



# **COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY FOR ANXIETY**

## **WEEK 6**

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# WELCOME TO WEEK SIX!

## AGENDA

- Overview of CBT-A Course
- Open Floor Discussion
- Closing Statements

# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW

## What is CBT?

- An evidence-based approach that focuses on present issues and ends with a focus on the causes
- Core Principles are that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours inform one another and are interconnected
  - Cognitive Triangle:
    - Situation triggers thoughts
    - Thoughts create feelings
    - Feelings create behaviours
    - Behaviours reinforces thoughts
- Learn to become our own therapist to gain objective insight to negative thought patterns (e.g., cognitive distortions, core beliefs) using an evidence-based approach (e.g., thought records)



# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW

## Automatic Thoughts:

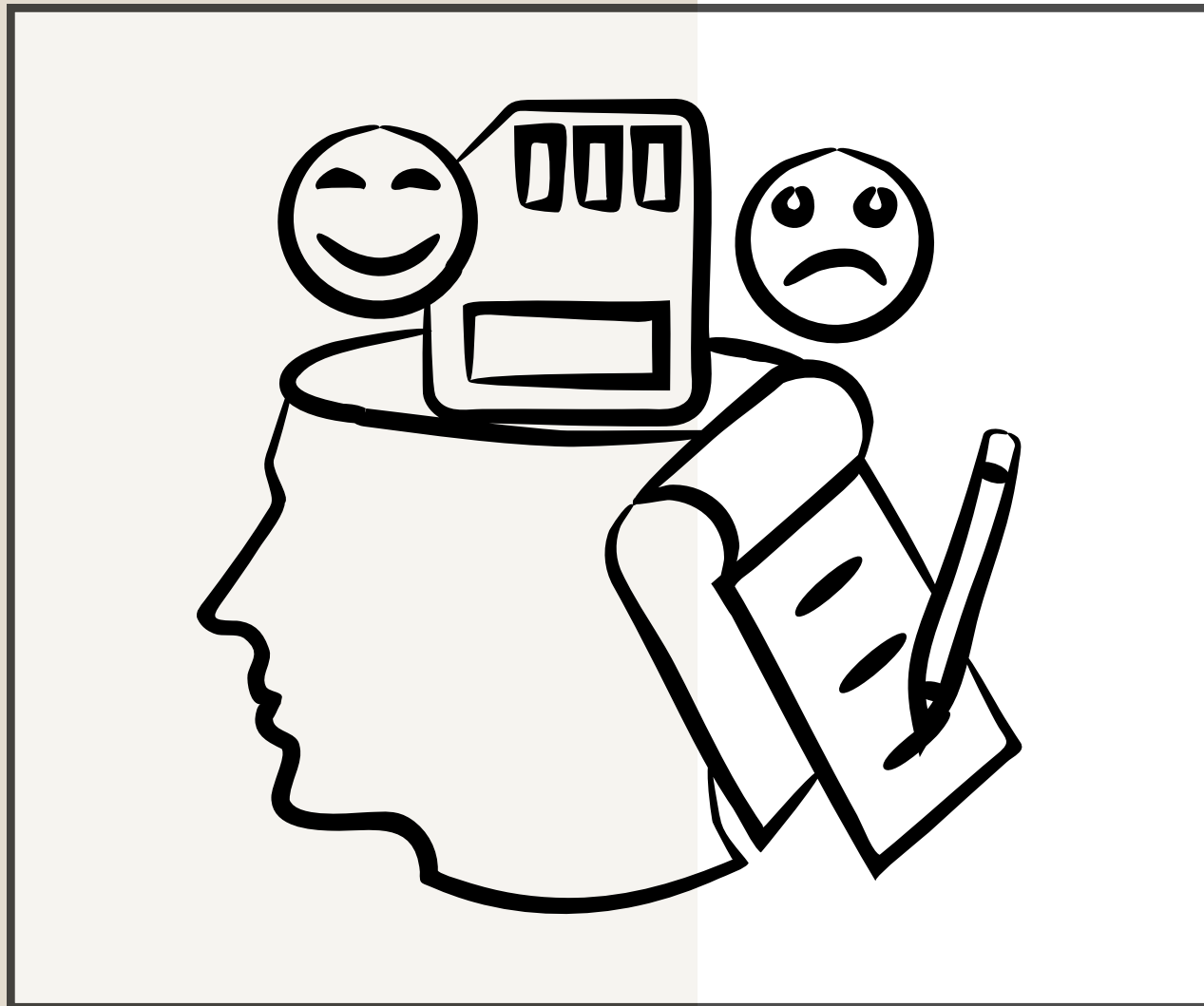
- Automatically arise throughout the day and have the potential to trigger negative emotions based on the meaning we attach to the automatic thoughts

