

# Transitions Program

A Program to Support Adults  
in Transition to Life after Cancer Treatment



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# Program Introduction

**Finishing** cancer treatment can be a turning point. The Transitions Program is designed to start just as your cancer treatment is coming to an end. During program visits, we will reflect on goals or expectations that you had for life after cancer treatment and discuss how things are going now. We may discuss aspects of your life that are going well and aspects that may be new, different, or challenging. We will introduce practical skills for coping with side effects and uncertainties about the future. We also will discuss how things are going in your relationships and introduce skills for strengthening the connections that are important to you.

We designed each program topic based on information we learned from people who recently went through cancer treatment. They shared what it was like to end treatment and start follow-up, along with things that they found helpful or not helpful during that time.

**We are excited to offer this program to you!** We hope that you will learn useful skills and strategies to take with you on your own path through life after treatment.

Sincerely,



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# Our Coping “Big Picture”

**We will meet** for five visits, including today’s visit. During these visits, we will practice skills for coping with side effects, uncertainties about the future, and other things that impact your day-to-day wellbeing. We also will practice skills for strengthening your relationships and connections that are important to you.

Throughout the program, we will use three different types of coping skills:

- 1 Using your clearest thinking to view a situation
- 2 Taking a step... and making a change when needed
- 3 Sitting still for a moment... and practicing acceptance when needed

We’ll discuss how to fit these three types of skills together into a ‘big picture’ coping strategy. You will be able to use this strategy to help you cope with issues that are important to you and continue to make your best possible quality of life.

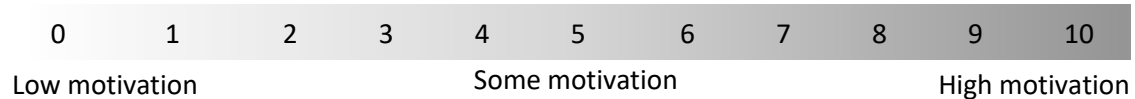
## Transitions Program Coping Strategy:



**motivation** (noun): *desire or willingness to do something; reason for doing something*

What is motivating you to participate in this program?

By attending this program, you have the chance to see whether the coping skills that we discuss can make a difference in your quality of life. Before we get started, it's helpful to think about your current level of motivation for **trying out new skills** or **working on your quality of life**:



What led you to pick this number?

What would move you to a higher number?



# Session 1

## Taking Stock of Life after Treatment



**“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”**

-- Annie Dillard

# Session 1 Introduction

**Session 1** focuses on looking back at expectations, plans and goals you may have had for the near future as you were finishing your cancer treatment. By talking about the things that were important to you then, we will be able to refer to them when we talk about how things are going now.

Are your current experiences the same or different than what you had imagined or expected? The transition from finishing cancer treatment to starting follow-up visits will look different for each person. We will discuss skills for using your clearest thinking – your most helpful and true thoughts - to view your plans and goals as you move forward.

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## Agenda:

### Session 1 content

Reviewing plans and goals

Are your plans and goals working for you?

Are you thinking clearly about your progress?

Linking your thoughts to your feelings and behaviors

Practicing clear thinking:

- Finding unhelpful and untrue thoughts
- Revising unhelpful and untrue thoughts



**In this session** we will take time to talk about how you view life after cancer treatment, including current day to day situations. We'll practice the first skill in our 'big picture' coping strategy: using your clearest thinking to view a difficult or challenging situation.

### Transitions Program Coping Strategy:



Then, in the next sessions of this program, we'll rely on the thinking skills that we practice here to guide you in using the rest of the 'big picture strategy' for coping with your current concerns.

## Reviewing plans and goals



**Think back** to plans or goals that you had for the first one or two months after treatment.

What were they?

Write the goals here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why was each goal important to you? How important is each goal to you now?  
Has each goal stayed the same? If not, how has it changed?

## Are your plans and goals working for you?



**Take a moment** to think about where your goals are coming from and what they mean to you. For instance, you may be hoping to run the same distance that you were able to run *before your cancer diagnosis* because that is a meaningful 'goal post' for you.

Let's take another look at the goals you set in the beginning of the program. How may they be helpful? How may they be unhelpful? Did you set them with another person, thing, or time in your life in mind? Ask yourself the following questions:

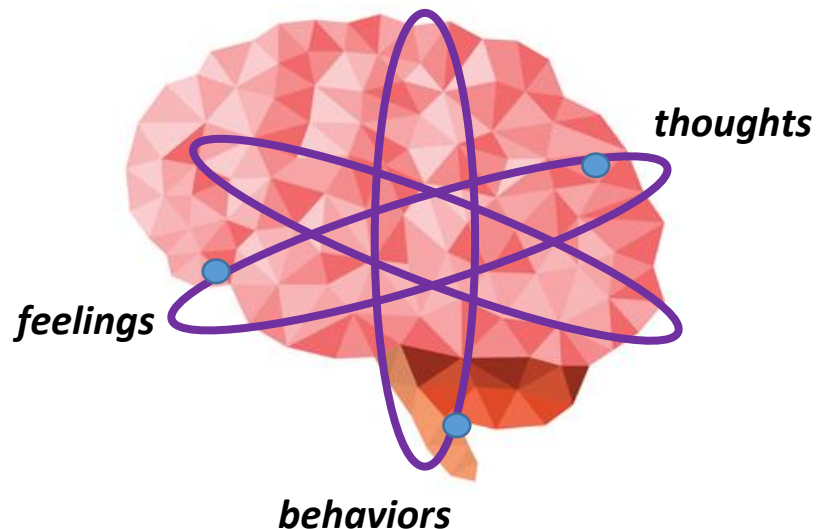
- 🕒 How is this goal meaningful to me?
- 🕒 How is it helpful?
- 🕒 How could it be unhelpful?
- 🕒 How does it affect how I see myself?
- 🕒 How does it affect how I see my current situation?
- 🕒 How does it affect how I see the future?

## Are you thinking clearly about your progress?

**Here's one more thing about goals:** We don't always see our goal progress as it really is. For instance, you may not notice the small gains you are making in your physical activity routine from week to week.

In fact, we often make errors in our judgment without even realizing it. For instance, you may have an unhelpful or untrue thought such as, "I'm useless" or "I'm never going to get any better." We call these 'thought distortions.' They happen to all of us and can happen at any time. But they happen most often when we are stressed, anxious or feeling down. Thought distortions, in turn, can impact how we feel and how we react to things.

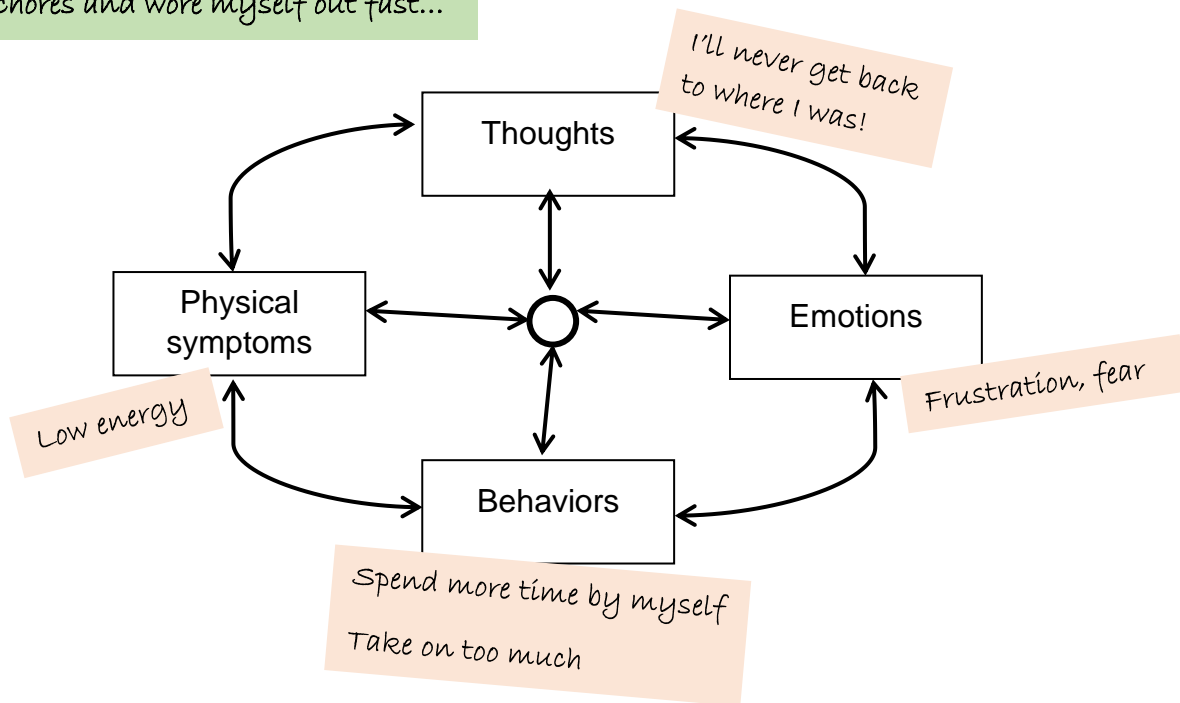
Have you experienced any recent thought distortions? It is important to 'rewind' our thoughts and catch these distortions in action.



