

Valued Living

A self-help guide to living effectively with emotional pain



Picture: The Falkirk Wheel, by Crimsonrose_01. Used with permission.

An Acceptance & Commitment Therapy Approach

- ⦿ Live a life based on what you value
- ⦿ Be willing to experience difficult emotions
- ⦿ Change the way you respond to your thoughts
- ⦿ Become mindful of the present moment
- ⦿ Learn how to accept life's challenges

The Authors



This manual has been written and designed by Shane Ford, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, as part of his thesis towards his Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Edinburgh.

It has been edited by his supervisor, Dr. David Gillanders, Academic Director, Doctoral Programme in Clinical Psychology, University of Edinburgh. Dr. Gillanders has many years experience practicing and teaching Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. He is an international ACT expert who has published many journal articles relating to ACT.



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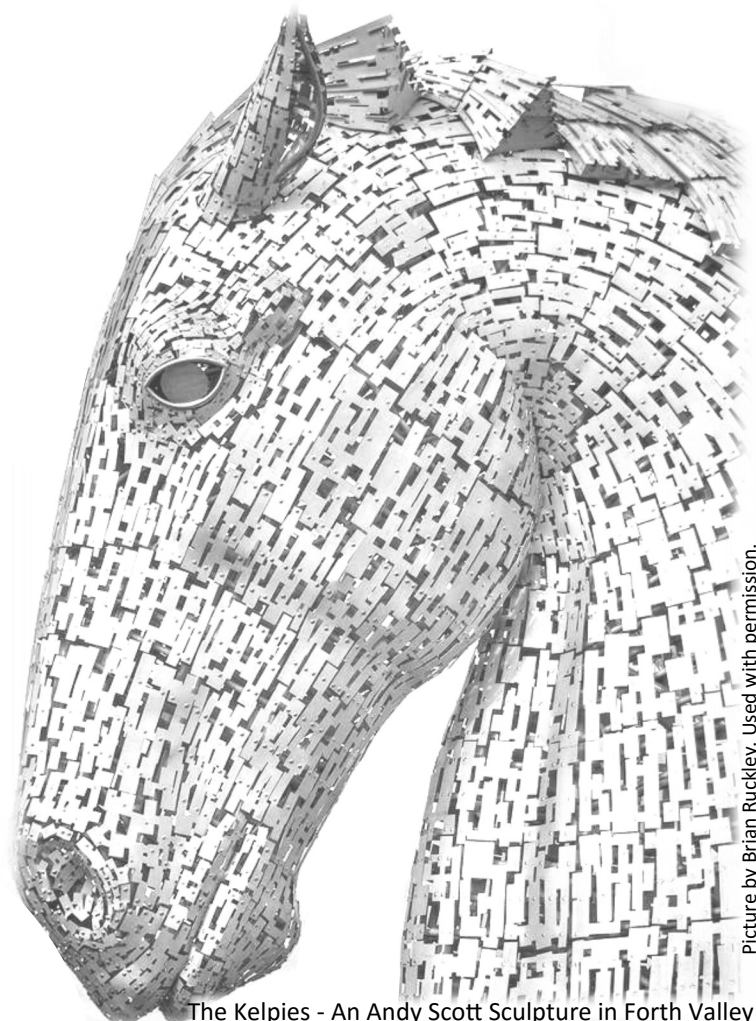
Dr Richard Payne, Dr Wendy Prentice, Dr Rebecca Curtis, Dr Fara McAfee, Dr Nick Bell, Dr Sally Rankine, Dr Christopher Graham, Miss Kirsty Banks, Mrs Nicola Ford & Mrs Sarah Abbott.

In loving memory of Dr Fara McAfee

Dedications:

To my wife, Nicola, for her patience and for giving me the time and space to be able to write this manual.

To my family, for all their support and encouragement over the years which has allowed me to help others.



Picture by Brian Ruckley. Used with permission.

The Kelpies - An Andy Scott Sculpture in Forth Valley

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This workbook has drawn on the following:-

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: An experiential approach to behavioural change*. New York: Guildford Press

Hayes, S. C., & Smith, S. (2005). *Get out of your mind and into your life: The new Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Harris, R. (2009). *ACT made simple: An easy-to-read primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Harris, R. (2008). *The Happiness Trap: How to stop struggling and start living*. Boston, MA: Trumpeter.

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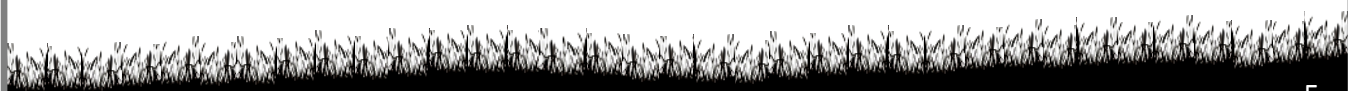
Harris, R. (2009). Mindfulness without Meditation. *Healthcare Counselling and Psychotherapy Journal*, 21-24.

Hayes, S.C., Strosahl, K.D. & Wilson, K.G. (1999). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: An experiential approach to behavioural change*. The Guildford Press: New York.

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All clients mentioned in this manual are based on real experience, however their names and identifiable information have been changed to maintain confidentiality. Images are for illustrative purposes only and are not the clients depicted in the text.



1

Welcome!

Thank you for taking the time to be involved in this new project. We really appreciate your participation. We aim for you to benefit from the content and strategies used within this manual. As you will be aware, this manual can work alongside other support and will not replace or prolong treatment you may be anticipating in the future. We hope that it will provide you with an extra resource in your tool box to manage your current difficulties.

How to use this manual

This manual has been designed to guide people struggling with difficult emotions and thoughts. We all find life difficult at times, whether because of ill health, low mood, anxiety, grief, anger, relationship problems and so on. It doesn't matter what difficulty brought you to read this manual because the techniques used are relevant across a whole range of life's problems.

What we ask is that you take your time to absorb the information from each of the pages. It may be useful to re-read chapters before moving on to the next stage. It is, however, recommended that you read one chapter each week. Even if you have the time to read the whole manual in one night, it is important that you give yourself space to reflect on what you have read. Each chapter is short, but there are lots of techniques within them. It would therefore be helpful if you could set aside some time each week to practice the recommended techniques. There are six main chapters and over the course of the six weeks you will gain a good understanding of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). This will help you to begin your journey of valued living.

What is ACT?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is based on evidence. It comes from a scientific model that builds on other cognitive and behavioural therapies. It approaches thoughts and feelings as events that can sometimes get in the way of living the life we value. We often get tied up in our worries and thoughts. Although some of the things our mind tells us can be helpful, others can be distressing (e.g. "I am such a failure", or "everybody is staring at me") which leaves us feeling down, angry or anxious. Very often we try to control our difficult thoughts and feelings. This could be trying not to think about them, withdrawing from social situations, drinking more than might be good for our health, distraction, self-harm and many more. These strategies may appear to work in the short term. However, how many of these solutions help in the long-term? If you find yourself using such strategies you may also find yourself having to keep going back to these strategies and using them over and over again. It may even feel like you are stuck in this cycle.



The fact is, some of our coping strategies can add to our problems or create entirely new ones. What we try as a way of managing difficult thoughts, memories, images and feelings can be unworkable. For example, an individual who thinks that everybody is staring at them may try to control this by avoiding going out. Although on the surface this looks like a good strategy to get rid of that difficult thought, it could lead to social isolation in the long term.

In ACT, the aim is not to change the content of distressing thoughts or to reduce difficult feelings; rather, it is to help you to take a step back and see your thoughts and feelings as just that (even those that are hard to have or that you know to be 'true'). By increasing your willingness to experience distressing thoughts and feelings you will be able to live with them more effectively.

This change in perspective, from avoidance to willingness, can help you begin to live your life in a way that is important to you.

An old woodwork teacher of mine once said that the only way you learn is by *doing*. "I could stand up here for hours", he used to say, "and explain the entire ins and outs of sawing, sanding, drilling and joining, but the only way you're going to learn is by giving it a go". I hate to admit it, but he was right! The principles of ACT are very similar. You have to practice them and live them out to experience how they can change you. It's very difficult writing a manual on something that is so practical. Therefore, we have included many exercises for you to practice in order to fully experience the power of this work. It's kind of like riding a bike; you can talk all day about the theory of balance and motion, but until you get on the bike you will never fully learn how it works. This manual is more about getting on that bike and less about understanding the theory.

Getting to know your own experience

"AM I NORMAL?"

All of us will have an idea of what 'normal' looks like. For most, it will contain some element of happiness, some element of success and a sense that most things are under control and that we can take on most of what life throws at us. However, sometimes we might feel we are struggling to keep things together and everyone else around us is able to achieve this relatively easily. Does it ever feel this way for you? Other people's lives seem to be going well, they are able to manage. The grass is always greener on the other side, right? And meanwhile, we are sat here with our list of problems not knowing where we are heading or what to do next. We want to be 'normal' but no matter how hard we try we don't seem to measure up to others.

Yet, despite our sense that the world appears to be 'living' whilst we're simply 'going through the motions', a quick glance of the figures on the next page show that this doesn't quite add up...



In the UK¹

1 in 4 British adults experience at least 1 mental health problem across their lifetime

In a year, 35,600 NHS hospital admissions were due to alcohol misuse

Between 8-12% of the population experience depression across their lifetime

Self-harm rates are higher here than most European countries

In Scotland²

800 people commit suicide a year (one of the highest rates in Europe)

The 5th most reported problem to doctors (GPs) was depression

Over 40,000 people have a severe and enduring mental health problem at any one time

In Glasgow North West³

Suicide is 40% higher in Glasgow North West than the Scottish average

Over 1000 people are referred to primary mental health services each year⁴

Anxiety is 60% higher than the Scottish average

Illegal drug use is 70% higher in Glasgow North West than the Scottish average.

¹ Figures from The Mental Health Foundation: <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-statistics/>

² Figures from the Scottish Government Audit: http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/health/2009/nr_090514_mental_health.pdf

³ Figures from Glasgow Centre for Population Health 2011: <http://www.gcph.co.uk/>

⁴ Estimate from Primary Care Team waiting list 2015

The figures above are quite shocking. Despite better health care, diet, education, income, standards of living and increased opportunities, people still seem to be suffering. Can we gain anything from these statistics? Well, what this demonstrates is that you are not alone in your struggle. Everybody, at some point in their life, will face some form of emotional pain, to some degree. Therefore, is it safe to say that human suffering *is* part of being 'normal'?

Most of us don't want the difficult thoughts and feelings we have and we will try our very best to either avoid them or get rid of them.

Let's start by taking a look at your own situation and what techniques you have tried to help deal with these issues.

Your difficult problems

Take some time to think about the problems you are facing that currently hold you back from living the life that you truly want to lead. Once you have identified these problems, write them down in the space provided below. **It is important that you write them down now as we will come back to this list in future exercises.** It may well be that some of these problems cause you more pain than others. Underline those that cause you the most distress.

Finally, take a moment to think how long you have experienced these problems... weeks? months? years? It may be worth writing the length of time down by the side of each issue.

Problem List:

E.g. Feeling sad, thinking nobody likes me,
feeling useless, getting frustrated with my partner,
emptiness in the pit of my stomach.

9 months
Years
6 weeks

What you have tried so far

Many people have tried lots of different things to cope with their problems. Take some time to really think about the things you have tried. This could be attempts to reduce your symptoms or attempts to get rid of the problem itself. Examples could be medication, therapy, avoiding certain situations, breathing and relaxation, drugs/alcohol, comfort eating and so on. Write down these strategies in the table on the next page.

Next, think about how these treatments or strategies have benefitted you over the short and long term. Think about the benefits you may have gained such as pain relief, improved mood, reduction in symptoms, greater ability to function, relationships, etc. Also, think about any difficulties associated with these strategies. What have the strategies cost you over both the short and long term? It may be money, time, energy, additional health problems or social isolation, to name but a few.

While you are doing this, try to focus on *why* these strategies worked or did not work. What was it about them that improved or worsened your situation? Were there any side effects?

Strategy/ Treatment Tried	Short-term Benefits	Long-term Benefits	Short-term Costs	Long-term Costs	Why did/didn't they work?
<i>E.g. Not going out</i>	<i>Feel less anxious and low</i>	<i>Don't have to worry</i>	<i>Can't see friends, can't go shopping</i>	<i>Lonely, loss of close friends, even more scared of going out</i>	<i>It stopped me from doing what I wanted to do</i>

Jake's Story

Image courtesy of artur84 / FreeDigitalPhotos.net



Jake is a 22-year old nursing student. He's been suffering from depression for the last couple of years. His main concern is that he thinks others do not want to be around him. This makes him feel low. Jake reports experiencing a constant stream of critical thoughts that go around and around in his head. They include thoughts such as, "I'm a loser", "Nobody likes me" and "I'll never have any pals". As a way of trying to deal with these difficult thoughts and feelings, Jake will sometimes drink heavily so all his worries disappear. On other occasions he will miss lectures. He has also turned down invitations to parties and limited his contact with others as a way of trying to control how often the thoughts occur. Sometimes he has stayed in his room all day so that he doesn't have to see another person.

Internal & External Problems

Take a moment to think about how Jake dealt with his problems. Now take a look at how you have dealt with your problems. Do you see any similarities? It is probable that, like Jake, the things you've done were attempts to get rid of the problem. You may have tried to avoid, change, overcome or distract yourself from your difficult thoughts and feelings.

No one wants to have difficult problems. The most logical thing to do is to try and change them. Our brain automatically works this way—identifying problems and thinking of ways to overcome them. As a general rule, when problems occur in our lives, we take action and things change. For example, if your car breaks down on the side of the road, you can begin to take control of the situation by coming up with solutions to 'fix' the problem. Your mind will begin to work out what to do (wave down another car for help, call a mechanic, ask a friend to pick you up). You may then predict from your possible options the best course of action.

Our mind is a powerful tool which can *predict, evaluate* and *plan*. This helps us overcome complex problems that we face in our environment. When our car breaks down, this is an external problem and so our external solution works. When dealing with our internal experiences, such as thoughts and feelings, do you think it works the same way? Are internal struggles the same as external ones?

Some attempts to control difficult internal experiences are not 100% successful. Reading this manual may be another attempt to try and control your internal struggles. You may have been struggling with difficult thoughts and feelings for a while. You've probably tried lots of different ways and invested time in trying to tackle your problems. But what if trying to control your problems does not work? Have all your efforts paid off? What has been the cost? You've perhaps had a good go at trying to get rid of your problems so it's not through not trying or a lack of motivation that they still remain. In fact, have you noticed that the times you really tried hard to defeat your struggles they got worse? Maybe the logical, reasonable strategies we use to try overcome our problems are simply unworkable.

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



Picture by Paul Brook. Kindly drawn for this manual

If you can get onto the internet, Bear Grylls (survival expert) demonstrates how to prevent quicksand from sucking you under. If you can have a look at the video now, type 'Bear Grylls quicksand' into the search box at www.youtube.com

If you can't watch the video then read on to see what to do.

Rather than trying to struggle with the sand, if we stay still, lie flat and make contact with the sand as much as we can (so our weight is more equally distributed), we would be less likely to sink. In this sense it's not about struggling to get out, it is about making more contact with the sand.

"Doesn't that mean I should give up then?", I hear you say, "because, if trying to fix things doesn't work, what's left?"

At this point in time, it probably does sound like the only alternative is to give up. However, let me assure you that the remainder of the manual isn't about giving up; it's about the exact opposite. First, let's have a look at what could happen if we continue on the path of trying to avoid or control our problems. Then, we will look at the alternative: acceptance and commitment to your values.

Amplifying your suffering

We've looked at how some of your responses to your difficulties may have produced positive outcomes whilst others may not have worked so well. In an effort to try to change your situation it may be that some of the responses you have tried has amplified your problem. This is through no fault of your own, so you shouldn't blame yourself. Take a look at the image below. Can you see how some reactions to the original problem may make matters worse, even though your original plan was to use them to get rid of the pain? For example, think about the impact your problems may have had on your relationships with others. Was it the original problem that caused these difficulties or was it how you responded to your problem (by engaging in some of the behaviours below) that really caused some friction?



Sometimes, when you buy in to your thoughts and the feelings they produce, what you do can add more problems on top of the original. Many things we do will make us feel a bit better in the short term, but they can become habit: something that you do on a regular basis. This makes it difficult to stop doing. However, we need to look at what is of benefit to you in the longer term. Surprisingly, the things that work long term may not be what you would expect. The metaphor below sheds some light on this.

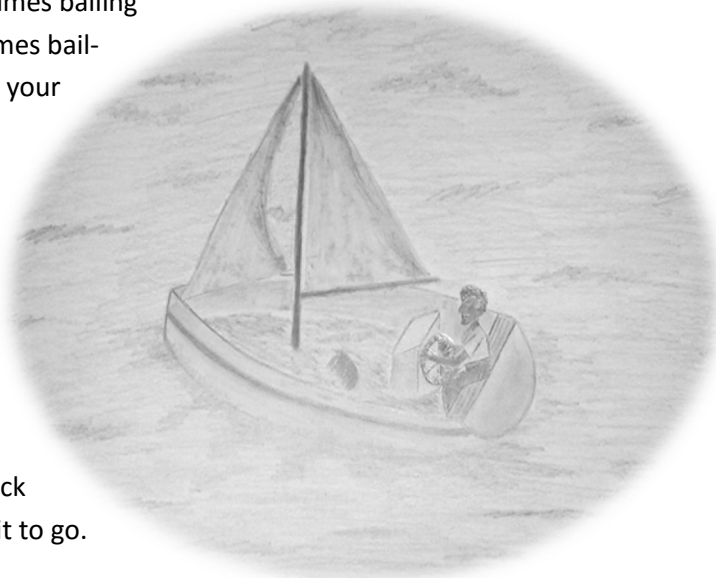
Sailing Boat Metaphor

Imagine that life were like sailing a small boat. During your life, you have picked up the skills necessary to sail your boat and you have a sense of where you are taking this boat. At some point in learning to sail, you learned that from time to time, waves may wash over the bow and you will find yourself with wet feet. You've learned that when you've water around your feet, use a bailer to bail out the water.

So you've learned about the bailer, but when its not needed it has been put away in a locker. At some point along your journey waves have come over your boat and there is now water in the bottom of your boat. So you have started to do the thing that is sensible and logical to do: get rid of the water.

You have been using that bailer a lot, sometimes bailing quickly, sometimes bailing carefully, sometimes bailing wildly, sometimes bailing desperately. In your experience, have you managed to get rid of the water yet? All this time that you have been bailing, what has been happening to the direction and progress your boat has been making? Is it fair to say that you have been bailing more than you have been sailing this boat?

The promise of bailing is this: once you get rid of the water - then you'll get this boat back on track and start sailing it where you want it to go.



Picture by Sarah Abbott. Kindly drawn for this manual

What if you were able to let go of needing to get rid of the water, and begin to look up from the bailing and look out in front of the boat and actually choose a direction that you want to take this boat? What if this manual could be about helping you to put both hands back on the wheel and to choose to pull in the sails and get the boat moving in whatever direction you choose? This could be very slowly at first, there is no speedometer in this work. Once you get the boat moving, then you might be able to investigate some other ways of bailing; if they prove to be useful strategies in helping you to take this boat where you want it to go.

The question to ask yourself is this; would you rather have a boat with only a little water in the bottom, but it is drifting and you are not choosing the direction you sail *or* would you want a boat which has water in the bottom, maybe sometimes so much water that you wonder how it is still afloat, but you are taking this boat, however slowly, in the direction that you would most want to take it?

We will look at what 'direction' means in chapter 5. This involves living towards your values - the things that are important to you and setting achievable goals along the way.

Willingness to engage

By now you may have noticed that some things mentioned within this manual may not have been what you were expecting. You may have been expecting strategies and tips on how to feel good and be positive. This is not what this manual is about. This manual is about changing your relationship with your thoughts and feelings; a perspective shift. Some things you read may seem odd at first. Some things may even be the exact opposite of what you would have tried. All that we ask is that you are willing to give it a go.

We can not promise that you will get better by reading this manual. However, if you do not fully engage, if you skip bits and don't do the exercises, then it is likely you won't get much from it. The principles within this manual have the potential to change you. If you doubt that this manual can have any impact in your life right now, that is great because you are being honest with yourself. We don't ask that you take everything here as truth, we just ask that you stick with it and be willing to give it a go. Bring your doubts with you, don't let them prevent you from reading on. Test out what is being said and see whether it fits with your own experience.

In Summary

As well as learning how to escape quicksand (this could come in handy!) we have also shown that:

- ◆ *Suffering is a major part of human life*
- ◆ *Although we feel like we're the only ones struggling, a significant number of other people will also be struggling with difficult thoughts, feelings and emotions*
- ◆ *Suffering occurs through the way our brains have developed and despite this development having a positive impact on our ability to compare, evaluate and reason, it doesn't help our internal thought processes*
- ◆ *Our brain tells us that the most logical and rational thing to do when we have a problem is to get rid of it*
- ◆ *Although this works for practical issues, our thoughts, feelings and emotions work differently: we can't just 'get rid of them'*
- ◆ *Sometimes, our attempts at 'fixing' our problems or avoiding them can make things worse*

What if trying to change things isn't the solution? What if our struggle with our problems is one which we cannot win? Can you imagine how your life would look if you took a side step from the struggling and practiced not getting hooked into it?

Weekly Task

At the end of each chapter we'd like to give you a couple of things to do that would be helpful to practice during the week. The first thing will always be to go back over what you have just read as many times as you wish, to absorb the material.

The second thing for this week will be to consider how much time you have spent 'bailing' the water out of your boat. What things do you do to get rid of your difficulties? What would it mean to stop 'dealing' with this water? At the moment, it is not about knowing what else to do but to realise that previous attempts to get rid of the water may not always have worked.

Spend this week noticing when low mood/anxiety come up and watch how you react to it. Do you take your hands off the wheel and begin 'dealing' with it again? Don't change anything, just notice it. On the next page is a diary that will help you note down what you did in response to your anxiety, depression, anger etc. Familiarise yourself with this now and take a few minutes, maybe at the end of each day, to fill it in so that you have a record of how the week went. Again, this is not an attempt to change things, it's a way of noticing what you do when faced with difficult feelings.



Image courtesy of Stuart Mills / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Day	What was the situation?	What feelings did you have (anxiety, anger etc)	What were your thoughts?	What did you feel in your body? (shaking, hot, butterflies, breathing increased etc)	What did you do to handle your feelings, thoughts and body sensations?	How would you rate the intensity of your problem in this situation? (1—None to 10—Extreme)	How much effort was put into getting this to go away? (1—None to 10—Extreme)	What were the effects of doing what you did? (short-term and long-term)
Monday								
Tuesday								
Wednesday								
Thursday								
Friday								
Saturday								
Sunday	<i>E.g. Friend rang and invited me out for drinks with her pals</i>	<i>Panic and fear</i>	<i>'How will I cope?'; 'What if I need to escape?'</i>	<i>Heart racing, sweating, shaking</i>	<i>Made an excuse so I didn't have to go out with my friend</i>	<i>8/10</i>	<i>5/10—Thinking quickly on the spot & having to lie</i>	<i>Got rid of the anxiety for now but can't go out with my friends which makes me feel isolated & lonely.</i>

2

Avoidance of thoughts

In Chapter 1, we began by looking at your difficult thoughts and feelings. We then asked you to identify any strategies you had previously used to cope with these. It was likely that you identified many logical ways of coping, but that they may have only been successful in the short-term. You may have also been able to identify that, in some situations, the more you tried to avoid problems, the more they came back at you with greater intensity. Our way of coping can sometimes lead to an amplification of the problem. Finally, we asked you to notice what difficult situations arose for you this week and what thoughts, feelings and body sensations were present. We also asked you to rate how intense the problem was, how much effort you put in to manage the problem and how workable this strategy would be in the long run.

In this chapter we are going to focus on our mind and attempt to explain why such an advanced and sophisticated part of us can produce such unpleasant and negative thoughts and feelings.

Mind Games

How easy is it to control our mind?

Experiment 1: Forget the numbers



Take a look at the above three numbers. It shouldn't take long for you to be able to remember them quite easily. Now, I want you to forget the numbers. Cover them up and try as hard as you can to forget what the numbers were above. Spend the next 30 seconds doing this.

Now, what were the numbers? Could you truly forget them?

Experiment 2: Don't think of a yellow elephant

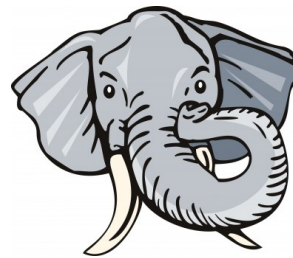


Image courtesy of Vectorolle / Freedigitalphotos.net

Okay, now for the next 60 seconds I want you to **NOT** think of a yellow elephant. Under no circumstances are you to allow your mind to think of a yellow elephant. Do **NOT** imagine it's long trunk. Do **NOT** think about how big it is, or the sound it makes. Try your best!

Is it still there?

What were the numbers again? 😊

The point is, once we have something in our mind, it tends to stay there. Do you think the same principle could work with your difficult thoughts and feelings? If so, how effective do you think trying to push them out of your mind would be?

Even seemingly useless information will stay in our mind. For example, complete the following:

... and they lived happily_____

... home is where the _____

... Humpty Dumpty sat on a _____

Again, this task demonstrates that once we have something in our brain (which got there through our own histories and experience) it tends to stick with us. Do you think we will ever need the information above? Probably not (the nursery rhyme might come in useful if you have children!).

So, what has this got to do with our difficulties and problems? Well, if we attempt to control what is going on in our mind, it simply does not work. Strategies that attempt to control thoughts, such as pushing them away, suppressing them or avoiding them have little impact, because our mind doesn't work that way. We've still got old nursery rhymes floating about up there so what's the chances of being able to avoid more recent thoughts? We can't delete from our mind what's already there; we can only add to it, and this sometimes means adding to its intensity. If our thoughts consist of only the rhymes and sayings like those above, then that's okay, because they don't pose a problem. However, when our mind produces critical, unhelpful thoughts, you can see how this may become an issue.

It is disappointing that our own thoughts and feelings can dominate us so much. However, what if we were able to live more effectively with them by simply changing the relationship we have with them? Rather than attempting to avoid them, could we just let go?

Giving up the Struggle

Professor Steven Hayes (1999) describes a client who likened the above to playing tug of war with a monster. The monster is big and ugly and represents all your problems, including the negative, critical thoughts your mind produces. The rope you are pulling is the struggle for control over the monster. Between you and the monster is a huge sea of hot, molten lava.

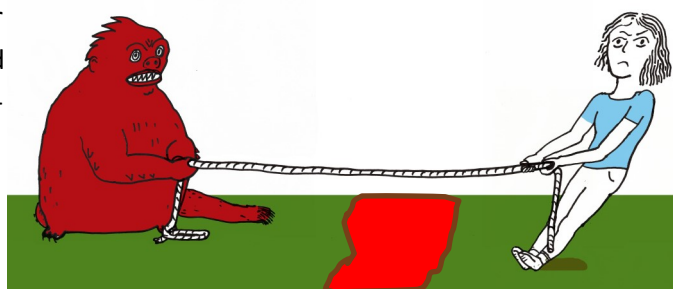


Image courtesy of Dr Christopher Graham

Do you feel like the monster is trying to pull you in? As you pull on the rope the monster also pulls with the same amount of force.

Notice that the monster hasn't won yet, and at the same time, in your efforts to pull the monster into the lava, you haven't won either. Does it feel like a stalemate? Does it feel like you are stuck in this? That there is no way of winning? But what if it wasn't about winning? What if there was another alternative to this situation? Can you think what it might be? **What if you simply drop the rope?**

Notice that the monster is still there, we haven't got rid of it, but our relationship with the monster has changed; we are no longer struggling to fight him, because we are not going to beat the monster. Notice how when we let go of fighting and step away from the struggle, things change. When we dig in and battle hard, we stay stuck in the fight.

Stuck to your Thoughts

First, take a moment to write down any difficult thoughts that bother you and increase your anxiety, low mood, frustration etc. These could be thoughts that occurred last week that you wrote down in your table, or particularly troublesome thoughts that have been with you for a long time. For example, a typical thought of someone experiencing low mood is, "I am a failure". For someone who is experiencing anxiety it might be something like, "I must complete this piece of work to the highest of standards, otherwise people will think I am stupid". For someone experiencing obsessions and compulsions, the thought may be, "If I don't check the gas is off one last time, I may be responsible for burning my flat down, with my house mates in it". Write the thoughts that frequently come in to your mind below:



Difficult Thoughts

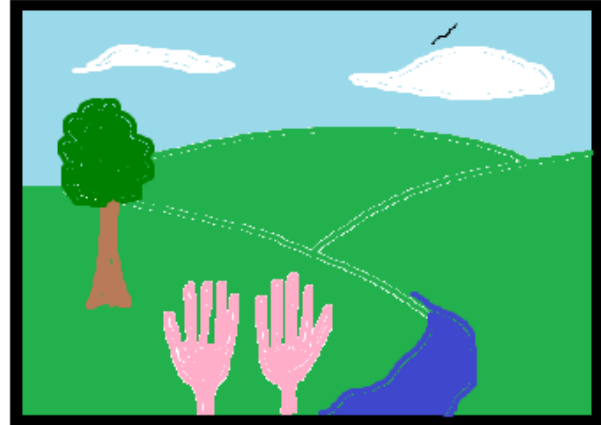


Now that you have a list of your difficult thoughts let's think about what it means to develop space between them. I want you to try to picture a warm, summer's day. You're sitting in the park with your sun glasses on, gazing into the distance. You think you spot something and so you take your sunglasses off for a better view. As the glasses come off, you realise how bright it actually is and you squint with the sun in your eyes. Now, imagine instead of wearing normal sunglasses you're wearing ones with blue lenses. What would the world look like now? After an hour or so, you may become so used to seeing the world in different shades of blue that you only realise the world isn't really like that when you remove the glasses.

