

Group Session Four Guidance Notes

Session four aims to:

1. Feedback on thought monitoring
2. Understand about fear of movement and activities in chronic low back pain
3. Practice 2 relaxation techniques

1. Challenging unhelpful thoughts homework review (15-20 mins)

Draw up on the flipchart the same chart as they had for homework and ask for examples that worked from the group. Write up several examples. Then ask the group for ones that didn't work or that they had difficulty with. Again, get the group to problem solve for each other.

Ask the group to continue practising the thought challenging with one or two examples each day.

2. Relaxation techniques (5-10 mins)

Suggested dialogue to introduce the topic:

"We found out in the first session that one of the consequences of being in pain is that we tense up. Tense muscles can become uncomfortable or painful, adding to our problems. Relaxation techniques help us to relax off these muscles. We will be running through some specific exercises to help us relax but it's worth thinking about other things that help us relax. What activities/techniques do you use to help you relax?"

Write answers on the flip chart e.g.:

Hot bath	Relaxation tapes
Watch TV	Nice meal
Yoga	Alcohol

Ask group: *"What are the other benefits of relaxation?"*

Tell the group:

"Relaxation can help counteract the side effects of tension and stress. Research has shown that relaxation can help reduce chronic pain, anxiety, high blood pressure and cholesterol levels."

Point out the following points:

- *"The best relaxation techniques are those that can be done anytime, anywhere and in any position. For example, if the participants were stuck in traffic and could feel their muscles tensing, then they would need to be able to start their relaxation techniques in sitting."*
- *"The key to succeeding with relaxation techniques is to practice them at first when pain is tolerable so that when the pain is worse they know the routine and the techniques can be*

more effective. If they only think to try the relaxation techniques when the pain is bad, then the techniques will not work as well."

- *"Most people find relaxing difficult as it is not something that we normally do. We often feel that we don't have the time to relax or that spending time relaxing is a waste of time. For this reason 'relaxing' is often linked with being 'lazy'. Participants need to give themselves 'permission' to spend time practising relaxation, as it is an important tool in pain management."*
- *"The relaxation techniques covered in the programme include simple breathing, stretching and relaxing your muscles and using your imagination to picture relaxing scenes in your mind. It is up to them to try them out and see which they prefer."*

3) Relaxation Practical (15 mins):

Encourage patients to get mats out and let everyone position him or herself comfortably, some people may prefer to sit in a chair - be flexible.

Mention you will go over a few techniques this week and some more next week.

Tell patients:

- Depending on where they are when they want to do the relaxation techniques their eyes can be open or closed and they should breathe slowly in and out. Different techniques work for different people so it is worth trying each out a few times to see which is the most effective for them.

a) Deep Breathing

Talk to the patients about using deep breathing as a relaxation technique. Suggested dialogue is provided below:

"Deep breathing is one of the easiest relaxation techniques to learn and the best thing about it is it can be done anywhere. When we become stressed, one of our body's fight or flight reactions is shallow, rapid breathing. Taking deep, slow breaths is one way we can turn off this fight or flight reaction. Deep breathing is the foundation of many other relaxation exercises."

Practice doing this with them. Suggested dialogue is below:

"Wherever you are, put one hand on your tummy, just below the rib cage.

Slowly breathe in through your nose. You should feel your tummy rising and expanding outwards.

Breathe out slowly through your mouth, emptying your lungs completely and letting your stomach fall. Repeat several times until you feel relaxed."

b) Stretch/relax muscle relaxation

Talk to the patients about using stretch/relax muscle relaxation as a technique. Suggested dialogue is provided below:

“This technique involves slowly stretching and then releasing each part of your body by itself. You can begin with either your head or your feet. You stretch the muscles for 5-8 seconds and then the tension is released. While releasing the tension, try to focus on the changes you feel when that part of your body is relaxed.”

Practice doing this with them. Suggested dialogue is below:

- *“If you decide to start with your lower body, pull your toes up towards the ceiling as far as you can, feel the stretch in the soles of your feet and hold.*
- *Then, very slowly, release the toes.*
- *Now, move up to your feet. Pull your whole foot up so your toes are pointing towards your head, feel the stretch in the back of your calves, hold, then slowly release the feet.*
- *Continue the stretching and releasing until you reach the top of your head.*
- *You can stretch and relax both sides simultaneously or one at a time.”*

Break at an appropriate point in this session (10 mins)

4. Avoidance of movement or activities (20-25 mins)

Open up a conversation on the avoidance of movements/activities. Below is an example dialogue you could use:

“When we’ve hurt our backs there seems to be typical movements or activities that cause pain when we do them.

As a result we naturally avoid doing them in the early stages as it hurts too much to ignore it. When we’ve avoided something for a long time, we tend not to go back to doing it again and this can be limiting for us.

