practice **mindfulness**: being aware that you are suffering/struggling, WHEN you are suffering/struggling. "This is a moment of suffering." "This hurts." "This is tough." As best you can, observe and label thoughts or the situation mindfully, without judging it/them as good or bad.
2. Recognize that these thoughts and feelings are common human experiences, and that suffering is a normal part of life. "That's common humanity." "Other people feel this way; I'm not alone." "We all struggle in our lives."
3. Extend kindness or tenderness toward yourself. Be your own best friend in this moment. Experiment with what expression of kindness is the best fit for you, whether offering kind words to yourself, gentle touch, the gift of a moment to yourself or a cup of tea, offering yourself a hot bath, or time in nature. If you have trouble, imagine how you'd tend to the pain of a loved one in this situation.

1 This exercise is one of the self-compassion practices on Dr. Neff's website, self-compassion.org/exercise-2-self-compassion-break.

compassion is related to less stress, anxiety, and depression,[8] and better resilience in the face of negative events.[9] It is also linked to feelings of happiness, optimism, gratitude, autonomy, competence, connectedness to others, self-determination, emotional intelligence, wisdom, initiative, curiosity, flexibility, and life satisfaction.[10]

Luckily, we can improve self-compassion with practice. Even a few weeks of self-compassion practice has been shown to decrease suffering and to improve wellness.[10]

As author and researcher Brené Brown points out, self-compassion isn't something you have or don't have: it's a commitment you can choose to practice.[11] Just like developing any habit, it takes practice and effort to establish this new behaviour.

Self-compassion is a portable source of support, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week—even when all of your family and friends are unavailable. Just as you would put a bandage on a physical cut, use self-compassion to care for your emotional wounds with the same attention.

In order to learn to be warm and kind toward yourself, you can become sensitive to your own needs, and to your distress.[10] If it's difficult for you to pay attention to your inner experiences (such as thoughts and feelings), **mindfulness** training or the help of a therapist may be useful.

There are a variety of exercises to practice self-compassion. Some involve the practice of noticing your judgments and cultivating a kinder, gentler, more supportive attitude toward yourself. Eventually, the habit of engaging in compassionate response becomes more automatic.

This practice includes reminding yourself that it's human to make mistakes, it's normal to have imperfections, and that you are not alone in your suffering.

Finally, you can practice being mindful by keeping your attention on the present moment, even when it includes suffering. In this way, you let go of ruminations about negative experiences without ignoring your own pain. You can be aware of your own needs and distress, and therefore provide yourself with support. ■

8 MacBeth, A. & Gumley, A. (2012). *Exploring compassion: A meta-analysis of the association between self-compassion and psychopathology.* Clinical Psychology Review, 32(6), 545-552.

9 Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E., Batts Allen, A., & Hancook, J. (2007). Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: the implications of treating oneself kindly. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 92*(5), 887.

10 Neff, K. D., & Costigan, A. P. (2014). Self-compassion, wellbeing, and happiness. *Psychologie in Österreich,* 114–117.

11 Brown, B. (2008). *I thought it was just me (but it isn't): Making the journey from "What will people think?" to "I am enough".* Gotham.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Nourishing and Depleting Events Skill[1]

The following exercise will be completed in class. Take a moment to write down all the activities you participate in during a typical day (e.g., take a shower, eat breakfast, walk the dog, commute to work).

ACTIVITY	D / N

Then, once this list has been completed, write down if the activity is:
D for depleting (e.g., unpleasant, discouraging, tiring, frustrating, draining), or **N** for nourishing (e.g., refreshing, energizing, pleasurable, satisfying).

What do you notice about this exercise? Anything interesting or helpful? Could you re-balance somewhere to support your wellness? Are there ways you can be more mindful of nourishing events? _____

Notice which of your daily activities are nourishing for you, and which ones are depleting.

Consider how you can take care of yourself in the face of depleting activities, and how **mindfulness** may play a role in how much you can benefit from an event's nourishing qualities.

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Giving yourself permission to engage in nourishing events is an important part of managing your **energy budget**.

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To inspire you, a list of potentially nourishing activities is included in the **Troubleshooting Appendix**.

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1 Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2012). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression, second edition. Guilford Press. Adapted with permission of Guilford Press.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Appreciation Skill: Good for Me Practice[2]

We have evolved to survive, not to be happy or calm. That means that our brains naturally focus on all the potential threats or problems that may need solving to help us survive, rather than focusing on what is going well. We call this tendency the **negativity bias**.

Good for Me(s) allow us to correct this negative bias by teaching us to focus on, and appreciate, moments where we invest time, energy, or effort (even if it feels small). When we focus on **baby steps** and congratulate ourselves for making an effort, no matter how small, we build momentum and confidence. We can remind our brain intentionally of the steps we are taking that are moving us forward, so that our overall assessment of ourselves is more balanced.

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Take time each day to congratulate yourself for achieving small, everyday goals.

What did you achieve today that required your time, energy, or effort?

When we are experiencing a tough time with mental health challenges, everything can take more effort. Our tendency is to compare our efforts to what we could accomplish when we were feeling better, which can make us feel even worse and less excited to work on our goals.

We can work toward noticing and giving ourselves credit for ANYTHING we do that takes energy, effort, or time, even if they are things we must do. For example, brushing your teeth still takes time and effort. Practice acknowledging these wins to yourself.

- Choose a time of day when you can reflect (such as before bedtime) and list roughly five things you did recently that required effort, or that you spent time on. The list can include tasks such as chores, commitments like attending an appointment, meditation, offering a prayer, **allowing emotions**, gardening, or calling a friend.

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- Choose small everyday things (rather than ones that took great effort): everyday things contribute most to a functioning life.
- Practice **self-compassion** in your self-talk. Be supportive and encouraging, even for small achievements, as you would for a friend.

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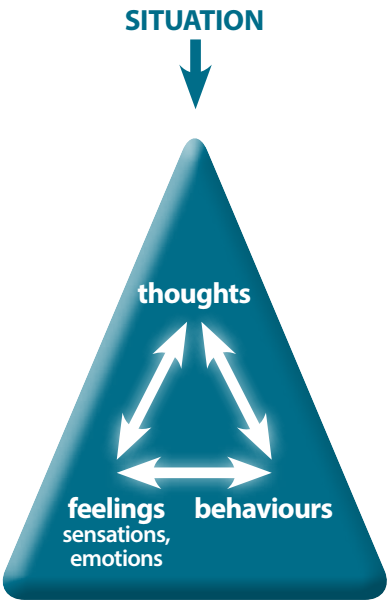
- Practice, practice, practice. Like building any new habit, it works best if you do it daily. To encourage the formation of this habit, write out a Good for Me in the home practice sheets for each chapter.

2 Adapted from General Practice Services Committee (2015), *CBIS: Cognitive Behavioural Interpersonal Skills*, p. 55. Retrieved from http://www.gpscbc.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/AMH_004.0_CBIS_Manual_v3.0_PR.pdf

Chapter 2 Home Practice

Practice Table: Be Mindful of Thoughts and Feelings

Similar to the last chapter, bring awareness to parts of the **Triangle of Experience** that arise in specific life situations. In this exercise, focus on the internal events—Thoughts and Feelings. As best you can, notice what arises with a curious, non-judgmental stance.



SITUATION **When?** **Where?** **Who?** **What?**	**THOUGHTS:** Sentences, images, or memories that come to mind	**FEELINGS:** Emotions or body sensations that arise
Sunday night, 9:30pm: Sitting on the couch, petting the dog.	"She is so soft." "She completely gives in to her nap."	Contentment Affection
Monday, 10am: At a meeting, someone is sniffling and looks ill.	"Why did she come if she's sick?" "Now I am going to get it!" "My week is packed! I can't handle a cold on top of it!"	Annoyed Scared Compassionate

SITUATION **When?** **Where?** **Who?** **What?**	**THOUGHTS:** Sentences, images, or memories that come to mind	**FEELINGS:** Emotions or body sensations that arise

Focus on your thoughts and feelings, taking a curious, non-judgmental stance.

Bring mindful attention to an everyday activity.

"**Mindfulness** is the aware, balanced acceptance of the present experience. It isn't more complicated than that. It is opening to, or receiving, the present moment—pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is, without either clinging to it or rejecting it."

Sylvia Boorstein, mindfulness teacher

40 Mindfulness Practice

This week, choose an everyday activity (e.g., washing dishes, lying in bed, drinking tea) and bring mindful attention to it. Pay attention, in the present moment, to all of your sensations, accepting your experience without judging it as good or bad, right or wrong.

What did you notice? _____

My Good for Me(s) This Week

I can give myself credit that I invested time, energy, or effort in:_____

Congratulate yourself for achieving a small, everyday goal that required your time, energy, or effort.

Notes

Noticing Thoughts as Just Thoughts

Don't believe everything you think!

Pearls for this Chapter

- Thoughts are **just thoughts**, not facts. Often, they are not entirely accurate or complete.
- Even when thoughts go undetected, they still have a powerful impact on our feelings and behaviours.
- A thought is a **kernel of truth**, surrounded by a **shell of interpretation**.
- The shell is influenced by our current feeling state, by the past, by our evolutionary inheritance, and by non-present moment focus.
- We have habits of thinking: thoughts that come up again and again—like the **Top 10 Tracks** on our mind's playlist.
- It can be useful to hone in on **hot thoughts**—thoughts that set off painful spirals of feeling, behaviour, and more thoughts.
- Some thoughts are **Thinking Traps**—shortcuts of thinking that are common to all humans—and may bring on strong emotions because of being skewed or inaccurate.
- We can develop the ability to **PAUSE** and be aware of thoughts. Once we **get distance from thoughts**, we have choice. We can encourage flexibility in our thinking, and we can create thoughts that are more helpful intentionally.
- *Don't believe everything you think!*

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Mountain Meditation: Developing Stability[1]

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In the face of an internal or external storm, this meditation will teach you to develop the solidity and stability of a mountain.

This meditation guides us to embody the ideas expressed in the metaphor of **the mountain and the weather**. We access our observer self, while also inviting a sense of solidity and stability.

For this exercise, begin by sitting or standing. Take a moment to notice the chair or floor that is supporting you. Pay attention to the actual sensations of all points of contact. Notice the stability and solidity in this contact.

With your upper body balanced over your hips, and with your shoulders in a comfortable but alert posture, allow your body to be still, and sit with a sense of dignity, solidity, and stability.

Let an image form in your mind of the most magnificent mountain you can imagine. Gradually, let it come into sharper focus. Even if it doesn't come as a visual image, allow the sense of this mountain. Feel its overall shape, with its large base rooted in the bedrock of the earth's crust.

Notice how massive, how solid, and how unmoving it is.

Observe it, noting its qualities. Perhaps see if you can embody the qualities of the mountain. You share in the massiveness and the stillness of the mountain. You become the mountain.

Exercise continues on the following page.

1 Adapted from Kabat-Zinn, J. (2009). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life.* Hachette UK. Retrieved from http://search.chadpearce.com/Home/BOOKS/97291641-Mindfulness-Meditation-for-Everyday-Life-Kabat-Zinn-Jon.pdf

Free guided versions can be found online by searching for **Mountain Meditation**.

With each breath, allow yourself to become a breathing mountain: a centred, grounded, unmoving presence, alive and vital, yet unwavering in stillness.

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While the seasons flow into one another, and as the weather changes from moment to moment, the mountain remains still, calm, and unchanged. At times, the mountain is visited by sunshine, by violent storms, by snow, and by rain and winds of unthinkable magnitude. Through it all, the mountain continues to sit, unmoved by the weather, or by what happens on its surface.

In the same way, as we sit, we can learn to experience the mountain. We can embody the same unwavering solidity and groundedness in the face of everything that changes in our own lives.

It's true that we experience storms of varying intensity and violence both in the outer world, and in our own minds and bodies. Buffeted by high winds, by cold, and by rain, we endure periods of darkness and pain as well as the moments of sunshine, joy, and uplift.

It may help us to see that our thoughts, feelings, preoccupations, emotional storms, crises, and all the things that happen to us are very much like the weather on the mountain. The weather of our own lives is not to be ignored or denied; it is to be encountered, honoured, felt, known for what it is, and held in awareness.

In holding it this way, we can come to know a deeper silence, stillness, and wisdom.

A Primer on Thoughts

What is a thought? Physically speaking, a thought is a series of brain cells (neurons) activating in sequence and creating a circuit or pathway. It is an event in the brain, experienced as a string of words, an image, or a memory. The mind generates thoughts spontaneously. Try to empty the mind of thoughts, and you'll notice what a challenging task it is. The brain is a thinking machine. In the same way that the mouth secretes saliva, the brain secretes thoughts.

While the brain is skilled at generating thoughts rapidly in response to a situation, often these thoughts are inaccurate. They are the mind's attempts to create a story that explains what is happening. We think of a thought as, 'a **kernel of truth** surrounded by a **shell of interpretation**'.[1] The brain computes the known facts, then fills in the rest with guesses, predictions, and assumptions. In this way, we tell ourselves a story in an attempt to make sense of the world around us.

For example, if you come home from work one day and your partner is quieter than usual, your mind generates many thoughts to explain the reason why, such as: "They're not interested in talking to me,"; "We haven't really talked in awhile,"; "I wonder if we're growing apart?"; or, "It reminds me of what happened with my friends, Riley and Khalil". The mind takes the fact that your partner is quieter and builds up a story around it.

The trouble is, these thoughts often pass beneath the radar of awareness, so we tend to believe them without question. And, as you have seen from the **Triangle of Experience**, believing these thoughts means we are affected by related feelings, and have urges to behave—all stemming from thoughts that may not reflect reality very accurately.

Investigating thoughts and examining them to separate the kernel of truth from the shell of interpretation is an important skill. In **CBT**, the fast, often unnoticed thoughts that make up the shell are called automatic thoughts**.**

We don't have control over the first automatic thought that pops into our heads. Luckily, we can learn to relate to these thoughts in a helpful way, and to cultivate healthier second thoughts.

A thought is a **kernel of truth** surrounded by a **shell of interpretation**.

The brain computes known facts, then fills in the rest with guesses, predictions, and assumptions.

In this way, we tell ourselves a story in attempt to make sense of the world around us.

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Being able to separate truth from interpretation is critical for us to avoid feelings and behaviours that

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are influenced by

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thoughts that reflect reality only dimly.

1 Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2012). *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression.* Guilford Press.

Hot thoughts are connected to challenging feelings, such as anger, sadness, or shame.

Hot Thoughts

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As you start to notice thoughts, you will notice that a single situation can bring on a number of automatic thoughts. When our **Triangle of Experience** is charged with anger, sadness, shame, or other uncomfortable emotions, it is likely that one of these thoughts is a **hot thought**. A hot thought is the thought linked most directly to the prominent emotion, and is the one we most want to catch and explore when we are less activated. We call these types of thoughts hot thoughts.[1]

Our brains have a built-in alarm system that signals us to possible threats. Hot thoughts arise more frequently when we've experienced (or felt the threat of) pain or harm in the past. For example, if you have experienced discrimination in the past, hearing a discriminatory comment may contribute to a hot thought arising (e.g. "They are unsafe"). You may experience deep anger, sadness, or fear. The thought and emotion alert us to danger.

However, like a smoke detector, our brain's alarm system may also go off even when the situation isn't threatening. For example, if you have a history of being rejected by loved ones, a friend being late to pick you up may contribute to the thought, "They don't care about me, just like everyone else." You may feel deep fear, sadness, or shame, even if the friend was delayed simply because they lost their keys.

As best you can, cultivate mindful awareness to notice these hot thoughts and their associated feelings, behaviours, and outcomes. A non-judgmental, curious approach helps you to see what is actually happening more clearly. It allows you

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to explore your internal experience and how it's influenced by the **negativity bias** for survival, the past, and the current situation. All thoughts and emotions make sense on some level; we need to discern whether they tell us more about our past, our present situation, or perhaps both if patterns are at play.

1 Adapted from McKay, M., Davis, M., & Fanning, P. (2011). *Thoughts and feelings: Taking control of your moods and your life.* New Harbinger Publications.

Hot thoughts are almost always believed.
Hot thoughts come and go in seconds, and we don't usually evaluate these thoughts. For example, if you see a man getting into a Porsche and think, "He's rich, he doesn't care for anyone but himself," that judgment is as real to you as the colour of the car.

Automatic thoughts, including hot thoughts, seem spontaneous.
They just pop up. We hardly notice them.

Hot thoughts generate other, similar thoughts and memories.
When we are low, we are more likely to remember times when things have been hard, when we haven't succeeded, or when we have been lonely. Similarly, self-confident thoughts tend to lead to thoughts that the world is manageable and that we can cope, or even thrive.

We have practiced our **hot thoughts** unintentionally; their pathways are well established in our brains.

Hot thoughts differ from what we say out loud.
We are usually much more certain, harsh, or final with our hot thoughts than with what we say to others. For example, when Kadeem's boyfriend cancelled dinner plans at the last minute, Kadeem remarked, "I'm disappointed that we haven't spent time together all week." This matter-of-fact thought differed significantly from the actual thoughts that were prompted by the cancellation, including, "He doesn't like me," "He thinks I'm boring," "Our relationship is falling apart," and "I'll be alone." Kadeem also envisioned the room shrinking.

Hot thoughts repeat habitual themes.
Thoughts and feelings are related and tend to match. In a state of anxiety, we will have more thoughts about danger. In a state of depression, thoughts focus on themes of loss, the past, and failure. In a state of anger, we notice thoughts about an unjust world, or about people hurting others deliberately. These themes dispose us to use the **mental filter Thinking Trap**, where we focus only on the aspect of the environment that jives with those thoughts. Mindfulness is the skill of pulling back from the mental filter and seeing more of what is arising.

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Consider four factors that influence our thoughts: current emotional state, the past, our evolutionary inheritance, and non-present focus.

What Influences Thoughts and Interpretations?

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Remember that a thought is a **kernel of truth**, surrounded by a shell of interpretation. *Interpretation* refers to the assumptions, inferences, predictions, or conclusions that we use to build a story to round out the facts presented to us. If someone offers you a seat on the subway, you form an interpretation, with guesses about what may have prompted that action. The capacity to form interpretations is one advantage human beings have that allows all manner of complex thinking and its applications. However, there are downsides to believing interpretations without question. Many things influence the particular interpretation you will form for a given event.

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We will focus on four influences that are relevant to **CBT**, and that are inspired by the writings of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy writers (such as Steven Hayes, Kirk Strosahl, Kelly Wilson, and Russ Harris).

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1. **Your mood, or current emotional state.** As the **Triangle of Experience** shows, feelings influence thoughts. When we feel down, we are more likely to have thoughts of loss, inadequacy, or loneliness. When we feel anxious, we are more likely to notice and ruminate on potential threats. When we feel happy, we recall other times we were happy more easily. Feelings give birth to thoughts of a similar nature.

2. **The past.** It is easy to think something we have thought many times in the past. The brain likes efficiency—especially when it comes to potential threats—so it tends to reuse pathways once it has laid them down. For example, we tend to perform routines the same way each time, such as the route we take to do errands, or the way we fold the laundry. Similarly, we develop habitual modes of thinking—characteristic thoughts or stories that attempt to explain what is happening around us and to keep us safe.

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These habits of thinking have been formed by ideas that we have adopted in **autopilot**. We have been told what to think since childhood. Our thoughts are also shaped daily by the media, by family, and by friends.

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As we bring **hot thoughts** into awareness, we may recognize that they reflect lessons not only from our past experiences, but also from our parents, teachers, faith group, or cultural group. Each person's typical hot thoughts are personal to them.

When faced with an uncertain and potentially threatening situation, our habits of automatic thinking may tell us a familiar story: of how we will rise to the challenge, how we will fail, how it's our fault, or how others have let us down. These thoughts depend on past learning from our own life experiences, and on the messages we've learned from others.

3. **Our evolutionary inheritance and negativity bias.** Our brain's job is to help us to survive, rather than to be happy or calm. Its alarm system against potential threats must be sensitive enough to keep us alive and, therefore, can lead to **false alarms**. As prey animals, we've evolved to assume danger lurks around every corner. As social beings, we've evolved to worry about being excluded from the group, compare ourselves to others, and worry that we are not enough to belong. Thinking about the worst situation— whether the physical threat of an external danger or the social threat of being removed from the group—allows us to prepare for it and to survive a potentially dangerous world. This thought process is called the **negativity bias**: we pay more attention to negative (potentially threatening) information than to positive or neutral information. Notably, the more stressed we are, and the more we have had overwhelmingly stressful experiences in the past, the more amplified this negativity bias is likely to be. The brain works diligently to keep us safe, but may fuel distress that overshadows the pleasant and safe aspects of our experience.

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We evolved to survive, not to be happy or calm.

4. **Non-present focus.** Our remarkable mind is able to jump back and forth between the past and the future. Even if the present moment is safe, our mind will hunt for past or future problems to help us survive. We analyze what has occurred in the past and predict how it may play out in new circumstances. This capacity is beneficial for problem-solving. However, when dealing with painful circumstances that we cannot change, this ability magnifies suffering by dredging up painful memories or predicting frightful futures. Non-present focus makes it hard to focus on thoughts relevant to the present. It is more challenging to check present moment facts when our thoughts are time travelling.

Because of **neuroplasticity**, we have the ability to change our thought habits, (just as we can change behaviour habits). Brain pathways are not set in stone, but are like plastic that can be molded and changed.

Changing Thought Habits: Neuroplasticity

Just as we can change a habit of behaviour (such as getting out of bed too late), we can change habits of thought. The principles are the same: notice when we are slipping into the old habit, **PAUSE**, and try something differently.

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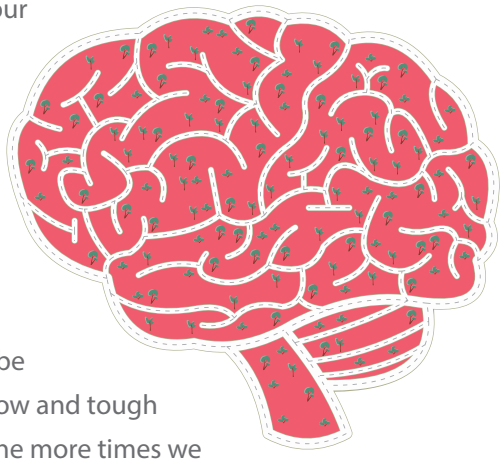
For example, Renee has a habit of not accepting praise. Her habitual thought when she accomplishes something is that it wasn't that valuable. When people congratulate her, or observe that she has done something well, she usually responds, "Oh, it's no big deal. It wasn't that hard." If she wants to change her habit to develop a **Good for Me** each time someone tells her she did a good job, she will: notice her automatic first thought of, "No big deal", recognize that it may not be serving her, and, cultivate a new pattern of thinking with the second thought of, "Yes, I did put effort into that."

49

Ample research now exists to demonstrate that by thinking different thoughts repeatedly and intentionally, people can change the circuits or pathways in their brains. Technically, this process is called **neuroplasticity**: the idea that brain pathways are not set in stone, but are like plastic that can be molded and changed.

Imagine our brain as forests, and our habit patterns as pathways in the forests. Changing a habit can be compared to bushwhacking: tough going at first, and easier the more times we walk the new path.



Imagine our brains as forests, and our habitual patterns as pathways in the forests. The more entrenched a habit, the more well-worn that pathway in the forest. This means we can walk down that path almost effortlessly and without thinking, on **autopilot**. In this analogy, changing a habit can be compared to bushwhacking: it is slow and tough going at first, but becomes easier the more times we walk down the new path.

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In this course, we discuss two main ways to change habits of thought:

1. **Mindfulness:** Relate differently to your thoughts. Step back from automatic thoughts and see them for what they are: **just thoughts**—not necessarily truths or accurate representations of reality. You don't have to believe everything you think!

2. **Investigation:** Choose different thoughts intentionally. Analyze your thoughts to separate the facts from the interpretations, and create new thoughts that are more accurate, balanced, and helpful.

NEURON BFFs: Best Friends Forever
FOR NOW

40 In this course, **mindfulness** and **investigation** are two main ways to change habits of thought.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Mindfulness: Getting Distance from Thoughts[1]

40

The seven strategies described here will help you to remember that you are not your thoughts, and that your thoughts are not necessarily true. As you practice these de-centring strategies, practice validating the **kernel of truth** within the thought. Given the influences on our thoughts outlined in this chapter, compassion will remind you to expect a range of automatic thoughts to arise.

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Use these seven strategies to remember that you are not your thoughts, and that your thoughts are not necessarily true.

These strategies may be especially useful when you find yourself ruminating about the past, or consumed by worries about the future. These are also helpful when you notice that you are stuck in the habit of making judgments about yourself or others.

1. Preface each thought with the phrase, "I'm noticing I'm having the thought that…". For example, instead of thinking, "He's mad at me," try thinking, "I'm noticing I'm having the thought that he's mad at me."

2. Imagine your thoughts as weather surrounding the mountain, as leaves floating on a stream, as clouds in the sky, or as movies playing on a cinema screen. Notice them going by without following them.

3. Remind yourself that thoughts are not facts (even the ones that say they are!). You don't have to believe everything you think!

4. Try writing your thoughts down on paper. This practice lets you observe your thoughts in a way that is less emotional and overwhelming. Also, the **PAUSE** between having the thought and writing it down can give you a moment to take a wider perspective and to **RESPOND** differently.

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7

1 These exercises are inspired by those described in Segal, Williams, Teasdale. 2012, p. 323, and by Harris R. 2009, pp. 108–120.

5. Put the thoughts in the **Triangle of Experience**, and explore what feelings, urges, or behaviours are connected.

6. Thank the mind! The mind has evolved to be always on the lookout for possible threats and difficulties, and tends toward a 'better safe than sorry' interpretation of situations. This perspective means that you are often thinking the worst. When you notice the mind offering up negative thoughts, step back, and thank it for doing its job. For example, "Thanks, mind, for trying to warn me about the dangers of going on this trip. I'm going to do it anyway, but I know you're just doing your job."

7. **Top 10 Tracks.** Over time, you may notice certain themes recurring over and over again. It can be helpful to think of these thoughts as your Top 10 Tracks, like annoying pop songs that your mind plays over and over again, whether you want them or not. Some common examples include:

- The "I can't do that" track
- The "My body is unattractive" track
- The "I'm too much for people" track
- The "I'm not good enough" track
- The "No one understands me" track
- The "I can't take that risk" track
- The "People can't be trusted" track
- The "What's the point?" track
- The "One mistake and I'm out of the group" track

"Our thoughts are **just thoughts**, not the truth of things, and certainly not accurate representations of who we are. In being seen and known, they cannot but self-liberate, and we are, in that moment, liberated from them."

Jon Kabat-Zinn

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Spotting Thinking Traps

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Psychologists have described a few categories of thoughts as **Thinking Traps** or **Cognitive Distortions** that are simply the brain's attempt to anticipate possible threats with shortcuts in thinking. However, because the brain's motto is *better safe than sorry*, Thinking Traps can result in skewed and extreme explanations that anticipate the worst in order to keep us safe **(negativity bias)**. When we are experiencing a highly activated **mood** or state (e.g., a wave of anger or shame, or periods of anxiety or depression), our brains are even more sensitive to possible threat. In such states, we are more likely to adopt Thinking Traps, which help us to survive potentially threatening times. Remember, we've evolved to survive rather than to be calm or happy.

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10

When we notice Thinking Traps in ourselves or in others, it's important to refrain from judgment. We all use Thinking Traps: our brains are functioning properly and we aren't doing anything wrong. Our brains are doing exactly what they are designed to do: keep us safe in a world that is potentially threatening. They become traps if they become rigid, self-defeating patterns of thinking, or if they are used in every situation without looking at the context.

The Thinking Traps on the following pages have been adapted from Dr. Aaron Beck (1976) and Dr. Burns (1980).[1] A summary can be found at the end of this chapter.

1 Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive therapies and emotional disorders.* New York: New American Library.
Burns, D. D. (1980). *Feeling good: The new mood therapy.* New York: New American Library.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

Thinking Trap: All-or-Nothing Thinking focuses on extremes.

What the mind is doing:

- Focusing on situations in terms of extremes.
- Seeing things as either good or bad, or as success or failures.
- Neglecting to recognize that most people and situations are complex.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- In reality, most situations call for more of a moderate view. Find a thought in the middle ground.
- Imagine putting the event on a scale from 0 to 100, where 100 is the most extreme version of that thought. Then ask, "What corresponds to the other numbers, between 0 and 100? Where does this particular thought fall? Is it possible that I am viewing this event as more extreme than it is in reality?"

Examples of All-or-Nothing Thinking, and of potential alternative thoughts:

- "I lost my keys. I'm disorganized and incompetent."
  - "Sometimes my actions are organized and sometimes my actions are disorganized, just like everyone else."
- "Being on this team is the worst thing that could have happened to me."
  - "If the worst thing that could happen to me was losing everyone I love (a 100 on the scale), this situation is actually only about a 40."
- "Anything less than 100 per cent is a failure."
  - "Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. No one would expect my performance to be absolutely perfect every time."

Thinking Trap: Over-generalizing makes sweeping, broad conclusions.

Over-generalizing

What the mind is doing:

- Drawing a general conclusion about something based on only one piece of evidence.
- Using words like 'everything', 'nothing', 'always', and 'never' when these absolutes can't be inferred from the present facts.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Check the facts!
- Search actively for other instances or pieces of evidence that do not support that conclusion.

Example of Over-generalizing, and of a potential alternative thought:

- "I forgot her birthday! I am always so thoughtless."
    - "I feel badly that I forgot her birthday, but I am a good friend in many other ways. There are times when I am thoughtful too. Even remembering now is thoughtful!"
- "I mispronounced another word in language class. I'm never going to make the Elders proud!"
    - "I feel embarrassed that I can't pronounce certain words correctly, which shows that learning my language is important and I just haven't mastered it yet. I know the Elders are proud of my efforts, even if the words aren't perfect."

Mental Filter

Thinking Trap:
Mental Filters only notice evidence that confirms existing beliefs.

What the mind is doing:

- Searching for evidence that confirms what you fear, or what you already believe.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Check the facts!
- Actively search for other examples that you may not have been noticing.

Example of a Mental Filter, and of a potential alternative thought:

- **"**I yelled at my child today. Just another reason I am a horrible father!"
    - "Today was hard. I was impatient and yelled at my child, but I apologized and took the time to listen to how they felt about the situation."

Thinking Trap: Disqualifying positive things or accomplishments as unimportant.

Disqualifying the Positive

What the mind is doing:

- Saying that the positive things you have done (or that have happened) are less valuable, or don't count.
- This **Thinking Trap** is an example of **negativity bias**: paying more attention to what is going wrong than to what is working well.

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Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Ask yourself, "If someone else were looking at the situation, would they be able to point out something positive?"
- See if you can practice a **Good for Me** in this circumstance.

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Example of Disqualifying the Positive, and of a potential alternative thought:

- **"**My room looks so sloppy because I left my clean laundry piled up on the chair."
    - "I did laundry, which is still an accomplishment because it required effort and time. It's okay if I was too tired to fold the clean clothes."

Jumping to Conclusions

Thinking Trap: Jumping to Conclusions involves imagining we can read other peoples' minds or predict the future.

There are two key types of **jumping to conclusions**: **mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking), and **fortune telling** (predicting the future).

