

ACT for Long Term Health Conditions



Session one

Course Booklet

Week One

- Introduction to the course

Welcome to the Course

Welcome



This workbook accompanies the course and is for you to keep.

This group is designed for people experiencing depression and/or anxiety that are also living with long term health conditions. It is hoped that by participating in this group, you will learn more about your difficulties and by the conclusion of the course, be in a position to manage your depression and/or anxiety as well as live a fulfilling life with your health condition.

Please do, take your time to absorb the information contained within this workbook. It is recommended that you read the session in this workbook as soon as possible after attending the group session and re-read this if required. If you read the whole workbook in one sitting, it can be extremely useful to give yourself space to reflect on all that you have read - although each chapter is short, there are lots of techniques within them. It can therefore also be helpful for you to set aside some time each week to practice the recommended techniques.

To ensure you gain the most benefit from the course, please do your best to attend all of the sessions where you can. Of course, from time to time things happen that may prevent you from attending, on these occasions, please notify us ahead of the session. If you do not attend and have not informed Steps to Wellbeing, someone will telephone you to check in with you. If you miss more than two sessions you may be asked to leave the group due to missing too much content. An alternative treatment may be suggested or it may be suggested you restart the course from the beginning. If you do miss a session, please make sure that you read the relevant pages of the workbook and try to complete any homework tasks.



Working Together

One of the most valuable things about courses is the support that you can give to each other. To help everyone feel safe and comfortable, it is helpful for the group to agree some guidelines for the sessions. We will discuss and agree these as a group, but below you can find some suggestions:

- As far as possible, we'd like to create the same atmosphere we would enjoy if we were together in the same room. To help with this please turn your camera on.
- It can be easy to accidentally talk over each other when meeting as a group online. To avoid this, please raise your hand clearly and wait to be invited to speak.
- On occasion, background noise can make it difficult for others to hear clearly online. We therefore ask that all participants put their microphone on mute unless speaking.
- Try to be on time, but if you are late do come in and join the session
- Respect other people's points of view; they may be different from your own
- Listen when others are talking
- If you are unable to make it to the session, please let Steps to Wellbeing know
- Do not attend the group under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Please keep any personal information shared within the group sessions confidential

Other rules that the group has agreed together:



Steps2Wellbeing contact telephone numbers

Dorset: 0800 484 0500

Southampton: 02380 272000 or 0800 612 7000

www.steps2wellbeing.co.uk



Keeping Safe Between Sessions

Steps to Wellbeing is not a crisis service, and although you are welcome to contact the service between sessions, the course facilitators may not be available to speak to you. If you need some support between sessions, there are a number of places that you can turn to:

- Contact Connection 0300 123 5440
- Contact your GP surgery and request an urgent appointment
- Telephone 111 for medical or mental health advice 24 hours a day
- Go to A&E if you are worried about hurting yourself or someone else
- The Samaritans- you can call 116 123 for someone to talk to
- Think of a friend, partner or family member that you can seek support from
- There may be another professional involved in your care who could help, for example your Health Visitor, Social Worker, Support Worker or GP Practice Nurse.

Please make a note of your useful telephone numbers, so that you have them to hand when you need them. You may want to write them in the space below, or save them in your phone so they are ready to use.



E.g. my GP surgery

My Personal Safety Plan

Signs that my mood is deteriorating
What steps can I take to manage this? Where can I get support?

Course Timetable

This course is made up of 8 session sessions. Each session includes learning new information and practicing skills as well as group discussion. Joining in with these things as much as you are able will help you get the most out of this course.



Session number:	Topic:
Session 1:	Introduction to the course
Session 2:	Understanding the urge to fix; costs/ benefits & reflections
Session 3:	More about ACT
Session 4:	Acceptance & mindfulness
Session 5:	Introducing cognitive fusion and defusion
Session 6:	A bit more about cognitive defusion
Session 7:	Identifying personal values
Session 8:	Clarifying personal values and value based action
Session 9:	Values based action & goal setting
Session 10:	Responding to barriers, problem solving, pacing
Session 11:	Maintaining gains



Hopes and Fears

Everyone in this group is here because they are living with a long-term health condition. Although there are differences in your conditions and the particular problems that you face, you all have this in common. And for all of you, your health condition is getting in the way of you leading the kind of life you'd like to live or feeding into your depression and/or anxiety.

Take a moment to think about why you are attending this group. Please take some time to think about what led you to attend this course as well as anything that might get in the way of fully engaging in the course. Please write these down in the spaces below. You can choose to share this information with the group or keep it to yourself. We will come back to these at the end of the course.



What led you to attend this course? What do you hope to get out of completing this course? What do you want to move towards?



Is there anything that might make it difficult to attend this course? Is there anything that might get in the way?



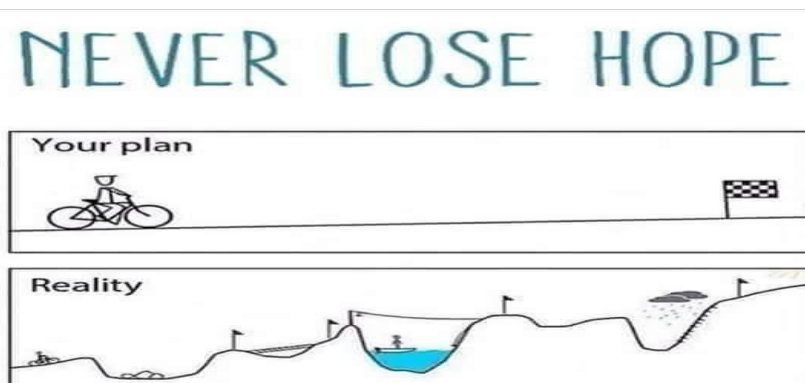
Building Motivation to Change

Sometimes we can have mixed feelings about making changes and trying something new. For example, attending this session you may have felt hopeful at the thought of feeling better and moving towards what matters to you in life, but nervous at the thought of meeting new people.

One way of thinking about change is to ask ourselves if we are willing to tolerate some of the experiences which might show up (such as nervousness in this example) in order to move in our valued direction. We will return to this idea throughout the course.

Recovery

Recovery is a journey. During the course you may have times where you feel better, and times where you feel worse. The times where you feel like you've slipped back are NOT disasters. These are often the times when the most learning takes place. Challenges present an opportunity to notice triggers, to try out new techniques and to think about what you could try doing differently next time.





About you

We'd like to understand a bit more about what it's like for you to live with your health condition.

How does your health condition affect how you feel emotionally? Does it prevent you from doing the things that matter most to you?



If it helps, you can use this space to write a bit about your experiences, and the impact your health has on your life now.

How do you do to cope with your anxiety/depression/ long term health condition?

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



Session two

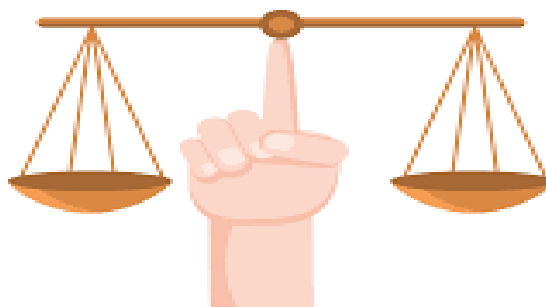
What you've tried so far

Most people have tried a lot of different things to cope with their depression and/or anxiety as well as their long term condition. Take some time to think about what you have tried. Use the worksheet on the following page to list the treatments and strategies that you have tried.

Next, think about how these treatments and strategies have benefitted you over the short and long term. You may want to write about benefits in the form of pain relief, improved mood, reduction in symptoms, greater ability to function, relationships, etc.

Also, think about any costs and difficulties associated with these strategies and treatments, again over both the short and long term.

While you are doing this, try to focus on why these strategies or treatments worked or did not work. Was it that they didn't change your health, or improved or worsened it? Side effects? Did any of them help you do more of the things you wanted to do?

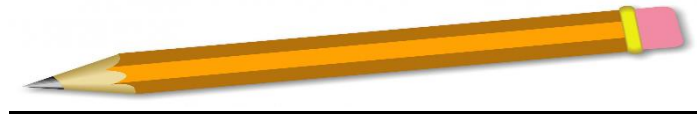


Treatments and Strategies: Costs and Benefits

Treatment/ Strategy	Short Term Benefits	Long Term Benefits	Short Term Costs	Long Term Costs	What were the ultimate results of this?
e.g. Not going out with friends for a walk	-Feel less anxious about not being able to keep up	-I experience less worry	-I miss out on seeing my friends and having a laugh -I miss out on getting out into nature -I cease up because I haven't exercised	-I feel disconnected from the people and world around me - I feel lonely and my mood lowers -My pain increases due to reduced activity	-It stopped me from doing what matters to me, connecting with friends and enjoying the outdoors -Feels like my LTC is ruling my life



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What has worked?

Take a look at what you've written down. Which treatments and strategies have worked well for you?

What has not worked?

Which strategies haven't worked for you? Do the strategies or treatments that haven't worked well have anything in common with each other?

Weighing up the costs

What are the costs associated with the strategies that have not worked? Perhaps most importantly, did these strategies or treatments help you do the things that are most important to you in life? Use this space to note down your thoughts.

What many people notice is that some coping strategies have added to their problems or created entirely new ones. For example, an individual who thinks that everybody is staring at them may try to control this by avoiding going out. Although on the surface this looks like a good strategy to get rid of that difficult thought, it could lead to social isolation in the long term. Have you noticed something like this at all?

THE URGE TO FIX

When we find ourselves suffering unwanted experiences (thoughts, emotions, physical sensations), we have a natural drive to want to change our experience (usually by attempting to control/fix or avoid). This is an understandable human response as we all have a desire to be free of suffering.

Indeed, our brains automatically work this way—identifying problems and thinking of ways to overcome them. As a general rule, when problems occur in our lives, we take action and things change. In this way our efforts to change our experience are positively reinforced and we learn to use our sophisticated problem-solving brains the next time we encounter a difficulty.



This is all well and good when we are contending with practical external problems which we are able to effectively problem solve (i.e., working out how to get to work when the car breaks down). However, how does this approach hold up when we are contending with elusive internal problems like depression and/or anxiety in the context of a health condition which may be unpredictable at best?

You may wish to check your own experience and review what you have written above when considering this question.

It is likely that you have invested a lot of time and energy into changing your situation, however, the difficulty persists. In fact, you may have noticed that the harder you struggled against your difficulty the worse it became.

The urge to control may work well in some areas of our life and may have had survival benefits in the past. But faced with a significant problem that is largely uncontrollable and often unpredictable, we get stuck in thinking about the problem over and over and often not getting anywhere with it (rumination and worry).

The urge to avoid unwanted experiences is a powerful one and we all do it from time to time. Avoidance of unwanted thoughts and emotions can lead us to self-destructive behaviours (involving, alcohol, overeating, drugs or even suicide). Avoidance can also cause us to stop doing things that involve encountering bad feelings and so we end up missing out on some things that matter to us because of how they make us feel (“narrowing of our lives”). Attempting to suppress unwanted thoughts usually has the effect of making them occur more often. Using distraction as a long-term approach for dealing with challenging thoughts and emotions can create more difficulties than it solves and can also lead to us missing out on the good bits of life. All of this suggests that perhaps the logical, reasonable strategies we use to overcome our practical external problems are simply unworkable when applied to our internal challenges.

It is important to acknowledge that we are not passing judgement on our urge to move away from unwanted experiences, nor are we suggesting it is morally wrong to do so, rather we are acknowledging that our efforts to control or avoid these experiences often get us into even more difficulty.

Steven Hayes (the founder of ACT; 2005) likens the above to being trapped in quick-sand. In this instance, the most logical thing to do would be to try and escape. However, with quicksand, the more you struggle the quicker you start to sink. As you try to move your arms and legs to escape the sand, you find yourself sinking deeper and deeper. Maybe sometimes our attempts to control our internal struggles are similar to struggling in quicksand. The more we fight with our difficult thoughts and try to 'fix' our internal problems the more stuck we get.



Survival experts offer advice as to how we can prevent quicksand from sucking us under. Rather than trying to struggle with the sand, if we stay still, lie flat and make contact with the sand as much as we can (so our weight is more equally distributed), we are less likely to sink. In this sense it's not about struggling to get out, it is about making more contact with the sand.