Our thoughts can sometimes be similar to wearing blue tinted sunglasses. We can get so caught up in them that our life is experienced through them. It becomes what we are used to. We can see the world more clearly when the sunglasses are not close to our eyes. What if we were able to see our thoughts from a similar perspective? Could we look *at them* rather than *from them* and see them for what they really are?

Healthy Distancing

Here's another example, taken from Russ Harris (2009), of how to see your thoughts and feelings differently, without changing them. I want you to place both your hands in front of your eyes. What do you notice? Can you see anything? If you look closely you might be able to see what's out there through the tiny gaps between your fingers. If you stood up and started walking you might be able to find your way around the room, but it will probably be slow and you'd be more likely to bump into things. Could you read, go jogging or drive like this?



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

Now very slowly move your hands away from your eyes. Notice what happens to the world and what happens to your hands. Notice how much smaller your hands become and how much bigger the world has become. You can still see your hands, they are still in the picture. However, there has been a change in perspective. Your hands no longer dominate the view and you are much more able to move about and get on with your day to day tasks. Notice also that the distance between you and your thoughts increases.

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

Dr Russ Harris provides a good visual demonstration of the above metaphor. You can see it by typing in 'hands as thoughts' at www.youtube.com

Notice how this is different to avoiding the problem. When we are close up and caught up in our thoughts we become restricted. This leads to a struggle and we try to escape. However, when we make space for our difficult thoughts and feelings and allow our self to sit with them, without getting into a struggle, we have more room to move. This is called willingness. Willingness isn't approving of our difficult thoughts or feelings. It isn't about tolerating them or wanting them. It is about letting go of the struggle with them and providing a space for them. It is important to state at this point that willingness isn't about giving up and just getting on with it either. It is about much more than that. This will become clearer in the coming chapters. For now, let's look at some strategies to help you distance yourself from what your mind tells you.

Strategies that allow flexibility

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

Identify

Strategy 1 You can become more aware of thoughts as simply thoughts by identifying them as what they are.

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

This can also work for feelings, bodily sensations and memories. By identifying them as what they are, rather than just experiencing them, you become less controlled by their content.

Vocalise

Strategy 3 You can alter the context in which a thought normally occurs by changing the way you hear it.

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

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

Similarly, have a go at changing the sound of the thought in other ways. Say it really slowly or really fast. Say it in a high-pitched, squeaky voice or in a low, deep voice.

Try doing this with some thoughts on your list from page 18.

Objectify

Strategy 2 You can create distance from difficult thoughts/feelings by turning them into something ...

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

What colour would it be?

What size would it be?

Is it hot, cold or somewhere in between?

What shape would it be?

Is it moving?

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

Say it x100

Strategy 4 Thoughts consist of sentences made up of words that we have learned over the years. Our brain gives meaning to these words which is why some can produce positive feelings and some more difficult feelings.

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

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

Strategy 5 Thought Cards

Write your difficult thoughts and feelings down on cards. Carry these on you for a couple of days in your wallet/purse or pocket. Occasionally, you will delve into your wallet/purse or pocket to get something and notice the cards. You may even take a few seconds to read what you have written on the cards, but what will you do next? You'll probably just

put them back and get on with your day. Let this be a reminder of how you can deal with your actual thoughts. When they occur, simply thank your mind for them and imagine them written down on one of the cards. The cards will stay on you but they don't have to interfere with what you are doing.

Every time I am in a social situation I think, 'I look ugly'; my heart starts to race and I want to escape.

Strategy 6 Walking in the rain

Imagine you're outside and it begins to rain. You're starting to get wet and the rain begins to pour heavier and heavier. You've got no umbrella and you feel fed up, cold and miserable. What would happen to your body and posture? Now imagine the same scenario but your perspective has changed. You know you can't do anything about the rain. You wish you'd remembered your umbrella but you say, 'Oh well, never mind. I'm still getting really wet!' Pay attention to how this feels in your body and what's happened to your posture. The question is, which perspective gets you wetter? Neither! Notice how being willing to be wet is a bit like doing what's important even though you're having a difficult thought. We may not be able to change some things like rain, but if we can change how we stand towards it, it changes our experience.

Note: This is more a metaphor than a practical exercise. However, maybe you will see things differently when you are out walking and it starts to rain!

By practising these strategies you are learning not to avoid difficult thoughts/feelings, and to be willing to have them. In time, your acceptance of them will build so that they no longer appear as problematic as you once thought.

Kim's Story



Image courtesy of Stockimages/FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Kim is a 43-year-old mother of three. She suffered a panic attack 9 months ago. She's been experiencing some distressing thoughts and feelings and has tried to avoid them by not going out into busy places.

Kim has found it hard to distance herself from her difficult thoughts and feelings as she believes they are true. As a result, she has avoided many situations where she predicts panic attacks may occur. This has involved not going to the supermarket, not taking her children to school, and not socialising with friends.

As a result, Kim is becoming isolated. She has unintentionally amplified her problem by trying to control it. She now sees friends less, spends less time with her family and has to get her partner to do all the out of house tasks, which is putting a strain on their relationship.

Kim is very much attached to her thoughts. They are motivating her, but for all the wrong reasons. Kim believes her thoughts to be true and therefore buys into them. She looks at the world through them, thinking it is a scary place that she doesn't want to be involved in.

The art of tuning in and out

What if, like Kim, my thoughts are true?

One of the main comments people make is, “Well my thoughts are 100% true so of course I believe them”. You may be thinking like this yourself. Kim chose to buy into her thoughts because she believed they were true. For most of us, if something is correct we tend to hold onto it. Anything that is false we disregard. This makes logical sense. However, it isn’t important if your thoughts are true or false, accurate or inaccurate, positive or negative. What matters is how they affect you and whether it is necessary to put up with their effects. Why pay attention to even true thoughts if they are causing you distress?

When you become a parent it is pretty normal to have a thought like, ‘what if my child were to die? That would be the end of the world for me’. And yes, this thought would be true, losing a child has to be one of the most horrible things that could happen as a parent. Here, the thought is true and it could actually happen. However, what happens to your life if you were to get totally entangled in that thought or in trying to make that thought not come true? Would it be helpful? Would it serve to motivate you to look after your child and keep them safe, or would it make you worry and even get you down? Could this, in turn, prevent you from being able to look after your child properly? So, despite whether the thought is true or not, buying into it and/or trying to get rid of it could waste a lot of time and energy and leave you feeling worse. If it is not helpful then separate yourself from it.

Sometimes thoughts can be helpful. If you have helpful thoughts then use them. Not all thoughts are nasty! It is only those that stop us from living a life we value that we need to learn to separate from. However, most critical thoughts are not motivational. If calling yourself a ‘failure’ motivates you to continue to look for a job, be careful that it isn’t fear that is driving you.

In summary

- ◆ ***Trying to control what our mind tells us doesn’t work.***
- ◆ ***We can, however, control how we respond to what our mind produces.***
- ◆ ***Practising strategies that help us see our thoughts as simply thoughts helps create distance between us and them.***
- ◆ ***Some thoughts may appear ‘true’ and ‘accurate’. Rather than focus on whether they are true or false, maybe it would work better to consider how effective you would be able to live if you were to buy into such a thought.***
- ◆ ***We don’t need to change the content of our mind, we need to see it from a different perspective.***

Weekly Task

In this chapter we have included many strategies that you can use to help identify and change how you see your difficult thoughts and feelings. This week's task is to go back over what you have just read and pick some strategies to try out as you go about your day-to-day routine. You won't have time to try them all so it may be worth extending this chapter across two weeks before you move onto the next one. We recommend you stick with a strategy for at least a couple of days before moving onto another one. Some strategies will work better than others in certain situations so be sure to try the same one out in different settings. Use the table below to help you organise your chosen strategies. There is a section for rating the strategies usefulness which will help you determine which works best for you with particular thoughts.



Day	Thought that popped up <i>E.g. 'I'm a failure'</i>	How it made you feel <i>E.g. Depressed</i>	Chosen strategy (e.g. vocalise) <i>E.g. Mickey Mouse</i>	How you felt after <i>E.g. Less depressed, smiled a little, was able to focus on more important things</i>	What were you able to achieve as a result of not getting hooked by the thought? <i>E.g. Went back to working on my</i>
Mon					
Tues					
Wed					
Thurs					
Fri					
Sat					
Sun					

Think of an occasion this week when you have used a strategy but it didn't work. What happened and why do you think it was not successful?

Is there anything you could have done differently?

Think of an occasion this week that you have used a strategy and it was successful. What happened and why was it successful?

What did you do differently? What changed as a result?

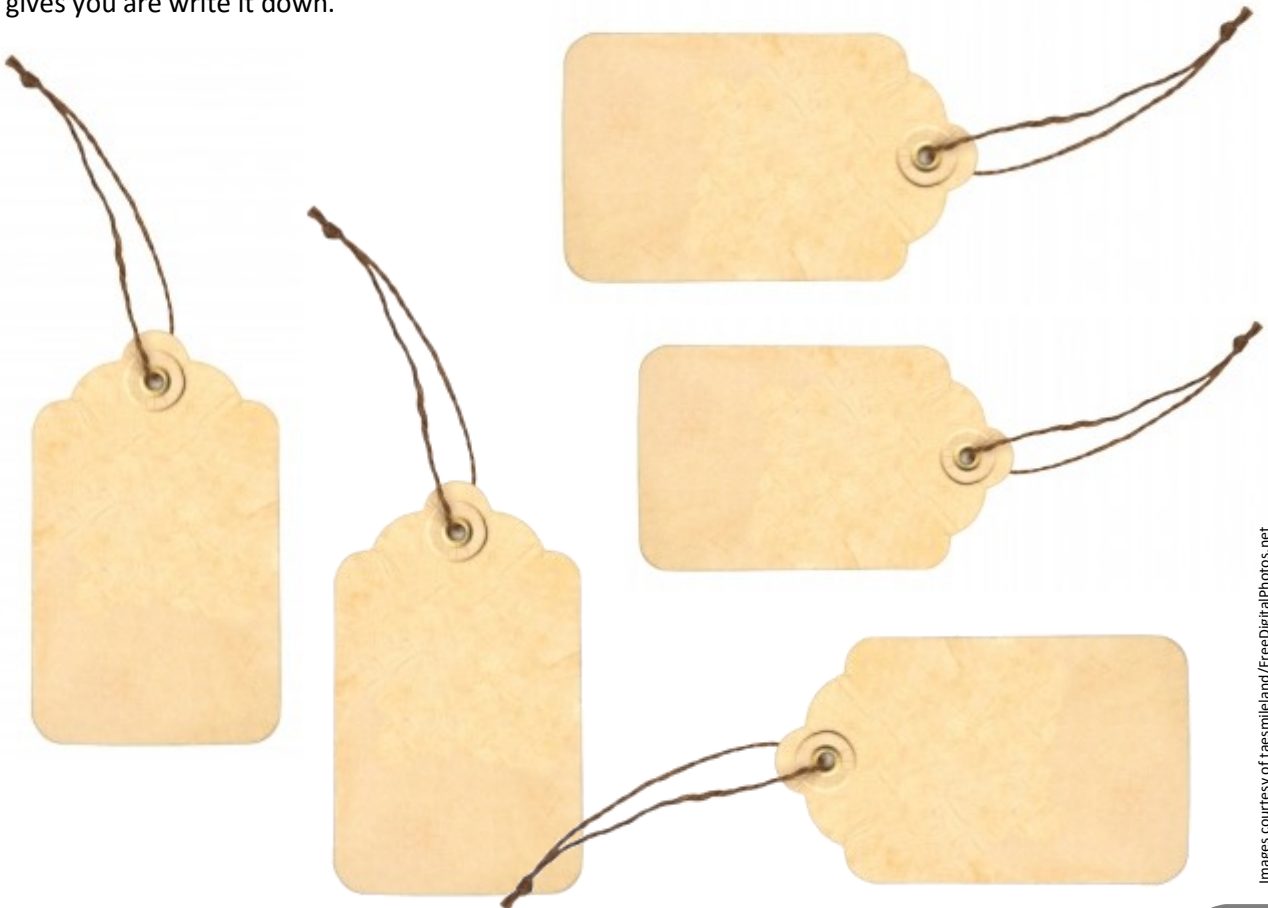
3

Awareness of you

In chapters 1 and 2 we looked at dealing with difficult thoughts and feelings. We saw how providing space for our difficulties allowed us to see them without having to fight them, change them or get rid of them in any way. We will now take a look at the thoughts and feelings that have been with us for a long time. These will include the good ones as well as the bad ones. We will show how getting too caught up in these can often narrow the life we lead, whereas seeing ourselves as a person who can contain many thoughts and feelings without them affecting who we truly are can lead to a more fulfilling life.

As human beings, we have a desire to know who we are. As young children we begin to develop a sense of our own identity through our parents, friends and culture. As teenagers, the clothes we wear, the music we listen to, the way we style our hair might all define us. As we grow older we start to develop deeper ideas about ourselves such as 'kind', 'friendly', 'lazy', 'chatty', 'boring'. These ideas or labels help us to put, not only ourselves, but others into groups. Think of two friends or family members right now and give them five labels each. It's probably a fairly easy task to do because our brain is set up to evaluate, compare and compartmentalise things.

Let's begin to think about how your mind 'labels' you. Below are some labels. Take a pen and write down what your mind says about you. These can be both positive and negative labels. Listen to your first response or 'gut instinct'. It is likely to be filled with stereotypes, and this is the point. There are no right or wrong answers and you're allowed to list as many as you want. Just notice what your mind gives you are write it down.



All of these statements may be true of you. You may be able to give evidence for each statement or get feedback from others that support your statements. However, when we label ourselves as something, it can cause problems if we fully buy into that label. This is because we can begin to change the world around us so it fits in with our labels. This is similar to what we looked at in chapter 2; when we become so connected to our thoughts we cannot see the bigger picture.

For example, imagine you believed that you were boring or useless. What happens if you tell someone that you think you are boring or useless? Do they try and convince you that you are not? And what does that make you do? Maybe you would downplay their message or defend or protect your story about yourself. You may say 'Oh, she's just saying that to be kind'. So we can even hold on to negative statements about ourselves. This can leave us stuck.

What we need to begin to do is take a step back from such labels. For example, if you wrote 'I am a person who is anxious', although this maybe correct, is it true all of the time? Are there instances where you have been less anxious? Similarly, even with positive labels, such as 'I'm a person who is caring', are you always caring? Does this describe you all of the time or can you think of situations where you haven't been so caring? Put another way, you could be different things at different times. You can also be many things at the same time.

Sometimes we can be caring, sometimes we can be anxious, sometimes we can be boring, sometimes we can be hard working. All these labels, or roles, that we hold about ourselves are fine as long as they are workable in the moment. Part of this depends on the context or situation we find ourselves in. For example, you have an essay to complete and you find yourself becoming hardworking and anxious. Is it workable in this setting to be hardworking? Yes, if it allows you to get the essay done. Is it workable in this setting to be anxious? Yes, if the anxiety motivates you to keep working hard. If either of these become unworkable, it is about noticing what is going on inside of you and possibly using the strategies described previously to change your relationship with your thoughts and feelings. This allows you to become more flexible. Think about when you have an hour free or so and slump in front of the television. Is it workable to be lazy and boring at this point in time? It probably is! Does this mean you are lazy and boring when you are doing your essay?