What the mind is doing:

- *Assuming* we know the conclusion even though there is still uncertainty.
- There is usually a negative tone to the assumptions. For example, in fortune telling, we usually overestimate the likelihood of a negative or unpleasant outcome. In mind reading, we often assume others are thinking the worst of us.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Check the facts! Separate facts from assumptions.
- Look for evidence that might lead you to a *different* conclusion.
- Acknowledge that there might be some uncertainty about the outcome.

Examples of mind reading and fortune telling are found on the following page.

An example of Fortune Telling, and of potential alternative thoughts:

- "I will not have fun at game night with my friends."
    - "Sometimes being with a larger group can be stressful, especially when I can't predict how the experience will unfold. I often feel better afterward when I get to spend time with closer friends."

Examples of Mind Reading, and of potential alternative thoughts:

- "The woman at the mall was staring at me. She thinks I'm ugly."
    - "I have no idea what the woman was looking at. Maybe she was looking at me, or perhaps she was looking for her friend somewhere behind me. I have no evidence that she was even thinking about me."
- "People think I'm stupid."
    - "No one has ever commented that I am stupid. In fact, most people ask for my advice."

Catastrophizing

Thinking Trap:
Catastrophizing is blowing things out of proportion.

What the mind is doing:

- Predicting that the worst-case scenario is going to happen, without considering other possible outcomes.
- Having 'what if' thoughts.
- Underestimating the ability to cope with this outcome if it does occur.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Check the facts (real odds) about the danger.
- Think about how you would cope, even if something bad did happen.

Examples of Catastrophizing, and of potential alternative thoughts:

- "I am late to meet my friend. They will be upset, and will never want to interact with me again. I will lose the friendship."
    - "I have a reasonable explanation for being late. I have sent them a message letting them know I will be late. My friend is a reasonable person. I will apologize and plan properly in the future so that I am not late again."
- "I can't collect my thoughts. My brain no longer works, and I won't be able to function again."
    - "I feel scattered and activated emotionally right now, which is making it hard to think. Even though it feels like this situation will last forever, I've had it happen many times before and have recovered when I have had time to calm down."

"My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened."

Anonymous

Thinking Trap: Minimization is shrinking something important to avoid uncomfortable feelings about it.

Minimization

What the mind is doing:

- Pretending something is less important than it is, usually to avoid uncomfortable feelings about it.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Check the facts!
- Ask yourself, "Is there something I am trying not to notice, or that I'm shrinking in importance?"

Examples of Minimization and of potential alternative thoughts:

- "My partner insulted me in front of our friends, but it's not a big deal."
    - "It did hurt my feelings when they said that. I am not okay with that."
- "I am sure my friend won't mind that I cancelled our get-together."
    - "I feel guilty about cancelling. But ignoring it doesn't make it go away. Maybe I should ask my friend how it made him feel."

Emotional Reasoning

Thinking Trap:
Emotional reasoning is when strong feelings meet rigid thoughts, combining them to feel like a fact.

What the mind is doing:

- When strong feelings meet rigid thoughts, the thoughts can feel like facts because our survival brain is activated and cares more about survival than about details.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Check the facts!
- Name your feelings and notice the thoughts associated with each feeling. Although the feeling is natural and may be valid, check to what extent the associated thoughts are in keeping with reality.

Examples of Emotional Reasoning, and of potential alternative thoughts:

- "I feel very anxious, so that must mean this bridge is not safe."
    - "I am afraid of heights, but this bridge is checked regularly by local government officials; they would close it if it weren't safe."
- "No one cares about me."
    - "I feel lonely right now, but it doesn't mean that no one cares about me, or that no one likes me. This feeling will pass."

Thinking Trap:
Shoulds and **Musts**
create feelings of guilt, failure, or frustration.

Shoulds and Musts

What the mind is doing:

- Telling us how we *should* or *must* feel, or behave.
- Making up rules in attempt to make things more certain, or because we think it will motivate us or others.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Notice these thoughts bring up feelings of guilt, shame, anxiety, or disappointment. When applied to others, they often bring up anger and resentment. Notice these feelings are rarely helpful in solving the problem.
- Change the words to *could* or *would like.*
- Examine whether or not the thought is helpful, and consider the advantages and disadvantages of believing it.

Examples of Shoulds and Musts, and of potential alternative thoughts:

- "I dropped and broke a plate. I should never be this clumsy."
    - "I would like never to be clumsy, but that's not possible. Asking myself to do everything perfectly makes me feel exhausted."
- "I 'must' be in control at all times."
    - "I wish I could be in control at all times, but I realize that's not realistic. It will be more helpful to separate what I can control from what I can't."

Labelling

Thinking Trap:
Labelling assigns negative words to ourselves, others, or things.

What the mind is doing:

- Trying to simplify things by putting them in a category.
- Putting people or things into categories because that makes them seem less complex and more easily understood.
- Attaching an emotionally-loaded label to something or someone as a shortcut for exploring all the feelings about it/them.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Ask yourself which behaviour or error is creating problems. Try isolating that issue rather than applying a label to the whole thing.
- Describe the specific situation and the context in which a person did a particular thing.

Examples of Labelling and of potential alternative thoughts:

- **"**I am a screw up."
    - "I screw some things up, sometimes. But I am not defined by my mistakes."
- "He didn't call me back. He's so self-centred."
    - "I don't like it when he doesn't call me back. Maybe he's too tired or overwhelmed right now. I can't judge his character based on one action."

Thinking Trap: Personalization is blaming yourself or others unfairly.

Personalization

What the mind is doing:

- Taking blame or responsibility for things that weren't (entirely) our fault, or within our control. Or, assigning responsibility to others for things that were outside their control.
- Making an effort to feel more in control, or to imagine that others have control.

Tips to untangle the Thinking Trap:

- Check the facts!
- Ask yourself what is within your control and responsibility, and what belongs to others. Determine aspects that are unknown or uncontrollable.

Example of Personalization, and of a potential alternative thought:

- "Akemi hasn't contacted me in awhile. I must have done something wrong."
    - "I don't know why Akemi has been out of touch. There could be many reasons—I just hope it was not something I did. Perhaps I could check in."

Thinking Trap Chart[1]

All or Nothing Thinking

69

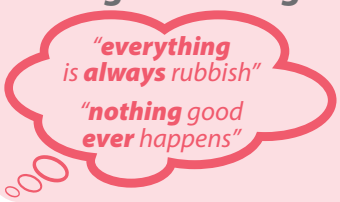
Focusing on situations in terms of extremes.

"If I'm not perfect I have failed."

"Either I do it right or not at all."

Over-generalizing

70



Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw.

Mental Filter

71

Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes.

Disqualifying the Positive

72

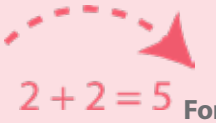
Discounting the good things that have happened or that WE have done for some reason or another.

"That doesn't count."

Jumping to Conclusions

73

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:



Mind reading (imagining we know what others are thinking)

Fortune telling (predicting the future)

Catastrophizing & Minimization

75
76

Blowing things out of proportion, or shrinking something inappropriately to make it seem less important.

Emotional Reasoning

77

Assuming that because we feel a certain way, what we think must be true.

"I feel embarrassed, so I must be an idiot."

Shoulds & Musts

78

should
must

Using critical words like *should*, *must*, or *ought* can make us feel guilty, or as though we have already failed. If we apply *shoulds* to other people, the result is often frustration.

Labelling

79

Assigning labels to ourselves or to other people.

"I'm a loser."
"I'm completely useless."
"He's such an idiot."

Personalization

80

"It is all my fault."

Blaming ourselves or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely our fault. Conversely, blaming other people when the responsibility wasn't entirely theirs.

1 Adapted from psychologytools.com

Chapter 3 Home Practice

Practice Table: Spot Thinking Traps

Notice events this week, or use a practice table from previous weeks, and try identifying the **Thinking Traps**.

SITUATION	AUTOMATIC THOUGHT	FEELINGS Sensations, Emotions	SPOT: IDENTIFY THINKING TRAPS
My two-month-old baby sneezed once today; I have not seen this behaviour before.	"My baby is sick, and it could get really bad. I must drop everything to watch my baby."	Terror Heart pounding, trembling, sweaty, breathless	• **Jumping to Conclusions (fortune telling)** • **Catastro-phizing**
I am showing my friend a video and he checks the length of the video before it has finished.	"My friend is bored and thinks I am an idiot."	Shame Flushed face, heart racing, sinking feeling in abdomen	• **Jumping to Conclusions (mind reading)** • **Labelling**

SITUATION	AUTOMATIC THOUGHT	FEELINGS Sensations, Emotions	SPOT: IDENTIFY THINKING TRAPS 81

57 Practice Mountain Meditation Skill

What did you notice? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

66 Read Strategies for Getting Distance from Thoughts

Are there any you already practice? Any that interest you to try?

My Top Strategies:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

My Good for Me(s) This Week

I can give myself credit that I invested time, energy, or effort in:_____

Notes

Developing Flexible Thinking

Pearls for this Chapter

- **STOP–SPOT–SWAP** describes a method for changing unhelpful thoughts.
- To STOP, **PAUSE** and come out of **autopilot** intentionally.
- To **SPOT**, label your thought as a thought, or as a **Thinking Trap** if applicable.
- To **SWAP** a thought, **THINK** about it (ask whether it is True, Helpful, Inspiring, Needs-alerting, Kind)
- SWAP anxious thoughts by using the **Anxiety Equation**, and by exploring the actual threat and ways you might cope.
- It is common for us to have automatic negative **core beliefs** related to believing that we are unworthy or that things are unsafe. We can try to STOP–SPOT–SWAP these thoughts as well.
- When we SWAP, we find alternative thoughts and beliefs that are more accurate, balanced, helpful, or kind.
- By repeating the new thought over and over, we can help it to become the new habit.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX
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Grounding 5-4-3-2-1 Skill[1]

Grounding is a calming and centring method that helps us to become more focused in our bodies and on the present moment. With this focus, we have an opportunity to remind ourselves of our resources and of our ability to cope in the present.

The same object, sound, or feeling can be used twice (or more) in a row. The exercise can be done in silence or out loud. It can be repeated as often as you need.

Exercise:

- Name five things that you see. Say, "I see _____, I see _____, etc."
- Name five things that you hear. Say, "I hear _____, I hear _____, etc."
- Name five things that you sense/touch (e.g., your feet inside your shoes, your heart beating, your temperature). Say, "I sense _____, I sense _____, etc."

- Name four things that you see.
- Name four things you hear.
- Name four things that you sense/touch.

- Name three things that you see.
- Name three things you hear.
- Name three things that you sense/touch.
  Continue this pattern for two things, then for one thing.

Alternate Exercise:

- Name five things that you see.
- Name four things that you hear.
- Name three things that you sense/touch.
- Name two things that you smell.
- Name one thing that you taste.

These instructions are only suggestions; there is nothing special about these particular sequences. You can design your own grounding exercise with whatever numbers and senses work best for you.

Ground yourself in the present moment using your senses.

This exercise works best if you are sitting down or standing still. You can use it in busy or quiet places.

Note: Do not attempt this exercise while driving.

1 Adapted from General Practice Services Committee (2015), *CBIS: Cognitive Behavioural Interpersonal Skills*, p. 74. Retrieved from http://www.gpscbc.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/AMH_004.0_CBIS_Manual_v3.0_PR.pdf

These steps can be summarized as **STOP–SPOT–SWAP.**

Investigating Thoughts and Thinking Traps

Recall that the strategy for working more skilfully with ourselves involves a few steps. The first, and most vital, is to **STOP**. This practice of **PAUSING** gets us out of **autopilot**, and brings awareness to what is happening.

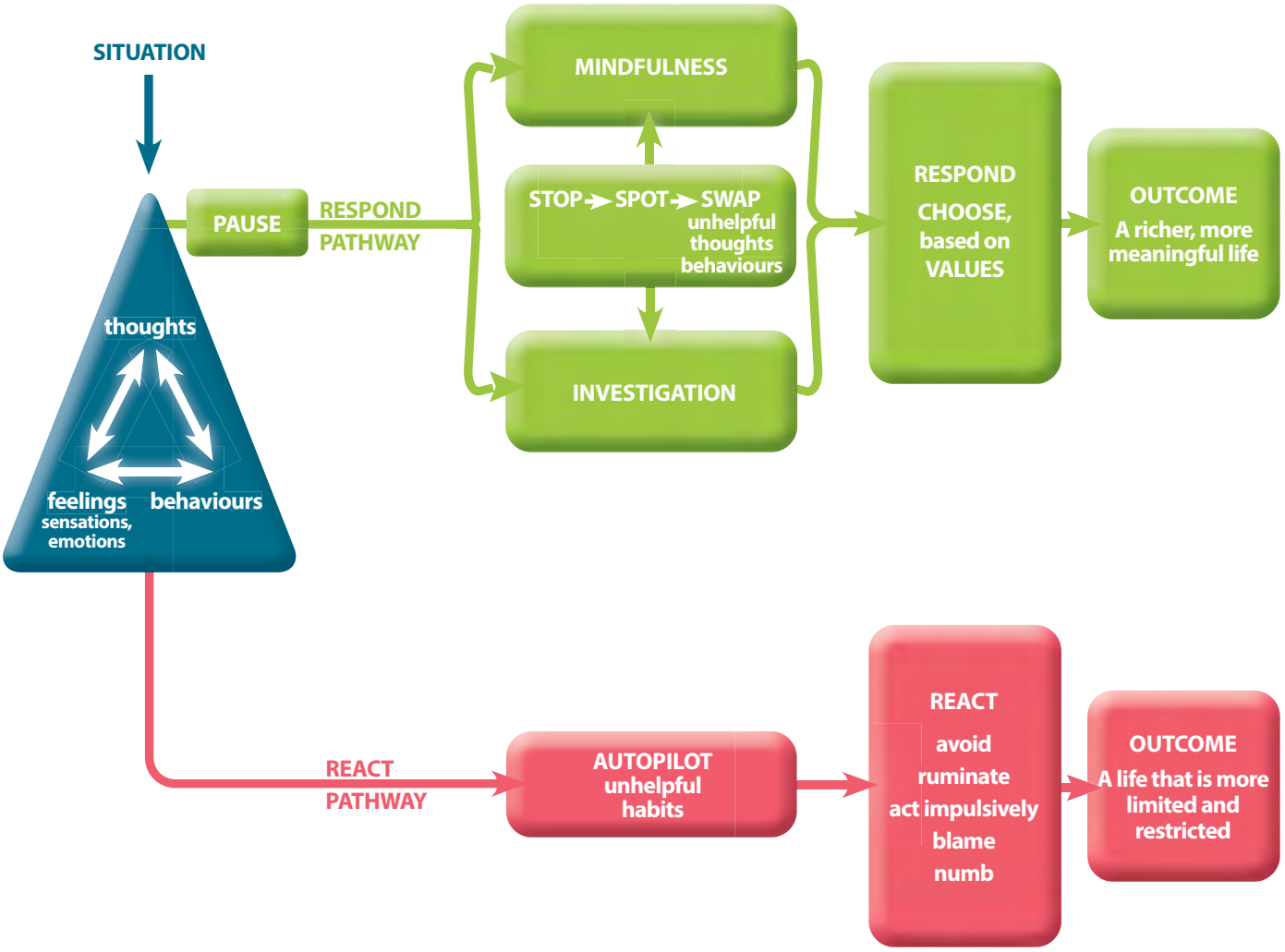
The second step is to **SPOT**: to notice the **Triangle of Experience** mindfully, and to label the relevant thoughts and feelings.

Once we have awareness, we can choose a strategy to direct our response. For example, we can cultivate **Mindfulness**: clear awareness and non-judgment of our experience, without identifying with the experience. From the observer stance that mindfulness allows us to obtain, we can see that we are not our thoughts, and that we don't have to believe all of our thoughts (Chapters 2 and 3).

In addition to mindfulness, we can also choose to **Investigate Thoughts**: to put them through a series of questions, to determine how true they are, and to decide if they are helpful in pointing us in a useful direction.

In the end, we can create alternative thoughts. We can **SWAP** in new, more helpful thoughts whenever problematic thoughts arise. Recall the concept of **neuroplasticity**: each time we SWAP thoughts, we are reinforcing our **RESPOND** pathway. **Changing from the Inside Out!**

It's important that we resist judging our minds for having unhelpful or difficult thoughts. We don't have control over our first thoughts, which is why they are called automatic. We can change how we relate to those first automatic thoughts using mindfulness to cultivate more helpful second thoughts.


SITUATION
PAUSE
RESPOND
PATHWAY
thoughts
feelings
sensations,
emotions
behaviours
MINDFULNESS
STOP
SPOT
SWAP
unhelpful
thoughts
behaviours
INVESTIGATION
RESPOND
CHOOSE,
based on
VALUES
OUTCOME
A richer, more
meaningful life
REACT
PATHWAY
AUTOPILOT
unhelpful
habits
REACT
avoid
ruminate
act impulsively
blame
numb
OUTCOME
A life that is more
limited and
restricted

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Naming and Swapping Negative Core Beliefs

Like all thoughts, core beliefs are **just thoughts**. We can use the same processes of **mindfulness** and **investigation** to bring them to light.

6 We view the world through the lens of our own life history. This perspective means that sometimes a particular series of **Triangles** (thoughts, feelings, behaviours) may arise more easily when a present situation reminds us of something from the past.

68 As we get better at noticing automatic thoughts and **Thinking Traps**, patterns start to emerge. We begin to see certain themes popping up again and again. These themes often indicate the presence of **core beliefs**—ways of explaining our experience to ourselves. Core beliefs are stable and enduring reactions that develop earlier in life, involving not just thoughts or beliefs, but also their associated feelings (e.g., sensations of panic), and urges to act (e.g., running away). They are often underneath our **hot thoughts** and **Top 10 Tracks**.

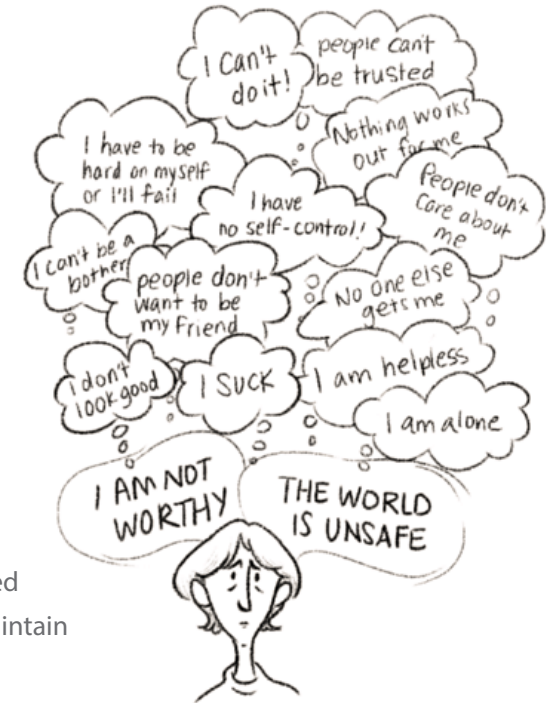
40 65 60 67

Often, we can trace common **hot thoughts** down to one or two basic, **negative core beliefs**.

Bear in mind that the label **core beliefs** is a bit misleading, because it seems as though they are beliefs that cannot change.

Often, given our history as hunter-gatherers, the core beliefs associated with unpleasant emotions can be boiled down to two main themes:

- *"The world or others are not safe."*
- *"I am not worthy or good enough."*



These beliefs are part of our inherited legacy. Our ancestors were vigilant against every type of danger and survived because of these beliefs. They took care around predators and environmental threats, and acted in ways that helped them to maintain acceptance within their group.

Born with these tendencies, **core beliefs** become habitual when they help us to adapt to early life problems. They may have been helpful at the time. For example, a child with an unreliable caregiver may assume that all others are unreliable and unpredictable. This belief is helpful to them at the time, because it creates expectations for the child that often match the actual circumstances, minimizing their disappointment and using their resources to survive without depending on others.

Over time, we end up believing these stories without question, and even without awareness that we are thinking them. As we start to notice painful automatic thoughts, we see that they likely derive from some version of these beliefs. Though they helped us to cope at the time we acquired them, they may not work so well for us now. We are transferring past strategies to current situations that may be very different. For example, when the child mentioned above grows up, he will likely encounter many people with whom he could have healthy connections, which could make his life easier and more fulfilling. Continuing to assume that others can't be depended on may lead to unnecessary loneliness and isolation.

The label 'core beliefs' is a bit misleading, because it makes them seem like they are beliefs that can't change. But just like all thoughts, core beliefs are **just thoughts**, and we can use the same processes of **mindfulness** and **investigation** to bring them to light. Returning to the analogy of the brain being like a forest (full of thought pathways), core beliefs are like well-established pathways—routes the mind has taken again and again. Breaking out of these well-trodden pathways takes both time and a great deal of repetition: you have probably been believing your own core beliefs in **autopilot** for many years. In fact, you will probably always have some version of these stories arising as an automatic response to events. With practice, you will get better at spotting the stories, naming them as a version of a core belief that is no longer helpful, and **SWAPPING** in a more helpful core belief.

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We can **SWAP** the negative core belief with something that is more helpful and based on present-day facts. In this way, we build **NEW core beliefs.**

Choosing new core beliefs intentionally results in positive ripple effects: over time, more helpful and hopeful automatic thoughts start being produced.

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IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Anxiety Equation

For thoughts associated with a feeling of anxiety, nervousness, or fear, a useful tool is the Anxiety Equation.[1] This skill is based on the fact that anxiety often arises out of exaggerating danger and underestimating our ability to cope.

$$\frac{\text{belief in } \textbf{likelihood of threat}}{\text{belief that } \textbf{I will be able to cope}} = \text{ANXIETY}$$

35 In **autopilot**, we tend to catastrophize or jump to conclusions about potential dangers, which leads to a large value on the top of the equation, and consequently to high anxiety. We also tend to ignore or underestimate our resources and ability to cope, which leads to a small value on the bottom of the equation, and consequently to high anxiety.

65 When we **investigate**, we seek to shift this equation in order to minimize the top (fear and the belief that bad things will happen), and to maximize 95 the bottom (**coping thoughts** and the belief that we will be able to handle it).

What might be helpful for you with this equation?

Top: Minimize fear by estimating the danger in a realistic way.

- Ask yourself, "What's fact? What's exaggerated? Can I challenge it? Can I make it more realistic?"
- 81 73 71 Notice what you are envisioning or saying to yourself that magnifies the fear. Notice **Thinking Traps** such as **catastrophization**, **jumping to conclusions (mind reading and fortune telling)**, and **mental filters**.
- Ask yourself what you could say to yourself to decrease the fear.

Remember, coping means muddling through somehow, not doing it perfectly or escaping without a scratch.

Bottom: Maximize coping by increasing coping resources.

- Identify your internal and external coping resources, both past and present.
- Remind yourself that you have coped with other difficult situations.
- 21 Use coping thoughts, problem solving, **healthy distraction**, cultural and spiritual practices, and relaxation.
- 238 Use compassionate thoughts and **nourishing activities**.

1 Padesky, C. (2013, December). Assertive defense of the self. Workshop conducted at the Evolution of Psychotherapy conference by M.H. Erickson Foundation, Inc. Anaheim, CA.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Coping Thoughts

During intense emotion, we tend to have extreme thoughts that catastrophize or overestimate danger and underestimate our ability to cope. One helpful strategy is to think of soothing and believable words to help us regain perspective. This self-coaching mirrors what we would do for a friend in a similar situation. These words remind us how we have coped with past challenges, and that we have internal resources (creativity, spirituality, compassion, determination) and external resources (friends, family, nature, community). Identify helpful, supportive statements as your **coping thoughts**. If a sample thought feels dismissive, invalidating, or unkind, it is not beneficial for you, and it's okay to use others. Coping thoughts can also be paired with **self-compassionate thoughts** if they feel helpful.

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SWAP anxious thoughts with thoughts about your capacity for coping.

Sample Coping Thoughts

Choose words that resonate with you (statements that you won't argue with). You may modify the ones in this box, or write your own.

- ❍ I will make it out of this situation.
- ❍ I'm doing the best I can given the resources that I have.
- ❍ I can stand it.
- ❍ This too shall pass.
- ❍ I will be OK.
- ❍ It won't last forever.
- ❍ I may not like this, but I can definitely stand it.
- ❍ I have coped with situations like this before and I can again.
- ❍ I just have to muddle through; I don't have to get everything perfect.
- ❍ I can try to find someone else to handle part of this situation.
- ❍ This situation is only going to last a little while longer; I can handle a few more minutes.
- ❍ Anxiety is uncomfortable, but it won't kill me.
- ❍ Worrying about things I can't change doesn't help anything. It only creates stress and wastes my time.
- ❍ There isn't time to do everything perfectly. I need to prioritize and accept that many tasks can be done to the point of being just good enough.
- ❍ How can I show myself the same love that I imagine my ancestors would give me in this moment?
- ❍ Saying no is hard, but healthy boundaries are kind to everyone.
- ❍ A little anxiety is okay: my body was made to handle it, and I can tolerate it.
- ❍ I will start feeling less anxious if I hang on and think about other things.
- ❍ **One Breath**.
- ❍ Good enough is good enough.
- ❍ I'm doing great, keep going.
- ❍ I can do hard things.
- ❍ We can make it through.
- ❍ Just do my best, let go of the rest.

Write out the thought that works for you. Put it on sticky notes around your house, as a picture on your phone, or write it on the mirror!

Alternatively, we can write out a balanced thought related to the situation. This **SWAPPED** thought can reflect reality more accurately than the automatic, emotionally-charged thoughts that arose at first. Thinking more accurate thoughts will help us to recognize our ability to cope with what is truly happening.

For example, imagine your son asks you to find someone else to pick you up from your doctor's appointment. Your mind automatically jumps to the feared conclusion that this request is a sign that your son doesn't value you (mind reading). This **hot thought** is highly emotionally charged and will be hard to cope with. However, you can re-write this thought to, "The fact that he can't pick me up doesn't necessarily mean he doesn't value me. It is uncomfortable not knowing why he can't pick me up, but right now I am making assumptions and need to get more information." You can save yourself unneeded stress by thinking about coping with the actual situation (one where there is uncertainty about what is going on), rather than imagining you have to cope with the feared situation (a disrupted relationship).

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX
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Changing Thoughts: THINK Acronym

When you are struggling with a thought, try **THINK**! THINK is a method developed originally to help people consider what they write on social media. It is also a great tool for **investigating** thoughts, because it asks you to examine the thought from several perspectives. It is often useful to write it out on paper, which helps us to engage the logical part of our mind.

65

T: TRUE?
H: HELPFUL?
I: INSPIRING?
N: NEEDS?
K: KIND?

Ask these questions about the thought:

What part of this thought is TRUE? Check the facts! Separate the **kernel of truth** from the shell of opinions and assumptions. How accurate is this thought? What **Thinking Traps** might be present? What is the evidence *for* it? What is the evidence *against* it? What evidence might I be ignoring? What is a thought that better reflects the known facts?

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How HELPFUL is this thought? How useful is it to go on thinking this thought? How does thinking this way make me feel? What are the outcomes of thinking this way? How might I act if I didn't believe this thought? Consider writing out the pros and cons of continuing to think the thought. Is there a thought that represents a more helpful way of viewing the situation?

How can I make this thought INSPIRING? Does accepting this thought inspire me to be my best self? How does it fit with my **values**, or who I want to be? How does it point me in a direction where I actually want to go? If I looked back on this thought five years from now, what advise would I give myself?

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Which NEEDS does this thought alert me to? Is my mind signalling an underlying need by bringing up this thought? Is this thought coming up because of something I need to take care of? Why did my mind jump to this thought?

What is the KINDest interpretation I can offer? How kind is this thought? Would I say it to a friend? If not, what would I be likely to say?

Use the **THINK Acronym** to separate the **kernel of truth** from the **shell of interpretation**.

Remember how a thought is a **kernel of truth**, surrounded by a **shell of interpretation**? Using the **THINK Acronym** helps you to separate the kernel from the shell. Once you work through these questions, you may see ways that you have been neglecting some information, filling in with guesses, or letting the past influence the present situation unduly. It also helps you to build new thoughts.

To illustrate this concept, consider Kaoru's situation. Her mother-in-law called to say that she is coming to visit for two weeks. Kaoru thinks it's going to be awful, like it always is: her mother-in-law will criticize everything Kaoru does, and her partner will not stand up for her. She wants to run away. But she also feels guilty, thinking she shouldn't feel this way toward her mother-in-law.

T – TRUE? Kaoru checks the facts. It is certainly true that in the past, her mother-in-law has been critical, and Kaoru has felt awful during her visits. But she also notices some **all-or-nothing thinking** and **over-generalization** (always/never thoughts), and recognizes that she has had many neutral moments with her mother-in-law, and even a handful of good times. She recalls how the last time, after she pointed it out, her partner did make an effort to stand up to her mother. She notices the two elements of the **Anxiety Equation**: **catastrophizing** (assuming that the worst-case scenario is most likely), and a lack of noticing her capacities to cope. Finally, she also sees that she is **jumping to conclusions** (fortune telling)**,** and that she cannot be certain that this visit will replicate past experiences. It would be more accurate to think, "My mother-in-law has been critical sometimes in the past, and it could happen on this trip."

H – HELPFUL? Kaoru recognizes that this pattern of thinking leads to feelings of helplessness, anger, and sadness. It leaves her with anticipatory anxiety, and a desire to withdraw from her partner. Her judgment that she *shouldn't feel this way* (*should* thought) makes her feel guilty. She now asks herself how she might approach this visit differently, and allow herself to believe that there is hope for change. She considers how she might be able to take some steps to minimize the negative aspects or look after herself better, knowing that criticism may come. She could take some time away to look after herself, and she and her partner could discuss ways to support her.

I – INSPIRING? Living according to our **values** helps motivate us to face challenges, and to move in the direction of what actually matters to us. Kaoru questions whether this way of thinking fits with some of her identified values, such as her connection to and sense of love with her partner, her commitment to self care, and a strong sense of family connection overall. She sees that running away from the situation and from these difficult emotions does not move her in the direction of these values. This question also opens up thinking about ways she could potentially move in valued directions during this visit. For example, rather than feeling helpless and complaining, she considers what boundaries she may need to set to take care of herself, and she and her partner explore ways they could respond that may also strengthen their relationship.

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N – NEEDS? Kaoru examines what underlying needs her reaction to this situation might be identifying. She wonders if perhaps she wishes for more recognition and acceptance from the important people in her life. She brainstorms how she might begin to work on this need with her partner, and even with her mother–in-law. She decides, as a first step, to ask her partner to listen regarding her mixed feelings, and to support her need to take a nourishing solo walk each morning during the visit.

K – KIND? Kaoru thinks about how she would respond to a friend describing this kind of situation. First, she would tell her friend that the guilt and thoughts of, "I shouldn't feel this way," are misplaced. She would remind her friend that not wanting to repeat past unpleasant situations is perfectly understandable. She would also advise her friend to take care of herself during the visit, while acknowledging that being on the receiving end of criticism (if it comes) is draining. She'd point out to her friend that being kind and caring to herself may actually improve the visit because she could be feeling less on edge.

As you remind yourself repeatedly of the new, alternative thought, notice the new types of feelings and behaviours that emerge.

The goal is not to replace wrong thoughts with right thoughts, or even negative thoughts with positive thoughts. Rather, the goal is to be flexible with thoughts in order to recognize that there can be multiple ways of thinking about a situation.