## Linking thoughts to your feelings and behaviors

**Why is it important** to catch thought distortions in action? Let's think about what happens when life doesn't match your expectations. For instance, let's say that you set a goal of getting back to your usual schedule at home. However, you still are experiencing low energy for months after you finish cancer treatment. Here is an example of how this situation can trigger you to have a thought distortion. In turn, that thought distortion can lead to a cycle or loop of unhelpful thoughts, feelings, and behaviors:

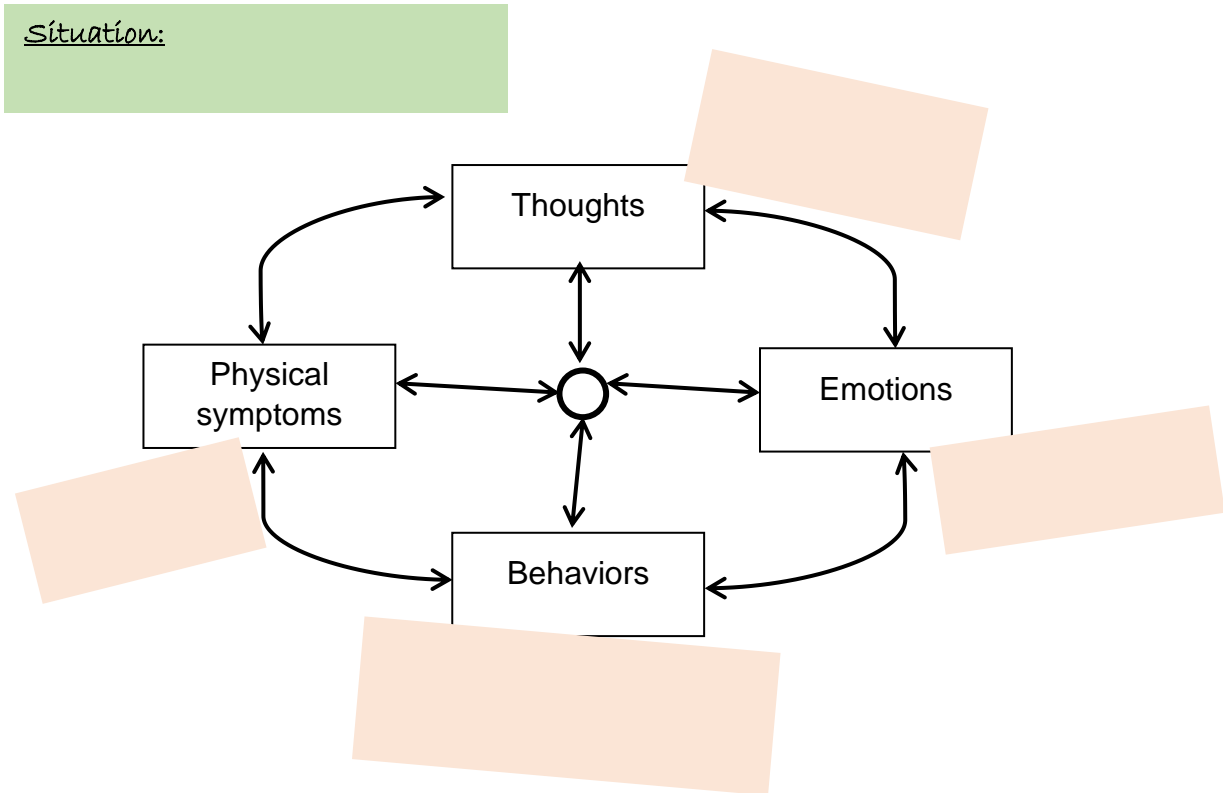
*Situation: did my usual Sunday chores and wore myself out fast...*



Pay attention to the thought, "I'll never get back to where I was!" Based on the cycle shown above, how is this thought impacting emotions and behaviors?

**Have you ever** experienced a recent difficult situation of your own? Try filling in the picture below using your own recent situation. First, write down a short description of a recent stressful or difficult event in the green box. Then write down any thoughts, emotions, and physical symptoms that you experienced and your behaviors during the situation:

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In this situation, how would you describe your thinking? Did you experience any helpful thoughts? Did you experience any thought distortions? How did your thoughts relate to your emotions, behaviors, and symptoms?

The next practice exercises will help you to use the power of your own thoughts to shape this cycle in helpful ways.

## Practicing Clear Thinking ①: Finding Unhelpful and Untrue Thoughts



For practice this week, read through the common types of thought distortions that are listed on the next page. When it comes to your goals, wishes and expectations for life after cancer treatment, do you find yourself having any of these thought distortions? If so, challenge yourself to come up with your own examples of each thought distortion and write them in the blank spaces on the next page.

## 7 THOUGHT DISTORTIONS

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**1 Minimizing** | downplaying a promising or positive thing

*You were able to jog for a few blocks this morning, but you tell yourself that this is not a big deal because you used to run 2 miles each day before you were diagnosed with cancer.*

My example: \_\_\_\_\_

**2 Mind reading** | assuming someone is having negative thoughts about you

*You see your co-worker during a weekday afternoon. You assume that she is thinking you look fine and should have returned to work by now.*

My example: \_\_\_\_\_

**3 Fortune telling** | predicting a negative outcome from an unclear or uncertain situation

*You wake up in the morning feeling tired and you guess that you will never feel energetic again.*

My example: \_\_\_\_\_

**4 Mental filter** | picking out a negative detail of a situation and filtering everything else out

*You spent a big part of your morning worrying about your cancer coming back and what will happen then. For the rest of the day, you keep focusing on the tough morning that you had.*

My example: \_\_\_\_\_

**5 Should statement** | making a strict statement about how you or other people should be

*Your family wants to celebrate that 'your cancer is over'. You think that your family should understand that you don't feel ready to celebrate.*

My example: \_\_\_\_\_

**6 Labeling** | applying a negative word to your whole self or another whole person

*You are with friends who are sharing stories about their recent adventures and you can't think of anything to contribute to the conversation. You start to call yourself boring and useless, which make you feel even more out of sorts during the conversation.*

My example: \_\_\_\_\_

**7 All-or-nothing thinking** | seeing things in strict yes/no categories

*You are trying to do more meaningful things with your time. When your efforts fall short of 'perfect' you count this as a failure.*

My example: \_\_\_\_\_



## Practicing Clear Thinking ②: Revising Unhelpful or Untrue Thoughts

It's up to you to keep a close watch on your thoughts. If you have set plans and goals that are not helpful to you -- or if you are thinking about your progress in unhelpful ways -- then put on the breaks! For next week, use the log at the end of this chapter to practice "Stop, Rewind and Revise." See if this helps you to shift your goals – or your thoughts about your progress - in helpful ways.

stop

Stop and take a breath. Increase your awareness and understanding of your goals for life after cancer treatment. Look for unhelpful thinking. If it's too hard to do this in the moment, try it later when you're in a clearer or calmer state of mind.

rewind

"Rewind" your thoughts. Look for thoughts about your goal progress that are unhelpful or untrue, and that affect how you feel. Ask yourself, "Would I say this to a friend," or "Is my judgment based on how I feel, or is this a fact?"

revise

Take out your imaginary red pen! Revise your thoughts so that they are more helpful. Take the new thoughts for a test ride. Make sure they are helpful and see if they change how you think about yourself, your current situation, or your future.

Here is an example of Stop, Rewind and Revise:

Let's say that you set a post-treatment goal of getting back to your local gym. But you still haven't gone back yet. You decide to stop, rewind and revise.

**stop**

*My goal after finishing cancer treatment was to get back to an exercise routine that I used to love. But I'm still not feeling up to doing what I used to do.*

**rewind**

*I am comparing myself what I used to do and how I used to feel before cancer. I'm feeling discouraged. I'm guessing that I'll never get back to where I was.*

**revise**

*How could I re-set my thinking to be more helpful, but still meaningful to me? Possibilities:*

- *Set a new goal: Find an exercise activity that I could do – and have fun exploring, or keep meeting my exercise buddy for a walk once a week*
- *Keep trying my old exercise routine and just do what I can each time. Recognize my progress.*
- *Remind myself of everything I am doing to take care of my well-being.*

My plans, expectations and goals for first 6 months after treatment	Recent thoughts about my progress, myself or my current situation	How these thoughts make me feel
#1:  #2:  #3:		
<i>Stop, rewind and revise (if needed):</i>	<i>Stop, rewind and revise (if needed):</i>	How these <i>new</i> thoughts make me feel
#1:  #2:  #3:		



**Closing point and next steps.** Keep an eye on your plans, wishes and goals for life after treatment. Ensure they are encouraging, inspiring, or helping you to have the best possible quality of life. Take time this week to start noticing thought distortions. Practice stop-rewind-revise to shift your goals or your day-to-day thinking when needed. Use the log at the end of this session as your guide!

Take time to consider what changes you might make to your daily life so that it matches your new plans, goals or thoughts. Discuss your ideas with your study clinician and others you trust.

Isn't it funny how day by day nothing changes,  
but when you look back, everything is different.

-- C.S. Lewis

Plans for this week:

- Complete worksheet: 7 Thought Distortions (page 16)
- Complete worksheet: Stop, Rewind, Revise (page 19)
- Other:

## Session 2

### Focusing on Mind & Body



**“Each patient carries his own doctor inside him”**

-- Albert Schweitzer

# Session 2 Introduction

**After cancer treatment** you may face unexpected changes in your sense of health and wellbeing. Session 2 focuses on increasing your understanding of physical symptoms and other aspects of your health that feel bothersome, unwanted, or stuck. We also will explore aspects that feel the same or even better. Focusing on both mind and body, we will discuss and practice how to cope with issues that impact your quality of life. We will introduce change skills and acceptance skills and look at how they go hand in hand.

