

# How to Process Your Emotions

## Course Workbook

### Essential Skills to Resolve Anxiety, Depression, and Work through Intense Emotions

#### Table of Contents:

##### **Section 1: Fundamentals**

1. Name it to Tame it
2. Stop Judging Emotions, Describe them Instead
3. The Function of Emotions
4. Radical Responsibility- Clean Pain vs. Dirty Pain- How you create your own suffering
5. How Avoidance Makes it Worse
6. Willingness: The Essential Skill for Processing Emotions
7. Primary vs. Secondary Emotions

##### **Section 2: A Calm Body Creates a Calm Mind**

8. The Mind Body Connection
9. How Anxiety affects your brain Fight/Flight/Freeze, and The Triune Brain
10. How Emotions Get Trapped in Your Body, and How to Release Them
11. How to Regulate your Nervous System
12. Creating Safety
13. Coping Skills/Crisis Skills
14. How to Turn off the FFF Response- Grounding the Body
15. Overcoming Emotional Blocks

##### **Section 3: Change How You Think to Change How You Feel**

16. Neuroplasticity: Change how you feel by changing how you think
17. Reframing- Choosing Helpful Stories
18. Cognitive Distortions Part 1
19. How to Change How you Think: Cognitive Distortions Part 2
20. Cognitive Defusion: Having a Thought vs. Buying a Thought
21. Mindfulness for Beginners
  - a. Bonus Section: Shoulds vs. Musts

##### **Section 4 Creating Change and the Life you Want**

22. Cognitive Dissonance: Mind the Gap
- 23.
24. Self-Deception: The Problem of Not Knowing You Have a Problem
25. Creating the Life You Want- One Small Change at a Time
26. The Happiness Paradox
27. Values: How to Create a Rich and Meaningful Life
28. Identity- Helpful and Unhelpful Labels
29. Fostering a Growth Mindset
30. Self Compassion as a Path to Growth
31. Creating Sustainable Change
32. The Choice: Act, Accept, (or Run Away)

## Skill #1: Name It To Tame It



Write about a stressful situation. What is a situation that brings up a lot of intense emotions for you? Write about your typical responses to intense emotions? For example:



What are the positive and negative consequences of these behaviors? What kinds of difficulties are you facing in your life? How might your life be improved if you had better ways to resolve your emotions?



Can you identify any ways that you talk that make you powerless? (If not, don't worry we will work on that more later on)



**Emotion Tracker:** Track your emotions every day for one month. You could use the attached emotion tracker in this workbook, or using a mood tracking app. Plan a regular time to do it, and set a timer on your phone. Each time the alarm goes off write down what emotions you are feeling. It can be easy to notice the big, loud or painful emotions, but it often takes a little more effort to notice the subtle ones. You may feel more than one emotion at once, this is normal. Write down as many as you can notice.

And then in your notebook, go ahead and set 3 goals for this course. I've made a short video on setting helpful goals, so you may want to watch that first.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## **Skill #2: Stop Judging Your Emotions, Describe Them Instead**



Write about which emotions you tend to believe are good and which emotions you tend to believe are bad. When were you taught that you need to be positive all the time or that anger is unacceptable to feel? Which emotions were you not allowed to feel? Boys are often taught it's not ok to cry, girls are often taught it's not ok to be angry. Are there any emotions which you believe will never ever be ok to feel?



When you do your emotion check-in today take a moment to carefully describe an emotion. What does it feel like to feel this way? Where do you feel it in your body? What thoughts come with this emotion? Pretend like you are the first person in humanity to feel this way and you want to describe it to someone who has never felt this - how would you tell them what it is like?

### Skill #3: Learn To Listen to the Wisdom of Your Emotions

Emotion	What it asks:	Need/Action it encourages
Fear/Anxiety	"Am I in danger?" "Look Out!" "Threat" "Is this actually dangerous?"	If yes- Take action- Fight, flight, Freeze-Create safety Imagined Danger: if not we need to manage our response (calm the body, calm the mind)
Excitement (aka Stress)	"Here comes a challenge"	Prepare and perform
Anger	Is someone taking advantage?	If yes- Protect, draw a boundary If no- I'm creating this victimhood in my mind, let it go, or find out what is underneath the anger
Guilt	"Did I do something wrong?"	If yes- Fix it, Make repairs If No- Let it go
Love	"Is this worth sacrificing for"	Connection, relationship- "Reach out, nurture, lift up, you're safe"
Hopelessness	Should I keep trying	True hopelessness- You can't build a bridge across a river with ritz crackers you should feel hopeless after trying this a number of times. so instead try using steel beams, trees, rocks, whatever. False hopelessness- giving up when it is still possible.
Sadness	"There has been a loss" or "The path you are on isn't going to be productive"	Slow down, heal, or re-evaluate or just connect with someone.



Explore one of the recent intense emotions you had. What purpose could it have? What was it trying to accomplish or show you? What kind of action did it seem to be asking for?

## Skill #4: Radical Responsibility (Clean vs. Dirty Pain)



Have you ever known someone who was always getting offended? Whose life seemed to be full of drama and victimhood? From an outside perspective what were some of the things they were doing to create their own suffering?

Sometimes it can be easy to see this problem in others, but it is truly hard to see how we create our own problems and add to our own pain. An even more important question to consider is “Are you ever that person? Are you creating your own suffering?” Take a few minutes to write your thoughts.



**Locus of Control Activity:** Think of a situation that has been hurtful or confusing for you. Write out your problem in the chart below:

In my control	In my influence	Out of my control

### Extra Resources:

Here’s an [exercise](#) that can help us when we are feeling clean pain- Mindfulness for Difficult Emotions

## **Skill #5: How Avoidance Makes it Worse**

The Thoughts I'd most like to get rid of are:

The Feelings I'd most like to get rid of are:

The Sensations I'd most like to get rid of are:

The Memories I'd most like to get rid of are:

What are some of the things you do to escape or avoid emotions and thoughts? For example, do you use distractions?

Do you choose to skip activities or avoid places?

How about substances or addictive behavior?

How well are those working? Did this get rid of those thoughts and feelings in the long term?

Any negative side effects? Even if they aren't immediately harmful (like Netflix Marathons instead of heroin), what are they keeping you from?

Did these avoidance behaviors bring you closer to a rich, meaningful life?

## **Skill #6: Willingness - Stop the Tug of War with Emotions**

Write about a time when you allowed yourself to feel an emotion:

Experiment with willingness by doing one of the following activities:

- Willingly out of Breath
- Holding an Ice Cube
- Doing a Wall Sit for 1-2 minutes



Here are the instructions for "Willingly Out of Breath"

From "Get out of your Mind and Into your Life" by Steven Hayes

(Or you can watch the video)

Find a timer and hold your breath as long as you can. Write down how long you lasted.

Now you're going to hold your breath again, but don't start yet, I want you to read these instructions first, we're going to see how willingness can change the experience for you.

This time, when you do the exercise and the urge to breathe becomes stronger, do the following:

1. **Notice** exactly where the urge to breathe begins and ends in your body. Locate exactly where you feel the urge to breathe.
2. See if you can **allow** that feeling to be precisely there and, at the same time, keep on holding your breath. Turn your willingness dial all the way up! Just feel the feeling and do not breathe...think of this a special opportunity to feel something you rarely feel.
3. **Notice any thoughts** that come up, and gently thank your mind for the thought, without being controlled by that thought. Watch out for sneaky thoughts that can quickly lead to breathing before you decide to breathe. After all, who is in charge of your life? You or your word machine?
4. **Expand your awareness- look around inside of yourself-Notice other emotions** that may emerge other than the urge to breathe. See if you can make room for those emotions, as well.
5. Survey your entire body and notice that, in addition to the urge to breathe, your body contains **other sensations** and continues to function.
6. Stay with the commitment to hold your breath as long as you can. As the urge to breathe becomes stronger, imagine that you are continuously and deliberately creating that urge. Close your eyes and see if you can replicate this urge in your imagination, divorced from your body. With every pang in your chest, every worry you have about passing out, every instinct to breathe, **shift if from something unwelcome that is being visited upon you to something you are creating deliberately, just for the sake of feeling what that feels like.** This new urge is formally the same, but it is of your creation. Do you need to be threatened by your own creation?
7. You're going to feel some discomfort- can you notice and describe those feelings, thoughts and sensations without needing to act on them right away?

## Skill #7: Primary vs. Secondary Emotions



What are the top 2 or 3 most frequent emotions you feel? What are your go-to emotions?

What are the emotions you almost never feel?

Identify a time that you probably were feeling or focused on a secondary emotion instead of the deeper emotion. What may have been the deeper, more vulnerable emotion underneath?

How are these emotions more comfortable for you than primary emotions? How do you use secondary emotions to protect yourself?

What are the costs of going to secondary emotions in your life?

