

## Exercise: Join the DOTS

We all naturally try to avoid or get rid of painful or unpleasant thoughts and feelings. The aim of this exercise is:

- a) to find out which methods you use
- b) what effects those methods may have *in the long term*.

NB: Please **do this non-judgmentally** – 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 these methods 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!

### D – Distraction:

What do you do to distract yourself from, or ‘take your mind’ off’ painful thoughts and 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? Circle 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

(Source: Russ Harris 2013)

- Positive thinking
- Positive affirmations
- Judging or criticising yourself
- Giving yourself a hard time
- Analysing yourself (trying to figure out why you are like this)
- Analysing the situation (trying to figure out why this happened)
- Analysing 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 you use:**

**S – Substances and 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 medications)? Any other strategies you use to avoid pain (e.g. yoga, meditation, having affairs, aggressiveness, Tai Chi, massage, exercise, picking fights, dancing, music, prayer, throwing things, staying in bed, self-help books, seeing a therapist)?

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

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, or increased emotional pain?