**Scripts for Tips CDs**

**Week 1: Tips from Pain Management Discussion Group #01: [*Comments in brackets not read*.]**

Each week, we will give you an audio recording with tips from the discussion group, usually as a CD. We’d like you to listen to this CD at least once during the week, just to remind yourself about the group. Listening to the Tips CD also helps remind you to think about—and practice—what you learned in the discussion group. We will also give you a recording of a relaxation exercise, a number of different ones over the course of the study. We’d like you to do the relaxation exercise at least three days during the week following the group meeting.

**[Review of This Week]**

This week, we learned about chronic pain, the stress and pain connection, and ways to judge a stressful situation.

Chronic pain is pain that lasts for longer 3 months, hurts most days, and limits what you can do. Surprisingly, at least 3 out 10 people have chronic pain. Although there are different causes and each person’s pain is different, there are also a lot of common things that people with pain share. Your pain is real. These groups can’t cure your pain, but they can teach you new information and skills to manage your pain.

Stress is a reaction of your body, including your brain, to situations that seem overwhelming. Stressors can be any problem in life. When you don’t think that you can cope with something that’s happening to you, or happening around you, then you feel pressure, and your body and your mind begin responding in an effort to defend you.

* **Your body** reacts to stress by tightening up the muscles, increasing your blood pressure and heart rate, and pumping stress chemicals into your blood stream. Your body’s reaction to stress is to prepare you to fight for your life, or run for your life!
* Your mind reacts to stress by translating the situation into negative **emotions** – things like feeling mad, sad, worried, or scared.
* Your mind also causes you to have **thoughts** about the stressful event, and you may find yourself saying very negative things about the situation.
* Finally, your **actions** or behaviors also change as a result of feeling stress: you are more likely to withdraw (or run away) when you are stressed, or sometimes, you may lash out at others (or fight) when you are feeling stressed.

Pain itself can be a stressor. It can cause the same negative reactions in your body, your emotions, your thoughts, and your behaviors. And other stressors, even if they are not related to pain, can certainly make pain worse.

This week, we also learned that the way you judge a situation makes all the difference in how you cope with it. We usually judge a stressful situation to be negative or positive. When we view it negative, we see it as a “threat” or a “loss.” When we judge a stressor to be a threat, we are likely to feel worried or afraid and avoid the stressor if at all possible. When we judge a situation to be a threat, we also tend to think thoughts that make us even more nervous. For example, we may tell ourselves that things are really bad and likely to get worse, which (of course!) makes things much worse! When we judge a stressor to be a loss, we are likely to feel sad or depressed and to withdraw and give up. We tend to think thoughts that increase the chances that we will give in and give up. For example, we might tell ourselves that we may as well give up on trying to become the person we want to be—that our time has passed. These judgments about stressful situations make the situation worse than it was to begin with. If we can learn how powerful our judgments are, and if we can learn how to recognize negative judgments, we can start taking more control over stressful situations.

One way to take control is to look at a stressor as a challenge. Even if it’s just a little bit, if we can see some part of our stressful situation as a challenge, we are more likely to feel some positive energy, to give solutions a try, and to help ourselves instead of hurting ourselves.

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
The first relaxation exercise—and the first tool in your new Pain Toolbox!—was called “**First Aid for Stress**.”We taught you how to take 20 breaths to feel less stressed. It is a short relaxation exercise, one that you can take with you anywhere you go. Learning how to pay attention to your breathing allows you to be able to quiet your body and your mind. The more you practice, the better you get at it. You can use **First Aid for Stress** in the middle of a hectic day or during a frustrating situation, just to calm yourself.

When you feel stressed, stop and notice how your body feels. Then, sit down and take 20 slow breaths. Breathing in, nice and slow, and breathing out for a little longer than you breathed in. Not straining or forcing the air. Letting yourself be comfortable and relaxed. Do 20 breaths so that your body can really feel the difference. Then, see how you feel! Does your body feel different? Practice this at least 3 times during the next week.

See you next week at next week’s discussion group!

**Week 2: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**
Last week, we learned about chronic pain, the stress and pain connection, and ways to judge a stressful situation. We learned that chronic pain lasts longer than 3 months, hurts most days, and limits what you can do. We also learned that it is fairly common, real, and different for different people. Although there is no cure, there is a lot you can do to manage the pain. We also talked about how stress can make your pain worse and how pain can make you more stressed. This negative cycle affects your body, your emotions, your thoughts, and your behavior. We also learned that there are positive and negative ways to think of a stressful situation and that how you view a situation makes all the difference in how you cope with it. If we see a stressful situation in a positive light, we’ll see it as a challenge we can work towards overcoming, and we will have more energy to manage our pain. If we see it in a negative light, we may get sad or scared, and we will be more limited in what we can do. If we can learn to see situations in a positive light, though—as a challenge we can face—we can start taking more control over stressful situations.

**[Review of This Week]**
This week, we learned how you can take charge of your pain, how pain works in the brain, and how you can start to change your pain. First, we talked about how you can Put Yourself in Charge of managing your pain. By thinking, “I can do it!,” you can grow a stronger belief in yourself that you can manage your pain and your life.

We also learned how pain works in the brain. Remember that it is the brain that tells us whether we are in pain or not. Sometimes, even if we have a broken or worn out body part, we don’t feel much pain. And sometimes, even if the broken body part is physically healed, we still feel pain. The key to understanding this is to understand more about how the brain works.

On the way up to the brain, pain signals from the body go through a “gate” in the spine that can let a lot of pain signals through or only a few pain signals through. How wide open the gate is depends on the brain. The brain sends signals down the spine to control the gate so that it opens wide or closes shut. When the gate is open wide, you might feel a lot of pain. When the gate is only open a little, you might feel just a little pain.

In the brain, there are “Thought Centers” and “Feeling Centers” that send these signals to the gate. We know that certain moods or emotions make the gate wider—things like depression, anger, and worry. Certain kinds of thoughts also make the gate wider—things like focusing on the pain itself, telling yourself there is nothing you can do, or thinking that you are a failure. Certain actions can also affect the gate. Inactivity or resting too much can make the gate wider, and using pain medication for a long period of time can lead to worse pain.

The good news is that there are also things that make the pain gate smaller! Positive moods, like being happy, hopeful, or joyful, and helpful thoughts like “I can do this” or “I am learning new things every day” can make the pain gate smaller. Other things like exercise, an active life, physical therapy, and massage can make the gate smaller. Relaxation exercises also make the gate smaller, so we will be teaching you several relaxation exercises during these discussion groups. The bottom line is that you can learn things that you can do yourself to make the pain gate smaller, and the aim of this discussion group is to teach you those things.

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
This week’s relaxation exercise was called “Breathing Space.” It is a short relaxation exercise that builds on First Aid for Stress to teach you how to adjust your body’s reaction to stress and pain. Like the First Aid, you can take it with you anywhere you go. Learning how to focus your awareness on your breathing allows you to be able to quiet your body and your mind. The more you practice, the better you get at it. You can use the breathing space exercise in the middle of a hectic day or during a frustrating situation, just to calm yourself. We generally sit upright when we do this exercise, relaxed, but not slouching in the chair. Your body gets used to the signal of sitting upright as a cue for relaxing with the breath. Listen to your audio recording each day, and remember what situation you were in and how it helped you so that you can tell us about it the next time we meet.

See you at the next discussion group!

**Week 3: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**Last week, we learned about “Putting Yourself in Charge.” We talked about how growing a feeling of “I know I can do it!” inside yourself can lead you to believe in yourself more strongly and help you manage your pain and your life better.

We also learned about a new idea of how pain works called “Pain is in the Brain.” This idea is better than the old idea that pain is caused by broken or worn-out body parts. The new idea means that the pain you feel comes from the way the brain processes signals sent from your body. Remember, it is the brain that tells us whether we are in pain or not. Fortunately, pain is a two-way street because the brain can also send signals to a gate in your spine. This gate can open wider to let more pain signals through or it can close smaller to let fewer pain signals through.

In the brain, there are “Thought Centers” and “Feeling Centers” that send these signals to the gate to open it or close it. Feelings like sad or mad; thoughts like telling yourself there is nothing you can do; or actions like resting too much can make the gate wider. The good news is that there are also things that make the pain gate smaller. Positive feelings, like being happy or hopeful, and helpful thoughts, like “I am learning new things every day,” can make the pain gate smaller. Other things like exercise, an active life, and relaxation can also make the gate smaller. The bottom line was that there are lots of things you can do to lower your pain.

**[Review of This Week]**

We began this week’s group by talking about what pain behaviors are. Behaviors are actions that others can see. One way we let people know we are in pain is by our pain behaviors. These can be words, facial expressions or other kinds of actions like limping or using a cane. Some pain behaviors help us, like resting and propping up our feet when we need to. Other pain behaviors may hurt us, like if we rest too much we begin to get weak and we are able to do less and less over time.

Most of this discussion group was spent talking about getting active. By “getting active”, we mean not only increasing your physical activity, but also making sure you do activities that are enjoyable, meaningful, or pleasurable to you. It’s easy to let pleasant activities get sidelined by the “have to’s” in our lives, but it is very important to make time for pleasant activities. We asked you to think of some activities that you enjoy. We also asked you to schedule in and do at least 3 small pleasurable activities during the next week. These do not have to be big things, but they usually need to be planned. In planning for the activity, be as specific as possible. When will you try it? Who will you do it with? Where are you going to do it? What are some of the roadblocks you might come across? How will you get around them?

There are also many reasons why it is important to increase your level of physical activity in your life. You may feel that your chronic pain makes it impossible for you to be physically active, and we realize that there are things you may no longer be able to do that you once did. But being physically active is important for your overall health, your mood, and your pain. Physical activity helps keep your muscles stronger, which helps support your spine and other bones and joints. Everyone is different when it comes to what kind of activity they can do and how long they can do it.

Pacing your physical activity is the key to being active without injuring yourself or causing pain flare-ups. The idea behind pacing is that when we have pain, we tend to “underdo” so that we reduce the chances of a pain flare-up, or we tend to “overdo” because we want to make up for lost time. Both underdoing and overdoing can get us into trouble. Pacing yourself involves learning to recognize the body’s signals that it is time to push yourself a little or it is time to back off a little.

Sometimes, people try to do too much too fast, and then they get pain or get discouraged and quit. If you pick a gentle activity, like walking, and start doing it a little bit at a time, you are more likely to stick with it. You’re also more likely to feel better after doing it. The goal is not to exercise to the point of being exhausted or to the point of feeling pain, but to do a little something that you know you can do, then rest, then repeat it. Over time, you will be able to increase you level of activity if you go slow and you do it often. Finding the right balance between rest and activity will help you feel less pain in the long run. We want you to experiment with pacing a physical activity at least 3 times this week.

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
This week’s relaxation exercise was called **“Warm & Heavy.”** It is a quick relaxation exercise that teaches you how to adjust your body’s reaction to stress and pain. It is designed to help teach your body and mind to be quiet and relax. This exercise is aimed at balancing out your body’s responses, so that the body doesn’t over-react to stress and pain and make things worse. Adding to the focus on the breath, you learn how to focus on certain sensations or feelings in the body and imagine, or create feelings of warmth and heaviness. These feelings help quiet down the nervous system so that it is less reactive overall. The more you practice, the better you get at it. Listen to your relaxation recording each day, and remember how many times you did it and what effect it had on your stress.

See you at the next discussion group!

**Week 4: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**Last week, we talked about actions related to our pain. These include both reactions to our pain (Pain Behaviors) and actions we can take to lower our pain (Pleasant Events & Physical Activity).

Pain behaviors are actions that others can see: words, facial expressions or other kinds of actions like limping or using a cane. We don’t always know when we’re showing them, and others may react to them in ways we can’t guess beforehand. Also, some pain behaviors may help us initially (like resting an injured limb) but later may start to hurt us if we keep doing them (like getting weak from resting too much).

We also talked about actions we can take to lower our pain. “Getting Active” means both increasing your physical activity AND making sure you do activities that are enjoyable, meaningful, or pleasurable to you. Being physically active is important for your overall health, your mood, and your pain. It helps keep your muscles stronger, which helps support your spine and other bones and joints. Pacing your physical activity is the key to being active without injuring yourself or causing pain flare-ups. By starting a little bit at a time and doing just a little less than what we know we can do without pain—then resting and repeating—we avoid “overdoing it” and paying for it the next day OR “underdoing it” and gradually doing less and less. Pacing yourself teaches you to know the body’s signals that it is time to push yourself a little or it is time to back off a little. Over time, you will be able to increase you level of activity if you go slow and you do it often. It is also very important to MAKE time for pleasant activities. We asked you to think of some activities that you enjoy and schedule them in several times throughout the week.

By “Getting Active,” you can take steps to a fuller life with less pain.

**[Review of This Week]**This week, we learned about depression and other common mood changes associated with chronic pain. We learned that feeling sad, scared, or mad are very common reactions to chronic pain that sometimes lead to depression or anxiety. The “Getting Active” skills that we asked you to experiment with last week are good ways to help you manage negative moods.

Another way to manage strong emotions and negative moods is to open up, express, and let go of, strong emotions—without hurting others or making other people uncomfortable. It’s important to have a way of being able to express strong emotions instead of letting them get bottled up inside you or causing you to lash out at those around you. Many of us are uncomfortable with our strong emotions. We might be scared that if we admit to strong emotions, especially the negative ones, we might get “swallowed up” or “swept away” by them. What really happens, though, is if we keep these feelings bottled up inside of us, they will eat away at us and have a negative effect on our physical and emotional wellbeing. So how should we open up to strong emotions? Many of us are afraid that we will hurt others, or turn them away from us, by talking about our strong feelings, especially if they are negative. The “**Express Yourself**” exercise allows you to open up, express, and let go of strong emotions. And it is meant just for you — not as a way of communicating with others.

There are two ways you can express yourself. You can write about your feelings and thoughts, or you can talk about them, perhaps into a voice recorder. You can write or talk about any feelings: Your feelings about your pain…. Changes you have made because of your pain….your childhood… your loved ones….your ideas about who you are now or who you want to be in the future. You can keep what you write or you can throw it away. You can save what you say into the recorder or you can erase it. It’s completely up to you.

We’d like you to do the “Express Yourself” exercise at least 3 times during this week. Each time you do the Express Yourself activity, write or talk for 10 minutes. When you write or talk, do it just for you! You do not have to share this with anyone. You can write or talk about anything you want. It is normal to experience many different feelings during this activity. You might feel sad. You might feel mad or even scared. In fact, some people say that at first, doing the exercise made them feel sad or mad. Later on, those same people said that it really helped them to write about and then let go of the strong feelings. It’s OK to write or talk about your sad or mad feelings. If you become too upset about your words, you can always change the subject. The important thing is to keep writing or talking.

Remember: The Express Yourself activity is just for you. You are in charge!

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
This week’s relaxation exercise was called “**Thoughts & Feelings**” relaxation. It works to help you become more aware of all the small things that are happening in your body and mind. Like the other relaxation exercises you’ve learned, this relaxation exercise helps teach your body and mind to be quiet and relax. This exercise is aimed at helping you observe your body and your mind, without judging what is happening or reacting to it. Your goal is simply to notice it. This relaxation exercise introduces the powerful idea of “acceptance”: when you accept your thoughts and feelings the way they really are—when you stop fighting things that are happening, you find that you can manage things better! Acceptance in no way means that you are giving in or giving up. Acceptance means to let go of judging. The more you practice, the better you get at it. Listen to your relaxation CD at least 3 times before the next session.

See you at the next discussion group!

**Week 5: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**Last week, we learned about how sadness and other common emotions are tied to our chronic pain. We learned that feeling sad, scared, or mad are very common reactions to chronic pain that sometimes lead to depression, anxiety, or other problems. Two ways to manage negative emotions—and the stress that goes along with them—are the last two Gate Closers: “Get Active” and “Express Yourself!”

Last week, you learned **Express Yourself** as a new way to *Close the Pain Gate*. You do this when you open up, express, and let go of strong emotions, without hurting others or making them upset. Many of us are uncomfortable with our strong emotions, but if we keep these feelings bottled up inside us, they eat away at us and have a negative effect on our physical and emotional wellbeing. Many of us are also scared that we will hurt others, or turn them away from us by talking about our strong feelings, especially when they are negative. The “**Express Yourself**” exercise allows you to open up, express, and let go of strong emotions—without bothering anyone else—because it is meant just for you, not as a way of talking to others.

All you have to do is write about your feelings and thoughts—maybe on a piece of paper or in a notebook—or talk about them—maybe to yourself or into a voice recorder so you can listen to them again later. You can write or talk about any feelings: *Your feelings about your pain…. Changes you have made because of your pain….your childhood… your loved ones….your ideas about who you are now or who you want to be in the future.* It is normal to experience many different feelings during this activity. You might feel sad, mad, or even scared. Some people say that at first, doing the exercise made them feel sad or mad, but later on, those same people said that it had really helped them to write about and then let go of the strong feelings. If you become too upset about your words, you can always change the subject. The important thing is to keep writing or talking. When you’re done, you can keep what you write or you can throw it away. It’s completely up to you. We wanted you to do this 3 times for 10 minutes at a time, but most of all, we wanted you to remember that the Express Yourself activity is just for you. You are in charge!

**[Review of This Week]**This week, we learned about the ways we can talk to someone: Attack talk, Retreat talk, and Stand Tall talk. Lots of people have problems asking for what they need or want in a clear and direct way. Often, we feel weak, like we don’t have the right to ask for what we need, or mad when our needs aren’t met.

* Sometimes, when we feel mad that people aren’t meeting our needs, we may use **Attack** talk, demanding that we get our way, fussing or even yelling at others because we feel “wronged” or hurt. It sounds like, *“I’m always right and strong! You are always weak and wrong! My needs are more important than your needs!”* Attack talk doesn’t work because it makes others feel angry or scared, and usually drives others away from us.
* When we feel like we don’t have a right to ask for what we need or want, we may use **Retreat** talk, wishing and hoping people would know what we need, or sometimes feeling like “doormats” because others are “walking all over us.” It sounds like*, “You are always right and powerful! I am always weak and wrong. Your needs are more important than my needs.”*  Retreat talk doesn’t work because people can’t read minds! We have to tell them what we want or need. As we discussed in the group, everyone has that right. Asking the right way does not guarantee that you will get your wants and needs met, but it helps people know what it is that you want.
* **Stand Tall** talk is a way of simply and directly asking for what you want and need without saying you’re sorry or seeming mad. Standing Tall and stating directly what you want or need is a brave thing to do. Standing Tall means that you are taking responsibility for your own feelings and for getting your needs met in a healthy way.

 To get started with Standing Tall, make a plan for what you want to say. Pick a problem situation in your life, but don’t choose the biggest one. *What is your problem situation? Who is involved? How does this situation make you feel? What do you want – what would you like to happen? What is your normal way to deal with this problem? And finally, what do you think will happen if you Stand Tall in this situation?* As you start to plan your Stand Tall talk, think about a good time and place for you to meet and talk about the situation with the person involved. You might want to write out the problem ahead of time. Then, write out what you want to say using your Stand Tall talk. Remember that saying no can also be Stand Tall talk. You have a right to say no. You don’t have to be nervous or Retreat, and you don’t have to be mean or Attack. Saying no in a polite, simple, and direct way, without apologizing, is a good example of Stand Tall talk.

Remember **The 4 steps to Standing Tall using “I”-messages**:

1. Say what the problem is in a simple and direct way and ask for one thing at a time.
2. Tell the other person what it is like for you when the problem happens—usually, that means telling them how the problem has a bad effect on you and how it makes you feel.
3. Tell the other person what change you would like to see happen.
4. Say how the change would be good for you and for the other person.

In general, when doing your Stand Tall talk, use “I” rather than “you” statements. That means to talk about yourself more than the other person. Don’t accuse the other person of “not caring” or “being a bad person.” That could ruin all the effort you’ve put into planning your Stand Tall talk! If you have to complain about the person you are talking to, focus on their behavior, not who they are as a person. When you Stand Tall, people know exactly what you want, and they may not put up their defenses so quickly. You may not always get what you want, but you’ll feel better about talking this way! Try using Stand Tall talk **at least 3 times** this week.

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
Our relaxation exercise this week was called “Images Relaxation.” In this relaxation exercise, you created a special place in your mind where you can go for relaxation and guidance. Make this place peaceful, comfortable, and safe. When you visualize this special place, try to use all of your senses — sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch — in order to make this place in your mind as real as possible. We want you to try this exercise **at least 3 times** in the coming week.

See you at the next discussion group!

**Week 6: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**Last week, we learned how to ask for what we want in a clear, direct way using Stand Tall talk. Instead of Attack talk, which can make people angry or scared, or Retreat talk, which forces other people to read your mind, Stand Tall talk helps you take responsibility for your own feelings and get your needs met in a healthy way. To get started Standing Tall, make a plan for what you want to say. Pick a problem situation in your life, but don’t choose the biggest one. Think about a good time and place for you to meet and talk about the situation with the person involved. Then, write out what you want to say. Try The 4 steps to Standing Tall using “I”-messages:

1. Say what the problem is in a simple and direct way and ask for one thing at a time.
2. Tell the other person what it is like for you when the problem happens. Usually, that means telling them how the problem has a bad effect on you and how it makes you feel.
3. Tell the other person what change you would like to see happen.
4. Say how the change would be good for you and for the other person.

Remember that demanding that we get our way, fussing or even yelling at others because we feel “wronged” or hurt, is not Standing Tall. That’s Attack talk, and it can make others be scared of us or resent us—or worse! Also, being afraid of saying what we need, wishing and hoping people would know what we need without saying it, is not Stand Tall talk. That’s Retreat talk and it may leave us feeling like “doormats” and not getting our needs met because others can’t read our minds.

Keep in mind that saying No can also be Stand Tall talk. You have a right to say No, and you don’t have to be nervous and Retreat or be mean and Attack. Just say No in a polite, simple, and direct way, without apologizing. That’s a good example of Stand Tall talk.

**[Review of This Week]**This week, we learned a lot more about the importance of our thoughts, both helpful and unhelpful. We learned that what we think really does affect our emotions, our actions, and our bodies. You’ll remember that thoughts affect the amount of pain we feel because they can work to open or close the pain gate, so paying attention to our thoughts can help us to have more control over our pain. These thoughts can be completely true, partly true, or not true at all, but they can still affect our pain a lot!

Unhelpful thoughts are thoughts that work against us—they can make our pain worse! Unhelpful thoughts can make us feel helpless and out of control, and make us feel like things are much worse than they really are. Unhelpful thoughts often lead us to stop doing things that we really want to do.

Helpful thoughts are thoughts that work for us—they can make our pain better. They can make us feel more in control and able to do the things we need to do to manage our pain. They can lead us to feel like things aren’t as bad as we may have thought. Helpful thoughts usually lead us to do more of the things we really want to do.

* Often, our thoughts are just simple **statements** we think to ourselves without even noticing. They can be helpful, unhelpful, or even harmful! An unhelpful thought might be: “Oh, I just can’t handle this back pain!” A helpful thought might be: “My pain is not so bad today.”
* Other thoughts are **rules** we have about how things “should” be, “ought to be,” or are “supposed to be” with ourselves, others, or the world. An unhelpful thought might be: “I should have taken better care of my health.” A helpful thought is “If I do the right things to take care of myself, my pain will probably get better.”
* Other thoughts are beliefs that are dug in **deeper**. They are the strongest and toughest to change, but we can change them with some effort. An unhelpful belief might be: “I’m less of a person because of my pain.” Or a helpful belief: “I am a whole person with chronic pain.” Carrying around unhelpful thoughts weighs us down like carrying a bunch of heavy bags.

During the coming week, practice noticing what unhelpful thoughts you carry around with you. Start by paying attention to your feelings. When your mood changes—when you get sad or mad or scared—think about what situation you were just in. Think about the thoughts you were just thinking. Do those thoughts work for you or work against you? Try to remember at least 3 of these thoughts or situations so that, if you want, we can discuss them in the next session. When you become more aware of your thoughts and recognize what you are saying to yourself, you will have taken the first step in getting better control of what you tell yourself. We’ll talk about what we can do with these thoughts in the next few weeks.

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
For our relaxation exercise this week, we returned to “**Thoughts & Feelings**,” which we first learned in Week 4. Thoughts & Feelings relaxation is particularly powerful, so we want you to have lots of opportunities to practice it. For that reason, we’ll be asking you to do it for the next few weeks as well. This relaxation works to help you become more aware of all the small things that are happening in your body and mind. Like the other relaxation exercises you’ve learned, this relaxation exercise helps teach your body and mind to be quiet and relax. It also helps you learn to observe your body and your mind—your feelings and your thoughts—without judging what is happening or reacting to it. Your goal is simply to notice it. This relaxation exercise introduces the powerful idea of “acceptance”: when you accept your thoughts and feelings the way they really are—when you stop fighting things that are happening—you find that you can manage things better! Acceptance in no way means that you are giving in or giving up. Acceptance means to let go of judging. The more you practice, the better you get at it. Over time, you may notice that you get better at thinking thoughts without having your emotions get out of hand and that you also get better focusing your mind on one thing without it getting distracted. We’d like you to listen to your relaxation CD **at least 3 times** before the next session.

See you at the next discussion group!

**Week 7: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**Last week, we learned a lot more about the importance of our thoughts, both helpful and unhelpful. We learned that what we think really does affect our emotions, our actions, and our bodies, so paying attention to our thoughts can help us to have more control over our pain. Whether the thoughts are completely true, partly true, or not true at all, we can change them to open or close the pain gate.

We described thoughts as either unhelpful or helpful. Unhelpful thoughts are thoughts that work against us. They can make us feel helpless and out of control, and like things are much worse than they really are. When we think unhelpful thoughts, we stop doing things that we really want to do. Helpful thoughts are thoughts that work for us by making us feel more in control and able to do the things we need to do to manage our pain, and like things aren’t as bad as we may have thought. When we think helpful thoughts, we do more of the things we really want to do.

Thoughts can be helpful or unhelpful and can be weak, strong, or very strong, but usually, we don’t even realize we think them. **Simple statements** are ideas like “This pain is too much!” that we think without noticing. They are like leaves on a tree because there are lots of them but they are pretty easy to get rid of or just let blow away. **Rules** are thoughts like “If I were a better mother, I would never let pain keep me from playing with my kids” that tell us to do things a certain way. They’re stronger, like branches, and take more effort to change. **Beliefs** are thoughts like “No one loves me because I’m too hard to love” that we believe very strongly, usually from when we were kids. They are very strong and hidden deep within us like the roots on a tree. They are hard to change, but we can change them with time and effort.

Carrying around all these unhelpful thoughts weighs us down like carrying a bunch of heavy bags, but we can change them if we really want to. Start by noticing them. When you feel your emotions change—when you notice that you are feeling sad or scared or mad—think back to the situation that happened right before, and try to remember what you were thinking when it happened. Ask yourself if they were helpful or unhelpful. This was the first step in getting better control of your thoughts.

**[Review of This Week]**This week, we learned new ways of “thinking about our thinking.” We can have habits in our thinking that are really unhelpful. Sometimes when we’re thinking unhelpful thoughts, one thought leads to another, and then to another, and another, and another, until we’re feeling overwhelmed by an army of unhelpful thoughts. We call this **Snowballing**, and it can happen easily when we let our minds go to think unhelpful thoughts. Knowing this pattern helps us to notice when it is happening and stop our tumble! Another pattern is when we think of things as the worst they could possibly be. It’s as if everything is a total catastrophe! Which is why we call this pattern **Catastrophizing**. When we think unhelpful thoughts as if they are as bad as they could be, it makes us feel like there is nothing we could possibly do to make it better. But now that we know this pattern, we can recognize that things are usually not that bad, and we can look for things we CAN do to make it feel like less of a catastrophe. Another way we can tell when we are thinking unhelpful thoughts is when we notice **Red Flag Words**. Red Flag Words are words that describes extremes like “always,” “never,” “all the time,” “every time,” “ever,” “everyone,” and “no one.” When we use Red Flag Words, whatever we are saying is usually not totally true because most things are not that black and white.

Our Gate Closer for this week taught you how to “Change Your Unhelpful Thoughts” by acting like a jury.

* **Step 1** was to figure out what unhelpful thoughts you are having. What emotion are you feeling?
* **Step 2** is to think about the thought like a jury. Ask yourself: “What is the evidence that this thought is true?” and “What is the evidence that this thought is not true?” What’s your verdict? How true is it overall?
* **Step 3** is to come up with a new thought that is more **helpful** than the original thought. They are usually more true or real and more positive.

When you learn to recognize and question your unhelpful thoughts, you will have more control over them. By learning how to change your thoughts, you are learning to harness the power of the brain to help you manage your pain. You are also learning to have a different relationship to your thoughts—learning that maybe they aren’t the “all powerful truth,” but just thoughts. This new relationship with our thoughts takes some of the power away from the unhelpful ones—the ones that have done a lot of damage to our emotions and to our bodies. Before the next discussion group, try to change at least 3 unhelpful thoughts as they come up. Make a note to yourself or remember what the thought was and how you changed it, so that we can discuss it next week.

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
Our relaxation exercise again this week was “**Thoughts & Feelings**.” We are doing this relaxation several times during these discussion groups because Thoughts & Feelings is a particularly powerful relaxation exercise, and we want you to have lots of opportunities to practice it. This relaxation works to help you become more aware of all the small things that are happening in your body and mind. Like the other relaxation exercises you’ve learned, this relaxation exercise helps teach your body and mind to be quiet and relax. It also helps you learn to observe your body and your mind—your feelings and your thoughts—without judging what is happening or reacting to it. Your goal is simply to notice it. This relaxation exercise teaches you the powerful idea of “acceptance”: when you accept your thoughts and feelings the way they really are—when you stop fighting things that are happening—you find that you can manage things better! Acceptance in no way means that you are giving in or giving up. Acceptance means to let go of judging. The more you practice, the better you get at it. You may already be noticing that you are getting better at thinking thoughts without having your emotions get out of hand and that you are also getting better focusing your mind on one thing without it getting distracted. Listen to your relaxation CD **at least 3 times** before the next session.

See you at the next discussion group!

**Week 8: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**Last week, we learned new ways of “thinking about our thinking.” We can have habits in our thinking that are really unhelpful. **Snowballing** happens when one unhelpful thought leads to another, and then to another, and another, and another, until we’re feeling overwhelmed. Knowing this pattern helps us to notice when it’s happening and stop our tumble! Another pattern is **Catastrophizing**, which happens when we think of things in the worst case scenario—as if everything is a total catastrophe! Catastrophizing makes us feel like there is nothing we could possibly do to make it better, but now that we know this pattern, we can look for things we CAN do to change the situation. Another sign that a thought is unhelpful is when we hear **Red Flag Words**. Red Flag Words are words that describe extremes like “always,” “never,” and “all the time.” When we use Red Flag Words, whatever we’re saying is usually not totally true because most things are not that black and white.

The Gate Closer for last week taught you to “Change Your Unhelpful Thoughts” by *acting like a jury*.

* **Step 1** was to figure out what unhelpful thoughts you’re having., and what emotion you’re feeling.
* **Step 2** was to think about the thought like a jury. Ask yourself: “What is the evidence that this thought is true?” and “What is the evidence that this thought is not true?” What’s your verdict? How true is it overall?
* **Step 3** was to come up with a new thought that is more **helpful** than the original thought. They are usually more true or real and more positive.

When you learn to recognize and question your unhelpful thoughts, you are learning to harness the power of the brain to have more control over your thoughts, which can help you manage your pain. You are also learning that thoughts are just thoughts, not some “all powerful truth.” This new relationship with your thoughts takes some of the power away from the unhelpful ones—the ones that have done a lot of damage to our emotions and our bodies.

**[Review of This Week]**This week, we learned how our helpful and unhelpful thoughts can be anything from a little weak to really strong. Like the leaves on a tree, most **simple thoughts** are pretty weak and can be changed easily or let to blow away. However, deeper, stronger thoughts like Rules or Beliefs are harder to change and have an effect on our emotions, our bodies, and the way we cope. These deeper thoughts and beliefs may have stronger “hooks” than other thoughts. We call some of these strong thoughts Rules because they are the ideas we carry around in our heads about how we, others, and the world “should be,” “ought to be,” or “is supposed to be.” Like the branches on the tree, they are stronger and tougher than regular unhelpful thoughts. We call other strong thoughts Beliefs because they are even more deeply held ideas about our own worth as human beings. When things are going well in our lives, our beliefs are usually ok. But when things are going badly in our lives or we are stressed, negative beliefs come out and take hold of us. Like the roots of a tree, they can be very strong and very hard to get rid of. Of course, when we are dealing with chronic pain, we can become very stressed, causing a vicious cycle where our pain triggers our negative beliefs, which come out even more strongly and trigger more pain. This is why it’s especially important to learn to recognize, and challenge, our negative rules and beliefs. It is hard, but you can do it.

In your **Gate Closer** this week, we told you about three ways to change rules and beliefs:

1. First, ask yourself how your belief helps or hurts you.
2. Second, “*Act As If”* the negative rule or belief is just not true. To do this, pick a negative belief and simply “act as if” it is not true, even if you strongly believe it. Here’s how. Once you’ve identified a strong negative belief, ask yourself: “If I didn’t’ believe this about myself, what would I do differently?” “Would I act differently in any way?” Once you’ve come up with some ideas about new ways to act, try them on for size during the next week. Act “As If” the belief is not true, and see how it changes the way you see things. Notice how you feel in the coming week and come in ready to discuss your tries.
3. Third, use coping statements. Coping statements are positive statements about you that can help you feel more in control, improve your mood, and feel more hopeful. One example of an important coping statement is: “I am a well-person with pain.” A good way to think about positive things about yourself is to think about the nice things a close friend would say about you. Even if the friend would say something balanced like “You may be late a lot, but I know it’s because you care so much about people that you have a hard time getting away.” A good coping statement from this would be: “I care a lot about people.” We will discuss what other coping statements you came up with at our next session.

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
Our relaxation exercise this week—for the last time—was “**Thoughts & Feelings**.” We have been doing this relaxation several times during these discussion groups because Thoughts & Feelings is a particularly powerful relaxation exercise, and we think you’ll get a lot out of practicing it. This relaxation works to help you become more aware of all the small things that are happening in your body and mind. Like the other relaxation exercises you’ve learned, this relaxation exercise helps teach your body and mind to be quiet and relax. It also helps you learn to observe your body and your mind—your feelings and your thoughts—without judging what is happening or reacting to it. Your goal is simply to notice it. This relaxation exercise builds inside you the powerful idea of “acceptance”: when you accept your thoughts and feelings the way they really are—when you stop fighting things that are happening to you—you find that you can manage things better! “Acceptance” in no way means that you are giving in or giving up. Acceptance means to let go of judging. The more you practice, the better you get at it. You should now be noticing that you are getting better at thinking thoughts without having your emotions get out of hand and that you are also getting better at focusing your mind on one thing without it getting distracted. Listen to your relaxation CD **at least 3 times** before the next session.

See you at the next discussion group!

**Week 9: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**

Last week, we learned more about thoughts and ways to change unhelpful ones. The thoughts we think, both helpful and unhelpful, can be of any strength from weak to very strong. Most thoughts are like the leaves on a tree, pretty weak and easily changed or let to fall. However, deeper, stronger thoughts like Rules or Beliefs, have stronger “hooks,” are harder to change, and affect our emotions, our bodies, and the way we cope. Rules are ideas we carry around in our heads about how we, others, and the world “should be,” “ought to be,” or “is supposed to be.” Like the branches of a tree, they are stronger and tougher than simple unhelpful thoughts. Beliefs are even more deeply held ideas about our own worth as human beings. When we are stressed, these negative beliefs come out and take hold of us. Like the roots of a tree, they can be very strong and very hard to change. Of course, chronic pain can raise stress and cause a vicious cycle where our pain triggers our negative beliefs, which triggers more pain. This is why it’s especially important to learn to recognize, and challenge, our negative rules and beliefs.

The **Gate Closer** last week told you three ways to do that:

1. First, ask yourself how your belief helps or hurts you.
2. Second, “*Act As If”* the negative rule or belief is just not true, even if you strongly believe it. Ask yourself: “If I didn’t believe this about myself, what would I do differently?” Try the new ways of doing things on for size and see how you like them.
3. Third, use coping statements. Coping statements are positive statements about you that can help you feel more in control, improve your mood, and feel more hopeful. One example of an important coping statement is: “I am a well person with pain.” Another is “I may not be able to do everything I used to, but I can still do many things.” Think about the nice things a close friend would say about you to come up with other ideas.

**[Review of This Week]**

This week, we learned about the importance of sleep and good sleep habits. About 1/3 of our time is spent asleep, and it is a very important function to keep our minds and bodies healthy. Good sleep means getting between 7 and 9 hours each night. Though each person is different, good sleepers fall asleep within 15 minutes and wake up in the morning feeling rested and alert. During the night, they may wake up as many as 6 times, but they rarely have trouble falling back to sleep.

Getting good sleep can help a lot with pain problems. Unfortunately, sleep problems are very common in people who have chronic pain. This could happen because the pain interferes with your ability to fall asleep, wakes you up at night, or causes you to wake up earlier in the morning than you would like to. That said, your sleep problems may not be related to your pain at all. You may have a medication that messes with your ability to sleep or other factors. We talked about how sleeping pills can be useful for a short time, but they may have side effects and usually lose their effectiveness over time. In fact, sleep medication may make your sleep problems worse if they are taken over a long period of time. Because of this, we taught you good sleep habits that you can do instead of or in addition to sleeping pills.

Poor sleep is hard to fix because the harder you try to make yourself go to sleep, the harder it is to fall asleep! It can be done, though, and here’s how. You have to give your body the right environment, teach it to know when to fall asleep, and then, LET it fall asleep. Make your bedroom dark, quiet, relaxing, and cool (not cold). Make sure you have a comfortable bed, a soft pillow, and no loud or bright distractions, such as TVs or computers. Build Good Sleep Habits like keeping a regular sleep schedule—waking up at the same time every day and going to sleep when you feel tired. Develop a bedtime ritual that you do every night, like brushing your teeth, washing your face, and reading for a few minutes. This will signal your body and your mind that you are preparing for sleep. Regular exercise definitely helps with sleep, but do the majority of your physical activity before evening. Caffeine from coffee, colas, and chocolate, and nicotine from cigarettes or chewing tobacco definitely reduce your ability to sleep well, especially if you use them between supper time and bedtime. Drugs and alcohol usually make sleep problems worse, and avoiding heavy meals late in the evening is also a good idea. If you do have trouble falling asleep, get out of bed after 15 minutes and do something else until you are sleepy. Then, go back to bed when you feel sleepy again. Remember that it is normal to have times when sleep is not good, but sleep will most likely return to normal before long. Relax about it and know it will pass.

For this week’s learning activity, we asked that you pick three good sleep habits to give a try. Make sure you pick ones that you know you can do but that you also think would help you. Think about the possible roadblocks to practicing your good sleep habit, and see if you can figure out a way to get around those roadblocks. Come to group ready to talk about what you have learned.

**[Review of Relaxation Technique]**
This week’s relaxation exercise was called “**Deepening Relaxation**.” It is a relaxation exercise to help you go deeper into the body’s relaxation response. Relaxation techniques use this body process to make you feel calmer, more focused, and healthier. As you learn to deepen your relaxation response, you are likely to be able to focus more completely on the exercise and get more out of it. The images and body sensations that are suggested are likely to seem more “real,” as if you were really there. Like the other relaxation exercises you have learned, this relaxation exercise helps teach your body and mind to be quiet and relax. But it also goes further by helping you deepen the sense of relaxation, concentration, and focused awareness. The more you practice, the better you get at it. We’re teaching it this week because it can be particularly helpful to help you relax and get your body ready to go to sleep. Listen to this relaxation audio **at least 3 times** before the next session.

See you at the next discussion group!

**Week 10: Tips from Pain Management Discussion**

**[Review of Last Week]**

Last week, we learned about the importance of sleep and good sleep habits. Sleep is a very important function to keep our minds and bodies healthy, particularly for people with chronic pain. Good sleep means getting between 7 and 9 hours each night, falling asleep within 15 minutes and waking up in the morning feeling rested and alert. During the night, you may wake up as many as 6 times, but rarely have trouble falling back to sleep. Unfortunately, sleep problems are very common in people who have chronic pain. This could happen because the pain interferes with your ability to fall asleep, wakes you up at night, or causes you to wake up earlier in the morning than you would like to. That said, your sleep problems may not be related to your pain at all.

Sleep problems are sometimes hard to fix because the harder you try to make yourself go to sleep, the harder it is to fall asleep! You have to give your body the right environment, teach it to know when to fall asleep, and then, LET it fall asleep. Make your bedroom dark, quiet, relaxing, and cool (not cold). Make sure you have a comfortable bed, a soft pillow, and no loud or bright distractions, such as TVs or computers. Build Good Sleep Habits like keeping a regular sleep schedule—waking up at the same time every day and going to sleep when you feel tired. Develop a bedtime ritual that you do every night. This will signal your body and your mind that you are preparing for sleep. Regular exercise during the day definitely helps, but caffeine, nicotine, drugs, and alcohol hurt your ability to sleep well. When you do have trouble falling asleep, get out of bed after 15 minutes, do something relaxing—like reading—until you feel sleepy, and then, go back to bed. Remember, it is normal to have times when sleep is not good, but sleep will most likely return to normal with time. Relax and know it will pass.

**[Review of This Week]**

In our last session together, we reviewed all of the various information and skills you learned in this group. The overarching idea from this pain management group is that “your pain is real” and that “it is stress-related.” Your thoughts about pain and stress affect how you feel, how you act, how you think, and how you cope. Your thoughts even affect your physical well-being. For example, judging stressful situations negatively instead of as a challenge can make them much harder to handle. All of the tools that we gave you had something to do with this stress-and-coping model of pain.

The first tool we learned was **the Relaxation tool**. Relaxation exercises focus on breathing, relaxing your muscles, thinking in a calm way, and paying attention to a peaceful word or saying that makes you feel happy. Relaxation exercises also focus a lot on visual imagery, whether that is a mental image, a smell, a taste, or a touch. Practicing relaxation exercises every day helps you get good at the skill of relaxing your body and quieting your mind.

Another tool we learned about was the **Get Active** tool. The best way to deal with negative emotions related to chronic pain is to be active. Getting active helps with both stress and pain, and it involves two main things: increasing physical activity and doing activities that are enjoyable, meaningful, or pleasurable to you. Pacing yourself so that you do not overdo and do not underdo is also an important part of getting active. When we remain active, despite the presence of pain, we continue to give our lives meaning instead of giving up and giving in.

Another tool we learned about was the **Express Yourself** activity. Writing or talking about your deepest thoughts or feelings about your pain and other stressful situations in your life helps you to understand them better. Writing or talking about strong feelings can make them seem less scary and less out of control. Writing or talking is also a great way to get your feelings off your chest for a while. Use this tool when you feel like you need to vent or when you’re confused about or overwhelmed with your feelings. Remember to write or talk to yourself. Don’t worry about spelling, grammar, or errors. The express-yourself activity is not for communicating with other people; it’s for you and you alone.

We also learned the **Stand Tall** way of talking. Remember that you have the right to express your wants and needs in a direct way without apologizing. Stand Tall talk helps you ask for what you want and need and helps you say No to something you don’t want. Stand Tall talk is not mean or selfish. Actually, it’s part of taking care of yourself. You may not always get what you want when you use Stand Tall talk, but chances are, you will feel better about being able to express yourself directly, without getting hostile or angry, without pushing others away, and without being a doormat. You can also improve your relationships with your health care providers by using this Gate Closer.

Another tool we learned taught us **how to change our thoughts** to change our lives. Our thoughts are not set in stone, although they can be very strong. We can change them if we try. Thoughts can be simple like leaves on a tree, rules that are stronger like branches, or deep beliefs that are the strongest like roots. Negative thoughts can cause us more pain and stress. Rules are the “shoulds” or “supposed tos” we hold about ourselves, about others, and about the world around us. Deep Beliefs are deeply held ideas about ourselves and our own self-worth. We often become aware of negative thoughts when our feelings change or we notice a change in our physical well-being. With practice you can know your thoughts by asking, “What just went through my mind?” You can change the negative part of your thought by looking for the evidence, the true and the not-true parts. With practice, you can change the negative part of your thought and create an alternative thought that is more realistic and more positive. You can also look at the drawbacks and benefits of that belief; and you can create an alternative, more realistic, and positive belief. Remember that “Acting As If” is very helpful in creating alternative beliefs.

A final tool we learned was **Good Sleep Habits**. Good sleep habits are important to help you sleep well. If you’re having trouble sleeping well, you might want to try the following: Talk to your doctor if you take sleep medication nearly every day. Go to bed when you’re sleepy or tired, and get up around the same time each day. Try to avoid naps during the day and try to avoid working, eating, or watching TV in bed. If you wake up and can’t get back to sleep, try getting up and reading a magazine or something in somewhat dim light until you’re sleepy again. Then, go back to bed, and try again. Good sleep habits can help you sleep better without medicine.

All of these tools are meant to help you learn to cope better with chronic pain. You have to practice them to get the benefits. It’s normal to forget these skills at first. Use your workbook and audio to remind yourself about how to use them. In spite of using them well, you will still have pain flare-ups from time to time. Knowing this can help you not to be surprised by it. When you have a pain flare-up is the most important time to use these skills, but practice during the good times will make it easier to do when you have more pain. The main goal of this group is to help you move from feeling like you are a disabled chronic pain patient to the idea that you are a well person with pain. Use your Gate Closers to get there.

Good luck!

**Relaxation Scripts**

**Week 1: First Aid for Stress**

The first relaxation exercise we will do is called First Aid for Stress.

We teach you how to take 20 breaths to feel less stressed. This is a way to respond to stress as soon as you feel it.

When you feel stressed, stop for a moment, and notice how your body feels. Observe what’s going on in your body. How do your muscles feel? Are some muscles more tense than others? What is your breathing like? Is it shallow or deep? Fast or slow? Take a moment to inhale and notice how that breath is. Now, take a moment to exhale, and notice how that breath is. This time when you breathe in and out, you might want to put one hand on your belly and notice when you breathe in, your belly expands like a little balloon. When you breathe out, you belly goes back down. As you breathe in, notice how your belly expands. When you breathe out, do it a little slower than when you breathe in.

Now, take about 3 minutes to take 20 breaths, breathing in and out at a rate that is comfortable for you. You can breathe with your eyes open or closed depending on where you do this. You can count quietly to yourself, and don’t worry if you lose count. You can do this at a comfortable pace for you, and you don’t have to listen to the CD to do this, or you can use my voice on the CD as a guide. You might want to breathe in through your nose, and breathe out through your mouth, but you don’t have to do it that way.

Ok, breathing in at your own pace, and breathing out just a little slower than you breath in……breathing in….breathing out…..

[Do the 20 breaths.]

Now, just sit quietly for a moment or two and notice how your body feels. What are the differences between when you started and now? How do your muscles feel? What is your breathing like? What other changes do you notice? As you continue practicing this breathing exercise, you’ll notice that your breathing changes depending on how you feel. You’ll also notice that you can use your breathing to calm your mind and your body. Breathing like this is a way to take care of stress right away, before it becomes a bigger problem.

Practice **First Aid for Stress** at least 3 times this coming week.

**Week 2: Breathing Space**

Because this is a short practice and we want to come into it quickly, we take on a posture that’s a little bit different from our normal sitting position. Normally, when we sit in a chair, we sink into it and our back rounds into the chair – we just let the chair support us. In this short relaxation exercise, I’d like you to experiment with sitting in the chair in a different way: Your body should be relaxed, but experiment with sitting a little bit more upright, allowing your back to be a bit lengthened, but not stiff or unnatural. Your shoulders can be relaxed and comfortably lowered away from your ears, and your hands can rest in your lap. Your head can be balanced evenly between your shoulders, in a neutral position -- neither dropping your chin forward toward your chest nor letting your head fall backward toward the back of the chair.

Now, closing your eyes, if that feels comfortable for you, take a deep breath in, hold it for a second or two, and let it out slowly….. and do that again a couple more times……… Now, just let your breathing return back to its normal rhythm. And focus your awareness on the movements of the breath coming in and going out of your body. As you inhale, be aware of the movement of the air coming in through your nose, past the back of your throat, and down into the lungs. As you exhale, notice, if you can, the movement of air back out of your lungs and out your nose…..as you breathe in notice that your chest gets a little bigger to allow for more air to fill the lungs….as you breathe out, notice how the chest goes gently back down as the air travels out. As you breathe in, notice how your belly also inflates a little bit, like a small balloon. As you breathe out, notice how your belly goes back down. Breathing in…. breathing out….really focusing your awareness on the rise and fall of the breath… moment by moment, breath by breath, as best you can. So that you know when the breath is moving in, and you know when the breath is moving out. Just bringing your awareness to the pattern of movement … using your breath as an anchor for your awareness of the present moment.

And now as a final step, allow your awareness to expand beyond the breath. As well as being aware of the breath, we also include a sense of the body as a whole. Noticing the sensations in the body… Are there sensations of tension, of holding, or whatever? Just noting whatever sensations you become aware of, without working to change them. And just experiment with following the breath as if your whole body is breathing. As you inhale, your breath travels into every part of your body, as your body breathes in the refreshing air. As you exhale, your body as a whole breathes out, getting rid of the old air. Exchanging the old, stale air for refreshing, healing air.

As we come to the end of this short relaxation exercise, know that you can practice this any time you have a few minutes to yourself. You can use the CD, and you can also do this breathing exercise anytime you need to quiet down and relax quickly…… You can do it with your eyes closed or with your eyes open. You can do it for 5 or 10 minutes, or for just a short minute. And now, when you are ready, just bring your awareness back into the room, and allow your eyes to open, alert, refreshed, and relaxed.

**Week 3: Warm and Heavy Relaxation**

This relaxation exercise is called the warm and heavy relaxation.

First find a comfortable position to sit or lie down. This relaxation is a different way to allow you to relax your body and calm your mind. Begin by breathing deeply, but in a way that is comfortable for you, drawing air into your lungs as is comfortable for you and releasing the breath slowly. Breathe in ….. Hold it for a second….and breath out, making the outbreath a little long than the inbreath. And do that again….. Breathe in…. Pause .. and breath out….And just continue taking slow, regular breaths.

Now turn your attention to your right hand. Feel the skin on the palm of your right hand becoming pleasantly warm and relaxed. Feel the warmth in each finger. And the warmth on your palm. Feel it spreading to the back of your hand…to your wrist. Feel your right arm becoming pleasantly warm. Your right arm is starting to feel heavy, very heavy, and very relaxed. Your right arm is warm, heavy, and relaxed.

Now focus on your left hand. Picture placing your left hand into soothing, warm water. Feel the warmth relaxing your hand completely. Allow your wrist to enter the warm, calming water and allow it to relax. Your left arm is becoming heavy. Allow your left arm to sink into the warm water. Your left arm feels warm, heavy, and relaxed.

Now turn your awareness to your legs. Feel your legs becoming comfortably warm. Feel the warmth spreading all the way from your feet to your ankles…your lower legs…your knees…your hips. Feel your legs becoming heavy, very heavy, and relaxed. Your legs are warm, heavy, and relaxed.

Imagine a pleasant, warm breeze gently blowing across your face. Feel your face and head relaxing. Whether your eyes are open or closed, your eyelids are very heavy…warm, heavy, and relaxed.

Picture the warmth of a gentle sun, shining down on you, warming the front of your body. Allow your chest and stomach to relax into this warmth. Feel the sun shining, warming your skin, relaxing your body, as your body is filled with heavy, warm, pleasant relaxation.

Now imagine sitting with your back to a pleasant camp fire. Feel the warmth of the campfire on your back. Feel your back warming and relaxing. The warmth spreads all the way from your neck to your shoulders…your upper back…middle and lower back. Feel your body relaxing as it becomes warm and calm through the gentle caress of the pleasant campfire.

Feel the heaviness in your entire body. Your body is warm, heavy, and relaxed. Enjoy this calm, relaxed feeling. Notice your smooth, even breathing, relaxed and comfortable, drawing you even deeper into relaxation. Your body feels very heavy, warm, and relaxed.

Enjoy the relaxation for a few more moments.

Now slowly begin to bring your attention back to the present, keeping your eyes closed. Notice the room around you. Notice the surface that you are sitting on or, if you are lying down, notice the surface that you are lying on. Hear the sounds around you. Gently start to reawaken your body. Wiggle your fingers and your toes. Move your arms and legs a little. Stretch if you like. And when you are ready, open your eyes, and become fully alert.

**Week 4: Thoughts and Feelings Relaxation**

Settle down in a chair, making yourself comfortable as best you can. Allow your eyes to close gently. Bring your awareness to how you’re sitting in the chair and where your body makes contact with the chair. Sitting with legs uncrossed and feet flat on the floor, your lower back can be supported by the back of the chair, making a stable base for your upper body. Gently guiding your chest to be slightly lifted and your shoulders to be back and down. Your head is centered, balanced comfortably between your shoulders. Allowing the crown of your head to be lifted toward the ceiling and your chin to lower slightly. Intentionally adjusting your body this way allows you to take on a dignified sitting posture.

Now, taking a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. Bringing your awareness to the physical sensations of how your breath is coming into the body, through the nostrils, past the back of the throat, down into the lungs. As you breathe in, the air moves into your lungs, your chest rises and your belly may balloon out slightly. As you breathe out, your belly recedes, and your lungs gently release the air back out through the back of your throat and out the nose. Take a few minutes to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

There is no need to try to control the breath in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is. You are simply being an observer of your breathing.

Sooner or later (usually sooner), your mind will wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along – whatever. This is perfectly OK – it’s simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently bring the awareness back to a focus on the changing pattern of physical sensations in the belly, renewing the intention to pay attention to the ongoing inbreath or outbreath, whichever you find.

When you feel reasonably settled in your awareness of the breath, allow your awareness to expand around the breath to include, as well, a sense of physical sensations throughout the whole body. You are still aware, in the background, of the movements of the breath in the belly, change your primary focus, so that you become aware of a sense of the movements of the breath throughout the body, as if the whole body were breathing.

Now, together with this wider sense of the body as a whole, you might want to become aware of the physical sensations where the body makes contact with the chair– the sensations of touch, pressure, or contact of the feet with the floor; the buttocks with whatever supports them; the hands where they rest on the thighs, or on each other.

You might also become aware of other sensations in your body that call for your attention. It could be an itch or a tickle, it could be an ache that you hadn’t been aware of before sitting quietly, or it could be a painful sensation that you deal with on a daily basis. For now, as best you can, simply observe this sensation and see what happens.

Does it take on a different quality? Does it go away or grow in intensity? Are thoughts or emotions tied to the sensation? As best you can, simply observe the sensation and be aware of the separation of the sensation from the thought that labels it or the emotion that may come along with it. If, as you are observing a sensation….say, an itch…..you decide to scratch the itch, that’s perfectly ok. Go ahead and make whatever adjustment you need to make – a scratch, or a shift in posture, whatever you need to do to be kind to your body at this particular moment in time.

And now, bringing your attention to the sounds in the room. As best you can, letting go of any categories you may normally use to make sense of what you hear; instead of hearing a chair scraping or a person coughing, hear the sounds in the room as patterns of pure sound.

Being aware of you are attracted to particular sounds, perhaps finding that you are saying to yourself, “Ah, how lovely that bird sounds singing.” And also being aware of the sounds that you are judging to be unpleasant, perhaps you may be wishing for certain sounds to go away or be different in some way… and just noting these judgments, and as best you can, letting them go and returning your focus of attention to simply the waves of sound…

Where is your awareness right now?

If you choose, you may like to now bring your awareness to any thoughts that are floating through your mind…

When we experience troubling thoughts, we tend to mull them over, or talk to ourselves about them, or even create an imaginary conversation or argument with another person to justify, or get it off our chest, or feel like we are “in the right” and the other person is “in the wrong”. When you find your mind getting carried downstream by a thought, it may help to simply note it by saying, “oh, there’s thinking”, or “oh, there’s thinking, and there’s sadness”, or “oh, there’s thinking, and there’s muscle tension.”

It’s as if you are sitting on the bank of a stream and watching thoughts and emotions and sensations come and go like leaves floating by on the stream. When you notice that you have floated along with one of the thoughts, or emotions, or sensations – that you are being carried downstream, simply note that, and bring yourself back to the bank of the stream, observing, and watching the thoughts and emotions and sensations pass by.

The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different. Accepting experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on, rather than trying to create some other state.

Through acceptance, we settle back into natural awareness of what is present. We let it be – we simply notice and observe whatever is already present, the breath, body, sounds, thoughts... This is a new way to deal with experiences that have a strong pull on our awareness.

As we come to the last few minutes of this relaxation exercise, wherever you are right now, simply bring your awareness back to your breathing. Focus on the fullness of the inbreath and the fullness of the outbreath. Become aware of any thoughts or emotions about the sitting coming to an end. Maybe relief or impatience. Maybe disappointment. Maybe a tendency to judge what you have just done, as if there is a right or a wrong way to do this. Simply note what is going through your mind as you become aware that you are nearing the end of the sitting, and then let those thoughts or emotions float on by as you sit on the edge of the thought stream, simply observing your breath.

**Week 5: Images Relaxation**

This relaxation exercise is called “Images Relaxation.”

Sit or lie down in a quiet place and close your eyes softly. Begin by narrowing your focus of attention. If you are comfortable doing so, you can focus on your breathing. If you prefer, you can focus on a word or a phrase that is right for you at this point in time. Just observe the repetition of the breath, or the word, as you focus your awareness and begin to calm your body and your mind. Be aware of the rhythm of the repetition, as you repeat your word or phrase, or observe your breath……

You might also want to scan your body, seeing if there is any tension in specific muscles and just allow those muscles to relax as best you can. Allowing the muscles to relax, let go, and unwind. How do the muscles in your legs feel? Just observe, and let any tension go…. Quiet and calm your back muscles, your shoulders….

During this imaging relaxation, you’ll be picturing mental images in your mind. The images will involve all your senses. Sight. Hearing. Smell. Touch. And taste. For example, you might imagine the sights of a green forest, with the trees, blue sky, white clouds, and pine needles underfoot. But then, you can choose to add the sounds into your image. The wind whispering through the trees. Water running. Bird calls. And, include the feel of the ground under your shoes. The smell of pine. Maybe even the taste of chewing a grass stem or tasting the mountain spring water.

During your visualization, you will be creating your own special place. You will be making a retreat for relaxation and guidance. This place may be indoors or out. In structuring your special place, follow a few guidelines. Allow a private entry into your special place. Make it peaceful, comfortable and safe. Fill your place with detail. What’s going on in the background? In the foreground? In the midground? Use all of your senses: vision, hearing, smelling, tasting, touch…

A special place might be at the end of a path that leads to a pond. Grass is under your feet. The pond is about 30 yards away, and mountains are in the distance. You can feel the coolness of the air in this shady spot. The mockingbird is singing everyone a song. The sun is bright on the pond. The honeysuckle’s powerful scent attracts the bee buzzing over the flower with its sweet nectar.

Or, your special place might be a sparkling, clean kitchen with cinnamon buns baking in the oven. Through the kitchen window, you can see fields of yellow wheat. A window chime flutters in the breeze. At the table is a cup of tea for you.

Take a few moments to create your special place……. Visualize… where it is, what it looks like, what makes up your special place. Construct the details to make it just right for you….. Think of the smells. Think of the sounds. Even the tastes that might be in your special place.

You’ll walk slowly to this quiet place in your mind. Your place can be inside or outside. It is peaceful and safe. Picture yourself unloading your anxieties, your worries, your tension. Picture yourself laying down your pain.

Notice the view in the distance of your safe place. Notice what is before you. Reach out and touch it. How does it feel? What do you smell? What do you hear? Make the temperature of your special place comfortable for you. Be safe here.

Look around for a special spot. A private spot. Find the path to this place. Feel the ground with your feet. Look above you. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? Walk down this path until you can enter your own quiet, comfortable, safe place.

(long pause)

You have arrived at your special place. What is under your feet? How does it feel? Take a couple of steps. What do you see above you? What do you hear? Do you hear something else? Reach out and touch something you’d like to touch. What is its texture? Are there pens/paper/paints nearby? Or is there sand to draw in, clay to work with? Go to them and handle them. Smell them. These are your special tools, or tools for your inner guide... to reveal ideas or feelings to you.

Look as far as you can see. What do you see? What do you hear? What aromas do you notice?

Now that you’re in your special place, in your mind’s eye, sit or lie down. Notice its smells, its sounds, its sights. This is your place, and nothing can harm you here. If you sense danger here, send it away. You are in control of this place. Spend a few moments realizing that you are relaxed, safe, and comfortable.

(long pause)

Memorize this place’s smells/tastes/sounds. You can come back and relax here anytime you want. You entered it by one path or entrance. Go ahead and be aware that you can leave by that same path and entrance. Notice the ground. Touch things near you. Look far away and appreciate the view. Remind yourself, this special place that you created can be entered whenever you wish. You might say to yourself, “I can relax here,” when you enter your special place, or “This is my special place. I can come here whenever I wish.”

When you go to your special place, you can choose to have a guide or an inner guide, come with you or meet you there. Or if you don’t want anyone else there with you, you don’t need to bring them here. You can invite other guides, until you find one you like, or you can let go of the notion of having an inner guide. If you have a guide, if you’re comfortable with it, you can ask it questions. For example, you can ask your guide, “How can I relax?” “What is causing my tension?” When your guide answers, you’ll probably be surprised at the simplicity of the responses. Before your guide leaves you, or immediately afterwards, remind yourself that you have the ability to relax with a simple, “I can relax here” or “This is my special place. I can come here whenever I wish.”

In a moment, we’ll finish with this imagery exercise, but for now, spend a moment or two bringing your awareness back into the room and appreciating whatever sense of relaxation you’ve been able to achieve. Remind yourself of the special place that you came up with. Notice whether or not you invited a guide along this time. Certainly not necessary, ever. But you may decide to at one point or another.

Enjoy the experience of imagining visually but also with sounds, with smells, and maybe even with taste. Enjoy the experience of having created yourself a special place.

And now, bring yourself back into the room by wriggling your feet, your toes, maybe flexing your fingers. Stretching your neck and shoulders a little bit.

Focus your awareness on my voice, on any noises or sounds around you. Within the room or outside the room. And when you’re ready, go ahead and open your eyes. Alert. Refreshed. And relaxed.

**Week 6, Week 7, Week 8: Thoughts and Feelings Relaxation**

Settle down in a chair, making yourself comfortable as best you can. Allow your eyes to close gently. Bring your awareness to how you’re sitting in the chair and where your body makes contact with the chair. Sitting with legs uncrossed and feet flat on the floor, your lower back can be supported by the back of the chair, making a stable base for your upper body. Gently guiding your chest to be slightly lifted and your shoulders to be back and down. Your head is centered, balanced comfortably between your shoulders. Allowing the crown of your head to be lifted toward the ceiling and your chin to lower slightly. Intentionally adjusting your body this way allows you to take on a dignified sitting posture.

Now, taking a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. Bringing your awareness to the physical sensations of how your breath is coming into the body, through the nostrils, past the back of the throat, down into the lungs. As you breathe in, the air moves into your lungs, your chest rises and your belly may balloon out slightly. As you breathe out, your belly recedes, and your lungs gently release the air back out through the back of your throat and out the nose. Take a few minutes to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

There is no need to try to control the breath in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is. You are simply being an observer of your breathing.

Sooner or later (usually sooner), your mind will wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along – whatever. This is perfectly OK – it’s simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently bring the awareness back to a focus on the changing pattern of physical sensations in the belly, renewing the intention to pay attention to the ongoing inbreath or outbreath, whichever you find.

When you feel reasonably settled in your awareness of the breath, allow your awareness to expand around the breath to include, as well, a sense of physical sensations throughout the whole body. You are still aware, in the background, of the movements of the breath in the belly, change your primary focus, so that you become aware of a sense of the movements of the breath throughout the body, as if the whole body were breathing.

Now, together with this wider sense of the body as a whole, you might want to become aware of the physical sensations where the body makes contact with the chair– the sensations of touch, pressure, or contact of the feet with the floor; the buttocks with whatever supports them; the hands where they rest on the thighs, or on each other.

You might also become aware of other sensations in your body that call for your attention. It could be an itch or a tickle, it could be an ache that you hadn’t been aware of before sitting quietly, or it could be a painful sensation that you deal with on a daily basis. For now, as best you can, simply observe this sensation and see what happens.

Does it take on a different quality? Does it go away or grow in intensity? Are thoughts or emotions tied to the sensation? As best you can, simply observe the sensation and be aware of the separation of the sensation from the thought that labels it or the emotion that may come along with it. If, as you are observing a sensation….say, an itch…..you decide to scratch the itch, that’s perfectly ok. Go ahead and make whatever adjustment you need to make – a scratch, or a shift in posture, whatever you need to do to be kind to your body at this particular moment in time.

And now, bringing your attention to the sounds in the room. As best you can, letting go of any categories you may normally use to make sense of what you hear; instead of hearing a chair scraping or a person coughing, hear the sounds in the room as patterns of pure sound.

Being aware of you are attracted to particular sounds, perhaps finding that you are saying to yourself, “Ah, how lovely that bird sounds singing.” And also being aware of the sounds that you are judging to be unpleasant, perhaps you may be wishing for certain sounds to go away or be different in some way… and just noting these judgments, and as best you can, letting them go and returning your focus of attention to simply the waves of sound…

Where is your awareness right now?

If you choose, you may like to now bring your awareness to any thoughts that are floating through your mind…

When we experience troubling thoughts, we tend to mull them over, or talk to ourselves about them, or even create an imaginary conversation or argument with another person to justify, or get it off our chest, or feel like we are “in the right” and the other person is “in the wrong”. When you find your mind getting carried downstream by a thought, it may help to simply note it by saying, “oh, there’s thinking”, or “oh, there’s thinking, and there’s sadness”, or “oh, there’s thinking, and there’s muscle tension.”

It’s as if you are sitting on the bank of a stream and watching thoughts and emotions and sensations come and go like leaves floating by on the stream. When you notice that you have floated along with one of the thoughts, or emotions, or sensations – that you are being carried downstream, simply note that, and bring yourself back to the bank of the stream, observing, and watching the thoughts and emotions and sensations pass by.

The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different. Accepting experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on, rather than trying to create some other state.

Through acceptance, we settle back into natural awareness of what is present. We let it be – we simply notice and observe whatever is already present, the breath, body, sounds, thoughts... This is a new way to deal with experiences that have a strong pull on our awareness.

As we come to the last few minutes of this relaxation exercise, wherever you are right now, simply bring your awareness back to your breathing. Focus on the fullness of the inbreath and the fullness of the outbreath. Become aware of any thoughts or emotions about the sitting coming to an end. Maybe relief or impatience. Maybe disappointment. Maybe a tendency to judge what you have just done, as if there is a right or a wrong way to do this. Simply note what is going through your mind as you become aware that you are nearing the end of the sitting, and then let those thoughts or emotions float on by as you sit on the edge of the thought stream, simply observing your breath.

**Week 9: Deepening Relaxation**

Find a quiet spot where you can rest in relative comfort for 20-30 minutes. You may sit in a chair or lie down. Make yourself as comfortable as possible. Take a few deep, cleansing breaths… which always prepare your body for relaxation. Notice the movement of the breath… into your lungs… and out of the body.

And for this exercise, I’d like you to begin by focusing your eyes on a spot if that is comfortable for you. Focus on a spot either on the wall in front of you… or on the ceiling if you happen to be lying down. Really stare at that spot. The point of staring is not to really focus on a visual image, but to steady your eyes on that spot on the wall or ceiling. So that they don’t blink as much…. So that you’re not distracted by other images…. So that you can just listen to my voice…. Pay attention to my suggestions…. As you continue staring at the spot….

You may be aware of your slow and steady breathing. That should be getting to feel fairly natural as part of your relaxation response. You may be aware of having a desire for your eyes to close…. They may be getting dry or itchy…. They may want to blink…. They may be watering just a bit…. Of course, you can close them any time you need to. But for an experiment, you might want to keep them open just a little bit longer. Staring at the spot and listening to my voice….. Breathing deep and slow and regular.

And when you’re ready, just let your eyes naturally close very gently. Be aware of the sensation of the eyelids as they close. Be aware of the increased comfort and then turning inward… once you don’t have anything visual coming in from the outside. Breathing deep and slow and regular. Focusing your awareness on your breathing and on my voice.

I’d like to invite you to experiment with the possibility of going deeper into this sense of relaxation that you’ve been working on the past several weeks now. This deepening exercise will actually go down several levels. We’ll experiment with going down… and coming up… and going down until you find the level that you’re comfortable with… for today, knowing that you can continue to experiment with different levels of deepening your relaxation.

For now, as best you can, put your body into the state of relaxation that you’ve been working on for the past several weeks. Whatever suggestions, images, or awarenesses that work for you best. Begin to put your body into a state of pleasant, restful, rejuvenating relaxation. Notice any sensations of tension or tightness in any parts of your body… and suggest to those areas that they can let go. The muscles can unwind or relax. Notice any areas of discomfort… perhaps pain, perhaps a sensation that you carry around with you pretty much 24 hours a day, or perhaps this is a sensation that you weren’t really aware of until I suggested that you focus your awareness. If you did become aware of an area of your body where there are painful sensations, just experiment for a moment with breathing into that part of your body… using the techniques from the exercise that we learned last week. Being aware of the sensation. Breathing into that part of your body. Giving the sensation some space, some lightness.

And now, having achieved some level of relaxation, I’d like you to experiment with a method that we use to help you deepen your relaxation. So, typically we imagine either an elevator or a staircase. Think about which you would be more comfortable with: going down on an elevator or going down on a staircase. Either way, it’s perfectly safe. It’s your elevator. You get to design it the way you want to. It’s your staircase. You get to design a sturdy, safe staircase, with a good, sturdy handrail.

And now, Consider what level of relaxation you are at the moment. Zero being totally relaxed, and 10 being very tense. There’s no right or wrong answer to this. It’s just another experiment. And let’s just say you’re at a 5. Sort of medium. Between tense and relaxed. You might want to visualize yourself on that elevator on the fifth floor. And if you’re using a staircase, you might want to visualize yourself standing on step 5. You’ve gone down five steps from the top of the steps, and there you are on the elevator or the staircase. And just have a look around.

This is your staircase, your elevator. Allow yourself to create an image—to create a situation that’s restful and positive and helpful to you. It may be a staircase from your childhood that you remember fondly, or it may be a totally made-up staircase. If you’re on the elevator, maybe the wall of the elevator is clear glass and you can see out on a beautiful field of flowers. Spend a moment creating that image for yourself….

And now, when you’re ready, if you would like to, experiment with going down one level as slowly and as gradually as you’d like to. Descend one level deeper into relaxation, focused awareness, and ability to concentrate on my voice and on my suggestions. See how that feels. You may not feel any difference at all, or you may feel a fairly intense difference. Be aware that at any time you can always go up the scale… as well as down the scale… because you’re in charge of this experiment. And if you care to, go down one more step, one more flight in the elevator….. and just experiment with going down 2 or 3 steps, as much or as little as you’d like to until you reach the point where you’re comfortable to stay, for now. And just take a look around.

Make a mental note of what you see. Remember, creating your image to be a positive, helpful, hopeful, relaxing image. One that nourishes you and sustains you. What do you see? Some of the things that you see may surprise you. You may not have thought about them in a long time. Or they may be new images for you. Really see if you can focus on the image so that it’s real for you. Knowing that at any time, you can change the image and you can also go up the stairs or up the elevator, experimenting with different levels of this relaxation response.

And if you’ve gotten to the level… where you’re comfortable… for today, for this experience, Just rest… and rejuvenate yourself here, while I make a few more suggestions. Now, you’re either sitting in a chair or lying down. As comfortable as you can be…. I’d like you to experiment with the idea that the chair or the bed or the recliner or the floor that is supporting your body is a huge tension absorbing cloud, almost like a sponge. A sponge that soaks up water. In this case, the sponge is soaking up tension. Maybe the sponge is soaking up feelings of fatigue or tiredness. Maybe the sponge is soaking up pain sensations, as if you’re letting those sensations of tension and tiredness and discomfort ease through your body and release into the sponge. And allowing the cloud that’s like a sponge to soak up those sensations away from your body. Really see if you can visualize, in your mind’s eye, floating… on this huge tension-absorbing, pain-absorbing, tiredness-absorbing cloud. Your body may even begin to feel light, lighter than normal. And if it does, that’s okay. It’s part of the experiment. It’s not right or wrong to feel that way. Just be aware of whatever it is that happens.

And if you’re experimenting with your pain sensations, you might focus on what your pain feels like at this moment. For example, when it’s bad, it might feel like a heavy black metal ball or, maybe, a metal with jagged edges. What does your pain feel like at this moment? Once you have a sense of that, you might want to experiment with changing the sensations in your mind by changing the image. If your pain is a heavy, black, jagged-edged piece of metal, you might want to experiment with changing the image to be more rounded. Lightening it. Making it a softer gray. Making it plastic, instead of metal. Rounding the edges. Lightening it. Softening it. In your mind, only in your mind, and yet, as you experiment, you may be interested to find… that those mind experiments… can actually influence what you feel in your body. Just experiment with that for a minute or two.

If your pain has a temperature---if it’s hot pain, experiment with cooling it down. If it’s cold pain, experiment with warming it up. You may have a very big change in the sensations that you’re experience, or a little bit, or nothing at all. There’s no right or wrong. Just whatever happens.

Now, you’ve been sort of hanging out at the same level for a few minutes now, and in a moment, we’re going to go back up. Back up to the level that you began with, a relatively relaxed but mild level of relaxation, perhaps. But before we do, look around. Look at the visual images that are part of your scene from the elevator or the staircase. Describe it to yourself in your mind’s eye in as much detail as you can get to. Remember that these are your images, you’re completely in charge. And therefore, you’re painting yourself an image that is helpful and restful and positive. Rejuvenating.

And now, when you’re ready, you can experiment with going back up the floors. Traveling, if you’re on the stairs, is little to no effort. The elevator moves silently and freely, up to the level that you began. And as you get to that level, the level where you began the relaxation exercise, bring your awareness back into your surroundings. You might want to wiggle your toes. Flex your arms. Shrug your shoulders a little bit. Take a good yawn. Be aware of your breathing again, always having been breathing. Now bringing your awareness to that life-force of breathing. Become more aware of my voice. More aware of, perhaps, the sounds around you that had faded into the distance. More aware of your own mind, already starting to process this exercise. And, when you’re ready, you can just allow your eyes to open, back in the room…. refreshed, relaxed, and alert.

Settle down in a chair, making yourself comfortable as best you can. Allow your eyes to close gently. Bring your awareness to how you’re sitting in the chair and where your body makes contact with the chair. Sitting with legs uncrossed and feet flat on the floor, your lower back can be supported by the back of the chair, making a stable base for your upper body. Gently guiding your chest to be slightly lifted and your shoulders to be back and down. Your head is centered, balanced comfortably between your shoulders. Allowing the crown of your head to be lifted toward the ceiling and your chin to lower slightly. Intentionally adjusting your body this way allows you to take on a dignified sitting posture.

Now, taking a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. Bringing your awareness to the physical sensations of how your breath is coming into the body, through the nostrils, past the back of the throat, down into the lungs. As you breathe in, the air moves into your lungs, your chest rises and your belly may balloon out slightly. As you breathe out, your belly recedes, and your lungs gently release the air back out through the back of your throat and out the nose. Take a few minutes to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

There is no need to try to control the breath in any way – simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is. You are simply being an observer of your breathing.

Sooner or later (usually sooner), your mind will wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along – whatever. This is perfectly OK – it’s simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently bring the awareness back to a focus on the changing pattern of physical sensations in the belly, renewing the intention to pay attention to the ongoing inbreath or outbreath, whichever you find.

When you feel reasonably settled in your awareness of the breath, allow your awareness to expand around the breath to include, as well, a sense of physical sensations throughout the whole body. You are still aware, in the background, of the movements of the breath in the belly, change your primary focus, so that you become aware of a sense of the movements of the breath throughout the body, as if the whole body were breathing.

Now, together with this wider sense of the body as a whole, you might want to become aware of the physical sensations where the body makes contact with the chair– the sensations of touch, pressure, or contact of the feet with the floor; the buttocks with whatever supports them; the hands where they rest on the thighs, or on each other.

You might also become aware of other sensations in your body that call for your attention. It could be an itch or a tickle, it could be an ache that you hadn’t been aware of before sitting quietly, or it could be a painful sensation that you deal with on a daily basis. For now, as best you can, simply observe this sensation and see what happens.

Does it take on a different quality? Does it go away or grow in intensity? Are thoughts or emotions tied to the sensation? As best you can, simply observe the sensation and be aware of the separation of the sensation from the thought that labels it or the emotion that may come along with it. If, as you are observing a sensation….say, an itch…..you decide to scratch the itch, that’s perfectly ok. Go ahead and make whatever adjustment you need to make – a scratch, or a shift in posture, whatever you need to do to be kind to your body at this particular moment in time.

And now, bringing your attention to the sounds in the room. As best you can, letting go of any categories you may normally use to make sense of what you hear; instead of hearing a chair scraping or a person coughing, hear the sounds in the room as patterns of pure sound.

Being aware of you are attracted to particular sounds, perhaps finding that you are saying to yourself, “Ah, how lovely that bird sounds singing.” And also being aware of the sounds that you are judging to be unpleasant, perhaps you may be wishing for certain sounds to go away or be different in some way… and just noting these judgments, and as best you can, letting them go and returning your focus of attention to simply the waves of sound…

Where is your awareness right now?

If you choose, you may like to now bring your awareness to any thoughts that are floating through your mind…

When we experience troubling thoughts, we tend to mull them over, or talk to ourselves about them, or even create an imaginary conversation or argument with another person to justify, or get it off our chest, or feel like we are “in the right” and the other person is “in the wrong”. When you find your mind getting carried downstream by a thought, it may help to simply note it by saying, “oh, there’s thinking”, or “oh, there’s thinking, and there’s sadness”, or “oh, there’s thinking, and there’s muscle tension.”

It’s as if you are sitting on the bank of a stream and watching thoughts and emotions and sensations come and go like leaves floating by on the stream. When you notice that you have floated along with one of the thoughts, or emotions, or sensations – that you are being carried downstream, simply note that, and bring yourself back to the bank of the stream, observing, and watching the thoughts and emotions and sensations pass by.

The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different. Accepting experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on, rather than trying to create some other state.

Through acceptance, we settle back into natural awareness of what is present. We let it be – we simply notice and observe whatever is already present, the breath, body, sounds, thoughts... This is a new way to deal with experiences that have a strong pull on our awareness.

As we come to the last few minutes of this relaxation exercise, wherever you are right now, simply bring your awareness back to your breathing. Focus on the fullness of the inbreath and the fullness of the outbreath. Become aware of any thoughts or emotions about the sitting coming to an end. Maybe relief or impatience. Maybe disappointment. Maybe a tendency to judge what you have just done, as if there is a right or a wrong way to do this. Simply note what is going through your mind as you become aware that you are nearing the end of the sitting, and then let those thoughts or emotions float on by as you sit on the edge of the thought stream, simply observing your breath.