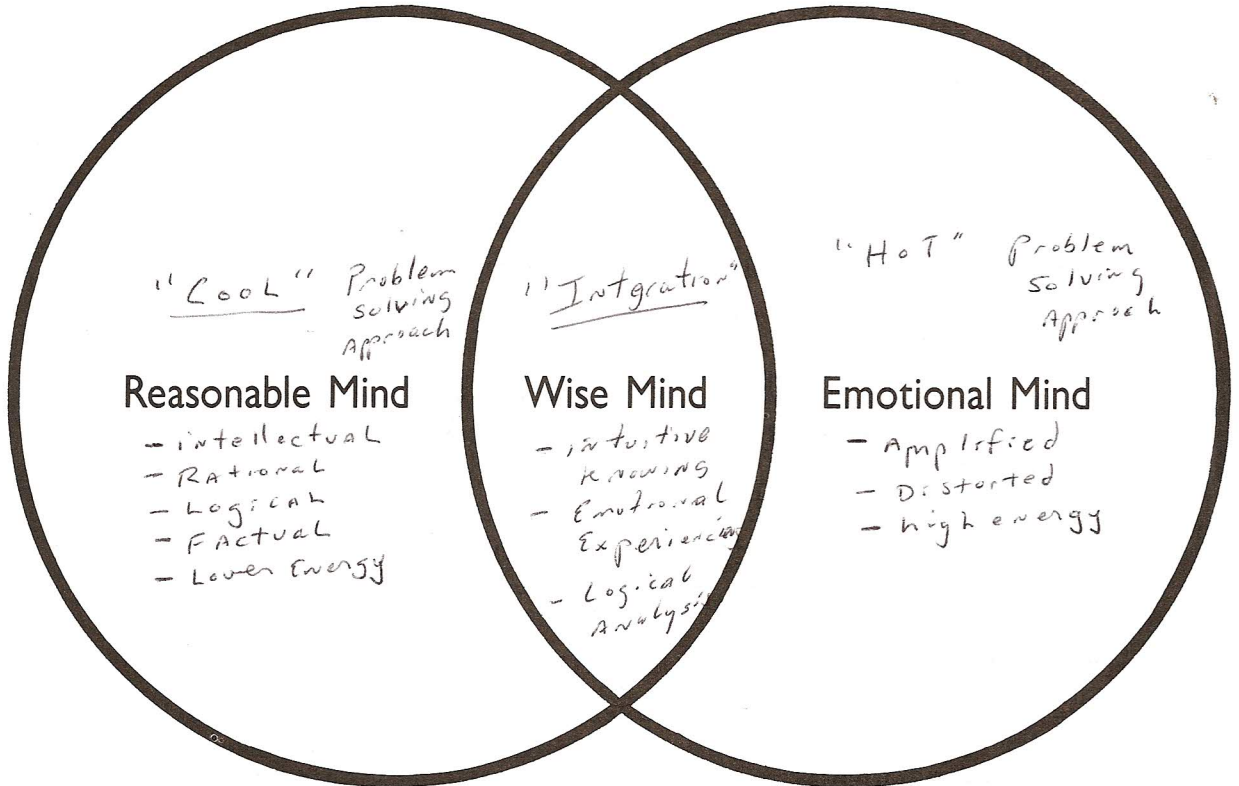


Taking Hold of Your Mind:

States of Mind



SPECIFIC GOALS

Behaviors to Decrease

1. Interpersonal chaos
2. Labile emotions, moods
3. Impulsiveness
4. Confusion about self, cognitive dysregulation

Behaviors to Increase

1. Interpersonal effectiveness skills
2. Emotion regulation skills
3. Distress tolerance skills
4. Core mindfulness skills

Taking Hold of Your Mind: “What” Skills

OBSERVE

- **JUST NOTICE THE EXPERIENCE.** Notice without getting caught in the experience. Experience without reacting to your experience.
- Have a “TEFLON MIND;” letting experiences, feelings, and thoughts come into your mind and slip right out.
- **CONTROL** your attention, but not what you see. Push away nothing. Cling to nothing.
- Be like a guard at the palace gate, **ALERT** to every thought, feeling, and action that comes through the gate of your mind.
- Step inside yourself and observe. **WATCH** your thoughts coming and going, like clouds in the sky. Notice each feeling, rising and falling, like waves in the ocean. Notice exactly what you are doing.
- Notice what comes through your **SENSES**—your eyes, ears, nose, skin, tongue. See others’ actions and expressions. “Smell the roses.”

