

Session 1: Overview

1. Overview of Sessions

- Total of 8 sessions
- Each session lasts 90 minutes
- Different topics each session
- Discussion
- Sometimes a writing exercise
- Group experiential activities
- Home activities
 - Reading
 - Writing exercises
 - Imagery CD
 - Monitoring or recording
 - Trying new relationships or activities
- Binders
- Bring binders every week

2. Acute Pain & Chronic Pain

3. Fibromyalgia: The Brain and Emotions

4. Stress: The role of emotional avoidance

5. Exercise: Life events-symptoms-core issues timeline

6. Upcoming topics

Acute Pain & Chronic Pain

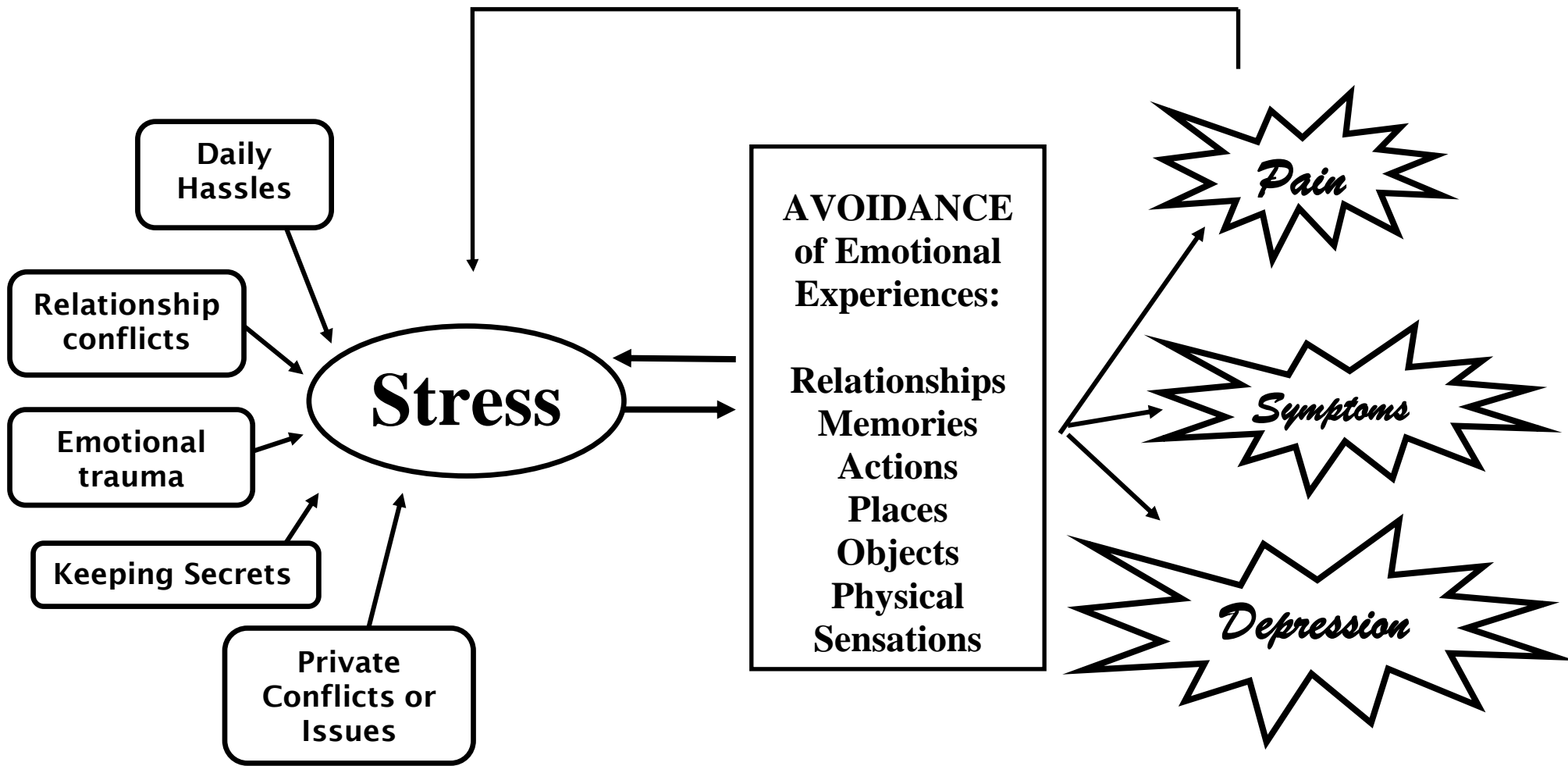
- Acute is primarily in your bodily tissues
- Chronic pain is primarily in your brain and spinal cord
- Regions of the brain that generate pain are linked with areas that experience emotions
 - Amygdala
 - Hypothalamus
 - Prefrontal Cortex

Chronic pain is a physical reality. It is not made up or imagined!!

KEY: It is primary generated and controlled by the brain, which creates the bodily experience.

Stress: The Role of Emotional Avoidance

- What we do with emotional experiences is most important
- Avoidance, suppression, or blocking of emotional experiences is the key problem
- Avoidance means that you can't change things—either the event or situation, or yourself!
- Avoidance leads to not knowing what you are feeling
- Avoidance of key emotions IS the main source of stress
- KEY: Stress is reduced when you choose to experience, express, and release—rather than avoid—emotional experiences!



Change Can Happen

- Change your experiences—especially emotional experiences—and you change your brain
- Brain changes = the definition of “learning”
- The more emotional the experience, the more the learning that occurs
- Our goal in this program is to have HEALTHY, new emotional experiences
- This will change your brain AND improve your symptoms

Topics Covered in Upcoming Sessions

- Learning about important emotions and ways that you block or avoid them
- Helping you identify the things that you avoid, but that you could potentially face and experience and become healthier by doing so
- Helping you experience, express, and release anger, sadness, guilt and love about relationships:
- Stopping self-blame and start showing self-compassion
- Forgiving or letting go of resentment and anger
- Experiencing intimacy or closer relationships
- Learning how to communicate in your relationships in a healthy way
- Experiencing gratitude and other positive feelings
- Becoming an emotionally healthy person into the future

STEP 1: LIST OF SYMPTOMS

CHECK EACH ITEM ON THIS LIST and write down at what age you were when each set of symptoms first appeared in your life.

<u>Age of onset</u>	<u>Symptom</u>
_____	Heartburn, acid reflux
_____	Abdominal pains
_____	Irritable bowel syndrome
_____	Tension headaches
_____	Migraine headaches
_____	Unexplained rashes
_____	Anxiety and/or panic attacks
_____	Depression
_____	Obsessive-compulsive thought patterns
_____	Eating disorders
_____	Insomnia or trouble sleeping
_____	Fibromyalgia
_____	Back pain
_____	Neck pain
_____	Shoulder pain
_____	Repetitive stress injury
_____	Carpal tunnel syndrome
_____	Reflex sympathetic dystrophy (RSD)
_____	Temporomandibular joint syndrome (TMJ)
_____	Chronic tendonitis
_____	Facial pain
_____	Numbness, tingling sensations
_____	Fatigue or chronic fatigue syndrome
_____	Palpitations
_____	Chest pain
_____	Hyperventilation
_____	Interstitial cystitis / irritable bladder
_____	Pelvic pain
_____	Muscle tenderness
_____	Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS)
_____	Tinnitus
_____	Dizziness
_____	Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

STEP 2: LIFE STRESSORS

AGES OF EVENTS

EVENT

Ever been in a serious disaster (e.g., an earthquake, hurricane, large fire, explosion)?

Ever seen a serious accident (for example, a bad car wreck or an on-the-job accident)?

Had a very serious accident or injury (a bad car wreck- on-the-job accident)?

Was a close family member ever sent to jail?

Have you ever been sent to jail?

Were you ever put in foster care or put up for adoption?

Did your parents ever separate or divorce while you were living with them?

Have you ever been separated or divorced?

Ever had serious money problems (not enough money for food or a place to live)?

Ever had a very serious physical or mental illness?

Ever been emotionally abused or neglected (frequently shamed, embarrassed, ignored, or repeatedly told that you were “no good”)?

Ever been physically neglected (for example, not fed, not properly clothed, or left to take care of yourself when you were too young or ill)?

Have you ever had an abortion or miscarriage (lost your baby)?

Have you ever been separated from your child against your will (for example, the loss of custody/visitation or kidnapping)?

Has a baby or child of yours ever had a severe physical or mental handicap?

Have you ever been responsible for taking care of someone close to you (not your child) who had a severe physical or mental handicap?

Has someone close to you died suddenly or unexpectedly?

Has someone close to you died?

Ever see violence between family members (e.g., hitting, kicking, slapping, punching)?

Ever seen a robbery, mugging, or attack taking place?

Ever been robbed, mugged, or attacked (not sexually) by someone you did not know?

Ever been abused or physically attacked (not sexually) by someone you knew?

Ever been bothered or harassed by sexual remarks, jokes, or demands for sexual favors by someone at work or school?

Ever touched or made to touch someone else in a sexual way because he/she forced you in some way or threatened to harm you if you didn't?

Ever have sex (oral, anal, genital) when you didn't want to because someone forced you in some way or threatened to hurt you if you didn't?

Have any of the events mentioned above ever happened to someone close to you so that even though you didn't experience it yourself, you were seriously upset by it?

STEP 3: CORE ISSUES

Once you have carefully and honestly reviewed the stresses in your life, you will likely begin to see patterns. You will be able to identify your “core issues,” those issues that have been stored in your subconscious mind and that are most likely to trigger the onset of physical and psychological symptoms. Indicate which of the following patterns apply to you, or describe any other patterns that apply to you.

**Check
all
that
apply**

CORE ISSUES

- _____ Loss and abandonment (losing a parent or sibling, divorce, moving)
 - _____ Never feeling loved or cared for
 - _____ Not trusting others; concerned that others will take advantage of you
 - _____ Avoiding being too close, touching, or connected with others
 - _____ Conflicts or struggles over sexual behaviors, identity, or relationships
 - _____ Not fitting in or feeling ostracized (being teased or picked on, being shy and reserved, not being athletic or popular)
 - _____ Feeling pressure to succeed or be perfect (from parents, other family members, church or religious organizations, or self)
 - _____ Feeling inferior to siblings or other relatives (not as beautiful, funny, athletic, interesting, accomplished)
 - _____ Never feeling good enough, having to “earn” love from parents, feeling criticized much of the time
 - _____ Resentment and/or anger towards family members, religious leaders, neighbors
 - _____ Learning to be anxious, worried, or insecure
 - _____ Identifying with one or several family members and trying to copy or imitate them or trying to be different from one or several family members
- Other patterns:
-

STEP 4: FINDING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SYMPTOMS, LIFE STRESSORS, & CORE ISSUES

Once you have identified your core issues, review the list of potential stress-related symptoms above.

Below, list the times in your life when you developed any of these symptoms, in chronological order. Think carefully about what events occurred just prior to or during the onset of symptoms. You will typically find that the symptoms began at or shortly after you experienced something that was stressful and that reminded you of your core issues (triggering your emotional speed dial), and you felt trapped in that situation. List each symptom, then write down the triggering events or situations, and the emotions and/or core issues which caused the symptoms to occur.

When you place the symptoms and diagnoses that have occurred next to the life stressors, see what patterns emerge and what connections you can make. This is a critical step in figuring out why you have chronic pain and fibromyalgia. Do this for each of these symptoms. For each symptom, think carefully about what was going on in your life at the time this symptom began. What events had occurred that bothered you? What emotions did you feel? How were these events or emotions similar to those you experienced in childhood? Which core issues might have been triggered? Did you feel trapped in some way, either physically or verbally (meaning that you were unable to respond or express what you felt)?

Be as open and honest as you can in this process. Often it is very obvious that stressful life events in childhood have created the emotional memories of hurt, loss, fear, guilt, or anger, and it is equally obvious that certain stressors later in life triggered stress-related symptoms. However, sometimes it takes a fair amount of introspection and searching to find the connections. It is common for mild stressors in adult life to trigger significant symptoms if the stressor is related to earlier stressors, particularly from childhood. Neglect or lack of love by a parent can create a childhood hurt that can get triggered later in life by seemingly small yet significant interactions.

Age	Symptom(s)	Stressors	Core Issues

Session 1: Home Activities Checklist

Read:

1. This Program and Patients' Stories
2. How the Brain Learns and Unlearns Pain and FM

Complete this worksheet:

1. Sources of Stress in Your Life

Note: Do as much of the home activities as you can, because the more you do, the more effective the program is and the more you benefit. However, come back and bring what you have, regardless of how much—or how little—you have done!

This Program and Patients' Stories

The leaders of this study have conducted research to test the effects on fibromyalgia of a briefer (4-session) program that has some of the components as the program that you are in now. But even that shorter program was quite effective. Six weeks after treatment, approximately 25 percent of patients went into remission, meaning their pain had been eliminated or reduced to very low levels. Another 25 percent experienced a moderate reduction in their pain. Furthermore, these reductions in pain were long lasting (measured at six months) and exceeded the results found in studies of medications. The women with fibromyalgia who in this study who were in a control group were able to use any medications or other treatments; however, none of them showed any evidence of pain reduction.

The current 8-week program that you are participating in now is designed to be even more powerful than the briefer program that we tested earlier. This new program addresses a wider range of stressors that people with fibromyalgia face, and it includes more powerful techniques to reduce avoidance and therefore stress. Thus, if you are open to this idea and give this program your best effort, we expect you to obtain significant improvement and perhaps even full pain elimination.

The program is built around changing experiencing, expressing, and releasing emotions that have been blocked or inhibited. We have seen many people released from the pain of fibromyalgia and other pain conditions when they reverse their emotional avoidance. Below are stories of people who have benefited greatly from this approach. If you listen carefully to the full life history of people with fibromyalgia, the relationships between life stressor and the onset of pain become crystal clear. Notice also how these people changed their emotional awareness and avoidance, and their pain improved.

Patients' Stories

(All of the following are true stories taken from the clinical practices of the leaders of this study. Identifying information has been removed to protect confidentiality.)

Here are some cases reflecting how pain can stem from avoided emotional experiences:

A FORTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD WOMAN developed stomach pains and anxiety attacks in the fall one year after her husband died. He was terminally ill and, in accord with his wishes, she had to decide to disconnect his life support, which she felt was in conflict with her religious beliefs. Each fall, her pains returned and increased. Several GI specialists saw her, but no one could help her resolve her pain. Through this program, she learned that her feelings about her husband's death (primarily guilt and loss) caused her pain. Her anxiety attacks were generally in the afternoon, occurring almost exactly at the time of day that he died.

A FIFTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD MAN developed back pain while on a plane from Michigan to California, where he was living. As a child, his father was his hero and well liked by everyone in his small Michigan town. His mother was critical and self-absorbed. She criticized the young boy constantly, and one day he replied to her in a disrespectful manner. Later that day, the mother called the local police and had him taken out of school in handcuffs and put into the town jail for the rest of the day, simply for talking back to his mother. After growing up, he moved to California. When he was

fifty, he returned home to visit his father, who was now elderly and in a nursing home. Upon arriving home, he found that his mother was mistreating his father and he felt that his father was “imprisoned” in the nursing home. On the flight back, he developed severe back pains that lasted for 2 years.

A THIRTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD MAN was raised by a dominant father and a submissive mother in a small, very religious town. He was highly skilled in school and sports, and was admired by most people. When drunk, his father would often physically abuse his mother, but this was accepted as “normal” in his community and no action was ever taken. When asked how he felt about this, the patient replied that he often vowed that if he ever hit a woman, he would “cut off his hand.” When he was a Ph.D. student, he was under the stress of preparing for his oral exams and was working feverishly on a big project. At this time, he began to have pain in both of his hands. The pain progressed to the point where he could not turn a doorknob, could not work on a computer, and could not pick up his infant son. Despite extensive testing and seeking care from several hand specialists, no one could explain his pain. When asked to recall any other events that occurred at the time of the onset of his pain, he noted that there was a conflict between two of his mentors. One mentor was a woman, who began to tell people that the patient was not fit to be in the Ph.D. program. He felt that she threatened his ability to complete his program. He was unaware of the depth of anger he felt towards her and his even stronger feelings of guilt at the prospect of his anger towards a woman. This internal and subconscious conflict was the trigger for his severe hand pain.

The specific symptoms caused by avoided emotional experiences can be quite different, even though the stressor and the emotional reaction may be very similar to that which occurred in childhood, as shown by the following brief vignettes.

A TEENAGER DEVELOPED HEADACHES after being sexually abused by an older brother. She developed fibromyalgia later in life at a time when she was emotionally abused by her husband.

A WOMAN DEVELOPED MIGRAINE HEADACHES as a child after her parents divorced and then developed interstitial cystitis as an adult after her own divorce.

Sometimes symptoms can be triggered by a positive event.

A 33-YEAR OLD MAN DEVELOPED NECK PAIN after his daughter was born. He was extremely happy at the time. However, her arrival complicated his life. He was busy with work and busy at home, and his daughter didn't sleep well at night. He was up several times a night with her, walking up and down the stairs with her to get her back to sleep. After several months of this, he and his wife disagreed on how to deal with her crying at night. He felt stressed, resentful, and trapped. Not being able to express (or even recognize) these feelings, he developed neck pain, which persisted for several months.

In some people, their early childhood experiences did not create the emotional events that typically lead to priming of the central nervous system. Those with loving, stable families and happy childhoods are less likely to develop fibromyalgia later in life. However, they are primed to expect that these relationships will continue, and when something happens that tears their world apart, fibromyalgia can develop.

A FORTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD WOMAN grew up in a nurturing, close family within an idyllic rural community. Her mother chose to give her a larger share of the family inheritance, and this set off a

contested will and the loss of her close relationships with her siblings. The trauma of those changes was enough to trigger severe body pain.

Here are some cases where fibromyalgia developed and then subsequent was cured in response to confronting emotional experiences.

A FORTY-SEVEN-YEAR-OLD WOMAN who migrated to the United States from India, reached a point in her life when she was beginning to think of doing some more things for herself, such as taking classes at a local college. However, her husband took an extra job, and she had three adolescent children who required a lot of her time. On top of that, her mother-in-law moved into her house and began to lecture her on how to be a better cook, homemaker, and mother. In addition, her brother moved in and expected her to wait on him. Being a dutiful person who put her obligations to others ahead of her own desires, she complied with these additional stressful tasks and cancelled her class, but she had no outlet for her feelings of resentment. Her body reacted to these stresses and suppressed emotions with a widespread painful process, which was diagnosed as fibromyalgia. After going through this program, her pain was dramatically reduced. One of the keys to her improvement was that she decided to speak up for herself and take more control over her situation at home.

A FORTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD WOMAN, grew up with a mother who was emotionally distant. The mother was very busy with her own life and was usually gone, often playing bridge and tennis. The patient had no illnesses or symptoms until she was in her thirties. She was happily married, with two small children, for whom she was determined to be the best mother possible. She was having a new home built and trying to make it perfect. At this time, she began to develop widespread pain in her muscles and tendons, which was diagnosed as fibromyalgia. When asked what her mother was doing at the time she and her children needed her help, she replied, "Playing bridge and tennis." She then began to sob over the loss that she experienced as a child and that her children were now experiencing. Her mother was being as distant with her grandchildren as she had been with her own daughter. At this stressful point in her life, that separation was enough to trigger severe pain in her body. Once she realized that she was not physically ill and that her pain came from unexpressed emotions, her pain totally disappeared.

A THIRTY-TWO YEAR OLD WOMAN who was a soldier in the first Gulf War developed fibromyalgia soon after returning from the war. She was upset and resentful that people did not appreciate her military service, and that the military leadership discounted her pain symptoms. For the next several years, her fibromyalgia worsened and she felt unable to get the attention and appreciation of the people in power. One day, she attended a talk by the general in charge of the American forces in the war, and after the talk, she confronted him and told this powerful general that she felt unappreciated for her service. The general then saluted her and said, "Thank you soldier, for your excellent service." The woman reported that her pain disappeared almost immediately, and remained that way. Her ability to express her resentment and assert herself to a powerful figure played a key role in her recovery.

How the Brain Learns and Unlearns Pain and FM

Everyone knows that if you break your arm, it will hurt, but after the fracture heals in a few weeks, the pain will disappear. But we have seen hundreds of people whose pain began with an injury but lasted five, ten, even twenty years. Why? The body has surely healed. The answer to this puzzle is found in the connections between the brain and the body.

We live in a stressful world to which we have not fully adapted. Our brains are wired to react to the very different, ancient world of our ancestors. They experienced acute stress—for example, dangerous animals—on an occasional basis. The brain often has trouble dealing with the chronic stresses of today. That's why, when stress becomes chronic and we feel trapped in situations for which there is no easy way out, we can easily develop a set of nerve connections that are painful.

You already know that stress causes physical reactions. Your face will turn red if you are embarrassed. That's because your emotions cause the autonomic nervous system to increase blood flow to the face. This is a very real bodily response to an emotion. If you have a stressful day at work or at school, you might get a headache; this is also real pain caused by emotions. If you have to give a speech in front of hundreds of people, your stomach may tighten up from nervousness. These are normal everyday reactions caused by the connections between the brain and the body. Everyone accepts that these are physical reactions to stressful events, that they are not signs of disease, and that the symptoms will disappear when the stress that triggers them subsides.

This is the mechanism of fibromyalgia and its associated syndromes. Stress triggers emotions that cause our bodies to react by producing physical symptoms. The symptoms are real. Your face really does turn red when you blush from embarrassment. Your head or your stomach really does hurt if you've had a difficult day or face a daunting challenge. The symptoms, including the pain, are not imaginary.

They are physical processes. They are real. But they are physiological processes that can be reversed. They are temporary. If you have these symptoms, you're not crazy. You're normal. Almost everyone has some physical symptoms due to the body's reaction to stress. It is common knowledge that stress can cause physical reactions.

What is not common knowledge is that stress and emotions can create the nerve pathways that can cause chronic and often severe physical symptoms. The cure for such chronic pain or other symptoms is not a drug or a remedy designed to lessen or cover up these symptoms. If you do not find and treat the underlying cause of the pain, you will not get better. For most people, the underlying cause is that the emotional reactions to stress trigger nerve connections that create physical pain.

The Emotional Brain

The way our brains work explains how the stresses of life can turn into bodily pain. Though our brains are very complicated and everyone reacts differently to different stresses, we share some things in common. We all need to be loved, nurtured, and protected. We all need to grow, develop, and become independent. We all have thoughts and emotions and memories.

Our emotional memories are imprinted in our brains and stored in what are called associative networks. They are imprinted in a part of the brain called the amygdala, the center where emotions are registered and stored. The amygdala is closely connected to the hypothalamus, the center for the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The ANS controls our breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, and many other automatic and involuntary functions—the things our body does without our conscious mind being aware of them.

During times of stress, the amygdala sends signals to activate the ANS and produce the hormones cortisol and adrenaline, which turn on the “fight or flight” reaction. That’s a system that directs blood flow to muscles to get our body ready to run or do battle, and it causes our bodies to react instantly before we are aware of what is going on. Human beings developed this system during the evolutionary process to help our chances for survival.

If we see something squiggly moving across the ground, our autonomic nervous system causes us to immediately jump back to protect ourselves. We do not stop and reach out to see what the squiggly thing is. That conscious action could get us killed. Our protective system kicks in before we have the chance to think. In fact, research shows that when emotions arise quickly, the blood flow in the brain shifts away from the frontal lobes, the conscious thinking part of the brain, to the limbic system, which is the emotional, reacting, and subconscious part of the brain, which includes the amygdala and the autonomic nervous system.

The Role of the Autonomic Nervous System

The autonomic nervous system controls the nerve fibers that affect every area of your body. Studies have shown that emotions such as anxiety or anger cause increased tension in the back muscles of people with chronic back pain. This muscle tension, which typically takes place without our conscious awareness, can cause real and severe physical pain. Often we are not even aware of the emotions that are triggering these automatic physical responses, which is why they are referred to as subconscious or unconscious emotions.

There is a large variety of processes that can occur with ANS activation. Not only are muscles and blood flow involved, but the nervous system, the heart, the gastrointestinal (GI) system, and the genito-urinary (GU) systems can all be altered. And the ANS can produce very specific changes, depending on the specific situation, that will vary from person to person and from moment to moment. A careful understanding of the reactions of animals to stressful situations reveals that they may fight or flee, but they may also freeze (as a rabbit will do) or submit (play dead). The ANS can produce a much greater variety of symptoms in response to stress and emotional reactions in humans. Activation of the muscles can produce pain in almost any part of the body. Nervous system activation can produce tingling, numbness, or burning sensations as well as dizziness, tinnitus, and anxiety. GI and GU system activation can produce irritable bowel and bladder syndromes. Cardiovascular (CV) activation can produce palpitations and a rapid heart rate. Alterations in blood flow can produce migraine headaches. And the freeze and submission responses typically cause fatigue and/or depression.

Pain caused by ANS activation can occur suddenly with an acute spasm of muscles, or it can develop gradually over time. It can occur in the back, neck, head, abdomen, pelvis, or almost anywhere in the body. This pain can be constant or occasional, it can be mild or severe, and it can feel like an ache, a

numbness, or a shooting pain. For people who suffer in these various ways in various places because of mind body symptoms, there is no tissue breakdown or physical disease in the body. Yet, the pain is real.

Stress and Pain

Pain cannot be felt without the brain, which interprets nerve signals and transforms them into the experience of pain. Of course, it is important to be able to feel pain so we can protect ourselves from danger. However, these pathways often tend to get reinforced over time by our reactions to the pain. Just about everyone who has chronic pain will react to that pain with fear, anger, anxiety, frustration, and other worrisome thoughts and emotions. These thoughts and emotions trigger increased pain by an “amplification” process in the brain.

Thoughts and emotions, whether we are aware of them or whether they are subconscious, are major factors in producing chronic pain and related syndromes. In addition, the stress that frequently accompanies these symptoms, such as decreased activity, decreased income, and difficult relationships, adds to the problem by making the stress-producing nerve pathways stronger. In this kind of situation, your brain will continue to produce pain because that’s the only way your brain knows how to deal with these stresses. The truth is that your mind can twist your body into a cycle of very real pain.

It is common for people with difficult emotional experiences in their childhood or their recent past to have this same amplification of pain. In fact, traumatic experiences in childhood can leave an imprint on the brain, making it more likely to develop the vicious pain cycle. People who have a great deal of unresolved stress are also more likely to have chronic pain. Almost everyone has stress to some degree, and in many people it results, sooner or later, in chronic pain that can range from mild and intermittent to intense and unrelenting. And there are many symptoms in addition to pain that can be caused by these wayward connections, such as diarrhea, insomnia, ringing in the ears, fatigue, bladder symptoms, and anxiety.

Pain in the Brain

In addition to the amygdala and the ANS, there are other areas in the brain that affect whether and how we feel pain. One part of the brain that mediates pain is known as the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC). Emotional responses increase the activity of this area, causing pain to become amplified. When you feel pain, this may cause worry about what it is; when you go to the doctor and you’re told you have a problem in your back or neck, this may cause fear; when your doctor tells you that he or she doesn’t know what is causing the pain, this may cause resentment; when the pain becomes chronic and you don’t know if you’ll ever get better, this may cause frustration.

All of these emotional reactions activate the ACC. MRI studies show that when the ACC is activated, pain is greatly increased. In addition, when the ACC is activated, it turns off the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC) area of the brain, a part of the brain that acts to decrease pain.

In addition, chronic stress produces increased sensitivity to pain in the brain, the spinal cord, and the nerves. Certain cytokines (proteins that send messages to other parts of the body) are released

during times of stress, and these cytokines cause cells and nerve endings to be more sensitive to pain.

The Role of Stress in Childhood

It is not only current stress that can trigger painful reactions. Emotional experiences in childhood are imprinted in the amygdala. Several studies show that animals exposed in infancy to very stressful environments (such as separation from their mother or being exposed to painful stimuli) grow up to have overly active autonomic nervous system responses. Human infants who are exposed to repeated blood drawing within the first few weeks of life have increased pain when they have medical procedures several months later. Adults who are exposed to traumatic events in childhood such as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse have a much greater chance of developing chronic pain (as well as anxiety and other psychological disturbances). The emotional imprinting from early experiences is stored in the amygdala, and when a similar experience occurs later in life, the ANS reaction can start a painful process.

Researchers can measure markers of chronic stress, such as abnormalities in an ANS hormone, cortisol. One study found that adults who have abnormalities in cortisol production are more likely to develop chronic pain than those who do not have these abnormalities. This further cements the powerful relationship between chronic stress and chronic pain.

How an Injury Can Start a Cycle of Pain

Sometimes the pain cycle is started by an injury, such as a strain, a sprain, or a fracture. When the injury occurs, the pain signals in the body and brain get fired. Usually these signals will decrease, and the pain will go away when the injury heals. Most acute injuries will heal within a few weeks. That is how long it usually takes for the body to repair any tissue breakdown that has occurred.

After that, if the pain does not go away, there is something else going on. Many people are suffering from chronic pain that they believe is caused by an injury that occurred several months or years ago. That doesn't make sense, because fractures of even our biggest bones will heal in several weeks. The injury itself—whether from a sprain or a strain such as a whiplash injury—is not causing the pain. But an injury can trigger a series of events that lead to chronic pain.

That's especially true if there are stressful life circumstances occurring around the same time as the injury. If so, it is much more likely that the pain signals set in motion by the injury will become learned, and a vicious cycle of pain will develop. It is well known among neuroscientists that when the nerves that carry pain signals from the site of an injury to the brain are activated for some time, the nerves become "sensitized," meaning they are more likely to fire and send more pain signals with lesser amounts of tissue activation.

This is how, over time, acute pain can become chronic, although the tissues have healed from the acute injury. The small nerves learn to react to even very minor changes, such as tense muscles, which are easily triggered by an overly active ACC and ANS. This process of sensitization has been shown to occur in people with fibromyalgia and chronic back pain.

These sensitized nerves that carry pain signals to the brain gradually affect the brain as well. The areas of painful sensation in the brain also become sensitized and continue to experience pain. This is another way that chronic pain becomes engrained. As the neurological system of the brain and body learns these pain and other symptom pathways, these nerve fibers very quickly start to get wired together. The more often nerves fire, the longer the pain occurs, and the more likely these fibers will continue to create this vicious cycle of pain. Scientists use the terms brain reorganization and neuroplasticity to describe the brain's ability to create new pathways. It has been shown that acute pain can induce changes in the spinal cord and brain, which can lead to increased pain and can enlarge over time, creating chronic pain.

The fact that pain can be felt in an area that is not diseased has been illustrated in phantom limb syndrome, where an amputee experiences pain that feels like it is coming from the part of the body that's been amputated. Phantom limb syndrome is a perfect example of the brain creating pain—pain is felt in an area that is clearly not diseased. The pain is caused by nerve sensitization and brain reorganization producing pain, which is felt in the missing limb.

Thoughts and Pain

A great deal of research over the past 20 years has also demonstrated how important the brain is in modulating pain. All pain has sensory, cognitive, and affective components. The **sensory** component includes descriptions of how pain is felt, such as aching, burning, sharpness, or numbing. The **cognitive** component is what you think about the pain: what the cause is, whether you believe it is temporary or permanent, controllable, or curable. The **affective** component consists of your feelings and emotions about the pain, such as fear, worry, anger, and resentment.

There are distinct areas of the nervous system that process these three components of pain. In order to eliminate chronic pain, all of the components need to be addressed. The ways in which people think about their pain and the feelings that are connected to it have great impact on the severity of the pain.

Emotions and Pain

Several studies demonstrate the connection between emotions and chronic pain. More than a third of people with fibromyalgia or irritable bowel syndrome have high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). One study of a group of military veterans with PTSD showed 80 percent of them had chronic pain. Another study examined pain thresholds in people with chronic low back pain. It found that when they recalled a time that had made them angry, they had increased activation of the lower back muscles and experienced more pain. They did not show increases in heart rate or blood pressure and did not have activation of muscle groups unrelated to the areas of pain, which shows that their bodies reacted to anger in a very specific area. In another study, volunteers were put in a situation that created either anxiety or anger and then instructed to either express their feelings normally, try to inhibit their feelings, or try not to show any feelings. After this they placed one hand in an ice water. Those who were instructed not to hide or inhibit their feelings had less tolerance for the pain. Finally, patients with low back pain were instructed to either suppress or not suppress anger during a stressful laboratory experiment. Those instructed to suppress their emotions reported more pain, both during and after the experiment. Together these studies show that both anxiety and anger can cause

a lower pain threshold and can increase muscle tension. Suppression of emotions leads to even higher pain levels.

Brain imaging studies have also revealed the strong relationship between emotions and pain. For example, Dr. Eisenberger and her colleagues have shown that when people are put in a laboratory situation where they are excluded or rejected by others, the ACC is activated and pain sensitivity is enhanced. The ACC is also activated by fear and worry, as is the amygdala and the ANS.

When pain develops, if we are unsure why it's there and our doctors are unable to explain it or make it go away, most people begin to worry about the pain and to fear that it will become a constant problem. These emotions then trigger pain pathways in the brain to become more pronounced, which, of course, tends to exacerbate the pain. A vicious cycle of pain, fear of pain, decreased activity, and worry often ensues. When this happens, chronic pain becomes a way of life, and there is no way out of it until the thoughts and feelings which are driving the pain are addressed.

To summarize, when we experience difficult or stressful situations, especially if we have had significant stresses earlier in life and if we are unable to express or show how we feel, we will be at risk for our bodies to experience pain.

The Triggers of Pain

Once a pain cycle is initiated between the brain and the body, certain “triggers” will usually begin to develop and add to the painful responses. Most people have heard of the experiments of Ivan Pavlov, the Russian scientist, who rang a buzzer when he fed his dogs. He soon noticed the dogs would salivate when the buzzer rang, even if there was no food in sight. Their brains had learned that a buzzer meant food, so their bodies reacted accordingly.

It is easy to see how certain triggers can develop in people with chronic pain. Once a pain pathway (say, a headache) has started, if it occurs during a stressful situation that also happens to coincide with eating a certain food, or drinking red wine, or seeing a certain kind of light, or meeting a certain person, the brain will learn that association. Then the next time you are exposed to that chemical or situation, the headache can recur. This is called conditioning. Physical activities can also be triggers. For example, someone with back pain will notice that walking, driving, sitting, or bending over will cause pain, and these actions will be associated with pain and become triggers for the pain.

Emotions can also be conditioned to pain. If an injury and pain occurred and the person was fearful or depressed, then later, experiencing those same feelings can elicit the response of pain. Over time, the pathways connecting these triggers to the pain will become stronger, and the pain cycle will become very well learned by the brain and the body. Fortunately, these triggers can be overcome or, in psychological terms, extinguished, by unlearning this connection. The program will teach you how to experience emotions and situations without experiencing the pain.

For example, there is research showing that only 32% of soldiers who were wounded in battle in World War II reported pain. In contrast, almost all of the civilians who were injured, such as British citizens wounded in bombing raids, reported pain. Why the difference? An injury to a soldier means that they will be sent to safety such as a hospital. A wound to civilians means that their lives are in danger. The message here is that the meaning of pain influences it. Pain that is interpreted as a danger signal is much more painful.

Priming of Pain

Another important concept to understand is that of “priming.” When we learn how to ride a bicycle or throw a ball, those nerve pathways become engrained. Even if we haven’t been on a bike or thrown a ball in several years, when we need to, those pathways will be activated, and we will perform that skill. Nerve impulses that are caused by a physical injury, such as a car accident or a fall, create a pain pathway between the brain and the body, which will typically diminish over a few days or weeks as the damaged body tissues heal. However, the pain pathways can lie dormant, and at some time in the future, if situations occur that create significant stress and emotional reactions, these pain pathways can re-emerge to create the same type of pain.

There was a young woman with severe back pain. As a teenager, she had sustained a back injury from a fall during an athletic competition. Her injury healed, and she was fine for several years. However, when her fiancé broke off their engagement just prior to the wedding date, she developed back pain in the same area, although no new injury occurred. Her brain was primed to have back pain in that specific area, and it created pain in a place that was convenient since it had already been learned.

How the Brain Stops Pain

Most people don’t realize that the brain can both create and cure chronic painful conditions, so they search for cures by using drugs or surgery. Cutting-edge brain research demonstrates that it is possible to change the brain pathways and interrupt this vicious cycle.

There are three major components of the nervous system that create the vicious cycle of pain: the nerves that send pain signals from the body to the brain; the brain itself, where those nerve signals are interpreted; and the nerves that send signals back to the body. The best way to end chronic pain and other chronic symptoms is by retraining the brain, the controller of the nervous system.

The good news is that the brain and the nervous system can be retrained to get out of the ruts that produce pain and to forge new nerve pathways to freedom from pain. An increasing body of evidence is showing that the brain has amazing neuroplasticity—it is always learning and creating new structural pathways. All you have to do is tap into that power and use it to reprogram your response to pain and to the factors that intensify that pain.

Fortunately, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, which is in the conscious part of the brain (the frontal lobe), can reverse the vicious cycle of pain by controlling the subconscious pathways that produce fibromyalgia and other mind body symptoms. The DLPFC is so powerful that it can eliminate painful experiences. It has been shown that people who habitually cut themselves with razor blades have much more tolerance for physical pain. When their brains are scanned, their DLPFC area is very active, demonstrating the power that this brain area can have over pain.

When the DLPFC is activated, the ACC—the area that exacerbates pain—is automatically deactivated, thus further reducing pain. Research has shown that people can learn to decrease the ACC and increase the DLPFC and therefore reduce pain as well as psychological symptoms. The exercises in this program are designed to increase activation of the DLPFC, decrease activation in

the ACC and the ANS, extinguish triggers that perpetuate pain, and diminish the emotional responses from the amygdala.

Understanding Fibromyalgia

One of the more puzzling disorders is fibromyalgia, which means “painful muscles and tissues.” People diagnosed with this disorder have chronic widespread pain throughout their bodies, but no one can tell them why. There is no pathological process (no tissue breakdown or destruction) in the bones, joints, tendons, or muscles, yet the pain can be severe and debilitating. Brain imaging studies have shown that the pain is real and is felt as much as pain from a bone fracture. It is incredibly frustrating for people with widespread pain to have no idea what causes it, to be considered crazy by some people, to be considered incurable by others, and to get little or no relief from available pain medications, muscle relaxants, anti-depressants, and mood stabilizers.

Biomedical experts have been able to determine that there is sensitization of pain fibers in the brains of people with fibromyalgia and changes in some of the neurotransmitters in their brains. However, they have not been able to develop any significant breakthrough medical therapies to change these brain processes. In fact, very few patients with this condition have been cured or gone into remission through standard medical treatments.

There is ample evidence that people with fibromyalgia have much higher rates of life stressors and victimization (e.g., abuse) compared to people with other physical disorders and compared to the general population. There is also a large overlap between those with fibromyalgia and those experiencing anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. As you shall see in this program, these stressors and how avoidance of emotional experiences lead to changes in the brain, which are the primary causes of the fibromyalgia symptoms. Fortunately, creating powerful NEW emotional learning experiences can reverse the brain changes, leading to reduced pain and symptoms.

Worksheet: Sources of Stress in Your Life

List of PAST traumatic or stressful events: Include any interactions or events that caused hurt, shame, resentment, embarrassment, pain, anger, guilt, humiliation, fear, worry, or other negative emotions. Try to think of anything and everything which falls into this category and list each event or situation as a separate item. Include events from your childhood as far back as you can remember. While you're doing this exercise, put down anything that comes into your mind, even if you think it may have no connection to your fibromyalgia symptoms.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____
- i. _____
- j. _____
- k. _____
- l. _____
- m. _____
- n. _____
- o. _____
- p. _____
- q. _____
- r. _____
- s. _____

List of CURRENT EXTERNAL stressful events: Include any interactions or events that caused hurt, shame, resentment, embarrassment, pain, anger, guilt, humiliation, fear, worry, or other emotions. Try to think of anything and everything which falls into this category and list each event or situation as a separate item. While you're doing this exercise, put down anything that comes into your mind, even if you think it may have no connection to your fibromyalgia symptoms.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____
- i. _____
- j. _____
- k. _____
- l. _____
- m. _____
- n. _____
- o. _____
- p. _____
- q. _____
- r. _____
- s. _____

List of INTERNAL issues, conflicts, or struggles that cause stress: These sources of stress are primarily internal. They might relate to your beliefs, attitudes, desires, or personality. Try to think of anything and everything, and list each issue separately. Include beliefs or traits that were learned or developed in childhood as well as those you currently possess.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____
- i. _____
- j. _____
- k. _____
- l. _____
- m. _____
- n. _____
- o. _____
- p. _____
- q. _____
- r. _____
- s. _____

Session 2: Overview

- Review Session 1
- Triangle Model of Stress and Symptoms
- Defenses and Avoidances
- Activating, Core, or Primary Emotions
- Activity: Experiencing and Expressing Anger
- Activity: Experiencing and Expressing Close or Connecting Feelings

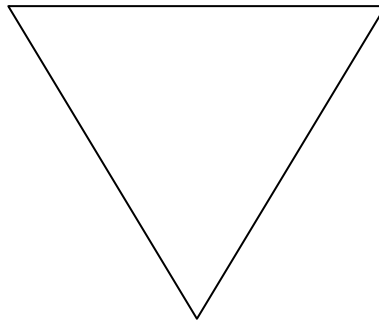
TRIANGLE MODEL OF STRESS AND SYMPTOMS

Avoidances or Defenses

(Behaviors, Thoughts, Feelings)

Inhibiting Symptoms

(Anxiety, Guilt, Tension, Pain)



Important Feelings or Needs

(Feelings: Anger, Grief, Love, Joy, Sexual desire)

(Needs: Power/independence/protection, Connection to others)

Triangle Model of Stress and Symptoms

- The Triangle helps to explain stress and symptoms
 - Important Feelings or Needs: Most important to experience and express these. Blocking or avoiding them causes symptoms.
 - Avoidances or Defenses: These are actions that you do to prevent yourself from experiencing important feelings or meeting your important needs. You should stop using these so that you can experience important emotions and have your needs met.
 - Anxiety and symptoms: These are experiences that your mind and body generate, and they signal that important feelings are present and/or that your defenses are not working well. They often inhibit or prevent you from acting or experiencing important feelings. These are often distracting. You do not want to experience or express these feelings or even focus on them.

Defenses

- Actions of mind or body to avoid or block experiencing and expressing activating feelings or getting your needs met
- Defenses are normal, and typically learned earlier in life
- Defenses can cost us:
 - Keep us from experiencing, expressing, and releasing important feelings, when it actually is SAFE!
 - Keep us from getting our needs for power/ autonomy and connection met.
 - Cause stress from inhibiting important feelings
- We need to “catch” and stop defenses, so that we can experience, express, and release our emotions, and get our needs met

Defenses Checklist

All of us do things with our actions or our minds when we have emotions that we do not want to feel inside or to express outwardly. Sometimes these can be helpful, but when we do them too often or when we do them when we really should experience or express emotions, then they can become unhelpful. On the lists below, check those defenses that you often or typically do to **avoid** experiencing and expressing your feelings.

Things you do with your actions:

- Change the topic
- Avoid eye contact
- Talk a lot
- Withdraw, move away, or leave
- Drink alcohol, use substances, or eat
- Get physically active, such as clean, exercise, or shop
- Laugh or giggle
- Make jokes or be sarcastic
- Make excuses
- Maintain your composure or act as if nothing is wrong
- Use a relaxation technique
- Meditate or pray
- Sleep or try to sleep
- Ask questions (e.g., “why”) rather than express thoughts and feelings directly
- Show a tough exterior (“this does not bother me”)
- Distract yourself with TV, videos, internet, or work
- Take care of others’ needs, such as family members, children, or friends
- Procrastinate
- Use euphemisms—polite or clean words rather than offensive or unpleasant words
- Blame or beat up yourself (when you should be angry or upset with others)
- Blame or become angry with others (when you are feeling upset with yourself)
- Put on a happy face and try to feel positive
- Cry

Things you do with your mind:

- Think about something else, distract your mind
- Block thoughts or memories
- Remain certain rather than doubt or question
- Think only positive thoughts, minimize the negative, or look on the bright side
- Think logically or rationally about the issue
- Fantasize, daydream, or imagine something good
- Deny or pretend something is not real
- Mentally “check out” or go “numb”
- Reassure yourself, such as “everything happens for a reason”
- Think the worst possible outcomes

Avoidances

- In daily life, we avoid many things that cause of physical or emotional symptoms (pain, anxiety, tension, guilt, embarrassment)
- These can be placed in various categories:
 - People: family members, neighbors, co-workers, people at religious institution
 - Places: where you had an accident or trauma; a cemetery, a certain room in the house
 - Objects: pictures, memorabilia, medical things, some unique object that evokes discomfort for you
 - Actions: speaking up, disagreeing, getting close, touching, eye contact, swearing, sexual behavior
 - Thoughts & memories: disagreeable religious ideas, sexual thoughts, bad words, troubling memories
 - Feelings and emotions: experiencing or expressing anger, sadness, joy, love
 - Physical sensations: heart beating fast, light headedness, stomach upset, pain

Important Feelings and Needs

- Empowering and protecting feelings and needs: Anger, rage, assertion
- Connecting or attaching feelings: Sadness, fear, sometimes guilt (if appropriate), longing for closeness
- Positive feelings: joy, gratitude, forgiveness, love, sexual pleasure

Empowering / Protecting Feelings

- Anger is a healthy, normal, adaptive emotion
- Should be experienced when treated unjustly, victimized, violated, or something taken from you
- Very often in conflict, so it is often suppressed or defended against
- External reasons (family, culture, religion)
- Internal reasons (guilt, fear, rejection, losing control)
- The most common source of bodily symptoms
 - Muscle tension
 - Activates brain's pain pathways
 - Causes fatigue
- You need to experience the release that comes from expressing anger
 - It is a major brain changer!
- Anger can be expressed directly in relationships in a healthy way

Connecting or Attaching Feelings

- Are healthy, normal, adaptive desires or emotions
- Should be experienced when seeking comfort, connection, trust
- Include guilt, fear, sadness, and love
- Very often in conflict, so they are often suppressed or defended against
 - Anger suppresses these feelings
 - Learned mistrust or pain in relationships
- You need to experience the release that comes from expressing these feelings
 - It is a major brain changer!
- Connecting feelings can be expressed directly in relationships in a healthy way

Session 2: Home Activities Checklist

This week, you should do the following:

1. Worksheet: Investigating your Childhood
 - Do this worksheet over 1 or 2 sessions or days
2. Daily Avoidance Record
 - Monitor your experiences each day and record any experiences that you avoid because they would make you uncomfortable or experience stress or pain
3. Listen to CD: “Emotional Awareness” (Track 1 or 2)
 - At least once, but more often if able and interested

INVESTIGATING YOUR CHILDHOOD

Childhood experiences create powerful reactions in our minds that remain for the rest of our lives. Emotions that are generated when we are young can very easily get triggered later in life, and, when they are triggered, can start stress-related illnesses. It is usually relatively easy to identify the childhood issues that people with stress-related have grown up with.

Some people with fibromyalgia have had severe childhood traumas. However, for many people, the childhood issues that generate strong emotions are normal experiences, such as jealousy, being ostracized, or picked on. These common experiences can generate enough emotions to cause stress-related illnesses, either at the time of the events or, more commonly, later in life.

Consider the following questions and write brief answers to as many of them as seem important.

What words would you use to describe your father? (or another male caregiver)

What kind of work did your father do? Was he successful in his career?

Was your father loving? Did he hug you or tell you he loved you? Was he supportive?

Were you particularly close to your father? Did he confide in you?

Was his love conditional?

Did your father have high expectations of you?

Was he critical or judgmental?

Was he a perfectionist?

Did he yell at you?

Did he hit or punish you?

Were you afraid of him?

Was your father aloof, neglectful, or self-centered?

Were some children given preferential treatment or treated more harshly than others? If so, how did that make you feel? How did that affect your relationships with your siblings?

Did your father drink or use drugs? If so, how did that affect him, the family, and you?

Did your father have any mental health issues?

Was he anxious, worried, or insecure?

How did your father treat your mother?

Did you identify with your father?

Did you attempt to be like him or to be different from him?

What words would you use to describe your mother (or another caregiver)?

What kind of work did your mother do?

Was she successful in her career?

Was your mother loving? Did she hug you or tell you she loved you? Was she supportive?

Were you particularly close to your mother? Did she confide in you?

Was her love conditional?

Did your mother have high expectations of you?

Was she critical or judgmental?

Was she a perfectionist?

Did she yell at you?

Did she hit or punish you?

Were you afraid of her?

Was your mother aloof, neglectful, or self-centered?

Were some children given preferential treatment or treated more harshly than others? If so, how did that make you feel? How did that affect the relationship between you and any of your siblings?

Did your mother drink or use drugs? If so, how did that affect her, the family, and you?

Did your mother have any mental health issues?

Was she anxious, worried, or insecure?

Did you identify with your mother?

Did you attempt to be like her or to be different from her?

How did your mother treat your father?

Who was in charge of the house?

Who handled disciplinary issues?

Did your parents argue?

Did anyone other than your mother and father have responsibility for you or care for you as a child? If so, who? How was your relationship with them?

Think of the relationships you had with your siblings while you were growing up.

Were there resentments or jealousies?

Was there any cruelty, meanness, or abuse?

Did any of your siblings have any illnesses, psychological problems, or drug abuse problems?

Did any of your siblings rebel, act out, or behave in ways that were upsetting to your parents or to you?

How did you react to these situations?

How was money handled in your family?

Did you feel that money was a scarce resource?

Did your parents use money as a controlling agent?

Finally, consider any particularly stressful or traumatic events in your childhood.

Describe any of the following: deaths, moves, bullying, taunting, teasing, emotional or physical abuse, changes in school situations, conflicts with teachers, or changes in family situations?

Have you ever been subjected to any episodes of unwanted sexual activity or sexual abuse? If so, describe to the degree that you are able.

Daily Avoidance Record

A major cause of stress and symptoms is conflict over doing or experiencing various things. All of us go about our daily lives avoiding some things that would otherwise make us feel bad in some way—scared, anxious, tense, embarrassed, guilty, or even in pain. When we avoid something, we usually feel temporarily better, but it costs us. Our lives become constrained and we are not free. We are unable to grow or accomplish what we want or need. We avoid because it is easier in the short run, but hurts us in the long run. This conflict between what you would like to express or experience and the discomfort of doing so is very stressful, making our symptoms and pain worse.

There are many different categories of experiences that people avoid because of negative feelings. These include certain:

- a) people who create a conflict in us
- b) places, such as locations where something bad happened
- c) objects that bother us (even if most people find them harmless)
- d) actions, including saying or doing things that are uncomfortable
- e) thoughts and memories that disturb us
- f) emotions or feelings, including experiencing and expressing them
- g) physical sensations, including uncomfortable arousal and even pain

Sometimes the things we avoid are big and obvious: we don't speak up, or go somewhere by ourselves, or express anger. Often, however, the things we avoid are very subtle, and we may not notice them unless we pay close attention, such as avoiding being touched, or thinking a bad thought, or eye contact.

The goal of this recording exercise is to help you become aware of the various things that you might avoid during your daily life and why you avoid them. On the following recording sheets—there are 7 of them, one for each day of this coming week—try to list those experiences that you avoid each day. Focus on recording those experiences that trigger negative feelings in you if you encounter or face the experience (discomfort, anxiety, embarrassment, pain). Record as many each day as you can, but try to find at least one avoided experience each day. You don't have to fill in every "type" of experience, but complete as many as you can. Most people have at least a few avoidances each day—often many!

Next, try to identify the negative feelings that underlie your avoidance—the feelings that you would feel if you engaged in the experience. Write those words in the space. Finally, think about whether or not you would like to change your avoidance. Would you like to be able to face it or do it, rather than avoid it? Write your response in that space. Remember, your job is to be an "avoidance detective" in your own life and start to identify those experiences that you avoid.

By the way, pay attention to those experiences that you "do all the time" or "do a lot of." These are often signs that you are avoiding the opposite experience. For example, a lot of laughing, apologizing, arguing, or checking could be a sign that you are avoiding doing something else, such as asserting or being vulnerable and open, or taking risks.

DAILY AVOIDANCE RECORD

Date: _____

<u>What I Avoided</u>	<u>Why Avoided?</u> (Ex: fear, anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, pain)	<u>Want to change?</u> (yes, maybe, no)
People:		
Places:		
Objects:		
Actions:		
Thoughts/Memories:		
Emotions/Feelings:		
Physical Sensations:		

Pay attention when you do a lot of something—you may be avoiding something else

DAILY AVOIDANCE RECORD

Date: _____

<u>What I Avoided</u>	<u>Why Avoided?</u> (Ex: fear, anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, pain)	<u>Would like to not avoid (to face it)?</u>
People:		
Places:		
Objects:		
Actions:		
Thoughts/Memories:		
Emotions/Feelings:		
Physical Sensations:		

Pay attention when you do a lot of something—you may be avoiding something else

DAILY AVOIDANCE RECORD

Date: _____

<u>What I Avoided</u>	<u>Why Avoided?</u> (Ex: fear, anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, pain)	<u>Would like to not avoid (to face it)?</u>
People:		
Places:		
Objects:		
Actions:		
Thoughts/Memories:		
Emotions/Feelings:		
Physical Sensations:		

Pay attention when you do a lot of something—you may be avoiding something else

DAILY AVOIDANCE RECORD

Date: _____

<u>What I Avoided</u>	<u>Why Avoided?</u> (Ex: fear, anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, pain)	<u>Would like to not avoid (to face it)?</u>
People:		
Places:		
Objects:		
Actions:		
Thoughts/Memories:		
Emotions/Feelings:		
Physical Sensations:		

Pay attention when you do a lot of something—you may be avoiding something else

DAILY AVOIDANCE RECORD

Date: _____

<u>What I Avoided</u>	<u>Why Avoided?</u> (Ex: fear, anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, pain)	<u>Would like to not avoid (to face it)?</u>
People:		
Places:		
Objects:		
Actions:		
Thoughts/Memories:		
Emotions/Feelings:		
Physical Sensations:		

Pay attention when you do a lot of something—you may be avoiding something else

DAILY AVOIDANCE RECORD

Date: _____

<u>What I Avoided</u>	<u>Why Avoided?</u> (Ex: fear, anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, pain)	<u>Would like to not avoid (to face it)?</u>
People:		
Places:		
Objects:		
Actions:		
Thoughts/Memories:		
Emotions/Feelings:		
Physical Sensations:		

Pay attention when you do a lot of something—you may be avoiding something else

DAILY AVOIDANCE RECORD

Date: _____

<u>What I Avoided</u>	<u>Why Avoided?</u> (Ex: fear, anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, pain)	<u>Would like to not avoid (to face it)?</u>
People:		
Places:		
Objects:		
Actions:		
Thoughts/Memories:		
Emotions/Feelings:		
Physical Sensations:		

Pay attention when you do a lot of something—you may be avoiding something else

Session 3: Overview

- Review Session 2 and Check-up
- Review and Discussion of Avoided Experiences
- Unhelpful Beliefs that Cause Avoidance
- Conflicted Feelings in Relationships
- Experiencing, Expressing, and Releasing Feelings about Relationships
- Unsent letter of anger or resentment

Facing or Confronting

Typically avoided:

People

Places

Objects

Actions

Thoughts / memories

Emotions / feelings

Physical sensations



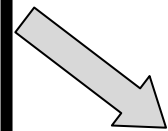
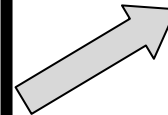
Unhelpful (Wrong) Beliefs

1) Bad things will happen (or are very likely to happen)

- It will turn out bad
- It will go wrong
- Something bad will happen to me or someone I care about
- I'll disappoint someone
- The feelings will be too strong

2) I won't be able to handle whatever happens

- I won't be able to cope with it
- I'll fall apart
- I'll hurt so bad
- I'll not recover



True?



Continue to Avoid



Continued Pain

False ?



Face and Confront



Experience Emotions



Reduction in Pain

Conflicted Feelings In Relationships

One of the biggest stress sources is due to strong, conflicted feelings about an important person. The conflict usually involves the two key desires and feelings that all of us have:

- 1) To stop the victimization or abuse, protect or defend yourself, hurt or punish the other person. Anger or rage is the appropriate and empowering feeling here
- 2) To be loved and cared for, wanted, respected, able to trust that person, depend on that person, and so on. Feelings of guilt, sadness, fear, trust, and gratitude are usually here—that is, feelings that make you feel connect, attached, close, or intimate.