- Thoughts are shaped by the core beliefs we develop through childhood and infiltrate the way we see ourselves, the world, and others

- Core beliefs are subconscious and persistent and work to validate core beliefs as an absolute truth and when our experiences do not align with the core beliefs our cognition will manipulate our perception through cognitive distortions to affirm the validity of our core beliefs



# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW



- **Cognitive distortions** are the brains way to consolidate past negative experiences (“mental shortcuts”)to keep us safe from future danger (e.g., negative memories can stand out more than positive or neutral ones)
  - Exaggerated patterns of thought not based on fact but our personal bias based on our core beliefs and can cause great distress
- We can begin to gather evidence of our thought patterns by using a thought record:
  - This tool requires a level of awareness to be able to make note of how situations can trigger automatic thoughts, feelings, and our behaviour so that we can recognize how it affects our mood
  - This information will give us the opportunity to explore core beliefs that we carry that influence of our interpretation.
- **Thought Record Format:**
  - Identify situation
  - Acknowledge thoughts
  - Label emotions
  - Describe behaviour

# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW

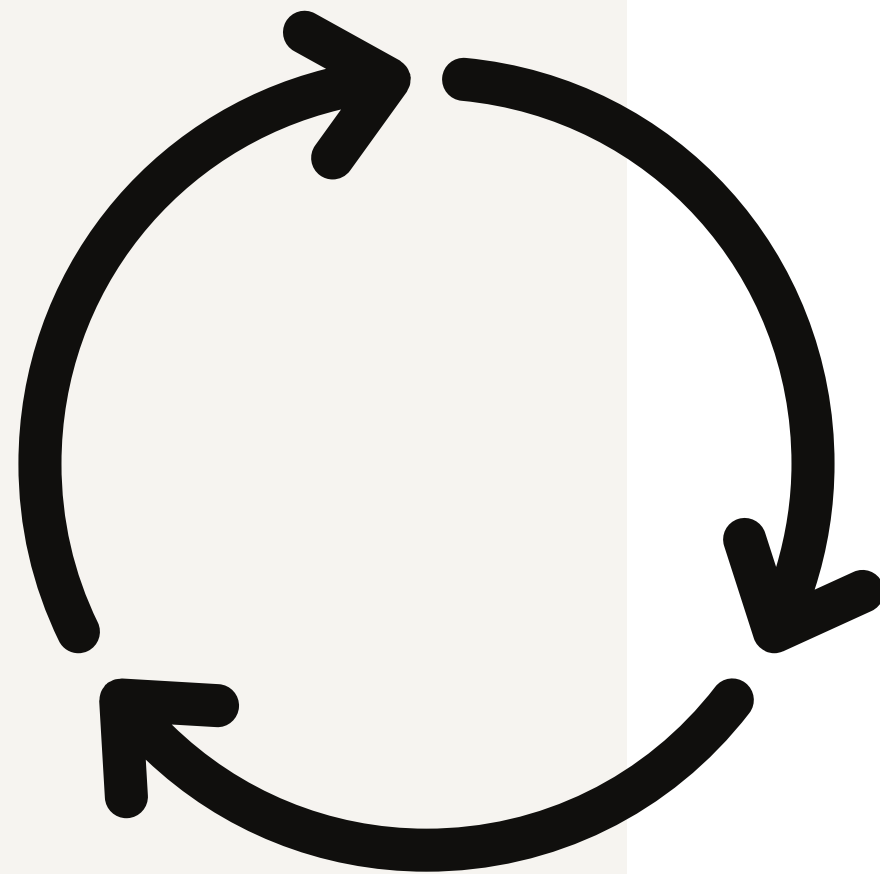
What is Anxiety?

- A natural response in both physical and mental states to keep us 'safe' in response to real or perceived danger
  - Becomes an “issue” when it disrupts our daily quality of life

## Automatic Stress Response

- The limbic system is the part of the brain that is responsible for emotional processing and regulation
  - The amygdala is in our limbic system and its job is to detect danger and activates our sympathetic nervous system to release hormones to engage stress response
  - It is important to note that more trauma we experience, the more sensitive our amygdala becomes which means false “alarms” are more likely
  - This process is impulsive and works as a safety mechanism and presents as:
    - Fight – prepare for physical altercation (e.g., presents as anger)
    - Flight – prepare to flee situation (e.g., feeling restless)
    - Freeze – prepare to play ‘dead’ (e.g., physical shut down)
    - Fawn – appease the threat by neglecting own needs (e.g., people pleasing to avoid conflict)

**Cycle of Anxiety** - A trigger induces an anxious response (physical, cognitive) and avoidance of trigger provides temporary relief from anxiety but increases the fear associated with the trigger because avoidance reinforces the idea that it is “too dangerous” or “too scary” which means we will be more likely to avoid the trigger in the future



# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW



What can contribute to our anxiety? Lifestyle factors directly influence our overall health and mood:

- **Physical movement** - ranging from low to high-impact, help release endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine, boosting energy, improving mood, and enhancing overall cognition
- **Nutritional intake** - what we eat impacts our health, especially gut health, which is linked to mental well-being. Diets rich in vegetables, fruits, protein, and unprocessed grains, like the Mediterranean diet, support gut health and reduce inflammation
- **Sleep hygiene** - lack of sleep significantly affects mood, making us more prone to irritability, brain fog, and stress. Healthy sleep practices include a regular bedtime, daytime exercise, reduced caffeine, and no screen time before bed

# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW

## Ways to Cope with Stress:

- Mindfulness is the practice of staying fully present, observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgment. It helps cultivate self-compassion and reduces self-criticism
- Meditation can increase gray matter in the brain, which helps improve emotional processing and mood. It reduces stress hormones, promoting relaxation, focus, and better sleep

## Express our Emotions:

- Journaling helps improve mood, reduce stress, and enhance emotional regulation. It promotes self-reflection, mindfulness, and gratitude, supporting overall well-being
- Creative outlets like art, music, or writing boost mood, reduce stress, and enhance emotional well-being by promoting self-expression, relaxation, and mindfulness
- Fulfilling activities, such as pursuing passions, helping others, or achieving personal goals, improve mood by boosting self-esteem, creating purpose, and reducing stress, while fostering happiness and a sense of accomplishment

