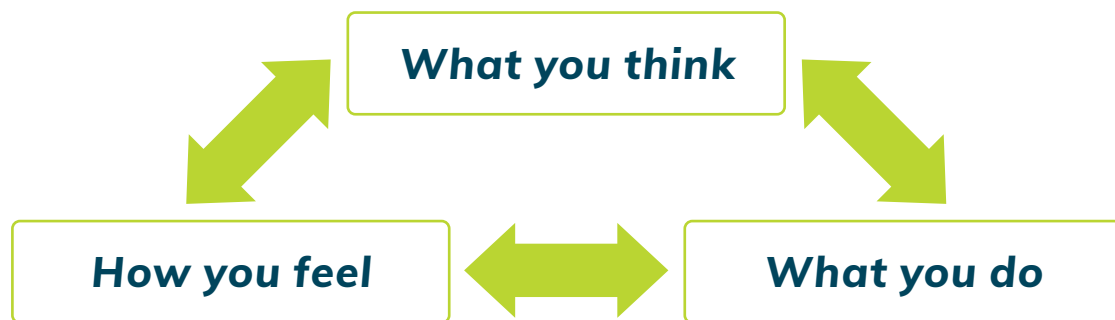




Be Pain Smart – Depression

Managing your thoughts

The way you think, feel and act are all linked and can help you to manage your chronic pain. Learning how to manage your thoughts is a big step in helping you to 'Be Pain Smart'.



The first step to managing your thoughts is knowing what they are. If you want to learn how to notice your thoughts, go to the '[Noticing thoughts](#)' tool. Try using some '[Thought swaps](#)', to identify helpful thoughts that you can swap for your unhelpful ones. Remember, helpful thoughts allow you to deal better with your problems and to manage your pain. Unhelpful thoughts make you feel worse, get in the way of things and stop you doing what you want to do. When this happens, it is helpful to learn ways to handle these thoughts so that they are not controlling you.

There are many ways to manage your thoughts. The two main tools are:

- 1. thought defusion** – this is defusing or distancing yourself from your thoughts. Click [here](#) to learn how to do this.
- 2. changing your thoughts** – this is when you weigh up the proof you have that the thought is true.

Both tools require lots of practice. Read the section below to see how you can defuse your thoughts to help you manage your pain.



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THOUGHT DEFUSION

Often you can get swept away or stuck in unhelpful thoughts. Thought defusion is about to making space or distance between you and your thoughts to let these thoughts come and go without holding onto them. When you have more distance between you and your thoughts, you can have time to respond rather than react to what is going on around you and your pain.

There are many ways to try thought defusion. Try using the following tools for a minute or two and take notice of what happens to your thoughts. Do your thoughts lose their power?

Passengers on the bus

Think of yourself as a bus driver and as you drive along, you pick up passengers. The passengers are your emotions, thoughts, feelings in your body, and memories. Some of these passengers are helpful like 'you did that well' or 'you are a great parent'.

Other passengers can cause problems. These passengers might be unhelpful like 'I will never be able to cope with my pain', strong emotions like fear that if you move more, your pain will get worse, or bad memories from your past. These passengers start to yell, bully and abuse you. They might say 'you are not good enough. Remember that time you failed', 'why bother' or 'you are a burden'. These rude passengers even start to tell you how to drive – 'stop there, slow down, go faster, you are going the wrong way'. You start to listen to them and end up driving around in circles not going to where you want to go.

What should you do as the bus driver? You could try pulling over and arguing with them, tell them to be quiet or try to kick them off the bus. But there are too many of them, and you can get stuck here fighting with them.

Notice that you are not driving the bus anymore and you are not getting to where you want to go. You may never be able to get the passengers to be quiet or say nice things. Remember, YOU are the bus driver and these rude passengers cannot make you do anything or drive anywhere. You need to try to keep driving the bus, making the stops you want to make, moving toward the places you want to get to.

Clouds in the sky

Close your eyes and imagine a sky full of clouds. There is lots of wind so you can see the clouds moving by. Think about how bright blue the sky looks and how clearly you can see each cloud. Breathe in and try to notice your thoughts. Imagine each thought is written on a separate cloud. Then see how the windy sky blows the cloud away, your thought also blows away. Keep noticing your thoughts and place them in a cloud that is floating away in the sky.



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Leaves on a stream

Sit with your eyes closed, imagine you are sitting in the bush next to a gently moving stream, you watch the leaves from the trees drop into the stream and sail away. Breathe in and try to notice your thoughts. When a thought comes up, put the thought on a leaf, place it in the stream and watch it drift away from you. When you notice each new thought, just do the same thing, put it on a leaf in the stream and let it sail away. Try not to judge the thoughts and just place them gently on the leaf.

Thoughts on a screen

Close your eyes and sit comfortably, imagine you are watching a movie in a theatre or in front of your television. Picture your thoughts, these can be words or images on the screen, like the credits rolling at the end. Watch your thoughts as they slowly roll by, as each new thought comes up, just add it to the credits rolling past you. Or imagine your thoughts are on your computer screen, you can see them flashing in front of you, try changing the font or the colour. Try making the words bigger or smaller.

Silly voice

When an unhelpful thought comes up, write it down and read it out in a silly or goofy voice. Keep reading it over and over again until it becomes nonsense. Try using voices like Donald Duck, Mr T or Mickey Mouse. Whenever that thought comes up again, you will hear it in that same funny voice and this can help you to see that these are just thoughts and not facts.

Hands in front of your face

Put your hands together side-by-side with your palms facing up in your lap, so that they look like pages in a book. Imagine that your hands are your unhelpful thoughts, the ones that trap you in your pain and keep you feeling bad about yourself. Slowly raise your hands to your face to nearly cover your eyes. Notice how difficult it is to see anything but your hands. You cannot see the room around you or anything else that is going on. See how easy it can be to get trapped by your thoughts. As you lower your hands slowly to your lap, see how much space grows between your eyes and your hands (your thoughts). You can see what is happening in the room, you can get more information and you can do more things. Your hands (thoughts) are still there, but they are not blocking you and you now have more space to get on with your life.

You need to practice using these tools to get the most out of them. Pick two that you will work on for the next few weeks. Start off trying these for one to two minutes and build up over time.



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Managing my thoughts worksheet

Pick two of the tools that you will try using them for the next few weeks. Give them a go and then write down what you noticed afterwards about your thoughts. Read the example below and then try it out for yourself.

I will use this tool: Silly voices

What did I notice about my thoughts?

It took a while to get the hang of this, but I tried it for two weeks. The thoughts come up less and I can get let them go more easily. I usually end up laughing when I try this, so it also helps to make me less angry.

I will use this tool: Passengers on the bus

What did I notice about my thoughts?

I did this nearly every day for two weeks. I felt less caught up in my thoughts and could let them go. Normally I try to make other people happy and think I know what they are thinking. Doing this really helped me to keep going with my own plans and do what I wanted to do. I noticed that it was easier to pace myself because I was not caught up in my usual guilt and need to finish jobs.



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Now it is your turn to try these tools out.

Managing my thoughts worksheet

Write down two tools you will try using for the next few weeks. Give them a go and then write down what you noticed afterwards about your thoughts.

I will use this tool:

What did I notice about my thoughts?

I will use this tool:

What did I notice about my thoughts?