

## HANDOUT 6-H

### MINDFUL ACCEPTANCE OF THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

You have learned that many of our most distressing feelings are caused by Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS). You have also learned that ANTS are an inevitable part of life, and they will come and go no matter what we do.

The key to emotional well-being is to change how we *interpret* our ANTS. Do we view them as absolute truth, or are they just passing experiences that we can use or let go of as we see fit?

Practitioners of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) have used metaphors to describe this ability to step back and get a more detached and realistic response to our inner experiences. Here are a few:

1. Imagine that you are a movie screen. Over time images are projected on you. Some of the images are happy, some scary, some sad, and some angry. The images come and go. However, you are the screen. You have a value-based self that can observe these thoughts and feelings as they occur. You are mindful of them but they do not define you. You are not your thoughts and feelings. You are the place and space where thoughts and feelings occur.
2. Imagine that you are a chessboard. There is a game of chess being played on you between your negative and positive thoughts. Your thoughts are doing battle, but you are the board. You're indifferent; you don't care which side wins or loses. You are not your thoughts and feelings. You are the place and space where your thoughts and feelings occur.
3. You are watching TV. Images and sounds come and go. You are aware of the images but you recognize that they are all "on TV" and not necessarily reality. You can use your intelligence and values to help you determine what information needs to be taken seriously and what can be let go. There might be a commercial that has a very emotional message such as "Don't miss this once in a lifetime opportunity!" In spite of the urgency of the commercial, you know that it's "just a commercial," so you let it pass. No matter what is on the TV (news, sports, entertainment), you are the ultimate authority on what you do with the information that is presented. And if the information is not useful, you just let it pass.
4. Try to imagine the wisest person you can think of—someone who remains calm and thoughtful through any storm; someone who is accepting and compassionate in all situations. Perhaps it is a relative or loved one. Perhaps it is a religious figure such as Jesus or the Buddha. Perhaps you can even form a "committee" of several wise, thoughtful, and compassionate individuals. As your thoughts and feelings pass through your awareness, imagine this wise person (or committee) speaking to you. The person or committee does not criticize or judge you for your passing thoughts and feelings, and is able to provide some wise perspective on your situation. As best you can, imagine what this person or committee has to say to you.