**Contents**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Session 1** | **Page** |
|  | Description of ACT | 3 |
|  | Feeling good exercise | 3 |
|  | Creative hopelessness | 4 |
|  | Values card sorting exercise | 5 |
|  | Values wheel | 5 |
|  | Homework | 5 |
|  | Handouts:  |  |
|  | Feeling good exercise | 7 |
|  | Coping strategies worksheet | 8 |
|  | The Journey | 9 |
| **Session 2** |  |
|  | Recap of session 1 | 10 |
|  | Pharmacotherapy | 10 |
|  | Rationale | 11 |
|  | Mindfulness of Breathing | 11 |
|  | S.T.O.P. | 12 |
|  | The Smoking Matrix | 13 |
|  | Homework | 14 |
|  | Handouts: |  |
|  | S.T.O.P. | 16 |
|  | The Matrix | 17 |
|  | Mindfulness of routine activities diary | 18 |
| **Session 3** |  |
|  | Recap of session 2 | 19 |
|  | Set a Quit Date | 19 |
|  | Rationale | 19 |
|  | Chinese finger trap | 20 |
|  | Physicalizing exercise | 20 |
|  | Identifying barriers to quitting | 21 |
|  | Exposure to internal barriers exercise | 21 |
|  | Withdrawal symptoms | 22 |
|  | Dealing with discomfort | 23 |
|  | Homework | 23 |
|  | Handouts: |  |
|  | Withdrawal symptoms  | 24 |
|  | Acceptance practice sheet | 25 |
| **Session 4** |  |
|  | Recap of session 3 | 26 |
|  | Rationale | 26 |
|  | Pushing away paper exercise | 27 |
|  | Defusion / fusion | 27 |
|  | Observing your thoughts exercise | 27 |
|  | Taking your mind for a walk exercise | 28 |
|  | Choices vs. decisions | 29 |
|  | Homework | 29 |
|  | Handouts: |  |
|  | Leaves on a stream | 30 |
|  | More defusion techniques | 31 |
| **Session 5** |  |
|  | Recap of session 4 | 32 |
|  | Rationale | 32 |
|  | Chessboard metaphor | 32 |
|  | The observer exercise | 33 |
|  | Self-compassion | 35 |
|  | Compassionate hand exercise | 35 |
|  | The Choice Point | 36 |
|  | Commitment | 37 |
|  | Homework | 37 |
|  | Handouts: |  |
|  | The Choice Point | 39 |
|  | The Road Not Taken | 40 |
|  | Tracking your thoughts in time | 41 |
|  | Watching bodily sensations | 42 |
|  | Defusing from implicit evaluations | 43 |
| **Session 6** |  |
|  | Recap of session 5 | 45 |
|  | Rationale | 45 |
|  | Passengers-on-the-bus metaphor | 45 |
|  | Goal setting | 46 |
|  | Psychological flexibility & review | 48 |
|  | Acceptance | 49 |
|  | Present-moment awareness | 49 |
|  | Defusion | 50 |
|  | The observing self | 50 |
|  | Values | 51 |
|  | Committed action | 51 |
|  | Handouts: |  |
|  | Clarifying your values | 52 |
|  | Goal setting | 54 |

**Session 1**

**Description of ACT:**

This course is based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy or ACT. ACT is scientifically based psychotherapy that has been shown to be useful for a wide range of problems. Research has supported ACT for treating people with anxiety, depression, hallucinations, delusions, and chronic stress. ACT has been found to be effective for people struggling with different health problems like diabetes, chronic pain, obesity, and cancer. And, most importantly, ACT has been found has been to be successful in helping people with a range of addictions from heroin, cocaine, cannabis, alcohol, and smoking.

 The research on which ACT is based suggests that many of the common sense ways in which we try to overcome problems in our lives can be unhelpful. As a result, ACT challenges some of the most conventional ways of thinking about how we approach these problems. What ACT asks you to do is fundamentally change the way in which you deal with your personal experience: your thoughts, feelings, emotions and so on.

 We are not going to try to convince you to quit smoking – that decision is yours and yours alone. But, if you’ve decided for yourself that it’s time to let go of cigarettes and you find that smoking is blocking you from living the life you want to live, then we offer this 6-week course to help you. Sometimes we’ll ask you to do some pretty strange stuff: odd exercises, activities, meditations, assignments and other things. It’s our hope that you find things here that move you toward the life you want to live.

 Many people who have considered quitting smoking have found that without a specific quit date they never get around to making the attempt to quit. In this course, we set the quit date far enough in advance to give you the opportunity to develop and practice a range of skills before you quit that you can then seamlessly put into practice when you do stop smoking. We encourage everybody to set their quit date between weeks three and four of the course. This also makes the group most effective, as it enables each of you to share common experiences and concerns as well as support for each other. Before your quit date it is okay to smoke normally; but because your body and mind are used to regular doses of nicotine, it is really important that after this quit date you commit to having not even a single puff on a cigarette.

**Introduction:**

Say your name, why you were called your name, and what you hope to get from the course.

**Feeling Good Exercise:**

 We are going to start with an exercise that involves looking at your beliefs about how to deal with difficulties in your life. There is a sheet in your folders called the ‘feeling good exercise.’ It consists of seven pairs of statements. Select one statement with a tick from each pair – either A or B – that most reflects your current belief.

 From a young age we are taught that we should be able to control our thoughts and feelings: “cheer up,” “chill out,” “there’s nothing to be afraid of” and so on. This belief can become really ingrained in us. The more you selected option A on the sheet, the greater the likelihood that trying to control how you think and feel is creating suffering in your life.

 A series of experiments by a Harvard Psychologist, Daniel Wegner, showed why this is the case. He studied individuals’ ability to get rid of an unwanted thought. In the early studies he asked them first to think of a ‘white bear’ and then asked them to get rid of this thought from their minds. He found that not only could they not do this; thoughts of white bears eventually began to appear more than ever – a rebound effect. A lot of research has since shown that suppressing thoughts and emotions doesn’t work over the long term. In other words, not only does thought suppression not work, it actually increases the frequency of the very thoughts we are trying to get rid of. Therefore, you can guess what will happen if you try to force a thought like “a smoke would be nice right now” or “what harm could one cigarette do” out of your mind. Despite this, research shows that approximately 80% of people try to get rid of unwanted thoughts.

 Why do we do this, attempt to control the way we think and feel? Control works very well in the external world – it’s a major reason why humans are the dominant species on the planet despite not having the strength of gorillas or the speed of cheetahs and so on. We can control things in the world outside the skin by problem solving: If you don’t like something, you figure out how to get rid of it, and then get rid of it. For example, if you don’t like a leak in the roof you can fix it. The problem is this approach doesn’t work well when we apply it to the world inside the skin – how we think and feel.

**Creative Hopelessness:**

Using the coping strategies sheet in your folder, I would like you to list a couple of thoughts and emotions that you have from time-to-time that you don’t like, for example, stress, sadness or anxiety. Then, list the things you sometimes do to get rid of these thoughts and emotions. Finally, rate how effective each of these strategies are, first in the short-term and then in the long-term – rate them from 1 to 5, where 1 is not effective at all and 5 is extremely effective.

* Discuss this exercise in pairs.
* Is anyone willing to share anything you noticed about this with the group?
	+ Effective short-term but ineffective long-term: this is a really serious problem because short-term effects are far more reinforcing – they have a much greater influence over how we behave – than long term effects.
	+ What are the costs associated with this?
	+ Name something else that people tend to do when they have unwanted experiences such as feeling stressed or anxious: Smoking! Works in the short-term: the nicotine in a cigarette reaches the brain within 10 seconds of inhaling and produces a sense of pleasure. How well does it work long-term, how long is the stress or worry gone for? What are the costs: financial, health, skin, even having to leave a building and go out in the cold to smoke?

Despite what we have just talked about, for many people overcoming a problem like stress or smoking refers not only to an ultimate end but also an end achieved by a specific means. For example, overcoming stress must first involve eliminating stressful feelings and overcoming smoking must first involve getting rid of urges to smoke. Naturally people do not want these feelings, but nobody wants to sit at their 90th birthday and somebody to stand up to say how “Martin never felt stressed or never had an urge to smoke, but never did anything with his life.” In line with this, we are going to take a look at the reasons why you want to quit smoking and the things in life that are most important to you.

**Values card sorting exercise:**

Each card in the deck describes a personal value or quality that you can bring to your actions on a daily basis. What I would like you to do is to sort your deck of cards into three piles:

1. Values that are very important to me
2. Values that are somewhat important to me
3. Values that are not very important to me

There are no right or wrong answers to this – You should sort the cards based on what you yourself personally value, rather than what other people think should be important to you.

* Set aside the pile of cards containing the values that are not very important to you.
* Go through the remaining two piles, and pick out the top five values that are most important to you.

**Values wheel:**

1. When you are done, take the wheel and write your top 5 values on the top lips of the coloured disks with the marker – write one value on each disk.
2. Now, I want you to think about each personal value that you have written down and, using your marker, put a dot on the target of each respective coloured segment to indicate the extent to which you have been living each value during the past week including today – how consistent your actions have been with each value. A mark in the centre means you are living this value to the fullest extent possible. A mark far from the centre means that you are way off the mark in terms of living this value.
3. Finally, I want you to indicate the relative importance of each value to you by changing the size the disks to represent this. A large slice of the pie means the value is very important to you, while a smaller slice means it is less important to you.

**Homework**

1. Now, I would like you to select which of the five values you would most like to work on.
2. I want you to think of something you could do: a specific goal that you could achieve between now and our session next week that would move you closer to the value you selected – to be a little bit more like the person you want to be.
3. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is “I am absolutely certain I am going to do this” and 0 means “there is no way I am going to do this”, right now, being brutally honest, rate how likely it is that you will complete this goal between now and our next session.
4. If the answer is lower than 7, set yourself a smaller goal.
5. Finally, if you feel comfortable, discuss your goal with the person beside you. Research shows that if you state your goal to at least one other person, you are more likely to follow through with it. However, if you are not comfortable discussing your goal, you can discuss how you found the process of clarifying your personal values and anything you noticed about it.
6. Is anyone willing to share their goal with the group?

As we’ve already discussed, spending your time and energy trying to avoid unwanted feelings like urges or cravings to smoke and get rid of thoughts such as “I would love a cigarette now” or “what if I go back on the cigarettes” is not useful – the evidence shows you don’t get a good return for your investment. We want to invest our time and energy moving towards what we have identified in that exercise: the things in life that are important to us. As we go forward with the course we will look at specific ways to help you to do that as you quit smoking.

**FEELING GOOD EXERCISE**

Listed here are a number of beliefs about negative moments in our lives, for example, feeling bad, having unwanted thoughts, memories or unpleasant physical sensations. For each pair of beliefs, check the one that is closest to how you currently address these moments in your life.

\_\_\_\_ la. Negative experiences will hurt you if you don’t do something to get rid of them.

\_\_\_\_ lb. Negative experiences can’t hurt you, even if they feel bad.

\_\_\_\_ 2a. When negative experiences occur, the goal is to do something to get them under control so they hurt less.

\_\_\_\_ 2b. The attempt to control negative experiences creates problems; the goal is to let them be there, and they will change as a natu­ral part of living.