There may be many different aspects to your illness. Some aspects you might be able to improve and others you may have less influence over. If there is something you can do to improve your situation and this works for you, then it makes sense to do this. However, it may be worth considering an alternative approach if there are aspects which can not be changed- especially if you feel your current approach is unworkable.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE



**Living well with a long-term condition will involve
tackling those things that can be improved
AND
learning to accept the presence of the things
that cannot be improved, without getting trapped
by ineffective strategies to control or avoid.**

AMPLIFYING SUFFERING

We've looked at how some of your responses to your difficulties may have produced positive outcomes whilst others may not have worked so well. We've acknowledged that it's human nature to want to change a difficult situation, however, it may be that some of the responses you have tried have amplified your problem. This is through no fault of your own, so try not to blame yourself. Recognising what is not working for you might motivate you to consider alternative approaches.

Over the course of the next eight weeks, we will draw upon the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to consider a different approach, which will support us to live a meaningful life within the context of living with a long term health condition.

HOMEWORK

- Read through this session in your workbook. Take time to reflect upon the questions asked and record your thoughts.
- Continue to reflect upon the costs/benefits worksheet and draw your own conclusion as to whether your current strategies are working for you. Please make a note of this.



ACT for Long term Health Conditions



Session three



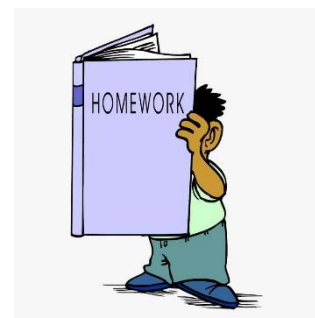
Week Three

- Passengers on the bus analogy
- Introduction to Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Touch of mindfulness

This week we will continue to consider our response to difficulty and the overall impact of our efforts to control or avoid challenging thoughts, emotions and sensations. We will also touch on mindfulness and engage in a practice together.

REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

Take a look at the notes you made in your workbook. Are there any themes or did lots of different things come up? Did anything get in the way of you doing the homework? Were there any barriers? Anything that made it difficult? Make a note of this here.



PASSENGERS ON THE BUS

Sometimes our symptoms, thoughts and feelings about our illness can get in the way of us doing what is important to us. One way to think of it is like you're the driver of a bus. As the driver, you know where this bus is going. Its somewhere you know you really want to go, somewhere really important to you. At the same time, there are some scary passengers on this bus. These passengers are like your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and memories. These passengers don't always want to go where you want to, and when you don't go their way, they let you know about it.

Suppose you want to take this bus that is your life, in the direction of going out for a meal with someone you really care about. One of the passengers starts saying things like "I wouldn't bother; you're just going to end up sore and uncomfortable." Think about the kind of things your passengers sometimes say to you. Perhaps they tell you that you're 'stupid' or 'a nuisance' to your loved ones. Make a note of what your passengers say, and perhaps what they look like, here.



These passengers might rush up behind you, shout in your face, threaten you – they’re basically bullying you into doing what they say. So, understandably, you choose to do what they say, and not go where you want to go and they settle down, into the back of the bus and out of sight. Maybe you make a deal with them – “if you sit in the back and hide down behind the seats so I can’t see you, I’ll go wherever you want me to.” In the meantime, you’re driving around in circles, and not going anywhere in particular, just driving aimlessly.

Now you may get fed up with this eventually. Maybe the next thing you try is getting rid of these nasty passengers. So to do that, you first stop the bus and then head up towards the passengers to confront them. But notice, the very first thing you had to do here was stop the bus. Where is your bus going right now? Is it going to that really important place you want it to go to? When you go to try to deal with the nasty passengers - and there are many of them – they look ready to fight you. You give it your best shot and wrestle with them. But ask yourself this – how well has it worked? And notice that all the time you fight them, the bus is not going anywhere.



And so, it's back to the old agreement, if they leave you alone, you will only go where they say and nowhere else. Pretty soon, they don't have to tell you where to go, you can predict it. You see the turn coming up and know as soon as you see it that they're going to start yelling "Turn right!" Over time you can maybe even pretend that you don't have any passengers anymore. You maybe tell yourself that's where you just have to go. However, when they do show up, it's with the added power from the deals you've made with them before.

Notice this interesting part, the key thing - these passengers have never done you any physical harm. They cannot, and never will. What they're basically saying is "If you don't do what we say, we're going to come right up to you, and you're going to have to look at us." All they've got over you is the ability to intimidate. They do look really nasty, horrible and scary, there's no getting away from that. However, the only power they have over you is the power you give them. You are the driver and you trade your control over the bus to keep the passengers away. Your passengers are maybe telling you that what you're doing is dangerous, scary, silly, difficult or worthless. That's their job to do that. Your job is to drive the bus in the direction that you've chosen.

GETTING RID OF OUR PASSENGERS

Last week, we talked about depression and/or anxiety in the context of a long term condition. We also discussed the kind of things we do in response to this, and how some of these responses can add extra layers of suffering. Look back over what you wrote in session one. Think about how well these strategies are working for you. Are any of these strategies about keeping the passengers on your bus quiet? How successful are they at keeping them quiet? Use this space to write some notes on this.

Trying to get rid of the difficult symptoms, thoughts and feelings that illness brings is very understandable. If we could just get rid of them, we'd be able to get on with things. But it doesn't usually work like that. If you try not to think about something, it usually ends up being in our thoughts. What does your experience tell you about trying to get rid of a sad feeling by telling ourselves to "Cheer up!"? Or how about stopping thinking about that worrying appointment we've got coming up?

Notice the kind of symptoms, thoughts and feelings that you try to get rid of, and what happens when you try to get rid of them. Make a note of the symptoms, thoughts and feelings, and what happens, here.

Experiences I try to get rid of:

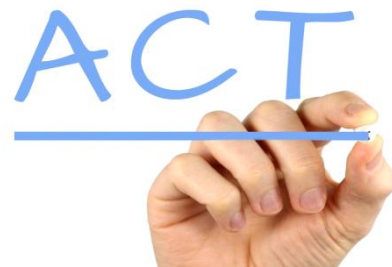
What I do to try to get rid of them:

How well is this working for me (think long term as well as short term):

Your experience is probably starting to suggest to you that trying to control or get rid of your thoughts and feelings doesn't work. We can put a lot of effort into trying to control these passengers on our bus, but the harder we try to quieten them down, the louder they seem to get.

What is Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)?

Acceptance Commitment therapy or ACT (said as the word "act" and not as the initials A-C-T) is an evidence based behavioural therapy. At it's centre, it encourages ACTion, not any ACTION, but value based Action driven by what is important to YOU.



ACT recognises that attempts to control or get rid of unwanted thoughts and feelings can sometimes get in the way of living the life we value. It provides an alternative to ineffective escape/control strategies by moving us closer towards a stance of acceptance of our experience.



In ACT, the aim is not to change the content of distressing thoughts or to reduce difficult feelings, but rather to take a step back and observe and accept our thoughts and feelings just as they are (even those that are hard to have or those that we know to be 'true').

By increasing your willingness to experience distressing thoughts and feelings you will be able to live with them more effectively. This change in perspective, from avoidance to willingness, can help you to begin to live a life in a way that is important to you.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness supports us to unhook from our urge to 'fix' unwanted experiences and enables us to meet our present moment experience just as it is. We will explore the topic of mindfulness in more depth next week, but here is a taster.

Please read through the script below so that you are familiar with the practice. Then place the workbook to one side, close your eyes (or if preferred, lower your gaze) and practice. Mindfulness is best learnt through experience so please don't just read about it... have a go!



Mindfulness of sounds

Find a sitting position which is comfortable to you. If possible, allow the spine to be self-supporting, with your back straight but not stiff. Sit with your shoulders relaxed, head and neck balanced and chin tucked slightly in.

Bring your attention to the movements of the breath in the body for a few minutes, until you feel reasonably settled. Then expand your attention to take in the body as a whole, as if the whole body were breathing, helping you to be aware of all the sensations in the interior landscape of the body.

When you are ready, allow the focus of your attention to shift from sensations in the body to hearing – open to sounds as they arise.

There is no need to go searching for sounds or listening out for particular sounds. Instead, as best you can, simply remain open, so that you are receptive to awareness of sounds from all directions as they arise – sounds near, sounds far, sounds in front, behind, to the side, above or below. In this way, you are opening to the whole space of sound around you: the 'soundscape'. Perhaps notice how the obvious sounds can easily crowd out the more subtle ones; noticing any spaces between sounds – moments of relative quiet.

As best you can, be aware of sounds simply as sounds, as raw sensations. Notice the tendency we all have to label sounds as soon as they are received (car, train, voice, air conditioning, radio), and see if it is possible simply to notice this labelling and then refocus, beyond and below the label, on the raw sensations of the sounds themselves (including the sounds within sounds).

You may find that you are thinking about the sounds. See if it is possible to reconnect with direct awareness of their sensory qualities (patterns of pitch, timbre, loudness and duration), rather than their meanings, implications or stories about them.

Whenever you notice that your awareness is no longer focused on sounds, gently acknowledge where the mind has moved to and then retune the attention back to sounds as they arise and pass away from moment to moment.

Then, after you have been focusing on sounds for four or five minutes, let go of your awareness of sounds. Return your awareness to the breath for a moment or two before concluding the practice.

HOMEWORK

- Read through this session in your workbook. Take time to reflect upon the analogy of passengers on the bus. Who are your passengers and how do they try to influence where you drive your bus? How do you respond to them and is this moving you towards your values? If you haven't already, record your responses.
- Find 5 or 10 minutes every day to practice being mindful. See if you can practice being mindful of everyday activities. You can choose anything to be mindful of. Here are some examples: Brushing your teeth, having a shower, sitting in the garden or washing up dishes.



Whatever you choose to be mindful of, try to notice as much about it as you can – noises, textures, sensations, colours, shades, moisture, temperature. When thoughts or feelings come up and distract you, try to practice noticing this, and then gently bringing your attention back to whatever you are trying to focus on.

When you get thoughts that hook you into thinking about other things – perhaps about being bored, or what you're doing later - try to practice noticing when this has happened and gently bring your attention back to whatever you have chosen. We're not trying to stop thoughts about other things from happening here. Instead, we're trying to notice when it happens (and it will happen!), and then practice redirecting our attention back to whatever you have chosen to be mindful of.

- ACT is a behavioural based therapy, so it's a good idea to start thinking about what you may be able to do differently in order to improve your psychological wellbeing. Consider what one small action which may take to improve your mental health this week. This may be

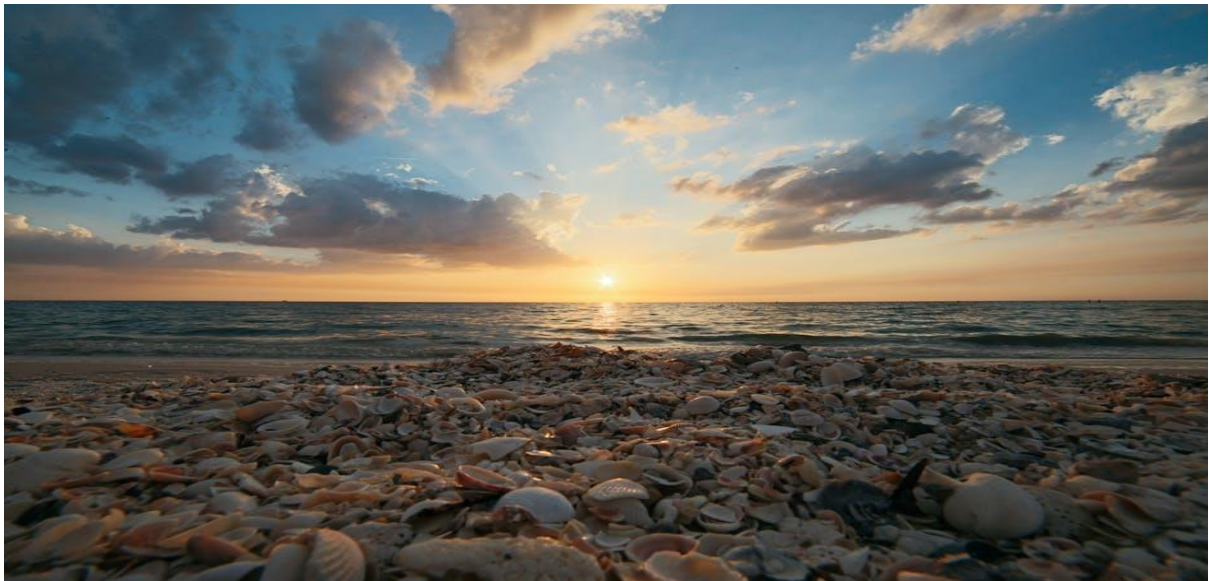


reaching out to a friend, spending some time engaging in a hobby or taking some exercise.
Record your intentions below:

WHAT I PLAN TO DO:

WHEN I PLAN TO DO THIS:

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



Session four

Week Four

- Introduction to mindfulness
- Fostering acceptance

This week we will explore the topic of mindfulness in greater depth. We will also consider an alternative approach to our urge to control or 'fix' unwanted experiences- acceptance.

