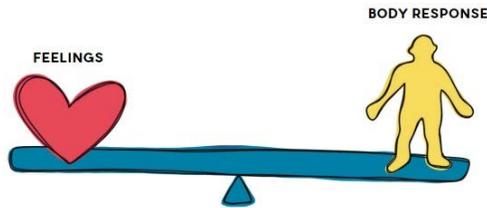
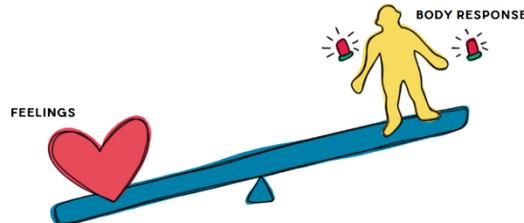


PATIENT TOOL: BALANCING THE PAIN/EMOTION SEESAW

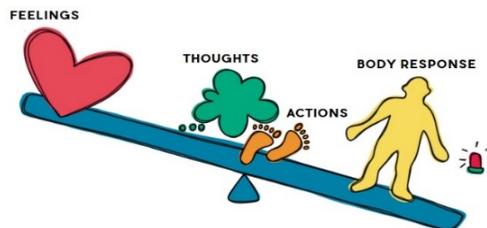
BEFORE chronic pain: As you can see, your feelings and body responses were balanced and hanging together evenly before chronic pain started.



DURING chronic pain: However, this balance becomes disrupted when you experience chronic pain (defined as pain lasting for 3 or more months). Imagine listening to a house alarm going off for that long—it's all you can focus on, and leads to this:



RETRAINING the brain: To restore the balance, first, you have to put a lot of effort in the other direction, which means *increasing* attention to feelings and *decreasing* attention to body responses using your thoughts and actions. It's like learning to listen to the birds chirping or traffic going by while the alarm is going off. Redirecting your attention to your feelings allows you to express how you are doing in a new way and learn new kinds of coping tools that can help you enjoy your life again, despite pain!



Here are some ways you can check-in with your feelings instead of body responses:

- Change how you check-in with yourself. When you wake up in the morning, notice what thoughts and emotions you have about the day instead of checking in with how your body is responding. Or if you notice a body response, take action by identifying what thoughts or feelings you are also having, and use a coping strategy that can help with expressing those thoughts or feelings to communicate your needs in a different way.
- Change how you respond to questions. Next time someone asks you “*What’s wrong?*” try telling them how you are feeling or what you are thinking instead of commenting on body responses.
 - For example: “*I am sad (feeling) that I can’t hang out with my friends today,*” OR “*I was thinking about the schoolwork I have missed (thought) and I’m worried (feeling) I won’t be able to catch up*” OR “*I’m happy (feeling) to see you!*”
 - Let people know: “*I am trying something new by focusing on my thoughts and feelings instead of on my body responses to help reduce attention to pain. You can help me do that by not asking me about my pain or symptoms, and just asking me regular questions, like ‘How are you?’*”

It may seem hard at first but the more you practice the easier it will become.

AFTER retraining the brain: After practicing in this way, your feelings and body responses can be rebalanced! Sometimes they might move a little in one direction or the other but now you know how to keep them steady!