The Story of You

Your story will contain all the labels your mind uses to define you by. These labels have usually been around for a long time and they can limit your experience of the world. Holding onto these labels (whether positive or negative) can lead to rigidity. We are unable to see the whole self; we are much, much more than what our labels tell us we are.

Like the fingers we have on our hands, each one is different yet they are all connected to the same hand. Sometimes it's about choosing when to use our index finger over our little finger and when we need to use them all together.

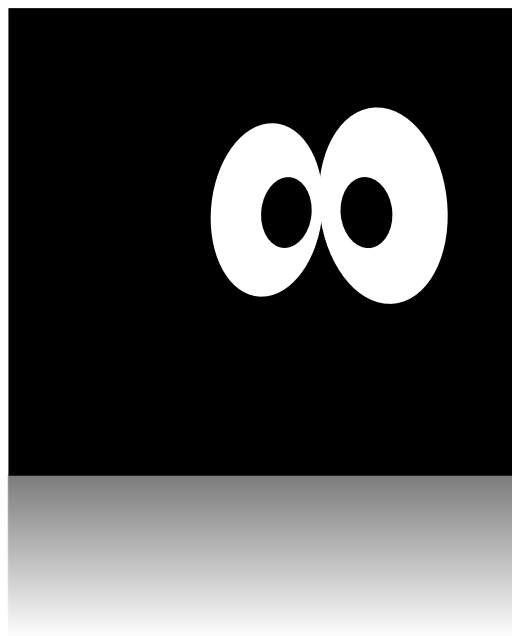
Just as you can be a mother, sister-in-law, wife, grandparent, friend and neighbour all at the same time. Which one is more true? Could it be that they are all true and there is some flexibility across the labels we have?

Human beings can be different things at different times. If we get caught up with a particular label we have assigned to ourselves we can begin to act this out, even if it is not true all of the time.

Actors who get into their role report finding it difficult to then get back out of that role. Actor, Will Smith once said that he almost became depressed whilst filming his movie *Seven Pounds* because he took on the role of his character to the extent that he couldn't shake it off after filming. "Just going into those places as an actor, you are pretending, but part of how you do that is you allow yourself to understand it and feel it for real". Taking on such a role made Will Smith become so different that even his kids noticed a change, "It was hard for the kids because you don't realise, necessarily, that you are different". If we buy into the labels we assign to ourselves we too can easily become those labels.

Labels, whether good or bad, are comfortable because they maintain a consistent sense of self. However, no matter how familiar they are it's about seeing the bigger picture. To become detached from our sense of self we need to step into the unknown. This can be scary. It's like having lived in a box for so long we no longer realise there is space outside. Rather than changing the box itself, we are going to venture outside of the box and simply observe it for what it is; a part of you within a much bigger picture.

To begin with, we can start to put in place some of the techniques used in Chapter 2 that looked at strategies that allow flexibility. For example, if your mind was telling you that one of your attributes was 'lazy', try separating from that label by saying to yourself, 'I'm having a thought that I am lazy'. From this point of view, you can then say, 'I am noticing that I am having a thought that I am lazy'.



Begin to step out into the unknown to see the bigger picture

In addition, we will start to develop a different sense of self. A self that is less interested in labels and producing the content that describes our attributes, and more interested in simply observing with a curious stance the thoughts and feelings our mind produces.

Another kind of self

To begin to take steps outside of your box; the box filled with verbal labels, both positive and negative, will be daunting. You've lived with these attributes for all your life. Even negative labels that you may not want can be hard to distance yourself from because if you are not your 'bad' attributes or even your 'good' attributes then who are you? This can lead to a certain unease.

To help you understand how you can relate to yourself differently I want you to imagine a rugby stadium. In the stadium there are two teams; one team is spots and the other team is stripes. At the start of the game, each team huddles together ready to begin. Once the whistle blows the two teams engage in a physically demanding battle in an attempt to score a try.

Imagine that each of the players represents a thought, feeling or body sensation. One team (stripes) consists of all the positive ones, whereas the other (spots) consists of the negative ones. Notice how the positive thoughts, feelings and body sensations tend to stay together in their team. They could be the “I’m good at...” thoughts, feelings of happiness and relaxed body sensations. Similarly, the negative ones also hang out together. These could be the “I hate this part of me” thoughts, feelings of anger and tension in the stomach. It makes sense that, given a choice, you would want to join the ‘positive’ team. However, you can’t join the ‘positive’ team because, if you do, you are competing against yourself. Your negative thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations are as much a part of you as your positive ones. Both sides are parts of your internal world and so you can’t be the teams or the players.

So which perspective do you adopt?

The referee?

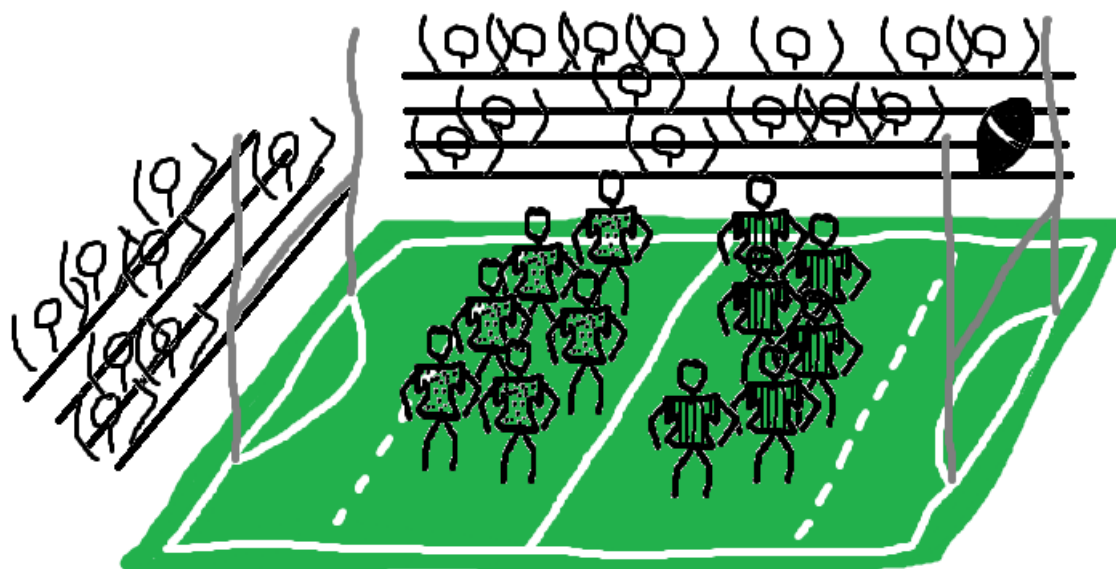
You can’t be the referee as it’s the referee’s job is to keep each team in order and make sure they are playing fairly. In previous chapters we saw that attempts to try to control our thoughts and feelings don’t always work.

The crowd?

You can’t be the supporters as they want one particular team to win. You are both your positive and negative emotions, therefore you cannot take sides. Notice that the fans also sit on the side lines. They never come into close contact with the players. This cannot be you as you know from experience that you come into close contact with both your positive and negative emotions every day.

The ball?

You may feel like the rugby ball at times, flung around from side to side, kicked, dropped, up in the air and flat on the ground. However, you will learn from the next section of this chapter that, although we may feel like the ball now, we do have a lot more control over our difficulties and room to breathe than we think (this type of control is different to the control that involves playing tug of war with our thoughts and feelings).



So what perspective should you try to adopt?

Suppose you adopt the perspective of the **stadium**. You are the very foundations on which both teams play. What does this mean? Well, it means several things. Firstly, it means that you are no longer part of the competition. The game can go on for as long as it likes. You are simply watching it. As the stadium, you cannot move any individual players. You cannot push all the negative players to one side and let the positive ones win.

Secondly, it means that you are not a particular thought, feeling or sensation. Notice that you are in contact with all the players. You are connected to both teams. Without you, the players would not exist. Without you, the game could not happen. You are solid, containing, enduring and bigger than anything within it.

Notice also that if you are the stadium, it doesn't matter which team wins or loses. How does this make you feel?

We can see from this metaphor that, firstly, a rugby game consists of many players. In our example, we said that the competing teams represented our positive and negative thoughts, feelings and sensations. Imagine if, for whatever reason, the 'negative' side consisted of hundreds of players and our 'positive' side only had ten players? How would this make you feel? Would this seem fair? Does this feel more like what you are experiencing? At first glance, this would look pretty daunting! However, if we are the stadium, it shouldn't matter how many players are on each team because we are not taking sides. We are not in this match to win or lose. If we think about a rugby stadium, as well as hosting rugby games, it can also host music concerts, ceremonies and sometimes there's just the ground staff quietly marking out the pitch. Which ever it is, the stadium doesn't mind what is happening on the pitch. There maybe times when you are experiencing many difficult or painful thoughts, feelings and sensations. If you adopt the perspective of the stadium, they themselves may not be the problem; rather your attachment to them could be the problem. Are you getting drawn in to what's happening on the pitch? If you think back to how the labels about ourselves keep us in a rigid and closed state, we can similarly become too attached to the 'negative' team in our stadium. This restricts our lives as we let the negative thoughts, feelings and sensations take over. What small changes could you make to change your perspective from player to stadium?

It is worth noting that we can also get attached to our positive thoughts. Let's take a positive thought such as, "I am a good person and I will help anybody who is in need". If you become over-attached to this thought, then you may be taken for granted and used by others. You may put yourself in situations that leave you vulnerable to being taken advantage of. It is only when we can take a step back and use our observing self to see our thoughts, such as those above, from a different viewpoint, that we realise how troublesome they can be. By thinking of yourself as the stadium you will be able to expand your awareness rather than getting sucked in by a particular thought or label.

The Noticing Self

This is the part of you that can take a step back from what is happening and simply notice. The noticing self does not judge, it simply inspects things that are happening, both within yourself and within the outside world. It is curious. It wants to notice things, but it never forms an opinion. When you begin to start making judgements you are not in the 'noticing self mode'. Being in the noticing self mode provides distance between you and your difficulties which prevents you from getting entangled within them.

Connecting with the noticing you

The next exercise has been adapted from Hayes (1999). It will help to bring you into contact with your observing self—the stadium, not the players, coach, crowd or the ball.

Find a quiet place where you can sit comfortably without being disturbed for about ten minutes. If it will help you concentrate better close your eyes, otherwise look at something that won't distract you. Begin by taking ten deep breaths. Notice the air coming into your body and filling your lungs. Notice how your body gets smaller and your shoulders relax each time you breathe out.

Notice where you are sitting in the room. Notice how you are sitting in the chair. Notice which parts of your body make contact with the chair and where your feet touch the ground. Notice any bodily sensations that arise. This might be tension in your shoulders, feelings in your stomach or pressure in your feet/back. As they come into your awareness, notice them and allow your mind to move on.

Now ask yourself these questions: Who was able to notice your breathing? Who was able to notice where you were sitting? Who was able to notice your tensions? Probably you noticed these things. So perhaps there is a 'noticing you' which is able to observe the things that are going on within and outside of you. Think about something you were doing yesterday. Where were you? The you that was able to notice these things yesterday is the same you who is able to notice these things now. Just like the stadium, you notice what is going on but you remain the same.

Think back to an important event that has happened in your life. This may be a wedding, the birth of a child, your first house, finishing school, getting your first pet etc. Think back to what you saw, what you heard and how you felt. Notice that the person who was there, noticing these things, is the same person now. The environment, the sounds and your feelings may have changed but you have remained constant. You were there then and you are here now.

Now remember something that happened when you were a teenager. Notice again the different sights, sounds and smells. Who was there with you? How were you feeling? Notice at that point you would have looked different. Your body as a teenager would have looked different to the way you look now. The lungs that you would have been breathing from would have been a lot smaller than the lungs that you breathe from today. Yet the you that was able to notice yourself through the eyes of a teenager is the same you that looks through those same eyes today. Even when you were three or four years old you were still able to notice yourself in the same way you can notice yourself now. That part of yourself is the you that remains constant.

Next, think about how your emotions are constantly changing. Sometimes you feel stressed, sometimes you feel happy, sometimes you feel angry, sometimes you feel joy, sometimes you feel anxious, and so on. Notice how these emotions come and go. Some emotions that you had as a child disappear, like a fear of the dark, and others remain. You experienced all these emotions. There was a part of you that was able to notice them from within.

Now think about your thoughts. Take a couple of minutes to notice all the thoughts your mind continuously produces here and now. Some thoughts may seem rational and practical. You may be having thoughts about what you're having for dinner tonight or how you're going to get to the supermarket tomorrow. Some thoughts that pop up may be difficult and distressing. They may be about how you look, how you act or what you think others think about you. Again, there is a part of you who is able to notice all these different types of thoughts. If you think about all the thoughts you've had since you were born, they must run into the thousands, or millions!

Some thoughts may have changed as you've developed over the years. Your thoughts about one issue may also have changed as your perspective has differed.

So your experience tells you that thoughts come and go, change and evolve, and there is a part of you that can simply notice this. This part of you is there through it all and it doesn't change. This part of you doesn't get affected by the thoughts. It doesn't challenge them or try to change things; it simply observes as they happen. Therefore, although you have thoughts, you must be more than your thoughts to be able to notice them. Thoughts can sometimes pull you in and, rather than simply noticing, you can get all caught up in their content. This is looking from the perspective of the rugby player. However you are able to separate from your thoughts, to move back a little and give them some room to simply be. This is when you connect with your 'noticing self' and you become the stadium: the space in which thoughts and feelings can play their game and you contain it.

In Summary

- ◆ ***Throughout our lives, we pick up labels about ourselves that we hang on to***
- ◆ ***These labels can shape our world in a restricted fashion***
- ◆ ***When we become aware of our labels and gain some distance from them, we begin to see they don't describe the full picture of who we truly are***
- ◆ ***This opens the world up around us; from a restricted identity to an understanding of a person who can be many things at the same time.***
- ◆ ***Awareness comes when you begin to see yourself and the world through the 'noticing self'***
- ◆ ***The place where you notice from is curious and non-judgemental. It provides distance between you and your thoughts, feelings and sensations.***

Weekly Task

This chapter can be quite tricky to get your head around. We have introduced a concept, the noticing self, that you may have never heard of before. Yet, this is the you that has remained the same throughout your life. Spend some time going over this concept so that you get a better grasp of what it means to simply notice.



This week, see whether you can begin to take an observing stance to the thoughts and feelings that pop up. For example, if your mind says something to you, think about the rugby metaphor. Has the thought grabbed hold of you? Are you therefore acting as one of the players? Or are you able to contain the thought? Can you see it as something that you are able to just notice, something that doesn't grab you or suck you in? We cannot control the thoughts that come into our mind, however we can change how we relate to them. This week notice whether you're getting stuck to your thoughts, or whether you are able to notice them for what they are.



A Recap

Congratulations on getting to the half way point of this manual. By now you will be somewhere around your third or fourth week since starting. We hope that you have read and re-read each chapter and used the exercises to enhance your learning. Most importantly, we hope that you have been able to implement the information, skills and strategies into your day-to-day life. The 'weekly tasks' should have been helpful in enabling you to do this. Before we begin the next chapter, let's recap on what we have so far learned:

Willingness

Willingness is about making room for difficult thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, problems and so on. This is like leaving the water inside of your sailing boat - although you still have contact with it, it's about accepting that it can remain there whilst concentrating on the things that are important to you. In the outside world, problems can usually be resolved by 'fixing' them. With our inside problems, 'fixing' them doesn't work in the same way. Therefore, learning to be willing to have difficult thoughts and feelings without letting them get to you or feeling the need to avoid them can be helpful.



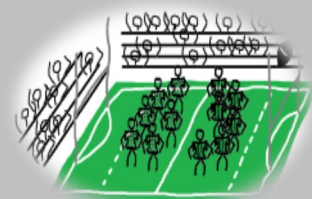
Stepping Back

When we become entangled in our thoughts we begin to live our lives through them. In this sense, they can have a big impact over how we feel and what we do. They can make us worry, make us anxious, make us feel bad about ourselves, make us stay in bed and avoid going out. By taking a step back and seeing our thoughts as just that changes the relationship we have with them. Rather than allowing our thoughts and feelings to control our lives, we can learn to distance ourselves from them. This brings about a shift in perspective, meaning they have less influence on us.



Perspective taking

We all have a story. Our story describes who we are. If we become too attached to this story we begin to view ourselves in a narrow and restricted way. Sometimes we can get caught up in a particular thought or feeling that causes us distress. Such thought or feeling may be true, but that's not important. What matters is whether it is helpful to you. As in the rugby stadium example, we can sometimes believe we are individual players, or the ball or the crowd. However, when we begin to see ourselves as the stadium we come to realise that we can contain everything—all of our thoughts and feelings—and simply observe what is happening.



4

Mindfulness

This chapter will focus on adopting a more flexible perspective on your own story; the stadium perspective as described in chapter 3. Ultimately, being the stadium will allow space for you to reconnect with the present and start living for what you value. Remember the hands metaphor in chapter 2? When our hands are against our eyes it's like getting lost in our thoughts. As a result, we miss out on the richness of what we could be experiencing in the present. You wouldn't want to watch your favourite band playing with your back turned towards them, or go see a beautiful location, such as Loch Lomond, whilst in the dark! You would want to fully engage in these activities so you could truly appreciate them for what they are.

Bringing your awareness to what is happening at present is a skill that can be taught. To begin with, you may find it hard. We all struggle with staying present. It's very easy to get tangled in your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations. This draws you away from being in the present moment. It's also very easy to engage in thoughts about the past or the future. Having contact with our observing self allows us to notice when this is happening so that we can bring ourselves back into the present. But how do you go about doing this? Learning how to shift from engaging in our thoughts to distancing ourselves from them and appreciating what is happening in the here and now is what we will look at next.

You can do this through learning some mindfulness skills.

Defining Mindfulness

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

Mindfulness has been around for many, many years. It originated in many of the ancient religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Even today it is still practiced in most of the major religions.

From an ACT perspective, however, mindfulness...

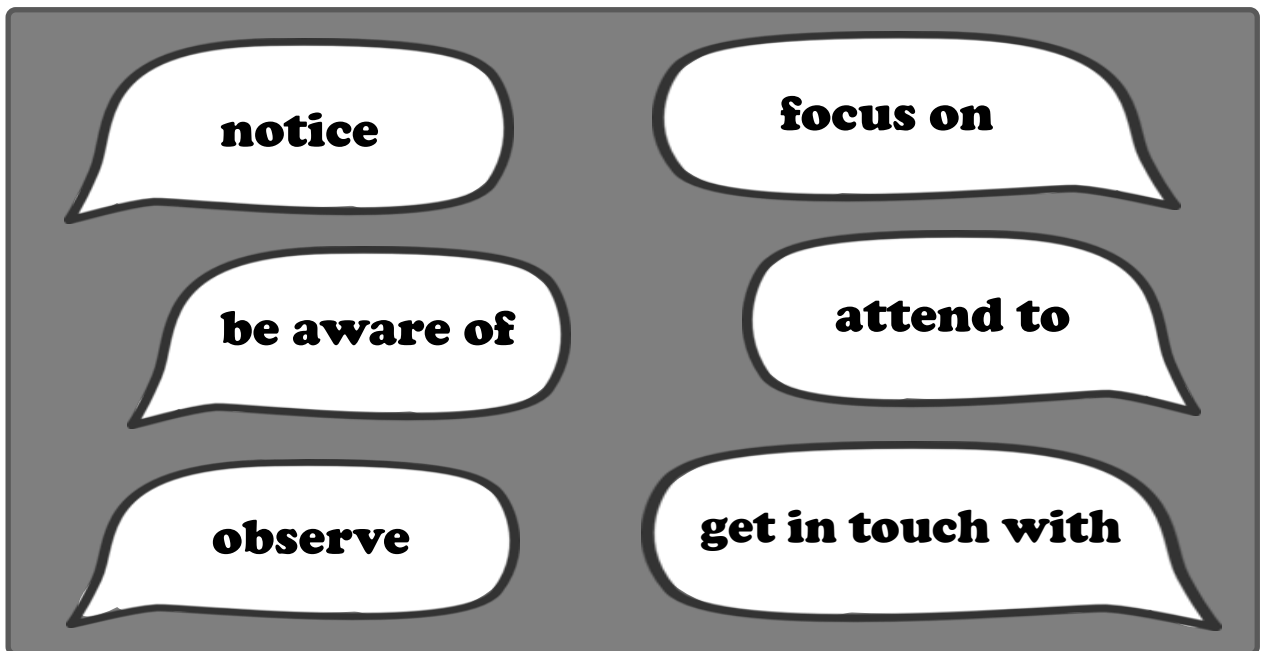
...is *not* religious. Although you may wish to add a spiritual side to it (if this is what you value), mindfulness is grounded in evidence-based research. It has many similarities with religious practices but focusses on the self and surroundings, as opposed to a higher entity. Mindfulness is used as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

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

Russ Harris (2007), defines mindfulness as, '*Consciously bringing awareness to your here-and-now experience, with openness, receptiveness and interest.*' We think that this provides a good definition of what the next few pages are trying to achieve.

When was the last time you got so carried away with something that ten or twenty minutes had passed and you were surprised at where the time had gone? When was the last time you were sat talking to someone or watching TV, for example, and you 'zoned out' to the point whereby if someone asked you to recall what had just been said you wouldn't be able to? Sometimes our mind wanders off and consciously we go somewhere else. Even reading this manual, you may find yourself at the end of a page not remembering a single word that you just read (which is why it's really important to read it over again).

Consciously bringing awareness to the here and now means noticing what is going on around you on purpose. Experiencing it with openness, receptiveness and interest means not evaluating or judging what is happening, but simply observing it. We will commonly use the words below to help you connect to the present:



Simply Noticing Exercise

Let's try simply noticing the things that are occurring right now. Take a moment to get comfortable and sit quietly. Begin to notice sounds around you. Pay attention to anything making a noise in the room, the sound of the radio, the hum of a light. Listen out for any noises coming from other rooms, the sound of a washing machine, the boiler, a fan. Now focus on sounds coming from outside, cars passing by, people talking, birds. Are some sounds louder than others? Do some sounds come and go? Notice the weather, can you hear rain on the window or the wind blowing through trees? Are there lots of sounds? Is it noisy? Or is it generally quite quiet? If it's quiet, can you hear your own body? Can you hear your breathing or the sound your body makes as you move?

Now pay attention to what you can see. How many different things are there in the room that you are in? Spend some time looking at them. Is anything moving? Pets, people passing by the window, birds in the sky? What's the lighting like? Does the room look dark or light? Notice any colours that are in the room. Focus on one object and spend a couple of minutes really looking at it. Notice its shape, colour, size. Does it look heavy or light? Can you see any marks on it, any dust or any faults? Does it have lots of intricate parts to it or is it a relatively plain object? Does it look hard or soft?

Now, go over to the object you were focussing on. If possible, touch the object with your hand. How does it feel? Is it rough or smooth? Is it cold or warm? Run your finger over the object and feel its different surfaces. Are they all the same or some smooth and others rough? Really look closely at the object. Notice how much more you can see when you take a closer look.

This is the end of the exercise, so when you are ready, come back and take a seat and continue reading below.

What did you think about simply noticing? Was it hard or easy? Did you find yourself getting lost in thoughts that were not related to the exercise? How long did it take to complete? In that time did you notice more about your environment than you would have done otherwise? All this exercise aims to do is bring your attention to what is happening around you. When you purposefully attend to what is going on the experience you have is much more satisfying. After all, do you really want to spend all your time in your head?

We have said before in this manual that our mind is a great tool in planning, predicting and evaluating. For many practical issues this is necessary. However, suppose we went to see one of the great wonders of the world such as the Great Wall of China, the Grand Canyon, Stonehenge or the Pyramids of Egypt. Do you think that an evaluative mind would be useful in such scenario? Do you think we need a mind that says, 'Oh, well the Pyramids could have done with being a little taller', or, 'I think the Great Wall of China should have been made out of sandstone instead', or 'Stonehenge should have been built slightly more to the right so it hits the light better'. Sometimes we just need to observe the things around us to feel connected. It's not about judging or evaluating, it's simply about noticing.

Diane's Story

Diane is a 30-year-old secondary school teacher. She's been struggling at work for the last six weeks due to stress and anxiety. Diane has always been a worrier. When she was a child she worried that if she didn't do really well at school, her parents would think badly of her. On several occasions, Diane didn't do too well on exams and was criticised by her mother for not studying hard enough. Diane remembers these, and other instances when she hadn't performed to her best. She frequently thinks back to those moments.

As a result, thoughts about being a failure and not being good enough catch Diane's attention and make her feel frustrated and tense inside. In turn, this makes her worry about the future. She particularly gets anxious about whether her lessons at school are good enough, whether her students like her and whether they will get the grades they need at the end of term. Diane rarely feels 'in the moment' as she frequently flicks between thinking about her mistakes in the past and worrying about how she will perform in the future. This can become incredibly draining for Diane and as a result she has had to take days off sick from work due to stress and exhaustion.



Image courtesy of David Castillo Dominic/FreeDigitalPhotos.net

It's easy to understand why Diane is feeling the way that she is. Repeated episodes of being treated in a critical way by family and others would be difficult for anyone. Experiencing the same thoughts going round and round in your head would also make you feel tired, as well as stuck.

But what if Diane was to try something new? What if Diane could use techniques that helped her stay in the moment, rather than her mind wondering into the past and future?

Like Diane, you may feel that there has been a long history of thinking and feeling the way you do. Your experiences have led you where you are now. The way that you have been treated, either by your mind, others or society, has meant that you tend to dwell on the beliefs, thoughts, memories and judgements of the past. It's important to be kind to yourself rather than feeling guilty or to blame. What's important is that change can be made.

Staying Connected

One of my favourite films of all time is Disney's, *The Lion King*. In one scene, Simba, the future king of Pride Rock, is telling Rafiki, the baboon, his worries about his past. Out of nowhere Rafiki hits Simba forcefully over the head with his stick. Simba responds by saying, 'Ow, what was that for?'. Rafiki replies, 'It doesn't matter, it's in the past'. What I think the creators are unintentionally trying to get across in this scene is an element of mindfulness. Rafiki is communicating to Simba that even the things that happened only a few seconds ago are now in the past. Even though these things can still hurt, what's important isn't to dwell on them but to make contact with the here and now and start living.

Life is happening now. Whatever happened in the past has gone and whatever is going to happen in the future has not yet been. So the only thing that really matters is what's happening now. Sure, we can learn from our past and bring things from it into the present. Similarly, we can plan ahead and make sure we have goals for our future. However, how many times have you got lost thinking over things that happened days ago, or worrying about the future? How much time has been wasted concentrating on anything but the here and now? Think about how beneficial it was the last time you spent thinking. What did you miss out on? Did you feel fully present?

We are not suggesting that the aim is to try and spend every waking moment in the here and now.

This is not doable, nor is it helpful. The aim is to help you to become more flexible when delving into



the past and future. It is about being in the past when this is helpful, being in the present when this is helpful and being in the future when, you guessed it, this is helpful. What's important is that, when we look into the past or future we do it from the present, from a place of noticing, rather than getting hooked into the past or future. As most of us will look something like the person in figure 1 (see the next page); thinking more about the future and the past then attending to the present, the aim is to help move your attention to what is happening now, as in figure 2 (see the next page).

Ways of attending to the past, present and future:

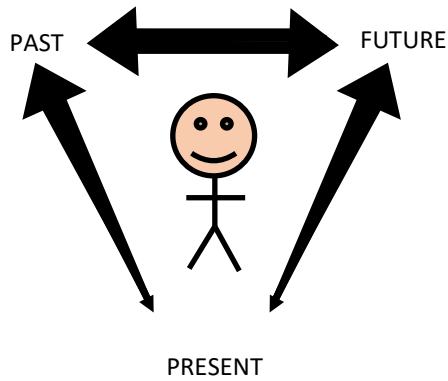


Figure 1. Spending more time thinking about the past and future

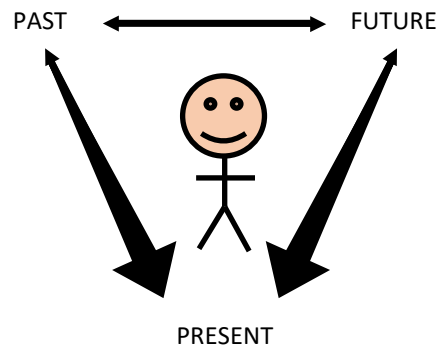


Figure 2. Attending to the here and now

5 senses of mindfulness

Here's a simple way of getting present. We have five senses; seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting. Day to day you can use all your senses to bring your attention to what is going on around you; from taking a shower to preparing a meal. In the next hour or so, pick three situations to be 'mindful' with. This shouldn't require much effort because you would have been doing the tasks anyway. It's just that this time we want you to practice doing it mindfully. Below we have given an example of how to mindfully wash your clothes. It's a task that is so routine that we would normally allow our mind to wander. See if you can become more mindful the next time you wash your clothes.

Mindfulness with The Five Senses

SMELL: Take note of what the washing detergent smells like. You may want to bring the box closer to your nose to get a stronger smell. If you use softener, sniff this too! When you take your clothes out of the washing machine, notice how they smell.

SIGHT: As you put your clothes into the washing machine, notice all the different colours and shades that make up what you wear. Watch as you pour the detergent and softener into the washing machine. When you start the cycle, notice how the colours of your clothes change when water is added. Spend a couple of minutes bringing your attention to what your clothes look like when they start to spin around in the washing machine.

HEARING: Notice how different textures of clothes sound as they rub against each other. Listen to the sound of the washing machine as it fills up with water. Listen to it spinning and the changes in volume from a slow spin to a fast spin.