DESCRIBE

- **PUT WORDS ON THE EXPERIENCE.** When a feeling or thought arises, or you do something, acknowledge it. For example, say in your mind, “Sadness has just enveloped me.” . . . or . . . “Stomach muscles tightening” . . . or . . . “A thought ‘I can’t do this’ has come into my mind.” . . . or . . . “walking, step, step, step. . . .”
- **PUT EXPERIENCES INTO WORDS.** Describe to yourself what is happening. Put a name on your feelings. Call a thought just a thought, a feeling just a feeling. Don’t get caught in content.

PARTICIPATE

- Enter into your experiences. Let yourself get involved in the moment, letting go of ruminating. **BECOME ONE WITH YOUR EXPERIENCE, COMPLETELY FORGETTING YOURSELF.**
- **ACT INTUITIVELY** from wise mind. Do just what is needed in each situation—a skillful dancer on the dance floor, one with the music and your partner, neither willful nor sitting on your hands.
- Actively **PRACTICE** your skills as you learn them until they become part of you, where you use them without self-consciousness. **PRACTICE:**
 1. Changing harmful situations.
 2. Changing your harmful reactions to situations.
 3. Accepting yourself and the situation as they are.

Taking Hold of Your Mind: “How” Skills

NON-JUDGMENTALLY

- See but **DON'T EVALUATE**. Take a nonjudgmental stance. Just the facts. Focus on the “what,” not the “good” or “bad,” the “terrible” or “wonderful,” the “should” or “should not.”
- **UNGLUE YOUR OPINIONS** from the facts, from the “who, what, when, and where.”
- **ACCEPT** each moment, each event as a blanket spread out on the lawn accepts both the rain and the sun, each leaf that falls upon it.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** the helpful, the wholesome, but don't judge it. Acknowledge the harmful, the unwholesome, but don't judge it.
- When you find yourself judging, **DON'T JUDGE YOUR JUDGING**.

ONE-MINDFULLY

- **DO ONE THING AT A TIME**. When you are eating, eat. When you are walking, walk. When you are bathing, bathe. When you are working, work. When you are in a group, or a conversation, focus your attention on the very moment you are in with the other person. When you are thinking, think. When you are worrying, worry. When you are planning, plan. When you are remembering, remember. Do each thing with all of your attention.
- If other actions, or other thoughts, or strong feelings distract you, **LET GO OF DISTRACTIONS** and go back to what you are doing—again, and again, and again.
- **CONCENTRATE YOUR MIND**. If you find you are doing two things at once, stop and go back to one thing at a time.

EFFECTIVELY

- **FOCUS ON WHAT WORKS**. Do what needs to be done in each situation. Stay away from “fair” and “unfair,” “right” and “wrong,” “should” and “should not.”
- **PLAY BY THE RULES**. Don't “cut off your nose to spite your face.”
- Act as **SKILLFULLY** as you can, meeting the needs of the situation you are in. Not the situation you wish you were in; not the one that is just; not the one that is more comfortable; not the one that. . . .
- Keep an eye on **YOUR OBJECTIVES** in the situation and do what is necessary to achieve them.
- **LET GO** of vengeance, useless anger, and righteousness that hurts you and doesn't work.

Rethinking Tools

Try the following tools to change your thinking.

*** List Your Options ***

In any situation, you have choices, and it helps to identify them. For example, David was living with his parents and feeling “pathetic, like a loser.” Instead of continuing to put himself down, he sat down and made a list of what he could do: (1) Go to job counseling, get a job, and earn money to move out; (2) See if I can live with a friend; (3) Apply for disability and move out; (4) Stay with my parents but spend more time on my own. He began to see that he had choices and that it was up to him to decide among them, rather than just feeling bad about the situation.

*** Notice the Source ***

Who’s telling you something? Can this person be believed? What are that person’s flaws? This strategy is especially important when you are being criticized or given advice that you disagree with. For example, Judy’s aunt kept telling her she was fat. Judy would get depressed and eat more, until she began to see that being talked to like that was “not okay—it was disrespectful.” She began to see that her aunt was a very unhappy person who took out her pain on the people around her.

*** Imagine ***

Create a mental picture that helps you feel better. For example, Allan imagined his “heart exploding” when he had a panic attack, and this would make him feel more anxious. He changed the image to his heart as a “computer,” hard-wired and solid—computers don’t just blow up and explode. You can create any image you want, as long as you can picture it: Imagine yourself as a coach encouraging yourself, or an explorer embarking on a search, or an artist playing with possibilities. You can also use your imagination to “invent a possible world”—imagine how you want the future to be, and then move toward that (as in sports training, when an athlete imagines a move before doing it).

*** Praise Yourself ***

Notice what you did right. Decades of research show that the most powerful method of growth is positive reinforcement. This is the opposite of “beating yourself up” or “putting yourself down”—neither of which works to make you better. Find every opportunity for praise, no matter how small. And be generous—there’s no such thing as overdoing it when it’s well earned.

*** Learn from Experience ***

Find a meaningful lesson that can help you next time. For example, Doug asked his roommate to take his marijuana plants out of the house, but the roommate refused. The lesson he learned was, “My roommate is not really there for me. I need to either move out or find a new roommate who is less selfish and won’t drag down my recovery.”

*** Create a New Story ***

Tell *“what happened”* in a way that is respectful of yourself. For example, Jennifer used to think of herself as “damaged goods.” Eventually she rewrote the story: “Now I think of myself as a walking miracle, and feel a sense of esteem when I realize how far I’ve come, and how I’m really a good and decent human being.”

*** Think of the Consequences ***

Evaluate the *pros and cons over the long term*. You feel like having a hit of cocaine. It may feel great for 15 minutes. But in the long term? You’ve wasted money; your body will feel worn out; you may dislike yourself more; your family may be disappointed.

*** Examine the Evidence ***

Like a scientist or detective, *strive to look at the facts objectively*. Notice both sides, pro and con. For example, Jack said, “I can’t get off drugs.” To examine the evidence, he wrote down two lists, *Pro* (e.g., “I’ve been using marijuana every day for 3 months”) and *Con* (e.g., “I was able to quit for 6 months 4 years ago”). Notice that the lists include only facts, not opinions. When Jack looked at the lists, he realized that he had had some past success with recovery and felt a little more motivated to try again.

*** Brainstorm ***

Try to think of as many interpretations of a negative situation as possible. For example, if someone cuts you off in driving, you could leap to “What a jerk! No one cares about anyone else.” Or you could generate other interpretations: “Maybe he just found out his wife has gone into labor,” “Maybe he’s a doctor rushing to the hospital to do surgery.” This strategy is especially important for situations where *you don’t know the truth and can’t find out*. In this situation, you can’t stop the other person’s car and ask why you were cut off on the road. In short, if you can’t know for sure, you might as well go with an interpretation that makes you feel better.

*** What’s the Real Impact? ***

Sometimes it helps to ask, *“What is the real impact on my life?”* If you apply for a job and don’t get it, you may feel depressed and say to yourself, “I’m incompetent; I really blew the interview. This is terrible.” But if you ask yourself, “What is the real impact?”, you might think “That was just one interview. There are many jobs out there, and I can keep applying, or maybe get new training, job counseling, practice interviewing, or read a book on how to get a job. This is not the end of the world.” In fact, most situations are not life-or-death.

*** Make a Decision ***

If you’re stuck, try just picking an imperfect road (as long as it’s safe). Sometimes people get caught up in so many possibilities or the attempt to find a “perfect” solution that they feel paralyzed, stuck, or confused. When you get this way, it’s actually better just to go ahead and make a decision for now, even though it may not be perfect. Down the line you can reevaluate your decision, but for now, “Do something, anything” (as long as it’s safe!) is better than feeling paralyzed and doing nothing.

*** Remember a Better Time ***

Get perspective by noticing good times. Sometimes when you're caught in a negative feeling, it seems as though it has always been this way in the past and will always be this way in the future. Try to remember better times (e.g., "Last month I was able to keep myself from bingeing on food for an entire week," or "Three years ago I was able to hold a job"). Both PTSD and substance abuse are disorders that may be different at different times. Stacy wrote, "I used to be Stacy, full of life and vigor, and smart. Now I don't know me. Will I come out of this? I am a good person, and the 'old me' wants back in. Can the 'old me' live with how I act when I'm sick? I have to remember it's not me now, it's an illness."