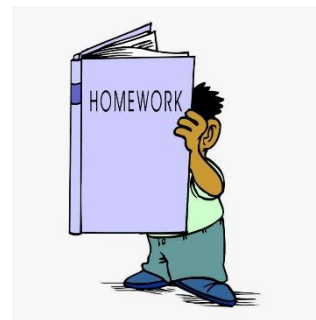
REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

Have you reflected further on the passengers on the bus analogy? Did you notice this showing up in your experience over the course of the past week?

Did you experiment with mindfulness of everyday activities? What was this like?

What small action did you take to improve your wellbeing?

Did anything get in the way of you doing the homework? Were there any barriers? Anything that made it difficult? Make a note of this here.





MINDFULNESS

So far, we have considered how efforts to control our thoughts and emotions are sometimes unhelpful or 'unworkable' in trying to live well with a long term condition. Fighting with our passengers, or making deals with them, is stopping us from driving our bus. It's taking a lot of effort and is getting in the way of us doing what is important to us. Perhaps we need to try

something different. Perhaps we need to stop struggling with our passengers and get on with driving our bus. The passengers will still be on the bus, but if we're no longer caught up in the struggle with them, we can get on with whatever is important to us.

One thing that can help us to get on with driving our bus is noticing when we have been hooked into heading back to fight with our passengers. For that we teach a purposeful form of paying attention called mindfulness.

The word 'mindfulness' means many different things to many different people. For some, it is associated with religion. For others, it may be linked to the concept of inner peace and meditation. Yet for others, it may bring about images of yoga and twisting your limbs into unimaginable positions!

Mindfulness has been around for many, many years. It originated in many of the ancient religions and is still practiced in many religions.

From an ACT perspective, however, mindfulness...

...is not religious. Although you may wish to add a spiritual side to it (if this is what you value), mindfulness is grounded in evidence-based research. It has many similarities with religious practices but focusses on the self and surroundings, as opposed to a higher entity. Mindfulness is used as a means to living a valued life rather than a means in itself.

...is not yoga - it's aim isn't to relax or achieve inner peace, as such. Although the exercises may make you feel relaxed, they are mainly to allow you to connect with the present moment.

An influential ACT therapist and trainer, Russ Harris, defines mindfulness as,

**“Consciously bringing awareness to your here-and-now experience,
with openness, receptiveness and interest.”**



Bringing your awareness to what is happening at present is a skill that can be developed. To begin with, you may find it hard but with practice you may more readily notice when thoughts, feelings, or physical sensations have drawn you away from being in the present moment. You'll most likely find that your mind is often pulled towards thoughts about the past or the future. Having contact with

our observing self allows us to notice when this is happening so that we can bring ourselves back into the present.

While we can gain a conceptual understanding of mindfulness by talking or reading about it, the best way to gain an understanding of this material is through practice itself. With that in mind let's engage in a short mindfulness practice.

A Mindfulness Practice

Adopt a comfortable position, with your feet on the floor, your back up-right and your shoulders loose. Close your eyes, or if you prefer, lower the gaze to softly rest on the surface just in front of you.

Make it your intention for the next few minutes to purely and simply be present, here and now – and to notice what is happening, with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

Begin by bringing your awareness to X (this may be the movement of your breath, sensations in your body, sounds or any other aspect of your experience)

Simply notice X without judging it, analysing it, fighting it or trying to change it.



Observe X with curiosity. Learn as much about X as you can. See if it is possible to invite a friendly curiosity to what you discover. As though you were encountering it for the very first time.

As you maintain your attention on X, thoughts will come into your awareness. Allow them to come and go freely, as they please. Don't try and hold on to them or push them away. Simply acknowledge their presence, let them be, and bring your attention back to X.

From time to time, urges, feelings and sensations will probably arise. When they do, simply acknowledge them, and let them be. Make room for them. Let them stay, or come and go freely, as they please. Don't try and hold on to them or push them away.

From time to time your attention will “wander off.” As soon as you realise this has happened, gently acknowledge it, briefly note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to X.

There is no need to be disappointed or frustrated. Our attention naturally wanders. Each time you notice your attention has wandered, simply note what distracted you, and gently bring your attention back to X.

Remember, you are learning a valuable skill so be gentle with yourself. If your attention wanders 1000 times, your aim is simply to bring it back 1000 times.

Now bring your attention to Y (Repeat previous instructions as desired.)

Now bring your attention to Z

Now notice X and Y and Z, all at the same time.

Now notice where you are, what you're doing, and everything you're aware of; then open your eyes and connect with the room around you, and hold onto that sense of being present, here and now.

We introduced mindfulness as a means of developing a greater awareness of when our passengers are carrying us away from our valued direction in life. With practice, we will become more skilled at noticing when unwanted thoughts, feelings and physical sensations are derailing us and moving us away from where we would like to be.

Now we will look at what to do when we notice that the passengers on the bus are acting up. But first here's another analogy...



WALKING IN THE RAIN



Imagine that you are outside, walking somewhere and it suddenly started to rain, absolutely pour down. You are starting to get quite wet. You have quite a long way left to walk to your destination and no umbrella or coat. You understandably start to feel fed up and cold which affects your mood. What happens to your body and posture? Imagine it now and let your body sense it. What would happen to your body and posture if you were in this situation right now?



Make some notes here about how your body has changed while you've been imagining walking in the rain.

Sticking with the same scenario, you're still outside walking in the pouring rain and getting soaked, but this time try imagining that your attitude was "Okay, I'm getting wet. I can't do anything about it. I wish I'd remembered my umbrella! Oh well, never mind. I'm still getting really wet!" Pay attention to how this feels in your body and what has happened to your posture with this. Write down how your body changed this time.

Think about the differences between these two scenarios. Which one do you get more wet in?

What does this have to do with living with a difficult health condition?.....Being willing to be wet while we walk where we want to go is a bit like doing what's important to us even though we have a health problem. We may not be able to change some things like rain, but if we can change how we stand towards it, it changes our experience.

ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy proposes that we respond to unwanted thoughts, feelings and physical sensations with an attitude of acceptance. ACT therapist, Russ Harris describes this process as 'Opening yourself fully to experience, as it is, not as your mind says it is'.

It is worth reiterating that ACT is not a passive resignation to whatever life throws at us. If there is something we may be able to do to improve our situation, then by all means do it! For example, if gentle movement helps to alleviate pain, then certainly move! If seeing friends helps to boost your mood, then reach out to your friends and plan a date.

However, living with an LTC can involve coming into contact with aspects of our lives which we may be unable to problem solve or find a practical solution for. In these instances, the most skilful response may be to foster an attitude of acceptance.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy encourages us to problem solve what we can and to accept the rest.



It can be difficult to use the word 'acceptance' when talking about strong and unpleasant- sometimes awful- feelings. 'Acceptance', like any other word, is a piece of language that has all sorts of relationship with other ideas in people's heads. So, for some, it is likened to 'surrender' or 'giving in'. That is not the sense with which we are using it. Rather we're talking about a willingness to leave that feeling alone- allow it to be present not because it is morally right, but because the alternatives (avoidance/ control) just don't work or do more harm than good.

ACT therapist, Ray Owen, likens this to the idea of 'putting out a fire with petrol'; if there's a small fire, and we don't want it to be there, we might have the instinct to throw liquid on it in order to put it out. The trouble is, the only liquid we're holding is petrol- it actually increases the fire rather than putting it out. And the real trouble is that once that happens, given that all we have to hand is more petrol, we end up putting more on in order to put out a bigger fire. We can stop the fire from growing bigger and taking over- we do it by letting the initial flame to be there and not doing the things that make it worse.



By accepting the presence of the flame- by being willing to let it be- we stop it growing and from taking over. So the price for not having the flame take over is that we have to be willing for it to be there in the first place.

Let's be clear that 'willing' is not the same thing as 'wanting'; we don't want the flame to be there, but we might be willing to let it be because life is better without a massive inferno.

If we are willing (and able) to allow unpleasant emotions to be present, then we can be sure we don't fall into the trap of avoiding, suppressing or distracting that will act like petrol on the flame.

So rather than this type of acceptance being a 'giving in', it's actually an active choice to allow an unwanted experience to be present, when attempts to get rid of it would actually make life worse.

We've already considered how mindfulness can support us to connect with the present moment in a non-judgmental way. Continuing to develop our mindfulness muscle will support us in developing a greater capacity to accept all aspects of our experience- pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

HOMEWORK

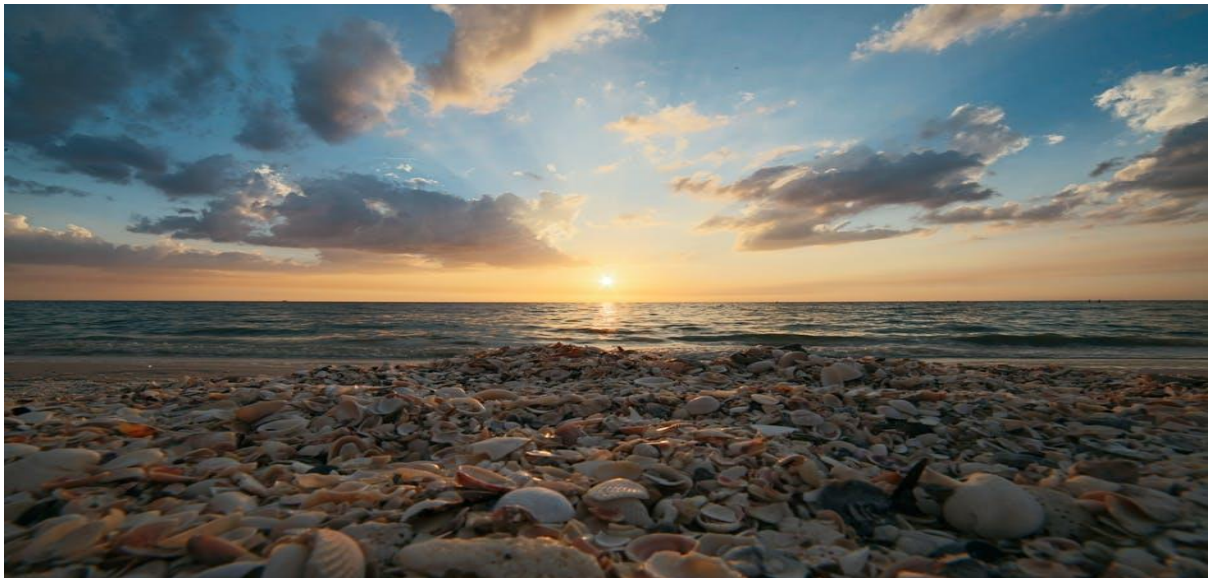
- Read through this session in your workbook.
- Continue to engage in a chosen daily activity mindfully. In addition to this engage in a formal mindfulness practice for five to ten minutes daily. Observe your experience and if you wish, make notes about what you notice.
- Experiment with approaching difficult experiences with acceptance. Note what impact this has.
- Consider what small action you may be able to take to improve your wellbeing. Record your intentions below:



WHAT I PLAN TO DO:

WHEN I PLAN TO DO THIS:

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



Session five

Week Five

- An introduction to cognitive fusion & defusion
- Cognitive defusion strategies

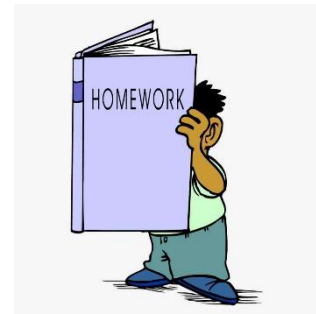
This week we will take a closer look at some of the unwanted passengers on our bus- unwanted thoughts. We will reflect upon the impact of fusing with our thoughts and consider the effectiveness of attempting to control thoughts. We will then explore alternative approaches to managing unwanted thoughts.

REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

How did you experience the mindfulness practices over the course of the week? What kind of things did you learn from it? Did anything get in the way of your practice?

What small action did you take to improve your wellbeing?

Did anything get in the way of you doing the homework? Were there any barriers? Anything that made it difficult? Make a note of this here.



COGNITIVE DEFUSION

Many people attempt to deal with unwanted passengers on their bus by attempting to control their mind. But how effective is this? For the next 60 seconds I want you to NOT think of a yellow elephant. Under no circumstances are you to allow your mind to think of a yellow elephant. Do NOT imagine it's long trunk. Do NOT think about how big it is, or the sound it makes. And whatever you do, do not imagine a YELLOW elephant. Try your best! What did you notice? How easy is it to push thoughts from our mind?



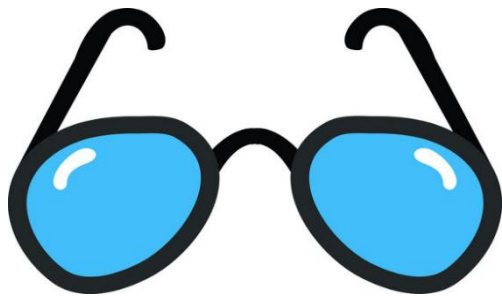
If you have concluded that pushing thoughts away is not a workable solution, you might like to consider changing your relationship to the thoughts. This is quite different to attempting to control, avoid or suppress thoughts.

STUCK TO YOUR THOUGHTS

First, take a moment to write down any difficult thoughts that bother you and increase your anxiety, low mood, frustration etc. These might include thoughts you have identified as passengers on your bus. They may be particularly troublesome thoughts that have been with you for a long time. For example, a typical thought of someone experiencing low mood is, “I am a failure and/or burden”. For someone who is experiencing anxiety, it might be something like, “I must keep up with everyone else, otherwise people will think I am lazy”. Write the unwanted thoughts that frequently come into your mind below:



Now that you have a list of your difficult thoughts, let’s think about what it means to develop space between them. Try to picture a warm, summer’s day. You’re sitting in the park with your sunglasses on, gazing into the distance. You think you spot something and so you take your sunglasses off for a better view. As the glasses come off, you realise how bright it actually is and you squint with the sun in your eyes.



Now, imagine instead of wearing normal sunglasses you're wearing ones with blue lenses. What would the world look like now? After an hour or so, you may become so used to seeing the world in different shades of blue that you only realise the world isn't really like that when you remove the glasses.

Our thoughts can sometimes be similar to wearing blue tinted sunglasses. We can get so caught up in them that our life is experienced through them. It becomes what we are used to and we automatically believe that our thoughts are true.

We can see the world more clearly when the sunglasses are not close to our eyes.

What if we were able to see our thoughts from a similar perspective?

Could we look at them rather than from them and see them for what they really are?

HEALTHY DISTANCING

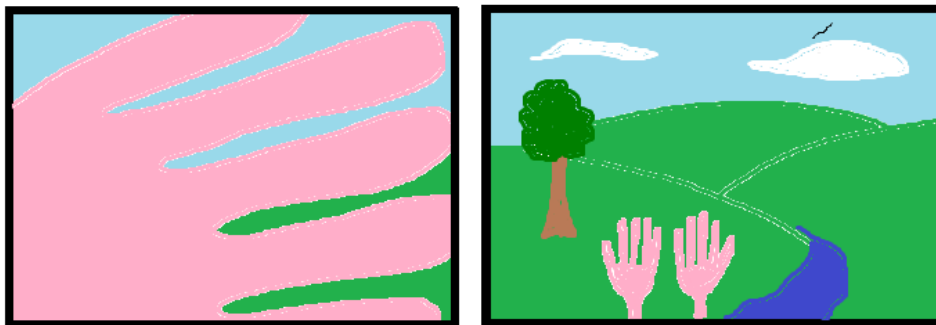
Here's another example, taken from Russ Harris, of how to see your thoughts and feelings differently, without changing them. I want you to place both your hands in front of your eyes. What do you notice? Can you see anything? If you look closely you might be able to see what's out there through the tiny gaps between your fingers. If you stood up and started walking you might be able to find your way around the room, but it will probably be slow and you'd be more likely to bump into things. Could you read, go jogging or drive like this?

Imagine that our hands represent all our anxieties and worries. Placing our hands in front of our eyes is like getting caught up in those unhelpful thoughts about the past and future, that may criticise or make you feel anxious. They dominate our lives so much that it is hard to see the outside world for what it really is. It's also hard to see the direction we are going in. If we get drawn in by our thoughts it almost becomes the reality we know. We become unable to notice what is actually going on around us. Would you feel like you were missing out?

Now very slowly move your hands away from your eyes. Notice what happens to the world and what happens to your hands. Notice how much smaller your hands become and how much bigger the world has become. You can still see your hands, they are still in the picture. However, there has been a change in perspective. Your hands no longer dominate the view and you are much more able to

move about and get on with your day to day tasks. Notice also that the distance between you and your thoughts increases.

As we become more aware of our environment we are able to engage with it fully and lead the life that we want to. Notice that the thoughts are still there. They haven't left us, but we are able to be more constructive even whilst the thoughts are around. They no longer take over our life. So if we can learn to distance ourselves from the content of our thoughts and recognise that our thoughts don't have to dictate what we do, then we can allow ourselves to begin to live the valued life we desire.



Notice how this is different to avoiding the problem. When we are close up and caught up in our thoughts we become restricted. This leads to a struggle and we try to escape. However, when we make space for our difficult thoughts and feelings and allow our self to sit with them, without getting into a struggle, we have more room to move. This is called willingness. Willingness isn't approving of our difficult thoughts or feelings. It isn't about tolerating them or wanting them. It is about letting go of the struggle with them and providing a space for them.

In Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, the term Cognitive Fusion is used to refer to the process of strongly identifying with our thoughts and believing them to be true.

**Cognitive Fusion:**

Thoughts are Reality; it's as if what we're thinking is actually present, here and now!

Thoughts are The Truth; we literally believe them!

Thoughts are Important; we take them seriously, and give them our full attention!

Thoughts are Orders; we automatically obey them!

Thoughts are Wise; we assume they know best and we follow their advice!

By contrast, Cognitive Defusion, describes the process of unhooking from our thoughts and seeing them as something that is happening in our minds and not necessarily accurate or helpful in what they tell us.

Cognitive Defusion:

Thoughts are merely sounds, words, stories, bits of language, passing through our heads.

Thoughts may or may not be true. We don't automatically believe them.

Thoughts may or may not be important. We pay attention only if they're helpful.

Thoughts are not orders. We don't have to obey them.

Thoughts may or may not be wise. We don't automatically follow their advice.

Helpful questions for unhelpful thoughts

Is this thought in anyway useful or helpful?

Is this an old story? Have I heard this one before?

What would I get for buying into this story?

Could this be helpful, or is my mind just babbling on?

Does this thought help me take effective action?

Am I going to trust my mind or my experience?



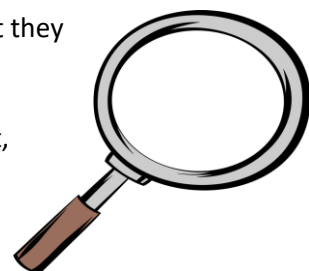
**The aim is to change our relationship to our thoughts
rather than to attempt to control them or get rid of them.**

The following Cognitive Defusion strategies may help to get some distance between you and your thoughts and feelings. This may allow you to become more flexible in how you choose to live your life. Instead of a life based on what you are thinking, you will begin to see that thoughts and feelings are only one part of you.

Strategy 1: IDENTIFY & LABEL

You can become more aware of thoughts AS simply thoughts by identifying them as what they are.

For example, when you notice a thought come into your mind, rather than simply think it, place something in front of it like, "I am having a thought that... I am incompetent", or, "Here comes that thought again that... I am worthless".



If you have a difficult thought you may wish to experiment with writing it down. This alone can help obtain some distance. Next write the words 'I am having the thought' before this. What impact does this have? Next write the words 'I am aware that' before this. What impact does this have?

You can apply this technique for emotions, bodily sensations and memories. For example, saying to yourself "I am aware there is a sense of frustration arising" or "I am noticing that I am experiencing the sensation of discomfort in my foot."

By identifying thoughts/emotions/sensations for what they are, rather than just experiencing them, we become less controlled by their content. It is important to remember we are not trying to suppress or get rid of the thought/ emotion/ sensation, but rather to change our relationship to it so that it can be held more lightly.

HOMEWORK

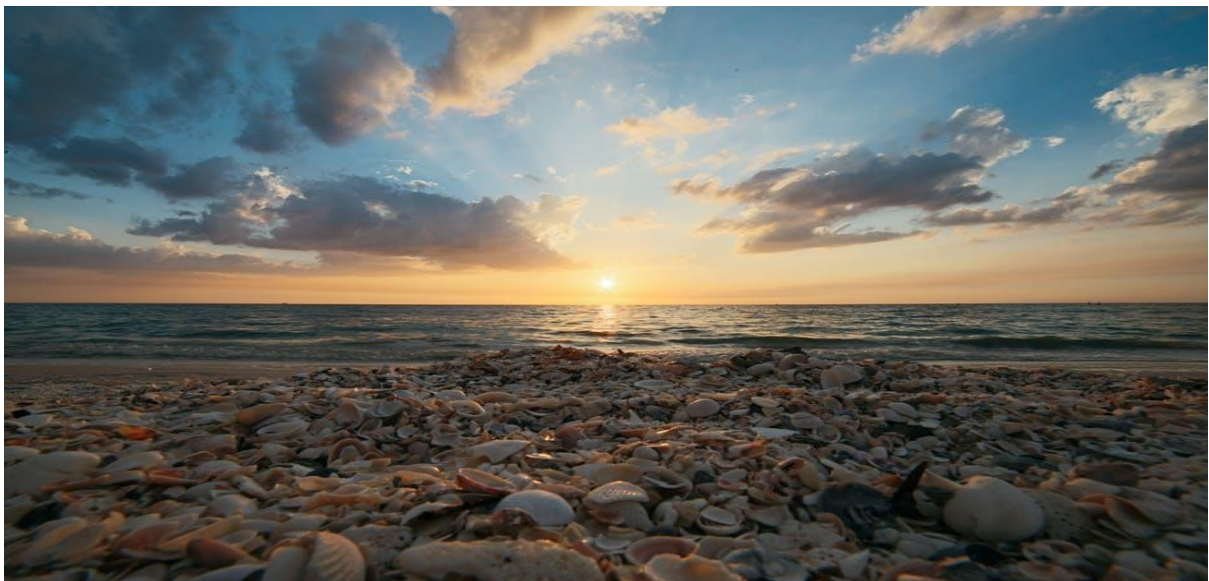
- Read through this session in your workbook.
- Experiment with labelling your thoughts as thoughts. Practice putting the words "I notice I am having the thought that..." before unworkable thoughts.
- Continue to engage in a chosen daily activity mindfully. In addition to this engage in a formal mindfulness practice for five to ten minutes daily. Observe your experience and if you wish, make notes about what you notice.
- Consider what small action you may be able to take to improve your wellbeing. Record your intentions below:



WHAT I PLAN TO DO:

WHEN I PLAN TO DO THIS:

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



Session six

Week Seven

- Cognitive defusion strategies

This week we will continue to develop our toolkit of cognitive defusion strategies.