TOUCH: As you place your clothes into the washing machine, notice how they feel. Are some materials softer than others? Do some feel prickly? If you use a powder detergent scoop some in your hand and notice how it feels. Open your fingers and let it fall through them back into the box. How does this feel?

TASTE: Don't use the taste sense in this one! Unless you are having a cup of tea at the same time.

Our thoughts, feelings, memories and past histories pop up into our mind all the time. What do you do when this happens? For many, you may respond by getting caught up in them. What mindfulness helps people to do is to bring you back from being in your thoughts to the present moment. It helps you become more aware of the here and now. If half our mind is focussed on our thoughts about the past and half our mind is focussed on what we are doing right now then we are not experiencing fully what is happening around us. Let's learn to stay connected.

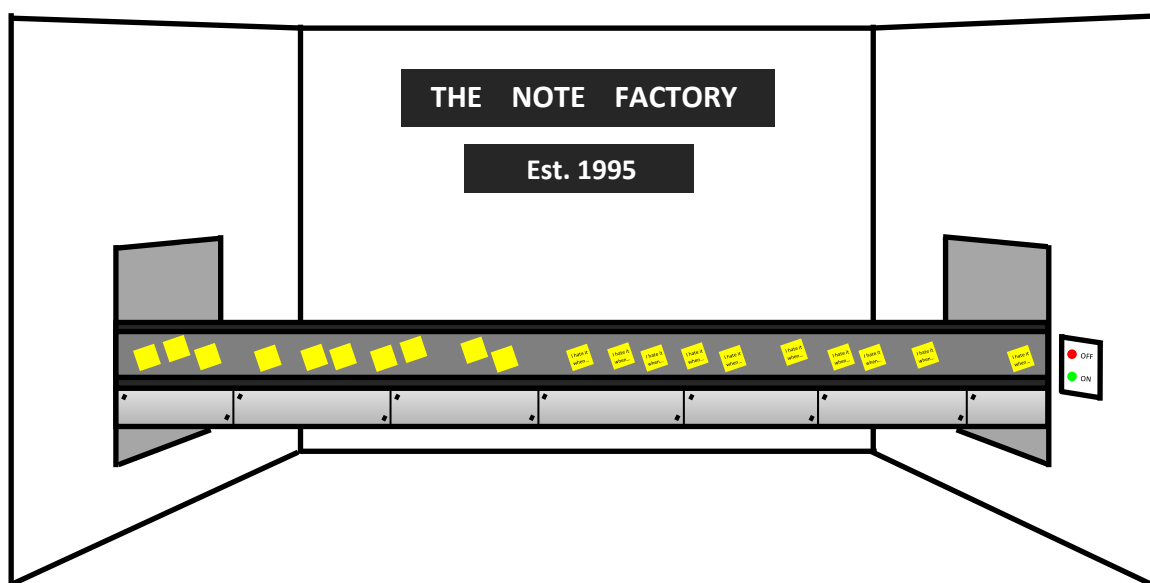
We have focussed on being mindful of external events - noticing sights, sounds, smells and so on. Now it is time to be mindful of what is going on inside of us. The next exercise helps to observe thoughts mindfully.

Mindfulness Exercise—The Conveyor belt

I invite you to find a quiet place where you can sit comfortably and not be disturbed for about ten minutes. If it will help you concentrate better close your eyes, otherwise simply stare at the floor or at something that wont distract you. Begin to notice your breath. Notice the air coming into the body and then leaving the body. Don't try and change your breathing, simply pay attention to its natural rhythm. Notice how your feet make contact with the floor. Notice the parts of your body that are making contact with what you are sitting on. Notice any tensions within your body; your back, your shoulders, your legs. Don't try to change these tensions, just notice that they are there. Be aware of them.

Take some time to sit in silence and notice all the thoughts that come into your mind. They may be about things you need to get done before tomorrow, they may be about conversations you've had during the day, they maybe critical thoughts about your appearance or ability. You may get an image, rather than a thought. Simply notice them. Notice how they come and go. Notice how some thoughts and images draw you in. If they do, acknowledge this and then go back to simply noticing as best you can.

Now imagine that you are sat in front of a conveyor belt. The conveyor belt appears out of a hole in the wall at one end of the room and disappears through another hole at the other end of the room. The conveyor belt is moving and on it there are hundreds of blank post it notes.



As you become aware of a thought in your mind, take a post it note and write the thought on it. Then place the post it note back onto the conveyor belt and watch it move along.

When you notice another thought appear in your mind, again take a post it note and write down that thought onto it. Watch it as it moves along the conveyor belt through the hole in the wall. If you have an image that comes into your mind, take that image and draw it on the post it note. If you notice any emotions or physical sensations, write them down and watch them move along.

If you are getting a lot of thoughts, feelings and physical sensations at the same time, you may want to imagine holding the post it notes in your hand, so you have time to write them all down. Take your time and when you are ready stick the notes onto the conveyor. Sometimes the conveyor may need to be stopped so the factory domestics can clean it or the mechanic can inspect it. At these points you can still continue to write your notes onto it—the conveyor is big and will be able to accommodate all your post it notes. Notice however that the notes you have written will linger. They won't move along into the hole in the wall. This is ok. Notice that they are in front of you and that you can observe them.

Practice this exercise in your mind for a few minutes. If you get lost in a thought acknowledge this and then come back to just noticing your thoughts. Don't try to change your thoughts in any way. Simply learn to observe them, place them on a note and watch them disappear along the conveyor belt. When you are ready, picture the room you are in and come back into it. Take a few seconds to orient yourself back into the room before you read on.

Now you have read through the script, spend a moment trying to remember it so that the next time you come to practice it you won't have to read it. Try to practice this kind of exercise in your daily routine. You can change the context from a conveyor belt with notes, to leaves on a stream (Hayes, 1995), passing transport, floating balloons or even branding a herd of moving animals with your thoughts! The important thing is that you are able to see your thoughts and feelings as passing and that you are able to observe them rather than get attached to them.

Mindfulness of your body

The next exercise is about focusing entirely on your body. It's about taking the time to notice your physical self without letting distractions get in the way. Most people never really pay attention to their body. It's something that has been with us since we were born, yet we just take it for granted. By paying attention to the body your awareness will become focussed on what is happening in the present. This will allow you to experience what is going on now without going into 'auto-pilot' or getting lost in your thoughts.

As with the exercise above, take some time from your busy day to really focus on the below script. It may be helpful to record yourself reading the script on your phone or a voice recorder and playing it back. Alternatively, you could read through the script, memorise it and practice it later.

Begin by finding a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. As we will be focussing on the body it can sometimes be helpful to lay down on the sofa, bed or floor. Before you do this, notice any clothing that you are wearing that may be restrictive. You may wish to put on something more comfortable and remove your shoes, if you wish.

Begin by getting a sense of where your body is in relation to the floor. Notice the parts of your body that have contact with the floor. Also, notice those parts that have no contact with the floor at all. Spend a few seconds identifying those body parts and the different sensations having contact, or not having contact with the floor creates (tension, relaxed, painful etc).

Then focus on your breathing. Notice how cool it is as it enters your body. Notice the movement of your body as it fills with air. Notice the warmer air that comes out of your nose or mouth as you exhale. Try not to change your breathing, just be aware of the process of breathing itself.

Allow your attention to focus on your body. By focussing on the body you may feel relaxed. The aim is not to relax, it is to simply notice. There may be times when you feel anxious whilst doing this. Feeling anxious is okay too and it is about noticing this within your body.

Now narrow your attention, almost like a funnel, to the left foot. Try and pay attention to it so you almost exclude anything else from your awareness. Notice any sensations within your left toes. There might be numbness, coolness/hotness, or no sensation at all. Allow whatever feeling you have to be there.

Bring your attention to the base of the foot, noticing the bones, muscles, tendons within your foot. You may get distracted whilst doing this; thinking about others things, memories, distractions in the room. When your attentions drifts, simply notice this and bring your attention back to your left foot.

Move your attention up to your left ankle. See if you can simply be aware of it, just as it is. Then go up to the lower leg, noticing your calf, your shin and any sensations inside of the muscles. Your lower leg is a part of the body you would never really pay attention to unless it was giving you some pain. Take this time to really be aware of your lower leg—any sensations, the clothing around your leg, inside the leg—your bone, tissue.

Continue to work your way up the leg, spending a couple of minutes focussing on each of the areas. If your attention has wandered and you become lost in thought, just bring your attention back to your leg and re-focus.

Now do the same for your right leg—starting at the toes and working your way up the leg to your pelvis. Sometimes memories or emotions may pop up. These may be related to a trauma of the particular area of the body you are focussing on. For example, if you had a nasty fall when you were younger, paying attention to the knee may evoke this memory and the emotions involved. Just allow these thoughts and emotions to come over you like a wave. Making room for them but noticing that they wash over you and disappear. Come back to paying attention to the leg and simply notice.

Let your attention rise up through your body, spending around a minute on each body part: your buttocks, lower back, torso, upper back and chest. Pay attention also to your spine, gut, rib cage, lungs, and heart. Notice how incredibly complex this part of the body is—all the organs, nerves, tissue, muscles and skin that make up your middle body.

When you are ready, bring your attention to your shoulders, noting any pain or tension there, and slowly let your attention go down each of the arms in turn. Notice your biceps, your elbow, your forearm, wrists, palms, and each finger. Become curious, without judging, as to how incredible your hand really is. Really take some time to experience each part of your body. This is your body. You may have never experienced it in this way before, but it has been with you all your life. If difficult memories, thoughts, feelings occur, allow them to come and go and then bring your attention back to the body.

Now bring your attention to the neck and up into the head. Notice any tensions. Notice your breath passing through your nose and down your neck, into your lungs.

Focus in on any sensations within the face. Focus on your mouth, your tongue, your lips, cheeks, the upper lip, the brow and the forehead. Notice any tightness across your face. You may even notice some tension within your teeth and jaw.

Pay attention to the sides of your head; the ears, the back of the head and what it is touching (if you are lying down). Notice the top of the head and your hair.

Now broaden your attention to encompass the body as a whole. Think of it as a breathing, functioning organism that is continually changing, yet at the same time staying the same. There is no need to make it any different than it already is. Simply make yourself aware. Now invite your attention back to your breathing and spend a couple of minutes resting your awareness on the breath. When you feel ready, orientate yourself back into the room you are in.

How did this feel for you? Were you able to remain focussed? What difficult thoughts, images, feelings, memories, sensations came up for you during this exercise? What did you discover about your own body?

Further Development: Many individuals like to read from a script or be guided in some way when doing mindfulness exercises. This is particularly useful at the beginning, when you are still learning to be aware of the present. After you have exhausted the examples given above you may wish to check out the free audio recommendations at the back of this manual.

In Summary

- ◆ ***Mindfulness is about bringing your attention to the here and now***
- ◆ ***It is easy for us to attend to thoughts about the past and future***
- ◆ ***Mindfulness is about learning to be flexible when thinking about the past, present and future***
- ◆ ***It's about knowing when we are getting drawn into unhelpful thoughts that may take us away from fully experiencing what is going on around us in the present***
- ◆ ***By learning to be present we allow ourselves to experience a rich, meaningful and fulfilling life***
- ◆ ***Mindfulness also allows us to connect with what we value as we shall see in the next chapter***

Weekly Task

Your task this week is to practice being present. Choose one of the many mindfulness tasks shared within the chapter and practice it for five to ten minutes each day. As well as setting time aside to do this, practice being mindful in your every day activities. You could become more mindful when washing your face, drying your hair, eating your breakfast, walking, working, talking, cooking, playing and so on.

Remember, you don't have to be in a 'good' place to practice mindfulness. It works when you are relaxed but it also works when you are feeling down, anxious, angry and so on. It is possible to be mindful of your negative experiences as well.

Use the form on the next page to make a record of your mindful activities this week.

TIP: There are many mindfulness apps you can download to your smartphone for free or for a small charge.



Mindfulness Practice Sheet

Adapted from Russ Harris (2009) in ACT made simple, New Harbinger Publications (p172)

Day & Time	How long I practised for	What type of mindfulness I did (e.g. 5 senses)	Script or CD used?	What were the benefits of doing it?	What difficult thoughts or feelings came up?
<i>E.g. 5pm at home in the kitchen</i>	<i>About 15 minutes</i>	<i>Mindfulness of the body</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>I noticed the tension in my shoulders and stress in my chest</i>	<i>"This is a waste of time", "I have others things to be doing"</i>

5 Values

So far you have worked on a different way of understanding your difficulties. You may not be quite there yet, but there is plenty of time for you to keep practicing.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) also looks at what you value. Values are what gives willingness its purpose. We are only willing to have difficult thoughts and feelings because this allows us greater choice in taking steps towards what we really care about in life. So, although up until now we have focussed on changing your relationship with your difficulties, we are going to change tack slightly and look at how to live a life with direction, value and meaning. After all, if we are willing to have difficult thoughts and be willing to accept them for what they are, what are we doing that for? Think back to the sailing boat metaphor. Are you able to put both hands back on the wheel and steer your boat in the direction you want to go? Ask yourself, which direction you would like your life to go in? The direction you wish to pursue will be individual to you; not everyone's direction will be the same. It is your choice what you decide to value, but the next few pages will help to identify and implement this.

Before we take a look at what you really value it's important to understand that this piece of work can be done despite feeling depressed, anxious, stressed, angry and so on. Many people think that in order to live a meaningful life they have to 'deal' with their issues before they can start to look at moving forward. This simply isn't the case. Like the sailor, when we choose a direction in life, we can still take our water along with us. It's about learning how to carry that stuff with us on our journey without it stopping us from moving forward. The next metaphor demonstrates this point further:

Sailing in a valued direction

Imagine back to the sailing boat. Our values would be likened to the direction that the boat is going. Notice that you never get to your 'direction', you only get to your 'destination'. Your direction leads you to somewhere but the direction you're going is also about the here and now. It is about something you're doing, not some place you'll get to.

Sometimes, in our 'boat of life' we may get to a stop over point. This can be likened to reaching one of our goals. It may be an island or a lighthouse or a port that we arrive at. In terms of our values, however, we will never arrive at these. They are ongoing.

On our boat we are likely to have a compass, and we can think of values like a compass—something that guides us to what is important. Values are not objects that can be obtained. Instead they are something that we chose to direct our life by. A value would be like travelling south. The goal maybe getting to Spain, and we can reach that goal, but we cannot reach our value—we can continue to go south.

So you're sailing along in your boat and this time you have brought a crew with you. There are some helpful members of the crew and some unhelpful members. Imagine that these represent your thoughts, memories, feelings, physical sensations etc.



The crew members come up to you to offer advice about how to sail your boat. The helpful ones may offer to provide techniques and skills to aid you to better sail the boat. These members may represent the useful thoughts, feelings and physical sensations that you have which allow you to live a better life. The unhelpful members may irritate you with what they say you should be doing and how you should be sailing. They constantly bug you and think they know better. These members may represent the thoughts, feelings and physical sensations that make you angry, upset, fearful, anxious and so on. You would much rather take these members off your boat and have done with them. However, the boat you are in is the 'boat of life'. It represents your entire existence up until now. As much as the sails are part of your boat, so too are the members in the boat. These members stay with you for the journey.

