

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for Chronic Pain

Session 6: Seeing Thoughts as Just Thoughts



John was on his way to school.

He was worried about the math lesson.

He was not sure he could control the class again today.

It was not part of his janitor duty.

Orientation

- Thoughts often have a **grain of truth** and an element of **interpretation**
- Interpretations **influenced by negative core beliefs**, ie. "I am defective"

Theme - Thoughts as Just Thoughts

- **Secretions of the mind, or mental events**
- **Freedom** of letting thoughts come and go, **without getting hooked** by them
- **If a thought does seem to be true, is it bearable?**
Can it be **acknowledged** with **kindness, gentleness, curiosity, patience?**

Radio Doom and Gloom

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=Bu2k0EGXAVo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bu2k0EGXAVo)

Working with Difficulty

- Bringing **awareness** to **how** we are **relating** to the **difficulty within the body**
- Moving attention to the body, **softening, opening** and **breathing with the sensations, giving them space** and **allowing** them to be present
- When sensation **no longer** has a **strong pull** on attention, **resting awareness** with the **movements of the breath** or the **body as a whole**



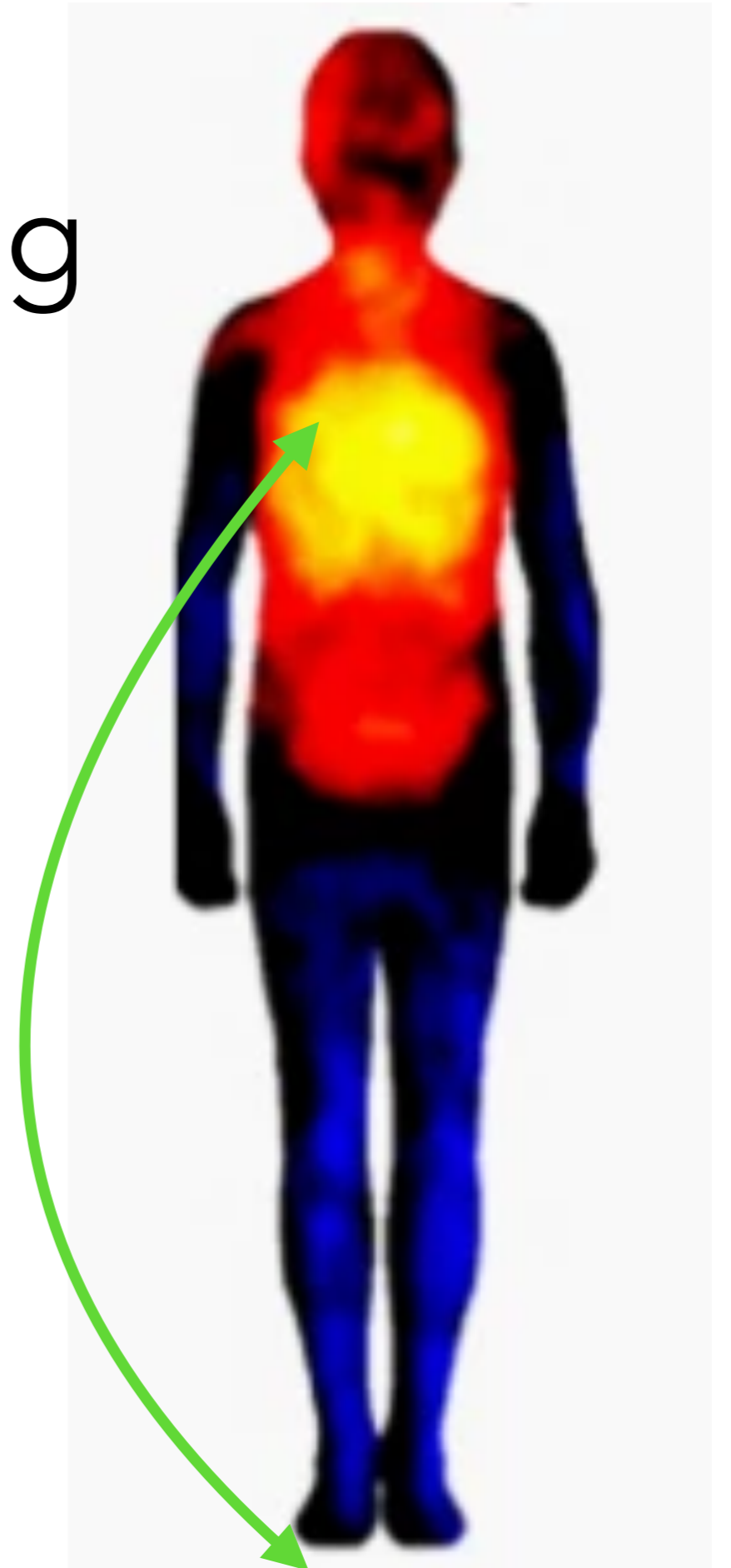
Working with Difficulty

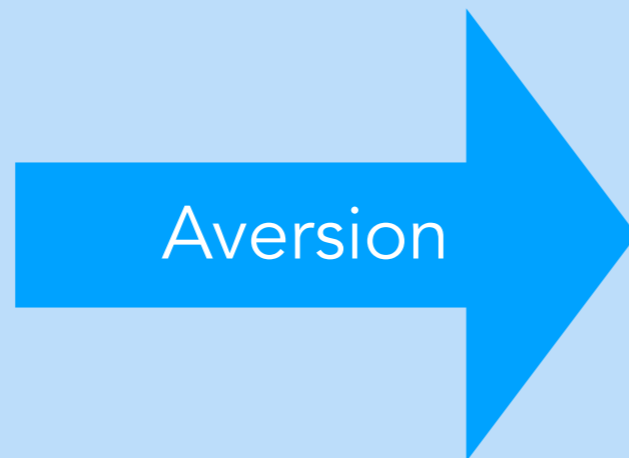
- Another option if **strong emotion is present**:
 - **Sitting with the emotional charge/energy**, rather than the thought itself
 - **Breathing with the emotion, giving it space, opening**
 - Staying with the emotional energy **rather than getting lost in thinking**
 - Staying present with the experience **without adding fuel to the fire**