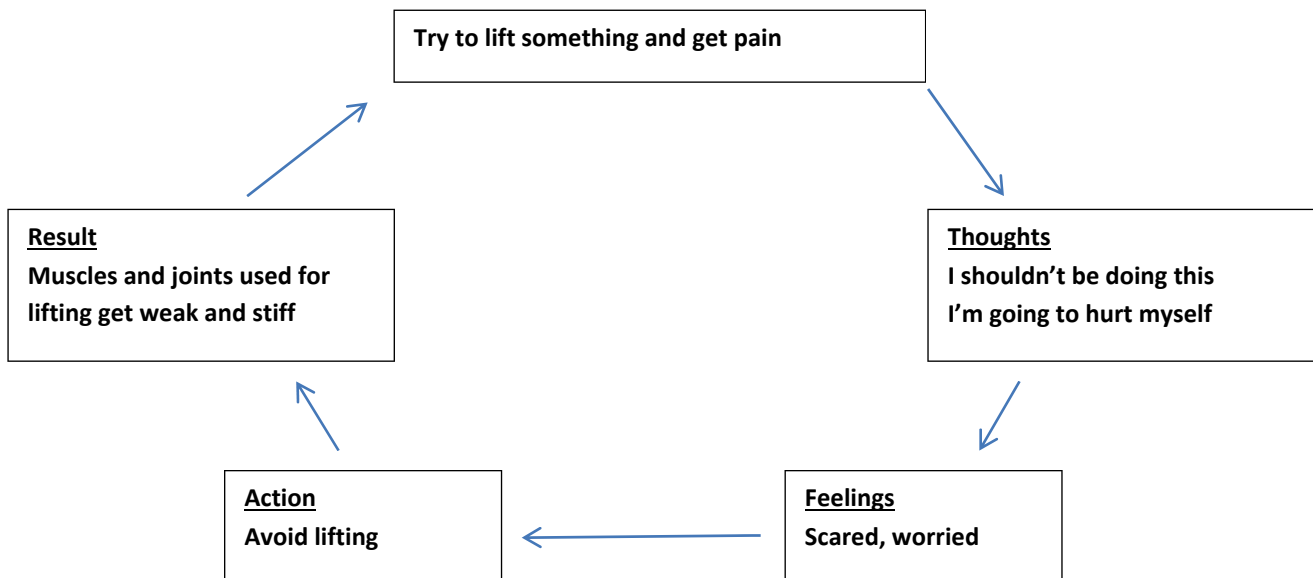
Since you’ve had back pain, is there any movement or activity that you find particularly worrying or difficult?”

Here we are looking for typical answers such as bending, twisting and lifting.

- Write these answers on the flipchart.

Use lifting as an example of the vicious cycle that pain can cause as laid out below.

Write up the top box (try to lift something and get pain) and the work clockwise to complete the whole cycle. Try and get the group to come up with each stage e.g. ‘*What thoughts go through your head when you try to lift something and get pain? And how does that make you feel? So what do you do? What do you think happens to muscles and joints used for lifting if you are avoiding lifting?’*



What needs to be highlighted is the pain the person gets when they lift acts to reinforce the thoughts, for example, 'I shouldn't be doing this'.

Make sure you emphasise that this vicious cycle is a very normal response to pain. In fact, it would be odd if we *didn't* respond in this way.

Ask the group: "How do we get out of this vicious cycle?"

- They will most likely end up by realising that they would need to start lifting, but if not prompt them.

Ask the group to come up with a way that they could gradually start lifting again.

- Remind them that they would need to set their baseline and consider pacing. For example they could start with an empty box and doing a few lifts each day which they could then progress by adding small loads to the box, e.g. tins of food, gradually increased over time. Or they could incrementally increase the height of the lift, or the distance the load is carried for etc. Remember that this is exposure to something that they are fearful of; they have to feel comfortable with how fast they progress on and their starting point.
- Make sure you problem solve from the lowest functional point within your group. This will ensure everyone can see how to re-start an activity and will emphasise that it doesn't matter how low you start, what matters is starting and gradually improving.

Depending on how long this has taken you may wish to pick another of the examples of avoided activities that they have come up with and again run through how they could restart the activity and progress themselves on.

Homework (5 mins)

Ask the group to work out how they would restart something they had avoided and write a plan as to how they would approach it. There is a sheet in their pack (page 36) to help them do this, however, they will go through any problems they had doing this at the beginning of next session. Also ask them to practice the two relaxation techniques and record how the practice went on the relaxation log on page 39 of their pack.

Feedback (1-2 mins)

As covered in previous sessions.

Link to the next session

Let the participants know that they will be discussing another typical vicious cycle next week that involves the effects of worrying about their pain and they will be covering two more relaxation techniques.