*** Discover Rules to Live By ***

Identify principles that keep you focused on recovery—for example, "Take good care of myself," or "When in doubt, do what's hardest."

About Rethinking

✦ **Everyone is thinking, all the time, even when one is not aware of it.** While awake, we are always in a “conversation” with ourselves (sometimes called “self-talk”). It ranges from the trivial (“What should I have for lunch?”) to the profound (“Why should I go on with life?”). Much of this thinking is automatic—it just happens. In rethinking, the idea is to become aware of this internal dialogue and to choose thinking that helps you feel better. For example, saying to yourself, “I’m no good,” would be depressing; saying to yourself, “I’ve had a hard life but that’s not my fault,” might feel a little better.

✦ **Notice how thinking impacts your life.** Thinking affects how you feel and act. For example, imagine that you are home alone at night and drifting off into sleep. Suddenly you hear a sound at the window. If you think, “It’s the wind rustling a tree branch against the window,” you are likely to feel fine and go back to sleep. But if you think, “It’s a robber trying to break in,” you are likely to feel anxious and call the police. The same situation occurs—hearing a sound at the window—but how you feel and act depends on what you *think*.

✦ **Rethinking does not mean “positive thinking”—it means realistic thinking.** For example, if you think, “I’m a bad person,” just flipping this around to “I’m a good person” does not work. The goal is not just to reverse negative thoughts into positive ones, but to evaluate them realistically. Various ways to evaluate your thoughts are described in Handout 2. But it is important to emphasize that rethinking does not mean “the power of positive thinking,” but rather, the power of actually exploring the way you look at the world, the meanings you create, and the realities of your experience.

✦ **Rethinking is a profound emotional experience.** People sometimes believe that “rethinking” is dry, intellectual, boring, or schoolish. When you learn to do it well, it is a deep experience that helps you truly feel better. It is not about repeating to yourself things you don’t really believe, or just saying what you think you ought to say. It is about discovering who you are and choosing how you want to approach your life. Some keys to make it work at this powerful level include the following:

- *Identify “hot” thoughts.* These are thoughts that are connected to your feelings, that matter to you right now.
- *Stay specific.* If you have a general thought such as “My life is hopeless,” try to break it down into what specific and recent real-life experience set off that thought. For example, it might help to identify when you most recently thought this (e.g., yesterday evening when you were home alone) and what it was connected to (e.g., you had been drinking). Then you can work on changing it more easily (e.g., “I notice that I feel more hopeless when I drink,” or “If I spend time with people in the evenings, I might not feel so down”). It takes practice, but it really can help.

✦ **Your thoughts are not wrong or bad.** Some people assume, “If I need to rethink, it means my thoughts are bad.” This is especially true for people with PTSD and substance abuse, who may already feel bad about themselves. But *everyone* has a variety of thoughts, some of which are negative. Remember that there are good reasons why you developed the thoughts you have—they come from your life experiences. For example, if you lived through combat during war, you may have begun to believe that “People are vicious and out for themselves.” Or if you were repeatedly told certain things when you were a child (e.g., “You’ll never amount to anything”), after a while you began to believe it. You may notice too that how you talk to yourself resembles how people in your life have talked to you.

✦ **Rethinking takes active practice.** Rethinking needs to be learned just like anything else. Remember when you learned to tie your shoes or ride a bike? You had to practice and make mistakes along the way. You can *definitely* learn rethinking—anyone can. It took a long time to develop your current way of thinking, and it may take a *while* to change it. The more actively you work on it, the better you'll get, and the quicker the results will be. When you notice destructive thinking, *stop yourself* at that moment and ask yourself, "How can I rethink this to feel better?" You need to make this sort of active effort for a while until a healthier way of thinking becomes automatic. It's like building a house: Each brick adds to the strength of the building; it does not happen all at once. Just keep trying!

✦ **Learn more about rethinking.** Browse in a library or bookstore or on the Internet; there are many different resources available under the term "cognitive therapy." For example, there are books by Aaron T. Beck, the main founder of cognitive therapy. Also, David Burns's *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* is an inexpensive, popular paperback. Call the Institute for Cognitive Therapy to locate a cognitive therapist in your area (610-664-3020).

✦ **Try SMART Recovery or Rational Recovery.** SMART Recovery and Rational Recovery are substance abuse self-help groups like AA, except that they focus on rethinking, do not have a spiritual component, and do not view addiction as a lifelong disease.