\_\_\_\_ 3a. The way to handle negative experiences is to understand why I’m having them, and then use that knowledge to eliminate them.

\_\_\_\_ 3b. The way to handle negative experiences is to notice they’re pres­ent without necessarily analyzing and judging them.

\_\_\_\_ 4a. The way to be “healthy” is to learn better and better ways to control and eliminate negative moments.

\_\_\_\_ 4b. The way to be “healthy” is to learn to have negative moments and to live effectively.

\_\_\_\_ 5a. The inability to control or eliminate a negative reaction is a sign of weakness.

\_\_\_\_ 5b. Needing to control a negative experience is a problem.

\_\_\_\_ 6a. The appearance of negative experiences is a clear sign of per­sonal problems.

\_\_\_\_ 6b. The appearance of negative experiences is an inevitable part of being alive.

\_\_\_\_ 7a. People who are in control of their lives are generally able to control how they react and feel.

\_\_\_\_ 7b. People who are in control of their lives need not try to control their reactions or feelings.

|  |
| --- |
| **Coping Strategies Worksheet** |
| **Painful thought or feeling** | **Coping technique** | **Short-term****effectiveness** | **Long-term****effectiveness** |
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**The Journey**

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice–
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
‘Mend my life!’
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognised as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do–
determined to save
the only life you could save.

**Mary Oliver (1986)**

**Session 2**

**Recap of Session 1**

Last week we started off by looking at how trying to control our thoughts and feelings can create problems in our lives. We talked about how trying to force thoughts out of our minds, for example “a smoke would be nice right now”, can backfire and actually increase the thoughts that we are trying to get rid of.

We also carried out an exercise looking at different strategies that we use to get rid unwanted thoughts and feelings such as stress or anxiety and found that these strategies usually work in the short-term but are not effective in the long-term and often have significant costs. We looked at how smoking is often another one of these strategies.

We finished off by looking at each of your reasons for quitting smoking and the things in life that are important to you.

**Review of homework**

**Overview of session**

We are going to begin this session by reviewing stop smoking medications. Following this, we will practice some exercises and techniques that can be really helpful when quitting smoking. Finally, we will look at an interesting point of view on smoking and many of the other behaviours we engage in.

**Pharmacotherapy**

Stop smoking medications can be a helpful ally in quitting. Research suggests that a combined treatment – attending a course such as this and taking stop smoking medication – provides the best odds of quitting. For this reason, we are going to spend some time reviewing the options available. The two licenced stop smoking medications that are primarily used in Ireland are nicotine replacement therapy or NRT and varenicline or champix.

NRTs deliver pharmaceutical nicotine to relieve withdrawal symptoms and do not contain the other harmful components of cigarettes, such as tar and carbon monoxide. NRTs include the nicotine patch as well as oral products including nicotine gum, lozenges, mouth spray and inhaler. It has been found that combining the patch with an oral NRT works better than using a single form of NRT: the patch provides a steady supply of nicotine throughout the day and the faster-acting oral products can be used to help with ‘breakthrough’ urges or cravings to smoke.

The patch is available in various strengths and typically provides half the nicotine of cigarettes. Sometimes the patch can produce a burning sensation to the area of skin where it is applied. This can be reduced by changing the area where it is applied each day. If you decide to use an oral NRT such as the gum, lozenge, spray or inhaler, it is recommended that you use it on the hour every hour. The number one problem with NRT is that people do not use enough of it for long enough. The nicotine in oral NRTs is absorbed through the lining of the cheeks – it is not well absorbed through saliva. For example, the gum should be chewed until you experience a peppery taste and then parked against the cheek for the nicotine to be absorbed. After a couple of minutes you can repeat this process. It is recommended that NRT be used for at least eight weeks. NRTs should be used with caution in people with heart disease, diabetes, oesophagitis, gastric or peptic ulcers, liver or kidney impairment, and uncontrolled hyperthyroidism.

The other stop smoking medication that is primarily used in Ireland is varenicline or champix. It has been found to be twice as effective as bupropion – another stop smoking medication – and more effective than single forms of NRT, but is available on prescription only. It works by reducing cravings, withdrawal symptoms, and the satisfaction you get from cigarettes. We are discussing this now because if you decide you are going to use it, you need to start taking it at least seven days before your quit date. A course of varenicline lasts for 12 weeks. It should be used with caution in people with kidney impairment, a history of psychiatric illness or epilepsy.

If you decide to use any of these medications, using them correctly is the key to maximising how beneficial they will be. It is important to point out, however, that stop smoking medications are a useful aid when quitting, but will not completely get rid of the desire to have a cigarette.

**Rationale**

Smoking is a difficult habit to break. What makes this seemingly simple behaviour so difficult to quit is the amount of conditioning that goes into establishing a smoking habit. For example, a person who smokes 20 a day takes an average of 160 puffs each day. Only breathing, walking, and eating behaviour can compete with the extremely high frequency of smoking behaviour. Can you think of anything else you do 160 times a day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year? Smoking also tends to become associated with a wide range of emotions, places, people and activities. If you think of smoking as a psychological cobweb, its strands are everywhere.

As with any behaviour that is repeated enough times, it becomes “second nature” and starts running on autopilot – mindlessly. You can have an urge, take out a packet, pull out a cigarette and light it up without ever being aware of having the thought to smoke. Given that habitual behaviours such as smoking are mindless, developing the skill of mindfulness is useful for combatting such behaviours. Mindfulness will help to increase your awareness of your cravings to smoke and your reactions to them and will provide you with a new skill that can be used in response to smoking urges. Mindfulness usually involves paying attention to things that we ordinarily don’t pay attention to and for this reason we are going to begin with a brief mindfulness exercise that focuses on paying attention to the feeling of the breath moving in and out of the body.

**Mindfulness of Breathing**

Begin by getting comfortable in your chair with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and your shoulders loose.

Now gently close your eyes.

For the next few minutes, there is nowhere you have to be, nothing you have to do, or no one you have to please. It is your time: time for you to purely and simply be present – here and now – and to notice what is happening, with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

And gently beginning to notice your breathing.

Noticing anything at all about the sensations of your breathing.

You may notice the sensation of air as it enters your nostrils… feeling cool on the way in and warm on the way out.

And taking a few breaths now as you notice the sensation of air flowing in and out… cool on the in-breath and warm on the out-breath.

You may notice the rise and fall of your chest and stomach as you breathe… rising on the in-breath and falling on the out-breath. Take a few moments to observe this.

As you continue to notice your breathing, you may notice that your breathing is rapid... or you may notice that your breathing is shallow… whatever you notice about your breathing, there is no need to change it… simply observe your breathing pattern… and if your breathing pattern changes, simply notice that as well.

And continuing to notice your breathing by paying attention to the rise and fall of your stomach. With the in-breath your stomach may rise a lot or it may rise just a little… whatever you notice, continue to observe as you focus on your breathing and the sensation of the rise and fall of your stomach.

From time to time, your attention will become distracted by thoughts or feelings. Each time this happens, simply notice what distracted you, then bring your attention back to your breath. No matter how often your attention wanders – whether a hundred times or a thousand – your aim is simply to note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the rise and fall of your stomach.

Continue to notice your breathing… gently returning to your breath when thoughts arise... for a few more moments.

And now getting a sense of whereabouts you are in the room… the sounds around you. And when you’re ready opening your eyes. Noticing what you can see… hear… and feel. If you like, have a stretch.

* Discuss your experience of this exercise in pairs
* Is anyone willing to share anything you noticed about this with the group?

**S.T.O.P.**

We are going to practice a brief exercise now that can be useful when you are faced with difficult urges or cravings to smoke. When you have an experience like this it can seem like an emotional storm is whipping through your body: tossing painful thoughts and feelings in all directions. In order to weather these storms we can learn to S.T.O.P:

1. Slow your breathing
2. Take note
3. Open up and
4. Pursue your values

If you would like to get comfortable in your chairs now, we are going to practice this.

* Begin by taking a few deep breaths and mindfully observe the breath flowing in and out of your body. This will help to keep you grounded or anchored in the present moment.
* Now take note of your experience right now. Notice what you are thinking. Notice what you are feeling. Notice what you are doing. Notice how your thoughts and feelings are constantly swirling around and you can easily get caught up in them if you are not careful.
* Open up to the feelings you are having. Breathe into them and make room for them. Make room for your thoughts as well: don’t try to push them away or don’t try to cling onto them. See them for what they are – just thoughts – and give them space rather than getting caught up in them.
* The final step is to pursue a valued course of action. Connect with your values: ask yourself “what do I want to be about in the face of this of this?” How would I like to act, so that I can look back years from now and feel proud of my response?”

**The Smoking Matrix**

On the handout there is a diagram called the matrix. The matrix provides a way of looking at smoking and virtually any other behaviour that you can think of. The top half of the matrix concerns what is experienced through your five senses. For example, you can see, hear, smell, taste and touch your pen. The bottom half of the matrix concerns mental experience. For example, if you put your pen away you can imagine what it looks, sounds, smells, tastes and feels like. The important point is to notice the difference between experiencing through your five senses and mental experience.

The left side of the matrix represents movement away from uncomfortable experience such as stress, anxiety, self-doubt or cravings to smoke. Can you give me some examples of uncomfortable experiences that people tend to avoid? What kind of things do people do to get away from these uncomfortable experiences (*get rid of a craving by smoking; comfort eating, “try not to think about it” (bottom left))*

The right side of the matrix represents movement toward what you value in life. This refers to actions that bring you closer to what you personally consider to be important, be it health, family, recreation, education, work etc. Can you give me some examples of what you consider to be important in life? Can you give me some examples of things people do (i.e., behaviours that others can see – with hands, feet or mouth,) to bring them closer towards the personal values that we have mentioned? (*play with children; go to the gym; take a course; meet up with friends etc.*)

For example, research shows that being overly hard on yourself can be unhelpful when quitting smoking. One of the reasons for this is that when a person who is trying to quit smoking lapses and really beats him/herself up over it, they often experience strong feelings of disappointment and guilt. In order to get immediate relief from these feelings they have a cigarette. Does this get rid of the disappointment forever? What eventually happens? Then they have another cigarette to get rid of these feelings and so on. This is called a vicious circle. It also applies to emotional eating and problem drinking.

Weight gain among people quitting smoking is also relevant to the matrix. One of the reasons why people sometimes gain weight when quitting smoking is because they replace cigarettes with food as a way of trying to get rid of uncomfortable feelings such as cravings and urges. This is called symptom substitution. On the other hand, in our sessions we are working on ways to address the underlying problem: that avoiding uncomfortable experience, be it with cigarettes, food, alcohol or many other substances and behaviours, can sometimes work in the short-term but does not work in the long-term and the resulting costs far outweigh the benefits. The mindfulness skills we have practiced tonight as well the range of other skills we will develop in the coming weeks will enable you to respond to this uncomfortable experience in a more effective way so that you can take your life in the direction you want it to go. Interestingly, a recent study of ACT for smoking cessation found no weight gain among participants who quit smoking using this approach.

Another important aspect of the matrix concerns “hooks.” Hooks are things that show up in your life and really capture your attention, emotionally grab you or get to you and stick with you for a while. For example, when somebody is really rude or disrespectful and you find this annoying and later complain about this person. We call things that really get to you and stick with you for a while “hooks.” Can you give me a few examples of hooks in your life (e.g., cut-off in traffic)? Being able to notice these hooks and what you tend to do after being hooked is a good skill to develop, as it is common for people to smoke after being hooked.