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## **Agenda:**

Review material and practice from last week

### Session 2 content

Identifying aspects of health and wellbeing

Expanding your view of wellbeing

Making sense of your concern

Improving your wellbeing by: taking a step

- Problem-solving

Improving your wellbeing by: sitting still

- Mindful awareness of sounds and body sensations
- Getting engaged

**In this session** we will take time to talk about two types of coping skills in our ‘big picture’ coping strategy: change and acceptance.

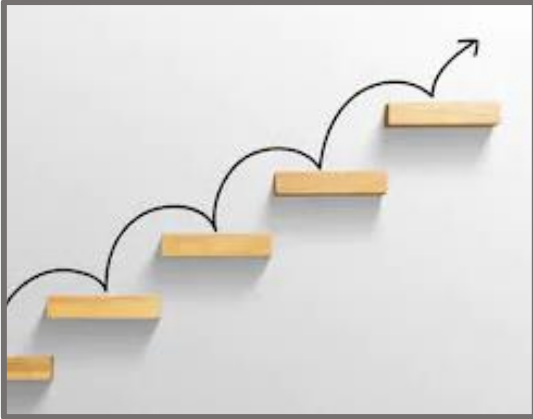
### Transitions Program Coping Strategy:



First, we’ll talk about and practice **change skills** – taking some kind of step to change a difficult situation when you believe it is possible and needed to do so. Then, we’ll talk about and practice **acceptance skills** – acknowledging a difficult situation and the thoughts and emotions that come with it, without letting them take control of your life. We’ll also get to see how change skills and acceptance skills go hand and hand. In this session, we will apply our ‘big picture’ coping strategy to help you cope with changes in your sense of health and wellbeing. In the following sessions we’ll apply this strategy to other important wellbeing concerns.

# Identifying aspects of health and wellbeing

**recovery** (noun): *a return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength*



**When you think about** life after your cancer treatment, what does the word recovery mean to *you*? How do your experiences fit with the definition of recovery that is written above? What other words come to mind, to describe your experiences after your treatment?

Use the space below to list any aspects of your health and wellbeing that are going well:

Use the space below to list any aspects of your health and wellbeing that are not going as well as you ideally would like:

Now let's take a close look at what you wrote:

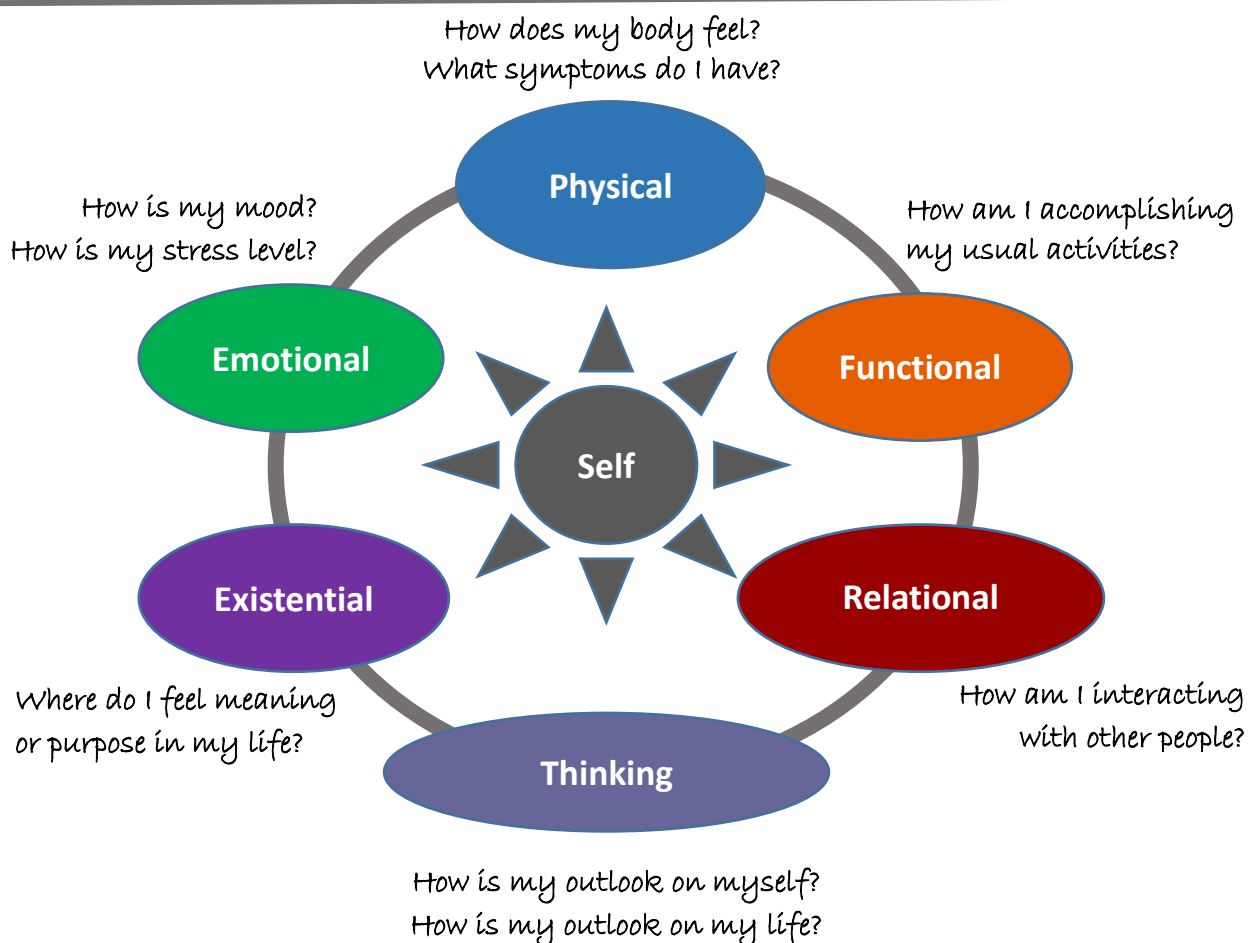
- What was *easier* to write about -- aspects that are going well or not going as well as you would like?
- What did you write *more* about – aspects that are going well or not going as well as you would like?
- What types of things did you write - physical health, emotional health, or something else?
- Of all the aspects that you wrote, which one stands out the most or is the 'biggest' one for you?



# Expanding your view of wellbeing

Your experiences with cancer may impact your physical wellbeing along with other important parts, or domains, of yourself. It's worth noting that you may experience change in some domains more than others. Also, each domain may not change at the same pace. For instance, your mood could be low even when you are looking or feeling better physically. Consider six different domains that may be affected by your cancer experiences, shown in the colored circles below. (You may even come up with other domains that we haven't listed here!)

## Wellbeing Domains

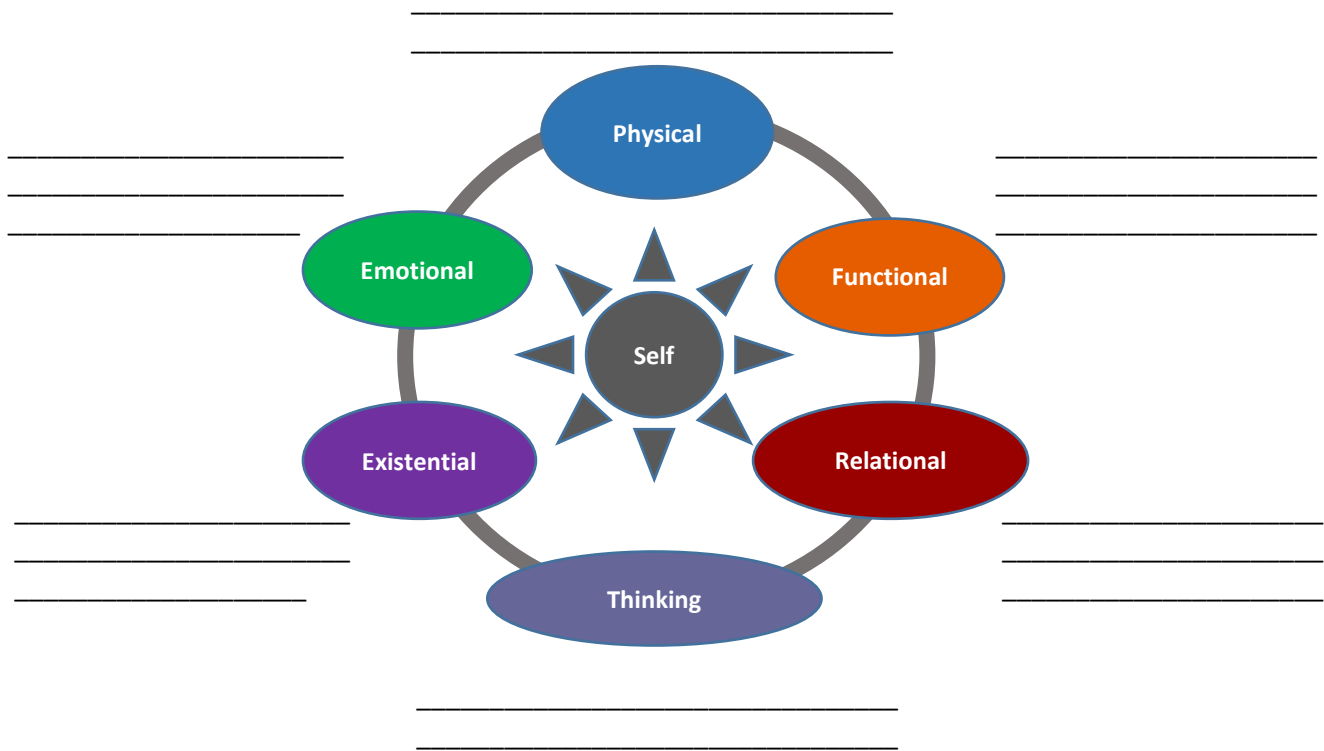


Let's look back at what you listed on the last page about aspects of your health and wellbeing that are going well and aspects that are not going as well as you ideally would like. Which domains appear most? Which domains appear least – or not at all?

