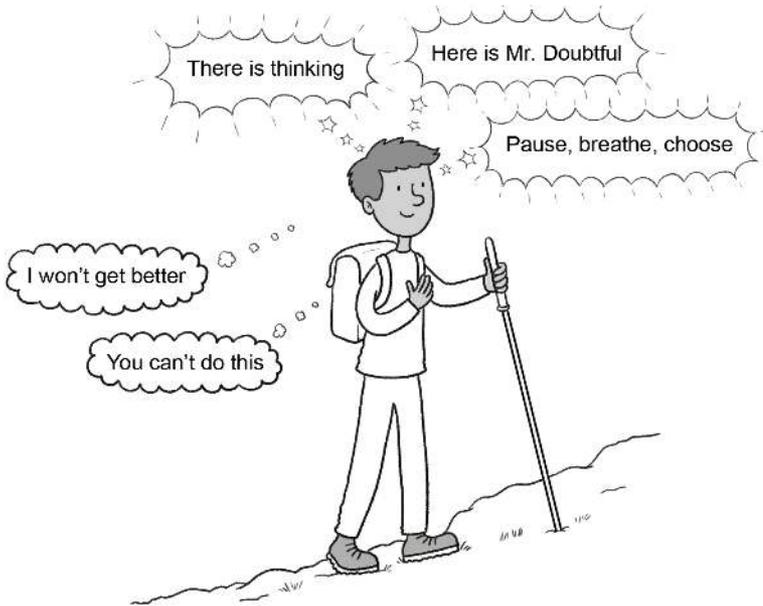


CHAPTER 38

Treating Yourself with Kindness!



When I was close to the end of writing this workbook, I ended up getting a terrible cold. Despite my best efforts, I could only stay awake for two to three hours and then I needed a nap. I'd wake up again for two to three hours and then take another nap, and so on. The nights were the worst because I became a coughing machine and sleeping was almost impossible for weeks.

Unexpected things happen that are out of our control, and for many of us, our minds, like a content generator machine, take us to places that we don't want to go. My mind came up with thoughts along the lines of "My publishers will be upset with me; the teens won't like the workbook; I won't get better from this cold; will I be sick for the whole year?" and so on... And,

when these unplanned things crop up, it's natural that the content generator machine of your mind will scream at you with obsessions that may seem so real and so true that, at times, you may end up getting hooked on them as I did when getting hooked on all those thoughts when having a cold.

It's natural, we all do it—we all get hooked from time to time. But at times your mind also may come up with loud judgments like: “You're not getting better; nothing is working for you; you're going backwards; you're not working hard enough.” Your mind can't help it. You cannot make your mind behave better, but instead of taking your mind so seriously—as if it's a bossy boss—you can choose how to respond to those judgments.

When you hear your mind coming up with all those criticisms, negative self-judgments, or blaming thoughts—either because of those pesky obsessions or because in the fear of the moment you engaged in compulsive, avoidant, or reassurance-seeking behaviors—those are the precise moments to practice kind behaviors.

Yup, you read that correctly. Kind behaviors are not only actions from you towards your friends, but they are also from you to you!

Why not pause for a moment and try the exercise below? Read the directions first, and then give it a try!

If you're sitting down or standing up, try to straighten your back, drop your shoulders, and press your feet gently against the floor. Next, recall a moment in which you had those loud criticisms showing up in your mind, and as you bring that moment into your mind, take a deep breath, make room to watch those judgment thoughts, and see if you can come with a name for them. Don't worry if it's not a perfect name, but just a name for you to recognize them, and imagine them as little ghosts on top of your shoulder screaming and criticizing you. See if you can watch them, and with gentleness, notice the feelings that come up and the sensations that show up in your body. As you continue to notice, slowly bring your hand towards your body in a gesture of bringing caring, support, and kindness towards yourself, and place your hand wherever you feel a sensation or a feeling—perhaps it's your stomach, your chest, your head—but gently let your hand rest there. And, as you let your hand rest there, keep in mind that your struggle is part of being alive, of being human, and not a sign of something being wrong with you.

How did it go for you? I hope you put this exercise into action just as a way to practice kind behaviors towards yourself. And if you want a recap of it so you can practice it anytime throughout your day, below are the mini steps listed for you to practice self-kindness:

1. Take a deep breath.
2. Notice those self-critical thoughts.
3. Name them (e.g. here is my harsh voice; Queen Judgy is here).
4. Unhook from them using one of your favorite unhooking skills (from Section 6).
5. Place your hand on your body where you notice your hurt or distress and make room for that feeling without trying to push it away, fix it, or get rid of it. Or if you prefer, you can even softly hug yourself with caring.