Notice also that sometimes a generally helpful member of the crew might start to become unhelpful. For example a problem-solving member that keeps saying, 'Oh, you better keep bailing out that water'. We may begin to realise that, although practical, this isn't the necessary thought we need right at this moment. It is therefore about being flexible; flexible in deciding which crew members to attend to and flexible in knowing when this needs to change. In the same way we need to be mindful of which thoughts are helpful. Rather than thinking which ones are true or false, we might be best thinking about which ones are workable and unworkable. This will change depending on the situation you are in.

Who is sailing this boat? You! It is not up to the crew within the boat to make the final decision, you are the captain. It is you that has both hands on the wheel and it is you that will decide the direction you are going.

What this means is that there has to be a willingness to bring along the good as well as the bad members on your journey through the ocean. This manual started by showing that, in the past, trying to get rid of difficult thoughts and feelings was ineffective. Hopefully, you have learned that life isn't going to start once we throw all our unhelpful crew members overboard. Life can start now, with all our problems. By using the techniques described in this manual you have learned to observe these difficulties rather than getting into a struggle for control over them. You learned that if you cannot take anything useful from our feelings or thoughts you take a step back and allow them to move along the conveyor belt.

So now that we are no longer waiting to throw our crew overboard or bail the water from beneath our feet before life can begin, let's think about what it is you truly value.

Becoming aware of what you value

For most of us, we live our life based upon routine. Our week can sometimes feel like it is the same day repeated over and over again. We may not even know why we do the things we do, but we go along and do them anyway. But what is it that you truly value? What do you do that shows others who you really are and what you stand for? Do your actions now reflect the person you want to be? What qualities would you choose to bring to these actions if you got to choose? Take time to think about what you stand for, what you care about and what you want to spend your time and effort doing. Once these things are realised we are going to ask you to implement them, so it is important that you have chosen values that are meaningful to you.

VALUES

Values are a way of living that is important and fulfilling to you.

Living by the values that you choose to live by increases your quality and enjoyment of life.

If you find it hard to clarify your values, imagine that you have in your hand a DVD that contains a documentary of your life, starting from now and continuing for the next ten years. What would you want that documentary to show? If you were to show it to people, what actions would they see you doing that highlighted particular values you cared about? You have a free choice when it comes to choosing values. If life were like a bowl of sweets and you could say, 'I'll choose that one and that one', what actions and qualities would you choose if you got a genuinely free choice about what matters? Even choosing to do something small can make a huge difference. If you think back to the sailing boat, a small change in it's course could lead to a very different place over miles of ocean.

My Values

Below are different areas of life that people choose to value. These may help you to pick your own values. Some will be relevant whereas others may not. Under each area there are several words that describe certain values. This is not an exhaustive list! There are hundreds of other things people may choose to value. These are just some of the common ones.



Leisure

Exciting	Fitness
Adventurous	Team player
Creative	Fairness
Self-control	Persistence



Family & Friendships

Nurturing	Organised
Sharing	Friendly
Encouraging	Gratitude



Education

Curious	Dedicated
Fun	Independence
Self-development	Skillfulness



Work

Hard-working	Leading
Dedicated	Challenging
Organised	Collaborative
Influential	Cooperative



Community

Connection	Supportiveness
Justice	Respect
Kindness	Reliable
Responsibility	Equality



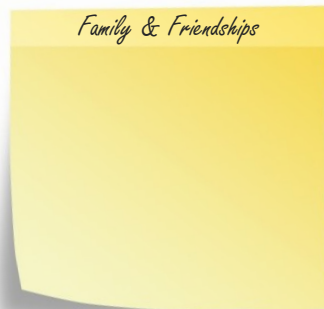
Romance

Caring	Romance
Sexuality	Intimacy
Trust	Honesty
Loving	Faithful

Think about the type of person you want to be. Do you wish to be a caring wife or a supportive husband? Do you value the environment and want to be responsible? Have you got a passion for justice and want to promote equality in what you do? Do you wish to invest time in your relationships and be trusting, caring and faithful? Do you enjoy your work and want to be influential, cooperative and hard-working?

You can be many of these at the same time. Your values can also change from time to time. What's important is that you are connected to your values so that the things you do are worthwhile.

On the sticky notes below, take a pen and write down brief descriptions of what you value within each area. It doesn't matter if some are not relevant to you, for example, you may not work or be in a romantic relationship. However, would it help you to think of what you would hope to be like in these areas, should they occur?



Images courtesy of Salvatore Vuono / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

What did you discover about yourself? Was it hard to choose your values? Were there some areas that felt more important to you than others? Did you notice any difficult thoughts appear that told you this was a waste of time and prevented you from moving forward? Try to separate yourself from these thoughts and give the above another go.

Ask yourself, at this moment in time, am I living by the values I hold as important? If you answered no, what are you currently doing that is inconsistent with your values? Write this down below:

Once you become reconnected with your values you will notice there will be times when you will have to make a choice. The choice will be between choosing to follow a direction that is consistent or inconsistent with your values. Sometimes, actions that you took in the past may be inconsistent with your values. These ways may include things like inaction, avoidance, trying to fix it or trying to ignore it. These old ways may feel comfortable and familiar. It may be hard not to turn to them. However, as we discussed earlier, it's likely that they will only work in the short term. Choosing the path that is consistent with your values will mean being willing to accept your difficult thoughts and feelings and not retreating to your old ways of dealing with them.

Remember, the term 'acceptance' doesn't mean approving of your difficult thoughts or feelings. It doesn't mean tolerating them or wanting them. It is about providing a space for them, without battling against them and bringing them along for the ride.

The next question may take some time for you to answer. Once you are ready to answer it, take a pen and write your decisions down in the spaces provided. Don't write them down unless you mean it.

In order to live by my values I am willing to make room for the following:

Thoughts and/or images _____

E.g. Thoughts that tell me I am incompetent _____

Feelings and/or emotions _____

E.g. Feeling down and upset that I cannot do what others do _____

Bodily sensations _____

E.g. Flat, sluggish, unmotivated, heavy heart _____

Don't put on hold what you value. Once you have written what you are willing to have in the service of living a valued and meaningful life, **START LIVING IT NOW!** The oldest person in the world lived for 122 years. Even that doesn't seem long in the grand scheme of things! Let's not spend any more time waiting for that 'perfect day' to fix things. Instead, let's try being the person we want to be now.

George's Story



Image courtesy of stockimages/FreeDigitalPhotos.net

George is 68 years old and has just retired from his job in car sales. His wife died three years ago and he has since become socially isolated. George has always been a sociable person but since the death of his wife he's kept himself to himself. He's had no job to wake up to in the morning and no wife to share each day with. A few months ago his daughter had a cancer scare which got George thinking about how fragile life can be. He decided not to dwell on the past, as he had been doing for many months, and started to reconnect with his values. George was a keen golfer and loves the outdoors so he decided to renew his membership with the local golf club. This brought him in contact with some of his old friends. He also valued caring for others and so decided to invest more time with his grandson, Thomas.

George is committed to his values and as a consequence has learned to bring his difficulties along for the ride, rather than letting them push him around. George still experiences difficult thoughts and feelings about being worthless and not being wanted but he has learned to hold them lightly and do things despite their occurrence.

In Summary

- ◆ ***As well as discussing difficult thoughts and feelings, we also need to think about a direction in life. Our values lead us in the right direction***
- ◆ ***Although some values are commonly shared, you need to get in touch with what you value, only for yourself, not what you think others expect of you etc.***
- ◆ ***Your values can change from time to time and how you live your values will also change. If you value being a loving parent, the behaviour that flows from that is very different when your child is 2 months old, 2 years old, 12 years old, 20 years old etc. As long as you are aware of this and continue to live in the direction of your current values, you will know you are on track***
- ◆ ***Living a life that is consistent with your values doesn't begin after you have 'dealt' with your difficult problems—it starts alongside your difficult problems***
- ◆ ***You can have many values at the same time. Human beings are complex and can hold many different values. This makes life interesting and varied.***

Weekly Task

Create some blank cards, about the same size as business cards and write an area of life (as outlined on page 44) at the top of each one. On each card, write down your values from page 45. Carry these cards around with you as a reminder of what you stand for. If, at any point, you feel like your values are changing or you remembered something else that you value, take out your cards and either cross off or add to them. At the end of each day make time to take out your cards and ask yourself whether you have been living to your values. If you have, be proud with yourself. If you haven't, don't worry about it, use this opportunity to reflect on what made it difficult for you to stick to your values. Also, think about any changes you could make in the future to make your week more consistent with what you value. Either way, you may want to start a journal to remind you of how far you have come, what you found difficult and what worked well for you.



6 Taking Action

If you feel you were able to connect with this manual and there were some things within it that really ‘clicked’ with you, now is the time to muster all the motivation you have to really put what you have learned into action. In the last chapter we spoke about your values. You may have never really sat down and thought about them before. They may have been in the back of your mind, but you could never really go there because of the difficulties you were facing. We hope that you have taken some time to really reflect on what you value. We will now begin to look at choosing some goals that are based on your values and living towards them.

Goals based on my values

Goals are obtainable events in your life that you are able to reach. When trying to reach a goal, it should be something that moves you in the direction of what you value. For example, if you value being a caring and loving spouse, then the goal may be to set some time aside to spend with your husband/wife. This may be in the form of booking a table at a restaurant so you both have a couple of hours to talk and listen to each other. You may also want to show your husband/wife how much you appreciate what they do. Your goal may be to do more than your fair share of chores around the house, such as deciding to do the washing up and vacuuming as extra this week. Goals based on your values allow you to measure the progress you are making along your path of valued living.

When thinking about goals, it is helpful to make them SMART. This stands for:

SPECIFIC

Don't be too vague. Think about who, where, what, how, when and why?

MEASURABLE

Are you able to keep track of your progress? How are you going to show that your goal has been met? What will you or other people see?

ATTAINABLE

Is this goal realistic? Are you able to achieve it? Does it have too little or too much challenge? Don't make it too simple or too hard.

RELEVANT

Is the goal important to you? Does it tie into your values? Is it a goal that is appropriate to achieve right now or is there something else more relevant?

TIME—BOUND

Make sure you identify a time scale. This will help you create some sense of urgency and will show you whether you are on track.

Let's put into practice the above. On the left hand side we have given an example of an individual going through their value-orientated SMART goal. On the right hand side there is space for yourself to plot out your own.

Example

My chosen value is:

to contribute to my local community

Now, let's create some goals that will help you to develop this value in the immediate future, the short term, medium term and long term:

A) Immediate look on the internet for possible volunteering opportunities

B) Short-term see if my friends will come

C) Medium-term meet with charities to try out their taster days

D) Long-term attend my chosen charity

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

A) at 5.30pm on Tuesday (after work), I will use the library computers to look on the internet for possible volunteering opportunities. I will spend 30 minutes searching and will print off the information I find so I have it to hand when making enquiries

B) I will ring my friends, Jack and Sarah, this weekend to see if they have a couple of hours to spare each week to volunteer with me

C) I will select the top three charities that I am interested in and organise to attend their taster days within the next three months

D) Commit to attending my chosen charity every week by making sure I have re-arranged my other commitments

Your own

My chosen value is:

Now, let's create some goals that will help you to develop this value in the immediate future, the short term, medium term and long term:

A) Immediate _____

B) Short-term _____

C) Medium-term _____

D) Long-term _____

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

A) _____

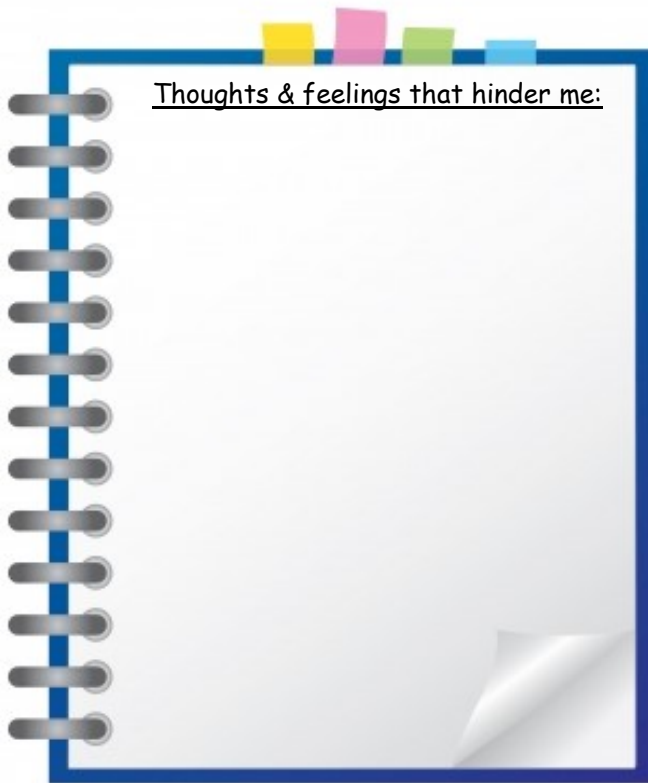
B) _____

C) _____

D) _____

What's holding you back?

As you can imagine, aiming towards your goals doesn't simply stop your difficult thoughts and feelings from occurring. These will pop up from time to time and may even prevent you from achieving your particular goals. Can you think of any difficult crew members that are making it difficult for you alter the direction you are sailing in to valued living? Spend a minute thinking about the thoughts and feelings that would hinder your progress and write them down in the space below:



Once you have made clear what potential thoughts and feelings could prevent you from achieving your goals, think about what strategies you have learned which could address such problems.

You know that trying to get rid of these thoughts or feelings or pushing them aside simply does not work. There needs to be a willingness from yourself to let them come along with you on your journey.

Rather than fighting against them it is about separating yourself from them so they do not hold you back from the life you want to lead.

Write down these strategies as a quick reminder of what works well for you in certain situations. You can then refer to this page in future should you need to:

The above should equip you to pursue one of your goals. However, remember that there are many different goals you will want to achieve and these can all be done at the same time. By focussing on more than one goal you add variety into your day-to-day routine. Things will also be achieved much quicker, but remember, it is also about the journey.

Engaging in activities that work towards your goals will inevitably bring up your difficult thoughts and emotions. After all, this is probably the reason why you have neglected your goals and values for weeks, months or even years. However, committing yourself to achieving your goals and living out your values will undermine your difficulties and allow you to move forward.

My Strategies	
1. _____	In which situations does this work?
2. _____	In which situations does this work?
3. _____	In which situations does this work?
4. _____	In which situations does this work?