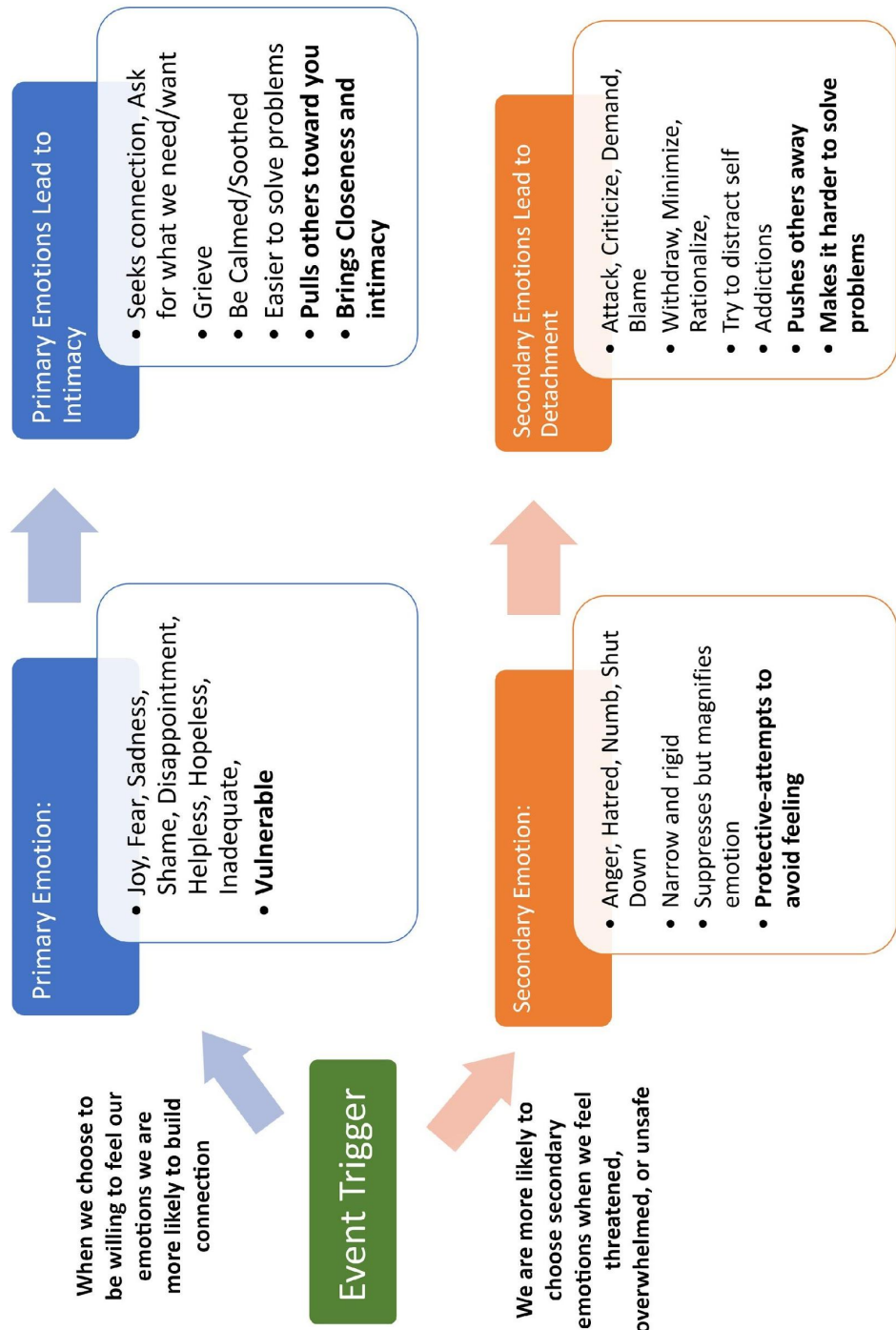
Start to explore: Where are these emotions coming from?

What are some of the thoughts I'm having around these emotions?

What are some of my automatic beliefs that are feeding these emotions?



**Identify Your Own Emotions:** The next time you are feeling wrapped up in an intense emotion, take a deep breath, pause, and then explore: "Is there something underneath this emotion? Is there something more sensitive down there?" Mindfully make room for that feeling and explore what it has to teach you. We are more likely to find resolution to our problems and our emotions when we look deeper than the surface.



# The Anger Iceberg



## Skill #8: Emotions Are in Your Body



Write about how you experience emotions in your body:



**Full Body Scan:** This activity is a longer one, it can be done for anything from 5-45 minutes. You can use the attached script or watch my video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lATiVQ1u58>

Take some time out of your day to do it well the first time, then you can do a briefer version as needed when you practice it in the future. The simple practice of checking in and being aware of our body will help it to regulate and heal.



**Commit to Change:** I will make this one small change in my life to improve my physical health:



**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** One antidote to the physical tension brought on by stress is physical relaxation. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNqYG95j\\_UQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNqYG95j_UQ)



**Grounding:** There are so many excellent grounding activities that I made an entire FREE course- check it out here:

<https://therapyinanutshell.teachable.com/p/grounding-skills-for-anxiety-stress-and-ptsd>

## Skill #9: Fight/Flight/Freeze and Flooding



**Red Flags Survey:** Take a look at the attached "Signs of the FFF Response Survey" to gain greater awareness of your Fight/Flight/Freeze reactions.



Take some time to write about one or two experiences you've had where you felt "Flooded" with the Fight/Flight/Freeze Response. What kind of situation triggered it?

What kind of emotions were you feeling (were you feeling attacked, afraid or unsafe)?

What do other people notice about you when you get flooded?

How did you react?



Write down a couple of things that you can do to take a break and calm down. What works for you?

## Signs of the Fight Flight Freeze Reaction:

Which of these responses do you commonly get when your emotions are activated? When we are able to recognize these in ourselves, it signals us that it is time to calm down or take a break so that we can come back and solve the problem.

### Fight

- Crying
- Hands in fists, desire to punch, rip
- Flexed/tight jaw, grinding teeth, snarl
- Fight in eyes, glaring, fight in voice
- Desire to stomp, kick, smash with legs, feet
- Feelings of anger/rage
- Homicidal/suicidal feelings
- Knotted stomach/nausea, burning stomach
- Defensiveness
- Close-mindedness, rigidity
- Pounding heart
- Fast or shallow breathing
- Cold hands or feet
- Sweaty palms
- Dry mouth

### Flight

- Restless legs, feet /numbness in legs
- Anxiety/shallow breathing
- Big/darting eyes
- Leg/foot movement
- Reported or observed fidgety-ness, restlessness, feeling trapped, tense
- Sense of running in life- one activity-next
- Excessive exercise
- Storming off
- Impulsivity
- Shaking
- Quivering voice

### Freeze

- Feeling stuck in some part of body
- Feeling cold/frozen, numb, pale skin
- Sense of stiffness, heaviness
- Holding breath/restricted breathing
- Sense of dread, heart pounding
- Decreased heart rate (can sometimes increase)
- Orientation to threat
- You shut down-you stop talking or walk out of situations
- Hiding in bed

### What other signs do you see in yourself?

## **Skill #10: Understanding the Two Parts of your Nervous System- And How Emotions can get Trapped in your Body**

What does it feel like when you are in the sympathetic (alert) state?

What does it feel like when you are in the parasympathetic state?

Are you aware of anything you do to stifle emotions? To stop them from processing through you?

What helps you calm your body down? What helps you relax and let down your guard?



**Try the “Shake it out Exercise”** Play some fun music and let loose- Try to do it for 4-6 minutes



**Breathe with your Diaphragm:** Take a few big, deep belly breaths, exhale slowly, and notice how that feels



## Skill #12: How to Regulate your Nervous System



Choose 3 of the following activities to try, which ones help you relax your body?

- Deep Breathing
- The Yawn
- Softening Your Gaze
- Standing on your Head
- Laughter
- Tapping
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Shake it out



Write about what it feels like when your body is relaxed:

## Skill #11: Four Self-Regulation Techniques



**4 Exercises to Trigger Calm:** The parasympathetic nervous system is in part controlled by the Vagus Nerve. The following exercises stimulate the Vagus Nerve and activate the calming reaction in our mind and body.

You'll have plenty of opportunities throughout your day to feel a little tense, notice it, and actively work to soften while still doing the activity. Practice this act of self-regulation every day. It takes no extra time, just a little awareness. The person who trained me in it (Eric Gentry) said we should be doing this every couple of minutes throughout the day. The practice of checking in, regulating your muscles and response, takes seconds to do, but when done repeatedly can completely change your nervous system to be dominated by calm.

**Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Sit back in your chair, if you have to you can scoot your bum forward in order to get a little reclined. Interlock your fingers of both your hands and put them over the center of your stomach. Now as you breathe try to make your hands go in and out a couple of inches by bringing air into your diaphragm. Your diaphragmatic muscles help pull air down and in deeply. When we just breathe with our chests we have much much less room for air.

Again one of the reasons I really like this activity is it is something you can do while you are working, or doing whatever you are doing. You can also put your hands with interlocked fingers behind your head and breathe deeply during meetings, phone calls, therapy sessions, etc.

**Pelvic Floor Relaxation:** Our pelvis is connected to so many important muscles and bones. It connects the upper and lower parts of our bodies, the quads, hamstrings, abdominal and back muscles all anchor on the pelvis. It has important sphincter muscles and the vagus nerve ends there. The vagus nerve is essential to the parasympathetic nervous system. It regulates the heart's function and other important nervous system responses. We can train our vagus nerve to send calming signals to the rest of our body by triggering the vagus nerve in the pelvic region.

EMT's often tell patients who are experiencing an accelerated heartbeat to "bear down" (meaning to push down as if they are going to take a poop) this action triggers the heart rate to slow down. We can use the same intentional action to trigger our mind and body to calm. Let's start by noticing our pelvis: first put your hands on your iliac crests- these are the bones that poke out in the front of our hips - this is the top of the front side of your pelvis, get a feel for where they are. Now put both hands under your buttocks, your sit-bones poke out under each buttock. (I just made you grab your bums :) these four points create a square, inside which you have some intensely strong muscles. Start your awareness of these muscles by pinching your anal sphincter tightly. Squeeze the openings

together. There's a reason people who are tense are often called "anal" or uptight, when our sympathetic nervous system is activated these muscles are tense. And vice versa, when we are calm these muscles relax. The vagus nerve sends that information to trigger the rest of the brain and the body to be calm. So now let's practice relaxing these muscles, first, stop clenching them. Now try forcing them open a little by "bearing down". Can you feel the difference? Now just try to soften them. Allow them to be soft and open. Practice this with the "Eye Contact Exercise" to train yourself to do this during times of stress.