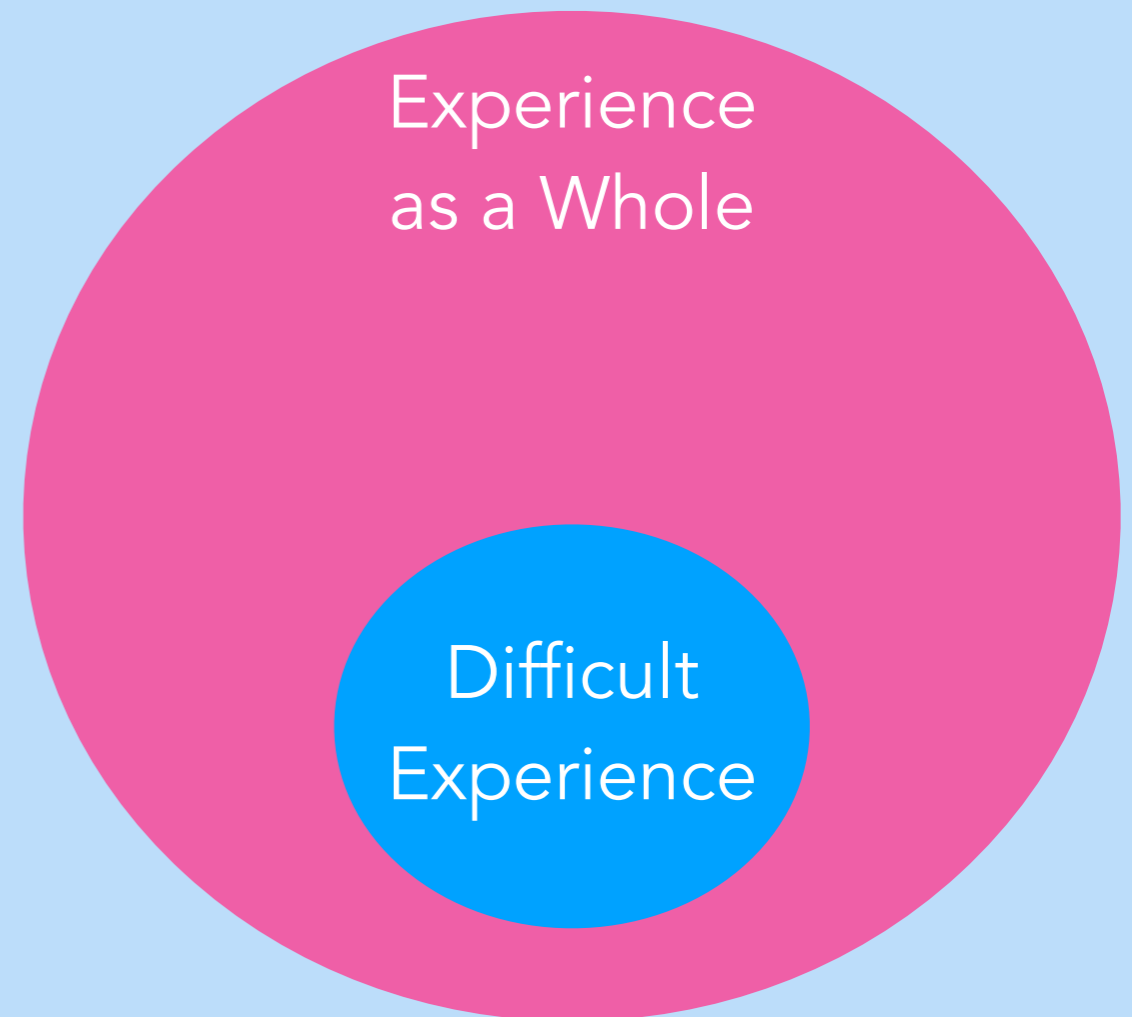
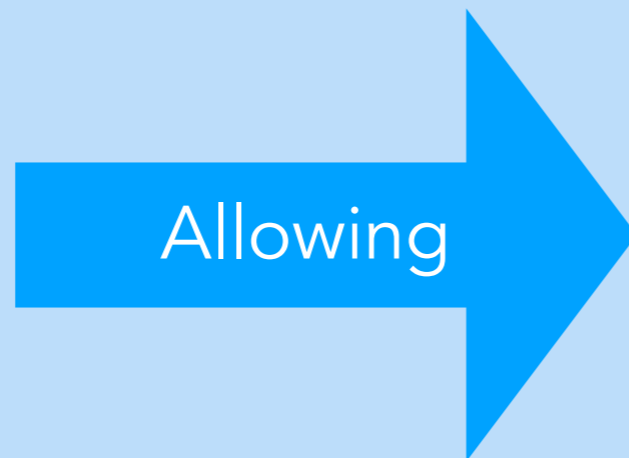