When we consider what we covered in our previous session – how trying to get rid of thoughts often backfires and how avoiding uncomfortable feelings often makes matters worse in the long-term – it becomes clear that we have far less control over mental experience than most people assume. In addition, if I were to ask you to look at the wall and not see it or touch your chair and not feel it, you could not do this. The point is that we have very little choice over what happens on the vertical axis of the matrix. But where we do have a choice is the horizontal axis. We can choose our actions. We can choose to act to avoid uncomfortable experience or we can choose to take action that brings us closer to what we value in life.

**Homework**

The mindfulness exercises we practiced in this session are useful for acquiring skills that can be helpful when quitting smoking, but what is most important is how you use these skills in your day-to-day life.

Over the next week I would like you to choose a routine activity from your daily life and each day make a conscious decision to bring moment-by-moment awareness to that activity. For example you might choose an activity like drinking tea or coffee, having a shower, brushing your teeth or going for a walk. During the activity let your awareness focus on the sensations and movements of your body and use your breath to help you to stay focused. I have a worksheet here to help you to note each time you tried this and any observations you had.

As we have mentioned before, we encourage you to set a quit date between weeks three and four of the course. That is, the week following next week’s session. I would like you to give some thought to this over the next week.

**What to do when you are faced by difficult urges and cravings to smoke**

When you are hit by difficult urges or cravings to smoke, an emotional storm is likely to whip through your mind and body, tossing painful thoughts and feelings in all directions. Here’s what you can do to survive and thrive: **S.T.O.P.**

**S**low your breathing

* Take a few deep breaths, and mindfully observe the breath flowing in and flowing out. This will help to anchor you in the present.

**T**ake note

* Take note of your experience in this moment. Notice what you are thinking. Notice what you are feeling. Notice what you are doing. Notice how your thoughts and feelings are swirling around, and can easily carry you away if you allow them.

**O**pen up

* Open up around your feelings. Breathe into them and make room for them. Open up to your thoughts too: take a step back and give them some room to move, without holding onto them or trying to push them away. See them for what they are and give them space, rather than fusing with them.

**P**ursue your values

* Once you’ve done the above three steps, you will be in a mental state of mindfulness. The next step is to respond to the difficult urges and cravings by pursuing a valued course of action. Connect with your values: ask yourself, ‘What do I want to be about, in the face of this crisis? What do I want to stand for? How would I like to act, so that I can look back years from now and feel proud of my response?’

**Things to Consider:**

1. Have you experienced anything similar before? If so, how did you respond that was useful and helpful in the long term? Is there anything you learned from that experience that you can usefully apply now?
2. Is there anything you can do to improve the situation in any way? Are there any TINY steps you could take immediately that could be helpful? What are the smallest, simplest, easiest, tiny steps you could take:
3. in the next few minutes
4. in the next few hours
5. in the next few days
6. *Note: the first step might simply be to spend a few minutes practicing some mindful breathing – or to take out a pen and paper and write an action plan.*
7. You don’t get to choose the hand of cards you are dealt in life; you only get to choose how you play with them. So a useful question to ask is: ‘Given this is the hand I’ve been dealt, what’s the best way to play with it? What personal strengths can I develop or strengthen as I go through this ordeal? How can I learn and grow from this experience?’ *Note: any painful experience is an opportunity to develop your mindfulness skills.*
8. Be compassionate to yourself. Ask yourself, ‘If someone I loved was going through this experience, feeling what I am feeling – if I wanted to be kind and caring towards them, how would I treat them? How would I behave towards them? What might I say or do?’ Then try treating yourself the same way.

**The Matrix:**

**5-Senses experiencing**

**Noticing**

**the**

**difference**

**Toward**

**Away**

**Mental experiencing**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Hook** |  | **Response** |
|  |  |  |
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Choose a **routine activity** from your daily life and each day make a conscious decision to bring moment by moment awareness to that activity. Possibilities for this could include: drinking tea or coffee, folding clothes, having a shower, brushing your teeth, going for a walk etc. Let your awareness focus on the sensations and movements of your body and use your breath to help you to stay anchored in the present moment.

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| **Day/Date** | **Routine Activity** | **Comments** |
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**Session 3**

**Recap of Session 2**

Last week we began by looking at the various stop smoking medications that are available. Following this, we looked at an interesting point of view on smoking called the matrix. We used it to understand vicious circles and symptom substitution such as emotional eating. We also spoke about how developing the skill of mindfulness can increase your awareness of cravings to smoke and can provide you with a useful tool that can be used in response to smoking urges. We worked on developing this skill by practicing a couple of mindfulness exercises such as mindful breathing and S.T.O.P. We finished off by talking about carrying this forward into everyday life by practicing mindful awareness of routine activities. How did you get on with this?

**Set a Quit Date**

As we have already mentioned, we encourage you to set a quit date between now and our next session, after which you do not smoke at all. After you have set a specific quit date, it is important to decide on the point at which you will have your last cigarette. For example, some people like to start from when they wake up on their quit day.

* Have a think about your quit date and the point at which you will have your last cigarette and discuss your plans in pairs.
* Is anyone willing to share their plans with the group?

**Rationale**

We are now going to work on developing a skill that will be extremely useful after your quit date. A helpful way to introduce this is to imagine being invited to a party. If you don’t want to attend this party and deliberately don’t show up, you’re literally removing yourself from a situation that, for some reason, you find unpleasant. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing – you could be skipping it to do something that is more important to you. But if you really wanted to go to the party and have a good time, then not showing up becomes a problem – specifically it is a problem of avoidance.

 In previous weeks we touched on the idea that smoking often serves as a subtle form of avoidance. It can provide some temporary relief when you are faced with a craving or urge to smoke. But I would say that we can all agree, all things considered, that the cost of this relief is too high.

Today we are going to look at how you can stay away from cigarettes and move in the direction you want your life to go – even when you are faced with unpleasant feelings and emotions. Mindful awareness of the present moment, the topic of last week’s session, is one way to do this. This week we are going to look at a way of being okay with the fact that our lives are filled with experiences that are both pleasant and unpleasant – we call this way acceptance.

**Chinese Finger Trap**

Place your index fingers in either end of the tube. Now try to pull them out and see what happens: When you try to pull them out, the tube constricts and traps your fingers; when you push your fingers inward, it causes the trap to loosen.

When we try to get away from unpleasant feelings or emotions, the struggle to get away from these experiences can make matters worse not better – like the way the bamboo tightens on our fingers when we try to pull away. But when we willingly come into contact with our discomfort – just as we gently press our fingers into finger trap – we create some room. Now it is important to remember that coming into contact with discomfort does not free you from it, but it creates some ‘wiggle room.’ A desire to pull away is natural, it seems to be human nature, but it often gets us stuck. When your entire focus is getting away from pain, this leaves few alternatives. If you’re willing to accept pain—even for a single moment—you’ve expanded your options.

Keep the finger trap to remind you of what happens when *you* struggle against your feelings and emotions.

It is important to mention that when you accept something, it does not mean you have to like it or want it. It is also important to distinguish acceptance from resignation. For example, if you are resigned to something it means that you have passively given up the fight with it. Acceptance, on the other hand, refers to actively coming into contact with uncomfortable feelings in the service of living the life you want to live.

I have spent a lot of time this evening talking and trying to get across ideas, but knowing is not the important thing here – the real magic is in the doing not the knowing.

**Physicalizing Exercise**

1. Get comfortable in your chair with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and your shoulders loose.

2. Now gently close your eyes.

3. And take a few slow, deep breaths and really notice the breath flowing in and out of your lungs. (*Pause 10 seconds*).

4. Now let your breath find its own natural rate and rhythm. Notice the rise & fall of your ribcage, the air flowing in & out of your nostrils, the rise & fall of your abdomen.

5. Now I want you to imagine that you are feeling an intense craving for a cigarette – a really strong urge. Try to really get in touch with how this craving makes you feel and all of the sensations in your body that come together to make up this craving.

6. Now I want you to imagine that you could pick this craving up and place it outside of you as an object, put it 4 or 5 feet in front of you on the floor in this room; and just slightly raise your hand to let me know when you have it out there.

7. Now, observe this object carefully and answer the following questions to yourself:

* What shape would this object have?
* What size is this Object?
* What colour is it?
* If you were to reach out and try to pick it up would it be heavy, like lead, or light like air?
* If it had a speed, how fast would it move?
* If you were to feel the surface of it, what texture would it have?
* What temperature would this object have, would it be hot or cold?

8. As you observe this object, with the shape, size, colour, weight, speed, texture and temperature that it has, notice if you have any reactions to this object. For example, you might dislike it, not want to have it or be repulsed by it.

9. If you notice any reactions to it, just move the object to the side and imagine that you could pick this reaction up and place it beside the first object.

10. And as you imagine this object there on the floor, answer the following questions: *ask same as before.*

11. Now, before taking these two objects back – because they are in you after all – take a look at the first object and see if it looks any different.

12. Now imagine picking up the second object and placing it back inside you.

13. And then pick up the first object and do the same. See if you can open up to this object.

14. Now, gently direct you attention back to your breath. Notice the rise & fall of your ribcage, the air flowing in & out of your nostrils, the rise & fall of your abdomen.

15. And when you are ready open your eyes.

* Discuss your experience of this exercise in pairs
* Is anyone willing to share anything you noticed about this with the group?

**Identifying barriers to quitting**

In the previous exercise you practiced opening up and making space for a really strong urge to smoke. We are now going to look at the potential barriers and obstacles to quitting smoking. Take, for example, being out with people who smoke. It’s likely, especially in the early stages of quitting, that you would feel awkward in this situation. They could have opinions on whether or not you should smoke. Some might even offer you a cigarette. What are some other difficult situations that you encounter when quitting smoking? Situations that expose you to some level of uncomfortable feelings and unwanted thoughts?

*(Generate a list of situational barriers and select the most relevant example.)*

If you were in this situation right now, what would you expect to encounter psychologically that would slow you down? What thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, memories or urges would you expect to show up?

**Exposure to internal barriers exercise**

We are now going to perform an eyes closed exercise that focuses on persevering with your goal of quitting smoking when faced with these barriers.

Get comfortable in your chair with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and your shoulders loose.

Now gently close your eyes.

And take a few slow, deep breaths and really notice the breath flowing in and out of your lungs.

Notice the rise and fall of your chest and stomach.

And notice how the air is slightly cooler on the way in and warmer on the way out.

Now, allow yourself to breathe as you normally would, without trying to change or regulate your breath it in any way… allow it to flow easily and naturally, with its own rhythm and pace, knowing you are breathing perfectly well right now.

If you notice your attention wandering from your breath at any time, as it inevitably will, just notice what distracted you and gently bring your attention back to your breath.

As you sit here, let an image form in your mind’s eye of (*insert difficult situation suggested by group here*)…, letting it gradually come into greater focus.

Try to really get a sense of this.

Visualise the sights…, imagine the sounds…, the smells…,

Now, I want you to contact the feelings and thoughts that show up in this situation. (*Insert psychological experiences that will show up in this situation, as suggested by group.*)

Try to really get a sense of this.