When I do this activity I often notice the tension more in my lower abdomen than in my anal sphincter. As a side note, being aware of tension and gaining control of those muscles can help with other problems like constipation (some people actually tighten the anal sphincter when they are trying to bear down, preventing the successful accomplishment of their goal).

**Softening the Gaze:** Have you ever heard the term "Tunnel Vision"? When our sympathetic nervous system is over-activated, we actually develop a narrow range of vision. I had never noticed this in my life until I had to do a "lead climbing test" at the climbing gym. In rock climbing there are two types of climbing: top roping, which is where your rope is already affixed at the top of the route, and lead climbing, where you start at the bottom and clip into steel bolts spread every 5-10 feet along the route. With top roping, if you fall you only fall a couple of inches until the rope catches you. With lead climbing when you fall you fall double the length of your distance above the last bolt, plus any slack you may have in the line. Usually this is still very safe (depending on where you are climbing) but it is still frightening for me. In order to be certified to lead climb at most gyms you have to pass the Lead Climbing Test where you climb to the top of a route, clipping into the bolts as you go, with someone from the gym watching you. If you make mistakes in technique or if you fall then you don't pass the test. I am an experienced climber, but for some reason that day I went into sympathetic over-activation (I got stressed out). My hands got sweaty, I gripped all the holds as hard as I could (which is a waste of energy) and strangely enough I could not seem to find the holds that were scattered every foot or so. I couldn't even see them because I had tunnel vision. I ended up making lunges for holds that were much further away. I didn't pass the test that day, but went back another day and I was able to stay calm and finish the climb to get "Lead Certified."

Long story short, when we are stressed out we get "Tunnel Vision", both in our physical eyes, but also in our mental eyes - our ability to be creative, flexible, see multiple options and ideas. Our stress triggers tunnel vision, but our open vision can also trigger a calming reaction. The mind triggers the body, but the body can trigger the mind.

To do this exercise all you need to do is look straight ahead, and then soften your vision. While keeping your eyes pointed in the same direction, notice what is on the edges of your vision without moving your head. That's it. Turning on your peripheral vision can induce a sense of calm.

**Yawning/Soft Palate:** The vagus nerve starts at the brainstem and is rooted near the top of the back of our mouths. We can trigger calm through this spot. Run your tongue

along the roof of your mouth from front to back, you'll feel where the hard palate (the bone) ends and the soft palate begins. We can lift the soft palette by making the "R" sound (cupping our mouths while doing it) or by yawning. (see "Day 28: The Power of the Breath" as to the social effects of yawning) You may have noticed that yawning is contagious - this is a helpful behavior for herd animals to trigger each other to calm down.

## Skill #12: Creating Safety



**Are you 100% safe right now?** As you listen to the video lesson-here is the place to record your answer to this question: Take 5 minutes to answer that question on paper.



How has your stress response, which is supposed to help you perform, gotten in the way of you being productive?



**3x5 Card Activity:** Take 3 minutes and write down the things that cause you stress.

Now look at those items again. Those things do not cause you stress, but the belief that they are threatening does. Our perception that we are in danger from those things leads to the physiological response of stress. For example, is there anything on that list that in other circumstances or perspectives could be seen as enjoyable, challenging, or pleasurable?



**Is this issue really about survival?** Take a minute to identify one stressor and ask the question, "Where is the survival fear here? Is it a valid fear?"



**Drawing Safety Activity:** Get out a piece of paper and some drawing supplies.

Set a 5 minute timer and begin to think about a place or activity where you feel safe and relaxed. Start drawing that place - this triggers the visual cortex of the brain, an important part of memory. It doesn't matter if your drawing is pretty in any way, the whole purpose is to put focused imagination into creating perceived safety. Continue thinking about and adding in any detail you can think of. At the end of the activity, check in with yourself. Notice the sensations in your body - what are you feeling?

One of the reasons this activity can be powerful is that it uses the visual cortex - the part of the brain that processes sight - to create safety.



**Safety List:** Start making a list - safe people, safe places, safe memories, safe music, safe physical stimulations, sensory inputs (smells, sounds, touches (like a blanket), movement). Notice how your body starts to feel as you think about, remember, and imagine these things.

## Skill #13: Coping Skills



Write down three activities that you can use to calm down when you're feeling overwhelmed with emotions: Try to think of at least one that will work in different environments (work, home, school, etc.).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Who are three people who you could contact in case of a mental health crisis?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Research now-** What are some of the mental health resources in your area- what hotlines can you use- for example, In my country and state-these are some resources:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline-<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>  
Safe Utah: <https://safeut.med.utah.edu/>

I have an entire course on Coping Skills and Self-Care-check it out if you'd like to learn more:

<https://therapyinanutshell.teachable.com/p/coping-skills-and-self-care-for-mental-health>

## Skill #14: Grounding the Body



**Grounding the Body Exercise:** (10-15 minutes) This exercise can help you come down from hyperarousal and find a more balanced emotional state. It can also help if you are in “freeze mode”.

Sit on your chair. Feel your feet touching the ground. Stamp your left foot into the ground, then your right. Do it slowly: left, right, left. Do this several times. Feel your thighs and buttocks in contact with the seat of your chair (5 seconds). Notice if your legs and buttocks now feel more present or less present than when you started focusing on your legs.

Now move your focus to your spine. Feel your spine as your midline. Slowly lengthen your spine and notice if it affects your breath (10 seconds). Move your focus toward your hands and arms. Put your hands together. Do it in a way that feels comfortable for you. Push your hands together and feel your strength and temperature. Release and pause, then push your hands together again. Release and rest your arms.

Now move your focus to your eyes. Look around the room. Find something that tells you that you are here. Remind yourself that you are here, now, and that you are safe. Notice how this exercise affects your breathing, your presence, your mood, and your strength.



There are many relaxing activities that we can do. Take some time to write down the things that you find relaxing:



Choose one of the following exercises to try today:

### **Guided Imagery:**

Visualization, or guided imagery, is a variation on traditional meditation that requires you to employ not only your visual sense, but also your sense of taste, touch, smell, and hearing. When used as a relaxation technique, visualization involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety.

Choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether it's a tropical beach, a favorite childhood spot, or a quiet wooded glen. You can do this visualization exercise on your own in silence, while listening to soothing music, or with a therapist (or an audio recording of a therapist) guiding you through the imagery. To help you employ your hearing you can use a sound machine or download sounds that match your chosen setting - the sound of ocean



waves if you've chosen a beach, for example.

Practicing visualization: Find a quiet, relaxed place. Beginners sometimes fall asleep during a visualization meditation, so you might try sitting up.

Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can - everything you can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. Visualization works best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible, using at least three of your senses. When visualizing, choose imagery that appeals to you; don't select images because you think they should be appealing. Let your own images come up and work for you.

If you are thinking about a dock on a quiet lake, for example:

- Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colors and textures around you.
- Spend some time exploring each of your senses.
- See the sun setting over the water.
- Hear the birds singing.
- Smell the pine trees.
- Feel the cool water on your bare feet.
- Taste the fresh, clean air.

Enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation that envelopes you as you slowly explore your restful place. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the present. Don't worry if you sometimes zone out or lose track of where you are during a guided imagery session. This is normal. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle movements, or even cough or yawn. Again, these are normal responses.

**5 Minute Self Massage:** A combination of strokes works well to relieve muscle tension. Try gentle chops with the edge of your hands or tapping with fingers or cupped palms. Put fingertip pressure on muscle knots. Knead across muscles, and try long, light, gliding strokes. You can apply these strokes to any part of the body that falls easily within your reach. For a short session like this, try focusing on your neck and head:

- Start by kneading the muscles at the back of your neck and shoulders. Make a loose fist and drum swiftly up and down the sides and back of your neck. Next, use your thumbs to work tiny circles around the base of your skull. Slowly massage the rest of your scalp with your fingertips. Then tap your fingers against your scalp, moving from the front to the back and then over the sides.
- Now massage your face. Make a series of tiny circles with your thumbs or fingertips. Pay particular attention to your temples, forehead, and jaw muscles. Use your middle fingers to massage the bridge of your nose and work outward over your eyebrows to your temples.
- Finally, close your eyes. Cup your hands loosely over your face and inhale and exhale easily for a short while.



Make a plan for how you are going to incorporate 10 minutes of relaxation into your day in the future:

**Extra Resources:**

There are tons of resources for relaxation techniques and guided imagery, here are two links:

<https://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/downloads.html#guided>

<http://www.the-guided-meditation-site.com/relaxation-script.html>

Also, if you just search “Guided Imagery” in the App Store there are tons of apps that can help you learn to practice relaxation.

**How TV makes us stressed:**

<http://time.com/3029797/watching-tv-to-relieve-stress-can-make-you-feel-like-a-failure/>,

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/inner-source/201110/your-unhappy-brain-television>,

<http://www.activistpost.com/2015/08/how-tv-affects-your-brain-chemistry-for-the-worst.html>

**Another nice resource on relaxation:** <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm>

**An interesting video on stress relief:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fL-pn80s-c>

## Skill #15 Overcoming Emotional Blocks

What is an issue that just keeps coming up for you?