THINK your way to new thoughts: STOP-SPOT-SWAP

After **investigating** using the **THINK Acronym**, the next step is to **SWAP** the thought. Write out a new thought that is more accurate, balanced, helpful, or kind. Then, each time the old thought pops up, remind yourself of the new thought. By turning your mind to the new thought repeatedly, you create a new habit of thinking.

For example, Kaoru's new thoughts were, "I feel anxious, and a sense of dread about my mother-in-law's upcoming visit, which makes sense because of the bad times we've had in the past. But I don't know how this visit is going to be. It is possible that we will get along better than last time. And, I will prepare so that I'm better able to handle criticism if it does come. I'll tell my partner how much it meant to me when they stood up for me in the past, and I will create opportunities to discuss both of our feelings about the visit together. I'll go for my morning walks to make sure I have the energy and perspective to handle what comes."

Warning: When swapping thoughts, it is important not to become judgmental about your automatic thoughts. They are simply your mind's first attempt to describe or explain the situation.

The goal is not to replace wrong thoughts with right thoughts, or even negative thoughts with positive thoughts. Rather, the goal is to be flexible with thoughts in order to recognize that there can be multiple ways of thinking about a situation. This strategy also gives us some choice about which thoughts we cultivate and encourage.

Chapter 4 Home Practice

Practice Swapping Three Ways

Investigate several **hot thoughts**, putting them under the spotlight. Remember, practice makes habit!

1. **SWAP Thinking Traps**

   Use your home practice from Chapter 3, where you noticed thoughts and labelled the **Thinking Trap**. Now, practice coming up with a new thought. Use the **SWAP** tips and examples to help you. Notice how feelings (and how activated they make us on the **Dial of Activation**) may shift with the swapped thoughts.

   EXAMPLE

   Hot thought:

   "I am lonely. My kids and grandkids should know that, and should call me."

   - *Associated feelings and intensity on the Dial of Activation:*
     Frustration: **6** Sadness/Loneliness: **4**
   - *Type of Thinking Trap(s):* **Mind reading**, **Shoulds and Musts**
   - *Alternative thought:* "My kids and grandkids may not have any awareness of how I feel right now. There have been times when I have been so busy in my own life and have been unaware or unsure of what my loved ones needed. Actually, it's my own responsibility to take care of my needs; it's not up to my family to predict all of my needs. I could call someone to connect, or ask if we can schedule regular calls."
   - *Feelings and intensity on the Dial of Activation if you were to think the alternative thought:*
     Frustration: **2** Sadness/Loneliness: **4** Empowered: **5**

EXERCISE

60 **Hot thought:** _____

_____

13 • *Associated feelings and intensity on the Dial of Activation:* _____

_____

81 • *Type of Thinking Trap(s)* _____

• *Alternative thought:* _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

• *Feelings and intensity on the Dial of Activation, if you were to think the alternative thought:* _____

_____

60 **Hot thought:** _____

_____

13 • *Associated feelings and intensity on the Dial of Activation:* _____

_____

81 • *Type of Thinking Trap(s)* _____

• *Alternative thought:* _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

• *Feelings and intensity on the Dial of Activation, if you were to think the alternative thought:* _____

_____

2. SWAP using the Anxiety Equation

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Use the **Anxiety Equation** to find a new thought for each of the following two statements:

a. "I really don't want to go to a holiday dinner with the entire extended family this year. I haven't been feeling well, and travelling feels like too much. My son will be upset and it will ruin our relationship."

i. Minimize fear: Write thoughts to help you estimate the danger in a realistic way: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

ii. Maximize coping: Write thoughts to help you consider your resources and abilities: _____

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_____

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_____

b. "The cake I made for the birthday party came out of the oven half-collapsed. The party is ruined!"

i. **Minimize fear**—write thoughts to help you estimate the danger in a realistic way: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

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ii. **Maximize coping**—write thoughts to help you consider your resources and abilities: _____

_____

_____

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_____

3. SWAP Using the THINK Acronym

Use the **THINK Acronym** to help you examine a thought from several perspectives. Start with very specific thoughts that arise in a situation, not general thoughts. For example, instead of writing, "Bad things always happen to me," you would write, "I was waiting for the bus. It was late, and I had the thought that bad things always happen to me."

Specific situation:_____

_____

_____

Hot thought: _____

_____

_____

On the next page, **THINK** it through:

T: TRUE?

H: HELPFUL?

I: INSPIRING?

N: NEEDS?

K: KIND?

What part of this thought is TRUE? Check the facts! Separate the **kernel of truth** from the shell of opinions and assumptions. How accurate is this thought? What **Thinking Traps** might be present? What is the evidence *for* it? What is the evidence *against* it? What evidence might I be ignoring? What is a thought that better reflects the known facts?	
How might this thought be HELPFUL? How useful is it to go on thinking this thought? How does thinking this way make me feel? What are the outcomes of thinking this way? How might I act if I didn't believe this thought? Consider writing out the pros and cons of continuing to think the thought. Is there a thought that represents a more helpful way of viewing the situation?	
How can I make this thought INSPIRING? Does accepting this thought inspire me to be my best self? How does it fit with my values, or who I want to be? How does it point me in a direction that I actually want to go? If I looked back on this thought five years from now, what would I advise myself about it?	
Which NEEDS does this thought alert me to? Is my mind signalling an underlying need by bringing up this thought? Is this thought coming up because of something I need to take care of? Why did my mind jump to this thought?	
What is the KINDest interpretation I can offer? How kind is this thought? Would I say it to a friend? If not, what would I be likely to say?	

SWAP: Now, rewrite the thought. You may be able to come up with more than one alternative. Remember the goal is to write thoughts that are more accurate, more helpful, and/or more flexible.

New thought(s): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Now practice thinking this new thought whenever the original **hot thought** comes up. You may need to put it in a prominent place to remind you. Remember that repetition creates habits, even in the brain!

Practice again using THINK questions and SWAPPING

Specific situation: _____

_____

_____

Hot thought: _____

_____

_____

_____

On the next page, THINK it through:

T:TRUE? **H**:HELPFUL? **I**: INSPIRING? **N**:NEEDS? **K**:KIND?

What part of this thought is TRUE? Check the facts! Separate the **kernel of truth** from the shell of opinions and assumptions. How accurate is this thought? What **Thinking Traps** might be present? What is the evidence *for* it? What is the evidence *against* it? What evidence might I be ignoring? What is a thought that better reflects the known facts?	
How might this thought be HELPFUL? How useful is it to go on thinking this thought? How does thinking this way make me feel? What are the outcomes of thinking this way? How might I act if I didn't believe this thought? Consider writing out the pros and cons of continuing to think the thought. Is there a thought that represents a more helpful way of viewing the situation?	
How can I make this thought INSPIRING? Does accepting this thought inspire me to be my best self? How does it fit with my **values**, or who I want to be? How does it point me in a direction that I actually want to go? If I looked back on this thought five years from now, what would I advise myself about it?	
Which NEEDS does this thought alert me to? Is my mind signalling an underlying need by bringing up this thought? Is this thought coming up because of something I need to take care of? Why did my mind jump to this thought?	
What is the KINDest interpretation I can offer? How kind is this thought? Would I say it to a friend? If not, what would I be likely to say?	

SWAP: Now, rewrite the thought. You may be able to come up with more than one alternative. Remember the goal is to write thoughts that are more accurate, more helpful, and/or more flexible.

New thought(s): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

"Until you change your thinking, you will always recycle your experiences."

Anonymous

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Practice the 5-4-3-2-1 Skill

For variety, you can also try just noticing four or five sights, sounds, and sensations.

What did you notice? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Brainstorm circumstances where this **grounding** skill may come in handy for you: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

My Good for Me(s) This Week

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I can give myself credit that I invested time, energy, or effort in:_____

Notes

Understanding Emotions

Pearls for this Chapter

- Emotions provide us with essential information, help us to communicate with others, and motivate us to act; they equip us to meet life's challenges.
- When we **PAUSE** intentionally, become aware of the **Triangle of Experience**, or nourish our mind–body connection, we are better able to integrate rapid emotional information from the limbic system with information and perspectives from the slower-to-respond prefrontal cortex. We need both.
- Feelings, which include both emotions and physical sensations, are personal to each individual. As we become more acquainted with the specific bodily sensations and characteristic urges linked to our emotions, we improve our ability to identify and name those emotions.
- **Primary emotions** arise in response to a situation, whereas **secondary emotions** arise because they feel more comfortable or familiar to us, either consciously or unconsciously, than the primary ones. Secondary emotions can confuse the message of primary emotions and may push us toward unhelpful actions.
- While we can't control our emotions, we can learn to relate to them in healthier ways: with curiosity, friendliness, and acceptance. We can practice **allowing emotions** because our automatic tendency is to avoid or amplify them. **Mindfulness**, the **STOPP** skill, and **self-validation** can help us to practice allowing emotions.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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STOPP Skill

STOPP is a way of pausing intentionally. It supports us to become self-observers, and puts us in a better position to **RESPOND** rather than to **REACT**. Often, we work through the STOPP steps after a situation has already occurred to understand it better, and to consider how to respond next (or next time). By practicing STOPP in everyday moments, we can also develop the awareness to use it in challenging situations.

7

STOP! Take a mindful **PAUSE** to move out of **autopilot** and into awareness.

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TAKE A BREATH. Pay attention to the physical sensations of your breath, or to anything else you notice in the present moment (such as the sounds in the room, or the physical sensations of the ground beneath your feet). Notice where you are on the **Dial of Activation**. If you are outside the **Zone of Workability**, engage in skills such as **DIAL Skills**, **grounding**, or other self-care to bring yourself to a place where you can self-observe.

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OBSERVE YOUR CURRENT TRIANGLE OF EXPERIENCE WITH COMPASSION. What bodily sensations do you notice? What emotions are you aware of? What thoughts are present? What urges are present? Practice curiosity and non-judgment, and see what compassion or softening you can offer to yourself.

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PERSPECTIVE. Get some **distance** from what you are observing. Imagine that you are the mountain observing thoughts, emotions, urges, and body sensations as weather systems passing through. Practice looking *at* rather than *from* your internal experiences. Naming these experiences (e.g., 'There's a judgment thought' or, 'Anger is here') can help you to gain perspective. Continue inviting kindness and compassion into your observation by softening your muscles or inviting a friendly stance (e.g., 'Let me see and make space for this experience').

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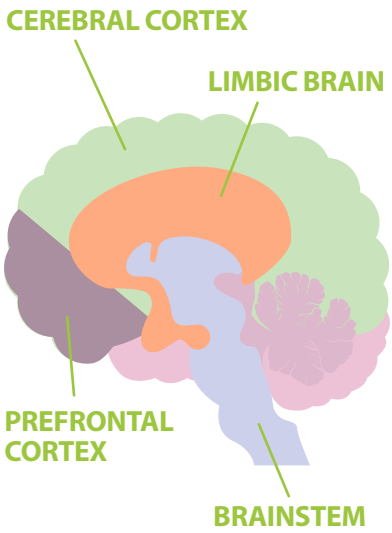
PROCEED. Recognize that you have a choice in what happens next. What small step would be best right now? Recognize that not acting can sometimes be the best choice. What can you do that aligns with what you really want for yourself/your relationships/your life? Given the situation, ask how you can best take care of yourself. Then RESPOND, acting in line with your intentions.



Brain Basics

While the last two chapters have focused on thinking, feelings are also vitally important because they signal information and motivate action in ways that can help us. By better understanding our brains and how feelings operate within the nervous system, we can create more compassion for ourselves and for others, and ultimately better meet our needs.

The human brain is the central headquarters of our nervous system. Although its structure is complex, we can look at a few basic features of the brain's anatomy to understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The main parts of the brain that we need to understand for this course are the brainstem, limbic system, and the prefrontal part of the cerebral cortex.

The Brainstem is a vital part of the brain that connects it to the spinal cord. It takes care of essential tasks that we don't have to think about: regulating breathing and heart rate, swallowing and digestion, adjusting temperature, among others. It serves as a bridge between the brain and the rest of the body, ensuring that basic life-support functions are maintained.

The limbic system is where we experience emotions and survival instincts, while the prefrontal cortex is the centre for integration of information and grounded thinking.

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The Limbic System is the seat of emotional activity, and where we experience instinctive urges. It is a grouping of connected mid-brain structures that includes the amygdala. It is activated by information that may signal threats or rewards, and acts very quickly to help us meet our urgent survival needs. For example, it lights up when we are faced with a predator, such as a bear. It sounds an alarm to push us to react quickly, before we've had time to think about the bear, or even to register it fully.

The Cerebral Cortex is the top layer of the brain, responsible for functions such as processing sensation, moving voluntary muscles, and thinking consciously. The front portion is called the **prefrontal cortex (PFC)**, where we are capable of self-awareness and empathy for others. It's also where we conduct complex planning and problem solving, focus our attention, inhibit impulses, anticipate outcomes, and make decisions. This area of the brain is active when we take an intentional **PAUSE**. It helps us to make sense of the

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world, giving us a sense of predictability and control.[1] Because this centre integrates a wide variety of information, it is slower to respond than the limbic system.

The prefrontal cortex has the ability to weigh the long-term pros and cons of acting on an instinctive urge, depending on the situation. The prefrontal cortex can compare our current experience with what has happened in the past to predict what might happen if the action is carried out. It gathers information from our body sensations and emotional messages from our limbic system, and can consider what others might be thinking, feeling, or needing. It **investigates** the data from both thoughts and emotions to try and accurately understand the situation. It uses this diverse information to make choices about actions that are likely to be helpful for us and for our relationships. When the fast limbic system signals something that—upon further inspection by the prefrontal cortex—is not entirely accurate or specific to the situation at hand, we call it a **false alarm**.

When faced with a threatening situation that activates our limbic system quickly, our prefrontal cortex is deactivated until the limbic system settles down. In that time, we are less capable of accessing our prefrontal cortex's functions of considering facts, having empathy, and weighing potential outcomes. Neuropsychiatrist Dr. Dan Siegel calls this situation *flipping our lids*: when a seemingly dire or urgent situation is actually a false alarm, which can happen if we misinterpret what is happening. During the period when the emotion's signal is activated, our prefrontal cortex is offline. We are less capable of taking perspective and of keeping others in mind. In these states, it is important to have compassion for ourselves and for others. We can also turn to non-cognitive, body-based skills to regulate our nervous system (such as **DIAL** or **Grounding 5-4-3-2-1 Skills** that help us to regain our prefrontal cortex functions).

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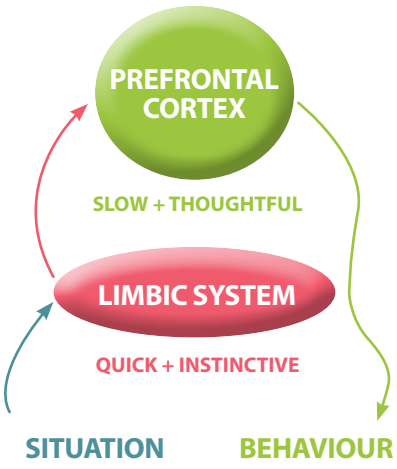
Neuropsychiatrist Dr. Dan Siegel has described a *hand model* of the brain. You can watch a YouTube video animation of this concept called *The Three Main Parts of Your Brain,* described by Dr. Russ Harris.

1 Lakshmin, P. (2003). *Real Self Care: A Transformative Program for Redefining Wellness.* Penguin Life.

PAUSING allows us to process emotional information coming from the body and limbic system within the prefrontal cortex, where we have the capacity to integrate with other data and make conscious choices.



Together, the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex empower us to **RESPOND** to a situation rather than to **REACT** in **autopilot**.

Balancing the Limbic System and the Prefrontal Cortex

The limbic system and prefrontal cortex work together and both play vital roles. Without the limbic system we would miss important signals, and without the prefrontal cortex we wouldn't be able to act on those messages intentionally. They work in different ways to meet our needs. By balancing these two essential parts of our brains, we can honour our emotions *and* decide how we want to proceed.

Often, an emotion is signalling an important message that needs our attention. For example, an emotion may be urging us to rest because we have pushed past our limits and we are exhausted. We can recognize this emotion's message and the helpfulness of the urge to rest.

Sometimes, an emotion pushes for an action that the prefrontal cortex decides is not helpful. In this case, we can use a top-down and/or bottom-up approach to regulate emotions and to control the urge. A top-down approach involves the prefrontal cortex overriding urges by thinking through the situation and by choosing intentional actions. A bottom-up approach involves tending to the mind-body connection by calming the body with tools such as breathing exercises or physical exertion.

By learning to **PAUSE**, then observing with compassion and perspective, we can train ourselves to process emotions' messages in the prefrontal cortex while taking care of ourselves as we experience the emotions in the mind–body. These practices strengthen brain connections, making such processing easier the next time. The important takeaway is that we need both the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex; together, they empower us to **RESPOND** to a situation rather than to **REACT** in **autopilot**.

Understanding Emotions

Emotions are messengers, signalling information. Emotions are essential to our survival. They are useful signals that alert us quickly to potential threats and rewards. They provide us with valuable information about our progress, interactions, environment, and actions. Emotions also provide information to others about our internal state, giving them clues as to what we might be wanting or needing.

Emotions motivate action. Emotions motivate us to act, equipping us to meet the challenges of specific situations.

We can experience multiple situations and multiple emotions at once.[1] Emotions can be expressed differently between individuals and cultures.

Researchers who study emotions rarely agree on a specific number of emotions or how we experience them in our mind, spirit, and body. For our purposes, we will focus on joy, anger, fear, sadness, guilt, and shame. Desire, surprise, and disgust are also featured as other **basic emotions**. If you'd like a longer list of different emotions, Dr. Brené Brown's book, *Atlas of the Heart* (2021) describes many more emotions in detail.

"Emotions are not problems in themselves, but alert us to problems; if we listen to them we can live a more authentic life."

Christine Dunkley

"Simply put, your emotions are like a GPS (or map app) that gives you information about your location, the terrain in front of and behind you, and your rate of progress. People who try desperately to escape, conceal, and avoid negative states miss out on this valuable information."

Todd Kashdan and Robert Biswas-Diener in *The Upside of Your Dark Side* (2014)

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1 For more information, refer to evolutionary psychiatrist Randolph Nesse's book, *Good Reasons for Bad Feelings: Insights from the Frontier of Evolutionary Psych*. 2019. Penguin.

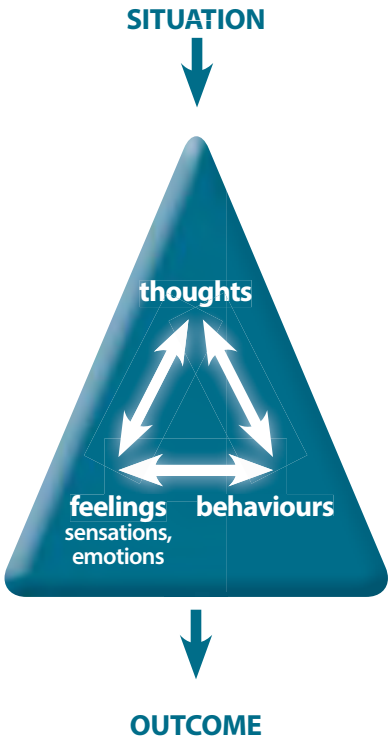
Basic Emotions

The following words are used commonly to express emotions grouped into families. There are many more words to describe emotions, including in languages other than English, and it can be helpful to find emotion names that resonate for you to characterize a set of sensations and urges in the body.

JOY	ANGER	FEAR	SADNESS	SHAME
Playful	Irritated	Afraid	Depressed	Ashamed
Proud	Frustrated	Threatened	Apathetic	Embarrassed
Enthusiastic	Aggravated	Anxious	Disheartened	Humiliated
Excited	Exasperated	Scared	Disappointed	Sheepish
Blissful	Furious	Weak	Grieving	Abashed
Triumphant	Grouchy	Insecure	Hurt	Cringe-worthy
Cheerful	Hateful	Worried	Agonized	Self-loathing
Delighted	Vengeful	Frightened	Defeated	Mortified
Amused	Spiteful	Panicky	Despair	Discomposed
Satisfied	Engraged	Apprehensive	Gloomy	Disgraceful
Content	Aggressive	Dread	Hopeless	Chagrined
Peaceful	Bitter	Jumpy	Miserable	Ignominious
Accepted	Defensive	Terrified	Neglected	
Confident	Hostile	Uneasy	Sorrow	
Elation	Outraged	Nervous	Isolated	
Happy	Resentful	Helpless	Lonely	
Eager	Annoyed	Powerless	Disillusioned	
Gleeful		Overwhelmed	Abandoned	
Connected		Exposed		
Relaxed				
Exhilarated				

DESIRE	GUILT	DISGUST	SURPRISE
Affectionate	Regretful	Disapproving	Stunned
Romantic	Remorseful	Repelled	Confused
Sentimental	Liable	Horrified	Amazed
Longing	Blameworthy	Revolted	Overcome
Tender	Sorry	Appalled	Moved
Fondness	Self-reproachful	Judgmental	Perplexed
	Contrite	Contemptuous	Shocked
	Culpable		Startled

The Triangle of Experience: Feelings



For some people, emotions are vivid, rapid sources of information. For others, they may be difficult to sense, and thoughts may be easier to notice. Since thoughts and feelings are so interrelated, it helps us to become familiar with both.

As we have learned, our thoughts create a story quickly to make sense of the situation in front of us. These thoughts fuel certain emotions that generate more thoughts of a similar theme. Much of this process happens so quickly that we may be unaware of it.

Emotions are also closely tied to behaviours: they urge us to act. While the actual behaviour is separate from the emotion, the urge to act that accompanies a specific emotion is part of the emotional experience.

We all have characteristic ways that we sense emotions in our bodies and the actions that they urge. An emotion can vary in intensity and quality; for example, anger can be mild (annoyance), moderate (mad), or intense (rage). Each of these variations will have its own characteristic bodily experiences and urges.

By practicing awareness of the **Triangle of Experience**, we can become aware of our unique experience of each emotion. It is beneficial to pay attention to:

- bodily sensations, such as muscle tension or temperature
- posture
- tone of voice
- facial expression
- specific gestures
- urges

6

Situations can be internal or external. An example of an internal situation is a difficult memory that comes up as we're trying to fall asleep. An example of an external situation is conflict with a friend.

Name it to claim it!

MRI imaging of the brain shows that **naming emotions** can build our capacity to hold and use them skilfully.

The languages we use are deeply connected to how we articulate and understand our emotions. Many languages may have emotion-based words that don't exist in English and may feel more accurate for you. You can personalize the course material by using any language that feels meaningful and comfortable for you in your reflections.

Urges are closely linked with emotions. Ideally, emotions prompt actions that equip us to act in a way that suits the situation. For example, fear may prompt us to flee a threatening situation, whereas anger may prompt us to defend against or set boundaries when someone intrudes or is unfair. While instinctive urges are common to all mammals, each person's emotional urges are shaped by life experience, by what others model and teach, by traumatic experiences, and more. Accordingly, each person's experience of feelings (emotions, bodily sensations, and urges) is unique.

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6 As we map our feelings through awareness of the **Triangle of Experience**, we will improve our ability to name and subsequently to use the information and urges from emotions to our benefit.

Recognizing Emotion Patterns and Functions

Emotions are not the same for everyone. We can begin to understand emotions by recognizing basic emotion patterns, then seeing how our own experience is unique.

The following tables demonstrate some common patterns for each of the six **basic emotions** we are considering. These tables are just suggestions; you can make your own in the **home practice pages**.

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You are encouraged to personalize this chart, by noticing:

1. What types of situations prompt this emotion for me?
2. What are the associated bodily sensations and postures of the emotion?
3. What are the instinctive action urges of the emotion? Often, it is easier to identify the urge than to name the emotion. If the urge is to run, it may be fear. If the urge is to fight, it may be anger.

The more we explore and personalize these tables, the more access we will have to our emotions and the messages they contain for us individually. There is space in the home practice to build out your own tables.

JOY / HAPPINESS / CONTENTMENT

SITUATIONS: a satisfying event, experiencing a desired outcome, or getting something you want or need

	EMOTION	
Potential Automatic Thoughts	**Potential Bodily Experiences**	**Potential Urges**
• This is the best! • I am enjoying this! • I'm so happy right now! • I feel so loved!	• Vibrations, giggling, smiling, sensations of expansion and warmth • Flushed or glowing face, flapping hands, energized • Resting face, increased heart rate, deep breath, tingling in stomach and chest • Smiling, crying, breathy voice, open posture	• Share the feeling • Celebrate • Savour the feeling • Show physical affection

Potential Message of the Emotion	Potential Helpful Responses
• A reward is here • I belong in my community • This situation is good for me • I accomplished my goal	• Seek out more situations that lead to joy • Know where I find rewards and nourishment • Be mindful and have gratitude for the current experience • Celebrate my accomplishments

ANGER / FRUSTRATION / RAGE

SITUATIONS: having a boundary crossed, being attacked or threatened, having a need or goal blocked, being disrespected or discriminated against, losing status or power

	EMOTION	
Potential Automatic Thoughts	**Potential Bodily Experiences**	**Potential Urges**
• This is wrong • This is someone's fault • Someone needs to act differently • They can't treat me this way	• Tension • Fists clenched • Eyes narrowed and focused • Loud voice • Hot upper body • Being very still • Crying • Flushed • Pacing • High energy	• Confront the problem • Call someone out • Fight for the other to be accountable and make repairs • Regain status or power

Potential Message of the Emotion	Potential Helpful Responses
• This situation isn't OK with me • This situation needs to change • I deserve to be treated better • I need to protect my wellbeing, or that of others I care about	• Hold and reinforce boundaries • Communicate directly and respectfully to meet my needs • Mobilize action and/or help to effect changes, stand up to injustices, overcome obstacles

FEAR / APPREHENSION / WORRY

SITUATIONS: having a threat to my wellbeing or life (or that of someone I love), anticipating an overwhelmingly negative event, having unfamiliarity or uncertainty

	EMOTION	
Potential Automatic Thoughts	**Potential Bodily Experiences**	**Potential Urges**
• I (or someone I care about) might get harmed • I might fail • I don't know how to act in this situation • I can't bear what's happening	• Muscles tense or shaking • Heart racing • Shallow, fast breathing • Wide pupils • Looking around a lot • Lump in throat • Nausea • Weak knees • Jumbled words	• Get away from the threat • Avoid the threat • Be vigilant to all potential information about the threat • Get close to someone safe

Potential Message of the Emotion	**Potential Helpful Responses**
• This situation is unsafe for me • I am not prepared (yet) or capable to deal with the possibilities • I need to know more about this threat	• Take action to avoid real threats • Have coping strategies for threats if they occur • Gently explore potential scenarios, and imagine coping or getting help

SADNESS / DISAPPOINTMENT / GRIEF

SITUATIONS: **losing someone or something valued, not getting what I hoped for or needed, not feeling valued or respected, losing progress towards goals or needs**

	EMOTION	
Potential Automatic Thoughts	**Potential Bodily Experiences**	**Potential Urges**
• I have lost this person • I didn't get what I really wanted • This is unrewarding • I didn't want this to happen and miss how it used to be	• Tears • Hollowness in chest or gut • Pit in stomach • Quiet voice • Low energy • Lack of hunger • Curling body up • Pain in throat • Eyebrows drawn together	• Withdraw from demands, wrap up in blanket, go to bed • Seek support and soothing • Stop trying, disconnect • Think about what has been lost • (later) Replace aspects of what has been lost

Potential Message of the Emotion	**Potential Helpful Responses**
• This person is beloved • I have lost something I really value • I am no longer getting returns on my efforts, I am dissatisfied • I can't change the past, and what I had before is gone	• Mourn, honour the memories of my loss, on my own or by sharing with trusted others • Allow myself the time and energy to grieve • Learn from my disappointment about what is missing for me now that I value, then strategize ways to find these things

GUILT / REGRET / REMORSE

SITUATIONS: causing harm to someone, acting out of line with my values or in a way that I believe is wrong

	EMOTION	
Potential Automatic Thoughts	**Potential Bodily Experiences**	**Potential Urges**
• I did something wrong • This problem is my fault • I acted badly • If only I had done something differently	• Hot, red face • Body numb, tingly, or jittery • Frown • Furrowed brow • Light-headed • Pit in stomach • Fast breath • Rapid speech	• Apologize • Make amends • Repair the situation • Ruminate about what went wrong

Potential Message of the Emotion	**Potential Helpful Responses**
• I acted in a way that I don't like • I know I can do better • I need to do something differently in the future • This relationship matters to me	• Examine how the problem happened, and consider ways to respond better in the future, perhaps with help from a trusted person • Take time to regulate before reaching out to apologize • Connect intentionally with the person I hurt and take responsibility for my actions

SHAME / HUMILIATION

SITUATIONS: being criticized or rejected, having belonging or worth threatened

	EMOTION	
Potential Automatic Thoughts	**Potential Bodily Experiences**	**Potential Urges**
• They don't like what they see when they look at me • I'm not part of this group • I'm not enough • I don't live up to a standard	• Stooped posture • No eye contact • Pit in stomach • Hot face, blushing • Heart racing • Nausea	• Hide • Give up • Try to please and perfect

Potential Message of the Emotion	Potential Helpful Responses
• It is not safe to be vulnerable here • If I show this part of me, I risk being rejected • I don't feel respected, valued, or supported in this space/by these people	• Show certain parts of myself only to chosen people who are safe and who will not shame me. • Practice **self-compassion** and kindness around the parts of myself that bring up shame

Summary: Emotion Functions

EMOTION	POTENTIAL MESSAGES ABOUT THE SITUATION	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
JOY	Reward	Savour Repeat
ANGER	Boundary violation Being blocked	Assert Confront
FEAR	Threat	Avoid or prepare for threat
SADNESS	Loss	Mourn Replace aspects of what was lost
GUILT	Having done something wrong	Take responsibility Repair
SHAME	I am not OK here	Find and build safer spaces/people Hide parts of self from unsafe people

Identifying Primary and Secondary Emotions

We may notice that we have habits of emotions: we feel more comfortable with certain emotions and avoid others. Our habits are shaped in part by how we were raised and what was modelled to us. Our families, cultures, schools, and workplaces may have taught us to express certain emotions but not others. Perhaps expressions of sadness, fear, guilt, or shame (which feel more vulnerable) were suppressed in favour of anger (which feels stronger and more powerful). Or perhaps anger felt scary and was replaced by fear, shame, or guilt. Feeling shame whenever anger arises can become a lifelong pattern. Over time, we develop habitual reactions to certain emotions, that is, we have emotions about emotions.

Primary emotions are prompted by an event, whereas **secondary emotions** arise in response to another emotion.

Primary Emotions

A **primary emotion** arises as a direct reaction to a situation. For example, sadness may arise in situations of loss, anger in situations of violation, and fear in situations of threat. The tables we have covered in this chapter provide examples of situations related to primary emotions.

Secondary Emotions

A **secondary emotion** arises in response to another emotion. It may be due to a judgment about the primary emotion being bad, unacceptable, or threatening, or it may be because we feel more familiar with the secondary emotion.

For example, Sunny, who uses the pronouns they/them, felt angry when their sister cancelled a dinner with them at the last minute, yet again. Anger is the primary emotion because Sunny felt their needs were being blocked. Quickly though, Sunny began feeling guilt about their anger, and that guilt gave birth

to thoughts about all the ways they may have messed up with their sister. In fact, anger may be an uncomfortable emotion for Sunny, and they switched instead to the **secondary emotion** of guilt. They may or may not be conscious that they have some discomfort or judgment about having anger.