Isaac's Story

Image courtesy of Stockimages/FreeDigitalPhotos.net



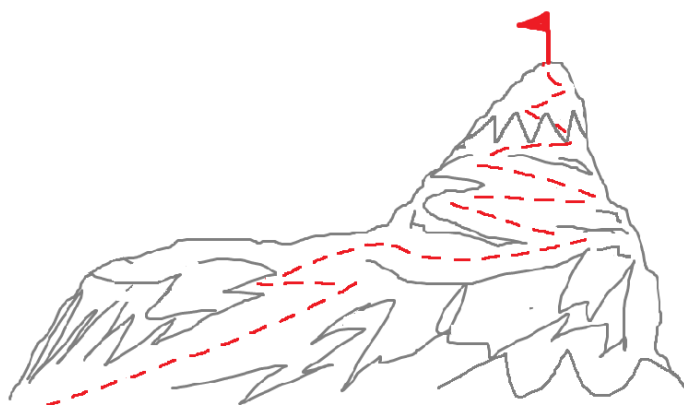
Isaac values creativity and adventure. He wanted to study architecture at university. Unfortunately, his depression got the better of him. He doubted whether he would be good enough and felt others would be far better than himself. He didn't submit his university application because he was stuck with the thought, 'I am incompetent'. Instead, he spent most of the day alone, thinking about the opportunities he didn't take and worrying about the future. Isaac also likes adventure and used to enjoy rock climbing. However, he again thinks that others are better than him and as a result has stopped his sport.

Like Isaac, are there difficult thoughts and feelings that are holding you back from pursuing your goals? If you were to find yourself in a similar position to Isaac, what first steps would you take to reconnect with your values? What immediate, short, medium and long-term goals would you set yourself?

Is it all up hill from here?

Ben Nevis is the highest mountain in the United Kingdom. It stands at 1344 meters above sea level and is a popular destination for walkers, attracting an estimated 100,000 people per year. If you've ever had the opportunity to walk up it you will notice something rather peculiar. At certain points, the path leading up to the summit turns back on itself, so that you are walking away from the top! These zigzags occur all the way up the cliff face. If you didn't have a map in front of you this would seem utterly bizarre! So why then do you have to walk away from the goal in order to reach it? The simple answer is that the mountain is too steep to walk straight up it. Unless you had climbing equipment it would be pretty hard to do. By zigzagging across the mountain face you slowly get higher and higher, even though at times this means walking away from the top. If you had a map you would be able to see that you were always making progress despite knowing you were walking in the wrong direction.

Living a valued life will sometimes be like climbing Ben Nevis. At times, it may feel like you are not making progress and sometimes even going in the opposite direction to what feels right. However, if you were to take a step back and see the bigger picture, you would realise that in the grand scheme of things progress was being made. Life sometimes throws hurdles in our path. It will not always seem like progress is being made. Sometimes we will need to walk away from our goals before we can walk towards them. Whether you're heading forward or moving backwards the main thing to make sure of is that you are committed.



Problem Solving

We've looked at strategies to deal with our internal problems, however, sometimes it is the external things that can get in the way of achieving our goals. When this happens, the first step we need to take is to be clear about which value we are struggling with, and what it is that is getting in the way. Once we have our problem written down, there are some simple steps that we can follow to take action and get us back on our valued path. The strategy below may work best for our external problems:-

- ◆ **Brainstorm all the different things you could try, no matter how outrageous.**
- ◆ **Go through the list and think about the positives and negatives of each option. Choose the option that makes the most sense for you in terms of living your values.**
- ◆ **What thoughts, feelings, physical sensations may come up that you will need to make room for in order put this option into action?**
- ◆ **Break your chosen option down into step-by-step actions.**
- ◆ **Write down the things that might help you achieve each action in spite of any barriers. Think about what strategies you know that will help you take a step back from obstacles to doing these actions**
- ◆ **Carry out the actions & review the problem: have your actions helped you to get back on to your valued path?**

So take Isaac, for example. Imagine he was to reconnect to his value of creativity, and he set himself the goal of applying to do architecture at university. However, when he applied to a local course, they were unable to offer him a place as the course was full.

Value: Being creative through designing

Goal: Complete an architecture degree at university

Obstacle: The course is fully subscribed

Once we have our obstacle on paper, the next step is brainstorming all the different options that we have. It's helpful at this point to include absolutely anything, even impossible or outrageous options, as these can sometimes spark off a very useful option. It's also best to try to stick to thinking of as many options as possible without starting to think through the detail of any of them at this point. Let's have a go with our example. You might find as you're doing this that your mind starts to tell you that some of your ideas are rubbish, impossible, or silly. When this happens, just try to hold that thought lightly, and put the idea down on the paper anyway.

What kind of options can you think of for Isaac? His options might include:-

- ◆ **Asking to go on a waiting list**
- ◆ **Applying to other universities**
- ◆ **Looking for distance learning courses**
- ◆ **Finding out whether a college course or night classes would be an alternative**
- ◆ **Pretend you are the great, great grandson of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and demand to be accepted onto the course**
- ◆ **Setting up a design business instead**
- ◆ **Doing graphic design or something related**
- ◆ **Wait until next year**

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

<p>Go on a waiting list</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + There's a chance he'll get on - He may be waiting for nothing 	<p>Other universities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The more he applies to the better his chances are - He may have to leave home which would add a financial difficulty to the problem 	<p>College course/Night class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + It would be easier than a full-time degree - It may not give him the qualifications he needs
<p>Distance learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Could be more tailored to his needs, with 1:1 tuition - He would remain isolated and would not be able to socialise with peers 	<p>Set up a business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + He would be his own boss and start earning a wage - This will take a lot of time and planning and may not be successful without the relevant training 	<p>Do a related course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Would mean he could start this year - Would he feel as committed as doing architecture and would it be moving away from what he truly values?
<p>Wait until next year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + He would be able to spend some time prepping before hand - This may be a way of avoiding thoughts and feelings that arise should he try another way 		<p>Pretend to be Mackintosh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The course would more than likely make room for him and he would be treated like royalty - This is dishonest and unlikely to go down well if he got found out (10/10 for being imaginative though!)

So based on this, let's say that Isaac chooses to contact other universities. The next step then is to think carefully about he's going to go about this option. Often it is helpful to break the option down into smaller 'chunks'. You can then plan when it will take place, where, who is involved. The more information we think through here, the more chance it will happen:-

- ◆ **Search for viable universities using the internet and make a list of them.**
- ◆ **Check each university website to see if they offer architecture courses.**
- ◆ **Call each university to check dates, prices and availability.**
- ◆ **Check how far away each university is.**
- ◆ **Check on website to see if there are discounts or funding for courses/living costs**
- ◆ **Possibly visit each university to get a feel of it.**
- ◆ **Choose university and book onto the course.**

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

Strategies to help aid action

Hierarchies - making a list of things that are gradually more challenging can help you approach difficult tasks bit by bit. It will help you to learn how to respond more flexibly to gradually harder situations. Notice what difficult thoughts, feelings and sensations arise at each stage and learn how to step back from these as you gradually go through your list.



Environmental changes - If it is hard to motivate yourself to do something, think about how you can change your environment to make it easier for you to achieve. For example, one of your values may centre around health. You have planned to do some exercise to meet this target, however you are finding it difficult to motivate yourself to go to the gym. Why not agree to meet a friend at the gym rather than go on your own?



Increasing positive actions - why not place a pound in a jar each day. At the end of the week or month you can give yourself a gift if you were able to complete a certain task in line with your values (e.g. go out more with friends, presenting at work, hitting the gym and so on).



Public commitment - you are more likely to do something if you tell other people. Once you have decided what it is you are going to do, make sure you let people around you know of this. Tell them face to face and make a commitment to them that you will do whatever it is you have in mind. They will check up on whether or not you have done what it is you said you were going to do.



Make time - Time is precious. We are all busy and sometimes the things we know we need to do can slip off the list. If you planned to go to yoga one evening and you said to yourself, 'I am too busy to go to yoga today', try turning this statement around and say something like, 'I am too busy to go to yoga today, and so I have made time to go to yoga today.' Then think of ways (by using the problem solving techniques) you can make this time to go to yoga.



In addition to the above, there are many other strategies that can help to aid you work towards your goals. Think about what goals you need to set to be able to move towards your values. You can then problem solve and list all the obstacles that may get in the way. From this think about what actions you need to commit to in order to head in your valued direction. If you feel anxious in social situations it may be about committing to going out with friends, despite the difficult feelings that pop up. If you are feeling low, it may be about setting some tasks to do during the day and committing to doing them, despite what your minds tells you. If you feel resentful about the past it may be about committing to doing mindfulness tasks throughout the day so you remain present and allow these difficult memories to be there without avoiding them.

In Summary

- ◆ ***Goals allow us to stay on track***
- ◆ ***SMART goals give more clarity over what we are trying to achieve. They allow us to measure when we have achieved it***
- ◆ ***Sometimes practical issues get in the way of achieving our goals. Problem solving helps us to find practical solutions to practical problems***
- ◆ ***We need to commit to tasks that move us closer to our goals and are in line with our values***
- ◆ ***These tasks will provoke many difficult thoughts, memories, feelings and sensations***
- ◆ ***Learning to hold your thoughts, memories, feelings and sensations lightly, with willingness, will help you to move towards your goals.***

Weekly Task

In this chapter we have focussed at creating goals to help you achieve your journey based on what you value. If you haven't done so already, make a note of some immediate, short-term, medium-term and long term goals. Think about things that will hinder you from doing these. If it is a practical issue, problem solve. If it is an internal problem, use distancing techniques and mindfulness to keep yourself aware and willing to bring these difficulties along for the journey. It is then up to you to begin to start putting these goals into action. This is the last chapter so although we have headed this 'Weekly Task', you actually have as long as you need to start achieving your goals. That goes for all the tasks within this manual. Keep coming back to them and practicing them so that they become part of your lifestyle.



Note: *This is nearly the end of the manual. However, we would encourage you to wait a week until you read the concluding remarks on the following page. This will give you time to practice the above strategies before we summarise all that you have learned within this manual and our hopes for you in the future.*

7

Conclusions

Thank you for taking the time to read this manual. We hope you've found it useful. It's yours to keep. You might find it helpful to keep coming back to it to remind yourself of the different things that you've learned, and the notes that you've made.

Keeping things going

If you feel that you've not come as far as you had hoped, remember that this is just the start of your journey and you can continue to make progress over the coming weeks, months and even years. It can take time for new skills to be learned and consolidated so that they're part of your everyday life. The things that you have tried here have not been easy. However, keeping at it will make the techniques become habit and this will make it far more easier to use them when needed. Checking your values regularly will also help you to move towards the direction in life you chose to take.

Preparing for setbacks

Thinking back to the bit about Ben Nevis, there will likely be setbacks along your journey. Write yourself a message now that might help you to get back on track. It might tell the 'future you' how you've been feeling when you've managed to live your life more as you would like. It might remind the future you what it was like to be in the situation you were previously in and that you do not want the 'future you' to go back to that place.

Moving on

Life is a journey. At certain points in your life, different challenges and opportunities will arise. Problems you once faced many years ago may be different to the ones you are currently facing now. Similarly, difficulties in the future may be different than those you are currently experiencing. No matter what the difficulty is, using ACT will enable you to be psychologically flexible by a) taking steps to hold lightly difficult thoughts, feelings and sensations, b) staying present so that memories of the past and worries about the future do not cloud your awareness of the here and now, c) get moving in the direction that you value by doing the things that matter to you, despite what your mind is telling you.

So here you are, back in your boat with water surrounding your feet. You can see the bailer, and you can also see the wheel in front of you. Which do you choose? Hopefully, you have a clearer idea now of where you want to take your boat. Can you leave aside the water and put both hands on the wheel? Good luck!



A Summary of ACT

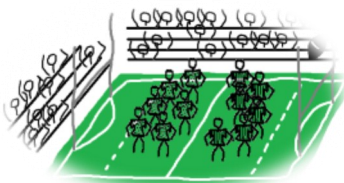
Willingness

It's about not avoiding or trying to control difficult thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, problems; rather, being willing to make room for them within your life.

It's about leaving the water inside of your sailing boat - although you still have contact with it, it's about accepting that it can remain there whilst concentrating on the things that are important to you.

Observing

It's about taking time to be fully aware of what is happening in the present. Noticing when your mind wanders and bringing your attention back to the present. Mindfully taking in your environment as well as noticing on your body. From mindlessness to mindfulness.



Values

Identifying a set of values you want to live your life by. These are individual to you.

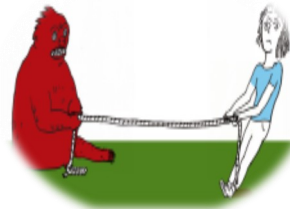
Living a life with that direction in mind. Setting goals along the way, but when they are reached, continuing your journey.

Taking along difficult thoughts, memories, emotions and feelings in your 'car of life', as well as the good ones. Accepting this but always being aware that it is you that is driving the car and you are still free to go in whatever direction your values are telling you to go in.

Stepping back

It's about allowing yourself to take a step back from difficult thoughts, images or sensations. Not letting yourself be consumed, caught up, or influenced by these difficult thoughts.

Rather than playing tug of war, it's about dropping the rope. Your difficult thoughts will still be there, but your battle with them will have ended.



Contact

Experiencing the here and now. Moving away from worrying about the past and fearing the future. Allowing yourself time to experience what is going on in the present; how your body feels, noticing your breathing and the sounds, smells and noises around you. Not attempting to change anything, just paying attention. It's also about mindfully delving into the past and future, but only if this is useful.

with the



Goals & Action

Planning where you want your life to go requires setting goals along the way so you can measure whether or not you are on track. Sometimes the things you need to do will appear scary. Difficult thoughts and memories may cloud your judgement and even put you off doing what needs to be done. Things will only change by doing and so it's about using the above techniques to make sure difficult feelings don't get in the way.

Sources of Additional Support



Further Reading

The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living. Russ Harris (2008). Boston, MA: Trumpeter.

An easy to read book which has more space to look through the six chapters of this manual in detail.

Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life: The New Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Steven Hayes (2005). Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.

A self-help manual which provides plenty of practical applications of ACT. This manual also has lots of worksheets for you to fill in.

Mindfulness MP3s — Check out these free MP3 downloads which will guide you through mindfulness exercises: 'Mindfulness of the Hand': http://www.thehappinesstrap.com/free_resources. Breathing mindfully and body mindfulness: <http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>.

Useful Contact Numbers



Samaritans 08457 909090

The Samaritans provide a confidential support line for people feeling in distress or despair. You can talk to somebody who will help you explore different options and help you come to your own decisions.



SANE 08457 678000

SANE runs an out-of-hours mental health helpline (6pm—11pm) offering specialist emotional support and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family, friends and carers.



NHS 24 111

This service provides comprehensive up-to-date medical information from NHS staff for people within Scotland. This telephone-based service can answer your questions about your health and offer advice.



Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87

This free and confidential telephone service consists of experienced advisors who will listen to you and provide information and advice.

If you become distressed

This manual is intended to help you address current ways of dealing with difficult thoughts and feelings and examine alternative ways of approaching them. At times, you may become overwhelmed or even distressed. This is normal and is to be expected when thinking about personal and difficult topics. However, if you feel distressed to a degree whereby you are unable to cope, or notice that your symptoms are worsening, you should contact your GP and arrange an appointment for the next available date. For significant distress that requires immediate help, go to your local A&E department or call 999 if you are unable to get there yourself.

Please contact the lead researcher if you have any questions about this manual or any of the information contained in it:

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