I want you to just sit with all of these thoughts and feelings. Don’t move; don't try to change anything. You don't have to like or want them. All you have to do is to notice these thoughts and feelings and not struggle with them.

Can you imagine all of this stuff showing up and still persisting with your goal of quitting smoking?

Now, ask yourself one question: Am I going to trade a moment of feeling good for the life I want to live?

This exercise is not about uncomfortable thoughts and feelings and what to do with them; it’s about taking your life in the direction you want it to go – even if it’s difficult or uncomfortable.

Now, bring your attention back to you breath…, notice the rise and fall of your chest and stomach with each breath..., notice how the air is slightly cooler on the way in and warmer on the way out.

And when you’re ready, open your eyes and bring yourself back to the room. Notice what you can see and feel and hear. If you like, have a stretch.

**Withdrawal Symptoms**

Our focus in this session on highlighting the problems associated with avoiding uncomfortable experiences and practicing acceptance as a more effective alternative is important because, as we have just touched on, quitting smoking can bring about a range of physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms: cravings for cigarettes, irritability, low mood, tiredness, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping, hunger, dizziness, tightness in the chest, constipation and cough.

**Dealing with Discomfort**

We are now going to work through an exercise that will allow you to practice opening up to uncomfortable physical sensations and reducing your struggle with them.

1. Get comfortable in your chair with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and your shoulders loose.

2. Now gently close your eyes.

3. Start by focusing your awareness on your breath. Notice the sensations of the air entering and exiting your nostrils with each breath. Keep your attention here for a few moments – just observing your breath.

4. Now pick up the ice-cube, hold it in a clenched fist, and close your eyes.

5. Keep your attention on your breath and notice the strong sensations you can feel in your hand. Your challenge is to open up to these sensations, letting go of the struggle with them as you maintain your focus on your breath.

6. Your mind knows that you are holding an ice-cube and that ice-cubes are cold, but cold is just one of the many sensations you can feel. See if you can look past this judgement with a curious mind and experience all the different sensations that make up this experience.

7. Notice the intensity of these sensations rise and fall like waves, and use your breath to keep you anchored in the present.

8. At times your mind might tell you that you have to put the ice down – just breathe through these moments focusing on what you can feel in the here and now, knowing that these sensations are just that – sensations – if you can make room for them and reduce your struggle with them, they can’t overwhelm you or hurt you.

9. Continue to observe the sensations in your hand while maintaining your awareness of your breath. Focus on staying present and opening up to the experience for a few more moments. (*pause 10 seconds*).

10. And now, putting the ice-cube back in the bowl… visualising the room as it was before you closed your eyes: the colour of the carpet and the walls, the people sitting around you, and when you are ready opening your eyes.

* Dry hands off and discuss your experience of this exercise in pairs.
* Is anyone willing to share anything you noticed about this with the group?

**Homework**

Over the next week I would like you to have a go at applying what we have worked on in your lives. I would like you to practice breathing into and making room for uncomfortable feelings at least once a day. For example, you could willingly accept and remain in contact with a feeling of awkwardness or discomfort that you experience in a social situation in which you used to smoke – rather than engaging in some behaviour to try to avoid this feeling. I’m not for a second encouraging you to seek out situations that create discomfort or can trigger smoking: as the quote says “grant me the serenity to accept the things *I cannot change*.” I have a worksheet here to help you to note each time you tried this and any observations you had.

**Withdrawal Symptoms**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Symptom** | **Cause** | **Duration** |
| Craving for a cigarette | Nicotine is a strongly addictive drug, and withdrawal causes cravings | A craving for a cigarette can last for between 3-5 minutes frequently for 2-3 days; can happen for months or years |
| Irritability  | The body’s craving for nicotine can produce irritability  | 2-4 weeks  |
| Dizziness  | The body is getting extra oxygen  | 1-2 days  |
| Chest tightness  | Tightness is likely due to tension created by the body’s need for nicotine or may be caused by sore muscles from coughing  | A few days  |
| Constipation, stomach pain, gas  | Intestinal movement decreases for a brief period  | 1-2 weeks  |
| Cough, dry throat, nasal drip  | The body is getting rid of mucus, which has blocked airways and restricted breathing  | A few days  |
| Depressed mood  | It is normal to feel sad for a period of time after you first quit smoking. Many people have a strong urge to smoke when they feel depressed  | 1-2 weeks  |
| Difficulty concentrating  | The body needs time to adjust to not having constant stimulation from nicotine  | A few weeks  |
| Fatigue  | Nicotine is a stimulant  | 2-4 weeks  |
| Hunger  | Cravings for a cigarette can be confused with hunger pangs; sensation may result from oral cravings or the desire for something in the mouth  | Up to several weeks  |
| Insomnia  | Nicotine affects brain wave function and influences sleep patterns; coughing and dreams about smoking are common  | 2-4 weeks  |

**Acceptance Practice Sheet**

Acceptance means opening up and making room for difficult feelings, urges and sensations – thereby allowing them to ‘flow through’ you without a struggle. You don’t have to like or want these feelings – you just make room for them and allow them to be there even though they are unpleasant. Once this skill is learned, if these feelings should resurface, you can rapidly make room for them and let them ‘flow on by’ – so you can invest your time and energy in doing meaningful life-enhancing activities, instead of struggling. Aim to practice at least once a day breathing into and making room for difficult feelings and sensations.

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| **Day/Date/Time****Feelings/sensations** | **How long I practiced for (mins)** | **Benefits and/or difficulties** |
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**Session 4**

**Recap of Session 3**

Last week we looked at how our attempts to avoid unpleasant or unwanted feelings such as cravings for cigarettes can make matters worse not better. We looked at how opening up to these feelings and being willing to remain in contact with them – rather than trying to get rid of them by smoking, for example – can help you stay away from cigarettes and move in the direction you want your life to go. We practiced a couple of exercises that brought you into contact with uncomfortable feelings – such as holding an ice-cube – so that you could practice opening up to them and reducing your struggle with them. We finished off by suggesting that you practice opening up to uncomfortable feelings that you experience a couple of times throughout the week. How did you get on with this?

**Rationale**

This week we are going to focus on developing skills that will help you to handle your mind more effectively when it starts hindering your efforts to quit smoking and move in the direction you want your life to go.

Believe it or not, the human mind evolved to think negatively. Our ancient ancestors lived in a world of constant danger – dangerous animals with big teeth roamed the land and so on. Back then a person’s mind had to be very alert to danger, anticipating anything that could hurt or harm them in any way. If two cavemen were walking along and noticed a bush shaking and one thought “I think I should get out of here,” while the other thought “everything is okay, there is nothing to worry about,” who do you think would be more likely to survive? These were the people that survived to raise children and as a result we inherited this mind-set. At its most basic, the modern mind is essentially a “don’t get killed machine” that warns us about anything and everything that could go wrong: “I will fail,” “she will reject me,” “I will never be happy.” And how about thoughts like “I’ll never be able to quit smoking” or “I have been a smoker for 10 years, and will die a smoker.”

Down through the years, when thoughts like this were creating a problem in a person’s life, psychologists would often try to help the person change or control these thoughts. The problem with this is that most research now shows that this usually does not work very well. We are going to look at an alternative approach that has been found to be more effective.

Although they can be really unpleasant sometimes, thoughts in-and-of themselves are not dangerous; the danger is when we really buy into unhelpful thoughts and take them literally. By this I mean when you take a thought, for example “I could not tolerate a life without cigarettes,” and consider it as an absolute fact or gospel truth: as if you would literally drop dead if you were prevented from ever having a cigarette again. What we are going to practice now is learning how to stop investing time, effort and energy in getting caught up in these thoughts and stories – when doing so prevents you from taking your life in the direction that you want it to go.

It is important to say now that we have no interest in whether your thoughts are right or wrong, good or bad, true or false – we are only interested in the extent to which they are helpful in taking your life in the direction that you want it to go.

**Pushing away paper**

Imagine in front of you is 1) everything that matters in your life: the people, activities and places that you love, 2) all of the difficulties in your life are out there too and 3) all of the tasks that you have to perform day-to-day to keep your life working.

Now imagine that the card represents a thought that you don’t want. Now I want you to take it in both hands and push it away from you as far as you can. Straighten out your elbows and get it as far away from you as you can.

Keep pushing it away and notice 3 things: 1) how tiring this is, 2) how distracting it is from the things that really matter to you and 3) how difficult it is to perform the activities that keep your life working.

Now I want you to rest the card on your lap. 1) Notice how much less effort this is, 2) notice how much easier it is to engage with things in life, 3) (*move hands around*) and how much easier it now is to take action.

Notice that the thought has not disappeared. But you have found a new way of responding to it, so that it doesn’t hold you back or stop you from taking effective action and engaging in your life.

And of course, when you have a useful thought – use it: thoughts give us important information. But if not, just let it sit there.

**Defusion/Fusion**

The technical name for this state of getting really caught up or entangled in your thoughts is fusion, just like when two pieces of metal are welded together we say they are fused. On the other hand, what we are practicing is known as defusion: it is a new way of relating to thoughts so that they have much less of an impact and influence over our behaviour.

**Observing your thoughts**

Close your eyes and start by bringing your awareness to your breath.

Notice the sensations of your breath in your nostrils as the air flows in and out.

Throughout this exercise, use your breath to keep you anchored in the present as you observe your thoughts.

Now, imagine yourself sitting at a busy bus stop watching an endless stream of busses pull-up, stop and drive away again – one after the other.

When each bus stops in front of you, imagine your thoughts painted on the side of the bus – like an advertisement. Place the words and images in your mind on the side of the bus just as they appear in your mind.

Just sit there, at the bus stop, observing your thoughts on the side of each bus until they move on – whenever they are ready to be replaced by another thought. As a new thought enters your mind, place this thought on the side of the next bus, and so on….

You may have boring thoughts, one repetitive thought, lots of different thoughts, incoherent thoughts or thoughts about thoughts. Whatever thoughts your mind has, simply observe them on the side of each bus and let them go when they choose to.

Whenever your attention drifts, just gently come back to your breath, notice what distracted you, and put the next thought that enters your mind on the side of the bus in front of you – until it too drives away and another thought takes its place.

Don’t try to change your thoughts or engage with them, just watch them – one after the other pulling up, stopping for a moment and disappearing.

Now, gently direct you attention back to your breath. Notice the rise & fall of your ribcage, the air flowing in & out of your nostrils, the rise & fall of your abdomen. And when you are ready open your eyes.

* Discuss your experience of this exercise in pairs
* Is anyone willing to share anything you noticed about this with the group?

**Taking your mind for a walk**

We are now going to work through an exercise to demonstrate the mind’s tendency to constantly chatter – often in unhelpful ways.