First, identify this person and their relationship to you. Then, write both sets of feelings, saying them directly to the person. Write in present tense and use “I” and “you” language.

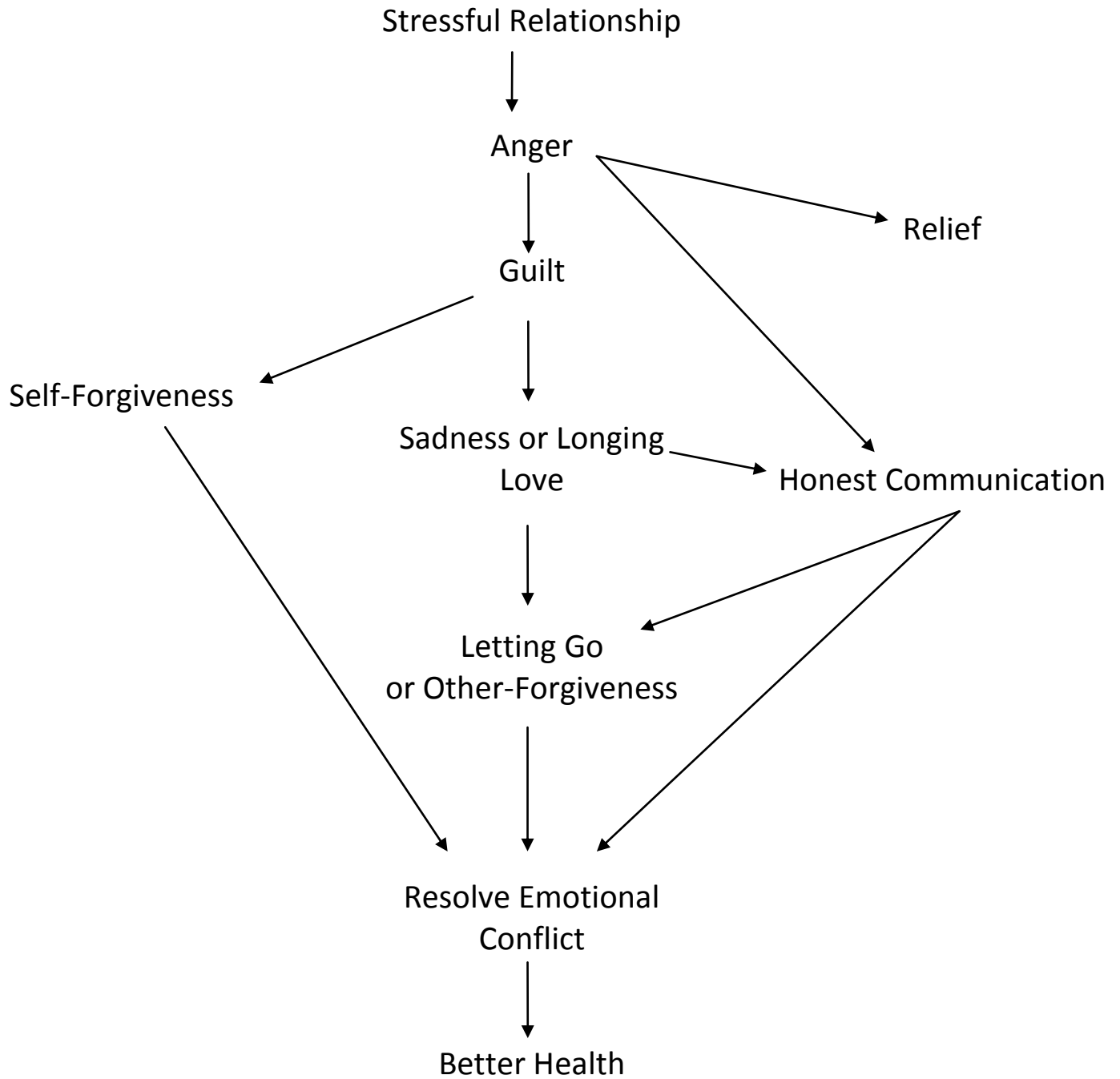
In the left column, write about your anger or rage toward that person. Write specifically about what they did. Use strong, powerful language. Do not hold back on your descriptions. In the right column, write about your other feelings—your wish for that person to love or value you, to be dependable, your guilt or sadness, and so on.

The person is: _____

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Experiencing, Expressing, and Releasing: The Progression of Feelings about Stressful Relationships



Working with Emotions Worksheet

1. Issue or Relationship Problem: _____

Anger/resentment: _____

Guilt/Shame: _____

Sadness/Grief: _____

Love / Connection: _____

Letting go / forgiveness: _____

Actions taken: _____

Lessons learned: _____

2. Issue or Relationship Problem: _____

Anger/resentment: _____

Guilt/Shame: _____

Sadness/Grief: _____

Love / Connection: _____

Letting go / forgiveness: _____

Actions taken: _____

Lessons learned: _____

3. Issue or Relationship Problem: _____

Anger/resentment: _____

Guilt/Shame: _____

Sadness/Grief: _____

Love / Connection: _____

Letting go / forgiveness: _____

Actions taken: _____

Lessons learned: _____

4. Issue or Relationship Problem: _____

Anger/resentment: _____

Guilt/Shame: _____

Sadness/Grief: _____

Love / Connection: _____

Letting go / forgiveness: _____

Actions taken: _____

Lessons learned: _____

5. Issue or Relationship Problem: _____

Anger/resentment: _____

Guilt/Shame: _____

Sadness/Grief: _____

Love / Connection: _____

Letting go / forgiveness: _____

Actions taken: _____

Lessons learned: _____

6. Issue or Relationship Problem: _____

Anger/resentment: _____

Guilt/Shame: _____

Sadness/Grief: _____

Love / Connection: _____

Letting go / forgiveness: _____

Actions taken: _____

Lessons learned: _____

7. Issue or Relationship Problem: _____

Anger/resentment: _____

Guilt/Shame: _____

Sadness/Grief: _____

Love / Connection: _____

Letting go / forgiveness: _____

Actions taken: _____

Lessons learned: _____

8. Issue or Relationship Problem: _____

Anger/resentment: _____

Guilt/Shame: _____

Sadness/Grief: _____

Love / Connection: _____

Letting go / forgiveness: _____

Actions taken: _____

Lessons learned: _____

Experiencing, Expressing, and Releasing

Step 1: Experience and express anger in the mind and body

(The intensity of anger experienced and expressed should fit the degree of violation experienced by the patient. This can range from assertive firm words for minor conflicts, to aggressive or murderous rage for severe violations, victimizations, or trauma.)

- a. Describe the situation, including imaging self there
- b. Verbally express anger directly to the offender
- c. Stop using defenses against the anger
- d. Verbally express until anger is felt in face, head, arms, hands, chest
- e. Allow yourself to use your words and actions (gestures) to stop the offending person, or to hurt that person back.
- f. Continue this expression until you feel either relief or a new feeling of sadness / loss.

Step 2: Inquire about guilt and sadness

(Adaptive guilt and sadness will be present to the degree that the relationship was one that the patient valued or should have valued, such as parents, siblings, and such. Violations by strangers or people who were distant should not elicit guilt and sadness.)

- a. Allow yourself to experience any true guilt from the anger that you expressed.
- b. This often stems from sadness over loss of a relationship, or the longing for closeness with the other person.

Step 3: Explore love and connection

- a. Allow yourself to experience any love for the other person.
- b. Imagine and say aloud what you want to say to them. Can you find compassion?

Step 4: Explore Actions

- a. Consider whether you need to use healthy communication with the other.
- b. Consider whether you can or should set boundaries to protect yourself.
- c. Consider whether you should “let go” of that person, or at least the hurt and pain from that relationship.
- d. Consider whether forgiveness is possible.

Session 3: Home Activities Checklist

- 1) Reading and Worksheet: “Dealing with Pain and Other Symptoms: Reprogramming your Nerve Pathways”
- 2) Engage in Avoided Experiences: Weekly Record
 - Try to engage in at least one typically avoided experience this week, but up to once per day
 - Record the experience that you tried, and its outcome
- 3) Daily Writing Exercise: Unsent Letters (and reflections)
 - Try to do this writing exercise 4 sessions or days this week
- 4) Listen to CD: “Anger Awareness and Expression” (Tracks 3 or 4)
 - Do at least once, but as often as able and interested

Dealing with Pain and Other Symptoms: Reprogramming Your Nerve Pathways

Many people will find that there are clear relationships between the type and amount of fibromyalgia pain and the emotional work that we are asking you to do in this program. When you think about stressful issues or write or talk about emotional issues, this can trigger pain pathways in the brain and the body. Activation of these pathways generates fibromyalgia pain. The more you understand these pathways and the linkages between pain and emotions, the better you will be, and the sooner you will see improvement in pain and other symptoms.

The reason that emotions and pain are linked in the brain and the body is that the emotions trigger an alarm mechanism that we are all born with. Stressful situations trigger a danger signal that the brain sounds, just as it can be triggered by being threatened physically. Studies have shown that emotional pain and physical pain both trigger the same alarm pathways in the brain that cause the body to respond with pain, anxiety and fear, fatigue, and often other symptoms, such as diarrhea or the need to urinate.

Therefore if you notice that your pain or other symptoms are increased when you start doing the emotional work in this program, it is important to realize that there is a good reason for this connection. When this happens, it should confirm for you that the emotions are the trigger for your pain. These exercises typically make that relationship very clear.

When your pain begins to increase in response to these exercises or other stressful situations in your life, you can now understand why the pain has increased and you can begin to see it in a new light. You can now see that the pain is simply a response to the danger signal and you can begin to worry less about the pain itself and focus on dealing with the stressful situations and the emotions. When you are able to deal differently with these situations and emotions, your pain will decrease and even go away. In fact, when emotions create pain, this is a good thing and exactly what we expect will happen.

Therefore when pain is increased, we are asking you to think of the pain in a new way and learn to stop worrying about the pain itself. We are asking you to actually “relax” when the pain occurs, rather than become tense. This is obviously not always easy. However with practice you will learn to reprogram these pain pathways in your brain. The exercises below will give you very specific things to do to reprogram the pain and anxiety pathways.

The following exercises give you methods of talking to your brain and your body. This self-talk will help you to override the pain pathways. It may seem silly to talk to yourself, but it really works. You are going to take charge of your pain; you are going to overcome it by force of will power. I don't advise ignoring your symptoms and hoping that they will go away. Ignoring symptoms can be similar to ignoring the puppy who is chewing the furniture; the puppy will just keep doing it until taught that it is unacceptable. You may find it takes many repetitions for your mind to stop producing the pain pathways. Keep it up as if you are training a puppy.

Reprogramming Triggers to Fibromyalgia Symptoms

Many people find that their pain or other fibromyalgia symptoms are triggered by certain situations or activities. For example, you may find that sitting, bending in a certain way, eating certain foods, or interacting with certain people may trigger the onset of symptoms. You may try to avoid these triggers to avoid having pain. It is generally not a good idea to avoid your triggers. The more you avoid them, the greater power they begin to have over you. Avoiding certain foods or locations or positions or activities can create fear and insecurity. Fear and insecurity will create more pain. It is much better to meet your triggers head on and learn to overcome them. The more you practice doing this, the sooner you will improve.

Complete the list provided here to help you become aware of these triggers and alert you to any associations that have developed over time. **List any activities, movements, places, positions, thoughts, emotions, people, situations, foods, weather changes, or anything else that triggers your symptoms.** Include anything that occurs at the same time or just before the symptoms occur.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____
- i. _____
- j. _____
- k. _____
- l. _____
- m. _____
- n. _____
- o. _____
- p. _____
- q. _____

When you have encountered, or are about to encounter, any of these triggers, either before or after you have developed any symptoms, do Exercise 1 below to prevent the symptoms from occurring or to reduce them.

EXERCISE 1:

When pain or other symptoms occur, stop and take a deep breath. Then take a moment to remind yourself that there is nothing seriously wrong with your body. You are healthy, and the fibromyalgia symptoms will subside soon. Tell your mind that you realize that the symptoms are just a way of warning you about underlying feelings of fear, guilt, anger, anxiety, shame, inadequacy, or other emotions. Tell your mind to stop producing the symptoms immediately. Do this with force and conviction, either out loud or silently. Take a few deep breaths, and move on with what you were doing.

This is the basic exercise to help you take control of your symptoms. It's an affirmation of your health that works because it activates the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex of your brain, which is the conscious part of the brain that reduces pain. It is critical that you believe in the importance of this exercise and that you believe fully in your ability to improve your symptoms by altering your mind. At first, you may feel embarrassed or self-conscious to talk to yourself, but these affirmations can be amazingly successful for defeating fibromyalgia. So, believe in them. Do them with enthusiasm! If you are so inclined, you have permission to curse. In fact, recent research studies showed that using swear words is helpful in reducing pain.

Many people are faced with constant pain, and they could spend their whole day talking to their brain and body. In this situation, you will need to practice this exercise frequently, but certainly not all day. Even if you don't see results initially, keep practicing—it may take some time to retrain your brain.

The more you encounter your triggers, the more opportunity you will have to overcome them and return to health. You can choose to take on your triggers, either gradually or more rapidly. You might choose to start exercising, driving more often, eating foods you've avoided, or going out in certain weather. Challenge yourself, and push forward to reprogram your brain.

Remember that you are doing this for yourself and that you need to take time for yourself in order to get better. You deserve that time, and you deserve to live your life without pain or other fibromyalgia symptoms.

Reprogramming Thoughts and Emotions Connected to Fibromyalgia Symptoms

It is critical to begin to notice thoughts and emotions as they occur. Everyone has a large number of them during the day. Most go unnoticed and can add to the buildup of emotions in the subconscious. One day a woman with fibromyalgia was walking into the kitchen, and she suddenly noticed a sharp pain that occurred in her back. The pain lasted a few minutes and seemed to come from “out of the blue.” She immediately stopped what she was doing and tried to notice what was going on in her mind. She asked herself, “What was I thinking about?” Her first reaction was that she wasn’t thinking about anything. So she asked again. This time it came to her. She had been thinking about a conflict she was having with a relative.

Thoughts and emotions are constantly bubbling below the surface of our consciousness. You can’t notice every one of them, but the more you train yourself to notice mental events, the better you will be at connecting your thoughts and emotions to fibromyalgia symptoms. Once you begin to make these connections, you are well on your way to getting better.

During your day, try to identify any emotions such as fear, anger, resentment, guilt, hurt, or shame that occur, whether they happen when you are having fibromyalgia symptoms or at other times. **It is important to recognize that all of your thoughts and emotions are normal.** Everyone has thoughts and emotions that appear to be at times silly, weird, dangerous, petty, fearful, and even evil. You can learn to notice a wide variety of thoughts and emotions yet stop your mind and body from reacting to them with pain or other symptoms.

When you notice any of these emotions, do the next exercise to reprogram your mind to reduce the symptoms they may be causing.

EXERCISE 2:

When you notice emotions during the day, whether they are associated with any symptoms or not, stop and take a deep breath. Then take a moment to talk to your mind. Tell yourself that your emotions and feelings are normal. Accept that you have these thoughts and that they may be very strong at times. Take another deep breath to allow the feelings to settle. Pay attention to what is causing the emotion. Then tell yourself that you won’t allow these thoughts and emotions to continue to cause fibromyalgia symptoms any longer. Do this firmly and assertively. Tell your mind that you are going to learn to have feelings without having the reactions that cause symptoms. Tell your mind that you are going to deal with the things causing the emotions, so your mind doesn’t need to warn you of a problem. It can just relax and allow the fibromyalgia symptoms to disappear. Take another deep breath and move on.

Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Weekly Record

Try to engage in an experience that you would typically avoid. Do at least one this week, but up to one per day. Write down the behavior or experience that you tried, and then write how it went, including how it affected your emotions and physical symptoms.

Day 1:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day 2:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day3:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day4:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day5:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day6:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day7:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Unsent Letters: Accessing and Expressing Anger, Guilt, Sadness, and Love

As you are becoming aware of, one of the causes of fibromyalgia is holding emotions inside. We often are unable to express some of these emotions verbally for a variety of reasons. The person we need to talk to may be gone from our lives, unavailable, or simply impossible to talk to. There are some things that one simply can't express to a boss, neighbor, or relative. Many emotions stem from many years ago, and the person involved may have changed. Yet we still may be hanging on to feelings that have been bothering us for years or decades. One way to express these feelings in a safe and useful way is to write letters that we do not send.

Unsent letters are useful to express negative feelings that we have been harboring and that are causing us harm, which if often unexpressed anger or resentment, but sometimes also guilt, sadness, or love.

Create a list of possible recipients to whom you might send an unsent letter. These letters will allow you to explore whatever you need to explore regarding your relationships. You may need to write to a parent, relative, current or former spouse, significant other, child, friend, neighbor, colleague, boss, or coworker. You may need to write to someone who has died or a person from whom you are estranged, as well as to people who are present in your life today. You can write to groups of people or to a president, a Pope, or God.

My list of possible "recipients" of an unsent letter includes:

For your 4 writing sessions this week, you will be choosing one of the recipients listed above to write an unsent letter to. Take a look at your list now, and circle the people that you think it might be most helpful for you to write to first. Once you begin writing, you may discover you need to send several letters to the same person. Feel free to do this if necessary. Then you may choose to move on to other letters.

When you write, feel free to allow your mind and hand to write whatever needs to be said to the person or entity you have chosen to address. Since the letter will not be sent, you can say anything that comes to your mind without censoring it. You might choose to use profanity, for example, or to express extreme emotion. This is perfectly acceptable and can help to relieve tension in the subconscious mind.

Trust that you are safe in writing this letter and that you can express any thoughts or feelings that cross your mind. Write as long as you need to, but typically 10 minutes is reasonable.

When you start writing, you may be surprised by the strength of the emotions you have been holding in. This is vital. Allow yourself to express ALL of the feelings that you have, and do NOT hold back any feelings.

After you complete the letter, you should write a letter of reflection to yourself. Take at least 5 minutes to do this. Think about what you have learned from this person, what you have gained from your interaction with this person (even if the interaction was very destructive), and in what ways you may have grown as a result of your relationship with this person.

The Unsent Letter

Date and write a letter below to a person or entity from your unsent letter list. Express your thoughts and feelings fully, especially those related to anger, resentment, hurt, guilt, sadness, and love. Use the back of the paper if needed. Remember to sign your name.

Dear _____:

Reflections on an Unsent Letter

Date and write a letter below to yourself about the unsent letter you just wrote. What did you learn from the letter? In what ways do you understand the situation differently? In what ways can you respond? Express your thoughts and feelings fully. Use the back of the paper if needed. Remember to sign your name.

Dear _____:

The Unsent Letter

Date and write a letter below to a person or entity from your unsent letter list. Express your thoughts and feelings fully, especially those related to anger, resentment, hurt, guilt, sadness, and love. Use the back of the paper if needed. Remember to sign your name.

Dear _____:

Reflections on an Unsent Letter

Date and write a letter below to yourself about the unsent letter you just wrote. What did you learn from the letter? In what ways do you understand the situation differently? In what ways can you respond? Express your thoughts and feelings fully. Use the back of the paper if needed. Remember to sign your name.

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Dear _____:

Reflections on an Unsent Letter

Date and write a letter below to yourself about the unsent letter you just wrote. What did you learn from the letter? In what ways do you understand the situation differently? In what ways can you respond? Express your thoughts and feelings fully. Use the back of the paper if needed. Remember to sign your name.

Dear _____:

The Unsent Letter

Date and write a letter below to a person or entity from your unsent letter list. Express your thoughts and feelings fully, especially those related to anger, resentment, hurt, guilt, sadness, and love. Use the back of the paper if needed. Remember to sign your name.

Dear _____:

Reflections on an Unsent Letter

Date and write a letter below to yourself about the unsent letter you just wrote. What did you learn from the letter? In what ways do you understand the situation differently? In what ways can you respond? Express your thoughts and feelings fully. Use the back of the paper if needed. Remember to sign your name.

Dear _____:

Session 4: Overview

- Review Session 3
- Unhealthy Core Beliefs or Rules
- Guilt
- Confession and Apology
- Reversing Self-blame with Self-compassion and Self-forgiveness
- Activity: Experiencing, Expressing, and Releasing Feelings (continued)

Unhealthy Core Beliefs or Rules

Many people have deep-seated, fundamental, or core beliefs or “rules that they operate by” about themselves, other people, or the future. These rules often are major sources of stress, and prevent many people from growing or changing. Which of the following beliefs do YOU hold?

- I am fundamentally not worthy or worthwhile.
- I should or must be perfect in everything that I do.
- I should please everyone, or everyone must like me.
- I am to blame for what another person did to me.
- I do not deserve anything good that happens to me.
- I must keep others from getting too close to me.
- I cannot take care of myself; I need someone to take care of me.
- It is my job to take care of everyone else.
- Making decisions is risky; I must not make the wrong one.
- I must follow the rules of my family, faith, or community.
- I have to keep boundaries or barriers up with most people.
- No one actually cares about or loves me.
- I cannot trust others.
- I cannot be a push-over or let others take advantage of me.
- I must be a perfect parent or son / daughter.
- I cannot make any mistakes.
- I should never get angry.
- I must be kind to and forgive others, even if they’ve harmed me. I should forget, or not think about, my past.
- I should only think positive thoughts.

Guilt

- Feeling that results from the belief that you have done wrong, bad, or inappropriate actions
- Healthy guilt is when you really have done wrong
 - Motivates confession and apology
 - Need self-compassion or self-forgiveness
- Unhealthy guilt occurs when normal behaviors, desires, or thoughts are punished
 - Show compassion to yourself
 - Experience and express anger or assertiveness to the other person

Confession and Apology

- Confession and apology may be needed if you have healthy guilt over some of your actions
 - Confess and apologize to the person wronged
 - Confess and apologize to God
- If guilt is unhealthy, then acceptance of oneself, and anger/assertiveness to other is needed

Session 4: Home Activities Checklist

- 1) Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Weekly Record
 - Try to engage in at least one typically avoided experience this week, but up to once per day
 - Record the experience that you tried, and its outcome
- 2) Daily Writing Exercise: “Childhood Stressors”
 - 4-day exercise that explores childhood stressors
 - Day 4 is a VERY important exercise: Writing to yourself as a child
- 3) Listen to CD: “Imaginal Childhood Stressors Exercise” (Tracks 5 or 6)
 - Do at least once, but as often as able and interested

Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Weekly Record

Try to engage in an experience that you would typically avoid. Do as many as you can this week, but at least one. Write down the behavior or experience that you tried, and then write how it went, including how it affected your emotions and physical symptoms.

Day 1:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day 2:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

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What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day5:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day6:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day7:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Writing About Childhood Stressors

The goal this week is to write about and change your emotional reactions to a difficult, stressor, or traumatic childhood experience or conflict. You should try to write for 4 days over this next week, ideally for 20 minutes each day.

This writing exercise might be the most emotionally difficult one for you. Many people have had experiences in childhood that they have not shared with others, or that they have only partially dealt with. It is common to have told “part” of a story, but to have left out some details. It also is common to experience some of the feelings relating to an experience, but other feelings remain hidden or buried. This writing exercise will help you face the entire story and your feelings. Although it might be hard to do, please try to give it your best effort. Be courageous, even if you have strong feelings about this.

Over the 4 days, your writing will change focus. Please follow the instructions each day.

Remember to write as freely as you can. Do not worry about trying to write well. Don't worry about your grammar, spelling, sentence structure, or language. Continue on to the next sheet if you wish.

Childhood Stressors: Writing Session 1

You should identify a very stressful, traumatic, or upsetting experience or conflict that you had as a child or adolescent. It should be one that you do not like to talk about openly with others, or that continues to haunt or trouble you; perhaps it is something that you feel guilty about, or ashamed of, or conflicted by.

Now, spend at least 20 minutes writing about this experience. Write about all aspects of the experience, including the facts and your deepest feelings. Try to hold nothing back.

Childhood Stressors: Writing Session 2

The goal today is to try to turn your experience into a story; that is, a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. There is evidence that if we take our stressful experiences, memories, and feelings, and organize them into a logical story, then it becomes less stressful and more in our control.

Thus, your assignment today is to write again about the stressful or traumatic experience of your childhood or adolescence that you wrote about last session. Today, however, you should try to write “an essay”; that is, try to turn it into a story in which there is an opening that provides some background, a middle section with the details, and then an ending. Try to present the experience and your feelings in the order that they happened.

Again, write about your deepest thoughts and feelings about the experience or issue. You might allow yourself to go into more depth about this experience, to describe more feelings, or to expand on it even further. Perhaps you can tell more of the story.

Childhood Stressors: Writing Session 3

Today, you should continue to write about your most stressful experience. This time, however, you should strive to search for meaning and growth in this experience. That is, it has been some years since this experience; can you gain some perspective on it?

Instead of focusing on negative consequences of the experience, today, focus on any positive life lessons learned, insights developed, strengths that you developed from it, or growth that you have experienced, either over the years or during this week of writing about it. Although this might be hard, try to write about find growth or benefit in some way.

Again, please write for at least 20 minutes.

Childhood Stressors: Writing Session 4:

A Letter to Yourself as a Child

Writing to yourself as a child has been very helpful and powerful for many people. Imagine yourself as a child or adolescent. When you picture that child, what feelings do you have for her (or him)? What kind of things would you say to her, if you could? How would you comfort her? How would you explain that she did nothing wrong and that “it’s simply not her fault?”

Compose a letter to yourself as a child. Express yourself fully and completely. Tell that child everything that they need to know in order to understand that they are not at fault, that they did nothing wrong, and that they are going to be OK and move forward and survive. Take at least 20 minutes to do this, if not longer.

Dear _____,

Session 5: Overview

- Review session 4
- Discussion: Forgiveness of Others, or Letting Go of Anger and Hurt
- Activity: Letting Go or Forgiving Another
- Activity: Experiencing, Expressing, and Releasing Feelings (continued)

Forgiveness of Others, or Letting Go of Anger and Hurt

- Some experiences involve being violated, hurt, neglected, or psychologically trapped by someone
- Holding onto the anger, hurt, and resentment often is punishing yourself. The other person's behavior is **STILL** controlling you. You remain a victim.
- Letting go of that anger and resentment is freeing.
- You should accept that what was done was wrong, and you should first recognize, accept, and even voice or share your **LEGITIMATE ANGER**.
- For some people or situations, true forgiveness is possible and needed. This is empowering because you are more powerful than they (have the ability to forgive).
- Forgiveness might be hard or impossible for some situations or victimizers, but letting go **IS** possible.

Examples of Statements: Letting Go, or Forgiveness

- “I am angry at you for what you did, but I am no longer going to hold it against you. I am going to let it go and free myself of resentment toward you.”
- “I will no longer hold your actions against you. I am moving forward.”
- “I free myself from your grip. Your actions no longer have power over me. I will let go of my hurt and pain.”
- “You hurt me, and I did not deserve it. You were wrong, but I choose to forgive you.”
- “You don’t deserve forgiveness, but God forgives you, so I will too.”

Session 5: Home Activities Checklist

1. Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Weekly Record

- Try to engage in at least one typically avoided experience this week, but up to once per day
- Record the experience that you tried, and its outcome

2. Writing about Forgiveness

- This activity takes 1 session, and encourages forgiveness of both self and others, and so summarizes these topics from both Sessions 4 and 5.

3. Writing about “Private Experiences and Secrets”

- First, review the master list of private experiences and secrets
- Try to do 3 sessions of writing this week on this topic, which focuses on your private experiences, your concerns about sharing these with others, and possible positive outcomes of sharing them.

4. Listen to CD: “Imaginal Sharing of Secrets” (Tracks 7 or 8)

- At least once, or more if interested and able

Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Weekly Record

Try to engage in an experience that you would typically avoid. Do as many as you can this week, but at least one. Write down the behavior or experience that you tried, and then write how it went, including how it affected your emotions and physical symptoms.

Day 1:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

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What was the outcome?

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What was the outcome?

Day6:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Day7:

What was the experience that you engaged in?

What was the outcome?

Writing About Forgiveness

How many people do you know who hold grudges? Typically, a grudge is held as if it were a precious gem. We hang onto it tightly. Holding onto strong feelings of anger and resentment towards others is harmful. It is like holding onto a poison which gradually saps us of health and power. Harboring resentment over long periods of time, especially if we don't acknowledge it, is often a major factor that perpetuates the vicious cycle of fibromyalgia. Often there is nothing we can do about the situations that bother us. If there is no direct action we can take to resolve the situation, we are left with emotional pains that serve to worsen our physical pain.

The only way out of this condition is forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift that you give to yourself. It is an act which allows you to free yourself from the prison of toxic emotions. Learning to forgive means that you are letting go of the emotional pain you harbor and that you choose to stop allowing a situation from the past to harm you today. It doesn't mean that the other person was "right." It means you are taking steps to free yourself and prevent another person from controlling your reactions any longer.

When you decide to forgive someone or some entity, you are taking a powerful step towards your health and towards eliminating your pain. It is that simple and that important. There are many people who harbor anger towards someone who injured them. Perhaps a car accident occurred many months or years ago. The body tissues have healed, but what is causing their current pain is that the emotional wounds have not healed. And that is something they can control!

Forgiveness is often a necessary ingredient in cases where we harbor guilt over something we did or didn't do. As you now know, fibromyalgia frequently develops in those of us who are self-critical and who tend to feel guilty. One woman harbored deep guilt that stemmed from her daughter's death. She clung to the belief that she should have protected her daughter, despite the fact that this would have been almost impossible. Her pain was a way of punishing herself.

Guilt is an extremely powerful emotion that is at the core of fibromyalgia in many people. That is why forgiving yourself is a critical component of this program. You deserve forgiveness from yourself and from others. On the next page:

- 1) Make a list of the people who you would like to forgive for something they might have done.
- 2) Then, list people that you would like to ask for forgiveness for something you may have done.
- 3) Finally, list those things for which you would like to forgive yourself.

Forgiveness Free-Write:

Complete one of these sentences and then in the space below, write about “why”?

I forgive _____ for _____
and this is why:

OR

I ask forgiveness from _____ for _____
and this is why:

OR

I forgive myself for _____
and this is why:

Private Experiences and Secrets

The following is a list of private experiences or secrets that some people have, and which they avoid sharing due to guilt, shame, or fear of others knowing. Read through this list and identify those that apply to you. Some may apply but not be private—that is, you are comfortable that others know about it. However, you should identify those experiences that you tend to keep private, or that you do not want others to know.

Legal issues:

- Stole, robbed, embezzled, or cheated
- Been arrested, jailed, or charged with a crime
- Used or sold illegal drugs
- Hurt, falsely accused, or harmed an innocent person
- Cheated or lied in school or work
- Been fired or other discipline at work
- Abandoned or neglected my children
- Did not intervene, report, or get involved when someone was in need
- Was drunk or high when driving or operating another vehicle
- Have (had) gambling problem
- Did something illegal but did not get caught
- Did not do my share or part in a project
- Unemployment
- Have (had) substantial debt
- Wish for a different career or calling in life

Family issues:

- Was abused physically or sexually as a child or adolescent
- Family member with an alcohol or drug problem
- Family member with mental illness or stigmatized issue (homosexuality, legal problems)
- Was adopted or lived in foster homes
- Adopted a child
- Gave a child up for adoption
- Was pregnant before marriage
- Had miscarriage
- Had abortion
- Had extramarital relationship or cheated on your partner
- Had a child from another person
- Regret having a child
- Want to leave spouse or partner
- Wish that a family member would die
- Favor one child over another
- Cut off relationships with specific friends or family members
- Hid a love relationship due to disapproval of the other person
- Desire a person who is not available or a past partner
- Conflict or negative feelings toward child, parent, or sibling
- Did not care appropriately for a child, spouse, or aging parent
- Want a divorce

Been abused verbally, physically, or sexually in current relationship
Been abusive verbally, physically, or sexually in my relationship

Beliefs:

Don't believe in God or don't believe as you were raised or as others think you do
Have doubts about key parts of your religion.
Do believe, or want to believe in God
Am angry with God
Have ideas or images that you hide from others
Have political beliefs are different than others know
Are a fake or imposter, not as productive, smart, or successful as people think
Have fantasies of wishing to hurt or kill someone

Identity:

Am gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or uncertain about sexual orientation
Am not interested in sex
Have a physical or health problem or defect
Have made secret changes to my appearance
Engage in secret rituals or behaviors
Have an addiction to a substance
Have an addiction to an activity or behavior
Assumed a false identity

Health problems:

Have purposely hurt yourself (e.g., cut or burn)
Have attempted or seriously considered suicide
Have a secret mental disorder
Have a behavior problem, such as eating problem, tic, hair pulling, etc.
Have abnormal anatomy (e.g., genitals, reproductive organs)
Have an embarrassing health problem or treatment for a health problem
Fearful of death or the future

Sexual Issues:

Was raped or sexually assaulted
Engaged in premarital sexual activity
Engaged in prostitution
Paid for sex
Use of pornography
Masturbation
Aversion to sex
Sexual desires or actions that are unusual or illegal

Writing About Private Experiences or Secrets

The goal this week is to write about one or more of your private experiences or secrets, perhaps one or more of those listed on the prior pages, and to explore your fears, guilt, and shame, surrounding them. The goal also is to write about your hopes and the possibility of sharing these private experiences with certain other people.

In EACH of your 3 writing sessions this week, try to do the following:

- 1) First, write about the private issue. Laying it out on paper gets transferred from the secrecy of your mind to the reality of being “out”...at least on paper. Try to write about the details of the issue....hiding the details, even from yourself, is not healthy. Describe both the facts and all of your feelings about the issue.
- 2) Next, you should write about the possibility of sharing this experience with someone. Who might that person (or those people) be? What do you fear will happen if you did share it? How realistic are those fears?
- 3) Finally, write about your hopes of how your private experience might be received by another person after you share it, and write about a positive outcome.

Because writing about private issues is often quite difficult, and some people are fearful that others might see their writing, you might choose to hide your writings carefully, or even destroy (burn, shred, discard safely) them. Do this if you feel that it might be important to do so.

Writing about Private Issues: Session 1

The issue (facts and feelings):

Your thoughts and feelings about sharing this with others:

A positive outcome of sharing it:

Writing about Private Issues: Session 2

The issue (facts and feelings):

Your thoughts and feelings about sharing this with others:

A positive outcome of sharing it:

Writing about Private Issues: Session 3

The issue (facts and feelings):

Your thoughts and feelings about sharing this with others:

A positive outcome of sharing it:

Session 6: Overview

- Review Session 5
- Shame
- Positive or Intimate Relationships
- Activity: Experiencing and Expressing Intimacy
- Private Experiences or Secrets and their Effects
 - Activity: Sharing Private Experiences or Secrets

Shame

- Shame: generalized sense of self that is defective or bad
 - Most shame is not healthy and not appropriate
 - Unfortunate consequence of family, culture, or religion that is overly critical of your entire self
 - Sometimes results from some perceived “defect” about yourself
 - Makes you want to hide or avoid closeness
- Shame often keeps others from knowing us, keeping us from closeness or intimacy

Positive or Intimate Relationships

- Bad relationship experiences often make you keep your guard up, feel uncomfortable, or avoid close or intimate behaviors
- Sometimes you don't "trust" others, so you don't open up to them
- Keeping up your guard is stressful and prevents you from the relationships and support you often desire.
- Often, we "transfer" our feelings of mistrust from someone who hurt us to many other people. This is unhealthy.
- Examples of closeness or intimacy:
 - Sitting close, touching, hugging, hand-holding, staring into another's eyes, closing your eyes while another watches
 - Expressing thankfulness
 - Complimenting others
 - Receiving compliments from others (without saying, "Yes, but...")
 - Telling someone "I like you" or "I love you."

Private Experiences or Secrets and Their Effects

- Secrets about yourself:
 - Things you have done
 - Things you think, feel, imagine, or wish
 - Things about people close to you, such as family
- Secrets are kept because
 - Guilt, shame, embarrassment
 - Risk, to relationships, work, school, etc.
 - We often tell no one, or only a few people, or only part of the story
- Keeping things private or secret is a major stressor and harms one's health, for various reasons
 - The mind has to both monitor for the secret and keep it from slipping out or being disclosed.
 - It decreases our willpower later for healthy things
 - It is physiologically arousing hurts the immune system
 - We never get a chance to see if we are accepted or valued if the secret is not shared
 - It can be a major cause of pain
- It is vital to try and share some personal things with others
- It almost always works out surprisingly well!

Session 6: Home Activities Checklist

1. Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Weekly Record

- Try to engage in at least one typically avoided experience this week, but up to once per day
- Try to engage in one, even small, intimacy behavior each day
- Try to find one or more people this week with whom you can share something private, or a secret
- Record the experience that you tried, and its outcome

2. Writing: Gratitude List and Gratitude Writing Free Writing

- Try to do this writing exercise over 3 sessions or days
- This could be a brief, 5-minute writing

3. Listen to CD: “Imaginal Positive Intimacy with Others” (Tracks 9 or 10)

- At least once, or more if interested and able

Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Intimacy and Secrets

Engage in at least one avoided experience daily. This week, try to include intimacy with others, such as non-verbal (touch, comfort) or verbal (praise, apologizing). Try to share a secret or private experience at least once. Write down the behavior / secret you engaged in, with whom, and how it went, including how it affected your emotions, symptoms, and relationship.

Day 1:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day 2:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day3:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day4:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day5:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day6:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day7:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Gratitude Free-Write

Now, write about at least one of those things, including why you are grateful.

I am grateful for _____ and this
is why:

Gratitude Free-Write

Now, write about at least one of those things, including why you are grateful.

I am grateful for _____ and this
is why:

Gratitude Free-Write

Now, write about at least one of those things, including why you are grateful.

I am grateful for _____ and this
is why:

Session 7: Overview

- Review Session 6
- Sexual intimacy
- Healthy Communication
- Activity: Practicing Healthy Communication
- Worksheet: Planning Healthy Communication

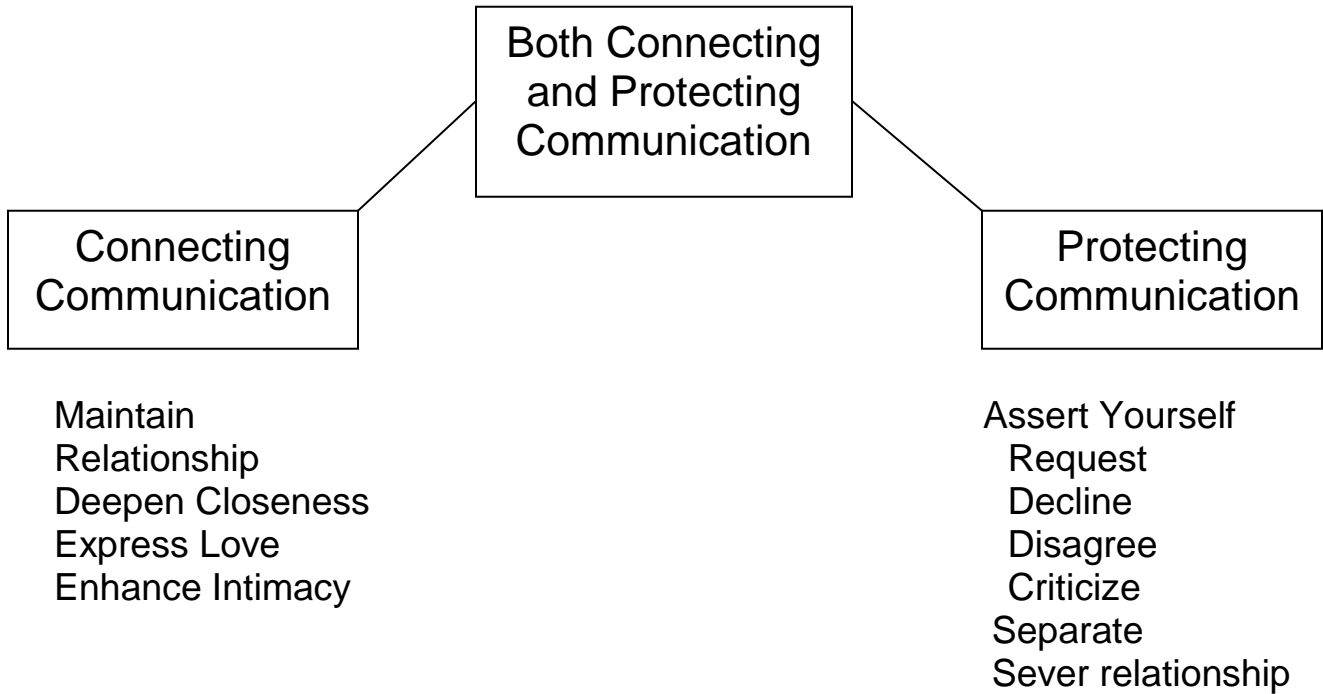
Sexual Intimacy

- A difficult and avoided topic, often problematic
- Many patients feel pain with sex.
 - Pain is a combination of physical and emotional pain, because sex is typically loaded with emotional and relationship issues
- Many patients have had bad sexual experiences, sometimes when they were young, sometimes in adult relationships
- Many patients feel inhibited, anxious, have difficulty having orgasm, or have flashbacks
- Some feel the need to be in control
- If sex with a partner, then issues of intimacy, trust, communication almost always come up
- Working on sexual issues can often lead to much insight and growth.
- Suggest that you first write about it, and then talk to someone safe about it. Ideally, talk with your partner about it, which holds great potential for growth.

Healthy Communication

- We often need to change the way that they interact or communicate in relationships.
- Healthy communication MAY change your relationship, or it may not. However, it WILL change you and your stress level.
- Healthy communication expresses YOUR feelings and needs, but is respectful of the other person's needs and feelings.
- There is a spectrum of healthy communication, ranging from Connecting Communication to Protecting Communication
- Connection:
 - Maintain close relationships
 - Have them like and value you
 - Avoid hurting their feelings
- Protecting:
 - Asserting yourself (make request, decline request, disagree, criticize)
 - Setting boundaries
 - Separating or severing a relationship
- In most cases, you find a balance between connecting and protecting

The Spectrum of Healthy Communication



Planning Healthy Communication

Step 1: Identify a problem situation

Think of a relationship situation that is a problem for you right now – something you would like to handle more assertively, while maintaining the relationship.

- What is the relationship situation?
- Who is involved?
- How does it make you feel?
- What would you like to happen?
- How would you normally handle this problem?
- What do you think would happen if you tried communicating more honestly?

Step 2: Plan the Healthy Communication

Reminding yourself of what you want and need to say:

- Think of a time and place convenient for both of you. You may have to ask the other person when you could have 15 minutes to talk. Write this down here:
- Write down the problem in the way that you want to describe it to the other person.
 - State the problem objectively, and avoid accusing or blaming.
 - Object to the person's behavior, not the person.
- *My problem:*

Step 3: Write down your statements

- Keep your statements honest and direct, but also short and simple
 - Be specific, not vague
 - Use “I” statements, rather than “you”
 - Don’t demand, command, or make ultimatums
 - If applicable, include both connecting statements and assertive statements
 - State the positive consequences of getting your request granted, or negative consequence of having it not granted, but without threats
- *My healthy communication:*

Session 7: Home Activities Checklist

1. Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Weekly Record
 - Try to engage in at least one typically avoided experience this week, but up to once per day
 - Try to engage healthy communication each day
 - Continue to try intimacy behaviors and sharing private issues or secrets
 - Record the experience that you tried, and its outcome

2. Writing Exercise: “Writing Your Life Story in a New Way”
 - This is a very important writing exercise that focuses on moving into the future and being a different person

 - Do this for 3 sessions or days

3. Writing Exercise: Written Healthy Communication Dialogs
 - Do this for 2 sessions or days

4. Listen to CD: “Imaginal Assertive Communication Exercise” (Tracks 11 or 12)
 - At least once, or more if interested and able

Engaging in Avoided Experiences: Healthy Communication

Engage in at least one avoided experience daily. This week, try to focus on engaging in healthy communication, including assertion, such as requesting, declining, and disagreeing. You can also continue to engage in intimate behaviors and sharing personal experiences.

Day 1:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day 2:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day3:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day4:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day5:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day6:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Day7:

What was the behavior (and with whom)?

What was the outcome?

Writing Your Life Story in a New Way

Everyone has a narrative or a story they tell themselves about their lives. These stories are very powerful, not only because they remind us of our past but because they also affect our future, since to a large degree we tend to think what we can accomplish is controlled by what happened in our past. However, there are many ways to view the past and many opportunities to alter our futures. This exercise gives you the opportunity to create a new life story.

Writing Session 1: Your Old Story

In your first writing session, write a synopsis or short version of your old story: the one where you emphasize the negative things that have happened in your life and how you tend to be limited by this view of yourself. In this version, you might see yourself as a victim of sorts—bad things happened to you, and you were unable to change them or rise above them. Importantly, you should write this in the PAST TENSE. This is the way you were. As you write, think of this as your “old self” ...the “way you were.” (Use the back of this sheet if necessary.)

Writing Session 2: Identifying and Overcoming the Barriers to a New You

In this writing session, you should honestly write about the barriers that you sense or fear might be keeping you from being a fully new and healthy person. Take an honest look at your life, your relationships, your fears, and so forth. Write about any concerns that you have about a new and better life. What relationships might change? What might be hard for you to think or do differently? What economic or social factors seem to hold you back? What fears do you have about being without pain and other symptoms? Try to be fully honest about these fears and concerns, as you write for 20 minutes. (Use the back of this sheet if necessary.)

Writing Session 3: The New You

Now, write a new story for yourself. I want you to write a positive, powerful, story of overcoming barriers and being a different, healthy, courageous person. You can take the facts about difficult things that have occurred, but put a new twist on them. Write about what you have learned from them and how you have overcome significant stressors or barriers. Emphasize the positive things that have happened to you and your positive reactions to life events. Emphasize your successes and things you have accomplished. This is an opportunity to view yourself as a hero—someone who has faced great odds yet finds a way to overcome them and triumph. If you can look at your life as a “hero’s journey,” you will be better equipped to deal with adversity and to change your life in important ways.

Importantly, write this story in the PRESENT TENSE...you ARE a new and different person. Try to imagine yourself actually being this way now, rather than in the future, and let your writing describe yourself in the present tense, in positive terms. Create the person who you really are: able to make new choices, able to overcome past problems, able to accomplish the things that you would like to accomplish. (Use the back of the sheet if necessary.)

Writing Exercise: Healthy Communication Dialogues

A dialogue is basically a conversation that you create in a written form. In a dialogue, you have the opportunity to express yourself to someone (or some entity), and to hear some things that you may need to hear from the other person or entity. One reason for writing these dialogues is to gain insight and learn more about important issues in your life. Another reason is so that you can imagine and put in writing how you might express to another person your honest feelings related to assertion, anger, closeness, love, and so on. Dialogues may help you better understand situations that are confusing to you or those about which you need to make important decisions. Some of the dialogues may be short, 10-minute jottings, while others may be longer pieces that you return to again and again to explore whatever you need to explore regarding a relationship.

The first step is to make a list of possible dialogues you might create. You may need to dialogue with a parent, another relative, a current or former spouse, significant other, friend, neighbor, colleague, boss, or coworker. You may choose to dialogue with someone who has died or a person from whom you are estranged, as well as with people who are present in your life today. You can dialogue with people whom you've never met, with religious leaders, political figures, or even God.

Some of these may be recipients of unsent letters, but there are other entities that you might want to consider dialoguing with. You may choose to dialogue with an event or situation in its entirety, not just a person involved in it. You can even dialogue with a business or an institution. Use your imagination, and be creative. If there is someone or something that is causing you stress in your life, you can write an imaginary dialogue and see what you can learn in order to help ease your mind or figure out how to better deal with it.

Consider all of these factors and any of the exercises you've done so far in this program and create a list of possible people or entities that you would like to engage in dialogue. Use the space provided to compile a list. Most dialogues will be between you and another person or entity. Most dialogs should include some aspects of assertion...your being able to express to another person your true feelings, directly and honestly, including what you want, do not want, think, and feel. They usually include statements of connection, love, or desire for closeness.

My list of possible dialogues includes:

Select Those Dialogues You Think Might Prove Most Beneficial

During your two writing sessions this week, you will be choosing a person or entity for a dialogue. Take a look at your list now, and circle the ones that you think it might be most helpful for you to write first. Once you begin writing, you may discover you need to continue a dialogue for more than one day with the same person or thing. Feel free to do this as necessary. Once you see what you need to learn or express, you can move on to dialogue with other people or entities. Some people have found it helpful to dialogue with a group (as if creating a meeting or conference call). For example, you could dialogue with yourself, your pain, and your subconscious mind.

Getting a Dialogue Started

When you write, feel free to allow your mind and hand to write whatever needs to be said to the person or entity you've chosen to address. Since the dialogue will remain on paper, you can say anything that comes to your mind without censoring what you write.

Do try to find ways to assert yourself in these dialogs. That is, find opportunities to let the other person know your true wishes, disagreements, and so on. If applicable, also let them know about close or tender feelings that you have. You also can write into the dialog about your fears of asserting yourself with the other person.

A good way to begin a dialogue is by writing a simple statement or a question. See what response might arise. Let your mind, your heart, and your hand go in whatever direction they will. Allow the person, situation, or entity to respond with whatever comes into your mind about how they might respond. It is important to be able to listen to what arises. Many people have found that they need to learn something from others in their life or from their pain or symptoms.

These are obviously imaginary dialogues, and you won't know exactly what responses from the other person might occur in real life. Don't script these dialogues ahead of time, but rather allow them to unfold as they occur. A dialogue can uncover hidden truths about the source of mind body symptoms and pain.

Most dialogues take about 10 to 15 minutes, but you can write as long as you need to. After each dialogue, write a few reflections on what you have learned in the space provided.

DIALOG EXERCISE:

Identify who the speakers will be below and then write a dialogue chosen from the list. It is helpful to continue to write the name of each speaker preceding what he, she, or it says. Express your thoughts and feelings fully. Your dialog should contain assertive communication. Write on the back or use more paper as needed. Remember to allow the other person, event, or entity to respond to you fully as well. Use the back of the sheet if necessary.

Speaker 1 = _____

Speaker 2 = _____

Reflections:

Complete this dialogue by writing some reflections on what you have learned from this dialog. In what ways do you understand things differently? What have you realized? What have you decided to do in real life? Use the back of the sheet if necessary.

DIALOG EXERCISE:

Identify who the speakers will be below and then write a dialogue chosen from the list. It is helpful to continue to write the name of each speaker preceding what he, she, or it says. Express your thoughts and feelings fully. Your dialog should contain assertive communication. Write on the back or use more paper as needed. Remember to allow the other person, event, or entity to respond to you fully as well. Use the back of the sheet if necessary.

Speaker 1 = _____

Speaker 2 = _____

Reflections:

Complete this dialogue by writing some reflections on what you have learned from this dialog. In what ways do you understand things differently? What have you realized? What have you decided to do in real life? Use the back of the sheet if necessary.

Session 8: Overview

- Review Session 7
- Gratitude
- Overcoming Barriers and becoming a New Person
- Worksheet: Planning for your Future
- Activity: Sharing what has changed and what you need to work on
- Feelings about ending the sessions

Gratitude

- Gratitude, thankfulness, or appreciation is sometimes hard for people
 - Constant pain makes it hard to see the positive
 - Sometimes bad experiences or hurts also interfere
- It is important to pay attention to the positive things in life, those things that ARE working for you, or that are good
- This means expressing gratitude or thankfulness to others
 - This can be especially hard if you have “mixed feelings” about a person

Overcoming Barriers and Becoming a New Person

- A big struggle for some people is whether and how much they want to change
- Some people have lived for a long time with a particular identity, or sense of themselves
 - Fibromyalgia Patient
 - Pain survivor
 - Other identity (e.g., caretaker, victim, loner, supermom)
- Ask, “What is my identity? What label do I give myself? What label would others give me?”
- Sometimes external forces seem to keep us the same—unchanged
 - Spouses who seem to want a wife to stay the same (e.g., dependent)
 - Children who expect the supermom
 - Medical disability status, that pushes you to remain ill or in pain
- Sometimes internal forces that hold back change
 - Fear of becoming someone different
 - Fear of new experiences or losing old safety nets
 - Pride in a certain identity
- Your current identity is sometimes scary to change
 - It is predictable and even controllable
 - But often a mixed blessing.
 - Unhappily content
 - Predictably miserable
 - In control and in pain
- It is vital to ask yourself some tough questions:
 - “What will I be like if I do not have pain?”
 - “What part of myself am I really willing to change?”
 - “What part of me feels safer or more in control staying the way I am?”

Worksheet: Planning for My Future

Activities or experiences that may be emotionally difficult, but that will be healthy for me:

This week:

In the next month:

In the next six months to one year:

Activities or experiences that are just for me—and not too difficult:

This week:

In the next month:

In the next six months to one year:

Activities or experiences that I can do for others that would give me pleasure:

This week:

In the next month:

In the next six months to one year:

Feelings About Ending

- It is common to experience a mixture of feelings about ending these sessions
 - Relief that it is over
 - Gratitude that it has helped
 - Disappointment that you did not improve as much as possible
 - Anger at leader or program that you are forced to end
 - Sadness about leaving new friends or the leader
 - Fear about facing the future with less support

Session 8: Home Activities Checklist

1. Work each day, week, month on doing those on the “Planning for My Future” worksheet.
2. Writing Exercise: “Creating the New You”
 - Do first the exercise of Being Open to and Accepting of Yourself
 - And then write about how “The New You Responds”
 - Try to write about the new you on at least 3 sessions or days

Writing Exercise: Creating the “New You”

How do you feel about yourself? If you're like most people, you have a variety of positive and negative thoughts about yourself, ranging from kind to disparaging. Once you begin to act in ways that emphasize the qualities you admire in yourself, those actions become habits that are easier to perform regularly. The more you act in ways that are consistent with how you would like to be, the more your self-image, your health, and your functioning changes for the better.

If you want to be kinder to yourself or to your family, you simply need to practice being kinder in small ways on a regular basis. If you want to be more assertive, practice saying “no” when asked to do something that you really don't want to do. If you want to be more generous or more outgoing, you can practice acting in those ways. If you want to be healthier, more active, or more fit, you can begin to do things that make you this way, and you will come to see yourself as a healthier, more active, and more fit person.

A good first step is to look inward to discover some positive qualities that you often ignore. There is an old story about a Native American elder who is telling his grandson about two creatures who are at war inside him: one a wild dog that is mean, vicious, and tells lies; the other an eagle that is kind, just, and honest. The small boy's eyes widen, and he asks his grandfather who will win this war. The elder statesman answers: “Whichever one I feed.”

It is up to you to notice this “war” that occurs in you. You can choose to “feed”—to pay attention to and nourish—those qualities that move you in the direction you would like to travel. You can choose to live in anger, fear, guilt, and sadness, or you can live in love, hope, and joy. You make these choices daily. The more often you choose to live in love, hope, and joy, the more that will be who you are.

Now make a list of possibly stressful situations that you are probably going to encounter—including those you expect to occur in the next several weeks or months.

List of situations that are likely to be stressful: (Examples might include certain conversations, meetings, frustrations, , memories, intimate relationships, symptoms)

Writing Exercise: The New You Responds

From the lists you have just created, choose a characteristic or a situation that is important to you, and write about it. You should write from the point of view of the new you—how you will be, how you will act, how you will respond to certain situations in your life. Incorporate the characteristics you would like to emphasize in yourself, and write about how you will think and act to “feed” these characteristics. Then incorporate these responses into your life.

Try to do as many of these final writing exercises as you can, as a regular part of your daily life. Do the first today, and try to do some more of these on future days, especially when you are feeling increased symptoms.

The New You Responds # 1:

_____ has just happened (or will happen soon).

How will you respond? What characteristics will you bring to this situation? Write the story of this situation as you’d like it to play out with the new you as the prime actor.

Writing Exercise: The New You Responds

From the lists you have just created, choose a characteristic or a situation that is important to you, and write about it. You should write from the point of view of the new you—how you will be, how you will act, how you will respond to certain situations in your life. Incorporate the characteristics you would like to emphasize in yourself, and write about how you will think and act to “feed” these characteristics. Then incorporate these responses into your life.

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