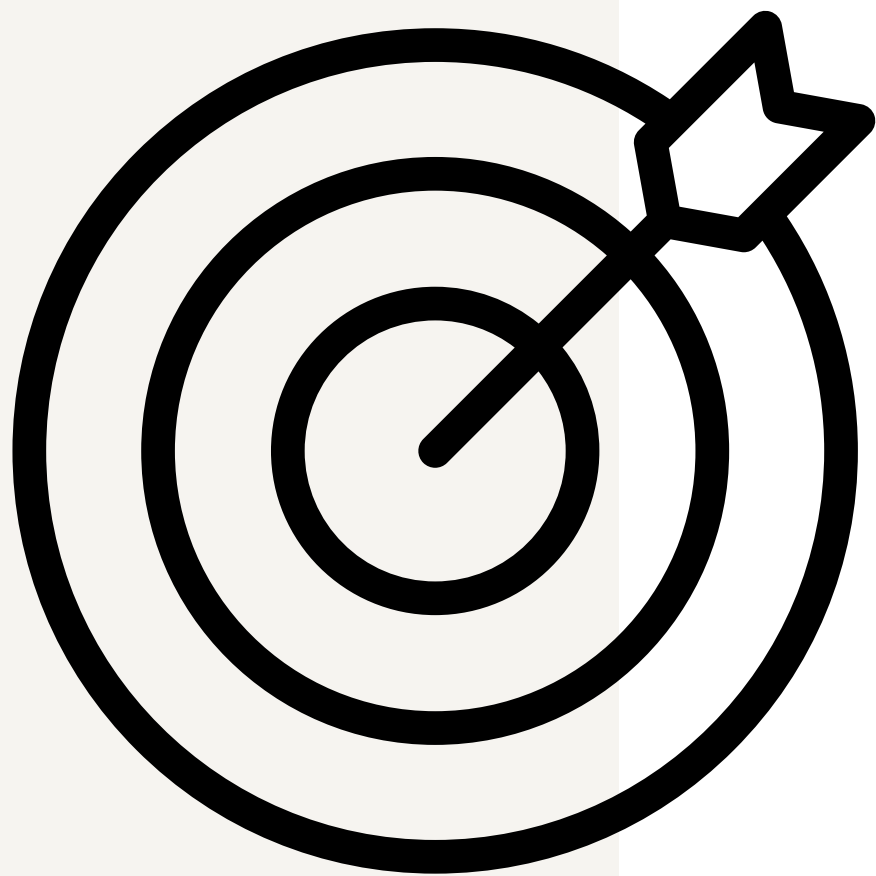


# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW

## Ways to Regulate Emotions:

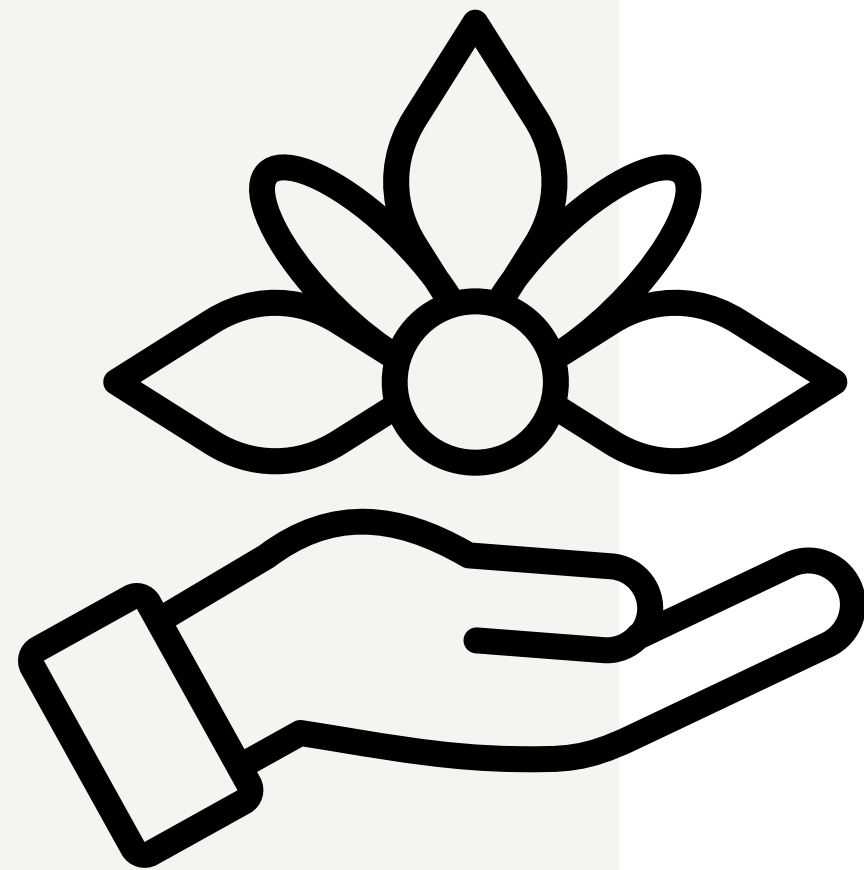
Grounding exercises use mindfulness to bring us back to the present moment during distress. Recognizing body activation helps us use these exercises to regulate our responses:

- Physical grounding techniques include breathing exercises (e.g., box breathing), holding or touching an object tightly, placing weight on the heels to connect with the ground, and practicing muscle relaxation by tensing and slowly releasing from the forehead to toes or vice versa
- Mental grounding strategies focus on our environment to help regulate distress. Techniques include the 5-3-4-2-1 strategy, using distraction (e.g., listening to music, reading poetry, or watching videos) to redirect negative thoughts or sensations, writing and reciting a script that reaffirms safety and autonomy, engaging in mental calculations (e.g., counting), and visualizing a safe, comfortable place with eyes closed



# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW

## Therapeutic Exercises



- Exposure therapy helps reduce anxiety by gradually confronting feared situations, building confidence as the fear lessens. It requires clear goals, a plan to track progress, and consistency. The length of therapy varies by individual, and any progress, no matter how small, is still valuable
  - Exposure ladders break down fears into measurable sub-goals by first identifying the specific fear, triggers, and how they impact anxiety and coping. Then, rank the triggers from least to most scary, assigning each a fear rating from 0-100. This process helps build confidence by gradually addressing fears from the least scary to the most intense

# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW

## Goal Setting in Therapy:

Goal setting is a key part of CBT, offering clarity and direction toward achieving desired outcomes. It promotes focus, accountability, and intrinsic motivation. Keeping a thought record helps track progress and highlights the changes we want to make over time

## Benefits Setting Goals:

- Focus and Clarity: Clear, specific goals create a roadmap, helping us stay focused and prioritize desired change by observing our behavior
- Intrinsic Motivation and Accountability: Meeting goals boosts intrinsic motivation, while regular check-ins track progress. Reaching milestones builds skills, confidence, and reinforces our ability to succeed



# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW

## SMART Goals:

**Specific:** Goals should be clear and defined, outlining exactly what you want to accomplish

**Measurable:** Goals must include a way to track progress, so you can quantify achievements

**Achievable:** Goals should be attainable based on your current circumstances

**Realistic:** Goals should align with your needs, values, and priorities

**Time-bound:** Goals should have a set timeframe to create urgency and motivation

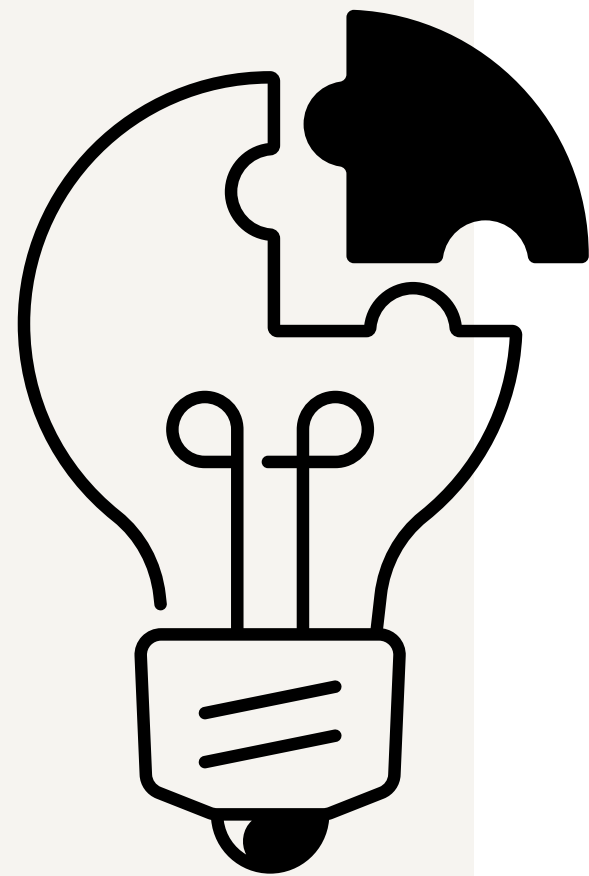
**Start vs. Stop Goals:** "Start" goals focus on introducing new behaviors, while "stop" goals aim to eliminate unwanted ones. "Start" goals help reduce negative emotions tied to "failure."

## Roadblocks to Reaching Goals

Negative thoughts, anxiety, and depression can lead to procrastination, avoidance, and hopelessness. Acknowledging these roadblocks helps us move through them with self-acceptance. Rewiring old patterns takes effort, so it's important to be kind to ourselves



# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW



## **Step 1: Understand the Change You Want**

- Identify issues that negatively impact you and define the problem objectively, focusing on facts rather than feelings

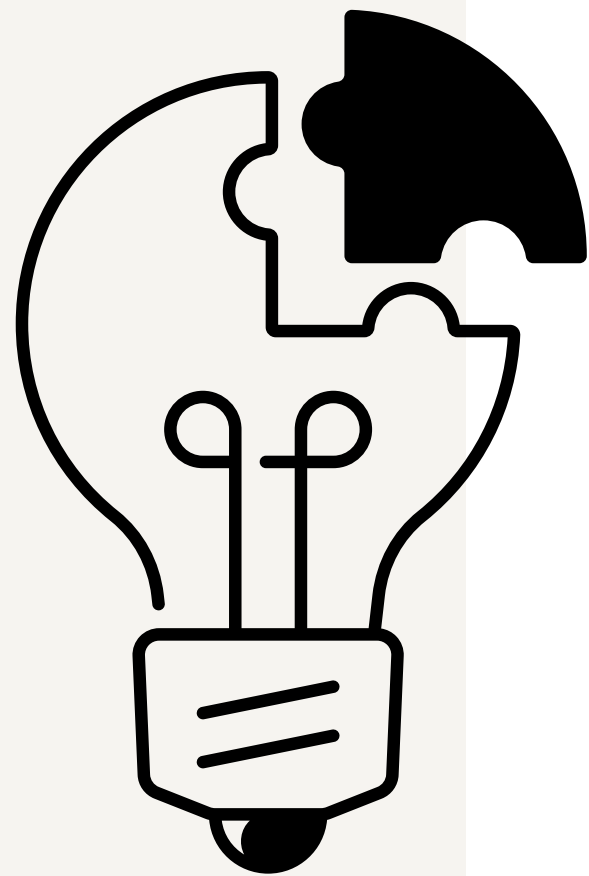
## **Step 2: Describe the Problem**

- Be specific about the thoughts, actions, and emotions involved. Use a thought record to understand how core beliefs influence the issue and identify what needs to change

## **Step 3: Address the Issue**

- Break the goal down into smaller parts. Consider exercises like exposure and ensure the goal is attainable, aligned with your values, and supports your growth

# CBT-A COURSE OVERVIEW



## **Step 4: Measure Progress**

- Track progress using tools like checklists, journals, or calendars, and make them easily accessible for smooth integration into routines. Set timelines for subgoals to create urgency, boost motivation, and increase confidence in making change

## **Step 5: Schedule Regular Check-ins**

- Regularly re-evaluate and adjust methods to ensure success. This is a learning journey where adjustments reflect a deeper understanding of ourselves, encouraging progress toward success

## **Step 6: How to Know If We've Achieved Our Goal**

- What will life look like after reaching the goal? What changes will occur, and how can we recognize them?

# OPEN DISCUSSION

# CLOSING STATEMENTS

As we reach the conclusion of this CBT-A therapy course, it's important to reflect on the progress we've made and the tools we've learned:

- We've explored various techniques to challenge negative thoughts, manage emotions, and change behaviors that may have been limiting our growth
- CBT empowers us to recognize patterns, set realistic goals, and break them down into actionable steps
- One of the key takeaways from this course is the idea of self-awareness and how it plays a crucial role in understanding our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors
  - By identifying unhelpful thinking patterns and replacing them with healthier perspectives, we've gained greater control over our reactions and developed more positive coping mechanisms
- Another essential aspect we've covered is goal setting—an integral part of CBT:
  - We've learned how to break down goals into manageable sub-goals, making them more achievable, and ensuring they align with our values and priorities
  - By tracking our progress, we've gained confidence in our ability to make meaningful change

The skills learned in this course provide a solid foundation for continued growth, but it's important to stay committed to applying these strategies in our everyday lives.



# CLOSING STATEMENTS

As we move forward, remember that CBT is not a one-time fix but a lifelong practice! It requires consistent effort, self-compassion, and a willingness to adapt.

Finally, it's essential to acknowledge that setbacks may occur, but they are part of the process. It's important to be kind to ourselves, stay patient, and understand that real change takes time. Remember, each step forward, no matter how small, is progress.



