

YOUR FREE GUIDE

FROM SUFFERING *FROM* TO LIVING *WITH* PAIN

THE FIRST STEPS TO CHANGE



www.healthymindpsychology.co.uk



Hello there!

Healthy Mind Psychology is here to be a trusted home for support and information regarding your wellbeing.

Our network of like-minded colleagues moves beyond the traditional medical model to explore new research and understanding of the brain-body connection.

Our values are to offer high-quality education and emotional skill-development to not only normalise but empower all people's struggles in a world filled with stress and challenge.

Dr. Amber Johnston

- **Founder & Clinical Psychologist in Neuropsychology**



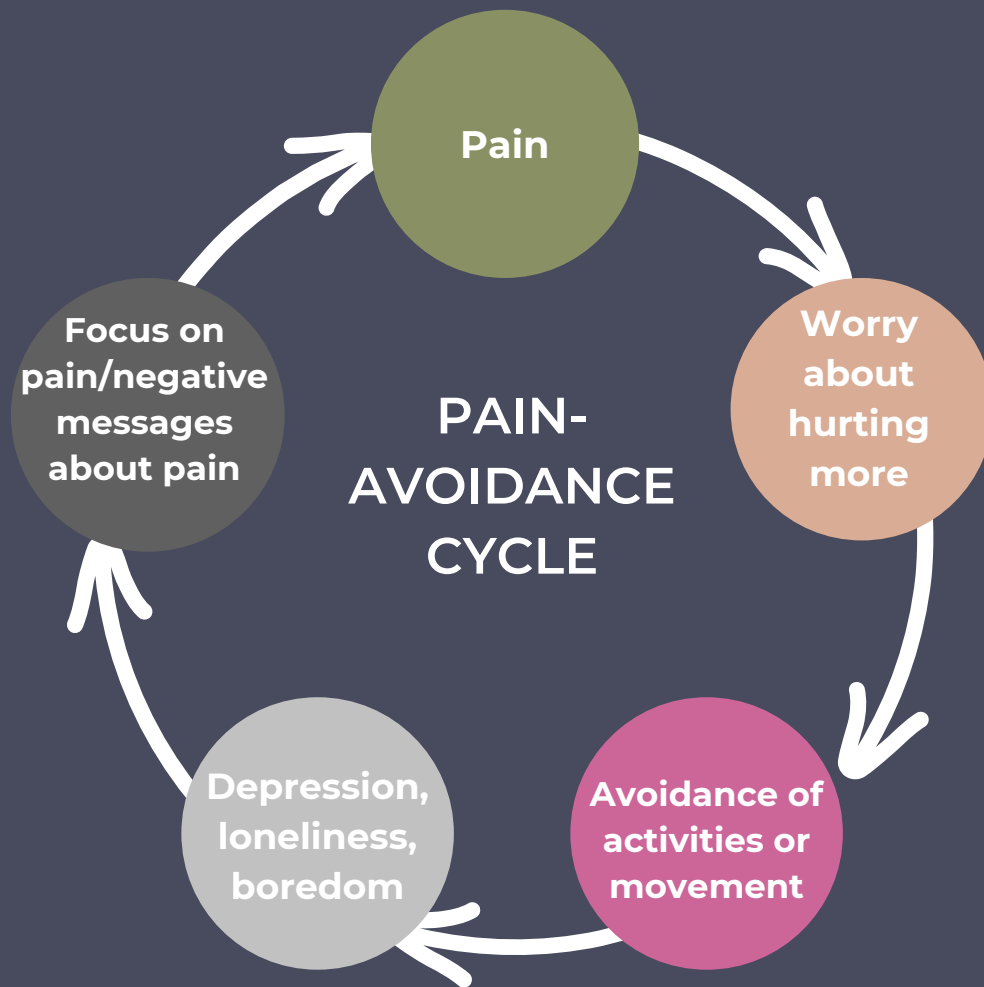
Understanding: Pain, Ourselves & Our Journey

Pain is incredibly complex. There are so many facets and variables that influence our pain experience, which can be outside of the realms of our intrinsic understanding. The messages we learned about pain as a child no longer are relevant when pain becomes chronic. The way we think about it, the way we treat it, and the messages we take from others must all be altered to reflect new science when understanding our pain.