1. Find a partner as this exercise will be done in pairs.
2. In your pairs, one of you will be the person and the other will be that person’s mind. You will be going for a walk together.
3. The person’s job is to go wherever he or she chooses and the mind must follow.
4. The mind’s job is constantly communicate with the person about anything and everything: the mind should evaluate, judge, predict, criticise and warn the person. However, the person cannot communicate with the mind and if this happens the mind should stop them (“never mind your mind”).
5. The person should listen to the mind without talking back and go wherever the person chooses to go.
6. After a couple of minutes I will ask you will change roles.
* Change roles
* Discuss your experience of this exercise in pairs
* Is anyone willing to share anything you noticed about this with the group? (*When we walk alone, each of us takes our own mind for a walk – just as we do as we go about our lives.*) (*This exercise demonstrates that we have thoughts, but our behaviour is not dictated by our thoughts – your mind may have told you to turn left, but you may have chosen to turn right.*)

**Choices vs. Decisions**

When we talk about defusing from thoughts that could hinder your efforts to quit smoking, it is important to distinguish between decisions and choices. These two are often confused. A decision is when you select among different courses of action for a reason. A reason comes from evaluating the pros and cons of different courses of action. For example, you might decide to do your shopping in a particular supermarket because it is close to your house, they have all of the items that you want and the prices are good. These reasons guide your decision to do your shopping in that particular supermarket. Choices are different. A choice is selecting among different courses of action regardless of reasons.

* Choose between Coke and Fanta?
* Why did you choose Coke? E.g. “I like the taste” – this is a decision as it’s made for a reason.
* Could you come up with some reason why you might choose Fanta?
* Could you come up with a false reason?
* Although you rather the taste of Coke, could you still choose Fanta?

That was a choice because, although reasons were present, it was made regardless of reasons.

Making the distinction between decisions and choices is important because sometimes it can be **reasonable** to smoke: reasons could include having a really stressful day or having an intense urge to smoke. The important point is that in spite of any reason that can enter your mind, you can still **choose** not to smoke and you can still **choose** to take your life in the direction you want it to go.

**Homework**

I have a handout here that outlines a lot of different defusion techniques. Over the next week, I would like you to choose a couple of these techniques to practice at least once a day and see which are most helpful for you when your mind starts hindering your efforts to quit smoking and take your life in the direction you want it to go.

**Leaves on a Stream**

This will be an eyes-closed exercise. First, read the instructions and then when you are sure you understand them, close your eyes and do the exercise.

Imagine a beautiful slow-moving stream. The water flows over rocks, around trees, descends downhill, and travels through a valley. Once in a while, a big leaf drops into the stream and floats away down the river. Imagine you are sitting beside that stream on a warm, sunny day, watching the leaves float by.

Now become conscious of your thoughts. Each time a thought pops into your head, imagine that it is written on one of those leaves. If you think in words, put them on the leaf as words. If you think in images, put them on the leaf as an image. The goal is to stay beside the stream and allow the leaves on the stream to keep flowing by. Don’t try to make the stream go faster or slower; don’t try to change what shows up on the leaves in any way. If the leaves disappear, or if you mentally go somewhere else, or if you find that you are in the stream or on a leaf, just stop and notice that this happened. File that knowledge away and then once again return to the stream, watch a thought come into your mind, write it on a leaf, and let the leaf float away downstream.

Continue doing this for at least five minutes. Keep a watch or clock close by and note when you start the exercise. This will be useful in answering some of the questions below. If the instructions are clear to you now, go ahead and close your eyes and do the exercise.

How long did you go until you got caught by one of your thoughts?

If you got the stream flowing and then it stopped, or if you went somewhere else in your mind, write down what happened just before that occurred:

If you never got the mental image of the stream started, write down what you were thinking while it wasn’t starting:

You can think of the moments when the stream wouldn’t flow as moments of fusion, while the moments when the stream does flow are moments of defusion. Many times we become fused to a thought without even being aware of it. Thoughts about this exercise can be especially “sticky.” If you thought “I’m not doing this right” or “this exercise doesn’t work for me,” these too are thoughts that you may become fused to quite easily. In many cases, you may not even notice them as thoughts. Other particularly sticky thoughts are emotional thoughts, comparative ones, and temporal or causal ones.

You may want to repeat this exercise regularly to see whether you can do better over time in allowing the stream just to flow.

**More Defusion Techniques**

What follows is a further sampling of cognitive defusion techniques. You may be able to apply some of these techniques to your own life and thus further your practice in cognitive defusion.

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| Cognitive Defusion Techniques |
| The Mind | Treat “the mind” as an external event, almost as a separate person. (e.g., “Well, there goes my mind again” or “My mind is telling me that a cigarette would be nice right now”). |
| Mental appreciation | Thank your mind when you notice it butting in with worries and opinions; show appreciation for its products (e.g., “You are doing a great job worrying today! Thanks for the input!”) *This is not sarcasm* … after all, the mind is doing exactly what it was designed to do all of those thousands of years ago: “problem solve” and avoid danger. |
| Just noticing | Use the language of observation (e.g., noticing) when talking about private experiences. For example, “So, I’m just noticing that I’m having the thought that I will never be able to quit smoking.” |
| Pop-up mind | Imagine that your negative chatter is like Internet pop-up ads. |
| Thoughts are not causes | If a thought seems to be a barrier to an action, ask yourself, “Is it possible to think that thought, as a thought, AND do x?” Try it out by deliberately thinking the thought while doing what it has been stopping. |
| And what is that in the service of? | When you are getting caught up in a thought, back up for a moment and ask yourself, “What is getting caught up in this thought in the service of?” If it is not in the service of your interests, stop getting caught up in the thought. |
| Carry cards | Write difficult thoughts on 3 x 5 cards and carry them with you. Use this practice as a metaphor for your ability to carry your thoughts without losing your ability to control your life. |
| And how has that worked for me? | When you are getting caught up in a thought, back up for a moment and ask yourself, “How has that worked for me?” and if it hasn’t worked ask, “Which should I be guided by, my mind or my experience?” |

**Session 5**

**Recap of Session 4**

Last week we looked at unhooking from unhelpful thoughts or “defusion.” As getting caught up or entangled in difficult thoughts – such as sparring with the idea that “a cigarette would be nice right now” – can be a major waste of time, effort and energy that could be better invested in taking your life in the direction you want it to go. We worked through an eyes closed exercise that allowed us to practice just observing our thoughts – letting them come and go as they please – without getting caught up in them. We also worked through an exercise that demonstrated how our behaviour is not dictated by our mind’s constant chatter and spoke about the difference between decisions and choices: a decision is based on reasons, while a choice refers to selecting a course of action despite reasons. We finished off by talking about practicing a couple of the defusion techniques listed on the handouts throughout the week. How did you get on with this?

**Rationale**

Throughout the week you have practiced unhooking from unhelpful thoughts. The type of thoughts that people most often get really caught up or entangled in are statements that your mind makes about you as a person. These statements are sometimes positive (e.g., “I am a kind person”) and sometimes negative (“I have very little willpower”). If you add up all of these statements, you get the story that you tell yourself about who you are.

 The problem with this is that when you say “I have no willpower,” you can’t be telling the whole story because surely there are times when you have shown willpower. The same applies to any other label, positive or negative, that you put on your “self.” More importantly, the statements and stories each of us has about who we are can really keep us stuck in a rut because we normally behave in ways that fit with how we see ourselves. Given that everybody here is making a serious effort to quit smoking, it’s pretty likely that statements related to your smoking have become part of the story that you’ve been telling yourself about your life. For example, the reason why I have smoked for X number of years is Y, or the reason why I have not quit until now is X. This is not to say that the stories you have about yourself aren’t real or true – the vast majority probably are. The point is that each of these stories does not tell the whole story.

Letting go of attachments to these statements could create a lot more possibilities and flexibility in how you behave. But before letting go of these statements and stories about who you are, you probably want to know what the alternatives are? I will provide a metaphor to point you in the right direction.

**Chessboard Metaphor**

Imagine a chessboard that is covered in black and white pieces. Think of the black pieces as “negative” thoughts, feeling and emotions. For example, cravings to smoke, thoughts you cannot stay abstinent and feelings such as sadness or anxiety. And think of the white pieces as “positive” experiences such as feelings of happiness or thoughts like “I’m good at my job.” Now imagine that the two teams are lined up on opposite sides of the board, black on one side and white on the other. What people typically do is get behind the white team and go to war against the black pieces. They struggle against uncomfortable feelings and try to get rid of unwanted thoughts. People assume that if you knock enough black pieces off the board you will eventually overpower them, but if we really look at our experience – as we have done in previous weeks – we see that this is not the case. Yet most people keep on fighting and as a result live their lives in a warzone – psychologically speaking. In this metaphor, suppose that you aren’t the pieces, who are you?

Without the chessboard the pieces have no place to be. What would happen to your thoughts if you were not there to be aware that you thought them or your feelings if you weren’t there to feel them? What if you are not defined by your thoughts, feelings or emotions, but are instead an observer of these experiences. Throughout your life there have been many changes in your thoughts, feelings, your roles and your body, yet you have been you your whole life. This may be a little bit confusing so we are now going to practice an exercise that will get you in contact with your observing self.

**The Observer Exercise**

Get comfortable in your chair with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and your shoulders loose.

Now gently close your eyes.

And take a few slow, deep breaths and really notice the breath flowing in and out of your lungs. (*Pause 10 seconds*).

Now we are going to do an exercise in imagination. Begin by getting a sense of yourself in this room. Picture the room. Picture yourself in this room – exactly where you are.

Now begin to get a sense of your body. Notice how you are sitting in your chair. Notice any bodily sensations that are present. Notice any tension. Notice where your clothes make contact with your skin and notice where you can feel the air on your skin. Just acknowledge any sensations that you can feel and allow your awareness to move on.

Notice any emotions that are present. When you notice an emotion, just acknowledge it. For example, you may be feeling boredom, curiosity, anxiety or maybe you’re unsure of what emotion you are experiencing – just notice it.

Now bring your awareness to your thoughts and just observe them for a few moments. There may be some evaluations about this exercise, about whether or not you like it, about what happened earlier or about what you are planning later. Just notice these thoughts.

Now I want you to notice that as you notice these things, a part of you noticed them. You noticed these sensations, these emotions and these thoughts. And that part of you we will call the observing self. There is a person here, behind those eyes, that is aware of what I am saying right now and it is the same person that you have been your whole life.

Now I want you to think back to when you first started smoking. Think of something that particularly stands out for you from this time. Now I want you to remember what that event looked like and felt like. Remember all of the things that were happening then. Remember what you looked like. Bring to mind any thoughts or emotions that you might have been experiencing.

Now I want you to think back a bit further: back to before you ever started smoking. Bring a particular event to mind. Now think about what that event looked like, remember what you looked like at the time. Bring to mind all of the sights and sounds that went along with it. Remember all of the things that were going on. Recall the feelings that you were experiencing and the thoughts that you were having.

Now I want you to imagine yourself in 10 years’ time. Can you imagine what you might look like in 10 years’ time? What your life might be like? Think about any events that might occur. What sort of thoughts and feelings do you think you will have in 10 years’ time?

I want you to take a moment to think about these three ages. Now, I want you to think about the following question: “*as you go through life what part of you remains the same?*” This question can seem straightforward but can be tricky to answer. Is it your body? Your body before you ever started smoking is not the same body that you will have in 10 years’ time. Notice how your body is constantly changing: sometimes it is sick and sometimes it is healthy, it may be rested or tired, it may be strong or weak. You were once a baby, then you grew. Nearly every cell in your body at the moment was not there before you started smoking or even when you first started. Your bodily sensations come and go – even as you have been listening to me they may have changed – so the part of you that stays the same is not your body.