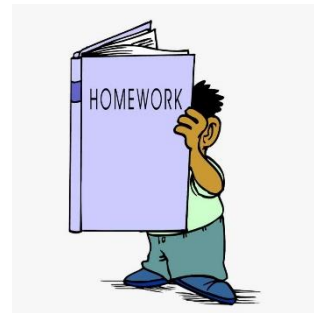
REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

How did you experience labelling your thoughts AS thoughts this week? Did this change your experience of the thought in anyway?

How did you experience the mindfulness practices over the course of the week?

What small action did you take to improve your wellbeing?

Did anything get in the way of you doing the homework? Were there any barriers? Anything that made it difficult? Make a note of this here.



COGNITIVE DEFUSION TECHNIQUES

Last week we introduced the concept of cognitive fusion (when we are highly invested in our thoughts) and cognitive defusion (when we have some distance from our thoughts). We introduced a cognitive defusion technique called 'identifying and labelling'.

Strategy 1: IDENTIFY & LABEL

You can become more aware of thoughts as simply thoughts by identifying and labelling them as what they are.

For example, when you notice a thought come into your mind, rather than simply think it, place something in front of it like, “I am having a thought that... I am incompetent”, or, “Here comes that thought again that... I am worthless”, or, “Thank you mind for saying that nobody likes me”.

Strategy 2: OBJECTIFY

You can create distance from difficult thoughts and feelings by turning them into something ...

Pick a difficult thought and place it outside of your mind, as if you were looking at it. Try to use the following questions to turn the thought into an object:

What colour would it be?

What size would it be?

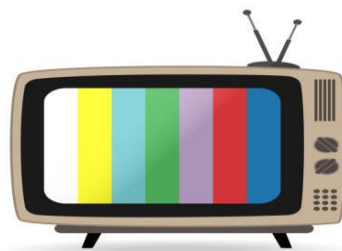
Is it hot, cold or somewhere in between?

What shape would it be?

Is it moving?

By turning the thought into something that can be easily observed it allows you to see it as something that can come along with you, but doesn't have to be in charge of your life.

Some people find it helpful to imagine their thoughts on a computer or TV screen and to experiment with changing the font, case or colour.



Strategy 3: VOCALISE

You can alter the context in which a thought normally occurs by changing the way you hear it.

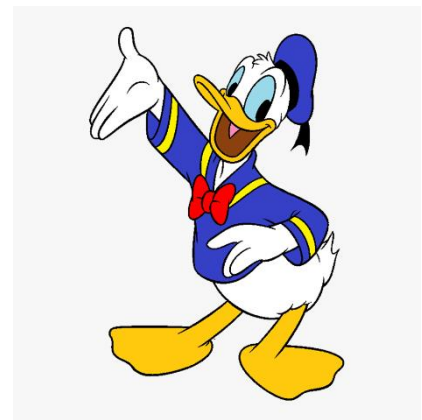
Try saying a thought in the voice of your favourite comedian, cartoon character, celebrity, royal or news reader. Those with distinctive voices work better (e.g. Peter Kay, Donald Duck, Davina McCall, The Queen or Jeremy Paxman).

Notice how, when you do this, the thought becomes less problematic.

Similarly, have a go at changing the sound of the thought in other ways. Say it really slowly or really fast.

Say it in a high-pitched, squeaky voice or in a low, deep voice.

You may wish to experiment with singing the thought (perhaps to the tune of happy birthday).



Strategy 4: SAY IT 100 TIMES



Thoughts consist of sentences made up of words that we have learned over the years. Our brain gives meaning to these words which is why some can produce positive feelings and some more difficult feelings.

Take a thought such as “I am a loser”. Now try saying the word ‘loser’ out loud one hundred times. What happens to the meaning of the word? When we hear the sound over and over again it loses its association with a particular emotion and it then just sounds funny.

When these thoughts occur, try practising the above until you feel the meaning of the word becomes less pertinent.

Strategy 5: MINDFUL AWARENESS

Thoughts are only one aspect of our experience in any given moment. It can be helpful to bring a mindful awareness to our full experience and acknowledge what else may be present in that moment besides our thoughts.

Over time we can practice observing thoughts, noting how they arise, last for some time and then change or fade over time, perhaps only to arise again at a later point. We can choose to observe our thoughts much as we may observe leaves floating along a stream or clouds floating across the sky. As best we can, simply bringing awareness to them without getting tangled up in their content.



REFLECTION

Now that we are half-way through the group, think about where you are. What have you learned? What have you found most helpful? What have you changed since starting the group? What do you still want to work on? Write about these things here

HOMEWORK

- Engage in a formal mindfulness practice for ten minutes daily. As far as possible, observe your thoughts as mental events passing through the mind. If you find yourself getting hooked into the content of the thought- simply acknowledge this and, as best you can, return to noticing the thoughts from the perspective of an observer. This is a skill that takes time to develop, so be patient with yourself!
- Consider what small action you may be able to take to improve your wellbeing. Record your intentions below:



WHAT I PLAN TO DO:

WHEN I PLAN TO DO THIS:

- In this session we have included many strategies that you can use to help identify and change how you see your difficult thoughts and feelings. This week's task is to go back over this session in the course workbook and pick some strategies to try out as you go about your day-to-day routine. Some strategies will work better than others in certain situations so be sure to try the same one out in different settings.

Use the table on the next page to help you organise your chosen strategies. There is a section for rating the strategies usefulness which will help you determine which works best for you with particular thoughts.



DAY	THOUGHT	HOW THAT THOUGHT MADE YOU FEEL	DEFUSION STRATEGY	HOW YOU FELT AFTER	IMPACT UPON BEHAVIOUR
Monday	<i>'I'm a failure'</i>	<i>Lowered my mood, made me not want to continue with my work</i>	<i>Vocalise- said thought in the voice of Mickey Mouse</i>	<i>Less depressed, smiled a little, was able to focus on more important things</i>	<i>Went back to working on my assignment</i>

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



Session seven

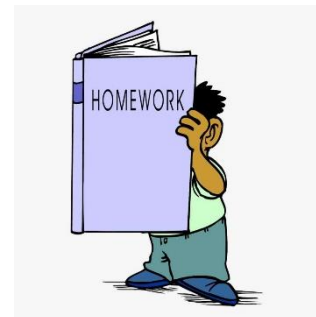
Week Eight

- Understanding values
- Identifying your personal values

So far, we have looked at moving towards adopting a willingness to experience challenging thoughts, emotions and physical sensations. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) also looks at what we value. Values are what gives willingness its purpose.

REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

Take a look at the notes you made on your worksheet. Did you notice unhelpful thoughts show up? What impact did these thoughts have? Were you able to experiment with using DEFUSION strategies? What was your experience of this? Did anything get in the way of completing the homework? If so, how did you respond to this?



From an ACT perspective, we are only willing to have difficult thoughts and feelings because this allows us greater choice in taking steps towards what we really care about in life. So, although up until now we have focussed on changing our relationship with our difficulties, we are going to change tack slightly and look at how to live a life with direction, value and meaning. After all, if we are willing to have difficult thoughts and be willing to accept them for what they are, what are we doing that for?

Think back to the passengers on the bus metaphor. Being able to step back from our thoughts can help us to be in charge at the wheel of the bus and make sure we're heading in a direction that's valued and important to us. But what does that really mean? And how do you know which direction to take your bus? Ask yourself, which direction you would like your life to go in? The direction you wish to pursue will be individual to you; not everyone's direction will be the same. It is your choice what you decide to value.



80 Year Old Birthday Celebration: An Exercise In Imagination

In this exercise, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes and imagine you are 80 years old, and that there is a birthday celebration in your honour. Also, remember this is your *imagination* – so it doesn't have to obey the rules of logic. It's okay if your parents are there and they're 120 years old. It's okay if your friends are there and they look exactly the same as they do today. Also, stay alert for the million and one sneaky ways your mind can try to pull you out of this exercise. Any time your mind starts interfering, making provocative comments etc. simply say 'Thankyou mind!' and come back to the exercise.

lose your eyes now and imagine you are 80 years old, and that there is a birthday celebration in your honour – and everybody you care about is there to honour you – friends, family, work colleagues.

Now imagine one person who you really care about – friend, family member, colleague, you choose; anyone who is important to you – imagine that person gets up to make a short speech about you – about the person you are, the life you've lived, what you stood for in life, and what you meant to them. Imagine that they say *and mean* whatever it is you would most like to hear them say *and mean*.

Notice how you feel as they say these things.

Now imagine another person who you really care about – friend, family member, colleague, you choose; anyone who is important to you – imagine that person gets up to make a short speech about you – about the person you are, the life you've lived, what you stood for in life, and what you meant to them. Imagine that they say *and mean* whatever it is you would most like to hear them say *and mean*.

Notice how you feel as they say these things.

Finally imagine one last person who you really care about – friend, family member, colleague, you choose; anyone who is important to you – imagine that person gets up to make a short speech about you – about the person you are, the life you've lived, what you stood for in life, and what you meant to them. Imagine that they say *and mean* whatever it is you would most like to hear them say *and mean*.

Notice how you feel as they say these things.

Now take a moment to reflect on what you've heard, and to consider: what does this tell you about your values? About what really matters to you, deep in your heart? Use the space below to capture your reflections:

VALUES

- Are what you want to live by and for
 - Are Personal
 - Are YOUR choice
- Give life direction and meaning
- Can never be achieved – that would be a goal
- Are something that's important to you

The following questions may assist you to connect with your values:

- 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?

Values are our heart's deepest desires for the way we want to interact with and relate to the world, other people, and ourselves. They are leading principles that can guide us and motivate us as we move through life.

Values are not the same as goals.

Values are directions we keep moving in, whereas goals are what we want to achieve along the way.



A value is like heading North; a goal is like the river or mountain or valley we aim to cross whilst traveling in that direction. Goals can be achieved or 'crossed off', whereas values are an ongoing process.

For example, if you want to be a loving, caring, supportive partner, that is a value – an ongoing process. If you stop being loving, caring and supportive, then you are no longer a loving, caring, supportive partner; you are no longer living by that value. In contrast, if you want to get married, that's a goal - it can be 'crossed off' or achieved. Once you're married, you're married – even if you start treating your partner very badly. If you want a better job, that's a goal. Once you've got it - goal achieved. But if you want to fully apply yourself at work, that's a value – an ongoing process.

Homework

See if you can take a few minutes each day to focus on one of the values that you've noted above and choose something that you could do, perhaps something very small that would take you towards living your values. Use the worksheet to keep a note of the steps you take over the next week in your valued direction.



Take 5 to 10 minutes each day this week to think about one of the values that you've identified. Try to think of something that you could do that day that would take you closer to living in line with your values. Try and be as specific as possible when you think about what you can do. You can choose a different value each day or choose the same value on lots of days.

Use this worksheet to keep a record of how you get on. Make a note of the value that you choose each day, and the actions that you identify to take you closer to your values. You can use the last column to record how you get on with the action.

If you are finding it difficult to think of any actions, perhaps notice and write down the thoughts that come up for you when you think of the value, or think of what someone else might do if this was one of their values.