1. What is the Emotion? (Name it)
2. Is there an underlying Primary Emotion, a more sensitive emotion underneath?
3. Are you Judging or avoiding these emotions?
4. What does your body do when this issue comes up? (ie do you get tense or stressed?)
5. Is this issue related to a fear you have about yourself? (ie I'm not good enough, I'm not loveable, etc)
6. What is in your Locus of Control?

In my Realm of Control	What I Invite	Not my Responsibility

7. Draw or diagram the problem. You may need a bigger piece of paper. Or write about the problem in depth. Organize your thoughts by putting them down on paper.

8. Get a third party involved- who can support you in getting a fresh perspective on this problem?

**Skill #16 Neuroplasticity:**  
**Change how you feel by changing how you think**

Can you identify any ways that you think that impact how you feel?

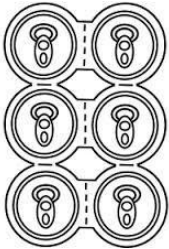
Can you identify anything about yourself that you believe that you can never change?

If you could change any one thing about yourself, what would it be?

## Skill #17: Reframing - Choosing More Helpful Narratives



How is the Desk the Mother of the Chair<sup>1</sup>? Write your answers below



**6 Pack Exercise:** Think of the last time you got really bugged at someone. Close your eyes and for a minute just put yourself back in that situation. What were you feeling? What were you thinking about that person? Write about it here:

Fill out the following sheet with your different “stories”. Don’t try to filter them before you write them, just write whatever comes to your mind.

6 stories (ways of interpreting it):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

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<sup>1</sup> I believe this thought exercise comes from Steven Hayes but I can’t find the reference

What are your values? (More on this in Skill #26) What kind of life do you want to live? What kind of person do you want to be?

Evaluate each story on the following:

Is this true?

Is it the kind of person you want to be?

Does it give you power to act?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Which of these stories are helpful to you? Which stories help you live your values?

## 18.1 Identifying Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive Distortion:	How you think	How you feel	Antidotes:
<p><b>1. All-or-Nothing Thinking</b> Everything has to go well or it's all a failure</p>	<p><i>"Why try?" Why bother if I can't do it all? Or "If I can't do it perfectly it's not worth it"</i></p>	<p>Hopeless, Depressed, Justified in Giving Up</p>	<p>Focus on Progress not perfection. Allow yourself to try without having to be perfect. Remind yourself that little efforts add up over time. Just get started and try to do one part</p>
<p><b>2. Overgeneralizing</b> You take one bad instance and assume that everything will be awful after that.</p>	<p><i>"Nothing good ever happens to me"</i> <i>"If this happened once, then it will probably always happen again"</i></p>	<p>Depressed, anxious, overwhelmed</p>	<p>Break problems down into tiny pieces. Face about one problem at a time. Look for exceptions and small changes that you can make.</p>
<p><b>3. Black and White Thinking</b> You think in extremes. We only see the negative in a situation or in ourselves.</p>	<p><i>"I'm a complete failure" "My parents are such idiots" "You never listen to me"</i> <i>Almost any time you use extreme wording like "Always, never, completely, terrible, etc."</i></p>	<p>Upset It magnifies all emotions- sadness, anxiety, anger, etc.</p>	<p>Try to see both sides of an issue. Use precise language about 1 specific thing. Ask "What else is there?" Is there more information that I'm ignoring? Can I see both the good and bad at the same time?</p>
<p><b>4. Mind Reading</b> Assuming you know what</p>	<p><i>"Nobody likes me"</i> <i>"Everyone is judging me"</i></p>	<p>Insecure, Anxious, Fearful</p>	<p>Ask clarifying questions, even sensitive ones. Get more information. Fact check.</p>



others are thinking	<i>"My boss must think I'm incompetent"</i>	and sometimes Angry, Vindictive or Upset	Remind yourself that you may not be making accurate guesses about other people's perceptions.
<b>5. Catastrophizing</b> Assuming that fears and worries about the worst case scenario must be true.	<i>"This is never going to work"</i> <i>"I'm going to fail and make a complete fool of myself"</i> <i>"She's late. It's raining. She has hydroplaned and her car is upside down in a ditch."</i>	Fearful, Anxious, Hopeless, Helpless	Look for examples of how things have worked out in the past. Ask "Am I safe now?" Focus on the present and on the work you need to do. Choose to open yourself up to positive possibilities and prepare for negative ones. Find something to be grateful for.
<b>6. Emotional Reasoning</b> thinking that our feelings accurately reflect reality	<i>"I feel stressed about school, the teacher must be giving us too much homework"</i> <i>"I feel hurt, so the other person must be a Jerk!"</i> <i>"I feel anxious at the party so I must be an awkward person."</i>	Exaggerates any emotion.	Separate feelings and thoughts. "Just because I feel ___ doesn't mean ___" It's essential to recognize that emotions, just like our thoughts, aren't always based on the facts, they can be influenced by hormones, sleep, hunger, and a lot of other things.
<b>7. Labeling</b> taking a behavior and turning it into an identity.	<i>"I'm a loser. I'm broken. I'm a failure."</i> <i>"She's a jerk" "He's an Idiot"</i>	Hopeless Angry	Think in terms of behaviors instead of identity. "He was unkind" instead of "He is a jerk" or "I made a mistake" instead of "I am a failure". My kid made a bad choice instead of my kid is a bad kid Replace it with a growth mindset ie. "I

			haven't learned this yet"
<b>8. Mental Filtering</b> Only seeing one side of a situation, usually the negative	<i>"Nothing good ever happens"</i> <i>"This has been the worst year ever"</i> <i>"I'm the only one who ever takes out the trash"</i>	Ashamed, Depressed, Defensive	Build habits around seeing the good in others and yourself. Gratitude Practice, three good things, or just practice saying "Thank you" when someone gives you a compliment. Or if you filter out the negative, or have a problem with denial create a system of accountability (ie feedback session, a support group like AA, etc)
<b>9. Personalization</b> Taking others' actions personally- believing they are about you.	<i>"If my son misbehaves, it must be because I'm a bad mother"</i> <i>"If my boss yells at me, it must be because I'm messing up"</i> <i>"If the cashier is rude to me, they must not be respecting me"</i>	Guilty, Overwhelmed, Burdened, Helpless Depressed Anxious	<i>"Not my monkeys, not my circus"</i> I am not responsible for other people's choices. I will focus on my own choices. Is this about them or me? "Maybe they are just having a bad day..." Be open to feedback, but only on what you're responsible for.
<b>10. Unreal-Ideal</b> Comparing ourselves unfairly to others	<i>"Susan seems to handle this job just fine, how come I'm struggling?"</i> <i>"Bob seems to have it all together, perfect job, perfect wife- I'm such a loser"</i>	"Never Good enough" Shame Depressed Anxious Mistreated	Remember that you are only seeing one small aspect of another persons' life. Build real relationships with real people who are honest about their flaws. Focus your energy on your life and your values. Spend less time on social media or unfollow toxic accounts.

## Skill #18: Learning to Notice Distorted Thinking

Use the Attached Chart to Explore Cognitive Distortions



**Perspective Exercise:** Ask a close friend or family member (or therapist or coach) to tell you which of these cognitive distortions you commonly use (from the Cognitive Distortions Chart). Write them down below.

Think of a couple of examples where you got really emotional recently. Use this chart to explore how thinking impacts how you feel:

Situation	Interpretation (how you think about the situation)	Feeling
I got feedback at work	"I'm going to get fired" "I'm never going to be successful" (Catastrophizing)	Hopeless, Helpless, Depressed
Your Husband forgets to take out the trash	He is so inconsiderate! He never takes out the trash! Why do I always have to do everything???? (Mental Filtering, Black and White Thinking)	Angry Justified Self-Righteous


**Extra Resources:**

And just for fun a short clip from "Dan in Real Life" Do you see any distortions going on?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1Ah2yqKlSk>

Matt and Anna: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65jiOtaFWJl>

Automatic Thoughts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2zRA5zCA6M>

## Skill #19 Changing How you Think- Stop Stinking Thinking<sup>1</sup>

Use your answers from Workbook Assignment 18.2 to continue in this section:

Also, please use the attached resource 19.2 Examples of How James Can Change His Thinking to see ways that James changed how he thought.



**Choose one recent time you got really emotional:**

1. **Notice and Name:** Learn to identify how you think. What type of Cognitive Distortions were you using?
2. **What are the indicators of this type of thinking?** For example- start to catch yourself when you say words like “Always or Never” or when you’re making assumptions and say that’s “Black and White thinking”.
3. **Explore:** What does this thought do for you? Is there any benefit? Does this thought give you a sense of control? Does it help you avoid taking responsibility or protect you from feeling vulnerable?

#### **4. Challenge the thought:**

If you told this thought to your kindest, most reasonable, rational friend or family member, what would they say to you about this thought?

What would you tell a friend if they had this thought (to help them)? Are there some other ways of seeing this problem?

Try reframing your thinking, that means looking at the problem from a different perspective. (see

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<sup>1</sup> This exercise is adapted from common CBT Therapy. And from this worksheet:  
<http://recoveryisbeautiful.tumblr.com/post/40734794410/redefiningbodyimage-this-looks-like-a-really>

the 6 pack exercise)

Look for exceptions- is your statement partially wrong? Or is your way of thinking possibly false in at least one situation?

Try to see both sides of the situation- people are usually a mixture of good and bad, situations have pros and cons.

Watch for extreme wording and try to be precise instead- So instead of saying "You never take out the trash", say "You did not take out the trash today, this is becoming a pattern".

Try thinking the opposite for just a second- what action would that motivate if you did believe the opposite?