In this case, anger as a **primary emotion** could motivate assertive communication. The secondary emotion of guilt, however, may push Sunny to apologize unnecessarily, or try to please their sister. Either reaction distracts them from addressing the problem. Some of us may experience such a quick shift to the secondary emotion that we mistake it for a primary emotion. We may not even be aware that we are judging and censoring our primary emotions. This tendency can be magnified for individuals who have experienced marginalization or trauma, because expressing primary emotions may not be safe in the present, and/or may not have been safe in the past. Because anger has been discouraged in the past, Sunny may first notice guilt. It may take hours, days, or longer to realize that they are actually angry.

We can also feel secondary emotions from pleasant experiences. If we have been let down before, it might be hard to trust times when we feel happy, peaceful, or safe, and instead we may jump to a secondary emotion like fear. As above, secondary emotions may be unhelpful in moments like this one, and may confuse the messages that primary emotions are trying to signal.

Importantly, there is a difference between feeling multiple primary emotions about a situation and feeling secondary emotions. In the example of Sunny, they may feel angry because their needs were being blocked, AND sad because their sister's repeated cancellations make them feel not a priority. Both of these emotions arise directly from the situation they are in. Feeling guilty for their anger would still be a secondary emotion in this situation.

Everyone experiences secondary emotions; we can find ourselves experiencing many secondary emotions, or emotions about emotions. For example, in a situation that prompts an emotion of guilt, we may experience sadness as a secondary emotion, followed by shame as a response to the sadness.

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While **secondary emotions** may be unhelpful for us in the moment, they can also be important teachers about the **primary emotions** for which we might want to build capacity.

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"Your emotions make you human. Even the unpleasant ones have a purpose. Don't lock them away. If you ignore them, they just get louder and angrier."

Sabaa Tahir, *A Torch Against the Night*

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Secondary emotions obscure **primary emotions**, causing us to miss the signal or the action urges that are potentially helpful in the situation. For example, anger as a primary emotion is essential because it protects us in situations of potential attack. However, when it arises as a secondary emotion, it confuses the message of the primary emotion and can lead us to act in ways that do not serve the situation. Similarly, if we feel guilt about making a mistake or hurting someone, the situation calls for us to make amends and repair. But if we switch into the secondary emotion of anger instead, we blame others. Despite it making us feel less vulnerable, this reaction doesn't help the situation. Secondary emotions often occur because of discomfort with vulnerability: if sadness is arising but we feel too vulnerable to communicate or reach out, we may switch to anger and push away support rather than seek comfort.

We can practice by noticing the emotion without judgment, then cultivating curiosity about it. How does this emotion feel in my body? What is the action urge? What name can I give it? Mindful curiosity helps us to **STOPP** and to be with the emotion in order to understand the message it is trying to communicate. We can then register the emotion's data in the prefrontal cortex, and sort out what to do with that information. This skilful approach saves us from trying to eliminate or avoid the emotion by switching to a secondary emotion.

How Judgments Take Us from Primary to Secondary Emotions

Situation	Primary emotion	Automatic judgment of the emotion (may be out of awareness)	Secondary emotion	Potential unhelpful action-urge arising from secondary emotion
Participating in the CBT Skills group	Fear about sharing	"Why am I anxious again? Why can't I just be stronger?"	Shame for experiencing fear	Disengaging and not attending groups
Experiencing micro-aggression in a social setting	Anger at the person making a remark	"Maybe I am overthinking." "Why am I always making a big deal out of these situations? I'll just make it awkward for everyone."	Shame about experiencing anger	Shutting down, not reaching out to a trusted friend or a mentor, not validating that the remark was hurtful and inappropriate
Receiving a compliment for my work	Joy, excitement, sense of pride	"Maybe this is a coincidence." "The other shoe will drop." "Don't get too excited or you'll be disappointed if it doesn't last."	Fear about the situation Worrying that good things will end soon	Dismissing the compliment. Not accepting future opportunities. Questioning my potential.
Death of a pet	Sadness	"It's so silly to feel sad about it."	Embarrassment, shame	Avoiding support from loved ones, not sharing the loss I have experienced

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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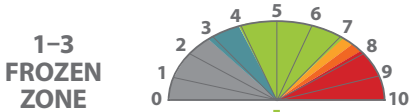
Working with Feelings Flowchart: STOPP

SITUATION

1 Stop → PAUSE

2 Take a breath → 4–7 ZONE OF WORKABILITY



3 Observe, with compassion →

4 Perspective with curiosity → Investigate Emotion's Message and Urge

5 Proceed with choice → Proceed with what is Helpful

Be mindful of emotion

Express emotion as is helpful

Act in line with helpful urges

STOPP to be Skilful

While our limbic system, or *fast brain*, wants us to act immediately to survive potential threats, we can train ourselves to take a mindful **PAUSE** and engage our slower prefrontal cortex, which allows us to receive data from our emotions and to make choices about our actions, rather than simply acting on automatic thoughts or urges. This process is the essence of **RESPOND vs. REACT**.

38
7

The **Working with Feelings Flowchart** in this chapter outlines a series of steps we can take to work with feelings in the **Triangle**. We can use the **STOPP** skill to guide us through the steps.

134
6
115

1

STOP! Give yourself a bit of **distance** from the situation by **pausing**. The mindful process illustrated in the flowchart often takes place after the fact, when we notice persistent thoughts or feelings about something. This step may be done alone, or by talking it out with someone you trust.

66

Stop

We first need to **stop** and get out of **autopilot**. We **PAUSE** with mindful intention: to be curious and compassionate with ourselves, and to see what is truly happening in our bodies and minds. This step provides more information about the situation and ultimately helps us decide what to do.

35

Exercise continues on the following pages.

2

13 17 89 **TAKE A BREATH.** Come into the present. Where are you on the **Dial of Activation**? If outside the **Zone of Workability**, do a **DIAL Skill**, **grounding skill**, or other self-care skill. We are more capable of doing the next steps if we are within the **Zone of Workability**.

Take a Breath

38 As we **Stop**, we ground ourselves using a skill like **Take a Breath**. Noticing breath is just one option: we can use any skill that helps us to focus our attention on the present moment. We can also notice body sensations (such 205 as **Soles of the Feet**) or other senses such as sounds around us. As we get grounded, it is also useful to check our Dial of Activation. If we are in the Zone of Workability, we are in a better position to examine ourselves with compassion and curiosity. If we are higher on the Dial, we may first want to use a body-based skill such as a DIAL Skill or a healthy distraction. In particular, 238 distracting for a time with a **nourishing event** can equip us to observe the situation and our experience mindfully. If we are lower on the Dial, a grounding skill, nourishing event, or soothing activity can help.

3

OBSERVE the Triangle in the Zone of Workability, mindfully and with compassion:

- notice automatic thoughts
- notice automatic urges
- name the emotion: observe sensations, facial expressions, tone, posture

Observe, with Compassion

When we are in the **Zone of Workability**, we can **Observe**, examining our **Triangle of Experience** in more detail. In this step, we are simply noticing, mindfully and with compassion, without trying to fix or change things.

13 6

When we want to identify emotions, it can help to notice bodily sensations, posture, tone, and facial expressions. The **Emotion Patterns and Functions** tables presented earlier in this chapter include helpful suggestions; we can add our own notes as we better understand own unique emotional expressions.

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Noticing sensations promotes curiosity, which in turn helps us to stay with the **primary emotion** rather than to act impulsively, or to shift into a more familiar secondary emotion.

130

Certain thoughts and emotions can be difficult to be with. In these instances, practicing **self-compassion** is key. As we Observe, we can remind ourselves that discomfort is part of the human condition while offering ourselves kindness and support.

44

Exercise continues on the following pages.

"Just like children, emotions heal when they are heard and validated."

Jill Bolte Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*

4

PERSPECTIVE with curiosity. Get distance and ask yourself, "What is this **emotion's function**? What message is it signalling, and what may be helpful about its urge?" Spot what is valid about the emotion and its thoughts (the **kernels of truth**). "It makes sense that I feel this emotion because…". Notice if the emotion is **primary** or **secondary**.

Perspective with Curiosity

We then harness our prefrontal cortex and our ability to take **Perspective**. We ask key questions:

- What message is the emotion signalling? For example, fear may be signalling threat, while sadness may be signalling loss.
- What parts of this message are helpful and/or accurate in this particular situation?
- What aspects of the urges may be helpful? What aspects are unhelpful?

This step is key. As we tune in to the emotion's signals, we are able to further evaluate our thoughts **(spot thoughts)**. We can acknowledge the kernels of truth and disengage from thoughts that aren't helpful or relevant to the situation.

We may notice that, actually, we are dealing with a **secondary emotion** that doesn't match the current situation, which may cause us to get curious about the underlying primary emotion.

This step also gives us a chance to **validate** the emotion. We name it, and can also notice the ways in which it makes sense: "It makes sense that I feel this way because…". We can get **distance** from the aspects of the emotion's message that don't match the current situation (for example, are more about the past or future), noticing these as **false alarms**.

5

PROCEED with choice. Choose to invite and allow **primary emotions** in the **Zone of Workability**. Be mindful of the emotion internally and notice bodily sensations. If helpful in the situation, express the emotion externally. If urges are in a helpful direction, act on them to respond effectively.

130 13

Proceed is an action step: it is our chance to choose to **RESPOND** rather than to **REACT**. We can invite valid, primary emotions to be felt within the Zone of Workability. When this step is difficult, it can help to practice noticing, and riding the waves of our bodily sensations with **mindfulness** and compassion.

7 40

We can also express our emotions when it would be wise to do so, which can help us to communicate our needs and preferences more effectively. We can also act, intentionally, and in ways that are likely to be helpful in the situation.

"Without the mud, you cannot grow the lotus flower."

Thich Nhat Hanh

Valuing All Emotions, Even Those Perceived as Negative

Emotions such as anger, guilt, and shame can sometimes be considered negative, either by ourselves or by others. As we work on **allowing** our emotions and viewing them as guidance, we can discern what aspects of our emotions (even those considered negative) and their action urges are helpful.

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Anger, for example, may be telling us that something is unfair, or that we are being violated. Guilt may be telling us that we have acted in ways that don't align with our **values**, or that we have caused harm to others. These messages are important, even if experiencing the emotion is unpleasant. The next section provides examples of how anger, guilt, and shame are important emotions that serve to help us.

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Anger can signal problems with boundaries: what is and what is not okay for us.

"Boundaries are the distance at which I can love me and you simultaneously."

Prentis Hemphill

Anger Alerts Us to Boundaries

Diego

Diego became aware of recurring waves of anger and resentment when interacting with his children and grandchildren. When he asked himself what these emotions were signalling, he noticed a pattern where he accommodates his children's needs without them respecting his own. He also realized that, while he was often asked to be with the grandchildren so that his adult children could have quality time with their partners, he wanted quality time with his adult children too. He realized that the anger and resentment made sense: his emotions were signalling the need for healthier boundaries, and to ask for what he needed in the relationships.

By allowing his resentment to be felt and experienced, Diego was motivated to solve the problem of building a more balanced and respectful relationship with his family. He considered potentially helpful responses, and decided it would be worthwhile saying something. He had an uncomfortable but productive conversation with his children about boundaries and expectations,

and discussed what behaviours were okay and not okay in their relationship. He asserted that they must check his schedule before coming over, and that he would no longer cancel plans to help them without notice. He also let them know that he wanted to spend quality time with them too, as well as with his grandchildren.

Boundaries Support Compassion

Anger and resentment can be uncomfortable, but they are often very helpful signals to warn us of violations, injustices, and obstacles. When they arise, it can be helpful to ask ourselves what boundaries might be needed in that moment.

Dr. Brené Brown defines boundaries as, "What's okay and what's not okay for me." We need boundaries to be able to have compassion for others. Boundaries define actions we will take, not how we wish others would act.

For example, if Diego's children come over without calling, and constantly ask him to babysit without thinking about his needs, his anger and resentment are helpful signals that tell him what boundaries are needed for him to extend compassion toward them. Only once these boundaries are in place does he have the capacity for compassion.

If you are noticing a lack of compassion, or anger and resentment toward someone, try asking yourself if any boundaries need to be established.

Compassion is more accessible when boundaries have been established.

If you notice a lack of compassion, or anger and resentment toward someone, ask yourself if any boundaries need to be established.

Why Do We Feel Shame?

No one likes to talk about shame; after all, its action urge is to hide. And yet, shame is a common emotion that we all feel. Its usefulness is somewhat different than the other emotions that we have discussed.

While guilt is often defined by the thought, "I did something bad," shame carries the thought, "I am bad." For this reason, when we've made a mistake

or harmed someone, it's often helpful to feel guilt rather than shame. Guilt pushes us to acknowledge the harm and to repair the situation. Shame, on the other hand, pushes us to hide or deny the impact of our actions. Parents and caregivers are now taught to tell their children, "I love you, but not this behaviour," hoping to induce guilt rather than shame and the action urges that go with it.

However, many of us have heard the opposite message so many times in our lives: that *we* are bad, rather than that our behaviours are having an unwanted impact. When we make a mistake, we habitually feel shame and believe that something is wrong with us, rather than recognizing that our action was the problem. While guilt is a helpful signal that we have acted in ways that cause harm, shame may arise for those who have experienced this type of messaging and modelling. In these situations, we can break out of shame cycles by taking a mindful **PAUSE** and noticing if taking responsibility for actions (guilt) is more helpful than hiding our perceived badness from others.

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There are, however, situations where shame is a helpful signal to keep us safe, but it requires an understanding of this emotion to receive the accurate message. Shame acts as a quick alarm where, if we were to reveal certain parts of ourselves, there is a risk of rejection or a threat to our belonging.

The helpful message of shame has nothing to do with our actual worth, but rather with how some environments are less accepting.

For example, if we are in an environment where making a mistake or disclosing a disabled or marginalized component of our identity will actually lead to rejection or ridicule, shame protects us by signalling that we should hide rather than share these aspects of ourselves. The **limbic brain** signals shame with its automatic thoughts, such as, "This part of me is bad," as a quick prompt for us to hide that aspect before rejection occurs. Only later can the prefrontal cortex get back online to fill in the more accurate story: that the problem lies in the lack of psychological safety within the social group, and not with ourselves specifically. Shame signals nothing about our worthiness; instead, it highlights that some environments are less accepting.

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Like other emotions, we may have **false alarms** about shame, especially if we have experienced many shaming situations in our past. For example,

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we may assume that we will be rejected because we have been rejected before. In these situations, our shame alarm can ring even when the present situation is actually quite safe.

When you notice shame arising, be sure to observe with friendly curiosity and a healthy dose of **self-compassion**. **PAUSE** and reflect on the message beneath the shame. Is shame alerting that your sense of belonging is threatened? Does guilt better represent your situation? Is it a **false alarm**, rooted in your past experience with shame?

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Shame thrives in silence. Even in emotionally unsafe environments that force us to hide parts of ourselves, it is important to share these aspects with those who have earned the right to witness them. The remedy for shame is sharing our shame stories with people who will hold space for us safely. Shame can motivate us to seek people who feel safer in order to create true belonging.

Olivia

Olivia noticed deep feelings of shame after saying something hurtful to a friend. In the moment, she had been defensive, insisting that what she said wasn't offensive. She thought about the conversation throughout the day and had trouble sleeping at night. Olivia realized that avoiding responsibility for hurting her friend was increasing her shame, which felt distressing and uncomfortable. She reflected on her initial comment, and on her reaction to being told she had been hurtful. Her reflection helped her to see that her actions weren't aligned with her **values** and didn't reflect the kind of friend she wanted to be.

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Olivia had learned from past experiences that it was unsafe to make mistakes, and she feared acknowledging her mistakes with others. Her shame alarm was signalling now to warn her about the risk of rejection if she admitted wrongdoing. However, when reflecting on the safety of her current relationship with this friend, she realized her shame signal was a false alarm: her friend had proven many times that she was a safe person with

whom Olivia could share her vulnerability. She decided that the most helpful response in this situation would be to follow the action urge of the **primary emotion** (guilt) which was telling her to take responsibility for her behaviour and to initiate a repair.

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Although Olivia was still uncomfortable, she committed to repairing the relationship with her friend. She created a thoughtful apology that acknowledged the harm she caused, shared what she had learned about the offensive comment, and explained how she would act differently in the future. She then asked her friend if they needed anything else to repair their relationship. By **allowing** guilt to signal its message, Olivia was able to identify where she wasn't living in line with her **values**, where she risked losing an important person in her life, and how she could repair the harm caused. By sharing her experience with her friend, who received it well and did not reject or judge her, she felt less shame about the mistake.

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Jealousy and Envy

We have touched on only six of the many emotions. Jealousy and envy also come up for us, especially when we are struggling, and the two are often confused. Jealousy arises with a threat of losing what we have, whereas envy occurs when we want something someone else has. For example, Kieran feels jealous when he hears his boyfriend sharing an unknown story with an acquaintance, because it feels as though his boyfriend is confiding in others rather than in him. Svetlana envies her sister's close circle of friends who hang out together all the time.

Though the urges for these emotions may be unhelpful, the emotions themselves still contain useful messages for us. Although jealousy leads to urges to cling to (or control) the loved one, or to threaten the rival, it can illuminate when important relationships feel unstable and need attention. While envy can urge us to spoil or devalue the other's good thing if we can't have it, it can also inspire us to seek things in other's lives that we perceive valuable.

Allowing Emotions and Letting Be

As we practice **allowing an emotion** to be present, our capacity and comfort around that emotion improves. Paradoxically, allowing an emotion makes our experience of it more pleasant because we give up the futile struggle to avoid it.

Our natural reaction to difficult feelings is to push them away as quickly as possible, with thoughts of, "It shouldn't be here," or, "I can't stand this." We often ruminate about our suffering, which only fuels its fire. We may blame others or ask, "Why me?" Both of these reactions amplify and prolong the pain. To put it simply, pain is inevitable, but the added suffering of struggling with emotions is optional.

Emotional wellbeing is not the absence of painful emotions. It is building our capacity to allow and hold the inevitable (and often helpful) pain that comes with living a meaningful life that is aligned with our **values**.

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How much of our suffering arises from attempts to avoid uncomfortable emotions, rather than to hold space for all emotions that arise within us, and to give ourselves permission to acknowledge and allow them to be there?

Note: When we talk about ***allowing***, we are referring to allowing and exploring emotions and other inner experiences because they are already present within us. We are not advocating for allowing outside events to occur. There are many instances where we need to set boundaries or to fight against external injustices, threats, and violations. Perhaps counter-intuitively, allowing ourselves to feel our emotions allows us to understand clearly where action is required, then to problem solve or take care of ourselves accordingly.

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Emotional wellbeing is not the absence of painful emotions. It is building our capacity to allow and hold the full range of emotions that comes with living a meaningful life that is aligned with our **values**.

Pain is inevitable, but the added suffering of struggling with emotions is optional.

"The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in."

Rumi

In this program, we can train ourselves to become curious about our emotions, rather than trying to discharge or avoid them.

To learn **mindfulness** in a deeper way, consider participating in a mindfulness-based intervention for health, such as those listed in the Resources section of the Mind Space website: mind-space.ca

If we can increase the capacity to allow our emotional experiences, we increase our ability to live fuller lives that move in the direction of our **values**, rather than only having the option to move away from discomfort. 208

We can borrow from Rumi, the 13th century Sufi mystic, whose poetic words from *The Guest House* remind us, "The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in."

We can support the skill of letting emotions be, just as they are, by practicing **mindfulness**, by validating ourselves, and by practicing compassion. We may need someone else's help, such as a trusted loved one or a professional, to hold our more painful emotions. Building capacity to be with strong and/or activating emotions is best done gradually. If we find ourselves outside the **Zone of Workability**, we can give ourselves a break, shift focus to a pleasant activity, or complete a **grounding**/soothing practice and return to the emotion in small chunks when manageable. 13 89

Mindfulness teaches that we can't change what experiences arrive in our awareness, but we can change how we relate to them. We practice holding all experiences (even unpleasant ones) gently, with kindness and curiosity, rather than dwelling on or denying them. By acknowledging what is already here, we can also access their important messages, use them to solve our problems, and take care of ourselves. One of the most effective ways to allow an emotion, as it is, is by practicing mindfulness of its physical sensations in the body (if accessible, and within the Zone of Workability). While our thoughts can propel us from the felt sensation of the emotion by jumping into the future or past, the sensations of the body anchor us to the present moment experience of our emotions. 40

Mindfulness teachers often remind us, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." A variety of mindfulness-based courses are available as Level 2 courses after you complete this Foundations course.

The Power of Validation

Another way to allow emotions is by **validating** them. Validating an emotion involves acknowledging explicitly that an emotion is present, and recognizing that the emotion is a legitimate reaction to what is happening. For example, we can tell ourselves, "I'm scared, and that makes sense. This situation is making me feel really powerless right now."

While it can be very helpful to have others validate our experiences, we can also learn to validate our own emotions.

Validation gives us permission to experience the emotion rather than struggle to get rid of it, believe something is wrong with us for feeling it, or shift too soon into problem solving. Self-validation gives us resources to cope more effectively with the inevitable pain of life, and is most effective when repeated over and over. Self-validation involves reflecting back to ourselves that our thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and urges make sense, either as a reaction to our current situation or from past learning. By validating our emotions, we become less prone to switching into **secondary emotions**.

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Self-validation is also a journey. When we fall back on self-judgment, we can guide ourselves gently back to self-validation, exploring how we can soften toward ourselves and welcome our emotions as important information. With practice, self-validation can help to us discern an emotion's message and work with its associated thoughts.

As we practice giving ourselves validation, we can consider offering validation to those we care about. For example, "You're angry! It makes sense that you're feeling so angry, because this situation has happened to you before".

Self-validation involves reflecting back to ourselves that our feelings make sense, either as a reaction to our current situation or from past learning.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Practical Skills to Help with Allowing Emotions

145 For many of us, **allowing** and experiencing certain emotions is a skill we need to practice. As we develop this capacity, we are more able to gather the data these emotions have for us and to choose how to express and act on them.

65 Several strategies can help us to **investigate** the feelings that are within our awareness.

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- **Self-validation:** Use a phrase such as, "It makes sense that I feel ___". Even better, list some reasons that it makes sense, perhaps because of what you've experienced in the past or how you're wired. Notice when others would likely feel the same in this situation.

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- **Mindfulness:** Notice and acknowledge your **Triangle** (emotions, sensations, associated thoughts and urges) with an attitude of non-judgment and curiosity. Stay anchored in the present rather than magnifying emotions with memories or forecasts. If you notice thoughts such as, "I shouldn't be feeling this way," or, "It's bad to feel this emotion," recognize these judgments and return to the intention of allowing your experience as it is. If available to you, work on **allowing emotions** by exploring the related sensations in the body and how they change from moment to moment.

When an emotion, or a set of sensations, activates us outside the Zone of Workability, it is wise to seek support.

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- **Breathing and coping thoughts:** If sensations are intense, experiment with breathing into the areas of intensity. Remind yourself about your abilities to cope with sensations: "It's already here, I can feel it", or "Just because it feels bad doesn't mean it is bad".[1]

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- **Self-compassion:** Respond to yourself in the way you would respond to a loved one if they were experiencing the situation, perhaps using the **Self-Compassion Break** skill from Chapter 2. Ask yourself what you might need, or how to take care of yourself in this situation.

1 Seek help if the experience related to an emotion or situation often pushes you outside the Zone of Workability on the Dial of Activation.

- **Getting distance from the emotion:** Use the **Mountain and Weather** metaphor to remind yourself that you are not only your emotions: you can observe them from a slight distance. You can also try thanking the mind, or thanking the emotions; bringing a lighthearted acknowledgment to an emotion and to its message can help with **allowing**.

  For example, you may notice catastrophic thoughts related to an upcoming challenge, the emotion of apprehensive fear, stomach knots, and low appetite. You can lean toward this unpleasant experience by saying, "Thanks, mind, for bringing this potential threat to my attention. I've noted it, and I'm working on how to prepare. I've got this."

- **Sharing with a trusted person:** An emotion is often more easily carried when it is shared. Telling someone you trust what you are feeling can give them a chance to be validating and compassionate, which can encourage self-validation and self-compassion. Others can help us to separate the useful data from the emotion and the thoughts from aspects that are less helpful.

Try thanking the mind for offering information in the form of an emotional signal.

Chapter 5 Home Practice

Working with Feelings Flowchart: STOPP

STOP! Give yourself **distance** from the situation by pausing. The mindful process illustrated in this flowchart is often done after the fact. It may be done alone, or by talking it out with someone you trust.

TAKE A BREATH. Come into the present. Where are you on the **Dial of Activation**? If outside the **Zone of Workability**, do a **DIAL Skill**, **grounding skill**, or other self-care skill.

OBSERVE THE TRIANGLE, MINDFULLY AND WITH COMPASSION:

- notice automatic thoughts
- notice automatic urges
- name the emotion: observe sensations, facial expressions, tone, posture

PERSPECTIVE USING CURIOSITY. Get distance and ask yourself, "What is this **emotion's function**? What message is it signalling, and what may be helpful about its urge?" Spot what is valid about the emotion and related thoughts (the **kernels of truth**). "It makes sense that I feel this emotion because…". Notice if the emotion is primary or secondary.

PROCEED WITH CHOICE. Choose to invite and allow **primary emotions** in the Zone of Workability. Be mindful of the emotion internally and notice bodily sensations. If helpful in the situation, express the emotion externally. If urges are in a helpful direction, act on them to respond effectively.

Try using the **STOPP Skill** to help you explore and allow feelings. After the fact, sit down, think about the situation, and imagine it as vividly as possible. Then go through the STOPP steps, lingering in **OBSERVE with compassion** and **PERSPECTIVE** as you explore the feelings. You can fill out the table in any order that makes sense to you. Specifically, explore the emotion, its associated physical sensations and other bodily aspects, and its action urge(s). Notice if any **secondary emotions** arise (such as shame or fear about feeling a primary emotion), and as best you can, notice these too without judgment. Try these explorations with everyday events rather than with charged situations, because you want to be able to stay within your **Zone of Workability** on the **Dial of Activation**.

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Once you've noted how the emotion showed up for you, consider its messages about the situation. **Validate** ways the emotion makes sense, and spot and get **distance from thoughts** that aren't helpful. Consider if the emotion can motivate some helpful actions.

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While **allowing** the emotion, consider whether the *Practical Skills for Help with Allowing Emotions* discussed in this chapter may be of use.

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Examples on the following page.

134 Working with Feelings Worksheet: STOPP

EXAMPLE: Being with a feeling that is uncomfortable

S	**Describe the situation.**	I went to an extended care home to visit a loved one whom I haven't seen in awhile. I was struck by how frail they looked compared to the last time I saw them.
T	**Take a breath.**	Practice something for a few moments/minutes to help ground you and bring you into the present moment. If you are outside the **Zone of Workability**, give yourself time, do a **DIAL Skill**, or engage in self-care until you are in the Zone of Workability.
O	**What emotions did you feel?** Circle the one you want to work with.	(Sadness) Shame Fear
	What were the associated bodily sensations, facial expressions, tone, posture, and/or gestures?	Cold hands, hollowness in my abdomen, stooped posture, teary eyes, lump in the throat.
	What urges were present (what did you feel like saying or doing)?	I had an urge to cry as soon as I saw them. I wanted to leave.
	What thoughts or images were going through your mind?	I am losing my loved one. They do not even look like the person I knew. They look so frail and sick.
P	**What message is the emotion signalling? What parts of this are helpful/accurate in the moment?** ***"It makes sense that I feel this because…"***	It makes sense that I feel this way. I am experiencing a significant loss in this moment. My life right now is different from what I had hoped.
	Spot the kernel of truth in thoughts, and step back from unhelpful interpretations.	My loved one *has* changed a lot.
	Which aspects of the urge(s) may be helpful? Which are unhelpful?	My urge to cry is telling me to express my sadness and to feel it. It's an indication of how much this person means to me. I don't necessarily want to cry in front of my loved one. It might be helpful to reach out to someone who can appreciate my sadness and support me to feel it. My urge to leave the facility is a wish to not feel this sadness, and that is not going to be helpful.

EXAMPLE (cont.): Being with a feeling that is uncomfortable

P	**Behaviour. If it already occurred, what did you say or do?**	I stayed for a short visit, and because I felt so uncomfortable, spoke with care aids more than with my loved one.
	How would you choose to proceed? • **Allow the emotion mindfully.** • **Express it when, and as much, as it is helpful.** • **If urges are toward a helpful direction, act on them. Problem solve the situation if possible.**	**Allow and Express:** I am going to accept the hollowness in my abdomen as a reminder of this important relationship and of the loss that is unfolding. Tears can come when they come. I'm going to encourage **self-compassion** by reminding myself that all humans experience loss, and although it is hard, it is also important. I can live these moments of my life fully. **Urges:** I am going to speak with another relative who has also gone to visit. We can share our sadness together, which I know will make it easier for me. I left quickly before, but now I have an urge to spend quality time with my loved one. I am going to bring in a book that I can read to them. I will also bring one of my knitting projects, which will make it easier for me to sit with them.
	Are there any secondary emotions?	I feel shame for feeling so much sadness. I feel the need to be more stoic to support them right now. I also feel fear about whether I will be able to cope with this amount of sadness.

134 Working with Feelings Worksheet: STOPP

EXERCISE: Analyze one of your own situations using the STOPP steps

S	**Describe the situation.**	
T	**Take a breath.**	
O	**What emotions did you feel?** Circle the one you want to work with.	
	What were the associated bodily sensations, facial expressions, tone, posture, and/or gestures?	
	What urges were present (what did you feel like saying or doing)?	
	What thoughts or images were going through your mind?	
P	**What message is the emotion signalling? What parts of this are helpful/accurate in the moment?** ***"It makes sense that I feel this because…"***	
	Spot the kernel of truth in thoughts, and step back from unhelpful interpretations.	
	Which aspects of the urge(s) may be helpful? Which are unhelpful?	

EXERCISE (cont.): Analyze one of your own situations using the STOPP steps

P	**Behaviour. If this has already occurred, what did you say or do?**	
	How would you choose to proceed? • **Allow the emotion mindfully.** • **Express it when, and as much, as it is helpful.** • **If urges are toward a helpful direction, act on them. Problem solve the situation if possible.**	
	Are there any secondary emotions?	

How Judgments take us from Primary to Secondary Emotions

130 Practice identifying **primary** and **secondary emotions**. Notice your primary and secondary emotion patterns with friendly curiosity. It's okay if you are not sure about the thoughts/judgments, emotions, and urges for all boxes in the chart; fill out what is apparent to you now, and be curious about the rest.

Situation	Primary emotion	Ways I may be judging the primary emotion	Secondary emotion	Unhelpful action-urge arising from the secondary emotion
My grade on my assignment was lower than I was expecting	Fear	"There's something wrong with me for the fact that I got upset over a grade."	Shame	Hide, don't check in with instructor

Mapping Emotions

Choose one emotion to examine in-depth. Notice what types of situations prompt this emotion for you. It may help to look back at **Triangles of Experience** that you have explored earlier in this course. Recall one situation where this emotion was activated. Notice physical ways the emotion shows up for you, what urges arise, and where you sense them in the body. Notice what the emotion may be telling you about the situation, along with responses that could be helpful in the situation that you have remembered or imagined. Ask yourself how you could use the energy of emotion-related urges to act in a way that is helpful. You are encouraged to fill out the boxes in this table in any order that makes sense to you, and in your preferred language.