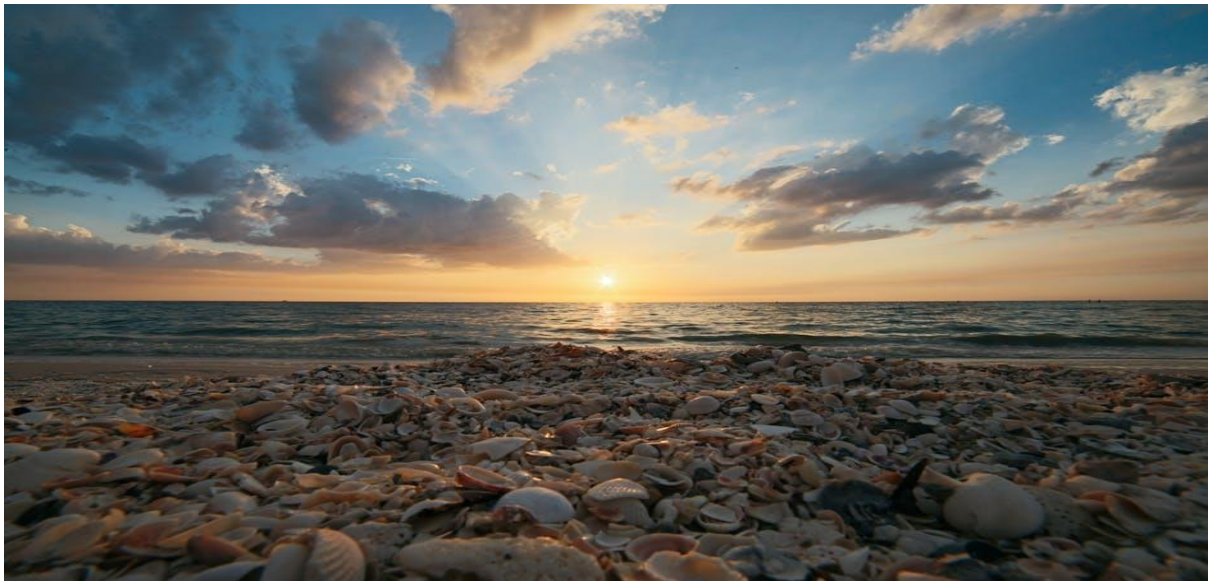
VALUED ACTION WORKSHEET

Day	Value	Steps taken towards valued direction	What was your experience of this? Did anything get in the way? If so, how did you respond to this?
1			



2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



Session eight

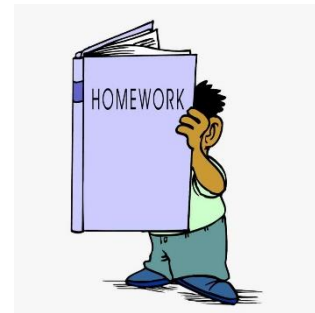
Week Nine

- A closer look at values
- Value based action

This week we will be taking a closer look at our personal values. We will take stock of what really matters to us in life and how we can take committed action to honour this. We will also consider how to adapt the manner in which we honour our values when we are no longer able to honour them as we have previously.

REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

Take a look at the notes you made on your worksheet. What values did you choose to honour and what actions did you take? Did anything make this difficult? How did you respond to any difficulties?



A CLOSER LOOK AT VALUES

The following are areas of life that are valued by some people. Not everyone has the same values, and this is not a test to see whether you have the "correct" values. Think about each area in terms of general life directions, rather than in terms of specific goals.

There may be certain areas that you don't value much; you may skip them if you wish. There may be areas that overlap – e.g. if you value hiking in the mountains, that may come under both physical health and recreation.

It is also important that you write down what you would value if there were nothing in your way. What's important? What do you care about? And what you would like to work towards?

Family relations. What sort of brother/sister, son/daughter, uncle/auntie do you want to be? What personal qualities would you like to bring to those relationships? What sort of relationships would you like to build? How would you interact with others if you were the ideal you in these relationships?

Marriage/couples/intimate relations. What sort of partner would you like to be in an intimate relationship? What personal qualities would you like to develop? What sort of relationship would you like to build? How would you interact with your partner if you were the 'ideal you' in this relationship?

Parenting. What sort of parent would you like to be? What sort of qualities would you like to have? What sort of relationships would you like to build with your children? How would you behave if you were the 'ideal you'.

Friendships/social life. What sort of qualities would you like to bring to your friendships? If you could be the best friend possible, how would you behave towards your friends? What sort of friendships would you like to build?

Career/employment. What do you value in your work? What would make it more meaningful? What kind of worker would you like to be? If you were living up to your own ideal standards, what personal qualities would you like to bring to your work? What sort of work relations would you like to build?

Education/personal growth and development. What do you value about learning, education, training, or personal growth? What new skills would you like to learn? What knowledge would you like to gain? What further education appeals to you? What sort of student would you like to be? What personal qualities would you like to apply?

Recreation/fun/leisure. What sorts of hobbies, sports, or leisure activities do you enjoy? How do you relax and unwind? How do you have fun? What sorts of activities would you like to do?

Spirituality. Whatever spirituality means to you is fine. It may be as simple as communing with nature, or as formal as participation in an organised religious group. What is important to you in this area of life?

Citizenship/ environment/ community life. How would you like to contribute to your community or environment, e.g. through volunteering, or recycling, or supporting a group/ charity/ political party? What sort of environments would you like to create at home, and at work? What environments would you like to spend more time in?

Health/physical well-being. What are your values related to maintaining your physical well-being? How do you want to look after your health, with regard to sleep, diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol, etc? Why is this important?

What do I value in the important areas of my life?

We have listed what are commonly important areas in most people's lives (e.g. family, work, etc). As a first step, it is helpful to look at these areas and work out which are important to you.

Then, we want to identify what is it that we specifically value in that area. This is individual and may vary from person to person. It is possible that many people may value the same area of their life, but for different reasons.

For example; the people below all value the area of work but for different reasons.



The Life Compass

In the main part of each large box, write a few key words about what is important or meaningful to you in this domain of life: What sort of person do you want to be? What sort of personal strengths and qualities do you want to cultivate? What you want to stand for? What do you want to do? How do you ideally want to behave? (If a box seems irrelevant to you, that's okay: just leave it blank. If you get stuck on a box, then skip it, and come back to it later. And it's okay if the same words appear in several or all boxes: this helps you identify core values that cut through many domains of life.)

Once you've done that for all boxes, go through them and in the upper small square inside each box, mark on a scale of 0-10 how important these values are to you, at this point in your life: 0= no importance, 10= extremely important. (It's okay if several squares all have the same score.) Finally, in the lower small square inside each box, mark on a scale of 0-10 how effectively you are living by these values right now. 0= not at all 10= living by them fully (Again, it's okay if several squares all have the same score.)

Finally have a good look at what you've written. What does this tell you about: a) What is important in your life? b) What you are currently neglecting?

Parenting	Personal Growth	Leisure	Spirituality
Health	Work	Community & Environment	
Family Relationships	Intimate Relationships	Social Relationships	

WHEN WE NEED TO ADJUST

Sometimes our health might limit what we can do or put a stop to it altogether. In these instances, we might need to change or adjust the way we honour your values.

Steps towards adjusting to your circumstances

1. Know what your value is e.g. “teaching my son a valuable skill.”

2. Link your values with your current goals e.g. “my goal is to take my son fishing twice a year.”

3. Review – is this a goal that is still realistic? In this example: “Fishing is too physically strenuous, I cannot do this anymore.”

4. Adjust – find new activities that fit your valued direction e.g. “I value teaching my son skills, I cannot fish but I can teach him chess which is not as strenuous for me.”

5. Plan – plan when, with who, where and how you will do this e.g. “once a month, I will play chess with my son on a weekend.”

**When changes to our health mean we are no longer able to honour our values as we have previously...
we don't give up on the value... we get creative!**



Homework

See if you can take a few minutes each day to focus on one of the values that you've noted above and choose something that you could do, perhaps something very small that would take you towards living your values. Use the worksheet to keep a note of the steps you take over the next week in your valued direction.



Take 5 to 10 minutes each day this week to think about one of the values that you've identified. Try to think of something that you could do that day that would take you closer to living in line with your values. Try and be as specific as possible when you think about what you can do. You can choose a different value each day or choose the same value on lots of days.

Use this worksheet to keep a record of how you get on. Make a note of the value that you choose each day, and the actions that you identify to take you closer to your values. You can use the last column to record how you get on with the action.

If you are finding it difficult to think of any actions, perhaps notice and write down the thoughts that come up for you when you think of the value, or think of what someone else might do if this was one of their values.

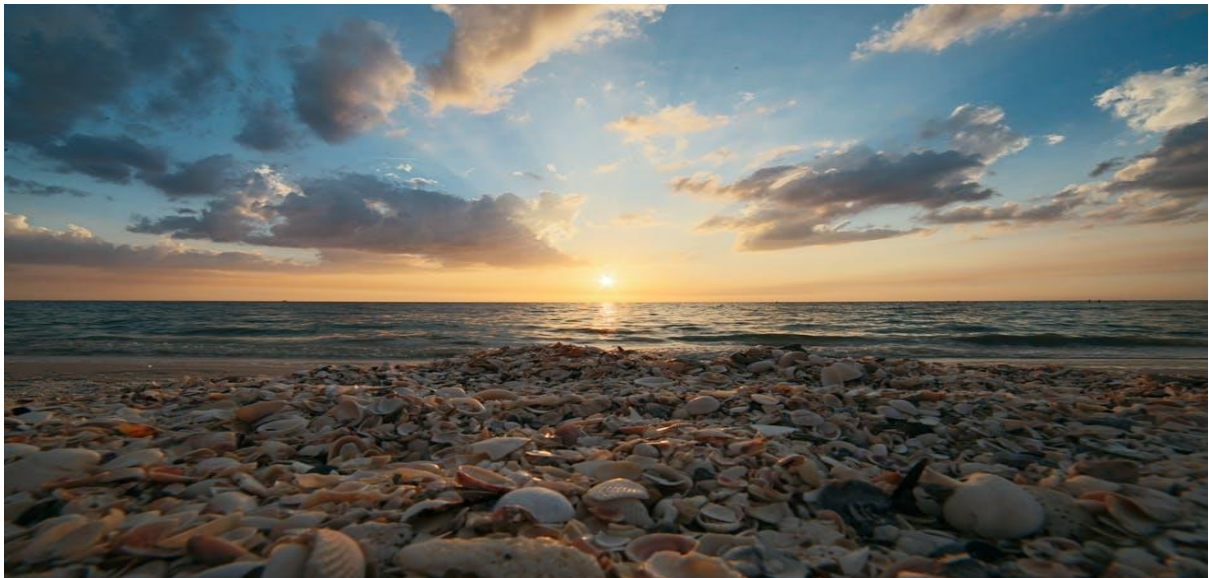
VALUED ACTION WORKSHEET

Day	Value	Steps taken towards valued direction	What was your experience of this? Did anything get in the way? If so, how did you respond to this?
1			
2			



3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



Session nine

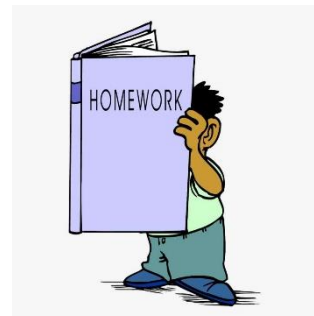
Week Six

- Understanding goals
- Setting goals and action plans

We have started to think about the steps we could take to begin to move towards our valued direction. This week we are going to take it further and look at goals we can set which are in line with our values.

REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

Look back to the worksheet from the last session. What kind of values did you choose to work towards? Did you take any steps towards these values? What kind of things got in the way of you doing this? How did you respond?



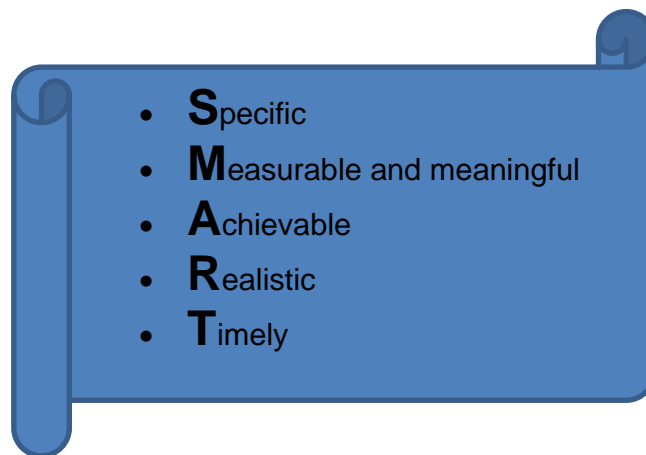
GOALS BASED ON OUR VALUES

Research shows that we are much more likely to follow through with our intended actions if we set clear goals.

When thinking about goals it can be helpful to follow these steps:

- Choose one value to focus on
- Consider goals which are in line with this value

- For each goal, think of about small, intermediate actions as well as short, medium and long term ones that will help you to achieve your goal. It's best to start small and work our way up. Try to make your goals as SMART as possible



Here is an example of how you could go about setting SMART goals. You can use this to help you think about your own SMART goals in line with your chosen values.