How would your life be different if you stopped believing that thought?

5. **Choose:** out of all the ways you could think about a situation- which one is going to be most helpful for you? If you were to be more truthful, hopeful or vulnerable what would you think, say, or do differently?

### Skill #19- Examples of How James Can Change His Thinking

James is based on a couple of real clients, all mish mashed together. He is a manager at a restaurant, but he would really rather be a Pilot. He's in his early 20's, single, wishes he was married, grew up in an abusive home, his father and stepfather are in Prison and now he's on his own and trying to figure out how to live a good life.

Jame's Distortions	Helpful/Truthful Antidotes
<p><b>1. All-or nothing thinking:</b> If I can't do it perfectly or immediately, why try.</p> <p><b>James:</b> He knows he should save money, but he's in so much debt that it doesn't seem like buying the occasional frivolous thing seems like a problem. Why even try getting out of debt he says- I'm in too deep- might as well buy this fancy watch or the next big video game. Or if he knows he wants to try to get a new job, he knows he should work on writing his resume, but he only has 2 hours before work and he's wasted the morning watching gaming videos on YouTube, so the day's already ruined- why try. It's not worth the effort.</p>	<p>Focus on Progress not perfection. allow yourself to try without having to be perfect. "Making an effort moves me towards my goal"</p> <p>Instead: remind himself that little efforts add up over time. If he can save \$5 a day from not eating out, that Addis up to \$1500 over a year, pulse the money he would have saved on interest. Small efforts are worth it, make the sacrifice.</p> <p>Or - He's wasted most of his morning watching youtube videos- just decide to spend 10 minutes on his resume, get it pulled up on his computer. When he does he realizes that he can finish getting it ready in 30 minutes, just pushes through and gets it done.</p>
<p><b>2. Overgeneralizing</b>-take one bad instance and assume that everything will be awful after that.</p> <p>"People will always take advantage of you"</p> <p>"Nothing good ever happens to me"</p> <p>"Why does this always happen to me?!?"</p> <p>He gets rejected by a girl he went out with once and says "I'll be single forever"</p>	<p>Instead of using words like always or never, talk/think about one problem at a time. Look for exceptions and small changes that you can make.</p> <p>Instead say- I haven't gotten married yet (this was really important to him) but I've still got a lot of time and opportunities. Keep trying, it's just one girl. Keep learning and trying.</p>

<p><b>3. Black and White Thinking: (aka Horriblizing)</b> This is when you think or talk think in extremes. You only see the negative in a situation or in yourself. Wording like “Always, never, completely, terrible, etc”</p> <p>James: My boss is the biggest jerk ever. She is so mean to me, she doesn’t even know how to make the food, I hate her. And I hate my job. It’s the worst job ever in the whole country</p>	<p>Try to see both sides of an issue. Ask “What else is there?” Is there more information that I'm ignoring? Can I see both the good and bad at the same time? Look for small examples of the opposite view. Find ways to understand the other and have compassion or empathy.</p> <p>-I don’t like the way my boss sits in her office and tells us what to do instead of helping when there is a rush. I don’t like the long hours and low pay of my job, but I do like the consistency of it, the benefits that come with it and the free food.</p>
<p><b>4. Mind Reading:</b> assuming that people don’t like you or assuming that you know how they feel about you.  “Everyone is judging me” “My boss must think I’m incompetent”  James: He would say this to me sometimes  “You must think I’m a terrible person”</p>	<p>Ask clarifying questions, even sensitive ones. Get more information. Fact check. Remind yourself that you may not be making accurate guesses about other people's perceptions.</p> <p>“Do you think I’m a terrible person” Can you give me some feedback on my strengths and areas to improve.</p>



<p><b>5. Catastrophizing</b> assuming that your fears and worries must be true.</p> <p>"I'm never going to be successful. I'm going to be stuck working fast food for the rest of my life" (his words, not mine, there is nothing wrong with honest labor).</p>	<p>Look for examples of how things have worked out in the past. Ask "Am I safe now?" Focus on the present and on the work you need to do. Try to open yourself to the possibilities that things could be good. Find something to be grateful for. Look for other potential outcomes. Decide where to place your hope. Choose to open yourself up to positive possibilities and prepare for negative ones. Take action in line with your values</p> <p>I can learn the skills to change my life. I can create new opportunities little by little by getting more education and more experience. Or I can find joy in the things that I am doing and I can find a way to make my life meaningful in addition to work.</p>
<p><b>6. Emotional Reasoning:</b> is thinking that your feelings accurately reflect reality. I feel hurt "<i>The other person must be a jerk!</i>"</p> <p>If you feel anxious in social situations you think "<i>I must be an awkward person.</i>"</p> <p>James felt discouraged and worried about his future ability to succeed. He felt hopeless, so he decided to believe that it was hopeless, that he would never be able to do much.</p>	<p>"Just because I feel ___ doesn't mean ___" separate feelings and thoughts. It's essential to recognize that emotions, just like our thoughts, aren't always based on the facts, they can be influenced by hormones, sleep, hunger, and a lot of other things.</p> <p>Instead: Just because I feel discouraged and hopeless, doesn't mean that it is. I'm going to try to learn one new skill per week and trust my therapist who says that things really can get better.</p>
<p><b>7. Labeling:</b> taking a behavior and turning it into an identity. Instead of thinking, "He made a mistake," you might label your neighbor as "an idiot."</p>	<p>Think/speak in terms of actions, and behaviors. He was unkind" or "I made a mistake" Instead of "He is a jerk" and "I am a failure"</p> <p>Describe behaviors instead of identity's</p>

<p>When he wasn't able to find a new job right away he started to say "I'm such a loser, I'll never be successful"</p>	<p>My kid made a bad choice instead of my kid is a bad kid          Replace it with a growth mindset.</p> <p>"I haven't learned this yet" I don't know how to be a pilot yet, or how to manage my finances yet. I am struggling with this problem, but it's not my identity</p>
<p><b>8. Mental Filtering-</b> is only seeing one side of a situation, usually the negative.</p> <p>James often would dwell on his failures, especially with women.</p>	<p>Build habits around seeing the good in others and yourself. Gratitude Practice, three good things, or just practice saying "Thank you" when someone gives you a compliment.</p> <p>One thing I do is write down and save some of the nice things people say in the comments section, that way I don't just focus on the rude comments.</p> <p>For him to change that, because he consistently saw only the negative win himself, he could counteract that by remembering three good things he did every day and writing them down. Just giving himself some extra time to reminisce on his wins.</p>
<p><b>9. Personalization:</b> is thinking that everything others do is about you. When customers were rude at his restaurant, he took it personally.</p>	<p>What might be going on for the other person? Is this about them or me? "Maybe they are just having a bad day..." or maybe there's something I need to change, but look out for always thinking just one way or the other. "Not my monkeys, not my circus"</p>
<p><b>10. Unreal-Ideal:</b></p> <p>James compared himself to all his old high school friends, especially the ones that he saw on social media. Their lives were perfect, his was a mess.</p>	<p>What we see of another person's life isn't the full picture...most often their life isn't perfect either.</p> <p>Values- ask yourself, what kind of character do I want to develop. Build your self-worth</p>

on your integrity, not on trying to be better than others. Rather than measuring your life against someone else's, commit to focusing on your own path to success.

And while he really wasn't being as successful as he would have liked, comparing himself to others didn't motivate him, it just made him think that he was broken. What we see on social media and even in public with others is just their best side, their highlight reel. Most people don't post about their failures, shortcomings, mistakes, or the things they are afraid of or ashamed of. When you really get to know someone, not on social media, you learn that they are more human than you thought- whether you imagined them to be a terrible person or a saint- they're probably a mixture of both.

## Skill #20 Cognitive Defusion



**Cognitive Defusion - Audio Walkthrough<sup>1</sup>:** Close your eyes and think of some negative self-judgmental thought that comes up for you a lot. Maybe it's something you say to yourself when you look in the mirror. Or perhaps it's how you think about yourself when you messed something up big time. Pick one of these thoughts to "fuse with". Put your negative self-judgment into a short sentence of the form, "I'm X." For example, "I'm boring" or "I'm stupid". Fuse with this thought for 10 seconds – get caught up in it, give it your full attention and believe it as much as you possibly can.

Now take that thought and put these words in front of it "I'm having the thought that..." i.e., "I'm having the thought that I'm a loser." Stay there for a bit. Can you notice the thought? Can you see it as a thought that you are having in this moment?

Now replay it one more time, but this time add this phrase "I notice I'm having the thought that..." For example, "I notice I'm having the thought that I'm a loser." What happened? Did you notice a sense of separation or distance from the thought? See if you can look at yourself having thoughts...

While you are noticing yourself having thoughts, take a second to open up your awareness, what other thoughts are you having? Is work popping up in your mind? Or perhaps the thought "How much longer is this going to take?" Are there other thoughts running through your mind? Take a second to notice them, and to notice yourself noticing them.

You just practiced Cognitive Defusion.