But this is not easy!

If you are reading this guide, I'm guessing it is because you or someone you know has had a difficult journey navigating the medical system or larger society as they manage a chronic health condition. Often this journey has been negative, invalidating, upsetting, and sometimes leaves people with a sense of no hope. We want to alter this, beginning with reflecting on your experience so far.

HOW WE GET STUCK?



Many people feel they cannot participate in things because they cannot guarantee that they will be ok enough to make plans. They are afraid that activity will make pain signals worse, they worry that they might let people down if they have to cancel activities, and they feel embarrassed or ashamed of feeling bad when others think they look ok (*it's an invisible illness*).

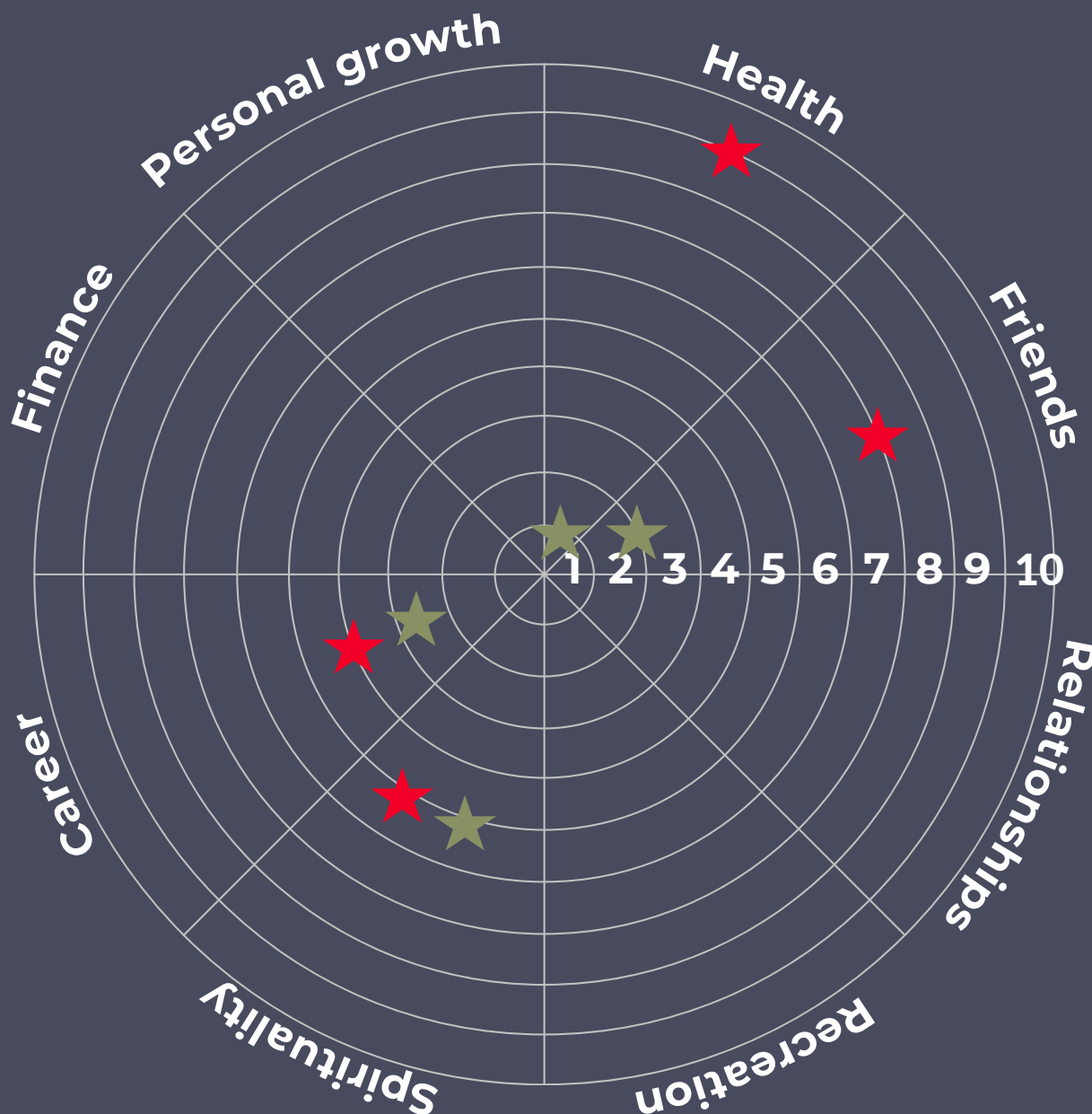
Therefore, many people end up in a cycle of avoidance, which unfortunately can lead to the worsening of a condition - and a more negative 'Wheel of Life.' Fear of movement and avoidance of using one's body is a particular way the cycle can worsen, as our avoidance creates new weakness or deconditioning in our body, further creating threat warning or pain signals that the brain interprets.