There are important benefits to taking an expanded view of your current wellbeing. Doing this helps you to:

- ☞ Understand your current experiences as a whole person, rather than focusing on one symptom or another
- ☞ Consider how a problem or concern may influence you in multiple areas of your life
- ☞ Maintain a balanced view of your wellbeing - including domains where you feel that you are doing well (these areas often go unrecognized)
- ☞ Identify wellbeing domains that are most important to you and concerns that could most benefit from some care and attention

Use the Wellbeing Domains below to expand your view of your current wellbeing. Next to each domain, write how you feel about your current wellbeing in this domain. Use the prompting questions shown next to each domain on the prior page to help guide you. You can write about what is going well, what bothers you, or what is not going as well as you ideally would like. You may end up repeating what you already wrote in the beginning of this session, and you also may identify new things to write. You also may find that certain concerns fall into more than one domain.



**When your wellbeing is not how you ideally want it to be,  
how can you improve it?**

First, look back at what you wrote in each wellbeing domain. Which domain is most important to you right now? Which concern could benefit from some care and attention? Before acting on this concern, let's make sure that you are observing it through the clearest and most helpful lens.



**Practice: Stop, Rewind, Revise**

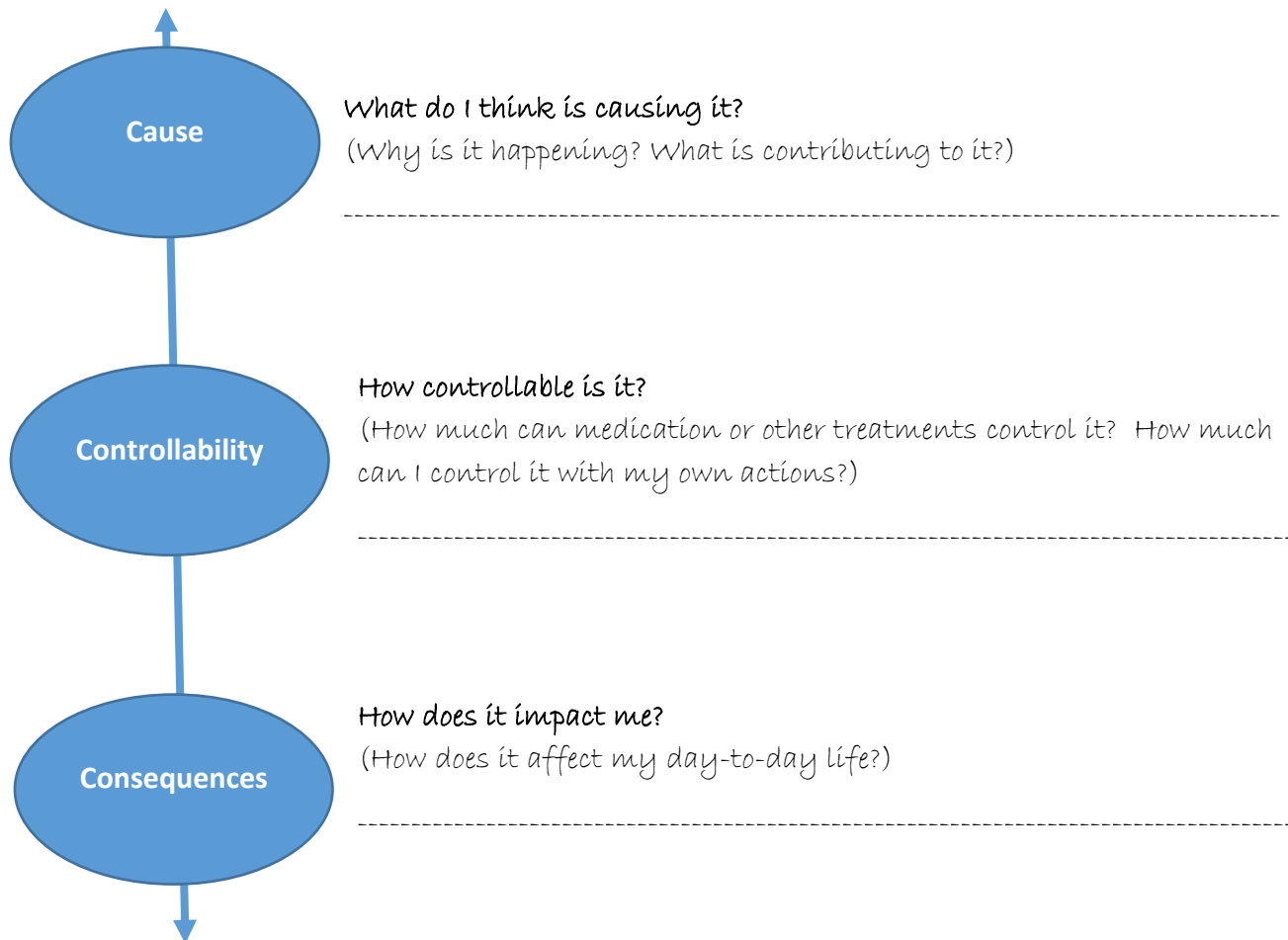
Does your concern – and its impact on your quality of life - contain any distortions? For instance, you might assume that you should be able to just 'get over' your low mood after cancer treatment (*should statement*). Or, you might be calling yourself 'weak' due to your fatigue (*labeling*). Like we discussed in Session 1, our minds have a habit of generating thoughts that are not helpful or true – especially when we are stressed. It's up to you to put on the breaks. **Stop, rewind and, if needed, revise your thoughts** about your current health and wellbeing.

For practice this week, use the worksheet below to help you make sure that you are relying on the most helpful and true information to guide your next steps:

Recent thoughts about my current health and wellbeing	How these thoughts make me feel
<i>Stop, rewind and revise (if needed):</i>	How these <i>new</i> thoughts make me feel

# Making sense of your concern

Using 'stop, rewind and revise' gives you time to generate your most helpful and true thoughts about your current concern. Let's take one more step to make sense of your concern before practicing change and acceptance coping skills. This step is particularly helpful for making sense of physical symptoms. For other wellbeing concerns, some of the questions below still will be useful. Making sense of your concern will help you figure out when it makes sense to use change skills, and when it makes sense to use acceptance skills. With your current concern in mind, answer the questions below. Discuss your answers with your study clinician.



# Improving wellbeing by: taking a step

You've now worked on making sense of your current concern. In some cases, you may be able to take an action. Can you think of a time during your cancer care when it helped to seek more information or make a change? Looking back at your answers on the last page, does at least one aspect of your concern offer **room for change**?

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## Is it time for change? (*and can I make this change?*)

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For the concern that you have identified, answer the problem-solving questions below:



- 1 What is one aspect of my concern that I could address by taking an action?
  
- 2 What are possible actions that I could take? (list all ideas, no matter how silly or impossible they sound)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3 Which action is most likely to work for me?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4 What could get in the way of taking this action?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5 What are ways to make it easier or more possible for me to take this action?

# Improving wellbeing by: sitting still

Let's think again about your current wellbeing concern. Whether or not you can take more steps to improve the problem, some aspects may not be changeable. What aspects of your concern are not changeable right now? Practicing acceptance coping involves managing how much your current concern affects you from day to day. But take note – acceptance doesn't mean giving up. It means acknowledging that your concern exists without letting it take control of your quality of life. In fact, some acceptance coping exercises are very active, as you'll see during this session.

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## Is it time for acceptance?

*(and how do I bear what I can't change?)*

---

Try out the two exercises on the following pages to help you cope with or manage your current wellbeing concern. These exercises help you to acknowledge your concern without letting it control your day. Practice them during this session and on your own during the week. See what is most helpful to you at times when your concern is affecting you.



## Practicing Acceptance ①: Mindful Awareness of Sounds and Body Sensations

In mindfulness exercises, a key goal is to practice awareness of your current reality without judging, criticizing, catastrophizing, or tightening around it (all reactions that can worsen suffering). If your current concern involves coping with difficult emotions, try practicing the Mindful Awareness of Emotions exercise in Session 3. If your current concern involves coping with physical symptoms, try practicing the exercise below. See how it can help you cope with body sensations such as pain, tightness, or tension. This exercise first focuses your attention on sounds happening outside of you (an easier place to start) and then moves your attention to sensations happening inside your body.

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Find a quiet place to sit or lay down. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes. Start by focusing your attention on your breath. Your inbreath.... and outbreath... Breathing naturally. Allow yourself to follow the rhythm of your breathing... and to just... be. Your breath is always there as a focus for your attention. During this exercise, whenever you notice that your mind has wandered, gently bring your attention back to your breath.



