



## Meaningful Actions

We know that people often lose touch with what is important to them when they have long term pain. We support people to reconnect with what they care about whilst managing difficult barriers such as pain, thoughts and emotions that can get in the way. We do this through practicing different skills and strategies and exploring values and goals. We have helped people get back to travelling, seeing friends and socialising, exercising, work and previous hobbies.

### **Values and Goals**

When you've been living with a chronic pain condition for a length of time it is common to have had to give up things in life that were important to you. Perhaps you've had to give up work or change career. Maybe all your energy goes into chores and it feels like there is nothing left for hobbies or socialising. These changes can make you feel sad, frustrated or even angry. It can be difficult to start thinking about what you want to do more of when it feels like pain is dictating what you can and cannot do. Sometimes people give up on setting goals because it's just too painful when it doesn't work out. However, when we lose sense of what really matters to us, we have no compass to point us in the right direction and life becomes more and more focused on pain.

### **Values**

Many people are so focused on trying to get rid of the pain that they have lost touch with these things, we will look at ways to help you do more of what matters by taking your pain with you. We do this through practicing different skills and strategies and exploring and goals. Values are things that define you and describe what sort of person you want to be, what you find inspiring and would make your life feel more fulfilling. Goals are things that tell you whether you are taking a step towards living a life that agrees with your values.

*For example, a value may be to 'be a good parent' and a goal may be 'to spend every Thursday afternoon taking the children to the park after school.'*

There will often be obstacles to doing more of what matters. The barriers may be external (e.g. lack of money, time) or internal (e.g. worries, confidence, fear, and pain). Some may be difficult to change, so we may need to think a bit differently about how we may pursue what is important to us. It may be that we might need to experience some difficulty and discomfort as we begin doing more of the things that are important to us.

We help encourage you to think about what really matters to you, what sort of person you want to be and what would make your life feel richer and more fulfilling. It can be difficult to identify what genuinely matters to you when pain has got in the way. It is helpful not to think about what you used to do but why you used to do things, what you used to get out of it. Take some time to consider this question:

*If you were struggling less with your pain, what would you want to do differently?*



Try to identify what genuinely matters to you, not what you think others expect you to care about. It may be worth ranking the things that matter to you in order of importance and noting whether there are certain areas which you have been neglecting.

### **Goal Setting**

Once you have identified areas in life that are important to you, setting goals can help provide the stepping stones to making some changes. Goals can be viewed as 'signposts' to notice if you are on route towards your valued direction.

Often goals can be looked at in terms of long term and short term and it is important to understand what your current baseline is. For example if one thing you care about is looking after your health you might decide a way of working towards this would be to walk for 30 minutes daily. However, if currently you are only able to walk for 2 minutes you will need to think about how you might realistically progress up to 30 minutes. So for this example to walk 30 minutes daily might be a goal you plan to achieve in 3 months' time, this would be your long term goal. Your short term goal would be the things you need to do to build up to this e.g. get some comfortable walking shoes, find a timer, walk 2 minutes a day for one week, then increase gradually to build up to achieving the long term goal.

It is therefore important to set realistic goals, as goals are things we can measure and either succeed at or fail to achieve. We may need to think a bit differently about how we may accomplish what is important to us.

One technique to help set goals is to set S-M-A-R-T goals. These are goals that are:

- Specific – the more specific, the clearer you can be about how to achieve it
- Measurable – so that you know when you have achieved it
- Achievable – make sure you feel confident it is manageable and realistic
- Rewarding – your goal needs to be something that is important and meaningful to you
- Timed – set yourself an achievable time limit to complete your goal

Ask yourself the following questions to help set goals in line with your values:

- Which area of my life do I want to make a change?
- Which value am I working towards?
- What is my long term goal?
- What steps do I need to take to achieve this (short term goals)?
- What can I do today/this week?
- How will I check my progress and how often?
- How will I reward myself for my achievements?
- Do I need any help/support to do this and if so what and from whom?