Imagine someone had identified that their top 3 values were:

- (a) Being with others
- (b) Learning new things
- (c) Being a caring / loving spouse / partner / parent etc

First of all, we might choose to focus on the first value, of being with others. Following this we could brainstorm some goals, looking at long term, medium term, short term and immediate goals in turn.

Long term goal	Go out with friends somewhere
Medium term goal	Have family round for Sunday lunch
Short term goal	Invite friend round for a catchup
Immediate goal	Go to the library

Once we have a list of goals, we can make any changes to make sure they are SMART:

	ORIGINAL GOAL	SMART GOAL
Long term goal	Go out with friends somewhere	Go bowling at All Stars Bowling ally with Jack and Jane before Christmas
Medium term goal	Have family round for Sunday lunch	Have my brother and nephews around to mine for Sunday lunch before Easter
Short term goal	Invite friend round for a catchup	Have Jack over to catch up one evening before the end of the month. Will suggest this Friday to him.
Immediate goal	Go to the library	Go to the local library this Sunday for 20 minutes when book club is on.





Using this example, choose one of your own values and brainstorm long, medium, short and immediate term goals. Remember to check to see if you could make your goals any SMARTer.

Chosen value:		
Long term goal:		
Medium term goal:		
Short term goal:		
Immediate goal:		



WILLINGNESS

Moving in our valued direction can sometimes involve coming into contact with uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, sensations and urges. In Acceptance and Commitment Therapy we foster a willingness to experience these in order to honour our values and lead a meaningful life. Returning to our passengers on the bus analogy, we are willing to put up with some unwanted passengers if it means we can get on with the business of driving our bus in our desired direction.

What thoughts/memories, emotions, sensations, urges are you willing to make room for in order to serve your values and achieve your value driven goals? It can be helpful to consider the passenger which are likely to be onboard your bus and how you would like to respond to them.

Passengers I may have onboard as I move in my valued direction

Thoughts/memories:

Emotions:

Physical sensations:

Urges:

Other:

When these passengers show up it would be useful to remind myself:

HOMEWORK

This week, spend some time selecting goals and choosing actions that will take you towards your valued path. Start by deciding which value you'd like to work on. Once you've done this, identify a goal that will help you to live this value. Then break this goal down into smaller steps or actions.



Record your chosen value, goal and actions in the space provided.

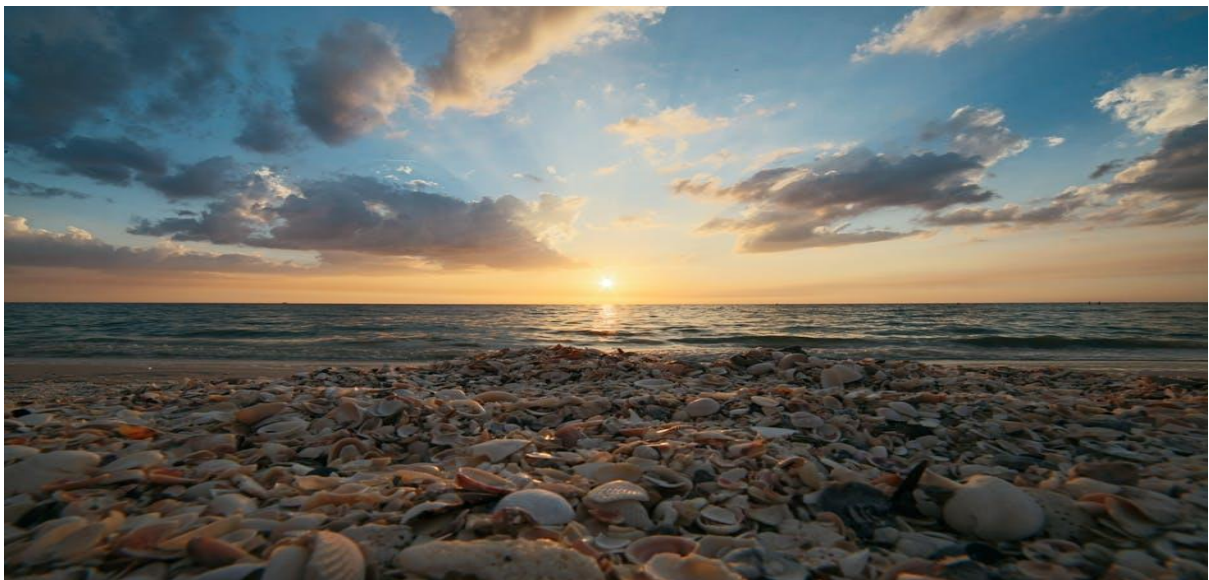
Try to do this 3 times over the course of the next week. We'll spend some time in the group discussing how you found this.



Value: _____
Goal: _____

Value: _____
Goal: _____
Actions: 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



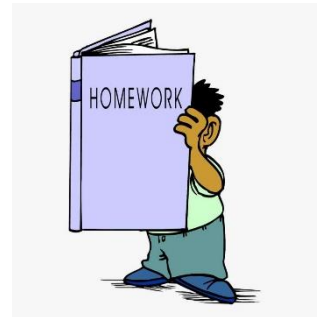
Session ten

Week Seven

- Identifying and responding to barriers
- Problem solving
- To learn about how pacing can be helpful in doing more of the things we value

REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

Review the worksheet from last session and use the space below to make notes of your reflections.



What kind of commitments did you choose, and what were the results?

Did anything get in the way or make it difficult?

How did you respond to aspects of your experience which may have made carrying out your committed action difficult?



How did this work for you? Would you apply this approach in the future or might there be another approach which may have been more helpful?

SOLVING PROBLEMS

Sometimes other things can get in the way of us working towards our values-based goals and living our life in line with our values. When this happens, the first step we need to take is to be clear about which value we are struggling with, and what it is that is getting in the way. This can help us to step back from the thoughts about the problem and start to look towards what we want to do about them.

Once we have our problem written down, there are some steps that we can follow to take action and get us back on our valued path:

- 1) Clearly identify the value, goal and problem.
- 2) Brainstorm all the different things you could try.
- 3) Go through the list and think about the positives and negatives of each option.
- 4) Choose the option that makes the most sense for you in terms of living your values.
- 5) Break your chosen option down into step-by-step actions.
- 6) Write down the things that might help you achieve each action in spite of any barriers.
- 7) Carry out the actions.
- 8) Review the problem – have your actions helped you to get back on to your valued path?

To take an example, perhaps you value learning and developing new skills, and you have set a goal of doing a photography course. However, when you applied to your local college for the course, they were unable to offer you a place as the course was full.

Value	Learning and developing new skills
Goal	Complete the photography course
Problem	Course is full

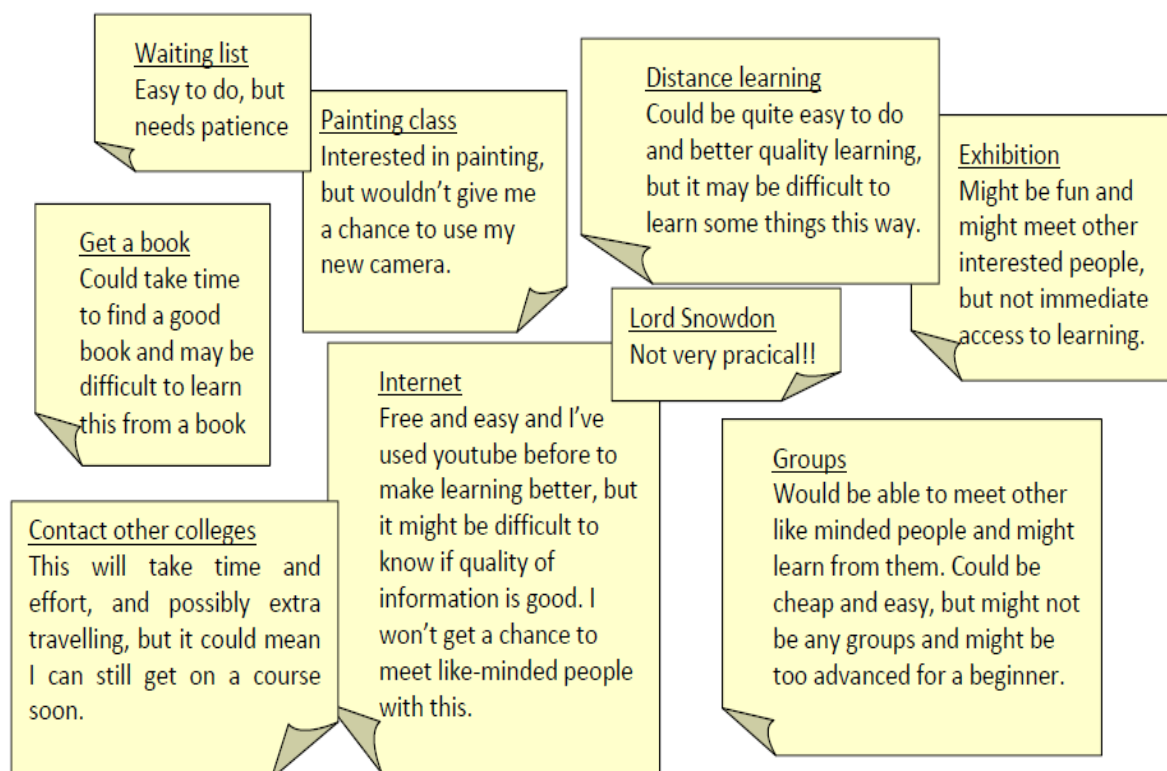
Once we have our problem on paper, the next step is brainstorming all the different options that we have. It's helpful at this point to include absolutely anything, even impossible or silly options, as these can sometimes spark off a very useful option. It's also best to try to stick to thinking of as many options as possible without starting to think through the detail of any of them at this point.

Let's have a go with our example... You might find as you're doing this that your mind starts to tell you that some of your ideas are rubbish, impossible, or silly. When this happens, just try to hold that thought lightly, and put the idea down on the paper anyway.

What kind of options can you think of? Options might include:

Value	Learning and developing new skills
Goal	Complete the photography course
Problem	Course is full
Brainstorming options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Contacting all the other colleges in the area - Asking to go on the local college waiting list - Buying or borrowing a book - Using the internet to learn basics - Finding out about distance learning courses - Inviting Lord Snowdon (or other famous photographer) round for a chat - Going to a photography exhibition - Visiting the library to find out about any local groups - Taking a painting class instead of photography

Once we have a list of ideas, the next step is to think about the good and bad sides to doing each option. So, in our example:



Based on this, perhaps the option of contacting other colleges is chosen. The next step then is to think carefully about how we're going to go about this option. Often it is helpful to break the option down into smaller 'chunks'. We can then plan when it will take place, where, who is involved. The more information we think through here, the more chance it will happen.

In our example, we could break this option down into:

1. Search for local colleges online and make a list of them.
2. Check each college website to see if they offer beginner photography courses.
3. Contact each college to check dates, prices and availability.
4. Check if courses are offered remotely or how far away each college is.
5. Check on website to see if there are discounts or funding for courses.
6. Possibly visit each college to find out more.
7. Choose college and book into course.

Finally, once we've carried out the actions, we can evaluate whether it has solved our problem and helped us live our value - or not. If it has, great! If not, or if we think more could be done, then maybe we want to go back to the list of options again and choose another one, or perhaps start the process again.

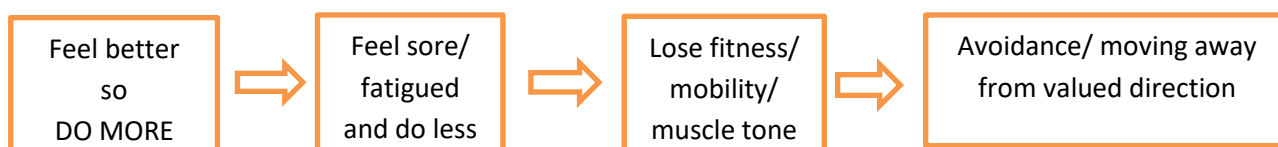
In our example, we get through all the steps and are booked into a course but realise that we can't get a bus to that college for the time of the course. So – we can follow the process again, clarifying what the problem is and brainstorming options like finding alternative transport or switching to another college further away but with better bus links.