**(Awareness of sounds):** Now, continuing to breath in and breath out, shift your attention to any sound going on around you. Allow this sound to come to your attention. Notice the quality of the sound, without judging it as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant... Notice how it stays the same or changes... notice how it is loud or soft... high pitched or low pitched..... Accepting this sound just as you accept the rising and falling of your inbreath and your outbreath...

**(Awareness of body sensations):** Now, continuing to breath in and breath out, shift your attention to your body... to sensations throughout your body... begin to explore whatever sensation comes to your awareness.... any area of tightness or tension... any area of discomfort... Noticing the quality of the sensation, without judging it as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant... noticing how it stays the same or changes... notice how it's dull or sharp..... Breathing into the area where you feel this sensation... and then breathing out. Accepting this sensation just as you accept the rising and falling of your inbreath and your outbreath... See if you can even soften around this sensation or this area of your body, as you continue to breath.



Now returning your attention to your inbreath.... and outbreath... Breathing naturally. Recognizing that you have given yourself this time to just... be. At your own pace, begin to open your eyes, and return to the room... knowing that you can bringing this sense of awareness with you for the rest of your day.



## Practicing Acceptance ②: Getting Engaged

Mindful awareness helps you to focus on the current moment. This means ‘unhooking’ your mind from other thoughts and attending to what you are experiencing right now. We bet that you naturally have had this degree of focus before. People have described this experience when they were learning a new skill, doing something creative, laughing with a friend, eating a favorite meal, or helping someone else. **Can you remember a recent time when you were engaged fully in a meaningful or enjoyable activity? What was it like?**

Remember that acceptance coping can be very active. For this exercise, take advantage of your naturally ability to get engaged. Brainstorm meaningful or enjoyable activities that capture your attention. This is *not* the same as ignoring your wellbeing concerns. Rather, this helps you to **widen your lens** and care for yourself as a whole person. This may even lessen or “dial down” suffering by drawing your attention away from concerns for the moment. In the longer term, it serves as a reminder of your power to bring meaning and enjoyment to your life.



Use the space below to describe five activities that are possible for you to do and that would be meaningful or enjoyable to you (*Think small or big, old or new, and everything in between. Use the prompts on the next page to get your ideas flowing*):

Now, based on the activities you described above, make a commitment to engage in at least one of these activities during the next week. Be as specific as possible about when, where and how you will make it happen:

*During this week, I will:*





Use the prompts below to help remind you of activities that captivate your attention and help you feel engaged in the moment.

Especially if your health limits your ability to engage in usual activities, take time to consider possible activities that are meaningful or enjoyable to you. Remember, think small or big, old or new, and everything in between.

## I feel engaged when I am:

---

**Spending time at...**

**Spending time with...**

**Taking care of...**

**Practicing...**

**Learning...**

**Helping...**

**Doing...**

**Going to...**

**Playing....**

**Surrounded by...**

**In front of...**

**Going for a...**

**Making progress on...**

**Involved in...**



Closing point and next steps. Remember that change skills and acceptance skills go hand in hand. Take time this week to use your ideas for improving your health and wellbeing. This may include taking steps to change your current concerns. This also may include practicing acceptance so that your concerns do not control your day. Practice the exercises that you've discussed in this session and remember to check on how they affect your sense of wellbeing. Acknowledge areas of wellbeing that are going well. Discuss your experiences with your study clinician and others you trust.

To keep a lamp burning we have to keep putting oil in it.

-- Mother Teresa

Plans for this week:

- Complete worksheet: stop, rewind, revise (page 27)
- Take a step toward improving wellbeing (page 29):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Practice mindful awareness of sounds or body sensations (page 31)
- Get engaged in a meaningful or enjoyable activity (page 32):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other:

## Session 3

### Strengthening Connections



**“There must be those among us with whom we can sit down and weep, and still be counted as warriors.”**

-- Adrienne Rich

## Session 3 Introduction

**Your experiences** with cancer may impact your connections with family, friends, or people in your community. Have you experienced changes in what you could give to others or what you needed from others? Or changes in what other people offered you or needed from you? Session 3 focuses on ways to enhance your connections with other people, as an important part of your quality of life and wellbeing. We also will discuss and practice how to cope with difficult interactions. We also will look back at all the effort you have put into this program, including the skills and strategies you have learned and practiced, and make plans to help you keep using the ones that are helpful to you.

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### Agenda:

Review material and practice from last week

#### Session 3 content

Identifying how you connect with others

Taking care of your connections with others

Improving relationship balance by: taking a step

- Problem-solving

Improving relationship balance by: sitting still

- Empathy
- Self-compassion

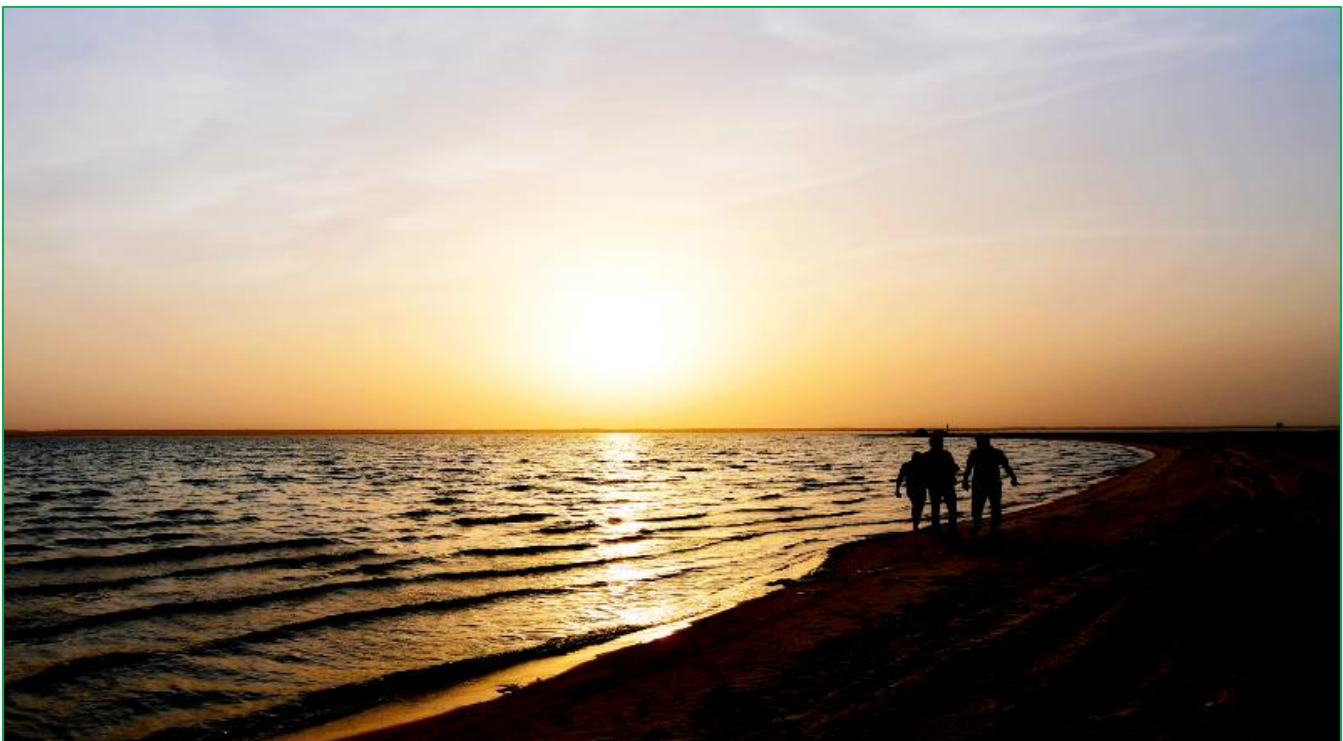
Loving kindness meditation

## Identifying how you connect with others

**How do you tend to connect** with people in your life? For instance, you might be most comfortable with being a good listener, giving advice, or some other role. You may prefer to keep concerns to yourself or to share what you are thinking and feeling. Your style may depend on the situation or the people involved.

As we discussed in Session 2, your experiences with cancer can impact different areas of wellbeing. This includes your connections with other people. After your cancer diagnosis, did you experience changes in the daily give and take of your relationships with family, friends, or people in your community? Changes in what you could give to others or what you needed from others? Changes in what other people offered you or needed from you?

Now let's look back to Session 1 and the plans, wishes or goals that you had for life after cancer treatment. Did any of these involve your relationships with other people? How have you felt lately about your relationships with others?



The picture below shows nine different areas of support that people may share. Think about an important or close relationship in your life. This could be a person or group in your life, or a community that you belong to. Draw a right arrow (→) inside any box that describes support that you give to them. Draw a left arrow (←) inside any box that describes support that you receive from them.

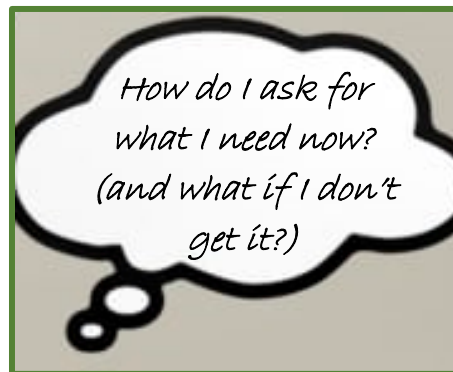


What do you think about the current 'give-and-take' in this relationship? Do you have arrows where you want them to be? How does this compare to life before your cancer diagnosis? Place a star next to any area of support that is going well. Circle any area of support that is not going as well as you would like it to be.