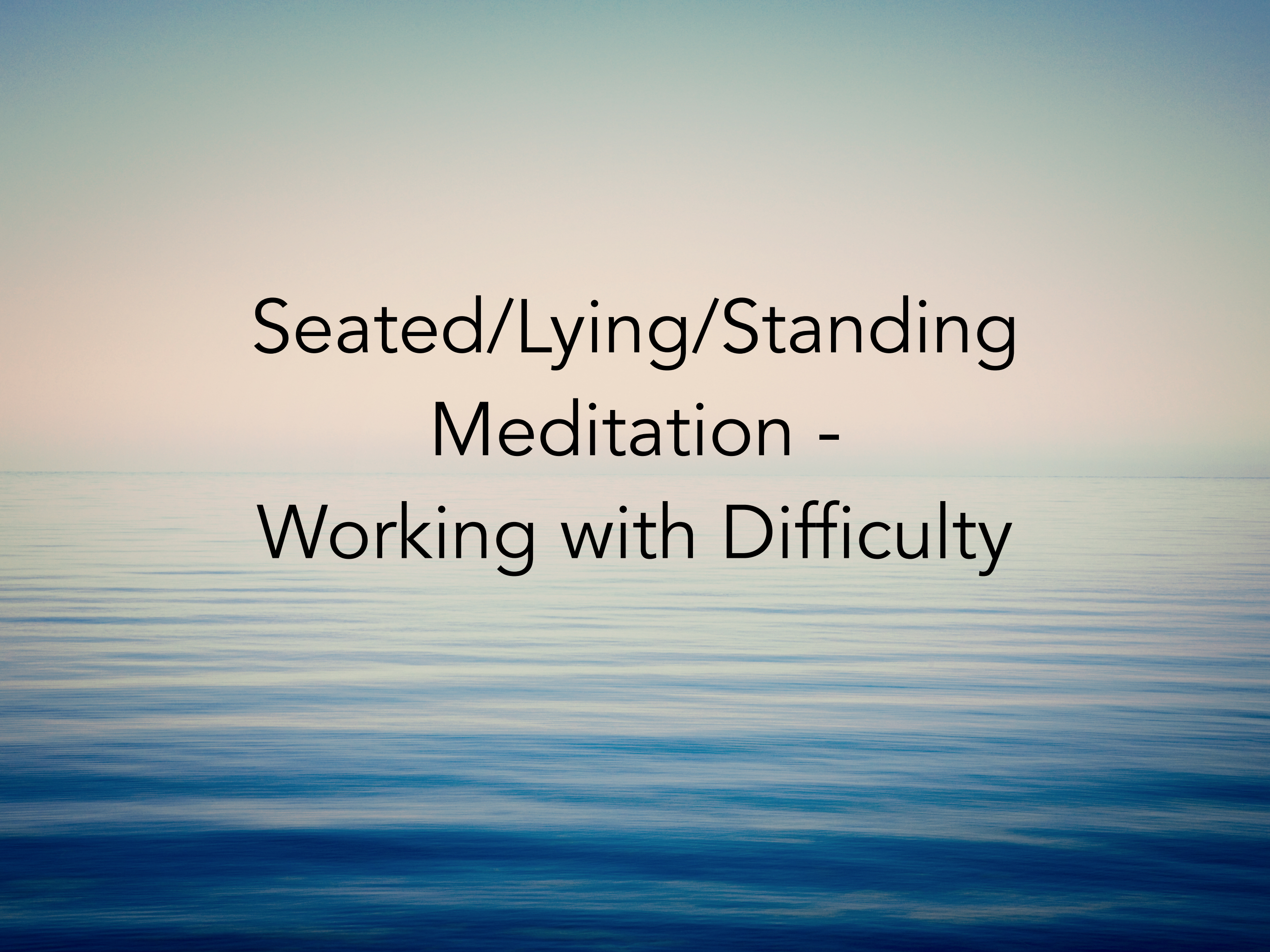
Working with Difficulty - Pendulation or Resourcing

Staying with the difficulty
with openness while
being kind to yourself









Seated/Lying/Standing
Meditation -
Working with Difficulty

The Guest House by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.



Alternate Viewpoints Exercise

Version 1

- “Imagine you woke up feeling down this morning after a bad night's sleep due to pain. You get to the kitchen and a person you live with rushes off, saying they couldn't stop and needed to run.
- What would you think?”

Version 2

- “Imagine you woke up feeling happy this morning after a good night's sleep with few interruptions from pain. You get to the kitchen and a person you live with rushes off, saying they couldn't stop and needed to run.
- What would you think?”

When Viewpoints Get Trapped

- Objectively the same situation of partner rushing off
- **Context and mood lead to different interpretations** -
> there is no single truth
- Perceived reality largely determined by what we bring to the situation
- **If mood negative**, likely interpretations or conclusions will be negative/unhelpful -> creates a vicious cycle leading to worsening mood, negative thinking and likely more pain
- **Negative mood is a sign to lean in**, pay attention to thoughts, and **catch the chain reaction early**