Using these kind of problem solving strategies can be very helpful in moving us towards doing more of what we value. But it's important that we are aware of when it's helping us to do this, and when it's not, so that we can make a choice about whether it is the right tool for us in that moment.

Pacing

Sometimes it can feel as though our pain or health symptoms are very unpredictable and get in the way of us living our values. Maybe you feel better on some days and feel like you can do the things that are important to you, but then when you do, you feel floored afterwards, maybe for days, and then miss out on things that are even more important to you. You maybe feel as though you really pay for the times when you do manage to do things. It can be hard to understand why this is happening.

One way to think about this may be:

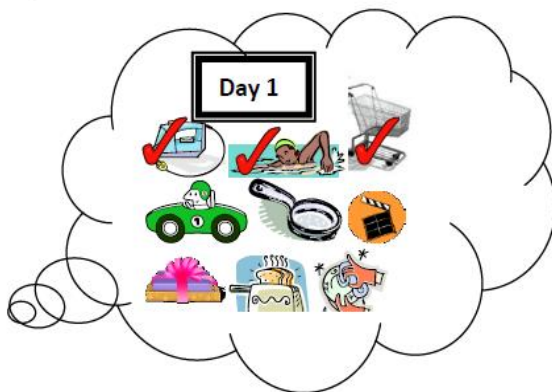
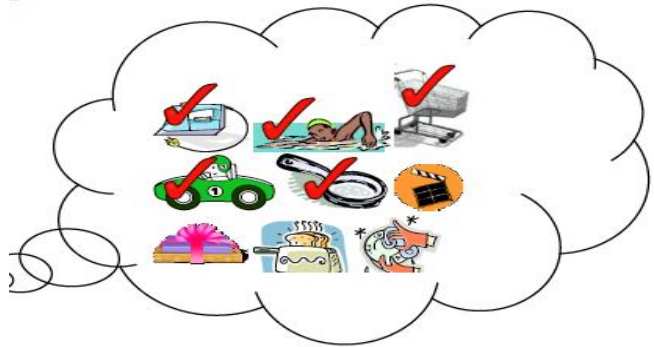


An alternative approach is to pace activities. Pacing is trying to keep doing the things you want to do but taking regular breaks to avoid overdoing things. It's trying to pause and rest before our symptoms kick in and stop us doing more of what is important to us. Life is a marathon, not a sprint, and pacing is something that can be useful in helping us do more of the things that are important to us.

What kind of ways have you tried to pace in the past? How have you found it? What kind of things stop you from pacing?

When we talk about pacing, we're not talking about doing it to try to reduce, control or get rid of your symptoms. Rather, pacing can be used to do more of the things that are important to you with the symptoms that you have by taking control of behaviour, rather than letting behaviour be dictated by symptoms.

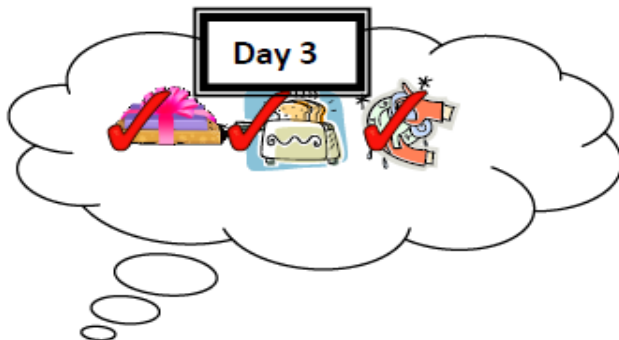
Imagine you have 9 things you *want to get done and you are having a good day so you blast along* and get 5 of them done and find that night your symptoms are really difficult and you find you can't manage anything for the next two days.



Now go back in time, it's that first day and you choose to do only 3 things and stop.



The next day you are not flared up, so you do three that day too, and stop.



Then on the third day you finish jobs 7, 8 and 9. After 3 days you have had your usual level of symptoms, and you have got all the things done you want to get done and not been floored by your symptoms.

HOMEWORK

The homework task this week is to continue to take valued action. This may involve continuing to work towards the value driven goals you identified last session or you may choose to set yourself new goals based on your values.

Review your reflections from the homework task and consider how you may apply this when moving towards your value driven goals.

Once again, we'll spend some time in the group discussing how you found this.





Value: _____

Goal: _____

Actions: 1. _____

 2. _____

 3. _____

Value: _____

Goal: _____

Actions: 1. _____

 2. _____

 3. _____

Value: _____

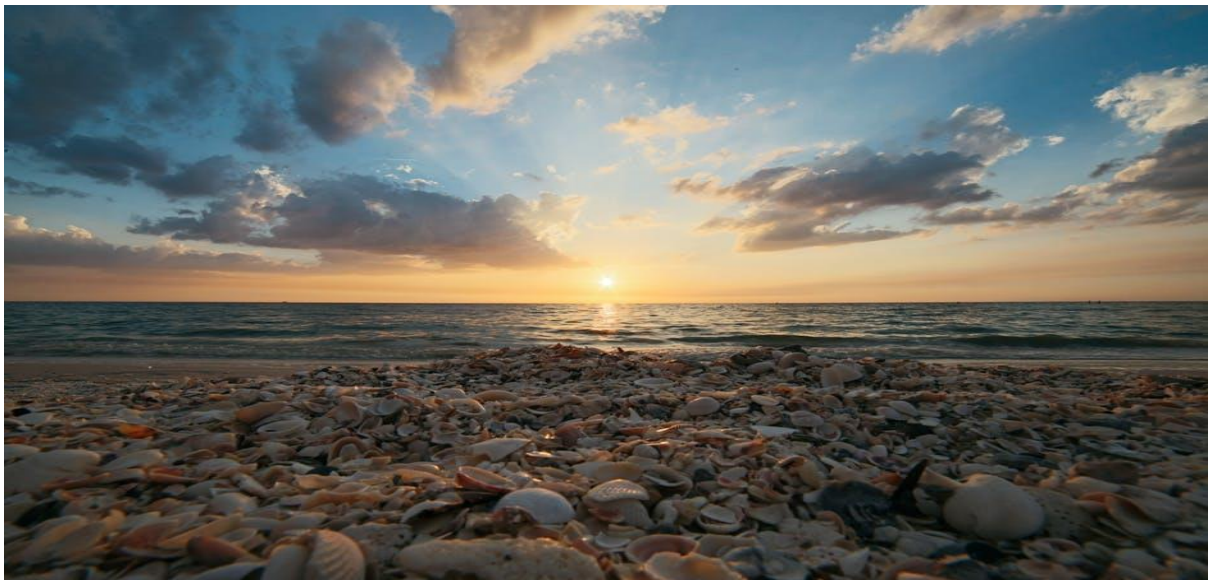
Goal: _____

Actions: 1. _____

 2. _____

 3. _____

ACT for Long term Health Conditions



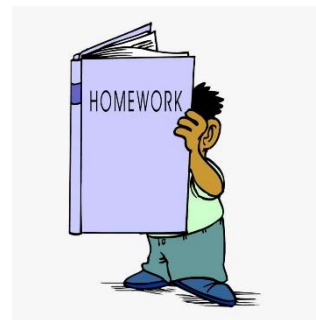
Session eleven

Week Eight

- To prepare for setbacks
- To refresh what we've learned in the group

REVIEW OF HOMEWORK

Review the worksheet from last session. What actions did you take, and what were the results? Did anything get in the way or make it difficult? How did you respond to this? Write about how you got on here.



Now that we have come to the end of this ACT course, take a moment to reflect upon the course. What was your experience of this course and what will you take away from it? You may like to summarise the course to someone who did not attend to reinforce your learning. Make a note of your reflections here:

PREPARING FOR SET BACKS

We've talked about a lot of skills that you hopefully find helpful in moving your life forward in the direction that you want to take it. However, the path ahead isn't likely to be smooth. In fact, we can probably guarantee that there will be some potholes ahead, and so we'd like to spend some time with you thinking about preparing for the potholes and punctures that lie ahead of you.

The things we have learned are like tools that have helped you to live a more meaningful life with your mental health and physical health condition. And we have a great tool bag to store all these tools in. Now you can take your toolkit and store it in your cupboard at home. And you can get on with living your life.



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While you're doing that what's happening to your tools? Maybe they're getting a bit rusty. Or maybe you're forgetting how to turn them on and operate them. You may find it hard to remember where they are stored in your cupboard. So, when you hit difficulties, which is likely to happen for all of us, what do you do? You maybe spend a lot of time looking for your tools in a panic, feeling like you're getting nowhere before you give up. Or maybe you find the tools but can't quite remember how to use them.

What else might we do with the toolkit we have been developing throughout this course? Perhaps we could leave it lying on the living room coffee table or beside the kettle in the kitchen. Somewhere where the bag is in sight and encouraging us to keep checking in with our tools. We could dip into the bag regularly and check that the tools are still working okay. That way, when things get difficult, everything is to hand, and we don't have to spend a lot of time and energy finding the tools at a time when that feels like a really difficult thing to do.



You can choose to take some time off from doing the hard work that we've been engaged in during this course. But there are costs and risks to doing this. ACT is not like some other treatments where you may attend to it for a time and then stop. Instead, ACT is an approach that is ongoing and will require continued practice to remain on your chosen path.

Given that setbacks are to be expected on any journey to recovery, it can be helpful to plan for these so that we may respond skilfully.

BE AWARE OF YOUR POTENTIAL TRIGGERS.

We know that moving away from our values can lead to setbacks. It can be helpful to be aware of what could cause this.

Is there anything coming up in the future which may challenge your ability to continue in your valued direction?

Helpful question to consider: could any past obstacles reappear and cause you to trip up again?

YOUR ACTION PLAN FOR SETBACKS:



Step 1: Taking stock...

Check in with yourself and keep an eye on whether you are moving away from your valued path. Some helpful questions to consider here:

- What are some of the things you value?
- How would you know if you are moving away from those values?
- How would that look? How would that feel?
- How might that affect you in how you think or do things?
- How could that impact your physical health?
- What impact could that have on your relationships?

If you feel you have moved away from your valued direction then make a few notes about how you feel you have drifted from your path:

Step 2: Acknowledging

All humans wander from our valued paths at times. This is not a personal failing – it’s just one aspect of being human. Bring as much kindness to yourself in the process as you can—it can be very painful to acknowledge when we are not acting in accordance with what matters to us.



Try answering the following question and note your response- 'If I was bringing kindness and understanding to myself in the current situation, what would I say to myself?'

Step 3: Considering barriers

Acknowledge barriers that could get in the way of starting again:

- Thoughts like "What's the point?"
- Feelings like embarrassment, anxiety, tiredness

The barriers that have shown up as I think about starting again are:

Step 4: Use your ACT framing

Look at the barriers and consider using an ACT perspective in how you approach them.

Use ACT skills such as acceptance, willingness, defusion and mindfulness, to work effectively with barriers

What ACT skills, practices, metaphors would help me work with these barriers?



Step 5: Planning

Plan a small, manageable step in your valued direction that you can do today, seeking support or encouragement if that would be helpful.

My small step is:

What support or encouragement do I need/can I ask for:

YOUR NEXT STEPS

Discharge from Steps2Wellbeing:

When you complete treatment with Steps2Wellbeing, you are discharged back to the care of your GP. We advise consolidating the skills learnt over several months to see a long-term difference.

Keep accessing further support if needed:

Recovery Education Centre:

The Recovery Education Centre (REC) is delivered in partnership between Dorset HealthCare and the Dorset Mental Health Forum. They offer a wide range of educational courses across Dorset which focus on recovery and wellbeing. Their courses are free to attend and are open to anyone over the age of 18 years living in Dorset. Visit their website to see the schedule of courses and refer in: <https://www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/our-services-hospitals/REC>

Book recommendation:

Living with the Enemy: Coping with the stress of chronic illness using CBT, mindfulness and acceptance by Ray Owen

MOVING ON

Thank you for coming along to the group. We hope you have found it helpful. If you feel you have not come as far as you had hoped, remember you can continue to make progress after the course finishes as you consolidate your skills. This process takes time, so as best you can, try to be patient with yourself.

As you move through a challenging or easier time, remember that this too shall pass. Checking your compass regularly to move you towards your valued direction in life will help you.