Now I want you to consider your emotions. Notice how your emotions are constantly changing: sometimes you feel happy and sometimes sad, sometimes love and sometimes hatred, joyful, sorrowful, calm or tense, you may be experiencing some emotion right now. Things you liked when you were younger, you may no longer like; and fears that you had as a teenager won’t be the fears that you will have in 10 years’ time. So the part of you that stays the same is not your emotions either.

What about your thoughts? You can be certain that your thoughts before you started smoking will not be the same as your thoughts in 10 years’ time. Our thoughts are constantly changing. Our opinions on things have changed. Consider how many thoughts you have had since this session started. Our thoughts are constantly changing, so the thing that stays the same is not your thoughts.

So if this part of you that stays the same is not your body, not your emotions or not your thoughts, then what is it? It’s you. Many things may change but you are always here – you aren’t just your body, you aren’t just your feelings and you aren’t just your thoughts. You are the observer that knows and sees your body, feelings and thoughts. As you look across the years you can see that things are constantly changing, yet you are still there able to observe all of these changes. Even as the stories that our minds tell us change, our core selves stay the same.

Now for just another moment, bring your attention back to you breath. Take a deep breath and notice the rise and fall of your chest and stomach. Notice how the air is slightly cooler on the way in and warmer on the way out.

Whenever you feel ready bring your attention back to the room and open your eyes.

* Discuss your experience of this exercise in pairs
* Is anyone willing to share anything you noticed about this with the group?

**Self-compassion**

We are now going to move on to look at the way in which we treat ourselves, because this has implications for successfully quitting smoking. There is a common misconception that being self-critical or hard on yourself will keep you in line. But research shows that self-criticism is not the motivator it is cracked up to be. Self-critics are much more likely to be depressed and anxious and self-criticism is often coupled with an intense fear of failure in people such that they don’t even try to achieve their goals because the possibility of failure is unacceptable to them.

 It might seem all warm and fuzzy, but research shows that it can be beneficial to take a more caring and compassionate approach with ourselves. Self-compassion has been shown to help people stay on diets, exercise and quit smoking. Furthermore, when people make such lifestyle changes and they have an occasional slip, those who have developed the skill to forgive themselves are more likely to succeed than those who beat themselves up over it. We are now going to do an eyes closed exercise to practice self-compassion.

**Compassionate hand exercise**

Begin by getting comfortable in your chair with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and your shoulders loose.

Now gently close your eyes.

Start by focusing your awareness on your breath. Notice the sensations of the air entering and exiting your nostrils with each breath. Keep your attention here for a few moments – just observing your breath.

Now bring to mind a difficult situation you’ve encountered since quitting smoking: it may be a really strong craving for a cigarette or maybe awkwardness you felt when out with friends who smoke.

See if you can put yourself in that situation: where were you, what happened, what were you doing, what were others saying or doing, see if you can be present with this experience as fully as you can. Noticing how you reacted then. And notice how you may be reacting now. Slow things down as best as you can and notice difficult thoughts, physical sensations and emotions that may be showing up right now. Just stay with this experience as best as you can.

Now pick one of your hands and imagine that this is the hand of a person that leaves you feeling good, understood, loved and cared for. It may be someone from your past or someone in your life right now. Allow your hand to be filled with the feeling you have when you are around that kind and caring person.

When you are ready, place this hand slowly and gently on the part of you that hurts the most. You may feel tension in your chest or discomfort in your head neck or heart. Just pick one place where the feelings are most intense and place the hand there. Or if you are not feeling much of anything, just go ahead and place the hand on your chest. Allow that kind and compassionate hand to rest on you – feel it against your skin and clothes. Notice the warmth of your hand flowing from the palm of your hand into your body and into the place of discomfort. Imagine that hand is a hand of healing and support, that it’s opening your heart to be kind to yourself. Just hold that hand of kindness on you gently, allow yourself to open up to this gentle action – feeling waves of caring and warmth penetrating your body and noticing any softening as you do that.

Go on now to make one last gesture of kindness with both hands. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Let them gently rest there as you hold yourself kindly. Allow yourself to sit this way: just caring for yourself, giving yourself comfort and support.

This exercise will end soon, so for this moment set the intention to bring a sense of compassion and support to yourself and your life. Bring your focus to your breath now and gently bring your awareness back into the space around you, hearing and noticing any sounds around you. As you open your eyes, just notice one or two objects in the space around you.

* Discuss your experience of this exercise in pairs
* Is anyone willing to share anything you noticed about this with the group?

**The Choice Point**

In the previous exercise I asked you to bring to mind a challenging situation you encountered since quitting smoking and to respond to this by treating yourself in a caring and compassionate way. In challenging situations, we often find it difficult to behave in line with our values – the direction we want our lives to take. These moments can be like a fork in the road: we can choose to act in a way that is either consistent or inconsistent with what we value in life. This is known as a choice point. On the handout there is a diagram of the choice point. As I mentioned, the choice point is a moment in time when it is possible to choose between values-consistent and values-inconsistent behaviour.

1. We begin by looking at a situation in which you find it challenging to behave in a way that fits with your values. *For example, maybe this could be when you are on a night-out with friends who smoke.*
2. When we are faced with a challenging situation like this, we typically experience difficult thoughts feelings and sensations. *For example, when you are out with friends who smoke, you may experience cravings or urges to smoke, feelings of awkwardness or thoughts like “what harm could one cigarette do?”*
3. However, in our sessions we have developed skills and strengths that can help us to respond effectively when difficult thoughts and feelings show up. These include acceptance of uncomfortable feelings (e.g., ice-cube, imagining them as objects), defusion from unhelpful thoughts (e.g., allowing them to come and go like busses past a bus-stop), mindful awareness of the present moment (e.g., focusing your awareness on sensations in your body), and clarifying why you want to quit smoking and the things in life that are important to you. A great technique when you are at a choice point is to S.T.O.P:
4. Slow your breathing
5. Take note
6. Open up and
7. Pursue your values
8. This can help you to take your life in the direction you want it to go. *For example, staying abstinent, eating a healthy meal or going to the gym etc.*
9. As opposed to moving further away from the life you want to live and the things that are important to you. *For example, have a cigarette, eat junk food or spend half the day watching T.V.*

You can see that these two roads lead to very different places. It’s not that one road leads to problems and pain, however, and the other one doesn’t – this is an important point. They both lead to problems and pain. When you go down the road on the left, the problems are old and familiar and the pain is suffocating and deadening. When you go down the road on the right the problems are unfamiliar and sometimes more challenging and the pain can be bittersweet and intensely human. The choice here (*at the choice point*) is not about whether or not to have pain. It is whether or not to live a valued, meaningful life.

* Is anyone willing to work through a choice point exercise with an example from their life?

**Commitment**

Before we finish, I’m going to spend a few minutes talking about “commitment” because it is relevant to our work here. When we use the term “commitment” in our day-to-day conversations, we are referring to a promise about something we are going to do in the future. From an ACT perspective, however, commitment is something we do in the present. Commitment to quitting smoking is a “one day at a time” activity – sometimes one minute or one second at a time; it’s a game of inches. It concerns the in-the-moment process of choosing to do something that puts you in better alignment with what truly matters to you – inch by inch. And when we fail or are pulled off the course we want to take, we find ourselves in a new moment where we can turn back towards the things in life we value.

When we practice an eyes closed mindfulness exercise, sometimes you probably find yourself thinking about something that happened earlier or something you are planning to do later. Eventually you notice that your attention has wandered and gently return to the exercise. How many times? You return one more time than you wander. Similarly, we sometimes drift off the course we want our life to take. When this happens, we can pause and notice that we are disconnected from the things in life that are important to us; then we gently get back on track. How many times? One more time than we turn away. Similar to mindfulness, the essence of commitment is in that moment of return.

**Homework**

Between now and our next session, I would like you to watch out for choice points in your own life and use the handout to take note of a couple of these. We all have numerous choice points each day, some major and some minor – this could be as simple as being tempted by a chocolate muffin. In addition, all of the skills that we have worked on in our sessions so far, including accepting uncomfortable feelings, defusing from unwanted thoughts and letting go of limiting self-stories when doing so helps you to let go of cigarettes and take your life in the direction you want it to go, can be deepened by improving your ability to focus on the present moment. I have a handout here with exercises I would like you to try that will help you with this.

**Challenging situation**

**Value consistent behaviour**

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting effectively, behaving like the person you want to be

**Value inconsistent behaviour**

Moving away from the outcome you want, acting ineffectively, behaving unlike the person you want to be

**Choice**

**Point**

**Values you want to live by and skills / strengths you can use**

**Difficult feelings, thoughts and sensations that show up in response to the challenging situation**

**The Road Not Taken**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveller, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less travelled by,

And that has made all the difference.

**Robert Frost (1920)Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,**

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

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**Exercise One: Tracking your Thoughts in Time**

In this exercise, you are going to track your thoughts along a single dimension – time.

When thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations arise, they tend to be associated with a certain time period in your life. Some lie in the past, some in the present, and some in the future. Even fantasies that have no basis in reality at all are generally associated with a particular time frame.

To see this more clearly, please take the next five minutes and track where in time your thoughts lie. Take a moment to contact the present moment: breathe deeply from your abdomen a few times. When you are relaxed, just let your mind wander at its will and watch what comes up. If you wish, you can use the “Leaves on a Stream” exercise you were given in session 4 to help you observe your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

While doing this, put your finger on the time line below. As your thoughts and feelings arise, slide your finger to the point on the time line that the thought or feeling corresponds to. You will notice that there are five points on the time line: distant past, recent past, present, close future, and distant future. You can choose any of these points for any thought that arises. However, note that this is a continuum, and if there is a point in the middle that makes more sense, feel free to place your finger on that point instead. Try to be accurate about what is happening without judging what comes up. Just watch it and note where in time the thought, feeling, or sensation lies.

Now, take the next five minutes, let your mind go, and track your thoughts in time.

**Time Line:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Distant Past** | **Recent Past** | **Present** | **Close Future** | **Distant Future** |

What did you notice about your thoughts? Was there a specific time that kept coming up, or did your thoughts move throughout time? Write a few notes on your experience below:

It is likely that your thoughts moved around throughout time. If they kept moving back to one place, that’s fine too. The point is simply to notice the thoughts and where they occur in time. There are no judgments that need to be made based on this information.

Learning to be mindful of where in time your thoughts are can be helpful in shifting your focus to the present moment. Let’s repeat the exercise with a slightly different intention. This time do the exercise with the intention to stay more in the present. When your mind drifts and your finger must move to the right or left, just notice what is actually happening in the present moment. If you are drifting, notice that. If you are having a thought about the future or past, notice that you are now having a thought. When you do that, you are back in the present and your finger will be able to drift back toward the middle.

Notice that if you get too intentional (“I must go for the next five minutes with my finger on the word ‘present’”), you will actually enter the verbal future, or past (“I haven’t been doing it!”). If that happens, notice that you are now having a thought, and let go of your fusion with that thought.

With practice, you can stay in the present for a large percentage of the time, and your finger will serve as a kind of meter to train you in all of the methods your mind uses to knock you out of the present.

**Exercise Two: Watching Bodily Sensations**

In this exercise, you are going to track your bodily sensations as they come and go. Below you will find a diagram of the human body. To the left of this diagram is a list of words that describe various sensations that commonly arise in the human body. To do this exercise, take a few moments to contact the present moment via your breath again. Then start to notice the different sensations that come up in your body. Perhaps your back aches from lifting too much at work. Or perhaps your stomach is knotted up with nervousness. Just notice how your body feels.