The negativity bias

bad experiences

good experiences

"Velcro for bad, Teflon for good" - Rick Hanson

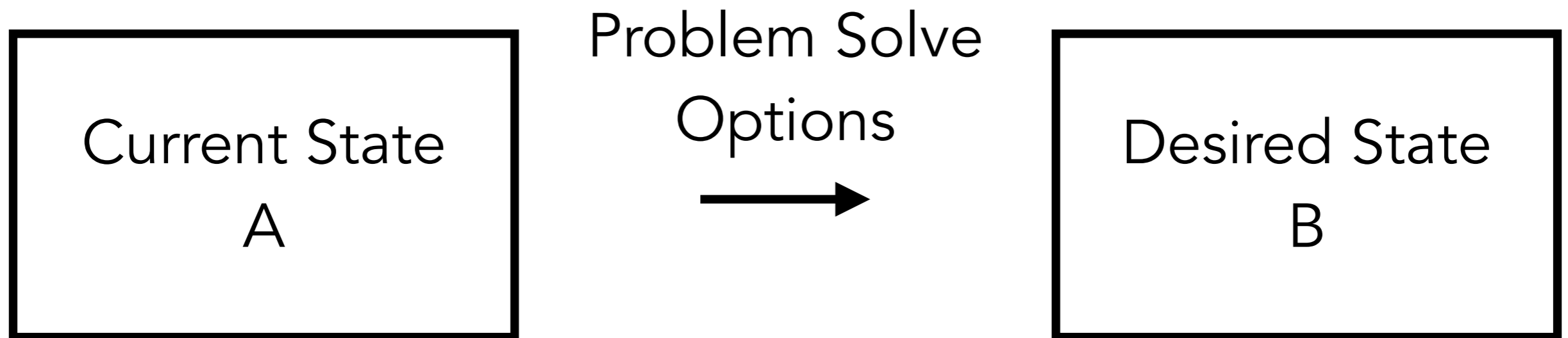
Tools to Shift Viewpoint on “Hot” Thoughts

- Start with 3 min Breathing Space, then:
 - **Observe** thoughts
 - **Label** thoughts as “thinking”
 - Notice, are there “**Unhelpful Habits of Mind**”, and **label** which habit is present
 - **Write** thoughts down
 - Examine - **THINK** acronym
 - Shift to the **body**, allowing **emotions**

