**A Note on Positive Thinking**

You may be thinking “it is all too easy for someone to talk about positive thinking, but that’s not always realistic in the real world”. We can repeat to ourselves mantras like “in every day in every way I’m getting better and better”, or read inspirational books on how we can think and grow rich, but does that really help?

While of course it is helpful to have a “glass half full” rather than a “glass half empty” thinking style, we are certainly not advocating a philosophy of uncritical positive thinking. Moreover, we are encouraging realistic balanced and flexible thinking.

Overly negative thinking can be unrealistic, only focusing on some aspects of the full picture. Thinking can become poorly balanced, subject to negative biases. By only focussing on the worst aspects of the situation and possibilities for the future, we darken our present enjoyment and limit our vision for the future. Negative thinking can also become rigid and inflexible. Flexibility means being able to adapt to the demands of the environment. Inflexibility means that we tend to respond in the same way, often the same negative way, even when other opportunities and options could be available.

So cognitive therapy really encourages us to consider as many different angles on a problem or situation as possible. It encourages us to seek out a range of alternative ways of viewing the situation and to consider a range of alternative behavioural options. Negative thinking usually leads us into either unproductive action or inaction, digging us further into the hole that we may have found ourselves in.

Realistic balanced and flexible thinking leads us into seeking out and trying a range of alternative solutions, it takes us somewhere!

A common example might be if I am invited to a social event. I feel stressed because I would like to go and there is expectation by my friends that I should go, but on the other hand the last time I went to a similar event I felt trapped there and my physical health condition made it a totally uncomfortable afternoon, perhaps even an embarrassing disaster. I recall finally arriving home exhausted and stressed, thinking that’s the last time I’ll ever do that!

Negative thinking would have me focussing on the previous experience and building up a dread of the afternoon, while at the same time being pressured by wanting to be there for my friends. I may prevaricate, come up with a range of excuses, and finally decide at the last minute whether or not to go.

Positive thinking would have me telling myself that it will all be OK, I’ll have a great time and there is no need to worry about anything.

More realistic thinking will acknowledge the presence of the problem and, at the same time, appreciate the benefits of getting out and spending time with friends, enjoying their company and maintaining a social network. It leads us to engage in positive problem-solving. This is likely to lead toward strategies that enable us to do the things that all add up to create a satisfying life, even with our condition.