As the feelings arise, use one finger to point to the word that most accurately describes your feeling on the left-hand side of the page. With your other hand, point to the place in your body where the sensation resides. For example, if your shoulders are tight, you would point to the tightness with your left index finger and to the shoulder in the diagram with your right index finger. Take five minutes to notice bodily sensations as they come in and go out of your body now.

This exercise will be awkward at first (especially since initially you will need to search for the words). As you repeat it, however, it will become more fluid and you will be able to focus on observing, while allowing your fingers to do the “describing.”

Tight

Loose

Achy

Sore

Light

Heavy

Constricted

Relaxed

Comfortable

Warm

Cold

Once you have completed the exercise, take a few minutes to jot down some notes about what you experienced.

**Exercise Three: Defusing from Implicit Evaluations**

In exercise two you may have noticed that the experiences you were tracking had an inherent evaluation in them. Your mind automatically evaluates emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations as they arise. For example, if you had a comfortable bodily sensation, you might have thought “good.” If you drifted into the distant future in the time exercise, you might have thought “bad.” Just as the whole point of mindfulness is to stay in the present, it is also the point to defuse from such evaluations.

You just practiced detecting when you drifted from the present; in this exercise you will practice detecting when you are drifting into evaluations. That’s relatively easy to do when the evaluative thoughts are explicit. It is harder when they are implicit. When they become combined with other experiences, they are easier to miss. The purpose of the next exercise is to learn to detect implicit evaluations, so that you can let them go and defuse from them.

Psychologists have shown that evaluations can occur reliably only along a limited number of dimensions. Good-bad and strong-weak are two of these primary polarities. Take a look at the box below. Notice that there are four terms in different areas surrounding the box. Think of this as a grid on which you can physically take note of where the nature of your evaluations lie in terms of how good or bad the evaluation is, or how strong or weak. Thus, in this exercise, simply sit quietly and become mindful of what is in the present moment. As you notice your experiences, see whether you are noticing them nonjudgmentally. If you find that you are implicitly evaluating, note the nature of that evaluation by placing your finger wherever your mind went, and see if you can let go of any attachment to the evaluation.

For example, suppose you have the thought “I’m anxious.” You might have just noticed that feeling nonjudgmentally and, if so, that’s fine. Do nothing but continue to observe. You also, however, might have noticed that, in the background of your thought, you were buying into the idea that this feeling is bad or too strong. If you sensed that implicit evaluation, place your finger in the upper right section of the box below. Then see if you can let go of this judgment. If you defuse from evaluations, you will find that you move your finger down into the bottom-middle part of the box (weak; neither good nor bad) and then move it out of the box altogether.

Now, please take the next several minutes to simply watch your own experience, detecting implicit judgments when they show up, and placing your finger in the box below as a kind of description of what is happening. Use the feedback this process provides to help you let go of fusion with the judgment altogether. See if you can gently create longer periods of time without having to buy into any evaluations that may appear.

 Good Bad

Strong

Weak

Again, take a few minutes to respond to your experience.

What happened for you in this exercise? Did you notice that your evaluations moved around as your mind moved from one thought to the next? Were you able to dig out implicit evaluations that, normally, you might miss? Were you able to let go of these judgments?

**Session 6**

**Recap of session 5**

Last week we looked at how the statements and stories each of us has about ourselves, some of which likely relate to smoking (e.g., the reason I have not quit until now is X), can keep us stuck in a rut because we usually behave in ways that fit with how we see ourselves. We moved on to consider an alternative and performed an exercise that highlighted the way in which our bodies, thoughts and feelings constantly change as we go through life, but the part of us that notices these experiences – the observing self – stays the same. Following this, we talked about choice points – moments in time when it is possible to choose between behaviour that fits with what we value in life and behaviour that doesn’t. We finished off by talking about noting choice points that you encounter during the week as well as practicing a couple of exercises on the handout to increase your mindful awareness of the present moment. How did you get on with this?

**Rationale**

This week I am going to begin by telling a story that provides a metaphor for many of the issues we covered throughout this course. Following this, we are going to work on planning for the future. We will also look at the way in which ACT helps people to quit smoking and how this relates to our work in each session. Finally, we will take some time for you to discuss your experiences of the course.

**Passengers-on-the-bus Metaphor**

Suppose that there’s a bus and you’re the driver. And on this bus are passengers. The passengers are your thoughts, memories, feelings and other psychological experiences. Some of these passengers are scary. So you’re driving the bus down the road and some of the scary passengers start threatening you: telling you what you’ve to do and where you’ve to go. “You can’t keep going straight,” “You have to turn left,” and so on. They threaten that if you don’t do as they say they’re coming up from the back of the bus for you.

So you come to some sort of a deal with these scary passengers: you’ll do what they say as long as they stay down the back of the bus where you can’t see them too often. But one day you get sick of this and decide that you’re going to go down and throw them off the bus. You stop the bus and you go down to sort out the nasty passengers. But to do this you notice you’ve had to stop the bus – you’re not going anywhere. And when you try to throw them off the bus, you realise that you are unable – they won’t leave.

Eventually you go back to what you had been doing, trying to keep these scary passengers at the back of the bus and out of sight. The problem with this deal is that you have to do what they say in exchange for keeping them out of your life. And when they eventually do show up, they have increased power due to the deals that you’ve made with them in the past.

The funny thing about this whole scenario is that the power the scary passengers have over you is 100% based on this: “if you don’t do what we say, we’re going to come up from the back of the bus and stand next to you and make you look at us.” That’s it. It’s true that when they do come up they look like they could do a lot worse – they are quite intimidating. However the fact is that you, the driver, control the bus but you have traded that control in the deal you made with the scary passengers. Basically, by trying to get control, you’ve actually given up control. The passengers cannot make you do anything against your will.

Can you think of how the parts of this story relate to issues that we have discussed throughout the course?

*The deal made with the passengers (you’ll do what they say as long as they stay down the back of the bus where you can’t see them too often) represents avoidance. For example, the passenger could be a craving to smoke and I agree to do what it wants – to have a cigarette – rather than take my life in the direction I want, as long as it stays away from me for a while.*

*The part where the driver stops the bus in a failed attempt to kick the unwanted passengers off represents how our own attempts to get rid of uncomfortable thoughts and feelings do not work in the long term and how this wastes time, energy and effort that would be better spent taking our lives in the direction we want – driving the bus.*

*The realisation that, although the scary passengers look like they could do a lot worse, all they can do is come up, stand beside you and make you look at them represents defusion: seeing thoughts for what they are rather than what they say they are. For example, recognising the difference between a thought of a disaster and an actual disaster – not responding to thoughts as if they are the actual things they represent.*

*The end of the story describes how you have control of the bus, but by trying to control the scary passengers you hand over control of the bus to them. If you are willing to face these unwanted thoughts and uncomfortable feelings and take them with you, you can move your life in the direction you want it to go.*

**Goal Setting**

We are now going to spend some time figuring out exactly where it is you want your bus to go and planning a route to get there.

On our first night, we looked into the overarching reasons why you want to quit smoking and the things in life you value most. We are now going to look at taking additional steps in this valued direction: the direction you want your life to move in. We are going to work on setting goals. The reason why this is important is that when you try to make a lifestyle change, there is a greater likelihood of success if you focus on moving towards the life you want to live rather than focusing on moving away from cigarettes or other problems (i.e., dead man’s goals).

The first step in effective goal setting is to identify the value or values that will guide your course of action. Although we spent time clarifying values in the first session, values are like the continents on a globe of the world: no matter how fast you spin the globe, you can never see all the continents at once; there are always some at the front and some at the back. Across time our choices differ regarding which values come to the front and which move to the back. For this reason, we are going to spend the next few minutes identifying the values that are very important to you at the moment.

Step 1: Clarify your Values

On the handout there is a list of the most common values. I want you to read each value and consider whether it is very important, quite important or not important and indicate this by putting the letter V, Q or N beside each value.

When you are done, go through each value you marked with a V and select the five most important. Write your top 5 values down on the respective section of the goal setting handout.

The values that you have selected as most important are like a compass. They guide you and your actions. They help you to set a course, stay on course and find your way when you’re lost. Values, however, are never finished, completed or done. They are the qualities that we want to bring to our actions on an ongoing basis. Goals, on the other hand, are things that can be completed or achieved – they can be ticked off the list. Marriage is a goal; being loving is a value. Marriage is something that can be ticked off the list; being loving is a way of behaving on an ongoing basis. I can achieve the goal of marriage but neglect the value of loving. Similarly, quitting smoking is a goal; self-care is a value. A value is like travelling west. No matter how far you go, you can always travel further west. Goals are like reaching Portlaoise, Galway, New York etc. Your values guide the goals that you set for yourself.

Step 2: Set a SMART Goal

Now, I would like you to look at the values you wrote down and think of one practical thing you could do to express one or more of these values. Choose a goal that is a practical step in the direction of your values. When doing this, the best approach is to set a SMART goal. You want the goal to be **specific**. For example, don’t choose something vague like “I will get healthy.” Instead specify the actions that you are going to take: “I will go to the gym.” The goal should also be **meaningful**; it should be aligned with the values that are very important to you. Thirdly, the goal should be **adaptive**: it should aim to improve your life in some way. Fourthly, the goal should be **realistic**; it should be something that you can realistically accomplish with the resources available to you (e.g., time, money, fitness, etc.). Finally, the goal should be **time-framed**. For example, “I will go to the gym at 6pm tomorrow evening and spend one hour exercising.”

Once you have your SMART goal in mind, the next step is to figure out whether it is a long-term or short-term goal. If it is a long-term goal – something to be completed in the next few months and years – you’ll need to consider short-term goals to get you there. On the other hand, if it is a short-term goal – something that is achievable in the next few days and weeks – you might consider where this goal is leading you and where you’d like to go after it is completed. Now, take a few minutes to write your Long-term and short-term goals on the respective section of the handout.

After writing down your short-term goal or goals, select the one you want to work on and define the specific actions you need to take to achieve that goal. For example, the short-term goal of going to the gym could be broken down into getting your sportswear ready, rearranging your schedule to accommodate going to the gym or maybe even enquiring into joining a gym.

Step 3: Identify Benefits

Now, I would like you to think about the goal that you have chosen and consider what would be the greatest things about achieving this goal. When you are clear on these positive consequences, write them down on the respective section of the handout.

Step 4: Identify Obstacles

Now we are going to take a look at the obstacles or barriers that might stand in the way of you achieving your goals. Begin by considering if you were to start working towards this goal right now, what would you expect to encounter psychologically that could slow you down? Consider difficult thoughts and feelings such as low motivation, self-doubt, insecurity, awkwardness etc. Make note of these difficulties on the handout.

After noting some of the barriers and obstacles in the way of you accomplishing your goal, reflect on the strategies you have learned in our sessions up to this point and consider what would be most useful when you are faced with these difficulties. For example, you might practice the brief S.T.O.P. exercise or willingly open up to the uncomfortable feelings as you did with the ice-cube in your clenched fist. Make note of the strategies you might use.

Next, I want you to think about possible external obstacles to you achieving your goal. External obstacles might include a lack of time, lack of skills or difficulties with other people. Make note of these.