## Taking care of your connections with others

**What happens when you find yourself** in a role or relationship pattern that doesn't have the support give-and-take that you want? After cancer diagnosis and treatment, it's normal to want some parts of your relationships to stay the same. It's also normal to experience a change in what you need from others – and what other people offer to you or need from you.

Here are some example thoughts and concerns about relationship balance:



Based on the Support Give-and-Take exercise on the last page, what are your own thoughts about your connections with others? For instance, what are you content with? What causes you frustration or concern? Where is there balance? Where is there imbalance? Write your thoughts or concerns below:

**When your Support Give and Take is not how you ideally want it to be,  
how can you improve the relationship?**

First, let's take a careful look at the thoughts you wrote down on the last page. Before acting on these thoughts, let's ensure that you are observing your connections with other people or groups through the clearest and most helpful lens.



**Practice: Stop, Rewind, Revise**

Do your thoughts contain any distortions? For instance, you might assume that you are burdening loved ones because you are not doing your usual share of household chores. In fact, you may be discounting recent times when loved ones relied on you for help or support (*minimizing*). Remember that our minds can sometimes generate thoughts that are not helpful or true. It's up to you to put on the breaks. **Stop, rewind and, if needed, revise your thoughts** about your recent interactions with other people.

For practice this week, use the worksheet below to help you make sure that you are relying on the most helpful and true information to guide your next steps:

Recent thoughts about my relationships and connections	How these thoughts make me feel
<i>Stop, rewind and revise (if needed):</i>	How these <i>new</i> thoughts make me feel



## Improving relationship balance by: taking a step

Using 'stop, rewind and revise' can help you generate your most helpful and true thoughts about the support give-and-take between you and other people. Now, with your most helpful and true thoughts in mind, let's work on coping with aspects of give-and-take that are not as you want them to be.

Just as we did in Session 2, let's practice two types of coping skills: change and acceptance. First, we'll start with change. Even when you appreciate your connections with others, you may still notice that there is **room for change**. You may be able to improve your support give-and-take by taking a step. Can you think of a time during your cancer care when you took a step to strengthen or improve your relationship with someone else? What did you do that was helpful?

---

### Is it time for change? (and can I make this change?)

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Now consider a relationship or connection that is important to you. Try answering the five problem-solving questions below:



- 1 What is one part of my relationship or connection with another person or group that is not ideal, that I could address by taking an action?
- 2 What are possible actions that I could take? (list all ideas, no matter how silly or impossible they sound)
- 3 Which action is most likely to work for me?
- 4 What could get in the way of taking this action?
- 5 What are ways to make it easier or more possible for me to take this action?

## Strengthening connections... and building new ones?

We've now talked about improving the relationship balance between you and other people in your life. What about connecting with someone new? Here are three examples of people talking about building new connections or finding connections in new or unexpected places. Which areas of support give-and-take does each example represent?

*I've been going to this local coffee shop for years. Lately the shop manager and I have been talking more. We have a good back-and-forth. He has two daughters and likes to ask me for parenting advice. I can talk about cancer with him, without worrying that I'll upset him or drag him down.*

*I signed up to volunteer at a local food bank. I'm not able to lift heavy boxes right now but I'm helping to better organize their stockroom. It makes me feel useful, but I've also had a good amount of fun being part of the team.*

*I've gotten closer to one of my cousins lately. She went through cancer treatment a while back. Different cancer, but still there are certain things that we don't have to explain to each other because we both get it.*

Do you have an area of support give-and-take that you could strengthen or rebalance through a new connection? If so, work on answering the four problem-solving questions below:

- 1 What are all possible actions that I could take to make a new connection?
- 2 Which action is most likely to work for me?
- 3 What could get in the way of taking this action?
- 4 What are ways to make it easier or more possible for me to take this action?

## Improving relationship balance by: **sitting still**

**Since finishing cancer treatment**, have you experienced a time when someone asked you a question, said something to you, or treated you in a way that you appreciated? What happened? Why does it stand out in your mind? On the other hand, have you experienced a time when someone acted in a way that was not helpful? What happened? How did you feel?

Your interactions with other people may not always be the way that you ideally want them to be. When it comes to life after cancer treatment, other people may not ask or say what you need to hear. Sometimes you may be able to move on. Other times, you may be left with frustration, loneliness, or other negative emotions. Whether or not you can take a step to change the conversation, you may need to sit with difficult feelings. Just like we discussed in Sessions 3 and 4, acceptance involves acknowledging these feelings and allowing them to come along for the ride **without taking the wheel**.

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### Is it time for acceptance?

*(and how do I bear what I can't change?)*

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Try out the two exercises on the following pages to help you manage difficult feelings that may come up during interactions with other people. Practice the exercises during this session and on your own from day to day. See how they can be helpful to you. Similar to the acceptance exercises that you practiced in the last session, these exercises focus on helping you to recognize and accept how you feel, without letting emotions be in charge. These exercises may even help you identify what steps you want to take next.

## Practicing Acceptance ①: Empathy

When someone fails to understand you or support you in the way that you want or need, the stress that you feel can cause you to lose **empathy** for that person. In the moment, that person's shortcomings may loom larger in your mind than anything else about them. In turn, this may increase your sense of disconnection, leading to even more negative thoughts and feelings. In situations like this, remind yourself that you have a mix of struggles and strengths that make you human. Also remind yourself that **this is true for the other person too**.

Even if you don't know the other person well, imagine the mix of experiences that make the person human. In other words, like we discussed in Session 3, **widen your lens**. First, acknowledge what happened and how you felt during a difficult interaction. Then, acknowledge at least one thing that makes each of you human. Use this exercise to help you regain your sense of wellbeing.

*Example: My neighbor looked at me with these wide eyes, gave me a hug, and told me how great I looked. I was caught off guard. I felt embarrassed, like, "Do I have the word 'cancer' written on my forehead?" I get angry when cancer makes people treat me differently. Maybe my neighbor was trying to say something supportive. I probably don't always know the right thing to say either, although I always try. I think my neighbor tries to keep things upbeat. He's someone who could whistle down the street even in the rain. Although I once saw him have an argument with someone at the grocery store. I guess he has his tough days too.*

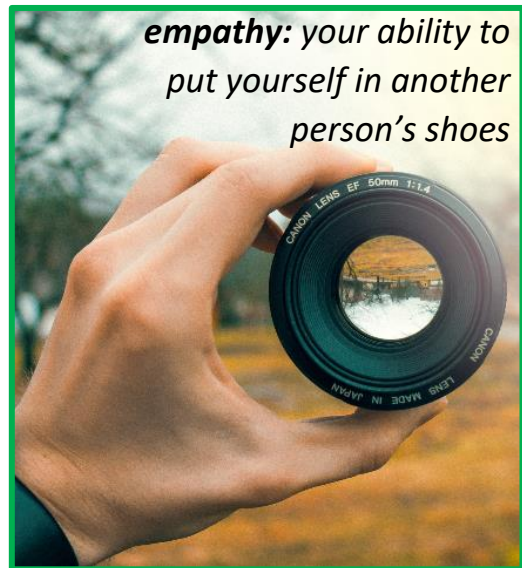
Describe a situation when someone acted toward you in a way that was not helpful. Capture 1) what happened, 2) how you felt, and 3) one thing that makes each of you human. See if this affects your sense of wellbeing:

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## Practicing Acceptance 2: Self-compassion

Let's look back once again at the Support Give-and-Take exercise that you completed. Did you identify situations that are hard to change *and* hard to accept?



We have every right to our feelings about our interactions with other people. On one hand, we don't want to let our negative emotions take charge of us. On the other hand, ignoring our concerns or criticizing ourselves for having them will not make them go away.

The following questions will help you increase your understanding of your experiences with support give-and-take. This is an important first step to practice **self-compassion** (how you take care of yourself).

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*What types of interactions make me feel understood or supported by other people?*

*What do I wish people understood better about my life after cancer treatment?*

*What makes me feel angry in my interactions with others?*

*What makes me feel sad or alone in my interactions with others?*

*What makes me feel tense in my interactions with others?*

Take time to acknowledge how you feel during difficult interactions. Acknowledge your experiences so that you can focus on coping with them. Ask yourself:

1. How do I want to take care of myself in this moment?
2. What state of mind would be helpful to me in this moment?

The next step in practicing self-compassion (taking care of yourself) is to apply your answers to the questions above. For instance, you might decide to breathe deeply and let your thoughts and feelings move through you. You might take time to do something that you enjoy. You might plan to spend time with someone who offers the support give-and-take that you need, or to look for opportunities to connect with new people. You might decide to communicate your concerns about the difficult interaction. In fact, you might try a combination of approaches.

## A final exercise: Loving Kindness Meditation

When you are feeling disconnected from yourself, loved ones, or people in general, try practicing this brief meditation as a way to increase your sense of connection. You can find many examples of this exercise on the Internet by searching the term 'loving kindness meditation' or 'metta meditation'.



### Loving Kindness Meditation

Find a quiet place to sit or lay down. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes. Start by focusing your attention on your breath. In-breath.... and out-breath... Breathing naturally. Allow yourself to follow the rhythm of your breathing... and to just... be. Your breath is always there as a focus for your attention. During this exercise, whenever you notice that your mind has wandered, gently bring your attention back to your breath.

Now place your attention on the area around your heart. Repeat to yourself gently: "May my heart be filled with love..." Feel a sense of warmth and caring spread through you while you repeat to yourself: May I be at peace... May I feel at ease... May I feel loved.

Bring into your mind someone you care about. Send them these feelings of warmth and caring, as you wish them well: May you be at peace... May you feel at ease... May you feel loved.

Bring to mind someone you feel neutral about. Maybe someone you don't know well but you see around. Send them these feelings of warmth and caring, as you wish them well: May you be at peace... May you feel at ease... May you feel loved.

Bring to mind someone you have a difficult or complicated relationship with. Send them these feelings of warmth and caring, as you wish them well: May you be at peace... May you feel at ease... May you feel loved.

Bring to mind everyone around you. Send them these feelings of warmth and caring, as a wave spreading from you to others, as you wish them well: May you be at peace... May you feel at ease... May you feel loved.

Bring your attention back to your breath. Breathing in.... and breathing out. When you are ready, open your eyes, bring your feelings of loving-kindness with you throughout your day.





**Closing point and next steps.** Take time this week to notice your support give-and-take with others, and the ways that you think and feel about it. Identify areas where you want to strengthen your connections or make new ones. Identify areas where you want to practice acceptance. As always, explore how change and acceptance skills go hand in hand, and look closely at the effects of your coping decisions. Use the exercises that you learned in this session and see which ones are most helpful. Discuss your experiences with people you trust.

“The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention”

-- Rachel Naomi Remen

Plans for this week:

- Complete worksheet: stop, rewind, revise (page 40)
- Take a step toward improving relationship balance (page 41):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Take a step toward building a new connection (page 42):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Practice empathy (page 44)
- Practice self-compassion (pages 45-46)
- Practice loving kindness meditation (page 47)
- Other:



## Session 4

### Making Your Way Through Uncertainty



**“I reminded myself that a beginning and an ending are two different places, and, in real life, you might be able to make your own ending, whatever had gone before.”**

-- Stephanie Butland

# Session 4 Introduction

**No handbook will lay out exactly what our futures hold.** You may face uncertainty about what upcoming follow-up tests or scans will show. What other uncertainties do you face? **Session 4** focuses on ways to cope with uncertainty so that you can reduce distress and maintain a quality of life that is important to you.

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## Agenda:

Review material and practice from last week

### Session 4 content

Identifying areas of uncertainty

Taking a closer look at worried thoughts

Reducing the effects of worry by: taking a step

- Problem-solving

Reducing the effects of worry by: sitting still

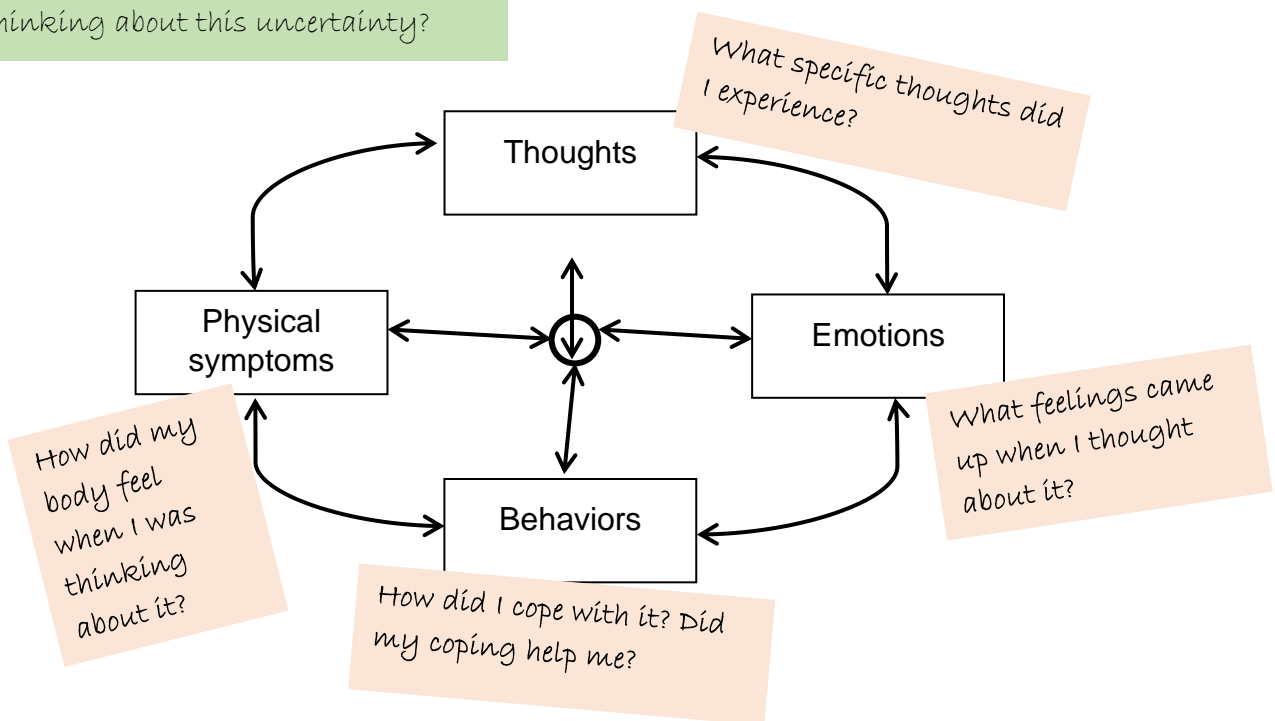
- Mindful awareness of emotions
- Dialectical thinking
- Helpful states of mind

## Identifying areas of uncertainty

**After cancer treatment**, many people have questions or concerns about what the future may hold. How often do you find yourself thinking about areas of uncertainty in your life? What kind of thoughts do you have? How do you respond to them?

The topic of uncertainty is worth our attention. Acknowledging the uncertainty that you experience gives you an opportunity to focus on ways to cope with it. Let's consider the loop or cycle that we discussed in Session 1. At any time, you can use the questions shown in the colored boxes below to help you take a careful look at an area of uncertainty in your life.

Situation: What was I doing, or what was going on, at the time I started thinking about this uncertainty?



Using the image above, write down the thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and physical symptoms that you experienced during a recent time when you focused on something that was uncertain.

## Taking a closer look at worried thoughts

**Did you identify any worried thoughts** during the last exercise? Did your thoughts show any distortions (and would it help to *stop, review* and *revise*)? Did your thoughts have a grain of truth? You have every right to worry about uncertain areas of your life. Ignoring your concerns or criticizing yourself for worrying will not make uncertainty disappear. Still, even when your worries have a grain of truth, it's important to look at how your mind *uses* worry.

Here are 3 examples of how our minds may use worry:

### Focusing on worries instead of other thoughts and activities

The act of worrying may lead us into believing that we are doing something toward a solution or preparing ourselves for the future in a productive way: *what if... what if...what if...*

### Using worry to avoid feelings

The act of worrying keeps our brains busy! While worry itself can be painful, it also helps us avoid painful emotions that may need some attention. Talk with your study clinician about ways that worry could be distracting you from other feelings such as sadness, anger, or grief.

### Replacing fears with smaller worries

We may replace larger fears (such as fears about cancer recurrence) with smaller worries that seem more manageable or controllable ("*I forgot to take my vitamins!*"). Worried thoughts become more like echoes of those larger fears.



*Do any of these three types of worry sound familiar to you? Do you recognize any of them in yourself? In other people you know? How are your worries helpful? How are they not helpful?*

## Managing uncertainty by: taking a step

In some cases, you will be able to reduce negative emotions related to uncertainty by taking some kind of action. Can you think of a time when it helped to shine a light on some area of uncertainty and take a step toward reducing it?

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### Is it time for change? *(and can I make this change?)*

---

Now consider the areas of uncertainty in your life, and the worries that you experience. Try answering the five problem-solving questions below:



- 1 What is one aspect of uncertainty, whether big or small, that I could address by taking an action?
- 2 What are possible actions that I could take? (list all ideas, no matter how silly or impossible they sound)
- 3 Which action is most likely to work for me?
- 4 What could get in the way of taking this action?
- 5 What are ways to make it easier or more possible for me to take this action?

After you take an action, a key final question to ask yourself is:

## Does my action reduce my distress... or keep it going?

This is an important question to ask. However, it is not always an easy question to answer. You may need time to understand how your action affects you.

Here is an example:

*You want to reduce your worry about whether your cancer could come back or spread before your next scan. You decide to act by checking your body for signs of cancer or checking the internet for new information about your cancer. This action makes you feel better in the moment. Over time, you find that you are repeating these checks each day to feel better. You stay worried until you can do your usual daily check. In this case, your action may be helpful in the moment but unhelpful in the longer term. Your daily checks may be giving you an unhelpful sense of control over cancer recurrence.*



Think back to an action that you recently took to cope with uncertainty. How did this action impact you in the moment? In the longer term?

Now look back on your answers to the five problem-solving questions on the prior page, and the action you have decided to take. How could this action impact you in the moment? In the longer term? How well does the action fit the uncertainty that you are trying to address?

For some aspects of uncertainty, it may take time to find a helpful action to take. For other aspects of uncertainty, using acceptance coping may be a good fit. We'll discuss acceptance coping next.

## Managing uncertainty by: **sitting still**

After cancer treatment, certain aspects of life may feel more uncertain or outside of your control. Remember that **change skills and acceptance skills go hand in hand**. Whether or not there are more steps to take, you still will need to sit with some degree of uncertainty -- and the emotions that come along with it. Acceptance involves managing how much uncertainty affects you from day to day. It means acknowledging your emotions about uncertainty and allowing them to come along for the ride **without taking the wheel**.