### Extra Resources:

Leaves on a Stream: One of my favorites: <http://drluoma.com/media/Leaves%20on%20the%20stream.mp3>

Passengers on the bus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z29ptSuoWRc>

Tug of War with thoughts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2TUXp5VMPI&index=5&list=PLAzHK3lqMPw8CQh73A840XdTp-mWwACsZ>

The Unwelcome party guest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYht-guymF4>

Russ Harris has written a great article with some great exercises that you should check out: [https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/Mindfulness\\_without\\_meditation--Russ\\_Harris--HCPJ\\_Oct\\_09.pdf](https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/Mindfulness_without_meditation--Russ_Harris--HCPJ_Oct_09.pdf)

Singing and Silly Voices: [https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/Mindfulness\\_without\\_meditation--Russ\\_Harris--HCPJ\\_Oct\\_09.pdf](https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/Mindfulness_without_meditation--Russ_Harris--HCPJ_Oct_09.pdf)

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<sup>1</sup> This comes straight from "Get out of your mind and into your life" by Steven Hayes, as do most of the exercises in this section. They are all adapted from ACT

**Putting thoughts on an object, or giving it a name:** Another exercise that is often helpful is to *symbolically put our thoughts onto an object*. Give them tangible form. Take an object and name it with one of your unhelpful thoughts - I've had clients who've chosen to carry rocks, sticks, horse poop in a bag, as a way to represent themselves being fused with their thoughts. When they are ready to notice them and separate from them they would set those objects aside. When they no longer need that thought, they let go of the object, sometimes coming back to it, but gradually just practicing labeling it and choosing if they want it.

Another helpful way to separate ourselves from thoughts is to *name them*. Literally. I've had clients who liked using the term "negative mind" to describe the spiral of thoughts, but I've also seen it very helpful when they give it a name like "Billy Bob". For example "Oh there's Billy Bob popping into my thoughts today." Meaning "Oh, there's those negative thoughts popping up that say "You'll never be successful"." When we give our thoughts a name we are saying "I am Emma" and "This is a thought"; essentially separating ourselves from them.

### **Stone Circle Story**

*When I was new to the field of treatment and had just started working in a Wilderness Therapy program, I had a boss named Sheri who noticed that I seemed to be drowning in self-doubt and insecurity. One day as we were about to go into the field for our 8-day shift, I made some comment degrading myself. Sheri grabbed my hand, pulled me outside on the front lawn, took a bunch of landscaping stones and put them in a circle around me. "Here's your negative thoughts about yourself," she said, with each one. "I'm not good enough", "I'm not kind enough", "I'm ugly", etc., etc. With each stone I felt more trapped and also embarrassed that my thoughts were so obvious. I preferred them to stay quietly inside of me, wreaking havoc while I pretended that they were reality, than to see them so clearly and bluntly outside. The thing was, everyone could already see them in how I talked and what I did.*

*Sheri said "You can leave them anytime you want, all you have to do is step out of the circle. The stones will still be there but they won't be trapping you. They are only trapping you because you're choosing to stay there."*

*In the moment I was so flustered, so flooded that I didn't know what to say or do. Other than maybe cry a little. I ended up carrying one of those stones with me for a long while, keeping it in my pocket where it rubbed and poked, putting it in my backpack where it weighed me down. Each time I saw it I was reminded that I didn't have to be carrying it, but at the same time not wanting to let go of the comfort that comes from believing that we are broken (Marianne Williamson Quote). Eventually I threw that rock off the top of a mountain. That's not to say that I don't still have moments where I believe those thoughts or get sucked into them, I do. But most of the time, I catch myself carrying those rocks around and it's just much harder for me to believe them. Now I drop them much more quickly than before. Where before I would spend months at a time feeling miserable about myself, now at the most it is a couple of days, but usually minutes or hours. By putting those thoughts into a tangible form, noticing them, I was able to de-fuse from them.*

## Skill #21: A Beginner's Guide to Mindfulness



Have you ever had an experience where you were intensely aware of the moment? Maybe it was a beautiful sunrise or even a frightening experience. And suddenly you started noticing the tiny details of each thing around you, perhaps you noticed the way the light was hitting the trees and the feel of the dirt beneath your feet, you heard the sound of the birds or maybe even of your own breath. Everything felt real, crisp, the moment felt magical, you felt alive! Write down one memory:

On the other hand, have you ever felt like you are just numb, plowing through the day, trying to just not think about your life or waiting for it to get better? Maybe you've felt that way for weeks and months on end. Write about your experience:

Before reading further, write about why you think the one experience was joyful and the other miserable:



How do you keep yourself distracted from the present moment throughout the day? Do you always need noise/stimulation/activities to keep you busy? Is technology a problem for you?



**Mindful Eating:** Eating is one of those things that we often do while multitasking. We watch TV or talk on the phone or just keep working while we down a sandwich. Distracted eating is associated with weight gain, overeating, and decreased enjoyment of food. Try one of these mindful eating exercises:

Written version: <https://www.livingwell.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/3-Eating-Mindfulness.pdf>

Or this audio version: <http://portlandpsychotherapyclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/mindful-eating-meditation-8-minutes.mp3>



**Daily Mindfulness:** Choose at least one of the following activities to practice mindfulness while doing one of your daily activities:

- Turn off the radio in the car, and just pay attention to your experience while you drive.
- Try walking mindfulness: <https://www.livingwell.org.au/mindfulness-exercises-3/4-walking-mindfulness/>
- When taking a shower, pay careful attention to the sensation of showering. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQZYPBpR3Es>
- Bringing Mindfulness to your chores: [https://www.thehappinesstrap.com/upimages/informal\\_mindfulness\\_exercises.pdf](https://www.thehappinesstrap.com/upimages/informal_mindfulness_exercises.pdf)
- **Minute Mindful Breathing:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NGbqNB7nD>

[o&t=6s](#)



Write about at least one of these experiences.

## Skill #22: Cognitive Dissonance



Write about one area in your life where your actions don't line up with your beliefs, values or words. How does that affect you? How do you feel about yourself in regards to it?

How do you tend to Justify yourself? See below for some examples:

**Signs of Justification/Rationalization include:**

- Blaming others
- Comparing yourself to others to put them up or down
- Labeling yourself- "I'm a good person" or "I'm just a bad person"
- Excuses
- Denial
- Extreme statements- Minimizing your problem, horribilizing others
- You are trying to convince others that you are right
- Holding different standards for yourself than others

In the area where your Actions and your Values don't line up-What do you think you should do about it? Do you think you should change how you think? Or change how you act?

What is one small thing you could do to have more congruence in your life?



## Skill 22.2 Bonus Section: Shoulds vs. Musts

If we are striving to live good lives, we will always desire to be a little better than we are. We will always wish for more time or energy or ability to do a little more or be a little better. We will often make mistakes. This is normal, this is healthy, it sometimes hurts, but that's also a good thing. The only way to not feel bad when we mess up is to try to stop caring about our life purpose and give up on our dreams.

Unfortunately, this desire to be better paired with our human nature can turn into a dangerous pattern of "Shoulding" all over ourselves (Thanks to Albert Ellis for that term). A desire to be kind gets warped into "I shouldn't ever say no", a desire to help turns into "I should be able to fix everyone's problems". When we leave piles of shoulds everywhere in our lives it is easy to become discouraged, overwhelmed, and feel like a shouldy person.



### Processing "Should's":

Going back to the emotions processing model, in order to resolve these "shouldy" feelings we need to first clarify them.

**1. Notice:** Write down some of your should's. Don't filter them. You might need another page, or if you're like me, a couple of pages...depending on your list you might have to just work through a few of them at a time.

**2. Explore:** What do you notice about them? Are they truthful? Helpful? Realistic? Or distorted? Demanding? Crippling? Would you say them to a friend? Ask the question "Why should I...?" Clarify the reason behind the should.

**3. Clarify:** Split these “should’s” into two categories: Double Down or Let it Go. As long as we leave this unclear, then we feel this constant sense of “should’s” hanging over our heads. You may need to ask for help from a second opinion for this part.

<p><b>Double Down:</b> This category is for the truthful, most important, most valued beliefs.</p>	<p><b>Let it Go:</b> Put perfectionistic, unhelpful, distorted, or disabling beliefs into this category. Other people’s expectations or obligations, old habits, and cultural expectations also go here.</p>

**4. Act:** If your should’s end up in the “Double Down” category, they are no longer shoulds. Think of them as “musts” and find a way to take action quickly and simply. Take care of it. Put your energy, effort and resources toward these few goals.

Write: A few small actions I will take:

For the should’s that end up in the “Let it Go” category: spend some time visualizing what it would be like to be free from your should’s...how would that free you to act? What kind of life would you make if you weren’t dragging a bag of should’s around?

Choose to notice your should’s, thank them for attempting to help you be better, but actively decide that they are not helpful for you. Continue to focus your energy and attention on your “musts”. Practice acceptance and compassion - even for yourself.

**Extra Resources:**

- <http://www.corecounselling.ca/uncategorized/the-tyranny-of-the-should/>
- [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nancy-colier/are-your-shoulds-really-helping-you\\_b\\_8005004.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nancy-colier/are-your-shoulds-really-helping-you_b_8005004.html)

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### Processing "Should's":

Going back to the emotions processing model, in order to resolve these "shouldy" feelings we need to first clarify them.

**1. Notice:** Write down some of your should's. Don't filter them. You might need another page, or if you're like me, a couple of pages...depending on your list you might have to just work through a few of them at a time.

**2. Explore:** What do you notice about them? Are they truthful? Helpful? Realistic? Or distorted? Demanding? Crippling? Would you say them to a friend? Ask the question "Why should I...?" Clarify the reason behind the should.

**3. Clarify:** Split these “should’s” into two categories: Double Down or Let it Go. As long as we leave this unclear, then we feel this constant sense of “should’s” hanging over our heads. You may need to ask for help from a second opinion for this part.

<p><b>Double Down:</b> This category is for the truthful, most important, most valued beliefs.</p>	<p><b>Let it Go:</b> Put perfectionistic, unhelpful, distorted, or disabling beliefs into this category. Other people’s expectations or obligations, old habits, and cultural expectations also go here.</p>

**4. Act:** If your should’s end up in the “Double Down” category, they are no longer shoulds. Think of them as “musts” and find a way to take action quickly and simply. Take care of it. Put your energy, effort and resources toward these few goals.

