

Join the D.O.T.S.

We all naturally try to avoid or get rid of painful or unpleasant thoughts & feelings. The aim of this exercise is a) to find out which methods you use, and b) what effects those methods may have *in the long term*. NB: *Please do this with genuine curiosity! Please **do not** start judging these methods as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, ‘positive’ or ‘negative’.* The aim is simply to find out if these methods are **workable** – i.e. do they work *in the long term* to give you a rich and meaningful life? (Obviously, if any of these methods *do* actually improve your life *in the long term*, keep doing them!)

What are the main thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, emotions, urges that you do not want?

D - Distraction: what do you do to distract yourself from, or ‘take your mind off’ painful thoughts & feelings? (e.g. movies, TV, internet, books, computer games, exercise, gardening, gambling, food, drugs, alcohol)

O - Opting out: what *important, meaningful or life-enhancing* activities, events, tasks, challenges, or people, do you avoid, quit, escape, procrastinate, or withdraw from? (If they’re not *important, meaningful or life-enhancing*, then opting out is no problem!)

T- Thinking strategies: how do you try (consciously or not) to think your way out of pain? Tick any of the following that you have done, and write in any others:

Worrying; Dwelling on the past; Fantasizing about the future; Imagining escape scenarios (eg leaving your job or your partner) or revenge scenarios; Thinking ‘It’s not fair ...’ or ‘If only’; Blaming yourself, others, or the world; Talking logically and rationally to yourself; Positive thinking; Positive affirmations; Judging or criticizing yourself; Giving yourself a hard time; Analyzing yourself (trying to figure out why you are like this); Analyzing the situation (trying to figure out why this happened); Analyzing others (trying to figure out why they are like this); Planning; Strategizing; Constructive problem-solving; Making To Do lists; Repeating inspirational sayings or proverbs; Challenging or disputing negative thoughts; Telling yourself ‘This too shall pass’ or ‘It may never happen’.

Other thinking strategies:

S – Substances & other Strategies: what substances do you use put into your body to avoid or get rid of pain, (include foods, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, naturopathic and herbal remedies, and prescription medication)? Any other Strategies you use to get rid of or avoid pain (e.g. yoga, meditation, having affairs, aggressiveness, Tai Chi, massage, exercise, picking fights, dancing, music, suicide attempts, self-harming, prayer, smashing things, staying in bed, self-help books, seeing a therapist, mindfulness)?

Now consider this: do these methods get rid of your unwanted thoughts and feelings, so they *never come back*?

So clearly, some of these methods are helpful, *if you use them **flexibly, moderately, sensibly*** – in which case, keep using them! However, when you have **over-relied** on these methods – used them **excessively, rigidly, or inappropriately** - what have they cost you in terms of health, money, wasted time, relationships, missed opportunities, work, increased pain, etc?

So how many of these methods give you some relief from pain *in the short term*, but keep you stuck or make your life worse *in the long term*: ‘none’ ‘a few’ ‘about half’ ‘most’ ‘all’?

You’ve tried very hard for a long time to get rid of these thoughts & feelings, and it’s not working; they keep coming back! And often what you do to get rid of them makes life worse in the long term. What’s it like to acknowledge that?

Given that a) no matter what you do, painful thoughts and feelings *keep coming back*, and b) trying very hard to avoid or get rid of them often makes life worse *in the long term* – would you be open to learning a ‘new way’ of responding to them; a method that is radically different to everything else you’ve tried ?