And, because practicing kind behaviors is a skill that can be developed, practice Steps 1–5 a couple of times, as you do with any other skill.

There is no need to be harsh with yourself when getting hooked on obsessions or if you find yourself running into safety country. And, even if your content generator machine is coming up with hundreds of criticisms at the speed of light, remember, there is no winning against the mind, so no need to prove it wrong, come up with a positive thought, or replace thoughts. But, you can always *choose* to respond to that mind noise with kindness, exactly as you do when you see your friends struggling, with the difference that this time it's about practicing kindness from you to you!

CHAPTER 39

Getting Out of Your Mind and into Your Life

Here is the beginning of a Saturday evening for me:

Dr. Z.: I really want to lie down on the sofa, watch the new Spider-Man movie, and just enjoy the evening!

Content generator machine: Did you finish the laundry? What about the paper you have to write? Did you notice the dust on the TV? Remember you need to call your mom; how many days more until Christmas? I miss the sunny weather. There is something different with my smoothie today. Halloween kitty, where are you?

Dr. Z.: Oh boy, I just want to watch the new Spider-Man movie. I may need to fire my brain for 2 hours and 15 minutes while watching the movie.

Any reactions to the above interaction between what I wanted to do and what my wonderful mind—a content generator machine—came up with? Have you been there? Isn't that interesting that our minds don't take a break, vacation, or holiday? They just keep going on and on and on, nonstop. Our minds don't take vacations, don't know about holidays, and they don't get paid either. They just keep moving, 24/7. The reality is that our minds are just doing their job. They're doing their own thinking and thinking!

Your mind, like my mind, creates all types of thoughts, funny ones, hypotheses, questions, judgments, worries, rules, memories, images, fantasy thoughts, dreams, storytelling thoughts, obsessions, and so on...and while your mind keeps doing its own thing, you are not your thoughts, you just have them. And just because you think it, it doesn't make it so.

No matter how certain and secure your mind seems to be, a thought is just a thought. A thought isn't reality, and obsessions are not your enemy. What about if, along with all the skills you have learned in this workbook, you learn two more: staying in the moment, and getting out of your mind and into your life!

After finishing this chapter, close the workbook, and practice for yourself to see how much you have taken from it.

Here is what to do to practice *staying out of your mind and getting back in your life*: When your mind wonders about anything, and a thought, any type of thought, pops up, see if you can catch the thought with a hand gesture, in the same way as you catch a spider. And, as if you're holding the thought as a physical thing, just put it in your pocket. An alternative gesture is that you catch the thought, and then press it against your body as if you're placing the thought in your skin. It's really up to you which hand gesture you prefer to use. There is no right or wrong way to do this exercise—it's more important you give it a try. When catching those thoughts with a hand gesture, you can name them if you like—here is judgment; here is Ms. Perfect, Mr. Sassy, jealous thought, etc.—and then go back to focus on what you're doing in that precise moment.

Sometimes, you may notice your thoughts coming really fast, and in those moments, hang in there with those fast and wondering thoughts, just do any of the physical gestures you choose, and then choose what you really want to pay attention to.

If paying attention, answering, and dwelling on all those thoughts that show up in your mind helps you to take steps toward your values, go for it. But if those thoughts are mere distractions and take you away from what's happening in front of you and the stuff you care about, there is no need to engage with them at all. In those moments, take a deep breath, and just do your best to go back to paying attention to what you were doing or pay attention to your surroundings by describing five things you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.

For example, Steven was hanging out with his friend at a party of the swimming team, and while chatting with his group of friends, the content generator machine of his mind came up with the obsessive thought of “I need to say this sentence correctly so it feels right.” Steven noticed the thought, knew that this thought had shown up before in his mind, and so he called it “the feeling good thought.” He then took a deep breath and chose to pay attention to his external surroundings. He noticed the tone of voice of each one of his friends, the smell of the soil after the rain, the taste of the slice of pizza he’d just had in his mouth, the texture of his jeans against his hand after pressing it on them, and observed the colors of the sky on the horizon.

Steven described all those observations to himself while continuing to watch his mind, and he decided to not respond to that mind noise. There is really no need to mind your mind at all times!

Give it a try as you continue moving forward with your life!