Write: A few small actions I will take:

For the should’s that end up in the “Let it Go” category: spend some time visualizing what it would be like to be free from your should’s...how would that free you to act? What kind of life would you make if you weren’t dragging a bag of should’s around?

Choose to notice your should’s, thank them for attempting to help you be better, but actively decide that they are not helpful for you. Continue to focus your energy and attention on your “musts”. Practice acceptance and compassion - even for yourself.

**Extra Resources:**

- <http://www.corecounselling.ca/uncategorized/the-tyranny-of-the-should/>
- [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nancy-colier/are-your-shoulds-really-helping-you\\_b\\_8005004.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nancy-colier/are-your-shoulds-really-helping-you_b_8005004.html)

## Skill #23: Letting Go of Self Deception



Have you ever had an experience like this, where you thought that another person was mistreating you, that you were right and they were being jerks, etc., and then later realized that you were either contributing to the problem or actually the one at fault? Write about it.



Consider one problem you're having in your life and ask yourself the question "Am I seeing this falsely?"

Do you have any of the signs of self-deception listed in the lesson?

### Signs of Self-Deception:

- **Justification**
- **Trying to change others**
- **Blame**
- **Horribilizing**
- **Feeling hopeless**
- **Victimhood**
- **Compiling evidence on the other person**
- **Seeing the same pattern of problems repeat themselves**

1. Self-Justification indicates that you aren't living your values- that at some point you've acted in a way that goes against your deepest sense of what is right.
2. Pause- What does my reaction to something or someone say about ME?
3. When you notice signs of self-deception, take some time to try to get clarity. Calm down, slow yourself down, spend time in a safe place or with a safe person, maybe

do some introspection and write down what kind of person you would like to be in that situation.

4. Take responsibility for what is in your locus of control. Don't use others' actions as excuses for you not living your values. This is one of the most common ways we get stuck in self-deception. Don't get wrapped up in spotting self-deception in others, and don't get stuck beating yourself up.
5. Be humble, be willing to change. Focus on trying to do a little better, on taking action that lines up with your values.

What kind of action would I have to take to live my values?

### **Extra Resources:**

Arbinger Awesomeness: One of the most influential books (philosophies) in my life has been The Arbinger Institute's work *Leadership and Self-Deception* and their other works like *The Anatomy of Peace and The Choice. Bonds that Make us Free* by C. Terry Warner was also transformative for me. Their seminars can also be amazing. I've discovered more freedom and power through their organization of ideas than just about anything else I've studied. To dive deeper into this stuff I'd recommend starting with their book *The Anatomy of Peace and The Choice*.

I also really like *The Parenting Pyramid* and *The Choice in Intervention*.

[https://content.byui.edu/file/91e7c911-20c5-4b9f-b8fc-9e4b1b37b6fc/1/Parenting\\_Pyramid\\_article.pdf](https://content.byui.edu/file/91e7c911-20c5-4b9f-b8fc-9e4b1b37b6fc/1/Parenting_Pyramid_article.pdf)

<http://www.actionablebooks.com/en-ca/summaries/leadership-and-self-deception/>

### **The Basic Principles:**

1. An act contrary to what I feel I should do for another is called an act of "self-betrayal".
2. When I betray myself, I begin to see the world in a way that justifies my self-betrayal.
3. When I see a self-justifying world, my view of reality becomes distorted.
4. So when I betray myself, I enter the box (of self-deception).
5. Over time, certain boxes become characteristic of me, and I carry them with me.
6. By being in the box, I provoke others to be in the box.
7. In the box, we invite mutual mistreatment and obtain mutual justification. We collude in giving each other reason to stay in the box.

**Living the Material:**

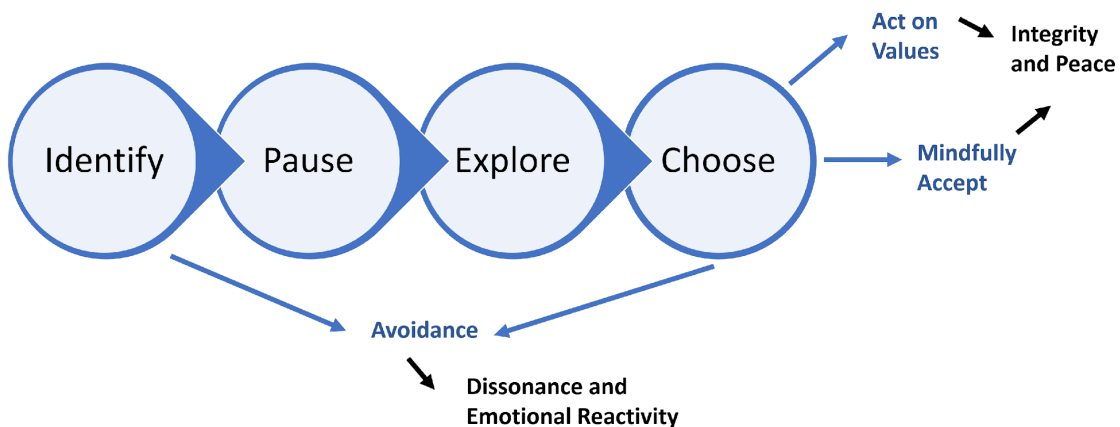
1. Don't try to be perfect. Do try to be better.
2. Don't use the vocabulary - "the box" and so on - with people who don't already know it. Do use the principles in your own life.
3. Don't look for others' boxes. Do look for your own.
4. Don't accuse others of being in the box. Do try to stay out of the box yourself.
5. Don't give up on yourself when you discover you've been in the box. Do keep trying.
6. Don't deny you've been in the box when you have been. Do apologize, then just keep marching forward, trying to be more helpful to others in the future.
7. Don't focus on what others are doing wrong. Do focus on what you can do right to help.
8. Don't worry whether others are helping you. Do worry whether you are helping others.

## Skill #24 The Big Picture: Creating the Life You Want- One Small Change at a Time

Welcome to Section 4, So here's the two main ideas from this 30 part course:

1. We create our happiness in a gradual, choice based approach
2. We create power to choose through careful emotional processing. When we process emotions, we are no longer reactive to them.

# The Emotion Process



For us to choose the life we want, we need to learn how to be less reactive to our emotions. Write about a time you acted contrary to your values because you felt flustered, rushed, or very emotional. Write down 3 things you could do in a future situation that would help you slow it down.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How can you remind yourself to use the skills you've learned, to feed the good wolf and create the gradual change you want? (ie phone reminders, accountability system, etc)



## Skill #24 Purpose, Joy, Love and Growth



**What will you be remembered for?** Go to a cemetery and walk through the headstones, look at what people chose to be remembered by. Some of them are remembered by sports, others by hobbies. Some focus on their families. Our lives are short blips in eternity, but very important at the same time.

So “*Tell me, what is it you plan to do With your one wild and precious life?*”-Mary Oliver  
What do you want your life to be about? Write about the things in life that bring you true purpose, joy, love and growth.

Is there anything you need to change about your direction and priorities to make that happen?

If you look at the big picture of your life, does that help you change your perspective on the momentary challenges of the now?

### Extra Resources:

*Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, the story of a Jewish doctor's experiences in a concentration camp, and the life purpose that evolved from that experience.

*The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren.

**3 Happiness Myths:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93LFNtcR1Ok>

## Skill #26: Honoring Your Values



**Values Exercise:** In your heart of hearts what kind of person do you long to be? Use the attached Core Values List to see some examples. While you may like all the values, just choose your top 10 values.



How are you doing with those values? How closely do your actions align with your desired character?



Write down 1-3 small actions that you could take now to live your life closer to your values.

### Extra Resources:

Values vs. Goals: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-IRbuy4XtA>

Demons on the boat: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-wyaP6xXwE&t=32s>

Passengers on the bus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z29ptSuoWRc>

**Another Values Exercise:** Go into more depth about the kind of person you want to be. [https://www.thehappinesstrap.com/upimages/Values\\_Questionnaire.pdf](https://www.thehappinesstrap.com/upimages/Values_Questionnaire.pdf)

## Core Values List

Acceptance	Cooperation	Fun
Accomplishment	Courage	Generosity
Accountability	Courtesy	Genius
Accuracy	Creation	Giving
Achievement	Creativity	Goodness
Adaptability	Credibility	Grace
Alertness	Curiosity	Gratitude
Altruism	Decisive	Greatness
Ambition	Decisiveness	Growth
Amusement	Dedication	Happiness
Assertiveness	Dependability	Hard work
Attentive	Determination	Harmony
Awareness	Development	Health
Balance	Devotion	Honesty
Beauty	Dignity	Honor
Boldness	Discipline	Hope
Bravery	Discovery	Humility
Brilliance	Drive	Humor
Calm	Effectiveness	Imagination
Candor	Efficiency	Improvement
Capable	Empathy	Independence
Careful	Empower	Individuality
Certainty	Endurance	Innovation
Challenge	Energy	Inquisitive
Charity	Enjoyment	Insightful
Cleanliness	Enthusiasm	Inspiring
Clear	Equality	Integrity
Clever	Ethical	Intelligence
Comfort	Excellence	Intensity
Commitment	Experience	Intuitive
Common sense	Exploration	Joy
Communication	Expressive	Justice
Community	Fairness	Kindness
Compassion	Family	Knowledge
Competence	Famous	Lawful
Concentration	Fearless	Leadership
Confidence	Feelings	Learning
Connection	Ferocious	Liberty
Consciousness	Fidelity	Logic
Consistency	Focus	Love
Contentment	Foresight	Loyalty
Contribution	Fortitude	Mastery
Control	Freedom	Maturity
Conviction	Friendship	Meaning