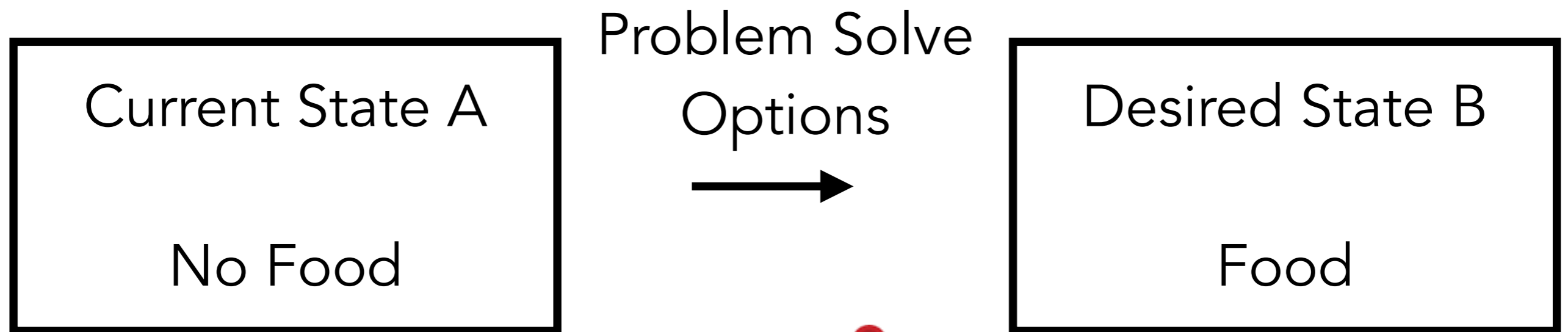


Discrepancy Based Processing

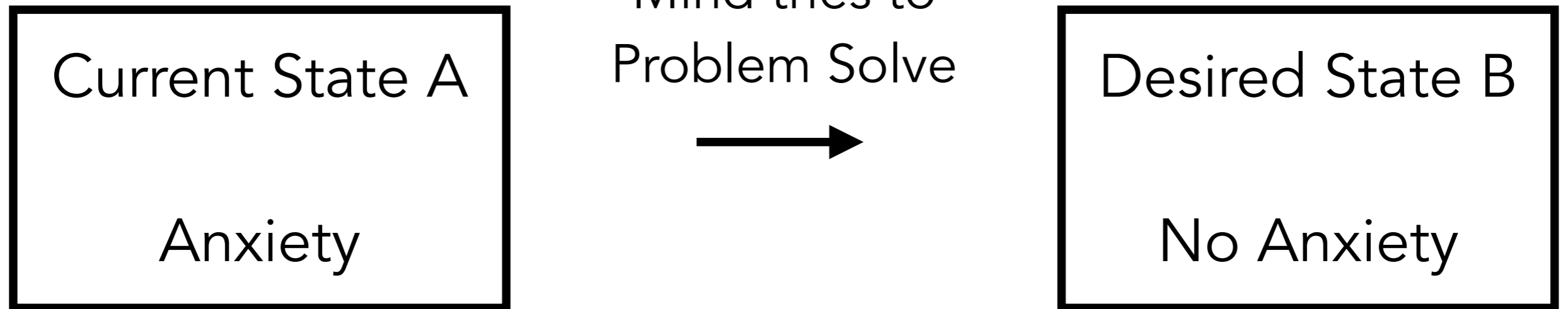
Mind compares current state (A) to desired state (B)
and will problem solves how to get from A to B



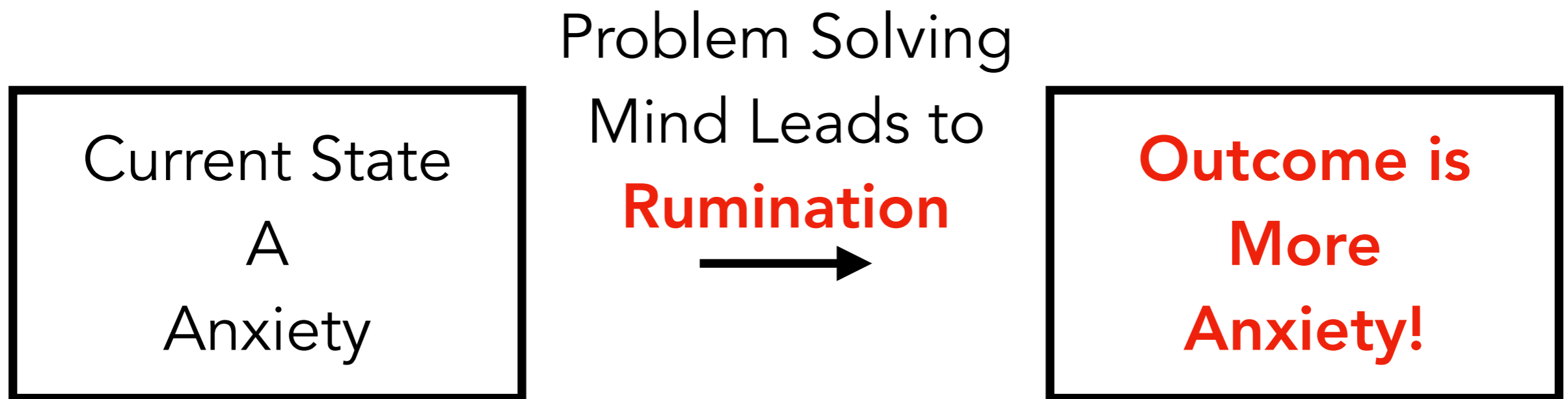
Discrepancy Based Processing Works Well for Many Problems



Discrepancy Based Processing with Emotions



Discrepancy Based Processing Unhelpful for Emotions



We can't problem solve our way out of emotions

Shift from "doing" to "being" by connecting with body and senses

Tools to Shift Viewpoint on “Hot” Thoughts

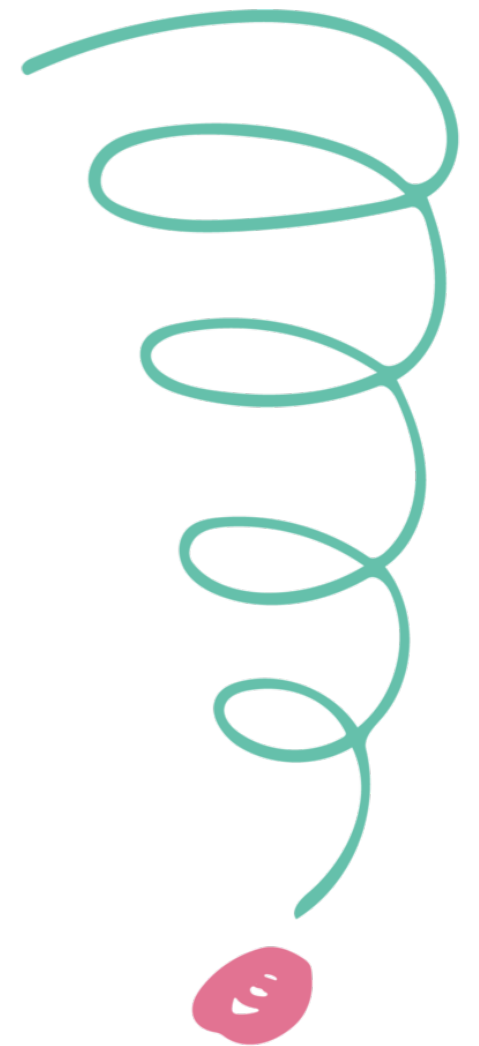
- Is there another view: "Where did this thought come from?" "What mood state might be accompanying this thought?" "How am I relating to this thought or mood in my body?" "Am I adding more baggage to the bare facts, and is there something I can acknowledge with kindness, and let go?"
- With particularly difficult thoughts, or same thought keeps coming up, bring these to the workbench of the mind, and use the working with difficulty practice. Moving attention to that place, softening, opening and breathing with the sensations, giving them space and allowing them to be present

Shifting our Viewpoint on Thoughts

- Seeing thoughts as just thoughts, and as mental events **opens up choices,**
- More **flexibility** to to consider other viewpoints
- Can **choose** how to **respond**
- Can see **difficulties in a different light;** thoughts, emotions, pain - any other difficulty - becomes (not easy) but **more manageable and less stressful**

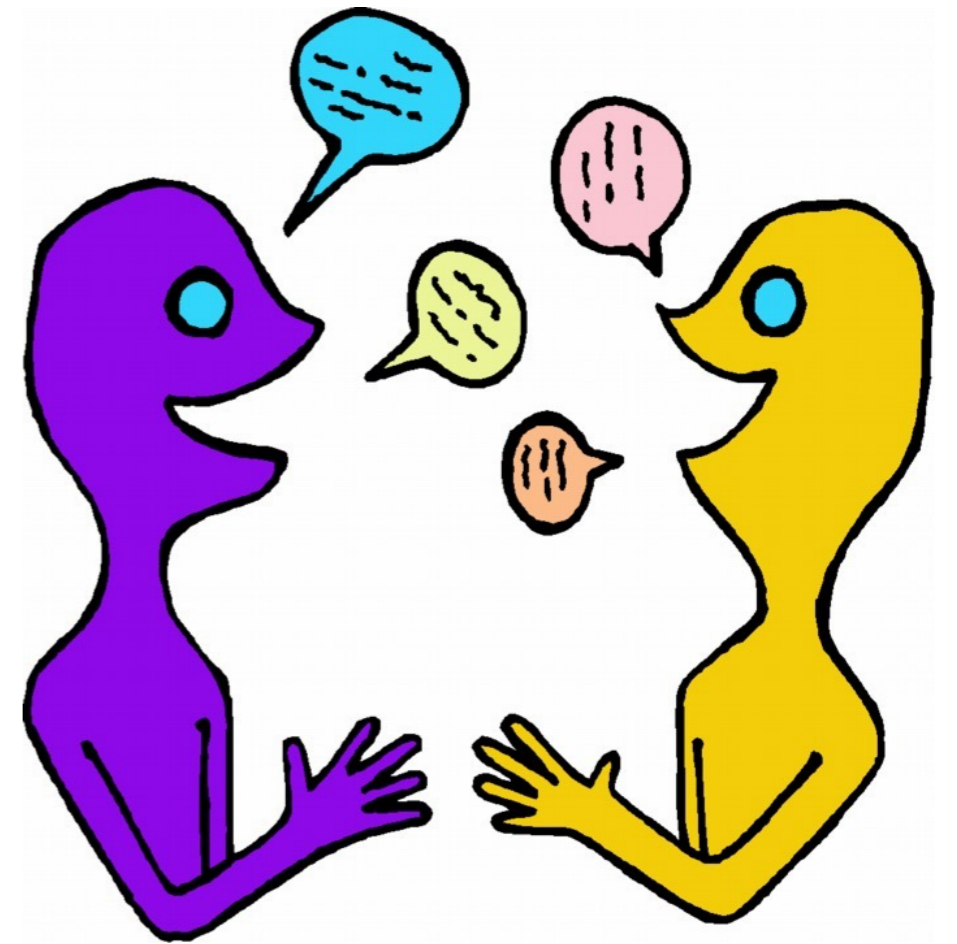
Identifying Red Flags for a Rising Stress-Pain Thermometer

- Early warning signs may include:
 - Over- or undergoing activity,
 - Over scheduled with depleting activities
 - Judging a situation as stressful,
 - Out of control feeling when pain seems to be creeping up
- **Awareness of early warning signs can lead to wise action** - responding rather than reacting - to care for self



Flare Up Triggers Exercise

- In breakout rooms, make a list of the **specific warning signals** that the stress-pain thermometer might be rising
- Followed a group discussion about red flags, please be prepared to share a few examples of what you identified in your small group



Flare Up Triggers Examples

- Over working or avoiding work completely
- Not taking time for self-care i.e., not exercising, eating unhealthily
- Experiencing mind "racing" into the future or dwelling on the past
- Feeling tense/anxious, angry, and/or depressed
- Sleeping a lot more or a lot less than usual
- Isolation and not wanting to talk to anyone
- Pushing through pain without listening to your body, or resting when needed

① FILL A SINK OR BIG BOWL WITH COLD WATER.



② RECOMMENDED:
ADD SOME ICE.
(I DUMP IN A
WHOLE TRAY!)



③ HOLD YOUR BREATH, AND
PUT YOUR FACE IN THE
WATER (OR AT LEAST YOUR
FOREHEAD/NOSE/CHEEK AREA)
FOR AS LONG AS YOU CAN.



Mammalian Dive Reflex:
To decrease the intensity of
strong emotions

Developing a Mindfulness Maintenance Plan

- Mindfulness as a way to better manage pain
- Keeping up the momentum with formal meditation practice daily is the best way to maintain changes
- Find ways to incorporate the formal and informal practices that will be sustainable for you
- Helps to notice the stress pain thermometer rising, notice pleasant and unpleasant experiences

Suggested Home Practice Week 6

- Practice with guided meditation audios for a min of 45 min a day. Experiment and settle into a **personal practice for you**
- **3-Minute Breathing Spaces** - Regular and Responsive
- Read "**Tools to Shift your Viewpoint on 'Hot' Thoughts**" handout and experiment with one of the options suggested
- Identify your **unique warning signs** that your stress-pain thermometer is rising. Thoughts, emotion, body, and activities that may be triggers for increased pain and stress
- If it feels comfortable, ask people close to you if they have noticed any signals that a pain flare-up is on the way

Sushi Train 2 min 10 s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzUoXJVI0wo>

Chessboard Metaphor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phbzSNsY8vc>

Thanking the Mind 1 min 45 s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=206WtwEyqzg>

Struggle Switch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCp1l16GCXI>

Radio Doom and Gloom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bu2k0EGXAVo>

Jon Kabat Zinn: Thoughts are like Bubbles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8Nsa45d0XE>

For those who struggle with seasonal lower mood

Light therapy is considered first line therapy for mild to moderate depression as per the CANMAT guidelines. It is recommended to use a full spectrum light box of 10,000 lux intensity. Place 24 inches away and sit in front of light box for 30 minutes soon after awakening every morning.

CBT Skills Groups

<https://cbtskills.ca/>