

## Ngā pūkenga ā-whakaaro, ā-mahi anōg Thinking and Doing Skills

It is hard to change difficult thoughts and feelings that come up for us in relation to pain but we can make helpful changes to how we engage with these thoughts and feelings.

### Thinking skills

Many people approach pain services hoping for their pain to stop. Unfortunately, it is not possible to 'fix' or eliminate pain. Thinking that "we shouldn't have to put up with pain" is not our fault - we are hardwired to think like this.

Never before in human history have we had so many ways to try to dampen, numb or alleviate pain. Unfortunately, the result is the number of people suffering from chronic pain has never been greater. Rather than coming at things from the approach of trying to eradicate pain or 'push it away', it can be helpful to consider ways of living along-side our pain experiences.

We can battle with pain in the same fruitless ways or perhaps practicing techniques to lessen your battle with pain, by learning to look at your thoughts in a different way.

### *Mental Imagery*

Mental Imagery taps in to your memory and imagination. The aim is to bring about a helpful sensual experience – the sights, temperatures, smells and sounds. Usually the situation is 'a happy place' that you're in full control of, bringing about relaxation and calm. Some people experience it like watching a movie, others feel immersed in the scene. It can be practiced by listening to a script or voice recording, or played out from your own inquisitive and creative mind. Playing out a scene in your mind can help you to rehearse a task, allowing you to experience what a helpful outcome may feel like.

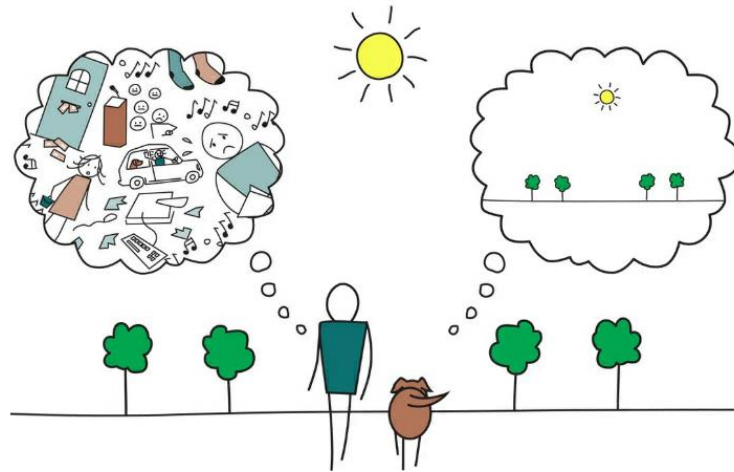
Remember pain is a sensation accompanied by an automatic intention to withdraw but moving towards pain and exploring it with an attitude of curiosity, opens the way for new possibilities.

### Doing skills

#### *Mindfulness*

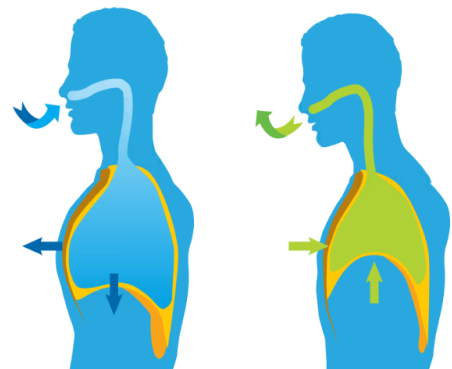
Mindfulness is the act of deliberately paying attention, simply allow yourself to be in the observer seat - learn to operate from the perspective of an observing self. The key is to be non-judgmental. We can bring our awareness to a range of different experiences including: our senses (what we see; hear; taste; touch and smell); our emotions; our thoughts; urges and impulses. It is not some special or mystical state that you entered into.

It not about trying to evoke a peacefulness nor is it a measure for assessing success or failure. Inevitably some of the things that come up will be good, others will not be so good. Repeated mindfulness practice can lead to a number of helpful outcomes including reduced stress and anxiety; improved mood; reduced chronic pain; improved coping and better sleep.



### *Breathing*

When we are completely relaxed we use the muscles in our abdomen (tummy) to breathe. The upper part of the chest and the ribs remain still while the area around our abdomen (tummy) moves. Poor posture, chronic tension in our abdominal muscles, and poor breathing habits can change the way we breathe. As a result the flow of oxygen to the lower part of the lungs is reduced when the muscles in our abdomen are tense. By breathing abdominally you are activating the relaxation side of your automatic nervous system.



*Tip: Be mindful. Use your "beginners" mind to experience situations. Stay curious and open, without judgement. Notice your thoughts but just let them be thoughts. There is no need to automatically believe or to argue with them.*