To try this exercise with other emotions, photocopy this page or download the table from mind-space.ca

EMOTION:		
Situations where this emotion comes up for me:		
	Emotion	
Automatic Thoughts	**Bodily Experiences**	**Urges**
Potential Messages of the Emotion		
Potentially Helpful Responses		

Practice Self-Validation

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This week, choose at least one moment to engage in **self-validation**. You may use some of the *Practical Skills for Help with Allowing Emotions* listed in this chapter, or identify alternatives that work for you.

What did you notice when you practiced self-validation?

My Good for Me(s) This Week

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I can give myself credit that I invested time, energy, or effort in:_____

Notes

Choosing Helpful Behaviours

Pearls for this Chapter

- Emotions communicate to us and to others, and they motivate action. Sometimes, though, our **Triangles of Experience** need shifting. This situation can occur when there are problems with:
    - **Emotion signal accuracy:** Our emotions may not be fully accurate or specific to the situation at hand (i.e., **false alarms**).
    - **Emotion signal strength:** The signals of our emotions may be too low for us to receive the message and to feel motivated, or they may be too high for us to take perspective and to be skilful.
- In these instances, emotion-related urges may not be helpful.
- We can work with Triangles that need shifting by **PAUSING** and using awareness; the **STOPP** tool is one effective strategy. We've already discussed evaluating and **SWAPPING** thoughts; now, we look at the powerful tool of increasing or decreasing behaviours (including the way the emotion is expressed in the body, in terms of posture, facial expression and tone, and the actions in which we engage). As we change behaviours, we can change our Triangles.
- Depression and anxiety are distressing physical–mental states that can be supported by choosing different behaviours. To decrease depression, we can engage in **Behavioural Activation**. To decrease anxiety, we can **challenge avoidance**.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Engineering Laughter

Try using this skill to shift an emotion state intentionally. Determine if and when it could be useful for you. With this skill, we are using behaviour to shift feelings.

1. **Notice how you're feeling**
2. **Try a half-smile**
3. **Make a bigger smile**
4. **Invite a little giggle**
5. **Make it louder**
6. **Make it even louder**
7. **For prolonged laughter, do this with someone else, making frequent eye contact!**

Laughing feels good! Studies have shown that laughter has benefits in terms of physiology, mental health, and social and spiritual wellbeing. Laughter improves quality of life. These benefits happen whether laughter is spontaneous and based on humour, or is brought on intentionally (as with this skill). The body cannot distinguish between the two types!

Given laughter's measurable, positive effects on health, for many it can be a way to invite more laughter into life. Although it can challenging in a difficult emotion state, it can also be a powerful tool to shift.

"I don't laugh because I am happy. I'm happy because I laugh."

Anonymous

Laughter Clubs exist all over India, where people gather by the hundreds to laugh, to enjoy the health benefits of laughter, and to discover that laughter really is contagious. Free online laughter clubs have now also emerged!

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Strength Poses

Use this skill to invite confidence or to Dial down other emotions.

Try using this skill to shift an emotional state intentionally. Determine if and when it could be useful for you. This skill is another example of using behaviour (in this case, posture) to shift feelings and thoughts.

Researchers have been studying how posture affects the way we feel. Although it may seem intuitive that adopting a certain posture effects feelings, quantifying this intuition in scientific studies has proven more difficult.

A 2010 study at Columbia University on posture and feelings[1] was made famous by one of its authors, Amy Cuddy, when she gave the 2012 TED Talk *Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are*. The study compared two groups of people performing under stress, where one group had been taught to hold one of the **strength poses** (pictured left) for two minutes beforehand. The strength pose group felt more confident, and was able to take more risks during the tasks.

This study sparked intense debate, and many other studies have also examined the effects of posture. In 2020, a large analysis examined all studies to date and concluded that evidence shows feelings and behaviours are influenced by body posture, particularly when the body is in a closed or contracted posture.[2] If you're curious, experiment with these postures to determine if they are helpful for you.

IMAGES: smallanswers.us

1 Carney, D. R., Cuddy, A. J., & Yap, A. J. (2010). Power posing brief nonverbal displays affect neuroendocrine levels and risk tolerance. *Psychological Science,* 21(10), pp. 1363–1368.

2 Elkjær, E., Mikkelsen, M. B., Michalak, J., Mennin, D. S., & O'Toole, M. S. (2022). Expansive and contractive postures and movement: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effect of motor displays on affective and behavioral responses. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 17(1), pp. 276–304.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Emotion-related Urges May be Unhelpful in Specific Situations

All emotions are valid, AND not all urges are pushing us to act in ways that are helpful for a specific situation.

In the last chapter, we explored how emotions are important signals that communicate information and push us to act. All emotions are valid and make sense, even when we don't understand them immediately. But not all emotions are pushing us to act in ways that are helpful to the situation in front of us. Some common experiences include:

1. Sometimes, our emotional responses are understandable in the context of our past, but are not helpful in our present. For example, if in the past we've learned that people aren't safe, our emotional alarms will go off when we meet a new person. We may feel a strong sense of fear, shame, or anger that signals us to avoid or to lash out, even when there is no evidence that the person in front of us is unsafe.

2. Alternatively, we may have developed a habit of switching to **secondary emotions**. For example, if we feel guilty for hurting a friend, but quickly switch to anger to avoid the pain of guilt, we might ignore the alert being sent by the primary emotion about what our priority should be (repair the friendship), and instead we may act on the secondary emotion.

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3. Sometimes, our emotions may push us to act for short-term gain, but the long-term picture is more complicated and requires a different action. For example, we may feel joy at a party, which pushes us to stay late connecting with others despite having an important early morning commitment.

4. By examining our thoughts and interpreting the situation that has led to a particular **Triangle**, we may recognize that the emotion's message is not helpful and is instead a **false alarm**. For example, we may have a fear response, but modify it when we assess the threats and realize that we can handle them. Or we may feel guilt arise, then realize we're having **should and must** thoughts that don't represent the situation accurately.

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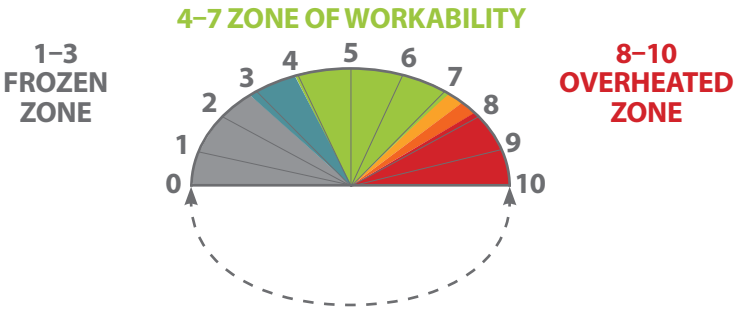
Section continues on the following page.

13 5. We may also be too high or too low on the **Dial of Activation** to act in a helpful way. For example, we may need to communicate with our landlord that essential repairs haven't been completed. If we are too low on the Dial, we aren't motivated enough to solve the problem by addressing it with the landlord. If we are too high on the Dial, it may be hard to communicate our point of view, and we may be at a higher risk of speaking disrespectfully, yelling, and not being effective.



Changing Behaviours to Shift Triangles[1]

As we discussed in Chapter 5, we can build our capacity to allow our emotions mindfully, and to make choices about how we express and act on them in a given situation.

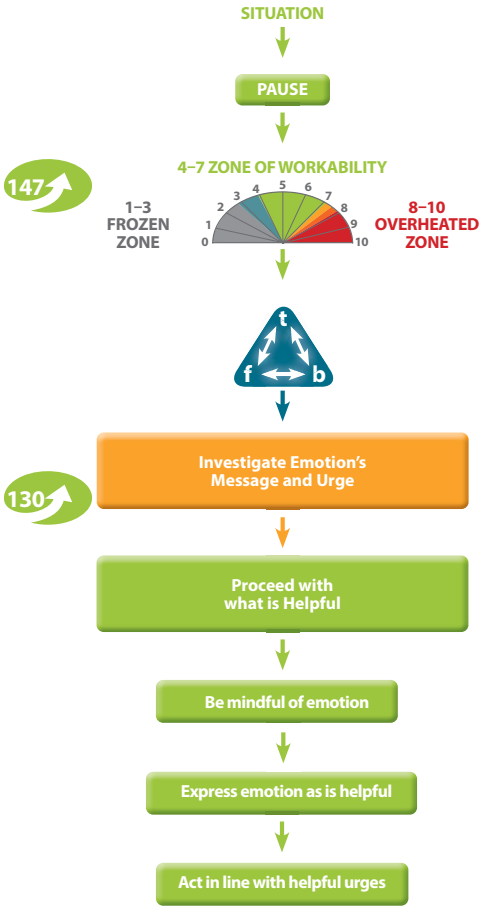
When we feel anger, that anger may be signalling that something is unfair, is being violated, or is blocked. When the emotion of anger arises, we want to ask ourselves what the emotion is urging us to notice. This work may happen during the situation, or hours or even days later, as we reflect and realize the emotion's message. Reflection brings perspective, and can **validate** what is helpful in the message. It can also spot and hone in on thoughts to give us more clarity about the situation.

This clarity allows us to think through what urges (or parts of urges) may be helpful in that moment.

As we work with and understand the helpful data that our emotions provide, we may have fewer urges to push them away or to switch into **secondary emotions**.

Section continues on the following page.

6 Ask yourself if acting on an urge will help you to move in a helpful direction that 208 reflects your **values**.



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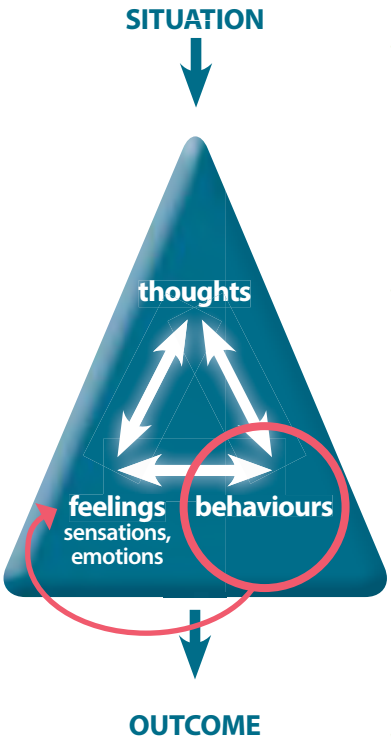
1 Dunkley, C. (2021). Regulating emotion the DBT Way. Routledge: New York, and Linehan, M.M. (1993). *Cognitive Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder.* New York: Guilford.



Sometimes, though, we may attempt to allow and express an emotion but still find it difficult to feel. We are low on the **Dial of Activation** and therefore unmotivated by the emotion to act, despite it potentially being helpful for us.

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Other times, we may recognize that the emotion's urge may be helpful, but we're too high on the Dial of Activation to be skilful. Or, we may recognize that the emotion's signal and urge are not relevant or helpful in the specific situation (a **false alarm**).

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In each of these instances, we can use behavioural strategies to shift the feeling and to change the intensity of the urge. We can make an intentional choice (the **Proceed** step of the **STOPP skill**) and express *more* of the feeling by adopting the signature features of the feeling within the body. We can also express *less* of the feeling by acting in a way that is different from, or even counter to, the emotion's urge and posture. In a similar fashion to what we learned with thoughts, when we need to shift a **Triangle** we can **STOP-SPOT-SWAP** behaviours.

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Let's look at the STOPP Skill and the **Working with Feelings Flowchart** again, with additional options around how we can respond, using behaviours. This version includes asking ourselves: How much of an emotion's expression and urge are helpful in the situation?

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IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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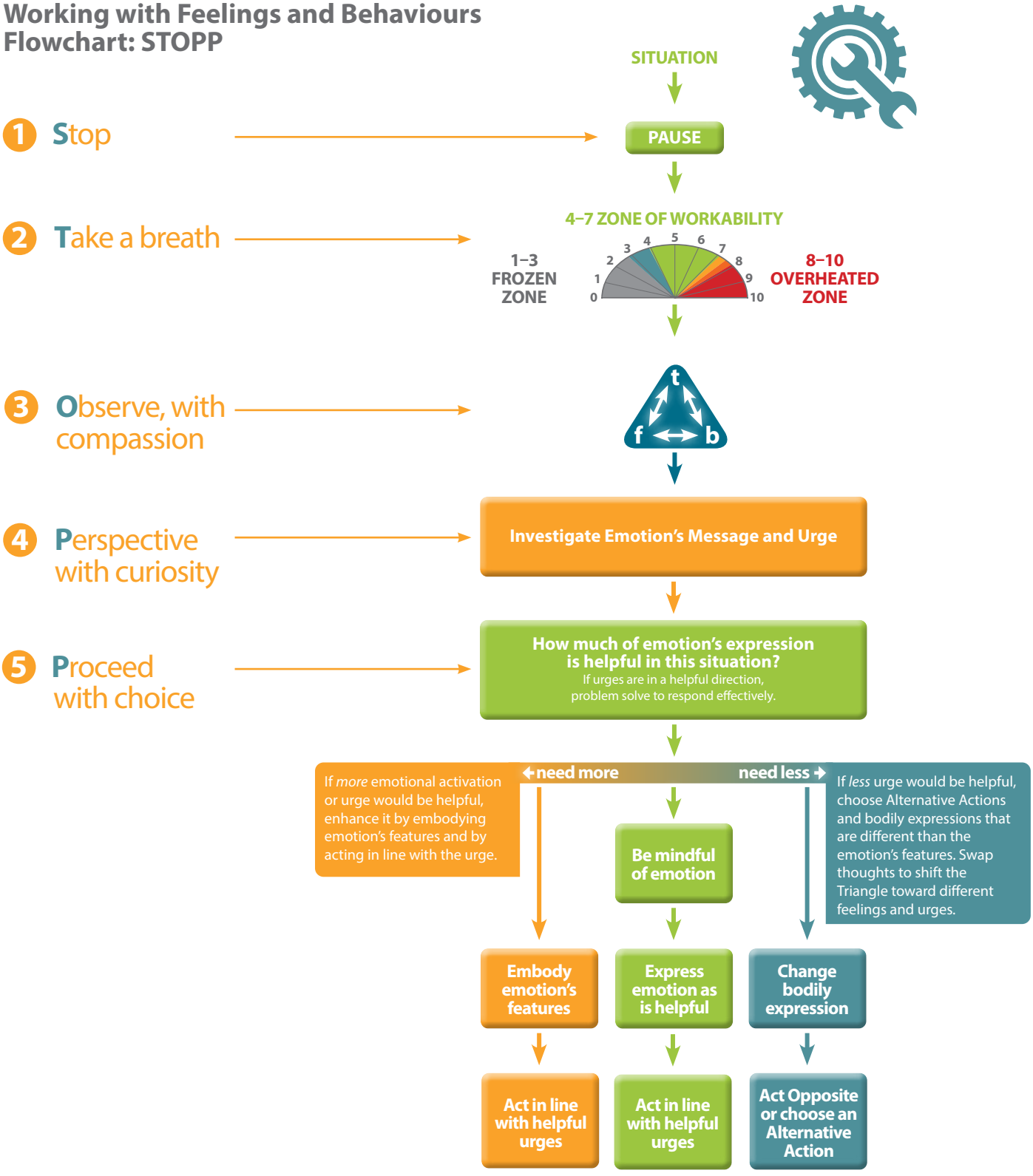
Working with Feelings and Behaviours Flowchart: STOPP



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STOP!

Give yourself a bit of distance from the situation by **PAUSING**.

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TAKE A BREATH.

Come into the present.

Where are you on the **Dial of Activation**?

If outside the **Zone of Workability**, do a **DIAL Skill**, **grounding skill**, or other self-care skill.

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OBSERVE THE TRIANGLE, MINDFULLY AND WITH COMPASSION:

- notice automatic thoughts
- notice automatic urges
- name the emotion: observe sensations, facial expressions, tone, and posture

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PERSPECTIVE USING CURIOSITY.

Get distance and ask yourself, "What is this **emotion's function**? What message is it signalling, and what may be helpful about its urge?"

Spot what is valid about the emotion and related thoughts (the **kernels of truth**).

"It makes sense that I feel this emotion because…".

Notice if the emotion is primary or secondary.

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PROCEED WITH CHOICE.

Allow emotions in the **Zone of Workability**, and make choices about expression and actions.

How much of emotion's expression is helpful in this situation?

If urges are in a helpful direction, problem solve to respond effectively.

← need more

If *more* emotional activation or urge would be helpful, enhance it by embodying emotion's features and by acting in line with the urge.

need less →

If *less* urge would be helpful, choose **Alternative Actions** and bodily expressions that are different than the emotion's features.

Swap thoughts to shift the **Triangle** toward different feelings and urges.

Enhancing Emotions and Urges

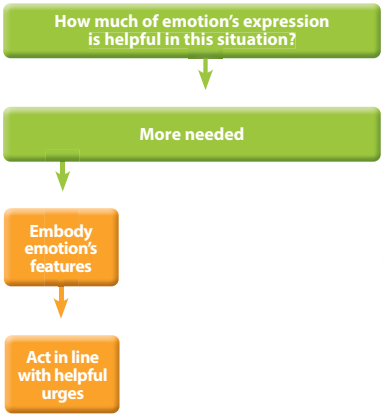
Sometimes, we may feel an emotion in a muted way, or notice related thoughts but not feel much of the associated urge. We are low on the **Dial of Activation**.

There are many reasons why an emotion may be muted in a situation. We may be in an environment where certain emotions don't feel safe or helpful to express. For example, if we have been criticized, punished, or discriminated against for showing emotions in the past, we will have learned that expressing such emotions isn't safe or helpful. This reaction may happen unconsciously. In these instances, we may not be able to access the emotion, even in situations where it would be useful.

Another reason for having less access to emotions is that our nervous system short circuits when our level of activation overwhelms our capacity to hold, acknowledge, and understand our emotions. In situations of overwhelm, our nervous system can shut down emotions to protect us. This protection is helpful in the moment, but can have costs when we are in a safer place with more capacity for feelings, but those feelings are not readily available.

Although useful to manage brief periods, being too low on the Dial may not be helpful in the long run. We may want to express more emotion in order to communicate well to others and have our needs met.

For example, if someone is not respecting our boundaries, it may take time to feel the anger that helps us to recognize something is not okay. Or, we may realize that we are angry, but not feel it enough to motivate asserting for healthy boundaries. Perhaps, when returning home after a hard day and our roommate asks how we are, we may show no emotion and miss out on receiving support. Or, when we've hurt someone, we may not experience enough guilt to apologize and repair an important relationship.



When we want to enhance the experience and the urge of an emotion, we can **behave in a way that is compatible with the specific features of that emotion**.

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- We can embody the emotion, adopting the **emotion's pattern** and features intentionally, such as posture, facial expression, tone of voice, or gestures. We can **validate** the emotion: "It makes sense that I feel this way because…"

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- We can act in line with the emotion, even if the urge is slight or not present

"We cannot selectively numb emotions; when we numb the painful emotions, we also numb the positive emotions."

Brené Brown

Attention to bodily sensations can be helpful. As we bring attention to the situation and validate that the emotion makes sense, often we can begin to feel sensations in the body such as a tightness in the chest, a lump in the throat, or crying. Focusing on these sensations can enhance them, especially if we continue to validate ourselves, and offer **Coping Thoughts** such as, "It's here and it makes sense, I can feel it."

95

Enhance Anger to Motivate Action: Diego

Coming back to the example of Diego in Chapter 5, Diego decides to have a conversation with his children to assert healthy boundaries, but by the time they meet to talk, he is feeling too low on the **Dial** and has less urge to assert himself about his needs. He realizes that enhancing his experience of anger would be more helpful than talking to them without expressing emotion.

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He adopts the *posture* of **anger** by inviting confidence, standing up tall with his chin and shoulders back, and making direct eye contact. He *acts* by speaking assertively and directly about his needs.

Enhance Guilt to Help Repair: Connie

When Connie's co-worker tells her that she has said something hurtful unintentionally, Connie notices that she is feeling shut down and very low on the **Dial of Activation**. She explores what this experience is trying to tell her. Knowing that she has caused harm feels painful, and she validates that it's understandable the feeling is unwelcome. She also recognizes that it hasn't been safe in the past to make mistakes without facing rejection. She offers herself compassion and practices **grounding skills**. Ultimately, she assesses that guilt is the emotion that matches the situation: she has caused harm to her co-worker.

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Connie realizes that **guilt's** urge to repair and apologize is a helpful response in this situation. She wants more of guilt's expression so that she can respond to the situation appropriately. She practices adding in guilt's features as she imagines an apology. She adopts the *posture* of guilt, with lowered shoulders and chin, soft posture, and a gentle, apologetic tone of voice. She *acts* on the urge, first in imagination and then in person by apologizing and communicating remorse to her co-worker.

127

Inviting Healthy Grieving: Kiara

Despite having learned about the death of a loved one, Kiara notices herself experiencing very little feeling. Instead, she keeps busy by exercising more, cleaning the house obsessively, and working longer hours.

She pauses to reflect, and realizes that sadness would be the emotion that matches her loss. She asks herself what this emotion is trying to tell her, then realizes it may be signalling to give herself time to process the loss, to receive support from others, and to heal. Meanwhile, she **validates** that it is very painful, and that it makes sense to shield herself from the pain by keeping busy.

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75 She also notices herself **catastrophizing** with the thought, "If I were to let myself feel this grief, it would never stop." She challenges this thought by remembering past situations where she has coped with similar feelings. She realizes that although they were painful times, she has always managed to muddle through with support from others.

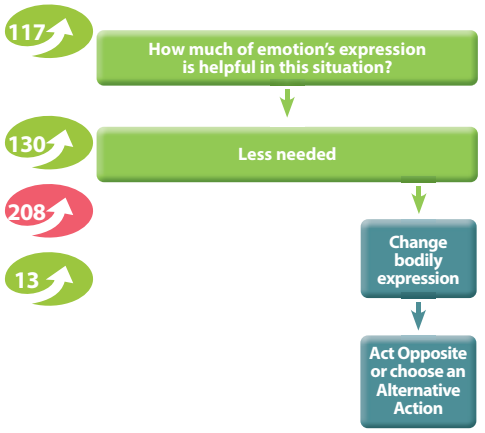
She decides that acting on the urges to slow down, to grieve, and to reach out for support are helpful in this situation. She decides to adopt the features 126 of **sadness** by staying still, curling her body under a blanket, and cradling a warm cup of tea in her hands, while paying attention to her sensations. She 145 gives herself permission to think about the loss (**allowing emotions** within 13 the **Zone of Workability**). When she begins to cry, she notices how the tears feel on her face. She then calls a friend for support.

Decreasing Emotional Urges: Alternative Action

In some situations, the urge attached to an emotion is unhelpful.

Remember, we may determine that an emotion's urge is unlikely to be helpful, such as when it:

- is a **false alarm** (e.g., yesterday's solution to today's problem, or based on thoughts not fully accurate nor helpful)
- has switched into misleading **secondary emotions**
- prioritizes short-term survival over long-term **values** and goals
- is expressed too high on the **Dial of Activation** to be helpful for the appropriate response in the situation



In cases where acting on the emotion's urge is unlikely to be helpful, we need to apply a skill that helps us to avoid doing so, and perhaps helps to diminish our experience of the emotion as well.

We can create space around an unhelpful or overactive urge. This strategy can be accomplished by taking steps to nourish the mind–body, such as deciding to choose **nourishing events**, to connect with trusted others, or to engage in regulation exercises or body work. Redirecting attention, such as participating in a **healthy distraction**, can also decrease the **Dial of Activation** and put us in a better position to evaluate the urge(s) afterward. We can also use body-based strategies such as the **DIAL Skills (Dunk face, Intense Activity, Abdominal Paced Breathing, Let Go of Tension)**.

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Alternative Action: If we want to move beyond simply making space around an urge and move away from it actively, we can choose an Alternative Action that is different from the one related to the emotion. We can shift the energy by choosing to engage in something funny or silly, or by practicing **self-compassion** or gratitude. Any of these behaviours tend to invite different thoughts and feelings, and therefore to shift our **Triangle**.

Choosing an **Alternative Action** is doing something different than the urge of the emotion.

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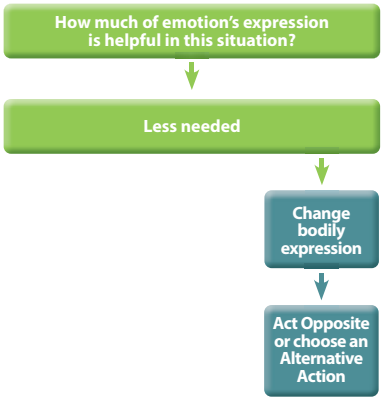
Choosing an **Opposite Action** is doing something directly opposite to the urge of the emotion.



175 **Opposite Action:** A specific type of **Alternative Action** is acting in a way that is incompatible with, or directly opposite to, the emotion's urge. By behaving in a way repeatedly that is not compatible with the feeling of a specific situation, the activation associated with the feeling decreases in intensity, and the urge changes or becomes less compelling. For example, if we are experiencing sadness, the action urges are to withdraw and to seek soothing, which may not be helpful in a given situation. Instead, we could do **Opposite Action** and engage, adopting an active, alert posture, and tackling a task that is mildly challenging, such as washing the dishes. As we continue to engage and activate, our feelings may shift away from sadness and the urge to withdraw my diminish.

It can be difficult to use Alternative Action**,** especially when we feel an emotion intensely. It requires intention, commitment, and repetition. In particular, if we are choosing an Opposite Action, we often temporarily feel worse when we act in an opposite way to our feelings. **SWAPPING behaviours**, however, acts more profoundly to shift our **Triangles** than swapping thoughts on its own. The commitment pays off.

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When choosing Opposite Action, it can be helpful to start in the body.

Change bodily expression: To move away from an emotion's urge, it can be very effective to start in the body: adopt a posture that is opposite to the emotion's features (e.g., stand up tall as a way to challenge sadness' urge to curl up). Then, move on to Alternative Actions. Changing posture is easier as a first step, and builds more willingness to engage in actions that are not compatible with the emotion. For example, it can be daunting to ask the boss for time off or for a raise. To diminish the fear, the first step could be to adopt a confident, assertive posture.

When engaging in **Alternative Action**, it can be helpful to **swap thoughts**.

90 **Swap thoughts while changing behaviour:** As we engage in Alternative Actions, we can also swap thoughts that we recognize as unhelpful. For example, if we are afraid of making a mistake while cooking and decide to challenge this fear by cooking anyway, we can swap thoughts as we do so. We can exchange catastrophic thoughts about mistakes in the kitchen by thinking, "Making mistakes is part of learning, and nobody cooks perfectly all the time".

Good for Me(s) and **self-compassion** help us to remember our intentions and to continue **Alternative Actions** that are serving us. We may need support from a trusted person such as a therapist to encourage us to engage in Alternative Actions.

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Sometimes, the behavioural aspect of **CBT** is misunderstood. People may think the idea is to use Alternative Action to invalidate or eliminate certain emotions and/or their related thoughts. They may think there is something wrong with feeling an emotion, such as sadness, and therefore believe that the advice is to act happy in order to course-correct. This skill is not intended as a tool for invalidation. Rather, once we become aware of the messages arising from our thoughts and emotions and then determine thoughtfully how to act, engaging in Alternative or **Opposite Action** supports us in decreasing the strength of the urge. We choose this skill because we know that decreasing the emotional activation is in our best interests. It may be helpful to think of it as a life hack for use in specific circumstances, rather than as a global prescription for how to interact with our emotions.

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Sometimes, the behavioural aspect of CBT is misunderstood.

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For example, we have described how, if the past has taught us that some people cannot be trusted, we may feel the urge to withdraw from a new person even without evidence that they are unreliable. We would not expect ourselves to move away from that urge by opening up completely to the new relationship. Instead, we would honour our past experiences by holding our boundaries and by acknowledging that we have incomplete information about the new person. We would **validate** the message that fear is offering. However, we can also add an intention to engage in Alternative Action by cultivating the willingness and openness to open up slowly, if the person shows evidence of their trustworthiness.

147

Choosing **Alternative Actions** in order to influence feelings and change urges is one of the most powerful skills in the Toolbox.

The table on the following page provides examples of how we can adopt specific postures or engage in specific actions once we decide to move away from an emotion's expression and its urge.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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To Decrease an Emotion's Expression and Urge, Try An Alternative Posture and Action

Emotion	Potential instinctive posture	Potential action urge	Potential alternative posture	Potential alternative action
Anger	Tense muscles Clenched fists and jaw	Approach Confront Fight	Loosen muscles Relax face and smile slightly Relax hands	Gently avoid what is angering you Practice empathy Be kind (even a little, to anyone)
Fear	Closed posture Tense muscles Eyes, chin, shoulders down	Avoid Flee Freeze	Relax muscles consciously Eyes and ears open Confident posture	Approach what causes fear Baby Steps, support
Sadness	Downcast Reserved posture	Withdraw Decrease activity	Upbeat posture Relaxed face, gentle smile	Become active, Baby Steps Connect with others
Guilt	Closed posture Quiet, gentle speech, soft gaze	Apologize Make amends	Eye contact Proud posture	Be assertive Empathize but don't apologize
Shame	Downcast gaze Small, closed posture	Hide	Eye contact Proud posture	Self-compassion Tell the shameful thing to people who will accept you

If the instinctive posture and action urge are not helpful, try an alternative

The next section examines two emotion-related action urges that typically are not helpful in the long run: withdrawal in depression, and avoidance in anxiety.

Shift Depressive Triangles by Alternative Action: Behavioural Activation

Depression can be an example of how emotion-related action urges create painful spirals of suffering.

Sadness and low mood are very helpful responses for survival in the short-term. In the same way that low energy during an illness pushes us to rest and recover, sadness from loss can push us to slow down and seek support to heal.

Feeling down can also signal that we are not progressing fast enough toward our goals, or that our needs are not being met. If we exercise regularly then are injured, we may experience low mood because we can't engage in the activity that we value. The low mood signals us either to withdraw, conserve energy, and wait until we have healed enough to exercise again, or to cease that exercise and invest in activity that does not stress the injury.

Sometimes, though, we can't shift ourselves out of the low mood. Although we may have recovered physically, the withdrawal has become so hardwired that restarting is difficult. At this point, the action urge to withdraw is no longer helpful, and we may become stuck in a spiral of depression. This spiral is self-perpetuating: by staying in bed or avoiding friends and activities, we no longer have access to the rewards (experiences of pleasure or accomplishment) that would improve our moods, and therefore the depression intensifies.

6 Depression makes us prone to behaviours that then increase depressed feelings.

Sadness is often a sign of loss, or that we aren't making progress toward our needs or goals.

When our action urge of withdrawal causes us to miss out on pleasurable experiences or accomplishments that lift our **moods**, sadness can spiral into depression. This mind–body state can last for weeks or months, becomes self-reinforcing, and (in addition to low mood) is characterized by low energy, disrupted sleep and appetite, and a tendency toward thoughts of worthlessness, hopelessness, and guilt.

Behavioural Activation, which involves engaging in small actions intentionally that provide pleasure, accomplishment, or meaning, is a way of treating depression.

In a state of clinical depression, one useful treatment that harnesses the power of **Alternative Action** is **Behavioural Activation**. In a 2016 study published in The Lancet[1], researchers from the National Institute for Health Research found that Behavioural Activation alone is just as effective as **CBT** (which also includes **swapping** thoughts) for treating depression.

Behavioural Activation involves practicing actions that provide a sense of pleasure, accomplishment, or meaning, regardless of our current mood. We often focus only on pleasure as a habit (e.g., watching shows for hours, socializing, or eating treats) or only on accomplishment at the expense of the pleasure (e.g., working, cleaning, or helping others). The key to successful Behavioural Activation is to have a mix of activities that invite pleasure with those that create a sense of accomplishment or meaning. In addition to the intentional behaviours that you are already using to activate yourself, see the Appendix for ideas about **nourishing activities** that could work well.

The action urge for sadness is to withdraw, to slow down, and to conserve energy. Behavioural Activation goes against these urges. The key is to take **baby steps**, and to avoid comparing ourselves to what we are like when we are not depressed. We can start by taking a warm bath or cleaning up a few dishes, and by giving ourselves a **Good for Me** for this baby step. See Appendix A for helpful tips on setting ourselves up for small, achievable steps.

1 Richards, D.A., Ekers, D., McMillan, D., Taylor, R.S., Byford, S., Warren, F.C., Barrett, B., Farrand, P.A., Gilbody, S., Kuyken, W., O'Mahen, H, Watkins, E.R., Wright, K.A., Hollon, S.D., Reed, N., Rhodes, S., Fletcher, E., Finning, K. (2016). Cost and Outcome of Behavioural Activation versus Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Depression (COBRA): a randomised, controlled, non-inferiority trial. *The Lancet*. 388: pp. 871–80.

Behavioural Activation focuses on slowly building more positive experiences 179 that improve our mood, rather than on striving for unattainable goals that will backfire when we can't achieve them. Remember, sadness indicates that we may be lacking progress toward our goals or needs. Small, attainable goals instead will provide a sense of accomplishment, which helps to break the cycle of depression. On the other hand, setting unattainable goals would fuel the depression with more perceived failure.

Behavioural Activation Worksheet

When depression is active, we can feel helpless and believe that things are out of control. Behavioural Activation focuses on the things we can control: our actions. By focusing on self-care, or on actions that increase our senses of pleasure, accomplishment, or meaning, we can decrease the urges to withdraw, and can shift the thoughts and feelings that are related to depression.

Track the actions on the following table (and add some of your own) that support you or shift your emotions during a low **mood**. Make sure the actions are small and attainable, even on your lowest day. Research shows that completing a checklist like this regularly can be helpful for some to begin a habit like Behavioural Activation.

Research shows that completing a checklist regularly can be helpful for some to begin a habit like **Behavioural Activation**.

229 10 179 Check out **Appendix A** for practical skills that help with **Behavioural Activation**, such as 235 236 234 **Baby Steps**, **Chunk the Day**, and **Energy Budget**.

On the following page, add a check mark whenever you complete one of the activities.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

228

Behavioural Activation Worksheet

This table outlines several actions often used for self-care in depression and in **Behavioural Activation**. Add a check mark whenever you do one of the activities below.

Activity	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Self-care: shower or bathe, shave, teeth, etc.							
Nourish with food: each meal or snack							
Sleep: actions that promote sleep, even if you don't							
Exercise: formal or informal physical activity, however small							
Pleasure Activities/Hobbies: check for each							
Small Task or Goal (accomplishment): accomplish one each day							
Social Contact (if nourishing): enough but not too much							
Good for Me(s): check for each							
Self-Compassion: even for filling out this chart							
STOP-SPOT-SWAP Unhelpful Thoughts: check for each time							

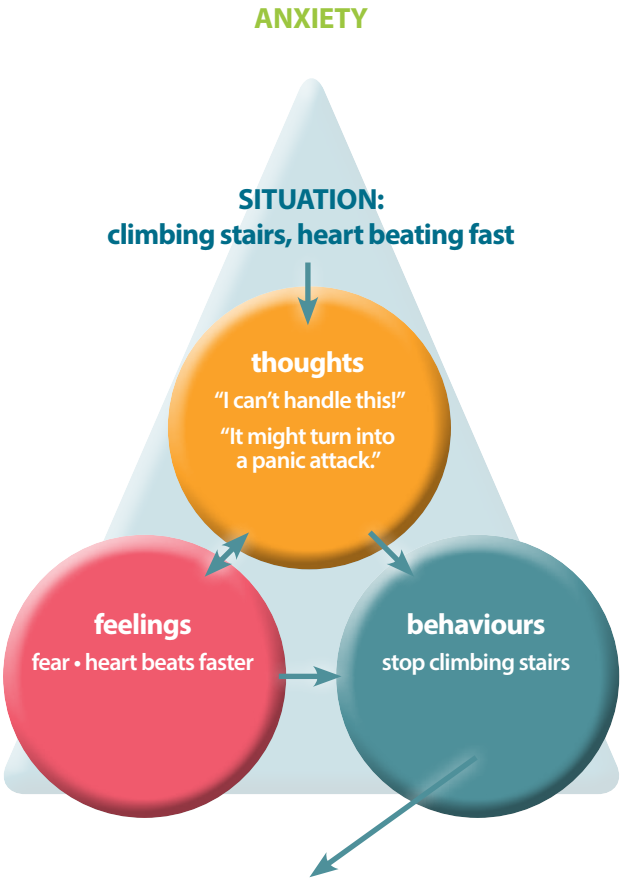
Shift Anxious Triangles by Alternative Action: Challenging Avoidance

Anxiety disorders illustrate how at times, our emotions may not drive the most helpful behaviours. Because fear can push us to avoid what scares us, this emotion has become essential to our survival by helping us to evade dangerous situations. But our brain's smoke detector for fear is very sensitive and often signals **false alarms**, just in case. As we (or those around us) experience more threats, our smoke detector becomes increasingly sensitive and more likely to go off. Our brains evolved with the motto, "It's better to be safe than sorry." This rule is particularly true for those who have anxiety disorders themselves, or within their families.

By continuing to avoid situations (and their related thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations) that scare us, we miss out on learning to cope with them. Avoidance can be self-perpetuating: we will be even more fearful of the experience the next time, leading to more avoidance, until anxiety makes our lives very limited and isolated. Anxiety-provoking situations are part of a meaningful life, and it can be liberating to develop the resources and resilience to cope with them.

We don't have control over the alarms going off: they ring automatically, immediately, and instinctively, in case we need to react right away. We do have control, however, over how we respond to those alarms.

6 Anxiety pushes for behaviours that make anxious feelings stronger



In this program, we can train ourselves to become curious about our emotions, rather than trying to discharge or avoid them.

An important exception is avoidance in the setting of sensory processing differences, such as people who have strong negative sensory responses to loud sounds or to certain foods or textures. In these instances, it may not be helpful to push through discomfort. More customized solutions that involve the intentional integration of sensory stimuli, and/or finding specific ways to cope may be needed (often with the help of a professional such as an occupational therapist). If you notice that moving toward what you are avoiding makes the distress worse in the long run, you can instead choose skills that better support your needs in the situation. As with any skill, there is no one size fits all and the key is to assess what is helpful to you in each unique situation.

The False Promise of Avoidance[1]

Often, we cope with difficult experiences by trying to avoid them. Sometimes, though, it is beneficial to cope with the distress, such as when a difficult experience is a part of something we want in our lives. For example, we may manage our social anxiety because we want to join a new group, or we might cope with distressing thoughts and feelings related to a meaningful project. In such circumstances, often our minds magnify the threat with catastrophic thinking and underestimate our ability to cope.

Avoidance helps when there are real, avoidable threats. But sometimes, we consider the emotional signal itself to be alarming and a threat, and our instinct then is to avoid the uncomfortable emotions and sensations themselves. We may be following the rule, "If it feels bad, it is bad," when that is not always the case.

Unfortunately, avoiding pursuits that we actually desire often backfires. Despite short-term relief from emotional and bodily discomfort, avoidance reinforces our belief that we can't bear the threats (or the feelings themselves), and amplifies our fear response in the long run. Avoidance moves us away from, rather than toward, activities that give our lives fullness and meaning.

Fortunately, we can also apply the principles of behaviour therapy here: if we choose an **Alternative Action**, rather than avoidance, we can break this cycle.

1 Barlow, D. H., Farchione, T. J., Fairholme, C. P., Ellard, K.K., Boisseau, C. L., Allen, L. B., & May, J. T. E. (2010). *Unified protocol for transdiagnostic treatment of emotional disorders: Therapist guide.* Oxford University Press.

Challenging the False Promise of Avoidance

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Engaging in **Opposite Action** can help to decrease anxiety by stopping the cycle of avoidance.

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Let's examine what happens to the sensations of anxiety in the body when we face an imagined threat. Anxiety can bring on bodily sensations very quickly. When we are high on the **Dial of Activation** it can be very physically uncomfortable. We may experience shortness of breath, a pounding heart, sweating, shaking, or other sensations.

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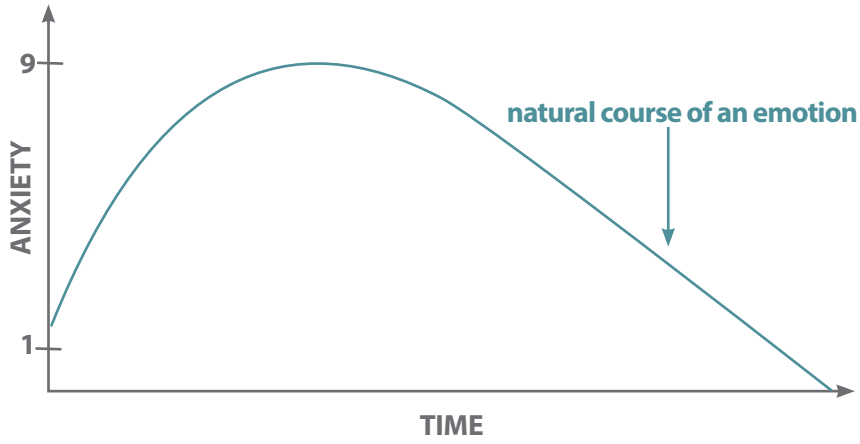
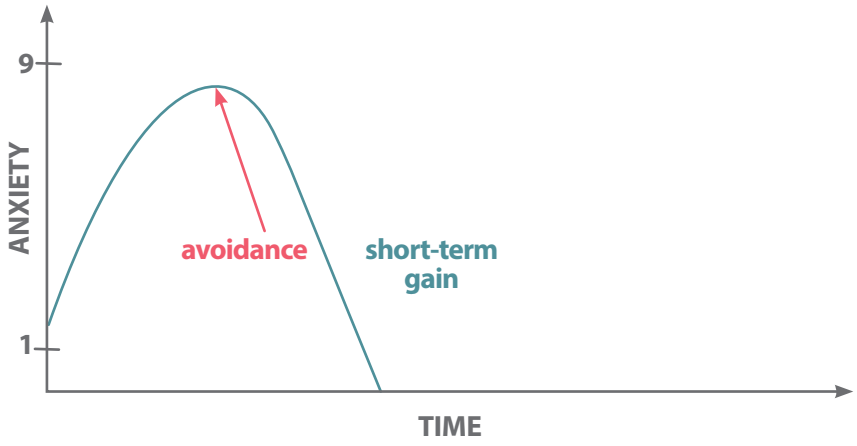
However, as we are exposed to a particular threat (real or imagined), if we realize that we have overestimated its seriousness and/or our inability to cope, the sensations of anxiety within the body diminish and the Dial of Activation goes back down. The emotion passes through us, like a wave.

As We Cope with a Threat, Anxiety Comes Down



Avoidance Provides Quick Relief

If we react to threat alarm signals by avoiding, we experience a rapid reduction in symptoms of anxiety that feels like a relief. This immediate nervous system response is highly reinforcing; the system believes it has avoided real danger that would have been unbearable. Although wonderful if true, this situation is less helpful when a threat is overblown and/or manageable.



While the relief is a short-term gain, it sets us up for long-term pain. When we encounter similar situations in the future, we will experience strong urges to continue avoiding. We haven't experienced the gradual reduction in sensations shown in the first graph, nor have we gained confidence that we can cope with both the threat and the anxiety-related sensations in the body.

Each time we avoid, we wire this message more strongly into our brains. Avoidance, therefore, makes anxiety around these situations not only persist, but also increase. Just thinking about a situation can spark intense emotions and sensations, which themselves can even feel like unbearable dangers to be avoided. The **Dial** starts getting activated for a variety of **false alarms**.

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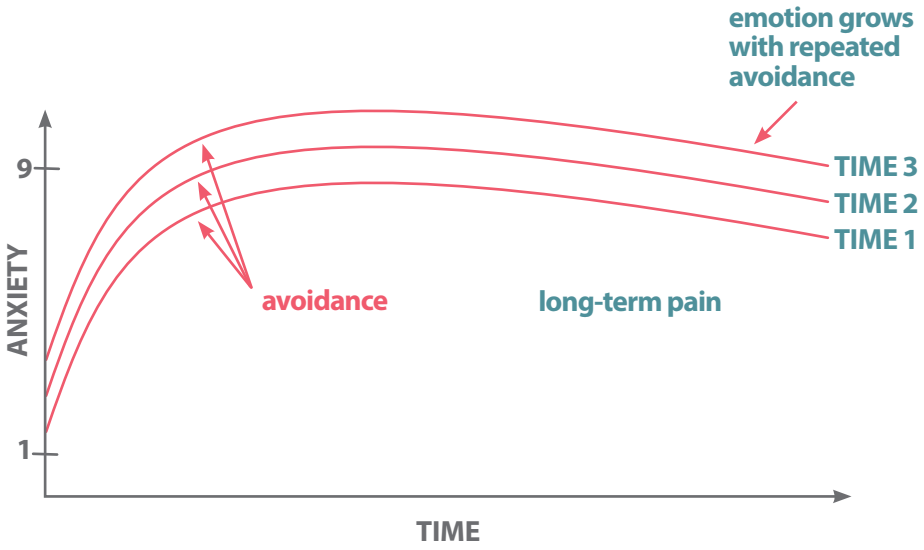
Avoidance Causes Anxiety to Grow



Alternative Action

Fortunately, we can use what we know about the relationships within the **Triangle of Experience** to break out of this cycle. When we recognize that the fear signal is a **false alarm** and choose with our behaviours to remain in (or move toward) the situation (which is the **Opposite Action** to avoidance), our fear response diminishes. It helps us to remember our ability to cope and resource ourselves to do so. With repetition, we can rewire the nervous system so the anxiety alarm becomes less sensitive to these types of threats.

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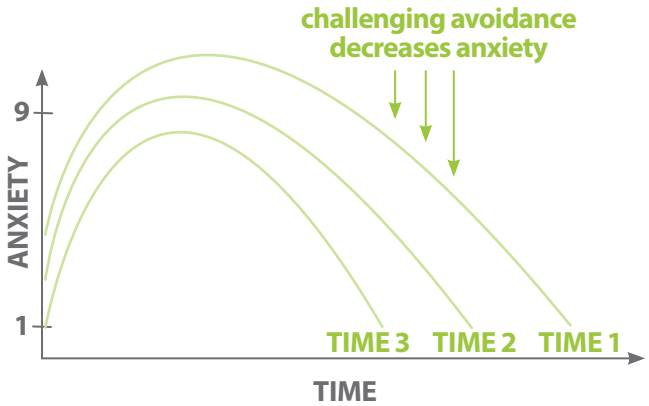

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

228

Exposure Therapy

Exposure Therapy involves exposing ourselves gradually, in a manageable and supported way, to fears that we wish to challenge. With repetition, this technique decreases the fear response.

One effective treatment for anxiety disorders is **Exposure Therapy**. When we assess that fear's urge to avoid is unhelpful in a particular situation, the treatment is to expose ourselves, gradually and with support, to the experience related to fear. This process helps to counter the **False Promise of Avoidance**. We learn to approach rather than to avoid, which ultimately decreases anxiety while increasing confidence.

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Just as with **Behavioural Activation**, the key to success is taking **baby steps**. As we achieve each small exposure, we increase our confidence that we can cope with similar scary situations. Our threat alarm system learns more from lived experience than it does from our attempts to self-reason through words alone. We still swap thoughts, though, to support us during exposures, such as with the **Anxiety Equation**. We remind ourselves that coping does not mean doing it perfectly, nor avoiding uncomfortable emotions. **Coping** means muddling through and completing the valued action while managing the uncomfortable feelings.

94

Proper planning of the steps in exposure therapy and support to tolerate uncomfortable feelings that arise may require the support of a therapist or therapy group.

The method starts with small challenges that incite low-level fear and repeats them until we feel comfortable. Once we're comfortable with smaller steps we progress to a harder one, then repeat that challenge until we're comfortable.

For example, living through the pandemic caused Charles to fear leaving his home, even though the public health officer had lifted many restrictions, he was fully vaccinated, and he had no health concerns that would make him vulnerable to COVID-19.

He recognized that his fear was not helping him to live a full life that was in line with his **values**. He began exposure exercises by reading a book outside in his yard, despite feeling uncomfortable and experiencing a high level of activation on the **Dial**. He practiced every day and noticed that the intensity of his reactions decreased.

208

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Example continues on the following page.

Once he felt comfortable reading outside, Charles practiced early morning walks around the block when there weren't many people around. Initially, his fear caused significant activation on the **Dial**, but each day that he practiced felt easier. He progressed to walking at busier times, then further distances. As he gained comfort, he practiced going into shops and visiting friends, and wore a mask indoors to protect himself and others. Although the progress was uncomfortable, challenging, and slow, he slowly rebuilt his life and was able to participate in activities that brought meaning and connection. As a result, his anxiety and **mood** improved tremendously.

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With practice, we learn to feel our feelings, and choose our behaviours.

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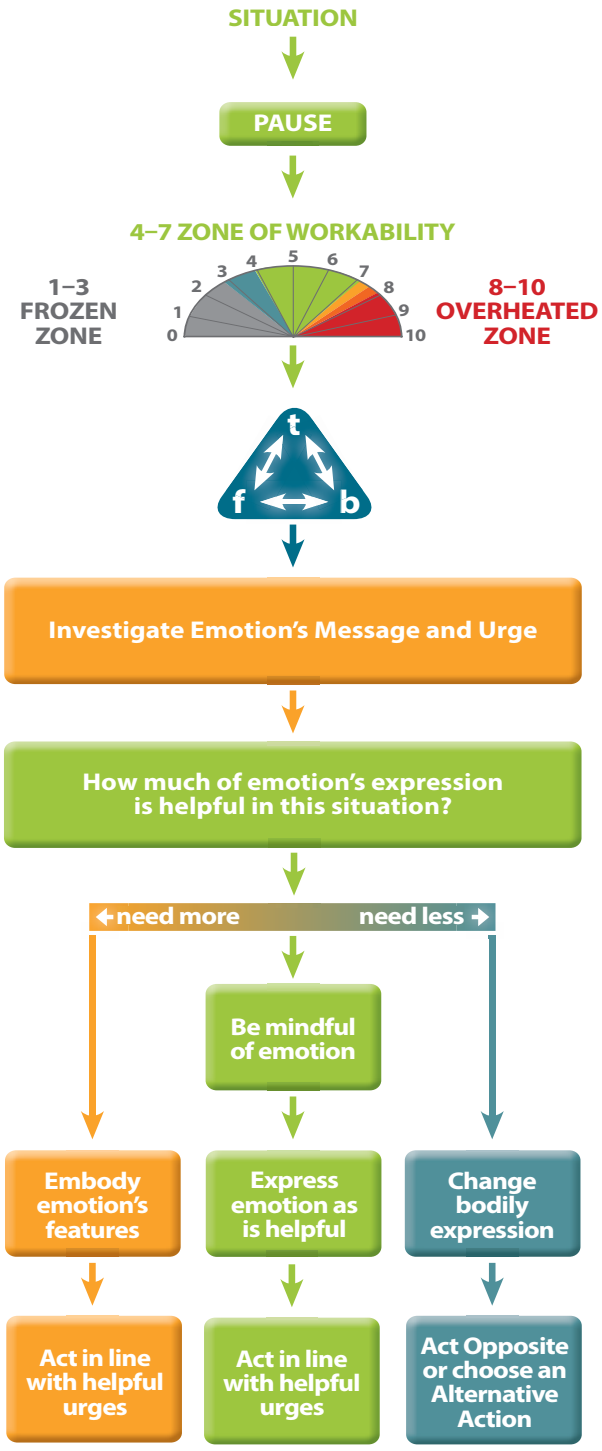
Avoidance is not the only reason that anxiety persists even when we know it is unhelpful. Sometimes anxiety is valued or even rewarded, either by ourselves or by those around us. Refer to *The Costs and Benefits of Anxiety* for further discussion of this aspect.

244



169 Working with Feelings and Behaviours: Examples

The following examples show how we can use the **STOPP** steps to help us process the messages of emotions and make decisions about expressing them, or adjust behaviours to shift them.

145 Allowing emotion and needing less of an urge: Mateo

In their spare time, Mateo loves to draw, and their partner has been encouraging them to enter a local competition. After some thought, Mateo decides to submit one of their favorite pieces. When results are posted, the piece is not included. Mateo feels heavy, hides in bed, and watches hours of television. They don't feel motivated to pick up around the house, do dishes, or shower. They ignore phone calls from their partner and from friends. Mateo is filled with thoughts that they should quit drawing altogether.

They recognize the experience has been hard, and 44 introduce some **self-compassion**. This strategy helps 115 them become more intentional, and they decide to 65 use the **STOPP** skill to **investigate**. First, they identify 13 sadness, and gauge it as a six on the **Dial of Activation**. 147 They **validate** the emotion, realizing that sadness makes sense because not being mentioned in the contest is a loss and a disappointment. They assess their thoughts and realize that some of the sadness may 74 be magnified by **mind reading**: assuming that others don't value or like their work, which may be untrue.

Example continues on the following page.

Mateo also recognizes that some thoughts represent **catastrophizing**: thinking they will never make it as an artist. This assumption is unfair after just one event, and is not helpful, considering there is more to art than winning contests. They realize their sadness is signalling that they value their artwork, and it matters that others haven't mirrored that. They **validate** the sadness and allow themselves to feel it, call their partner to talk, and have a releasing cry.

75 147

They realize that other urges they experience as a part of sadness, such as withdrawing to bed and stopping other activities are not helpful and are hindering the creation of art that is so important to them. They realize the behaviour is preventing them from experiencing other moments of pleasure and accomplishment, which is making their **mood** worse.

10

Mateo realizes that although their sadness is valid, it is being over-expressed and they want to decrease it on the **Dial**. They plan for **Opposite Action** to reduce the feeling and its urge. They get out of bed, adopt a **strength pose**, and play upbeat music. Although they suspect creating more artwork may help, that still feels too painful. Instead, they choose **Alternative Actions** like cleaning up, talking to their partner and friends, and taking their sketchbook to the couch. Gradually, when these **baby steps** don't reinforce sadness, Mateo feels more hopeful and their catastrophic thoughts decrease. Eventually, they remember why they love art in the first place. Beginning to draw again helps to shift their sadness **Triangle** further. With this increased perspective, they use the messages of sadness (that they value their art and wish others did too) to explore how they can receive more support to share their art and to cope with disappointments that can come with taking risks.

13 176 164 175 235 6

Recognizing that Opposite Action will be more helpful than acting on unhelpful urges: Sofia

Sofia arrives at her family physician's clinic for an appointment. The medical office assistant informs her that they must cancel at the last minute, with the earliest opportunity to rebook in three weeks. Sofia argues with the receptionist, saying that she needs the appointment sooner and has already waited two weeks for this one. The receptionist apologizes for the inconvenience, but states that the doctor had to assist at the hospital this afternoon and is no longer available. Sofia leaves in a foul state of mind, glares at a passersby, stomps heavily, and slams her car door shut. That's when she catches herself.

Sofia stops and takes a breath. She checks her **Dial of Activation**. Although she is quite activated, she can still think things through, so gauges herself at about six or seven on the Dial. She observes her emotions, bodily sensations, and urges. It is obvious to Sofia that she is angry. Her neck and shoulders are tense, she's gripping the steering wheel, her brow is furrowed, and she has an urge to march back into the clinic to give them a piece of her mind.

She understands that her anger is telling her that something important is being blocked. She needs to see the doctor but has to wait. She **validates** that it makes sense to feel this anger. Her health is important; she has made efforts to prioritize this appointment and get herself there, and that effort is in vain.

She asks herself whether acting on the urge would be helpful. The urge for anger is to approach the problem (sometimes forcefully). At the limbic level, sometimes there is an urge to fight. She realizes that she already acted on her urge by protesting and expressing anger inside, but that did not solve her problem. She asks herself if it would be helpful to keep confronting the problem, and realizes the answer (at least in the short term), is no. The response most likely to meet her needs would be asking to be placed on a cancellation list. This response would require her to decrease anger's expression using an **Alternative** or **Opposite Action**.

After validating that her anger makes sense, Sofia commits to doing an opposite bodily expression to decrease anger's activation. She softens her posture, loosens her grip on the steering wheel, and slows her breathing. She relaxes her face intentionally and adopts a gentle smile. While anger's urges can include lashing out and avoiding empathy for others, instead she chooses actions that are opposite. On the drive home, she does something nice by allowing another vehicle to enter the roadway in front of her, and notices anger decreasing when the driver gives her a wave. She plays upbeat music. When the scene at the clinic returns to her mind, she acknowledges again that her anger makes sense. She chooses an **Opposite Action** by practicing kindness for others: she makes a wish that the physician's hospitalized patients get well. By the time she gets home, she feels much less activated and is able to call and request to be on the cancellation list. She also problem solves, suggesting to the office assistant that it would be very helpful for patients if a cancellation list could accompany cancellation news, and/or if they could provide same-day appointments for patients in this position.

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Swapping thoughts and Alternative Action when an emotional signal is a false alarm: Shirley

90 175 117

Shirley works in sales, and her boss asks her to pitch an additional product to an important client. Though honoured, Shirley feels nervous, nauseous, and sweaty. She imagines fumbling the pitch, seeming unprofessional, or making an error that loses the client. She considers telling the boss that she is sick and going home to avoid the task.

At first, Shirley can't think straight. She realizes that she's in the Overheated Zone on the **Dial**. She takes a brisk walk on her lunch break (**Intense Activity**). Then, she chooses an **Alternative Action** by joking around with a colleague for a few minutes. After that, she feels more able to sit down and consider what her emotions are telling her.

13 17

Examples continue on the following page.

"Courage is not the lack of fear. It is acting in spite of it."

Mark Twain

115 Shirley practices the **STOPP** skill, and observes that whenever she imagines walking into the client's office, she feels nausea and breathlessness. She 75 notices the Thinking Trap of **catastrophization**. She notices urges to avoid, 125 and realizes the emotion is **fear**.

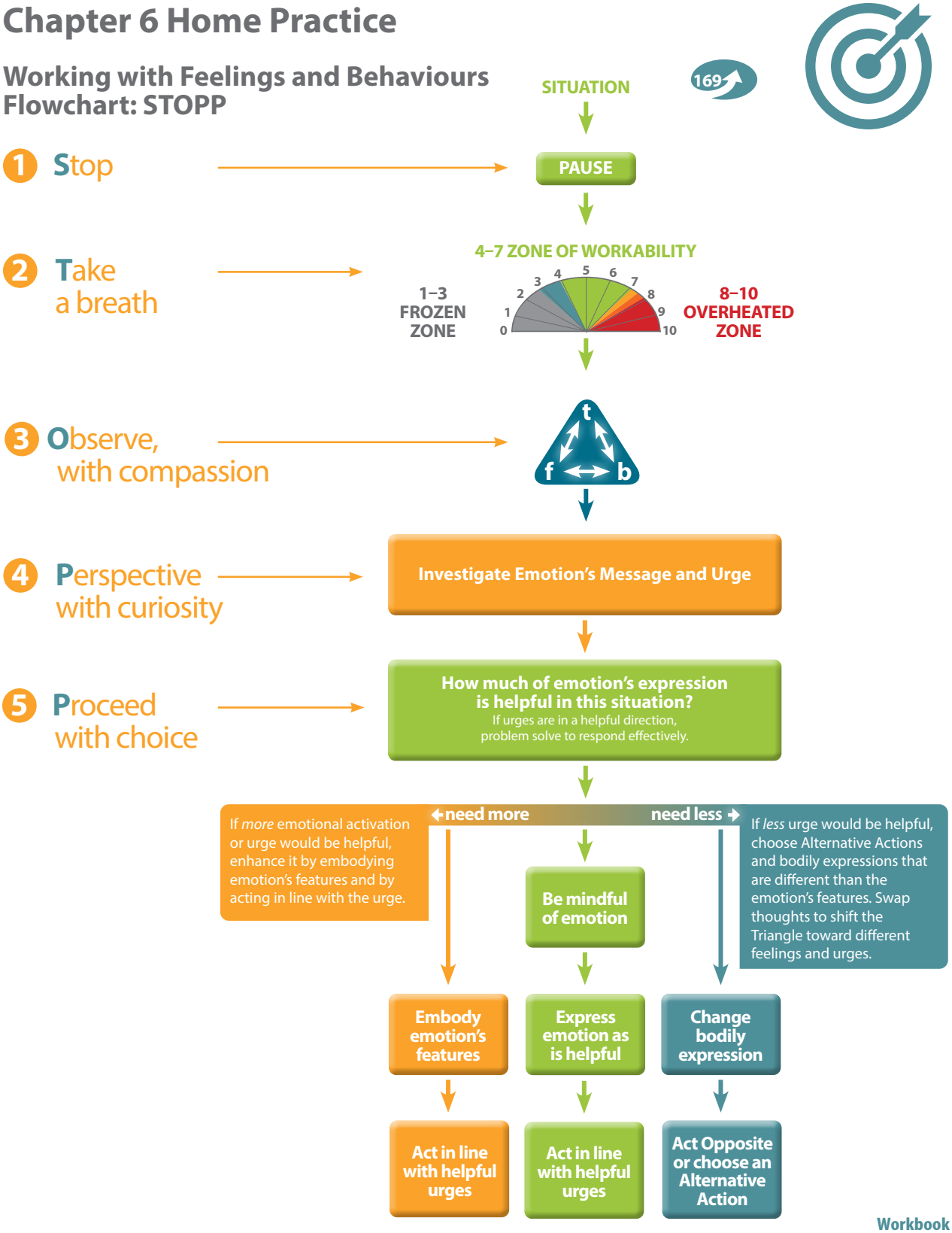
Shirley knows that fear signals potential threats. She considers what kind of threat is present. Most people feel uncomfortable presenting in front of 147 others, so she **validates** this fear. She's afraid of making a mistake that could affect her job, which is also a valid threat because she needs her job to pay the 94 bills. Then she thinks of the **Anxiety Equation** and how it can help to focus on both coping and noticing threats. She recalls that she's coped with pitches like this many times before and actually excels at them, which is exactly why her boss asked her to do it. Even if it goes poorly, it's unlikely to cost her the job because she has been with the company for a long time. She realizes that she is catastrophizing, and not noticing coping abilities. She swaps in the more balanced thought, "I feel nervous because performing in front of others is uncomfortable for most people. I do have the skills to handle it."

176 She commits to doing an **Opposite Action** to fear: to 'feel the fear and do it anyway'[1]. Shirley accepts the assignment and asks a colleague if she can practice pitching the software to her. When intimidating images come to mind, she recognizes them as *just fear thoughts* and re-engages with planning and preparation. She imagines the meeting: greeting the client with a confident posture, making eye contact, and engaging in the discussion. She imagines questions the client might ask, and plans how to respond.