Now, make note of the things you could do to deal with these external difficulties if they show up.

Finally, if you feel comfortable, discuss your goal with the person beside you. If you are not comfortable discussing your goal, you can discuss how you found the process of goal setting and anything you noticed about it.

* Is anyone willing to share their goal with the group?

**Psychological flexibility & review**

Now, we are going to look at how ACT helps people to quit smoking and how our work throughout the course ties in with this. ACT helps people to quit smoking by developing what is known as psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility is the ability to take effective action guided by your values even if things are going on in your head or in your life that make it difficult. It is what enables you to take the bus in the direction you want it to go. Psychological flexibility is based on 6 skills: acceptance, defusion, present-moment awareness, the observing self, values and committed action guided by those values.

**Acceptance**

When uncomfortable feelings get between you and what you want – to quit smoking – acceptance is the skill you need to keep you moving in the direction you want to go. Our work on acceptance began in the first session by examining the things you sometimes do to get rid of discomfort, such as smoking. We looked at how these attempts to avoid uncomfortable feelings generally work in the short-term but tend to be ineffective in the long-term and their costs usually far outweigh their benefits. In session 3, the Chinese finger trap was used to get across this idea that the struggle to get away from uncomfortable feelings often makes matters worse not better. However, it also touched on something else – an alternative: by willingly coming into contact with our uncomfortable feelings we can create some room for manoeuvre. We spoke about how this process of acceptance means actively coming into contact with your uncomfortable feelings in the service of living the life you want to live; as opposed to resignation which means passively giving up the fight with them. We then worked through a couple of exercises that gave you opportunity to practice acceptance, as the key is not to know acceptance it is to do acceptance. In the first exercise you visualised your craving to smoke as an external object and then did the same with your reaction to it. In doing this, you were practicing observing and describing these feelings without struggling with them. In another exercise we created some discomfort by holding an ice-cube to simulate the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal. This gave you an opportunity to practice opening up to uncomfortable physical sensations and reducing your struggle with them.

**Present-moment awareness**

The second component of psychological flexibility that we looked at was present-moment awareness. We focused on this in session 2. This skill can be very helpful because habitual behaviour like smoking is difficult to control at the best of times – but even more so if you are going through life on autopilot. By increasing your ability to focus on the present moment, you become better at catching thoughts and feelings that may have led you to smoke in the past. Once you can catch or pick up on these thoughts and feelings, you have the opportunity to defuse or accept them. We worked on increasing our present-moment awareness in the session by practicing a couple of mindfulness meditations – basically focusing our awareness on things we normally don’t pay attention to and returning our awareness to these things without judgement whenever it wanders. We practiced a meditation that encouraged you to focus your awareness on the feeling of the breath moving in and out of the body. We also looked at how being able to S.T.O.P. (*slow your breathing, take note, open up, & pursue your values*) can be helpful when you are faced with difficult urges or cravings to smoke. Would it be okay if we spend a few minutes practicing this now?

Start by getting comfortable in your chair, with your feet flat on the floor and your shoulders loose.

* Now, take a few deep breaths and mindfully observe the breath flowing in and out of your body. This will help to keep you grounded or anchored in the present moment.
* And take note of your experience right now. Notice what you are thinking. Notice what you are feeling. Notice what you are doing. Notice how your thoughts and feelings are constantly swirling around and you can easily get caught up in them if you are not careful.
* Open up to the feelings you are having. Breathe into them and make room for them. Make room for your thoughts as well: don’t try to push them away or don’t try to cling onto them. See them for what they are – just thoughts – and give them space rather than getting caught up in them.
* The final step is to pursue a valued course of action. Connect with your values: ask yourself “what do I want to be about in the face of this of this?” “How would I like to act, so that I can look back years from now and feel proud of my response?”

**Defusion**

Another one of the key skills that make up psychological flexibility is defusion. In session 4 we focused on developing this skill. To recap, defusion is a different way of relating to your thoughts, so that they have much less impact and influence over you. It’s a helpful skill for handling your mind more effectively when it starts hindering your efforts to quit smoking and take your life in the direction you want it to go. Rather than change or control thoughts (i.e., by encouraging you to think more positively), defusion allows us to stop getting really caught up or entangled in unhelpful thoughts – thoughts that don’t help us to take our lives in a valued direction. In a nutshell, defusion allows us to see thoughts for what they are – just words and images passing through our minds – rather than what they say they are. During the session, we practiced defusing thoughts in an eyes closed exercise that involved visualising yourself sitting at a bus stop and observing your thoughts on the sides of buses that pulled up, stopped and drove away again whenever they were ready. In doing this, you we developing the skill of defusion by noticing your thoughts come and go without getting all caught up in them. Another simple defusion technique that can give you some distance from unhelpful thoughts is to insert the phrase “I’m having the thought that …” before the thought. For example, when an unpleasant thought like “a smoke would be nice now” comes to mind, think to yourself: “I’m having the thought that a smoke would be nice now” or the even longer phrase “I notice I’m having the thought that a smoke would be nice now.” This has been found to reduce the impact and influence of unhelpful thoughts.

**The observing self**

In session 5, we focused on the part of you that is aware of everything you see, hear, touch, smell, feel, think and do. ACT calls this part of you the observing self and it is another one of the core components of psychological flexibility. We began session 5 by talking about how the labels, statements and stories each of us have about who we are – some of which are related to smoking – can really keep us stuck in a rut, because we typically behave in ways that fit with how we see ourselves. We talked about how letting go of our attachments to these labels, statements and stories can open up a lot more possibilities and flexibility in how we behave. We discussed the observing self as an alternative to clinging to these restrictive labels, statements and stories. The observing self is like the sky, while thoughts, memories and feelings are like the weather. The weather constantly changes throughout the day. And whatever it is, the sky always has room for it. No matter how bad the weather, no matter how violent a thunderstorm or severe the sun, the sky cannot be damaged in any way. Even hurricanes and tsunamis, which may cause death and destruction on the land, are unable to hurt the sky. And, as time passes, the weather will change again and again, while the sky remains as pure and clear as ever. Similarly, whatever you are thinking, whatever you are feeling, whatever you are sensing, whatever you are doing, this part of you – the observing self – is always there, aware of it. During the session, we worked through an exercise to bring you into contact with your observing self. The exercise showed how your observing self stays the same across time (when you first started smoking, before you ever started, in 10 years’ time), while the things you normally define yourself by – your body, thoughts and feelings – are constantly changing.

**Values**

Another essential part of psychological flexibility is being able to clarify and connect with your personal values. Quitting smoking is hard; there is no doubt about that. There may be times when you feel like going back on the cigarettes, when every part of you is screaming “why am I doing this to myself?” Your values give you the answer: because something matters to me. Your values are your heart’s deepest desires for the sort of person you want to be, what is meaningful for you, and what you want your life to stand for. It’s your values that justify the hard work you have done since starting this course. You began work on clarifying your personal values in the first session with the values card sorting exercise. You then used the values wheel to look at the relative importance of each of your chosen values and the extent to which your day-to-day actions were in line with these. Tonight’s work on goal setting also began with a values clarification exercise, as values serve as a compass to guide the goals we set and actions we take.

**Committed action**

The purpose of all of the skills I have mentioned so far – acceptance, defusion, present-moment awareness and the observing self – is to enable you to take effective action guided by your values. All of our work on these skills risks being for nothing unless you can get your feet moving in the direction you want your life to go. This is the final component of psychological flexibility and is known as committed action. Committed action is action that you take again and again, no matter how many times you fail or go off track. It is directly addressed in the second line of the Serenity Prayer: “grant me the courage to change the things I can.” We worked on committed action in tonight’s session by looking at how to effectively set SMART goals guided by our values and how break these goals down into action plans.

**Refreshments**

**Discussion on participants experiences of the course**

**Clarifying your Values**

Values are your heart’s deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being. Values are not about what you want to get or achieve; they are about how you want to behave or act on an ongoing basis.

There are literally hundreds of different values, but below you’ll find a list of the most common ones. Probably, not all of them will be relevant to you. Keep in mind there are no such things as ‘right values’ or ‘wrong values’. It’s a bit like our taste in pizzas. If you prefer

Margherita but I prefer Hawaiian, that doesn’t mean that my taste in pizzas is *right* and yours is *wrong*. It just means we have different tastes. And similarly, we may have different values. So read through the list below and write a letter next to each value: V = Very important, Q = Quite important, and N = Not so important; and make sure to score *at least* *ten* of them as Very important.

1. Acceptance: to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life etc.
2. Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences
3. Assertiveness: to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want
4. Authenticity: to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself
5. Beauty: to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment etc.
6. Caring: to be caring towards myself, others, the environment etc.
7. Challenge: to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve
8. Compassion: to act with kindness towards those who are suffering
9. Connection: to engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others
10. Contribution: to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others
11. Conformity: to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations
12. Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others
13. Courage: to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
14. Creativity: to be creative or innovative
15. Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover
16. Encouragement: to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others
17. Equality: to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa
18. Excitement: to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating or thrilling
19. Fairness: to be fair to myself or others
20. Fitness: to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing
21. Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
22. Freedom: to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise
23. Friendliness: to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others
24. Forgiveness: to be forgiving towards myself or others
25. Fun: to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
26. Generosity: to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others
27. Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life
28. Honesty: to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others
29. Humour: to see and appreciate the humorous side of life
30. Humility: to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves
31. Industry: to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated
32. Independence: to be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things
33. Intimacy: to open up, reveal, and share myself – emotionally or physically – in my close personal relationships
34. Justice: to uphold justice and fairness
35. Kindness: to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others
36. Love: to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others
37. Mindfulness: to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience
38. Order: to be orderly and organized
39. Open-mindedness: to think things through, see things from other’s points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.
40. Patience: to wait calmly for what I want
41. Persistence: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
42. Pleasure: to create and give pleasure to myself or others
43. Power: to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organizing
44. Reciprocity: to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking
45. Respect: to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard
46. Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions
47. Romance: to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection
48. Safety: to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others
49. Self-awareness: to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions
50. Self-care: to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met
51. Self-development: to keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experience.
52. Self-control: to act in accordance with my own ideals
53. Sensuality: to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses
54. Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality
55. Spirituality: to connect with things bigger than myself
56. Skilfulness: to continually practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them
57. Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others
58. Trust: to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable

Once you’ve marked each value as V, Q, or N (Very, Quite, or Not so important), go through all the Vs, and select out the top five that are most important to you.

**Goal Setting**

*Step 1. Identify Your Guiding Values*

Identify the value or values that will underpin your course of action.

*Step 2. Set SMART Goals*

S = specific, M = meaningful, A = adaptive, R = realistic & T = time-framed.

The value(s) above will be expressed in the following long-term goal:

Which, in turn, will be expressed in these short-term goals:

Define specific actions you need to take to achieve your chosen short-term goal:

*Step 3. Identify Benefits*

Clarify for yourself, what would be the most positive outcome(s) of achieving your goal? Write the benefits below:

*Step 4. Identify Obstacles*

Imagine the potential difficulties and obstacles that might stand in the way of you achieving your goals, and how you will deal with them if they arise.

If internal difficulties arise in the form of thoughts and feelings, such as:

then I will use the following skills to unhook, accept and get present:

If external difficulties arise, such as:

then I will take the following steps to deal with them: