

STRIDE Workbook

Session 3

In this session, we will:

- ❖ Review your practice since our last session
- ❖ Learn different coping strategies and how to choose the most helpful strategy for a situation
- ❖ Explore what it means to be mindful and how to use mindfulness to cope with worry or stress
- ❖ Practice a mindfulness exercise called a Body Scan

Coping & Mindfulness

Review

Let's review one example from the practice last week of replacing a negative automatic thought with a more accurate, balanced, new thought.

- *Was it difficult to replace your thought?*
- *Once you did, did you believe the new thought?*
- *Did you behave or respond differently to the new thought than you did to the old thought?*

Feel free to write down any related thoughts below:

Coping

Since your breast cancer diagnosis, you may be so overwhelmed with stress that you start to wonder how you are getting through each day. The build-up of stress may lead to feelings of not doing well or coping well. However, feeling and stressed out does not mean that you are not coping well. Take a step back and recognize how you have managed to find ways to get through each day, and maybe even getting better at this with each day and each challenge.

You may realize that in fact you are coping quite well considering the tremendous emotional and physical difficulties of your current situation.

On the other hand, when we are dealing with great uncertainty, we can find ourselves doing too much searching around online or spending too much time ruminating about our worries (thinking over and over).

These habits might not be helpful in the long run. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at how you are coping with this stressful situation and whether there is anything you want to change. Coping can be an active process and a skill that you can get better at because we can always choose how we cope with stress or worry.

Here are two main ways we can cope:

1. Action-oriented coping:

What action can I take to resolve the situation?

2. Emotion-oriented coping:

If I can't resolve the situation, what can I do to reduce the discomfort or stress I feel?

To choose a strategy, start by pointing out what parts of a stressor are in your control and what parts are out of your control. Almost every stressor has controllable and uncontrollable aspects.

Let's look at an example:

Stressful situation: A severe snowstorm is forecasted to hit Massachusetts. What are the uncontrollable and controllable parts of this situation?

Uncontrollable	Controllable
The fact that a snowstorm is coming and how much snow there will be	Stock up on supplies (food, water, batteries, shovel)
What areas will get hit the hardest	Get a hotel room or stay with a friend closer to work
Whether there will be power outages	Leave early from work to avoid dangerous conditions
Whether there will be road closures and delays in transportation	Move your car off the street to avoid towing or snow plow damage

Exercise 3.1: Coping in a stressful situation

Stressful situation: You received a diagnosis of breast cancer, finished treatment, and are taking hormonal therapy for several years.

What is uncontrollable and what is controllable about this situation?

Uncontrollable	Controllable

Controllable → Action-oriented coping

To manage the controllable parts of a stressor, use action-oriented
Action-oriented coping involves changing a problem, or aspect of a problem, that is causing distress.

Action-oriented coping may involve:

- ❖ Making a decision
- ❖ Resolving a conflict
- ❖ Seeking information or advice
- ❖ Setting a goal
- ❖ Engaging in problem-solving
- ❖ Requesting help

An example of action-oriented coping:

Problem:

“I am not sure if the limitations I am experiencing with my arm are normal.”

Action-oriented coping:

“I will talk to my doctor or nurse about my arm to get more information.”

Exercise 3.2: Can you think of a stressor that you were able to do something about or change in some way?

Problem:

Action-oriented coping:

Uncontrollable → Emotion-oriented coping

To manage the uncontrollable parts of a stressor, use emotion-oriented coping:

Emotion-oriented coping involves managing the emotional response from a stressful situation (managing stress).

Emotion-focused coping strategies may involve:

- ❖ Reframing thoughts and adaptive thinking
- ❖ Expressing emotion
- ❖ Engaging in enjoyable activities
- ❖ Relaxation, deep breathing, or massage
- ❖ Acceptance and self-soothing
- ❖ Exercise
- ❖ Listen to or play music
- ❖ Take a walk or bike ride
- ❖ Talk to a friend or relative
- ❖ Write in a journal

An example of emotion-oriented coping:

Problem:

"I am anxious and tense about my upcoming bone scan."

Emotion-oriented coping:

"Dwelling on it won't do any good, so I'll go for a bike ride with my friend."

Exercise 3.3: Can you think of a stressor that you were not able to control? How did you manage your emotions/stress?

Problem:

Emotion-oriented coping:

When do I use action-oriented coping vs. emotion-focused coping?



The Importance of Matching the Controllability of the Stressor to the Coping Strategy

If you did the opposite of the chart above and used an action-oriented coping strategy to try to change something that you cannot control or used an emotion-oriented coping strategy to avoid doing something that is in your control, you would end up tired and more upset. It is often helpful to use a combination of action- and emotion-oriented coping and to switch between them as needed.

Following a diagnosis of breast cancer there are aspects of the treatment process that are **controllable**. For example, a woman could gather information and advice from doctors and nurses to make informed decisions about hormonal therapy (**action-oriented coping**). However, if she continues to gather too much information and engages in too much internet searching, she might start to second-guess her decision, and this could lead to increased worry and nervousness about the hormonal medication.

Alternatively, once she has made her decision about starting hormonal therapy, she may need to manage the stress of needing to take hormonal therapy for several years (**uncontrollable**). For this, she could turn to friends for support and do something self-soothing such as relaxation or massage (**emotion-oriented coping**).

Unhelpful Coping Strategies (Adapted from Antoni CBSM):

Sometimes we choose ways to cope that make us feel better in the moment, but in the long term may create additional challenges or make things worse.

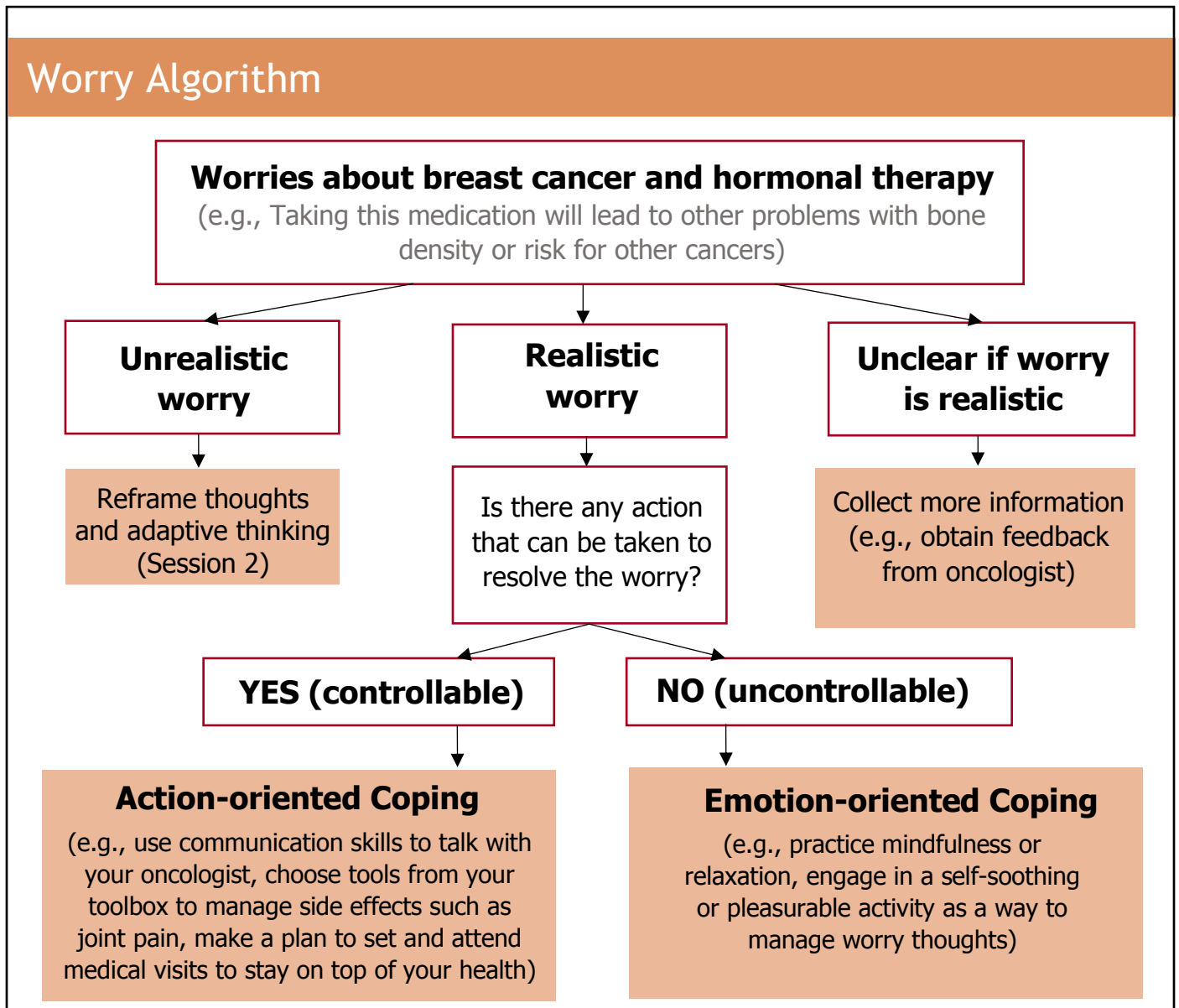
- *Do you notice yourself engaging in any habits that might not work so well in the end?*
- *Can you replace any of these less helpful coping strategies with a more helpful action-oriented or emotion-oriented coping strategy above?*

- ❖ Researching on the internet/Googling
- ❖ Ruminating/perseverating (thinking about something over and over again)
- ❖ Drinking
- ❖ Smoking
- ❖ Denying that something is happening
- ❖ Using drugs
- ❖ Procrastinating
- ❖ Avoiding life activities
- ❖ Shutting down/shutting off emotions
- ❖ Over-eating
- ❖ Withdrawing from friends or family
- ❖ "White-knuckling" through it
- ❖ Lying in bed for long periods of time

Coping with Worries about Hormonal Therapy and Breast Cancer

It is normal to have concerns about your hormonal therapy. Some women describe worries around the cost of medication or long-term health concerns. Others describe that the medication is a reminder that they had breast cancer and triggers worries about a recurrence. Our goal is to help you feel more in control of your worries and concerns.

When you are not sure what skills to use to manage your worry



Mindfulness

From time to time, we can find ourselves spending a great deal of time worrying about the future or dwelling on the past and filling our minds with “catastrophic” thinking, guilt, regret, and other negative thoughts that we identified in Session 2. While this is very normal, especially after cancer, it can result in less awareness and attentiveness to other parts of life with which we would like to engage.

When we notice a need to pull ourselves back from our worry thoughts, we can use a simple skill called mindfulness to re-focus our awareness back to the present

Mindfulness is simply a state of **awareness**, a focus on the **present moment**, and an **acknowledgement and acceptance** of your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations **without having to change them**. Mindfulness and relaxation exercises can lower physical stress, increase blood flow, and decrease muscle tension.

When we are mindful, we:

- ❖ Pay attention on purpose
- ❖ Are fully present in the moment
- ❖ Cultivate a non-judgmental attitude

How Do I Practice Mindfulness?

1. Observe:

- a) Notice your environment, thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations without reacting to them

Example: Observe your 5 senses as it pertains to what you are doing: What do I see, hear, smell, taste, feel?

- b) Remind yourself that there is no "right" or "wrong" way to feel- don't judge it
- c) Don't try to change it, simply notice and pay attention to your experience

2. Describe:

- a) Use descriptive words to illustrate your experience, "I feel sad" or "there is uncertainty" or "my frustration is real for me"
- b) Stay non-judgmental, recognize that your thoughts and emotions don't define you. Your thoughts are not facts.

Example: You became frustrated when you getting dressed for a night out because your clothes don't fit the way they used to.

Judgmental description:

I have nothing to wear; I look terrible and hate myself.

Mindful description:

I am having a hard time adjusting to my body, but that doesn't mean I look terrible. I will be kind to myself as I am getting back to where I want to be.

3. Participate

- a) Participate in the present moment- stay in the NOW.
- b) Engage fully in whatever you are doing- washing the dishes, driving, anything.

Example: Notice your 5 senses as it pertains to what you are doing- sight, sound, smell, taste, touch.

- c) Practice letting go and softening around unwanted or unhelpful worry

Let's Practice Mindfulness Together

The following exercise is called a body scan. It is a way to release emotions, practice letting go, focus your attention on physical tension, and train your mind to focus on the present moment. The internet has a wide variety of free resources for mindfulness exercises.

- ❖ When you are practicing, remember that your mind will wander to the many things that are swirling around in your head that you need to do.
- ❖ When you notice a thought come into your mind, acknowledge it, and re-focus your attention back to your breath.
- ❖ Resist the urge to criticize yourself for becoming distracted. This is very common and happens to everyone.
- ❖ Just like repetitive weight training strengthens your physical muscles, the repetitive mindfulness practice strengthens your ability to re-focus your attention.
- ❖ Each time you bring your attention back to the present moment, you are strengthening your mindfulness muscle.

Body Scan

Get comfortable, close your eyes, and take a few moments to be still.

Perhaps it's been a busy day and this is the first time you're stopping. As you begin to enter the world of being rather than doing, there's no need to judge, analyze, or figure things out. Just allow yourself to be in the moment with all that's there.

When you feel ready, gently shift your focus to your breath.

Now become aware of breathing. Breathe normally and naturally. Breathing in and knowing you're breathing in, and breathing out and knowing you're breathing out.

At times the mind may wander away from awareness of breathing. When you recognize this, acknowledge wherever you went and then come back to the breath.

And now gently withdraw awareness from mindful breathing as you shift to the body scan. As you go through the body, you may come across areas that are tight or tense. If you can allow them to soften, let that happen; if you can't, just let the sensations be, letting them go in whatever direction they need to go.

Start by bringing awareness to the bottom of your feet. Feel into your feet, sensing into what is being felt.

Feeling the heel, ball, and sole of the feet. Noticing any sensations of heaviness, lightness, pressure, or softness. Perhaps you can notice a warmth or coolness... or perhaps you can associate a color with the feeling, such as red, blue, or purple.

Now move your awareness up the legs, feeling into the calves, shins, knees, and thighs and their connection to your feet and body. Being present.

Continuing to breathe naturally. And now lift the awareness through the hips towards the abdomen and into the belly, again noticing sensations of heaviness, lightness, pressure, or softness. Notice if you are holding tension in this area of the body and try to breathe into that tension. Let any tightness soften and let be what is not softening.

Let the awareness shift into the chest and back, and shoulders. Being present and again noticing tension while letting any tightness soften. Continuing to shift your awareness out to your arms, hands, and fingertips. Feeling into the wrists and palms. Noticing any sensations and letting them be. Continuing to breathe as you release tension you may be holding.

Finally, let the awareness move into the neck, jaw, and gently into the teeth, tongue, nose, eyes, and forehead. Being present, breathing into the tension. Again, noticing any warmth, coolness, or color that may come to you as you visualize these sensations.

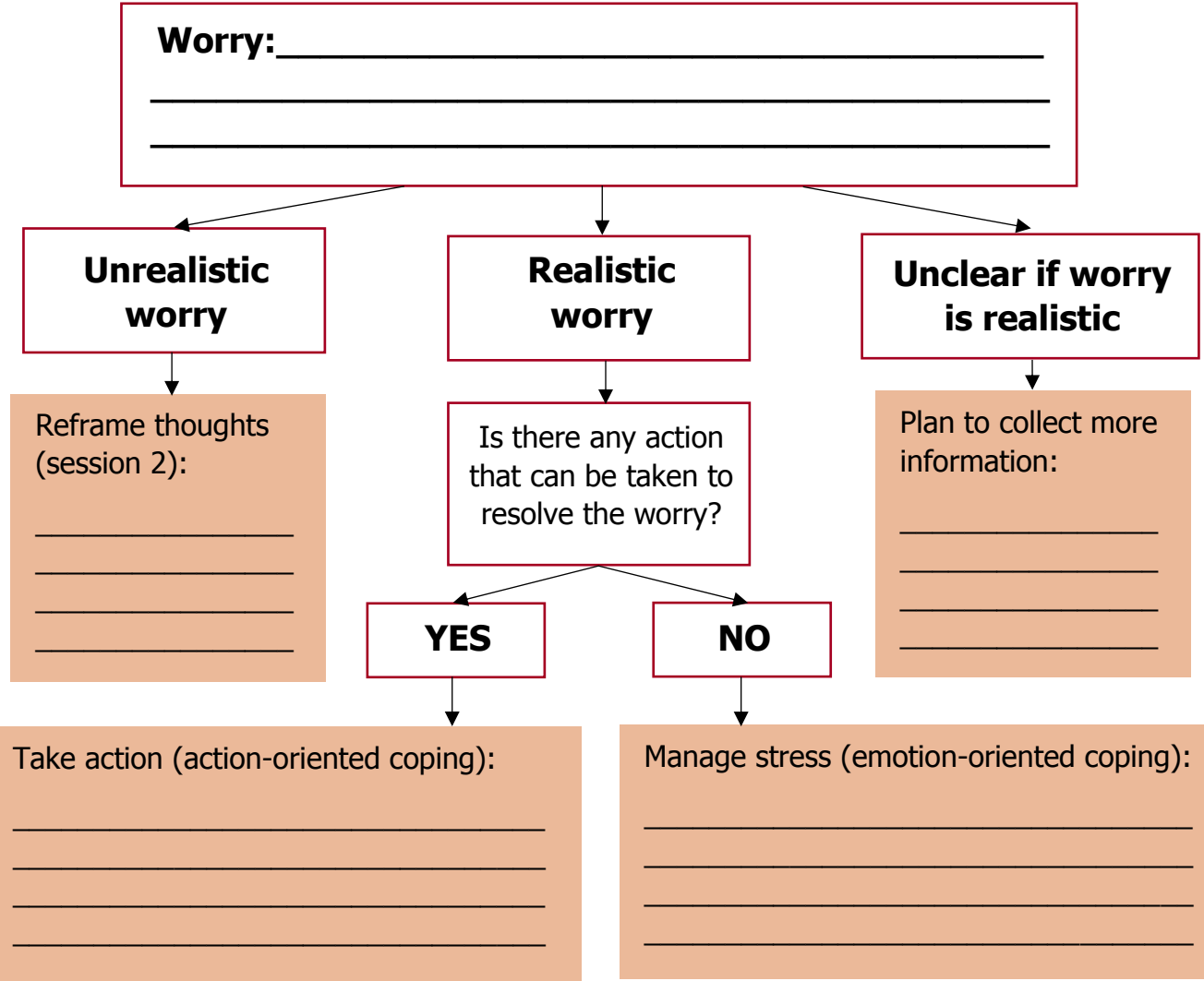
Now expand the field of awareness to the entire connected body from head to toe. Breathing in, feel the whole body rising and expanding on an inhalation and falling and contracting on an exhalation.

Being present. As you come to the end of the body scan, congratulate yourself for taking this time to be present. Know that you can return to this feeling right here, right now...and when you are ready, open your eyes, feeling refreshed, relaxed, and alert.

Adapted from A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook by Bob Stahl and Elisha Goldstein

Exercise 3.4 Session 3 Home Practice

1. Choose a stressor or worry and complete the Worry Algorithm below, filling in which coping strategies you used to take action (action-oriented coping), and which you manage stress (emotion-oriented coping).



2. Practice mindfulness body scan, or diaphragmatic breathing 5-10 minutes per day.

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