1 Jeffers, S. (2007). *Feel the fear and do it anyway.* Vermilion.

Chapter 6 Home Practice

Working with Feelings and Behaviours Flowchart: STOPP



195 Working with Feelings and Behaviours Worksheet: STOPP

Evaluate some daily situations to notice what your emotions are trying to tell you, and the ways in which their action urges may be helpful. Use the flowchart to help you.

EXAMPLE

1 **STOP!**	You've already started this step by sitting down to think about the situation! You may write out your scenario (see exercise on the following pages) if that helps you, talk it out with someone, draw it, or choose another way to explore a situation and your response in depth.	
	What is the situation prompting the **Triangle**?	I was at the ocean with my kids. I have never learned to swim, and usually avoid going in at all. They wanted me to play catch with them in waist-deep water.
2 **TAKE a breath**	Practice something for a few moments to help ground you and bring you into the present moment. If you are outside the **Zone of Workability**, give yourself time, do a **DIAL Skill**, or engage in self-care until you are in the Zone of Workability.	
3 **OBSERVE**	Mindfully, and with compassion, notice:	
	Thoughts	It would be fun to play with them. But what if I can't get back to shore? I don't do water!
	Urges	Don't play, stay on beach
	Sensations	A bit activated: faster heart rate, stomach clenched
	Emotions	(circle the strongest one, or the one you want to work with) Excitement (Fear)
4 **PERSPECTIVE**	What is this emotion trying to tell me? What parts of it are helpful or accurate? "It makes sense that I feel this because…" Swap thoughts for what is not helpful.	It makes sense that I feel scared, because I haven't learned to swim and I am not used to being in the water. Water can be dangerous. My emotion is making sure I am aware that there is some threat. AND The threat right here is not significant: the beach here is shallow and the water is calm.

EXAMPLE (cont.)

PERSPECTIVE (cont.)	What aspects of the urge may be helpful? What may be unhelpful?	**Helpful:** It would be unsafe for me to go in deep water or into a current. **Unhelpful:** I will miss out and regret it if I don't play with my kids, because that is what brings me joy.
5 **PROCEED**	If urges are toward a helpful direction, act on them and problem solve: **More:** If more emotional activation or urge would be helpful, enhance by embodying the emotion's features and by acting in line with urges. **Less:** If urges are in an unhelpful direction or are too intense, choose **Alternative actions** and bodily expressions that are different than the emotion's features.	I need **LESS** of my urge to stay on the beach and avoid the water. **Opposite bodily expressions:** Stand up straight, relax muscles, especially in the face. Smile slightly. Make eye contact with my kids. **Alternative Actions:** Stand in water. Play catch!
NOTICE	What is the short-term outcome? What did you feel? What happened around you?	Very, very anxious when I first walked toward the water and stepped in. I asked the kids to throw the ball to me while I stayed in the shallow part.
	What is the long-term outcome? What did you feel? What happened around you?	I stayed knee deep and started playing. I kept my eyes on the game and didn't look back to the shore. I started having fun and decided to wade deeper, where I could play closer to my kids. My anxiety went up again, but when I continued playing, smiling, and focusing on the game, my anxious sensations decreased. My kids were thrilled that I came in and played with them! I felt proud of myself.

Exercise continues on the following two pages.

Working with Feelings and Behaviours Worksheet: STOPP

Evaluate some daily situations to notice what your emotions are trying to tell you, and the ways in which their action urges may be helpful. Use the flowchart and the example on the previous page to guide this exercise.

EXERCISE

1 **STOP!**	You've already started this step by sitting down to think about the situation! You may write out your scenario below if that helps you, talk it out with someone, draw it, or choose another way to explore a situation and your response in depth.	
2	What is the situation prompting the **Triangle**?	
TAKE a breath	Practice something for a few moments to help ground you and bring you into the present moment. If you are outside the **Zone of Workability**, give yourself time, do a **DIAL Skill**, or engage in self-care until you are in the Zone of Workability.	
3 **OBSERVE**	Mindfully, and with compassion, notice:	
	Thoughts	
	Urges	
	Sensations	
	Emotions	(circle the strongest one, or the one you want to work with)
4 **PERSPECTIVE**	What is this emotion trying to tell me? What parts of it are helpful or accurate? "It makes sense that I feel this because…" Swap thoughts for what is not helpful.	

PERSPECTIVE **(cont.)**	What aspects of the urge may be helpful? What may be unhelpful?	
5 **PROCEED**	If urges are towards a helpful direction, act on them and problem solve: **More:** If more emotional activation or urge would be helpful, enhance it by embodying the emotion's features and by acting in line with urges. **Less:** If urges are in an unhelpful direction or are too intense, choose **Alternative Actions** and bodily expressions that are different than the emotion's features.	
NOTICE	What is the short-term outcome? What did you feel? What happened around you?	
	What is the long-term outcome? What did you feel? What happened around you?	

Practice Strength Poses and/or Engineering Laughter.

What did you notice? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

My Good for Me(s) This Week

49

I can give myself credit that I invested time, energy, or effort in:_____

Notes

Finding What Matters

Pearls for this Chapter

- Identifying what's important for us helps us to build lives based on choice, rather than on habit.
- Values are like a compass that provides us with direction and help to know where we want to go.
- Goals are stops along the way that help us to chart our progress.
- Setting SMART goals makes our goals more effective.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Soles of the Feet[1]

This practice can be grounding, and raises our awareness of the present moment. Connecting to the **soles of our feet** allows us to get out of our minds. It is helpful when we are outside the **Zone of Workability** on the **Dial of Activation**, when we are feeling unanchored, or when the mind is very busy. This skill can be done on the move. Try it for between one and five minutes.

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In a standing position, notice the sensation of the soles of your feet contacting the floor. Try rocking forward and backward, and from side to side. Perhaps try making circles with your knees, feeling the changes of sensation in the soles of your feet. You may notice the four corners of each foot. When you notice your mind wandering, just feel the soles of your feet again.

If you wish, begin to walk slowly while noticing changing sensations in the soles of your feet. Notice the sensations of lifting one foot, stepping forward, then placing that foot back on the floor. Do the same with each foot as you walk.

This exercise can be adapted to sitting in a chair: lift the toes of one foot, then the whole foot. Set the foot back down, then repeat the exercise on the other side. Repeat the process multiple times, switching from one foot to the other while focusing your attention on the feeling of your soles on the floor or earth. You can also try practicing this exercise with your hands or fingers if one of those methods is more accessible to you.

If you like, remind yourself that you are supported, while noticing the feeling of stability beneath your feet. Remind yourself to connect to the present moment, perhaps using the words *here* and *now* as you set each foot down.

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1 This exercise was modified from the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion. centerformsc.org (Practice/Guided Meditations and Exercises/Soles of the Feet)

Originally adapted from Singh, N. N., Wahler, R. G., Adkins, A. D., Myers, R. E., & Mindfulness Research Group. (2003). Soles of the feet: A mindfulness-based self-control intervention for aggression by an individual with mild mental retardation and mental illness. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 24(3), pp. 158–169.

The Magic Wand Question: what does living a full and meaningful life look like for you?

Most people find that this exercise brings up a whole range of feelings: some warm and loving, others painful. Notice what you are feeling, and consider what these feelings tell you about what truly matters to you, and how you want to be in this world. You may also notice some things that you're not currently focusing on that do matter. Note these as well.

The Magic Wand Question[1]

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Values are unique and personal to each of us; therefore, we will attempt to help you explore what might be important for you. It's very important to make sure that your statements reflect how YOU want to live, what's important to YOU, and what matters to YOU—not how you think others want you to live.

In this imagination exercise, we will explore the following question:
What does living a full and meaningful life look like for you?

1. Imagine that I have a magic wand, and with a wave of this wand, all the things that have been getting in your way are no longer an issue. Your difficulties, stressors, depression, anxiety, sticky habits, or whatever has been tripping you up, just disappear.

   How would you want to live your life?

   What would be your heart's deepest desires for how you would want to behave?

   What qualities matter to you?

   Allow and notice whatever images, impressions, and thoughts come up for you.

2. Now, imagine that I wave this wand again, and the values you choose are accepted and supported by everyone around you. Everyone is absolutely fine with you living by the values that feel important to you. With this magic wand, you can have any values that you want.

   What values would YOU choose?

   What would YOU want to do with your life?

   What qualities would matter most to you?

1 Adapted from Harris, R. (2009). ACT made simple: A quick-start guide to ACT basics and beyond. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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3. Now, imagine that it's your ideal 90th birthday party. Two or three people whom you really care about (friends, children, and/or partner—you choose) make speeches about what you stand for, what you have contributed, what you mean to them, and the role you play in the world. In your *ideal* world, where you have lived as the person you want to be, what would you hear them saying?

The Magic Wand Question[1]

Imaginal exercise: You may write your reflections here after your facilitator guides you through this exercise.

1 Harris, R. (2009). *ACT made simple: A quick-start guide to ACT basics and beyond.* Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Many people list happiness as their top value, but emotional states aren't actually **values**. Happiness is a side effect of purpose, and of living in-line with our values.

If we do things that matter to us while embodying the qualities we value, we will experience happiness and other pleasant emotions more often, even if we are experiencing adversity.

Exploring Values

Mental health is not the absence of emotional pain and a flatline on happy. Instead, it's the capacity to live a bumpy, meaningful life that is in line with our **values**, while coping with the pain that comes along with it. So far, this course has focused on building greater capacity to be with our thoughts, feelings, and urges. By doing so, we can move toward creating a meaningful life that aligns with our values, rather than simply moving away from discomfort.

Dr. Russ Harris explores values as part of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in his book, *The Happiness Trap*[1]. Values reflect how we want to be and to act in this world, he teaches. Values are our compass, always available to consult for direction when we are lost.

Just as each of us has unique histories, privileges, beliefs, talents, traumas, and obstacles, we also hold individual values that describe how we want to relate to the world, to other people, and to ourselves. Values describe how we are being or acting in the world versus what we are doing specifically. To explore what values fit best for you, Harris suggests asking yourself the following questions:

- Deep down inside, what is important to you?
- What do you want your life to stand for?
- What sort of qualities do you want to cultivate as a person?
- How do you want to be in your relationships with others?

Many people list happiness as their top value, however, emotional states aren't values. Happiness is a side effect of purpose, and of living aligned with our values. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*[2], Jewish physician Viktor Frankl documents how focusing on meaning and purpose allowed him to survive torturous conditions as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps. "Happiness cannot be pursued," he wrote. "It must ensue. One must have a reason to 'be happy.'" If we do things that matter to us while embodying the qualities we value, we will experience happiness and other pleasant emotions more often, even if we are experiencing adversity.

1 Harris R. (2008) *The happiness trap: How to stop struggling and start living.* Boston: Shambhala.

2 Frankl, VE. (1962) *Man's search for meaning An introduction to logotherapy.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Values, which guide ongoing action, differ from goals. Goals are the points we want to achieve along the way. For example, a value is like heading North, while goals are reaching each new town on the journey. Goals can be completed and checked off, but values are always available as your compass to help direct ongoing action. If you value being creative, you can let that quality guide you whether you are working on a goal of making a piece of art, helping with a performance at your child's school, or planning your most effective workflow. After you have completed a goal, the value is still there to guide you in setting your next goal.

Values are also global: they aren't specific to one domain of life or activity. If you've been managing parenting or career goals and your circumstances change (perhaps your children move away, or you retire), you may notice a lack of direction because these goals and activities are no longer available to you. However, if you look at the underlying global values that gave those goals and activities meaning (being connected, being present, contributing, being playful, being creative, etc.), you can apply these values to decide which new pursuits will likely be meaningful.

Values vs. Goals

VALUES	GOALS
Qualities: *HOW* you are	Achievements: *WHAT* you do
Compass Directions	Destinations
Global	Depend on circumstances
Ongoing Action	Distinct Acts (Measurable)
In the Now	In the Future
Held Lightly	Exact

Values are global. They are not specific to one domain of your life.

Prioritize a handful of values that resonate with you, and refer to them as you make goals and decisions. Remember the **RESPOND vs REACT** diagram? Values can help you to determine what choosing to RESPOND might look like: what behaviours can you choose to best reflect being the person you want to be?

7

While values can be helpful to guide our lives, we may not really understand what our own values are without putting attention on this aspect of ourselves. Just as a plant requires sunshine to grow, we can shine a light on the values that we would like to nurture within us.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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There are no right or wrong values. This exercise merely asks you to identify which **values** are most important to you.

Clarifying Your Values[1]

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Below is a list of some common **values**. Remember, the list does not imply that they are *correct* values, but merely common ones. These words may help you to become more clear on what your values are.

Acceptance/self-acceptance:	to be accepting of myself, of others, and of life
Adventure:	to be adventurous, and to explore novel or stimulating experiences actively
Assertiveness:	to stand up for my rights respectfully, and to request what I want
Authenticity:	to be genuine, real, and true to myself
Caring/self-care:	to be caring to myself, to others, and to the environment
Challenge:	to rise to obstacles or difficulties, and to work toward overcoming them
Collectivism:	to consider and attend to the needs of others, and to contribute to the benefit of my community
Compassion/self-compassion:	to act kindly toward myself and to others who are in pain
Competition:	to be excited to keep score, to push myself, and to celebrate wins
Connection:	to engage fully in whatever I'm doing, and to be fully present with others
Contribution and generosity:	to contribute, give, help, assist, or share
Cooperation:	to be cooperative and collaborative with others
Courage:	to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
Creativity:	to be creative or innovative
Curiosity:	to be curious, open-minded, and interested; to explore and discover
Duty:	to commit to assist, respect, or support one's family, culture, country, or environment
Encouragement:	to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or in others

1 © Russ Harris 2013 russharris@actmindfully.com.au www.actmindfully.com.au

Excitement:	to seek, create, and engage in activities that are exciting or stimulating
Fairness and justice:	to be fair and just to myself and to others
Faithfulness:	to be loyal and committed to others or to my ideals and beliefs
Fitness:	to maintain, improve, or look after my physical and mental health
Flexibility:	to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
Freedom and independence:	to choose how I live and help others to do likewise
Friendliness:	to be friendly, congenial, or agreeable toward others
Forgiveness/self-forgiveness:	to be forgiving toward myself and to others
Fun and humour:	to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
Gratitude:	to be grateful for and appreciative of myself, of others, and of life
Honesty:	to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and with others
Humility:	to acknowledge not knowing, and to approach the world as a learner
Inclusion:	to build a culture of belonging everywhere that I go
Industry:	to be industrious, hardworking, and dedicated
Intimacy:	to open up, reveal, and share myself emotionally or physically
Kindness:	to be kind, considerate, nurturing, or caring toward myself and toward others
Love:	to act lovingly or affectionately toward myself and toward others
Mindfulness:	to be open to, engaged in, and curious about the present moment
Order:	to be orderly and organized

40

Persistence and commitment:	to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties
Recognition:	to be recognized, admired, and appreciated by others
Respect/self-respect:	to treat myself and others with care and consideration
Responsibility:	to be responsible and accountable for my actions
Safety and protection:	to secure, protect, or ensure my own safety and the safety of others
Sensuality and pleasure:	to create or enjoy pleasurable and sensual experiences
Sexuality:	to explore and express my sexuality
Skillfulness:	to practice and improve my skills continually, and to apply myself completely
Spirituality:	to contemplate and explore my connection to the sacred, and to engage in spiritual practices
Stability:	to promote predictability in patterns and routines
Supportiveness:	to be supportive, helpful, and available to myself or to others
Trust:	to be trustworthy, loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable

Feel free to add and identify your own value words to this list.

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Other values not listed above:

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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The Bull's Eye Exercise

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The Bull's Eye is a values-clarification exercise designed by Tobias Lundgren[1] and adapted by Russ Harris as a part of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).[2] We can divide our lives into different domains, such as relationships, leisure, work, education, volunteering, community involvement, personal growth, spirituality or religion, and health. Choose which domains resonate as important to you. On what areas do you want to focus that will help you to live a full, meaningful, healthy life?

The Bull's Eye is a useful exercise to help you clarify how closely your life is aligned to your own values.

For each domain, consider what values are relevant. How do you want to behave in this domain? Toward the world? Toward others? Toward yourself? What sort of personal qualities do you want to cultivate?

For each life domain, write out a few values that are relevant. Values may be repeated across several or all domains.

DOMAIN 1: _____

Relevant values: What do you want to cultivate? _____

_____

DOMAIN 2: _____

Relevant values: What do you want to cultivate? _____

_____

DOMAIN 3: _____

Relevant values: What do you want to cultivate? _____

_____

DOMAIN 4: _____

Relevant values: What do you want to cultivate? _____

_____

1 Dahl, J., Lundgren, T., Plumb, J., & Stewart, I. (2009). *The art and science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.* New Harbinger Publications.

2 Harris R. (2009). *ACT made simple: A quick-start guide to ACT basics and beyond.* Oakland: New Harbinger.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Place an X in each quadrant of the dart board to represent where you stand today.

The Bull's Eye:

1. List the domains of life on which you want to focus.
2. Place an X in each quadrant of the dartboard to represent how near or far you are from living in line with your **values** for that domain.

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3. From this snapshot, you may notice areas where there is a gap between your current behaviours and how you would like to live. You can narrow this gap by setting goals intentionally to cultivate wanted values (refer to the next exercise on **SMART Goals**).

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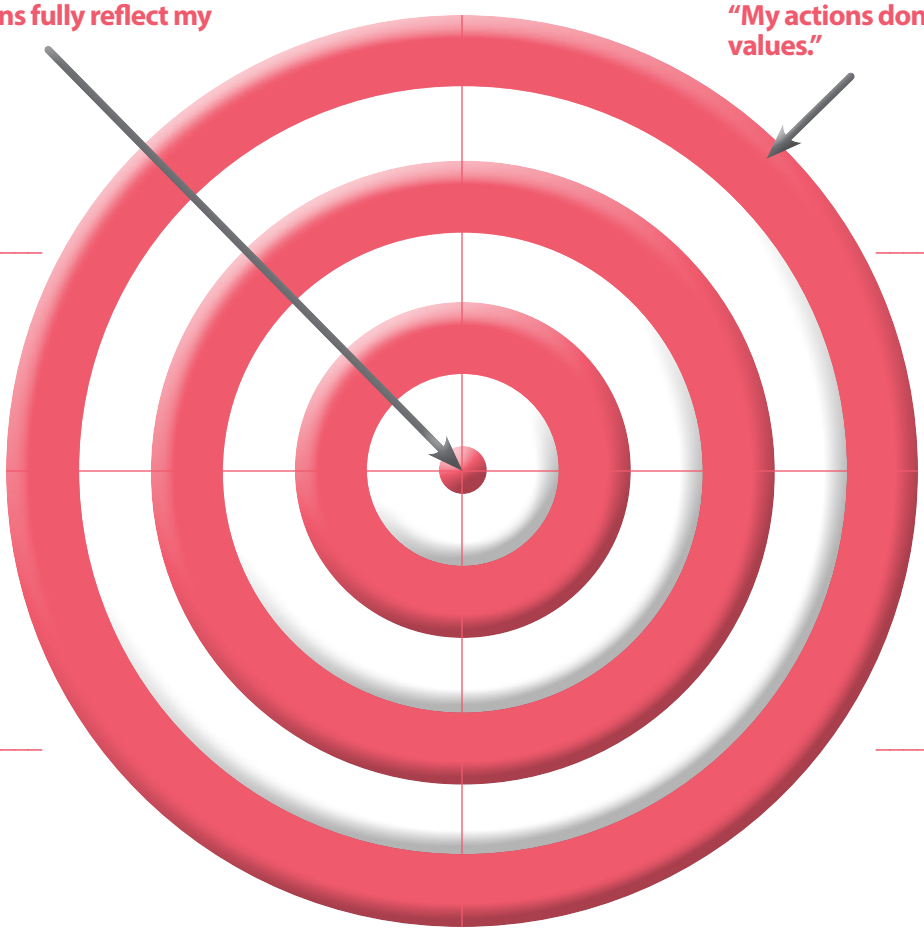
"My actions fully reflect my values."

"My actions don't match my values."



DOMAIN 1: _____

DOMAIN 2: _____

DOMAIN 3: _____

DOMAIN4: _____

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Setting Value-based SMART Goals

Use the **SMART** acronym to help make goals that are meaningful, achievable, and manageable. **SMART Goals** will help you to build confidence and momentum as you move intentionally in the direction of a **value** that is important to you at this time.

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SMART Goals are:

Specific: Specify the actions you will take, when and where you will take them, and who or what is involved.

Measurable: Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress. Write the goal in such a way that if others were watching, they would be able to recognize when you have completed it.

Attainable: Make sure your goal is realistic and attainable. Rate how confident you are that you can accomplish the goal, on a scale from one to 10. If your confidence is less than eight on the scale, break the goal into several smaller, more attainable goals.

Relevant: Is your goal guided genuinely by a personal value that is important right now? What is that value? Are you motivated to achieve your goal at this moment of your life?

Time-bound: Set a realistic date and time for completion of the goal. This strategy will both act as a helpful motivator and give you a sense of accomplishment when achieved.

Once you have set a SMART Goal, take committed action and remember to give yourself credit for your efforts, regardless of the outcome. Try to learn from what doesn't go well and celebrate your successes. Whenever we set a SMART Goal, we either get the outcome that we want, or the lesson that we need.

Once the time-bound deadline for your goal has passed, check in with yourself. How did it go? Did the **SMART Goal** actually move you in the direction of your value? Do you want to revise your goal, set another goal related to this value, or work with a different value?

Chapter 7 Home Practice

Work on a Value-based SMART Goal

Step 1: Value _____

_____

Domain _____

Step 2: For the purposes of this exercise, keep this goal small—something that can be done within the next week. What is the smallest, simplest step you could take in the direction of this value?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

☑ **Check that the goal is:**

Smart ☐

Measurable ☐

Attainable ☐ > **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**
(rate your confidence that you can complete the goal as written)

Relevant ☐

Time-bound ☐

Step 3: Are there any obstacles that could get in the way of completing this goal?_____

_____

_____

_____

What can you do to deal with these obstacles?:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Step 4: (After you have tried to complete the goal) How did it go? Do you want to re-set this goal, or to set another goal? Is there anything you would like to do differently? _____

_____

_____

Step 5: Give yourself credit and practice a **Good for Me**!

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Practice the Soles of the Feet Skill

What did you notice? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

My Good for Me(s) This Week

I can give myself credit that I invested time, energy, or effort in:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Notes

Looking Back and Moving Ahead

Review of Course Concepts

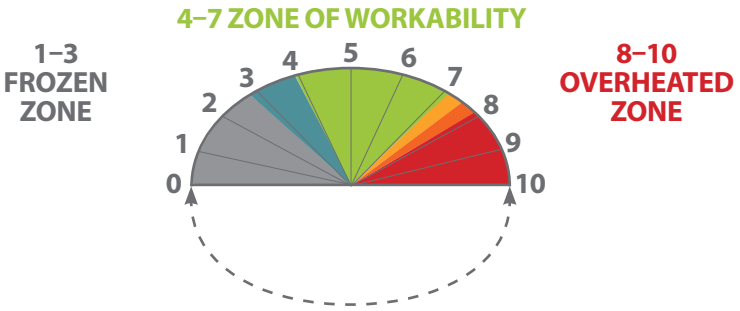
CONCEPT	ASSOCIATED SKILLS
• **Triangle of Experience**	Noticing, Curiosity, Non-judgment 6
• **Pausing, Grounding in the Present Moment**	One Breath 4
	Noticing the Dial of Activation 13
	Dunk, **I**ntense Activity, **A**bdominal Paced Breath, **L**et go of Tension (DIAL) 17
	Mountain Meditation 57
	Self-compassion 44
	5-4-3-2-1 89
	STOPP 115
	Soles of the Feet 205
	Nourishing Events 238
	Coping Thoughts 95
• **Mindfulness (awareness, acceptance)**	Doing Activities Mindfully 40
• **Identifying Situations and When You are in Autopilot**	STOPP Skill 115
• **Thoughts are just thoughts, not facts:** "A kernel of truth, surrounded by a shell of interpretation."	Strategies for Getting Distance from Thoughts 66
	Changing Thinking Traps 81
• **Hot Thoughts**	STOP-SPOT-SWAP 90
• **Core Beliefs**	Naming and Swapping Negative Core Beliefs 92
• **Thinking Traps**	THINK Acronym 97
• **Anxiety Equation**	Assessing Risk accurately 94
	Noticing Internal and External Resources 95
	Coping Thoughts 95
• **Feelings have Important Functions: communication and urging action**	Noticing the Message of the Emotion 129
	Noticing Secondary Emotions 130
	Working with Feelings 134
• **Dial of Activation, Zone of Workability**	Noticing Which Aspects of Urges may be Helpful/Unhelpful 165
• **Allowing Emotions and Letting Be**	Validation 147
	Mindfulness 40
	Self-compassion 44
	Breathing and Coping Thoughts 95
	Get Distance from Emotion 66
	Allowing Emotions and Letting Be 145

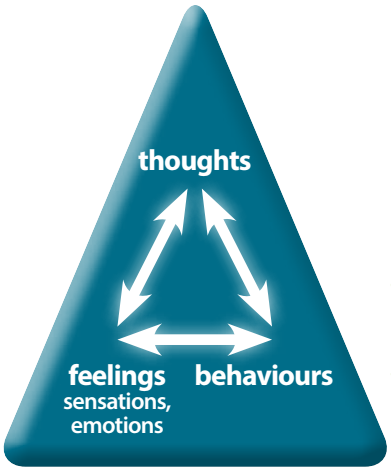
Review of Course Concepts

• **Working with Feelings and Behaviours Flowchart: STOPP: Decrease an Emotion's Expression or Urge**	**PAUSE**	38
	Healthy Distraction	21
	Self-compassion	44
	Validate the Kernel of Truth	59
	Working with Feelings and Behaviours	169
	Alternative Action	175
	Behavioural Activation	179
	Exposure Therapy	188
• **Working with Feelings and Behaviours Flowchart: STOPP: Increase an Emotion's Expression or Urge**	Validate Emotion	147
	Working with Feelings and Behaviours	169
	Embody Emotion's Features	171
	Act in Line with Emotion's Urges if helpful	171
• **Behaviours**	Nourishing and Depleting Events	48
	Good for Me(s)	49
	Energy Budget	234
	Baby Steps	235
	Chunk the Day	236
	SMART Goals	215
• **False Promise of Avoidance**	Opposite Action to Anxiety	176
	Exposure Therapy	188
• **Old and New Paths in the Forest of the Brain**	Using PAUSE to Choose	38
• **RESPOND vs. REACT**	Repetition and Practice	7
• **Finding and Moving Toward What Matters**	Identifying Values	208
	Setting Value-Based SMART Goals	215

A review of what we've learned in this course. Notice which of the concepts have been most relevant for you.

CBT Skills Take-Home Points





- We can understand our response to a given situation as having three interrelated parts: thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Feelings consist of both bodily sensations and emotions.
- Emotions are helpful! They motivate action, and communicate with ourselves and with others about what we need, and what we value.
- We can work with our emotions most effectively within the **Zone of Workability** on the **Dial of Activation**. Sometimes, we use skills intentionally to adjust where we are on the Dial so that we can **RESPOND** effectively.
- We can have habits of thinking, habits of feeling, and habits of behaving. We develop these habits—which may be helpful or unhelpful—through repetition. Though they are wired into our brains, we can change them through awareness and practice (**neuroplasticity**).
- We can use mindful awareness to allow ourselves to notice our habits with compassion and curiosity. This awareness allows us to **PAUSE**, and then to use **mindfulness** and **investigation** skills in order to choose more helpful responses.

- Often, we need to get more information about emotions in order to understand them.
  - Once we identify emotions by exploring their features, we can see their **functions** more clearly, and we can notice what messages they are signalling and how they are urging us to act. 129
  - We can then use the **Working with Feelings and Behaviours Flowchart**, asking ourselves how much of an emotion's expression is helpful in the situation. If needed, we can regulate our response up or down, and choose which urges we act on. 169
- We can influence feelings by looking at both thoughts and behaviours:
  - **Thoughts:** Thoughts are not facts; they are simply passing mental events. They are influenced by the past, by feelings, and by evolutionary **negativity bias**. Through awareness, we recognize patterns of thoughts and underlying **core beliefs**. We have a choice about whether to go on believing our thoughts, or to **SWAP** in more flexible or helpful alternatives. **Thinking Traps**, the **Anxiety Equation**, and the **THINK Acronym** are tools that help us to SWAP thoughts. 92 90 81 94 97
  - **Behaviours:** All emotions are associated with urges. When emotion-related urges are unlikely to be helpful, we can choose **Alternative** or even **Opposite Actions** to decrease the intensity of these urges. At other times, we may benefit from enhancing an emotion's expression or urge by adopting an emotion's posture intentionally, or by acting in line with its urges. 176
- Defining **values** helps us to move in directions that are important to us, to resolve conflicting priorities, and to set relevant goals for ourselves. 208

We can influence our feelings by using skills to change thoughts and behaviours.

Personal Reflections

This page is a place for you to capture some of what has been meaningful to you in this course. You can look back through the chapters to help you remember what was helpful.

Consider:

- Why did you come to this course? Why did you stay?
- What has worked well for you, and why?
- What are some pearls you hope to remember?

Also consider:

- What skills do you want to develop further?
- What topics would you like to learn more about?
- What areas of self-awareness would you like to explore further?

Moving Ahead

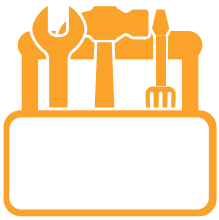
Sometimes, circumstances may make it more challenging to remember the things you've learned. Building new habits takes time and effort, and perhaps you have just started on a path with this course.

What can you do to help yourself stick with one or two of the skills and habits that are important to you? You may wish to discuss your progress with your doctor, or with a friend, and ask them to check in with you. You could keep your *CBT Skills Group Foundations Course Workbook* somewhere handy to help you through tricky moments. You may also wish to use an app that reinforces these skills (see Resources at mind-space.ca). Write your ideas here: _____

Take some time to think about which skills from this course you would like to continue practicing, and what strategies will help you to stay on track.

It is helpful to identify the specific signs that indicate you are experiencing more symptoms of distress. You can think of these as **red flags**. For example, some red flags for a person who has had depression in the past might be cancelling plans, decreased eating, or being more irritable. Other types of red flags may be urges to use substances, decreased sleep, or avoiding wanted activities. By identifying them now, you will be more aware of them when they occur and be able to make conscious choices.

What are some **red flags** for you that can alert you to be more conscious about applying **CBT skills**?



Remember this icon throughout the *Workbook*? In the space provided, list the skills that you checked as your favourites.

This list is an excellent resource to share with your primary care practitioner so that they can support you most effectively.

Creating Your Personal CBT Skills Toolbox

5 Throughout this **CBT Skills Foundations** program, dozens of **CBT** skills have been presented so that you are able to experiment with various strategies. It is not expected that you will remember or benefit from all of these skills—some will likely resonate with you, or impact you, more than others.

Perhaps you made note of these favourite skills by placing a check mark in the toolbox icons provided at the top of each skill page. Take a moment to flip through the *Workbook* and list which skills worked best for you, so that you can find them easily. The *Review of Course Concepts* and the *Toolbox of CBT Skills* may be helpful.

