

## Module 4

### Unhooking

***“I used to think the brain was the most wonderful organ in my body. Then I realized who was telling me this.” ~ Emo Philips***

#### **Review Weekly Tasks – Contacting the Present Moment**

Review mindfulness exercises from last week

#### **Unhooking**

In the first session, we focused on problems we tend to struggle with and the actions we commonly use to relieve distress. We also discussed how the mind is engineered to scan the environment for signs of threat and danger (remember the Cave Man video?).

#### **Unhooking from Thoughts and Feelings**

- The mind is not an easy thing to control. In fact, it is impossible to control!
- Strategies to suppress, forget or avoid thoughts typically don't work long term.
- Once we have something in our mind, it usually stays there. There is no delete button in the brain.
- Sometimes, we believe a thought to be so true that it leads to action:
  - “I can't get out of bed” – might lead you to stay in bed all morning.
  - “I'm too tired to exercise” – might lead you to avoid exercising.
- What if we acted on every thought we had? What would our lives be like?

#### **Types of thoughts that the mind creates:**

- **Rigid rules - about life, illness, actions, self, relationships, feelings:** - e.g., If I feel 'X', I can't do 'Y',- If I'm too depressed/anxious /in pain, I can't go out (I must wait until I feel better), I shouldn't be feeling this way, The doctors ought to help me, I can't change who I am etc. These often contain 'should', 'have to', 'can't', 'ought' or 'must'.
- **Reasons - why change is too difficult:** e.g., I can't change or do ..... (this or that) because I'm too sick, in pain, tired, old, young, overweight, a rebel etc.... I can't cope with the stress or anxiety. It's too hard. I'll do it when I have more money... etc. (these are common and can also sound like **excuses!!** But be gentle on yourself about them)

- **Judgements – about people, conditions and the world:** e.g., People are bad, sad, or mad ... People don't care...The world is a terrible place...Life sucks!.. Being sick is awful... All doctors are quacks / or they know best ... People can never understand me/my situation ...etc.
- **Past or present ruminating (thinking too much)** – rehashing the past, remembering old hurts, mistakes, your old life, the 'good old days', reliving painful interactions with people, thinking 'if only ..', dwelling, flashbacks, analyzing yourself, others & your condition etc. Thinking over and over, I'm in pain, I'm in pain, I hate it, it has to stop.
- **Future worrying or fantasizing (even holding on to plans too rigidly):** It'll be a catastrophe if 'such or such' happens, this *has* to happen, daydreaming about being better or escaping, caught up in thinking about everything you have to do later, worse-case scenario etc.
- **Self-descriptions / judgements:** e.g., I'm broken, I'm sick, I'm in pain all the time, I'm disabled, I'm not good with people, I don't like 'such and such, I can't cope, I'm right, they're wrong, I'm too lazy, I'm weak / useless / a failure / unlovable / not good for anything anymore ...etc.

When the mind knows “everything” and we believe whatever it tells us (even though doing so won't create a rich meaningful life) we call it “fusion” with our thoughts. Other words to describe this process are:

- Getting hooked by thoughts
- Buying into the thoughts
- Entangled by thoughts
- Absorbed by thoughts
- Wrapped up by thoughts

These thoughts and beliefs are usually part of a larger picture – The Story of You! Your future is influenced by your past, but what happens if you cling to this narrative in a way that isn't workable?

### **In-Group Exercise**

If you allow your behaviour to be dictated by your thoughts in a manner that is not enriching your life or causing you pain you're “hooked” by those thoughts.

### **Strategies to Unhook from thoughts**

1. Watch Your Thinking
2. Tichteners Repetition
3. Leaves on a Stream
4. I'm Having the Thought That...
5. The Mind as a Separate Entity
  - Overly Helpful Friend.
  - The Mind as "Radio Doom and Gloom".
  - The Mind as a Dictator or bully.
6. Label the (no longer needed)function of the thought. Label mind events according to (often old) functions, such as 'protective', e.g., "That thought is trying to protect me from 'lions' that may be at the watering hole – or pub, gym or shopping centre".
7. Label the type of thought it is. Label the thought according to the six common (non-useful) categories e.g., It's a ... 'self-judgement', a 'reason-excuse' why I can't do things, it's a 'future worry', 'past rehash', 'It's just catastrophizing' ... etc.
8. Say it backwards. Take a negative word that is at the heart of a recurrent difficult thought and spell it backwards. For example, "I guess I'm just stupid. ... Say, did you know that stupid spelled backwards is diputs?"Odd interruptions like that remind you that you are just thinking – and that is the point: to back up and look at thoughts not from thoughts. (A fun variant if you remember the old song "The Name Game" – apply it to the word. "Stupid, stupid, bo burpid, banana fana fo furpid, fe fi,mo murpid. Stupid")
9. Get off your "buts". Replace the word "but" with "and".
10. Carry Cards. Write difficult thoughts on cards and carry them with you. Use this practice as a metaphor for the ability to carry your history without losing control of your life.
- 11. Disobey on Purpose.**

**Weekly Task**

1. **Know Your Hooks Worksheet (Gordon & Borushok, 2017)**
2. **Video Mental Brakes to Avoid Mental Breaks (Steve Hayes)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnSHpBRLJrQ>