

Easy does it: Practicing kind attention

This module encourages you to adopt the slogan often heard in recovery circles – “*Easy does it*” – as a mantra. There is good reason for this. The Cambridge online dictionary defines it as “a phrase used to tell someone to do something slowly and carefully”. We strongly suggest that you approach your life in recovery slowly and carefully. There is no rush. As long as you stay abstinent today, everything will work out in its own time. Don’t put too much pressure on yourself.

Kind attention

Miracles@Home goes further by saying: “Easy does it, with kind attention.” Kind attention means cultivating an intention to develop kindness, patience, tolerance, gentleness, empathy, non-striving acceptance and openness towards yourself, others and the world.

Kind attention to yourself is the act of attempting, over and over, slowly and carefully, to accept and be kind to all the levels of unpleasant inner experiences that may arise in you from moment to moment. Kind attention to others and the world involves attempting, over and over, slowly and carefully, to accept and be kind to all levels of people and the world itself, no matter how unpleasant our experiences may be.

It is essential for you to try to develop the skill of kind attention because, while in active addiction, you most likely became less and less able to cope with uncomfortable feelings, thoughts and experiences, hence having to use more of your drug to block them out. Now you need to face them, slowly, gently and with courage and determination. Kind attention is the easiest way through. Easy does it.

Your thinking

It is a fact that we think 65 000 thoughts per day. Now, this could be good news or bad news. What you have learnt in previous modules is that the first stage of the disease of addiction is mental, with obsessive – and, often, negative – thinking. In that case, the fact that we think 65 000 thoughts a day is bad news for people with addiction.

Another important fact is that 90% of those thoughts are the same thoughts we had yesterday and will have again tomorrow.

Changing your thinking

The good news is that you can change your thinking. With new scientific understanding of neuroplasticity and the ease with which our brain pathways can be changed, a good start is an attitude of “*Easy does it*”, while instituting regular mindfulness practice, meditation, CBT, being in the here and now, and using other recovery slogans like “Just for today”, “Keep it simple”, “Let go and let God”, “Live and let live”, “First things first”, etc.

With an attitude of “*Easy does it*”, you can start practising mindfulness here and now, just for today, which will begin to change your obsessive loop thinking. Then you can

also apply many of the strategies you will learn as you progress through your program. These will help you change your old thinking and become more comfortable, mentally well and kind to yourself and others.

Awareness

So, how do we go from a shattered mind to a calm and relaxed mind? Awareness is the first step. Awareness means that we are aware when our mind and emotions take us on the roller-coaster of thinking about our past experiences or our fears of the future. Becoming aware of your thoughts is something that takes practice, and we will be presenting you with the tools to do this as we progress. Learning how to watch your thoughts, and not buy into them, is a valuable skill to develop.

Journaling

For today, we ask that you start keeping a journal of your thoughts, so that you can track the common themes. You don't need to carry it around with you everywhere, but if you can sit for a half an hour or so every day and simply write down what is on your mind, you may be surprised. It's a good start. Don't be concerned about what comes out – just write. We will discuss it in your group sessions. Also practise the mindfulness exercises we introduced to you in the Mindfulness module.

The Serenity Prayer

Another tool along the “*Easy does it*” lines is the *Serenity Prayer*. It can be extremely helpful to repeat it to yourself if your mind is racing. You don't need to use the word “God”. You could say anything you like to start the prayer, or poem, if you prefer to call it that. Or you could just say:

*“Grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can
And wisdom to know the difference.”*

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change – that is, your past, other people, places and things over which you have no control.

Courage to change the things I can – that is, you, your present moment, the way you think, your feelings and anything in your life that you can change for the better.

And the wisdom to know the difference – that is, help you to distinguish between what you can and can't change in reality.

Self-talk

Is your mind set on focusing on your failures and mistakes? If so, don't be too concerned; you are not alone. After working with thousands of people in all walks of life and asking them to write down five things they like about themselves and five things they don't like about themselves, we found that the majority (probably more than 80%) of them could easily find five things they didn't like, but had a hard time finding five things they did like. Most of them couldn't come up with more than three things they liked about themselves. Try it for yourself.

The sad thing here is that for people suffering from the disease of addiction, this sort of thinking can be fatal. Negative thinking can send you back to your drug and you may not survive next time. Worse still, you may remain abstinent, but fail to change your thinking habits. You could be stuck in a very painful and unhappy world of negativity and pessimism for years. Now, that would be truly sad.

In the early stages of recovery, the only thoughts you might have are about the mess that your behaviors have created. Perhaps you lost relationships, the trust and respect of friends, colleagues and loved ones; there may have been financial problems, or the loss of long-held dreams and goals. Indulging in these thoughts will not help you in any way with your healing in recovery. Using the slogan “*Easy does it – on myself*” as a mantra has helped millions of others in their recovery.

Do you like bullies? It isn't a stupid question. We don't believe anyone likes bullies; not even bullies like themselves. What we call self-communication, or self-talk (ie, the way you communicate with yourself) is very important to the quality of your recovery and it's essential not to bully yourself. How do you communicate with yourself about your yourself? Do you tell yourself any of the following? (Circle any of the following statements you tell yourself):

I hate myself *No-one will ever trust me again* *I'm a loser* *No-one could love me*
I'm lazy *I'll never succeed* *I just want to die* *I'm a bad person*
Everyone hates me *I'm ugly* *I can't do it* *I'm weak* *I'm useless*

Perhaps you have your own special brand of self-abusive talk. Maybe there's one particular statement you keep telling yourself again and again.

Would you ever say any of these things to a friend?

I hate you *Everyone hates you* *No-one will ever trust you*
You're a loser
No-one could ever love you *You'll never succeed* *I wish you would die*
You're a bad person *You're ugly* *You're weak* *You're useless*

In the future, try to identify and use the opposites of your negative self-talk. For example:

I love myself *I'm trustworthy* *I'm a winner* *I'm loveable*
I'm energised *I'm successful* *I'm alive* *Someone loves me*
I'm beautiful

It's a very powerful exercise and if you practise it regularly, you'll eventually come to believe the positives.

The “if only” trap

Your future is created here and now. Another suggestion along the “*Easy does it*” path is to try not trapping yourself in the “if only” pit. Regrets are wasted energy. Pull yourself out of the “if only” pit as soon as you see yourself in there. All these areas will improve, trust us.

Slowly and carefully

Practice doing things *slowly and carefully* in every area of life: think slowly and carefully, walk slowly and carefully, talk slowly and carefully, eat slowly and carefully. Think of some other things you can do slowly and carefully from now on – and do them. As another saying goes: “*Easy does it, but do it!*”

Do your morning routine slowly and carefully. Your morning routine is probably the most important cornerstone for each day. Go through your daily plan every morning, or the night before. If your day isn’t full, add in meditation or relaxing activities that you enjoy. What’s important is to plan your day in a way that supports your new way of life.

If your day is fully booked and very busy, go through every moment of it, make sure everything on your plan is necessary and prepare yourself. If there’s something that isn’t necessary to do that day, shift it to the following day so that you have space left for *slow and careful* living in your plan.

One day at a time

When you start to recover, you may get the urge to make up for lost time and opportunities. Some people rush out and make amends to loads of people, trying to cram years of lost time into their early recovery. We strongly advise you NOT TO do this. It is often a recipe for disaster because people burn out and relapse. Remember – “*Easy does it*”.

The greatest amends you can make to yourself and others at first is remaining abstinent and recovering from your drug use one day at a time. Making amends is an activity that requires a period of abstinence, reflection and sage guidance.

First things first

Your abstinence is the foundation on which you build everything else. Many times, we hear: “I have to make up for lost time.” However, when you’re suffering from a progressive, chronic and fatal disease, there’s nothing more important than focusing on your recovery initially. When you do, everything and everyone else benefits — the situations with the kids, the company and even the gym will improve as you improve.

Choose your advisors wisely and carefully

If you want your recovery to be enjoyable, seek guidance from those who are already there, in a place of happiness – i.e., happy to be free of addiction and genuinely happy in their lives.

You can find mentors at any recovery group, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), SMART Recovery groups or other organisations that may run recovery groups.

Be careful — you may be listening to advisors who mean well but have no experience with addiction recovery. Sometimes family members or friends may encourage you to have “just one” glass of wine, not understanding the nature of your disease. These people may be genuinely willing to help, but they are unaware of the nature of your problem and the power it has to hurt you and others again.

So please choose your advisors wisely. Select kind but firm individuals who understand how the addiction cycle works and can show you the way of kindness and discipline to a happier life for you and your loved ones.

Be a part of the greater whole

Carefully re-enter the world and become part of the greater whole. Don't compare yourself with others. Your experiences will benefit someone else one day, just as someone's experience will benefit you today if you let them. This is being part of the greater whole in early recovery.

What are your wildest dreams, or wishes for your life? It's a great idea to write them down and reflect on them later. Often people state that the dreams they wrote in early recovery were surpassed 100 times over in later recovery.

The power of “Easy does it”

In “Easy does it” mode, you will find the power to better manage:

- Triggers of all kinds.
- Negative emotions.
- Negative thinking.
- Negative people.

Your responsibility is to integrate “Easy does it” into your life on a day-by-day – or even an hour-by-hour or minute-by-minute – basis. Good luck! And keep at it, *slowly and carefully*.

Recommended Videos

Slow Down to Go Faster - The Power of Pause | Ralph Simone.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AIy07FNiFA> (16:16 min)

Guided Lovingkindness Meditation: Refuge Recovery.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypwfFeYBHvU>

TED Talk: Pause and effect: Becoming who we are | Peter Nilsson.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEnuYHdRsMo> (10:37 min)

TED Talk: The power of the pause | Tim Tompkins.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kVblc5mVCw> (12:15min)

TED Talk: Redefining Rest - Slowing Down to Speed Up | Bec Heidrich.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hypNfi10JZo> (16:31min)

Reflective Questions: Easy Does It

1. Identify five to 10 things about yourself that you like.

i.

ii.

iii.

iv.

v.

vi.

vii.

viii.

ix.

x.

Did you find this difficult? If so, it's OK. Look at it as a way of exercising one of your spiritual muscles. Just as in the gym for the first time, you don't know how to use a certain machine or how to maximise its results, it takes practice. Keep coming back to this list until you can find 10 things. Then start another list!

2. Fill in the table below with common negative statements you make about yourself every day, such as, *“I’m so silly, stupid, fat, loud, weak, etc...”*, and then fill in the column for the opposite statements, such as *“I’m smart in my own way, I enjoy my food, I have a great sense of humor, people don’t have to strain to hear me, I am strong etc”*. Once you have identified the opposite positive statements, try saying them to yourself at least once a day, in front of the mirror, if you can.

Common self- talk	Opposite statements

3. Do you compare yourself with others? Why? Do you think you could try to stop comparisons when you recognize yourself doing it?

4. “*Easy does it*” for you includes the following phrases and/or actions. (Identify at least three):

a)

b)

c)

5. List at least five dreams or goals you have for your life.

i)

ii)

iii)

iv)

v)

6. Do you think you'll be able to do things slowly and carefully today? If not, why not?

7. Start your journal here. Write something about today. What did you do today? Who did you see today? How have you engaged in recovery practices today? How do/did you feel today? Could you be kind to yourself today? Write anything you feel like writing — but write something. It's important to see your thoughts so you can become aware of your thought patterns. Remember, the first step toward change is awareness.