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Skill	Page Number

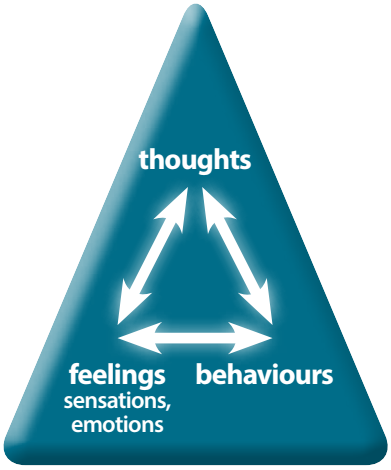
Turning Stumbling Blocks Into Stepping Stones

Appendix A: TROUBLESHOOTING

"The important thing about a problem is not the solution, but the strength we gain in finding a solution."

Seneca

What Stumbling Blocks Are You Encountering?



BEHAVIOUR STUMBLING BLOCKS	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Are you trying to do too much?	**Energy Budget** 234 **Baby Steps** 235 **Chunk the Day** 236
Are you focusing only on difficult activities?	Balance things out by adding some **nourishing activities** 238

If you are encountering **BEHAVIOUR-related** stumbling blocks, experiment to see if one of these skills may be helpful.

Appendix A: TROUBLESHOOTING

If you are encountering **FEELING-related** stumbling blocks, experiment to see if one of these skills may be helpful.

FEELING STUMBLING BLOCKS	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Are you overwhelmed by your feelings?	Check your **Dial** and work on choosing a skill that is as intense as the level of activation to move into the **Zone of Workability**. When very low or very high on the Dial, we need more engaging skills, like **DIAL Skills** or **Alternative Action**. 13 17 17 175
Are painful feelings still present?	**Practice Allowing Emotions:** Living a full life involves experiencing uncomfortable feelings; it is not a sign of doing it wrong. Experiment with ways to **allow emotions** and to **give up the struggle with emotions.** 145 242
Are you finding it hard to allow and feel emotions, even in the Zone of Workability?	• **Get distance** from thoughts and feelings 66 • Become curious about the emotion and its message and urge • Focus on what aspects of the urge may be **helpful or not** 165 • **Self-validation** and **self-compassion** 147 44

THOUGHT STUMBLING BLOCKS	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
"I'm doing it all, and I'm still struggling. The intense feelings and difficult thoughts have not gone away."	Remember that the goal is not to get rid of difficult mental states, but to manage them with less struggle and to use our energy for what we value. Try skills for **getting distance** and for **surviving difficult feelings**. 66 240
"I don't want to do this."	Examine all sides of your feelings, considering **pros and cons**, and (for anxiety) considering the **costs of continuing** the path that you're on. 243 244
"I'm not doing it perfectly."	Review the role of **perfectionism** and ways of addressing it. 246
"I'll do it later."	Review the role of **procrastination** and ways of addressing it. 247
"I am not doing a good job of changing." "There are still so many things I wish were different."	Try **Good for Me(s):** notice and give yourself credit for things you *are* doing. 49

If you are encountering **THOUGHT-related** stumbling blocks, experiment to see if one of these skills may be helpful.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Energy Budget[1]

Every day, we wake up with **resources** available to use that day. These resources include energy, time, motivation, and a sense of wellbeing. The amount available to us will change from day to day, and even over the course of the day.

Refuel your energy: top up your tank.

If we spend more resources than we have, we end up feeling drained. The lower our **mood** or more stressed we are feeling, the fewer resources we tend to have. For example, if we have the flu, we will not have the same amount of energy to complete everyday tasks. Similarly, if we are experiencing an episode of depression or a stressful event, we will not have the same amount of energy as usual to deal with other commitments.

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We need to be aware of the resources we have at any given time so that we can figure out what is reasonable for us to accomplish. It's important to start with where we are: neither where we used to be, nor where we feel we should be. We cannot build the future effectively unless we start from where we are in the present.

The temptation when we get a little more energy is to spend it *all*! But spending it all can lead to a crash and burn cycle; we usually need to keep a little in reserve.

Try doing a task, then giving yourself a break. Resting or doing something nourishing to take care of yourself is a way of replenishing the budget.

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1 Adapted from General Practice Services Committee (2015), *CBIS: Cognitive Behavioural Interpersonal Skills, p. 47–48*. Retrieved from http://www.gpscbc.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/AMH_004.0_CBIS_Manual_v3.0_PR.pdf

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Baby Steps[1]

When we are experiencing difficulty, it can be challenging to change our patterns and behaviours. It is important to begin with small steps or goals. If we try to do too much, too fast, we become overwhelmed and can end up feeling worse. However, accomplishing even one small thing can help us to feel a little better in the moment, and can improve our motivation to do other things.

Select a small goal:

- Choose a small task, and pick a time to do it. The task should be easy to complete. Set your goals around tasks that you could do even if you feel very sad, or don't have much energy.
- Be specific about what, when, and how you are going to it. For example, a goal might be to ***read five pages of the book on my nightstand this Thursday evening*** rather than *read a book*.

If you don't complete the goal, don't give up. Choose another time, or break your goal into smaller parts. Can you break your current goal into two steps? Five steps? For example: ***read five paragraphs in my book this Thursday evening***.

It is easier to know when you have reached goals involving actions and thoughts than those involving emotions, so focus on these types of goals. When you meet your goal, give yourself a **Good for Me**. Even if you don't meet your goal as you define it, give yourself credit for the effort you made, and notice what new information you gained through your efforts.

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What is the smallest first step you can take toward your goal?

1 Adapted from General Practice Services Committee (2015), *CBIS: Cognitive Behavioural Interpersonal Skills, p. 49–50*. Retrieved from http://www.gpscbc.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/AMH_004.0_CBIS_Manual_v3.0_PR.pdf

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Break tasks into time chunks, then make it a goal to work on one chunk.

Chunk the Day[1]

If you're finding it hard to meet your intentions, try setting your goal in terms of *time* rather than *task*. We call this **chunking the day.**

- Decide on the smallest amount of time that you think you might be able to spend on a task. Ten minutes? One hour? Somewhere in between?
- Decide when you will do the chunk of time. Tell yourself, "I only have to keep going for this chunk, then I can stop."
- When the chunk is over, you can decide to rest, continue with what you were doing, or do something different. You can complete your whole day in chunks.

While we are taking care of the things we need to do, it is important to pay attention to which activities nourish us and to those that deplete us. When we have to do depleting activities, chunking them can help to prevent procrastination on one hand, or overdoing it and depleting the energy budget on the other.

1 Adapted from General Practice Services Committee (2015), *CBIS Cognitive Behavioural Interpersonal Skills Manual, p. 53*. Retrieved from http://www.gpscbc.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/AMH_004.0_CBIS_Manual_v3.0_PR.pdf

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Taking Care of Yourself: Recognizing Basic Needs[1]

Often, we do not respect and meet our basic human needs. Sometimes, we may not even recognize these things *as* basic needs, and yet they are essential for emotional wellbeing.[1] Consider these psychological needs and the extent to which these are being met in your life. Until these needs are met, be aware that it will likely be more difficult for you to introduce new challenges and habits. Also, ask yourself what **baby steps** you may take in order to have the needs fulfilled.

- Having the respect of significant others
- Feeling of physical safety and security
- Being financially secure enough to meet basic needs
- Friendship and the attention of others
- Guidance as needed and wanted
- Being listened to
- Being able to express feelings, and to have those feelings **validated**

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- Having a sense of belonging/connection
- Having the ability to play and have fun
- Having a sense of freedom and independence
- Feeling loved and valued
- Feeling confident and competent in some area
- Having a sense of trust and loyalty
- Having the freedom to express sexuality
- Having a sense of accomplishment
- Developing sense of spirituality
- Being able to contribute and/or create
- Feeling connected to nature

"An empty lantern provides no light. Self-care is the fuel that allows your light to shine brightly."

Unknown

1 Bourne, E.J. (2011). *The anxiety and phobia workbook, Fifth edition.* New Harbinger.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Taking Care of Yourself: Nourishing Activities

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This exercise is a different kind of **Good for Me**. It includes some suggestions for ways you might find physical, emotional, spiritual, or intellectual comfort, and ways to nourish your spirit, your body, and/or your soul.

There are many things you can do when you need a lift, or a break. Savour the time spent taking care of yourself.

You may recognize some of these behaviours as things you turn to—without thinking—when you need a lift or a break. Try building up your list, both with the tried and true, and with new possibilities. Think about activities that bring a sense of pleasure, joy, strength, peace, or confidence. The idea is to enjoy the time spent taking care of yourself.

- Talk with a friend or friends
- Exercise
- Dance
- Sit and watch the ocean
- Sing
- Ponder the mysteries of the universe in nature, in prayer, and/or in meditation
- Read a poem out loud
- Have a cup of tea
- Take a bubble bath
- Blow bubbles
- Colour a picture
- Paint or draw something
- Watch a funny video: babies laughing can bring a smile
- Watch a movie that makes you feel good
- Listen to a great playlist
- Visit a nursing home and read to somebody
- Volunteer to babysit: someone needs your help
- Lie in a hammock
- Wear a favourite piece of clothing
- Listen to a choir
- Learn to play an instrument
- Listen to a relaxation exercise (e.g., Mindshift app)
- Play a board game or a game of catch
- Play with a child or a pet

- Visit an old favourite: a book, movie, or video
- Wrap up in your favourite blanket (if you have one)
- Go on a picnic
- Go to a park: look at the flowers, listen to the birds, play on the swings
- Buy some flowers
- Paint your toenails
- Have a massage
- Look at old photos
- Create something
- Cook a favourite meal
- Get a (washable) tattoo
- Splash in a child's pool
- Walk through a puddle
- Meander
- Lie on the beach
- Go ice skating
- Learn a few words of another language
- Smile at and for yourself
- Go paddling or rowing
- Look at the stars
- Watch a cloud
- Put on your favourite slippers
- Take a hike
- Fix something easy
- Bake some cookies
- Play a game of pool
- Rearrange your room: get a fresh start/perspective
- Go for a drive or bicycle ride
- Shave, paying attention to the sensations
- Tinker
- Explore your neighbourhood
- Sing with a choir
- Write a poem or a song
- Spend time with your faith community
- Work on a jigsaw puzzle
- Volunteer at a charity
- Engage in spiritual practices such as yoga, meditation, reading sacred texts, or prayer
- _____
  _____
- _____
  _____

Build up your own list of favourites and keep it on hand for moments when you need some extra nurturing.

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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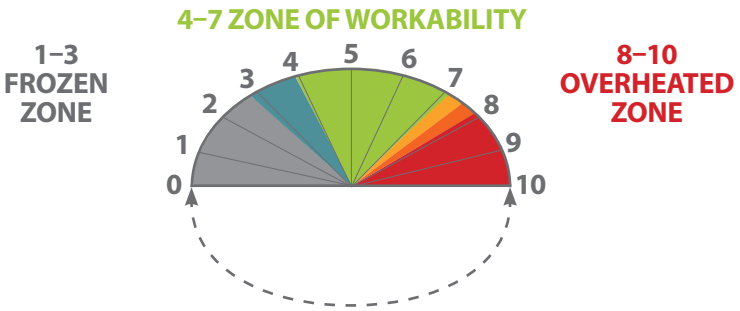
Tips for When Feelings Are Difficult



Match Skill Intensity to Intensity on the Dial of Activation

13 17 21 175

To cope with being high on the **Dial of Activation**, use high intensity skills such as a **DIAL Skill** (e.g., Dunk your face, Intense Activity), or very engaging distraction **activities** such as dancing, yoga, video games, or arts and crafts. Engaging in an **Alternative Action** (especially one that may be nourishing or counter to the emotion that is driving activation) can support a shift into the **Zone of Workability**.

Emotions are useful! The goal is not to eliminate emotions; they serve us in many ways.

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Practice Allowing Emotions

Remember that the goal is not to eliminate emotions, even when they are uncomfortable or distressing. It is helpful to remember that many emotional reactions are normal and expected. Just because something feels bad, doesn't mean it is bad for you. Feelings tell us (and others) what's important and prepare us for action. Many feelings are necessary (for example, the intense grief experienced after a loss of a loved one).

Here are some strategies you can use to coach yourself through distressing emotions:

- **Ride the wave.** The sensations that make emotions so uncomfortable are always in flux. Although intensity can be very high, it cannot stay that way forever. "This too shall pass."
- **Get analytical about the emotion's pattern and function. Investigate** the situation that has led to this emotion. Locate the sorts of *bodily sensations* you associate with this feeling. Investigate the message of the emotion, and consider what data it reveals about the situation.
- **Re-frame the emotion.** Look for a way to see the emotion as helpful rather than 'bad'. For example, stress can be seen as the body's response to a challenge. For more information about this strategy, watch Kelly McGonigal's TED Talk entitled, *How to Make Stress Your Friend.*
- **Use a coping thought.** Re-visit the section on Coping Thoughts to remind you of your capacity to get through it.
- **Get distance from the emotion:** Say, "I'm having the emotion of anger", rather than, "I am angry". See the section on ***Mindfulness: Getting Distance from Thoughts*** and ***Practical Skills to Help with Allowing Emotions*** for other ways of getting a bit of distance between yourself and the experience.
- **Avoid Thinking Traps.** Revisit Thinking Traps. Notice whether or not you are **catastrophizing** about the emotion itself. For example, do you hear yourself thinking, "Feeling this way is the worst. I can't bear it," or **over-generalizing** by thinking, "I always feel this way,"?

Keep in mind that to build your capacity to choose the **RESPOND** Pathway using **CBT Skills**, you will have to endure some distressing emotional experiences. *The magic happens when you go outside of your comfort zone.* It is okay to be uncomfortable. Know that you can use the skills you have been learning, **Good for Me(s)**, and ways to take care of yourself in order to keep the work within your safety zone.

"What we resist, persists."

C.G. Jung

Strategies for Giving Up the Struggle with Emotions

Carl Jung said famously, "What we resist, persists." The reverse is also true in many situations: "What we can feel, we can heal."

We can't get away from our inner world: our thoughts, our emotions, and our sensations. They live with us! By changing our relationship to these things when they are unpleasant, and by living WITH rather than fighting AGAINST, we free ourselves to do things that are important to us.

One image that may help you to live with persistent feelings that are uncomfortable is to imagine them as keys on a key chain. For example, you could imagine your nervousness, dread, and disappointment as three keys you are carrying. Just as your keys go with you everywhere but don't determine the course of the day, so can you live with these feelings and still pursue what is important to you.

Another analogy is to imagine that your worst fears are playing out in front of you like a horror movie. When we are in **autopilot**, it feels like an IMAX film, with all the lights out and surround sound—as though it is our entire reality. However, when we find the **PAUSE**, this film shifts to a small monitor off in the corner. We turn the lights on, and we can notice other things in the room. The movie (thoughts, emotions, sensations) is still playing, but it is no longer taking centre stage.

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IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU,
PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Lacking Motivation? Pros and Cons of Change

When you have mixed feelings, feel torn, or have low motivation about wanting to change, consider the pros and cons for both changing and staying the same. You can do this exercise for any type of change you are considering.

Consider the pros and cons for changing, and for staying the same.

	PROS/BENEFITS	CONS/COSTS
STAYING THE SAME		
CHANGING		

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Considering the Costs and Benefits of Anxiety[1]

Sometimes we resist changing an anxiety pattern because, in some ways, the anxiety is helping us, or we believe it is helping us. We may need to raise awareness of these pros and cons. Check below to see what benefits anxiety has brought you and what it has cost you.

BENEFITS OF HAVING ANXIETY	COSTS OF HAVING ANXIETY
You are anxious about doing a good enough job, so you work harder than others. Your employer lets you know how much you are valued, which makes you feel good.	When you are not at work, you still think about work, worrying if you did things correctly. You may take work home. Your stress affects your family because you are too busy and irritable to spend time with them.
You are anxious that people won't like you, so you do everything you can to please them. People talk about how kind, helpful, and generous you are.	People get used to you being helpful, and start to take advantage of you. People stop appreciating your efforts so you have to try harder to please them. No one seems to think your needs are important and you feel resentful.
You are afraid that things will go wrong, so you always plan very carefully. You are vigilant and often catch things when they start to go wrong so that you can head off bigger problems.	You over-plan everything, and get stressed if the least little thing goes wrong. Your over-planning takes fun and spontaneity out of events. You are constantly on guard and can't relax.
You are afraid to make mistakes, so you do a thorough job of any tasks you take on. People know they can rely on you to do everything well.	You are so afraid of a mistake that you do things over and over, which takes an excessive amount of time and makes you less productive. You procrastinate because you don't think you can do the task perfectly.
You are afraid that if your life gets out of control there will be total chaos, so you are very organized and orderly. People perceive your orderliness as a valuable trait at work or at home.	You spend so much time organizing and trying to keep things under control that you feel constantly stressed and overwhelmed. You are tough to live with because you require everyone else to be as organized as you.

The goal is to balance the benefits and costs so that you keep some of the benefits and don't pay such a heavy price. It is challenging because anxiety tries to push you to do more: more checking, more planning, more working, more organizing, more worrying, and more avoiding.

What are the Benefits of Limiting Anxiety?

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On the other hand, if you were to stop fueling anxiety related to wanted activities with **Thinking Traps** and **avoidance**, you would likely enjoy feeling more relaxed and comfortable, being able to play and have fun, other people being more comfortable around you, getting some of your own needs met, being appreciated even if you are not perfect, feeling better about yourself, and/or sleeping better.

5

"Feel the fear, and do it anyway."

Susan Jeffers

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Weigh the costs: as you begin to apply **CBT skills** for anxiety, you may be drawn back into established, anxiety-driven habits such as avoidance. This tendency occurs because, as you practice **Alternative Actions** (especially if you are engaging in an **Opposite Action**), you will experience more distress initially: a surge of thoughts or feelings you have avoided in the past. It can be helpful to remind yourself that although it costs to make changes, being ruled by anxiety costs more. Reassure yourself that the short-term pain needed to challenge anxiety will result in long-term gain.

1 Adapted from General Practice Services Committee (2015), *CBIS Cognitive Behavioural Interpersonal Skills Manual*. Retrieved from http://www.gpscbc.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/AMH_004.0_CBIS_Manual_v3.0_PR.pdf

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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The Pitfalls of Perfectionism

Perfectionism usually involves:

- unrealistically high standards
- judging self-worth largely on the achievement of such standards
- continued striving despite negative consequences

People often view perfectionism as positive, believing that it boosts achievement. The paradox of perfectionism is that it often gets in the way of happiness and can actually impair performance.

Perfectionism often stems from rigid and/or unreasonable rules and assumptions (for example, "I must never make mistakes"). More helpful rules and assumptions are realistic, flexible, and adaptable.

Perfectionist behaviours include excessive checking of work, excessive organizing, list making, correcting others, and excessive slowness with tasks.

When perfectionists fear that they will not be able to reach their high standards, they may be too afraid of failure to even try. Some may procrastinate by putting off a task (often indefinitely), while others will wait until the last minute before doing a task, give up too soon, or be very indecisive.

There are three approaches to liberating yourself from perfectionism:

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1. Challenge these rules and assumptions and **SWAP** in more flexible and helpful thoughts. For example, try telling yourself that, "good enough is good enough," or that, "practice makes progress".

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2. Practice **Alternative Action:** Practice imperfection. Carefully choose situations where you can make small mistakes without dire consequences, practice remembering that you can manage the distress of making mistakes. For example, send texts with spelling mistakes.

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3. Connect with your **values**: What underlying values are driving your perfectionism? For those who value connection, armouring up with perfectionism may feel necessary to keep one's place in the group. But is perfectionism really supporting your values? Do your high standards push away connection by frustrating or criticizing others? Do you spend so much time stuck on details that there's no time to connect? Would vulnerability foster connection more than perfection?

"Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

Voltaire

"Healthy striving is self-focused: 'How can I improve?' **Perfectionism** is other-focused: 'What will they think?'"

Brené Brown

"Imperfections are not inadequacies; they are reminders that we're all in this together."

Brené Brown

IF THIS SKILL SEEMS TO WORK WELL FOR YOU, PLACE A CHECK MARK IN THE TOOLBOX

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Pushing Back Procrastination

Procrastination is a common problem even for those who aren't perfectionists.

At the heart of procrastination is *feeling* or anticipating discomfort about doing a task or goal that you are facing. If you detest a particular type of discomfort, you will be more likely to procrastinate to avoid that discomfort. This strategy creates the situation where you are discomfort driven: you **REACT** from the discomfort that is guiding your behaviour.

7

Procrastination is a problem of avoiding some type of discomfort.

Procrastination is a problem of avoidance. It can be helpful to see that what you are avoiding is a feeling (i.e., of discomfort)—nothing more, and nothing less.

A helpful way to address procrastination is to increase your tolerance for discomfort. Try reminding yourself of these statements: "I don't like discomfort, but I can stand it. I can stay with it, and I can get through it. I can tolerate it." At the same time, focus on what is truly important, rather than only on the discomfort. See *Tips for When Feelings are Difficult* for help to tolerate uncomfortable feelings. The more you ride out the discomfort, the greater your tolerance, and the less procrastination will rule your life.

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Other tips for dealing with procrastination:

- **Baby Steps** 235
- **Chunk the Day** 236
- **Self-Compassion** 44
- **Mind Space** offers a Level 2 course on Avoidance that explores perfectionism and procrastination in detail

Notes

Development of a Mental Health Condition

In this course, we have discussed ways that the mind helps us, and ways that it works against us. While these functions of the mind are true for all humans, some people experience significant difficulty as a result of their mind's functioning.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* is the guide doctors use to diagnose **mental health conditions**. These conditions are defined as the experience of a specific number of characteristic symptoms for a specified duration of time, in a way that causes the person significant distress or interferes with their life in significant ways. A major depressive episode, for example, occurs when someone experiences a low **mood** or loss of interest every day for at least two weeks, along with changes in eating, sleeping, energy, and concentration.

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What Causes Mental Health Conditions?

While this question is complex, one way to understand the interplay of inherited factors with life events is to use the analogy of jars.

We all are born with the genetic vulnerability to have a mental health problem. Many different genes can make us vulnerable to mental illness, as indicated by yellow circles in the drawing. We each have a different amount of theses vulnerability genes. Even our siblings will have a different random inheritance of vulnerability genes, because we can inherit so many combinations from our parents.

Mental Illness Jars[1]

Jehannine Austin, Canada Research Chair and Professor of Medical Genetics at the University of British Columbia, works to improve outcomes for people with mental illness and their families by helping them to better understand the causes of mental illness. Austin developed the Mental Illness Jars analogy to aid in this understanding. These images have been borrowed with permission.

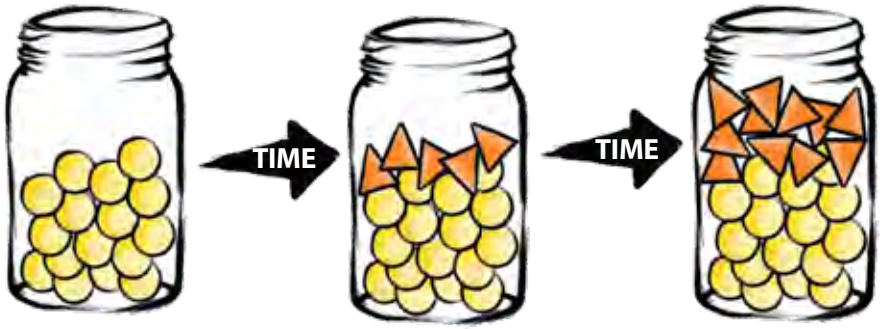
1 Adapted from Peay, H. & Austin, J. *How to Talk with Families About Genetics and Psychiatric Illness.* 2011.

Development of a Mental Illness[1]

As we go through life, we accumulate environmental factors that further make us vulnerable to mental health problems (indicated by the orange triangles). Environmental factors can include:

- Biological factors like head injuries, physical illness, poor diet, lack of sleep or exercise, or substance use; and,
- Psychological and social factors like loss of loved ones, difficult work and living environments, situations of powerlessness or uncertainty, bullying, and trauma.

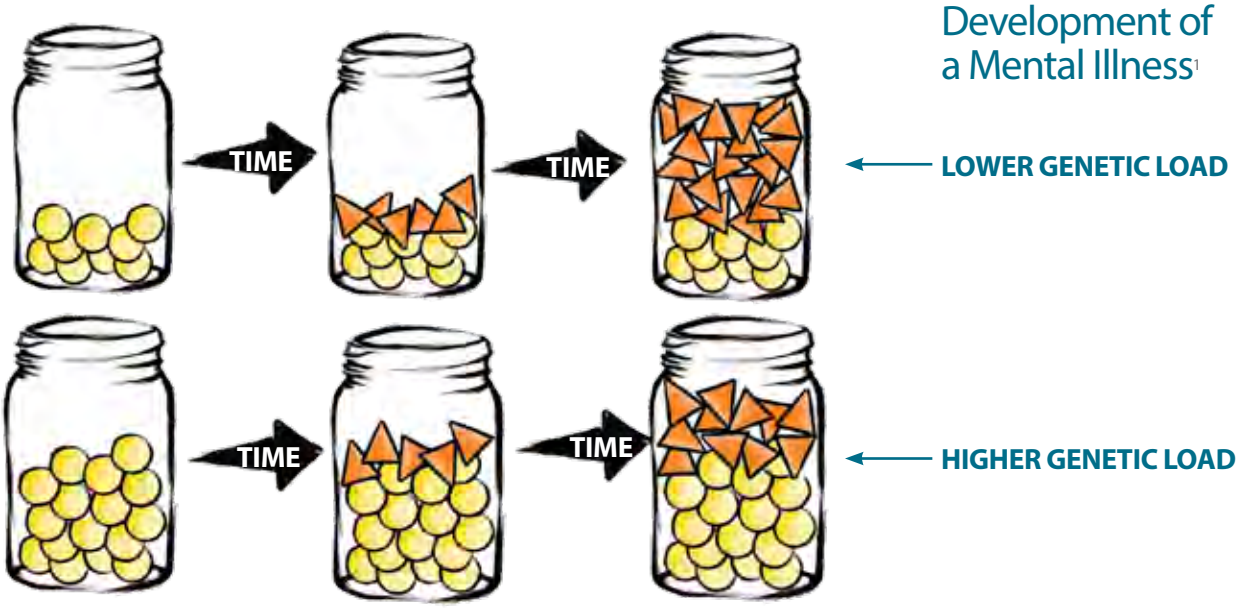
When enough triangles fill the jar, a diagnosable mental health condition is experienced.

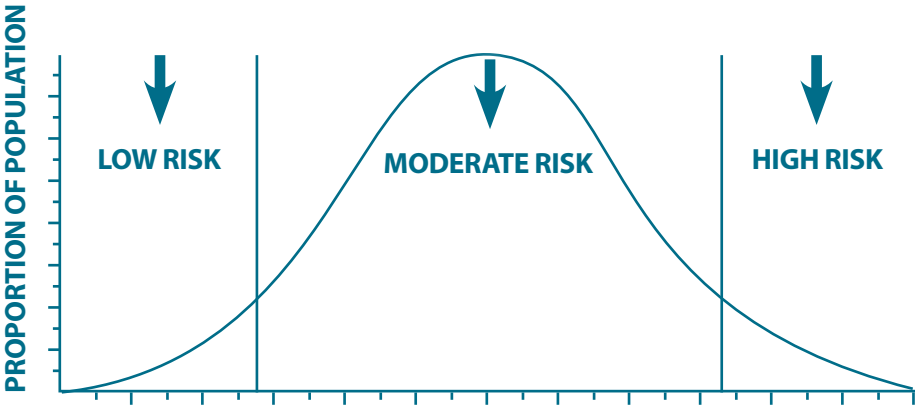


The appearance of mental health symptoms therefore depends both on genetic inheritance and on environmental factors. For this reason, a person who has a high genetic vulnerability (many yellow circles) will experience illness with fewer stressors than a person who has a lower genetic load.

1 Adapted from Peay, H. & Austin, J. *How to Talk with Families About Genetics and Psychiatric Illness.* 2011.

Development of a Mental Illness[1]





1 Adapted from Peay, H. & Austin, J. *How to Talk with Families About Genetics and Psychiatric Illness.* 2011.

Protective factors can include:[2]

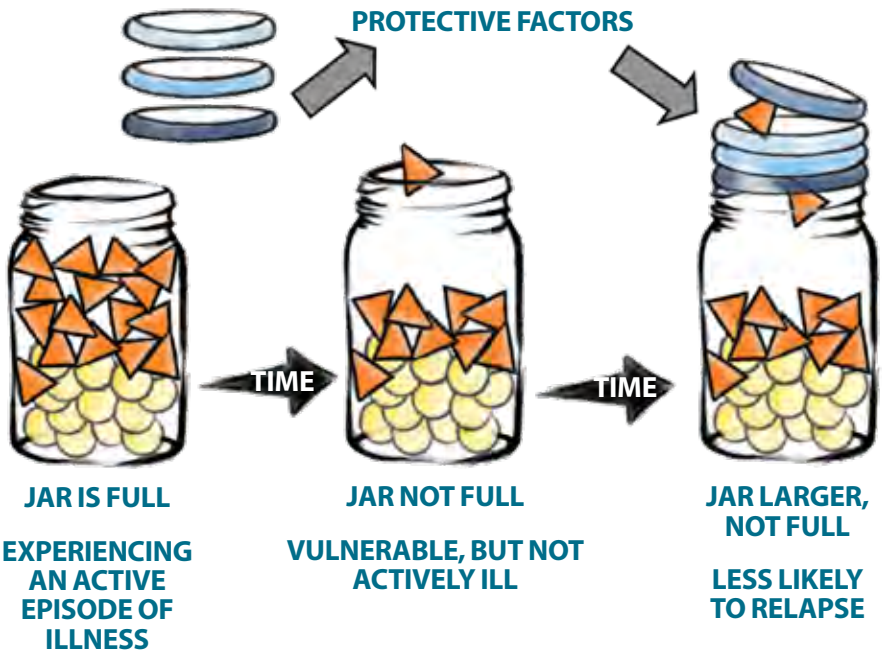
- **CBT** skills (empowerment, coping skills, self-management strategies)
- Mindfulness practice
- Connected, supportive relationships
- Regular exercise
- Nutrition
- Physical health
- Economic security
- Experiences of mastery, competence, and success
- Access to support services

5

Treatment and recovery from an episode of mental illness includes addressing the life factors that are contributing to the illness (i.e., removing orange triangles from the jar). Strategies might involve reducing demands at work or home, getting treatment for physical illness or pain, or problem solving financial or relationship issues.

In addition to these practical considerations, people can increase resilience and help to prevent the development or recurrence of mental illness by building protective factors—illustrated below as extenders added to increase the jar's capacity, which allows it to hold more without overflowing.

Recovery From a Mental Illness



2 Contributions from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health website, camh.ca

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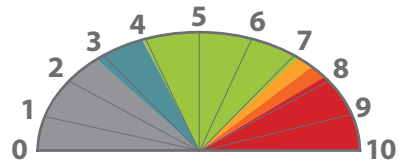

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CBT Skills Groups

An initiative of Mind Space and the Shared Care Committee (a collaboration of Doctors of BC and the B.C. Ministry of Health), in partnership with the Victoria and Vancouver Divisions of Family Practice.

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