

What's in Your Backpack?!

It seems that we all carry our own backpacks on life's journey. In our backpack we carry our life's experiences and expectations, and these influence the way we are, what we do, and what we make of our life and how we go about it.

Our backpack – and what we carry in it - affects the way we think, feel and act: towards ourselves, towards others, and towards life in general.

If we think about our problems as “backpacks”, we can take the problem/s outside of us, which makes it easier to change things in a positive way. Before we can make those helpful changes, we need to understand more about our personal backpack, and how it affects us.

Understanding our Backpack

- What's in your backpack that's affecting your ability to cope with daily life?
 - Past experiences – memories, thoughts, images, ruminating about the past
 - Current concerns – life circumstances, worries.
 - What's keeping your problems going now?
 - Future – anxiety about what might happen and your ability to cope
 - Your core beliefs about yourself, others and the world as a result of past experiences, current circumstances and anxiety about the future
- If you could picture a backpack, how big would it be?

As you bring up a picture of that backpack now, ask yourself:

- What color is it?
- How heavy is it?
- How do you carry it?
 - Using one strap over one shoulder, 2 straps, strap around the abdomen, wheels, handle
- How is it fastened?
 - How tightly?
 - How secure is it?
 - Does it have a zip, velcro, buttons, straps, padlock etc?
- What would cause it to come undone and open up?
- What would happen to you then?
- What would that look like? What would others see (about you) when that happens?
- Are there pockets on the outside that you keep things in?
- What's in there? Is there anything else attached to it?
- What does it feel like when you're carrying the backpack? What do you feel in your body?

- What goes through your mind?
- What does it mean or say about you (that you're carrying this backpack)?

How does carrying the backpack affect you? (in different situations)

- Thoughts
 - What goes through your mind?
 - What images or memories come up?
 - What thoughts keep coming up?
 - What does that say about you, or mean?
- Feelings
 - What emotions do you often experience?
 - Depression, Anxiety, Anger, etc.
- Physical Sensation
 - What do you often feel in your body?
 - Tiredness, headache, heart racing or pounding, breathing changes, shaking, dizzy, light-headed, tense muscles, hot, sweaty, can't concentrate, poor memory, restless etc
- Behaviors
 - What do you do that helps you cope or feel better?
 - What do you do that keeps your problem going?
 - What do you do that makes you feel bad?

What do other people see (when you're carrying your backpack)? What would they notice about you?

- What do think they notice about you?
- What might they see you doing?
- What would they think that you were feeling or thinking?
- What would make them think that about you?
- Is there only one backpack or do you have different ones?
 - What do they look like (etc)?
 - When do you use them?
 - What's in them.....etc?
- What else is there about the backpack, or about you when you're carrying the backpack?

Exceptions

- Are there times when you don't carry the backpack, or when it feels lighter, or is different in any way? Describe those times..
- Are there times when it feels bigger, heavier etc?
- Are there times when you carry or fasten it differently?
- Are there times when you take it off, even if only for a short time?
- At these times, how are things different?

- Can you think of a time when you felt much better? What happened to your backpack at that time?

Coping

- Are there things in your backpack that help you cope with your difficulties? What are they?
- What is it about your backpack that keeps you going or stops you getting worse?
- Are these coping strategies helping you in the long term?
- What would be the first thing you would change about the way you cope?
- What would you do more of or start doing?
- What would you do less of or stop doing?

Changing the Backpack

- Could you carry a different backpack, or could you make changes to the one you have?
- What would your new backpack be like?
- What color would you like it to be? How big would it be? How does it fasten?
- How do you wear it? How heavy would it be? What would be in it? What would you carry?
- What would be most helpful for you to carry with you?
- How would you feel different if you were able to take off the backpack?
- Would you start by lightening the backpack in some way? How?
- If you took the backpack off, what would be the first thing you'd notice? And then what?
- What would others notice if you weren't wearing your backpack?
- What would need to happen before you could take the backpack off or lighten the load?

Discarding the Backpack

- When could you start taking it off? Where could you leave it? How long for?
- Can you imagine taking and leaving the backpack off for a period of time?
- Can you imagine discarding the backpack completely and not needing it any more?
- How would things be different if you didn't have your backpack?
 - What thoughts would go through your mind at that time?
 - What would that feel like? (emotionally and in your body)
 - What would it look like? What would you do differently?

Can you imagine waking up one morning and finding that your backpack had gone, and no longer having to lug it around with you.

- What would be the first thing you would notice that was different?
- What would be the next thing?
- What else?
- What would others notice about you?
- What would be the first thing they'd notice or comment on?
- What then?

Moving on

Now that we know more about your backpack, and how you'd like things to be when you discard your backpack, make an action plan to start bringing these things about:

- What do I need to stop doing?
- What do I need to do less of?
- What do I need to start doing?
- What do I need to do more of?
- How can I think differently?

Notice and remind myself about the backpack and how it affects the way I think, feel and act, and how it's keeping me feeling bad

- Remember the new backpack or being without the backpack, and how I would think and feel differently
- Remind myself what I would be doing differently without a backpack, or with a new backpack
- Imagine myself without the backpack, doing, thinking and feeling differently (at least three times daily)
- Tell myself I have discarded the backpack, and I can be the new me!!