

Join the D.O.T.S. - Part 1: What have you tried?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other thinking strategies:

S – Substances & other Strategies: what Substances do you use put into your body to avoid or get rid of pain: foods, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, naturopathic & herbal remedies, over-the-counter & prescription medications?

Any other Strategies you ever use in response to unwanted thoughts and feelings? For example, have you tried yoga, meditation, having affairs, aggressiveness, Tai Chi, massage, exercise, picking fights, dancing, music, suicide attempts, self-harming, prayer, smashing things, staying in bed, self-help books, seeing a therapist or doctor or other health professional, getting angry at life or other people? Ever tried ‘tolerating it’, ‘putting up with it’ or ‘sucking it up and getting on with it’? Ever tried giving up?

Join the D.O.T.S. - Part 2: How has it worked? What has it cost?

Most of these strategies give you short term relief from painful thoughts and feelings. But do they *permanently* get rid of those unwanted thoughts and feelings, so they *never come back*?

Most of the time, with most of these strategies, how long does your pain go away for before it returns?

Now clearly, some of these methods are helpful, if you use them flexibly, moderately, sensibly – in which case, keep using them!

However, when we *over-use* or *over-rely* on these methods – when we use them **excessively, rigidly, or inappropriately** – they have significant costs. When you have over-used them, what have these methods cost you in terms of health, money, wasted time, relationships, missed opportunities, work, increased pain, tiredness, wasted energy, frustration, disappointment, etc?

How many of these methods give you relief from pain *in the short term*, but keep you stuck or make your life worse or have significant costs *in the long term*?

‘none’ ‘a few’ ‘about half’ ‘most’ ‘all’

You’re Not Lazy or Stupid

You’ve tried very hard for a long time to get rid of these thoughts & feelings. No one can call you lazy! And you’re not stupid! These are methods that everyone uses to some extent, to avoid or get rid of pain. We all try to distract ourselves; we all opt out of things that are difficult; we all try to think our way out of our pain; and we all put substances of one form or another into our bodies. And our friends, family, and health professionals often actively encourage us to do all these things!

However ... no matter how hard we try to avoid or get rid of these thoughts and feelings in the long term, they keep coming back!

Are You Stuck In A Vicious Cycle?

Unfortunately, often what we do to get short term relief from painful thoughts and feelings, tends to make our life worse in the long term. In other words, we get stuck in a vicious cycle. And most people find it painful when they realise this. What difficult thoughts and feelings does this bring up for you?

Can you take a moment to acknowledge just how painful and difficult it is to be caught in this vicious cycle? (Is there something kind you can say to yourself or do for yourself?)

Given that:

a) no matter what you do, your painful thoughts and feelings *keep coming back*, and
b) many of the ways you respond to them are making your life worse *in the long term*
would you be open to something new? Would you be interested in learning a brand new way of responding to them; a method that is radically different to everything else you’ve tried?