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### **Is it time for acceptance?** *(and how do I bear what I can't change?)*

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Before we practice the acceptance exercises in this session, let's take a closer look at what acceptance coping means.

**Acceptance is a choice** to recognize what is happening on the outside or what you are thinking and feeling on the inside in any given moment. This choice is different from railing against a difficult situation, forcing yourself to feel differently, avoiding it, letting it sweep you under, or throwing up your hands in defeat. For instance, when you recognize and allow for what is going on in a given moment, this frees you up to tend to any difficult feelings and make even more choices about moving forward.

Try out the two exercises on the following pages to help you sit with difficult thoughts and feelings related to uncertainty. Practice these exercises during this session and on your own from day to day. See which ones are most helpful to you. Each exercise focuses on helping you to recognize and accept worried thoughts without letting them be in charge, so that you can return to the present moment and your plans and goals for the present day.





## Practicing Acceptance ①: Mindful Awareness of Emotions

Stop, reflect, and name a thought or worry that is on your mind (*I am thinking...*). Repeat it slowly to yourself. Then turn your focus toward identifying and naming whatever emotions and sensations you feel in the moment. (*Example: I am thinking about what would happen if my cancer came back. I am feeling angry. I am feeling sad. I am feeling nostalgic for the past.*) Then follow the guided instructions below:

**Option 1:** Imagine that each emotion you have named is a breeze blowing through the open windows and doors of an empty house. Feel each breeze as fierce or gentle... fast or slow... loud or silent. Whatever seems right to you. Imagine each breeze blowing in, sweeping through, and blowing out. Reminding yourself that emotions are real... and you can tolerate them. As the breeze can sway you... emotions can move you. You have the strength to tolerate them. Reminding yourself that emotions are real... and they are temporary. Just as the breeze sweeps in and out... your emotions move in... and eventually... they move out.



**Option 2:** Imagine that each emotion you have named is an ocean wave that comes up to shore. Feel each wave as fierce or gentle... fast or slow... loud or silent. Whatever seems right to you. Imagine each wave coming up to shore, reaching the sand, and retreating back out. In and out.... In and out. Reminding yourself that emotions are real... and that you can tolerate them. As the waves can sway you... your emotions can move you. You have the strength to tolerate them. Reminding yourself that emotions are real... and they are temporary. Just as the waves come in and out... your emotions move in... and eventually... they move out.

## Practicing Acceptance ②: Dialectical Thinking

Many thoughts run through your mind at any given moment. And seemingly opposite thoughts can be true at the same time. **Widen your lens.** Acknowledge opposite thoughts, so that you can see the bigger picture of your life without sacrificing one thought or the other. We call this **dialectical thinking.**



Here is how one person described two seemingly opposite thoughts or two seemingly different aspects of her day, about two months after she finished her cancer treatment:

*Example: I am worrying today about what my next scans will show AND I am enjoying my time with my daughter today and excited about how much she has grown.*

Why is this important? By acknowledging two seemingly opposite thoughts at the same time, you do not have to fight, avoid or ignore one aspect of your reality while prioritizing another. You do not have to criticize yourself for whatever thoughts come to your mind. In the spaces below, turn three worried thoughts that you have identified into statements that capture different aspects of your reality at the same time. Use these statements to allow the worry to come along for the ride without taking charge:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



**Closing point and next steps.** Take time this week to notice how you may be coping with uncertainty in your life. Think about how change skills and acceptance skills go hand in hand. Identify areas where you want to take some action. Identify areas where you want to practice more acceptance. Practice the three acceptance exercises and see which one helps you reduce the negative effects of worry. Discuss your experiences with your study clinician and others you trust.

Promise me you will not spend so much time treading water  
and trying to keep your head above the waves  
that you forget, truly forget, how much  
you have always loved to swim.

-- Tyler Knott Gregson

Plans for this week:

- Practice: stop, rewind, revise
- Take a step toward reducing uncertainty (page 53):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Practice mindful awareness of emotions (page 57)
- Practice dialectical thinking (page 58)
- Other:



# Session 5

## Looking Ahead



**“In the end, it all begins”**

— Saji Ijiyemi

# Session 5 Introduction

**During this program**, you practiced different skills to help you increase or maintain your quality of life. This is a chance to think about what was important to you during your participation in this program, and how to keep the important aspects in mind as you move forward.

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## Agenda:

Review material and practice from last week

### Session 5 content

Finding your coping balance

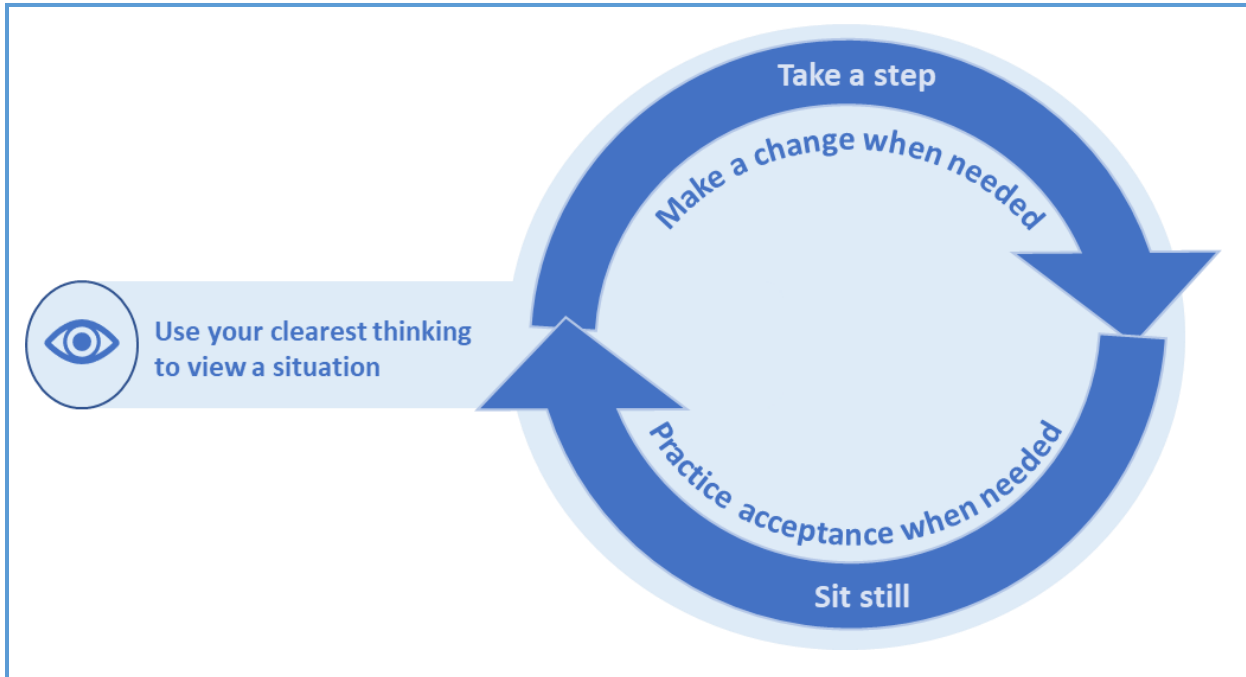
Program review: maintaining your skills

Looking ahead

## Finding your coping balance

In this program you took time to think about, talk about, and address your current quality of life. You practiced a range of change skills and acceptance skills as part of a 'big picture' coping strategy.

### Transitions Program Coping Strategy:



The following questions go hand in hand, and they each have value in their own way:

**Is there room for change?**

**Is there room for acceptance?**

The most helpful balance between change and acceptance will depend on your own preferences and the situation at hand. Throughout this program, what have you noticed about your usual balance between change and acceptance? Which type of coping do you tend to favor? At any point in time, it can be helpful to shine a light on the balance that you are striking. Test out adjustments to your coping strategy and see how that impacts your quality of life.

## Program review: maintaining your skills

Consider the efforts you've made to improve your quality of life and take care of your wellbeing. Use the table below to review the key skills and strategies that you practiced. Plan for ways to keep practicing. Make notes about what you want to remember.

Skills and strategies	Notes
<b>Increasing awareness and understanding of current experiences</b>	
Hopes, expectations and goals for the future	
Thought distortions	
Relationships among thoughts, feelings and behaviors	
Support give-and-take	
Areas of uncertainty	
<b>Viewing things in a helpful and true way</b>	
Stop, rewind and revise	
Making sense of your concern	
<b>Change coping</b>	
Planning for change	
Gathering information and using self-care	
Building new connections	
<b>Acceptance coping</b>	
Mindful awareness of emotions	
Mindful awareness of body sensations	
Dialectical thinking	
Helpful states of mind	
Getting engaged	
Empathy	
Self-compassion	
Loving kindness meditation	



## Looking ahead

Use any of the following prompts to reflect on aspects of your program participation that were important to you and to make future plans.

**Participating in the program showed me or reminded me that I have the following strengths:**

**Participating in this program introduced me to the following new skills or ideas:**

**Participating in this program gave me a chance to:**

**After this program ends, I would like to learn more about the following:**

**After this program ends, I plan to keep doing or practicing the following:**

**For whatever I plan to keep doing or practicing, here is how I will make it (or keep it) a habit:**



**Closing point.** Thank you for participating in this program! Your thoughts and feelings about cancer may change as you get further past treatment. By developing a big picture coping strategy today, you can continue applying this strategy into the future and set your sights on maintaining a quality of life that matters to you.

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

-- Steve Jobs