Moderation	Skillfulness
Motivation	Smart
Openness	Solitude
Optimism	Spirit
Order	Spirituality
Organization	Spontaneous
Originality	Stability
Passion	Status
Patience	Stewardship
Peace	Strength
Performance	Structure
Persistence	Success
Playfulness	Support
Poise	Surprise
Potential	Sustainability
Power	Talent
Present	Teamwork
Productivity	Temperance
Professionalism	Thankful
Prosperity	Thorough
Purpose	Thoughtful
Quality	Timeliness
Realistic	Tolerance
Reason	Toughness
Recognition	Traditional
Recreation	Tranquility
Reflective	Transparency
Respect	Trust
Responsibility	Trustworthy
Restraint	Truth
Results-oriented	Understanding
Reverence	Uniqueness
Rigor	Unity
Risk	Valor
Satisfaction	Victory
Security	Vigor
Self-reliance	Vision
Selfless	Vitality
Sensitivity	Wealth
Serenity	Welcoming
Service	Winning
Sharing	Wisdom
Significance	Wonder
Simplicity	
Sincerity	

## Skill #27: Creating a Flexible and Strong Identity: "I AM". vs. My Experience

### So how do we do it- how do we let go of our labels?



1. What kind of labels have you given yourself? Which of them get in the way of emotional health, behavioral change or relationships?
2. Try to step back from them- practice watching your thoughts with the leaves on a stream or other cognitive defusion activity
3. Explore your labels. Check them for rigidity, falsehoods, or exaggerations. Which ones are helpful and which ones may get in the way of growth or change
4. Highlight the labels that serve as excuses for you like "I'm just bad at math"
5. Consider replacing some labels with a growth mindset- "I haven't figured this out yet"
6. It may be helpful to get the perspective of a safe friend or therapist so you can see your labels more clearly
7. Let go of false sources of self-worth, these will always let you down.
  - a. Perfection
  - b. Appearance
  - c. Approval
  - d. Comparison
8. Spend less time obsessing about your identity and your ego and more energy focusing on your values: When you confront a trait that you don't like in yourself- ask yourself- what value does this represent, and focus your energy on living that value instead of beating yourself up.

9. What are you going to hang onto for your identity? Are there any labels that are helpful for you right now?

**Extra Resources:**

*The Rock Warrior's Way*, the chapter on ego.

Self as Observer Exercise: <http://portlandpsychotherapyclinic.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/Brief-observer-self-exercise-13-minutes.mp3>

Here's a couple of videos that are interesting:

"You are not Depressed": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykvC3QXJb18>. I don't necessarily agree with this approach, but I find it and the comments below very interesting. Some people find this very offensive and invalidating - it is a threat to their locked-in view of themselves as defective or permanently depressed. This video may not be helpful for you, but the idea behind this video and the comments of others may be enlightening

"Be Like the Board" - not the pieces: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz\\_nexLqY\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz_nexLqY_8)

## Skill #28 Fostering a Growth Mindset

*"In a **growth mindset**, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work - brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment." -Carol Dweck, author of Mindset*

Start by checking the chart (on the next page) to see if you have a fixed mindset. Circle or highlight the statements that you believe. Do you have more of a growth mindset or a fixed mindset?

**You can develop a Growth Mindset. This is a skill that you can learn.**

- Embrace imperfections, don't hide them, see them as an opportunity to grow. Focus on Progress, not Perfection
- Replace the word "failure" with "not yet" as in *"I haven't figured out how to be a good listener, yet"*.
- Focus more on effort and the process of learning, than on the outcome
- Focus more on your values, the kind of person you want to be, rather than on approval from others.
- Get good at asking for and receiving feedback
- Give yourself credit for the effort you put in, not just the outcome.

Choose one or two areas you can replace fixed thinking with a growth mindset, write them down here:

<b>Fixed Mindset</b>		<b>Growth Mindset</b>
Mistakes are a sign of failure or being defective. "I'm just bad at math"	Mistakes	Mistakes are an opportunity to learn and improve myself. "I just haven't learned that math skill yet"
I'm always going to fail. Other people are just lucky, I'm just unlucky	Success	I can impact my outcome with effort and attitude.
You either have it or you don't. It's just talent. It's something you were born with.	Abilities	I can develop my abilities.
Depression is a permanent biological or character trait and there's nothing I can do about it.	Depression	Depression has many influencing factors and I can learn new skills that can help me improve or resolve my depression
I'm just a bad person	Identity	I can learn new skills, I can try a little every day to improve myself.
Emotions are just things that happen to you	Emotions	I can influence my emotions by how I act and how I think
Emotions are bad, a sign of being weak, or are something to be avoided	Emotions	Emotions are something you can learn from, and listen to, but you don't always have to act on them.
Feedback is a personal attack.	Feedback	Feedback helps me grow and improve to be a better human being.
I'm discouraged if others are successful or better than me.	Others' Success	I'm inspired by the goodness of others, I can learn from others to be better.
I'll stick to what I already know and what I'm good at		I'm willing to learn new things
It's fine the way it is, It's too much effort to change	Difficulties	I know this will help me even if it's difficult. I can do hard things
It's easy for them, they were born smart or they don't have anxiety		Hmm, I wonder how they're doing that? Let me try to figure it out.



## Skill #29 How to Practice Self-Compassion<sup>1</sup> to Help Yourself Change

“We can’t hate ourselves into a version of ourselves we can love.” — **Lori Deschene**



When you see something in yourself that you don’t like-how do you treat yourself? Do you try to get rid of your faults by punishing yourself or criticising yourself?

Take a moment and reflect on the pain that you cause yourself by treating yourself this way. Can you have compassion on yourself for how it hurts to be judged so harshly?



See if you can find a kinder, gentler way to motivate yourself to change. Imagine what a loving friend or mentor would say to you to help you improve yourself, but in a loving and supportive way.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Kristen Neff has extensively researched self-compassion and has an excellent website with resources, from which I based this chapter on. <https://self-compassion.org/>

## Skill #30: Creating Sustainable Change



What is a problem that you've been having that keeps coming back? That you've made multiple attempts to make change happen, but so far nothing has worked? What have you tried?



**New Approaches:** Going back to the problem you wrote about above, brainstorm some different approaches you could try. Consider the following:

What have you thought about trying?

What are the underlying emotions? Needs?

Is there a survival threat/fear?

Is there a rejection fear?

What about self-worth/core issues?

What is your motivation to change?

What is the smallest step in the direction of change?

What are your strengths that could help you create change?

How can you trust in your internal goodness to help you become the person you want to be?

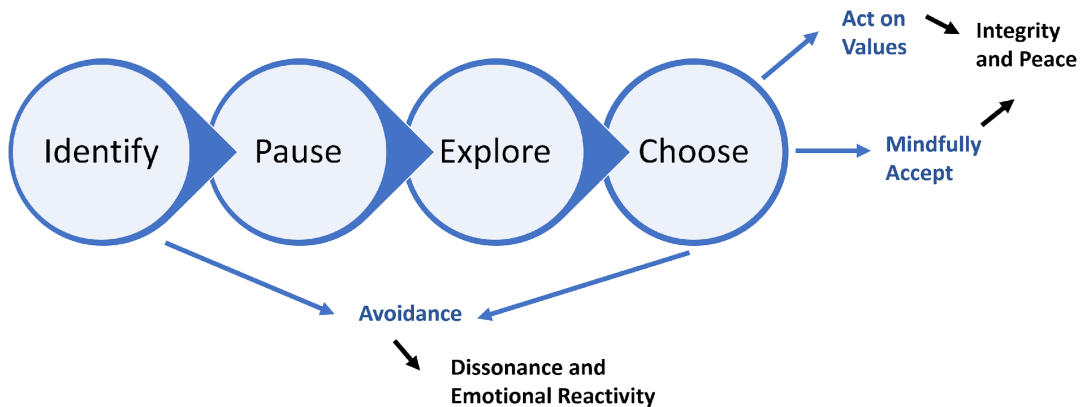
**How could you channel your efforts to resolve the deeper emotions/needs/drives, etc.?** Often we just don't know, but asking the question opens us to look for more flexible solutions, instead of just doing the same thing over and over.

**What resources can you access for help?**

## Skill #31: The Choice - Act, Accept (or Run Away)

Emotion: e-motion, the “mot” comes from Latin and means “to move”, the same root that is in words like motivation and motor, it is something that inspires movement. Our emotions, even the ones that can be considered “negative” (or uncomfortable) can be powerful motivating forces to help us move and change.

# The Emotion Process



### The Choice

Emotion Processing all comes down to using your values as your compass. When you are at the point of choice, the point where you need to decide; Should I take action? Should I let go of things outside of my control? To answer these questions, ACT asks the question- What do you value?

What do you want your life to look like? Does giving a lot of energy and attention to this problem help you live a more rich and fulfilling life? If not, then shift your attention and your energy back to what is most important to you.

The Serenity Prayer- From Alcoholics Anonymous

*God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change  
The courage to change the things I can  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*



**Breaking it Down:** What can I change and influence about my mental health?  
Fill out the three boxes below:

<b>Accept What I Cannot Change</b>	<b>What I Can Influence</b>	<b>What I Can Change</b>

As you get good at processing emotions- what will your life look like? What will change?  
What will you improve on?