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

The wheel of life is a great tool that helps you better understand what you can do to make your life more balanced.

Think about the 8 life categories below. In each category, put one red star where you are now, and one green star where you'd like to be ideally. (10 is farthest away from your goals.)

What's most important to you?



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

A Comprehensive View

As we delve into the intricacies of pain, it becomes evident that there are numerous pieces to the puzzle. There's the physical state of our body, our emotional and cognitive interpretations of the pain, the environmental and social factors that might be exacerbating our stress, and even our past and present experiences that shape our worldview.

To truly understand an individual's pain condition, we need to adopt a holistic perspective. This means considering the biological, psychological, and social dimensions. It's not as simple as just using pills or surgeries, nor just "thinking our way out" of pain. The experience is far more nuanced than that and includes all of the elements discussed above.

Formulating the Experience

In psychology, the process of understanding an individual's pain involves creating a formulation. This is a comprehensive model that integrates all the biopsychosocial information to make an individualised picture. By piecing together the biological, psychological, and social factors, professionals can provide a clearer picture to the individual, which is much more helpful than a simplified medical model (relying only on pills and surgery for treatment). This helps people understand the role of pain in their past, how it's affecting their present, and how they can approach it in the future.

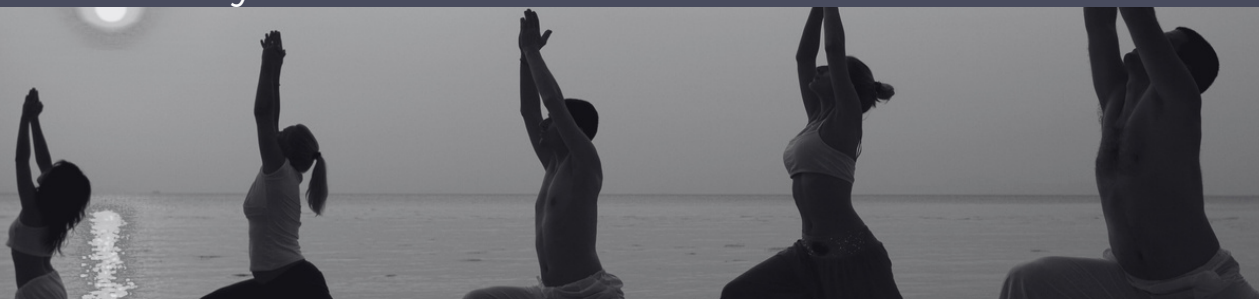
LIVING WELL WITH PAIN

Look again at the discrepancies between your red and green stars. Can you identify some specific areas where you could focus your mental and physical energies to make changes to your lifestyle, your sense of inclusion, or your mindset? It is important that you understand the importance of **PRACTICE!**

New habits are not set easily. They require small exchanges built over time, done repetitively, and set realistically. We are not wanting you to make major changes quickly but instead slowly incorporate new plans little by little over time.

To do this well, we want to commit to any change by clarifying exactly why you are making it. Make your motivation crystal clear! Use our Goals sheet below to help clarify your reasoning for doing something new... and hard.

Once you have clarified which goal you are beginning with and thought about why you are setting it, you can incorporate it into your day using our Daily Planner. Start small. This planner can help you organise how you manage your schedule to allow for this small incorporations of new change, with your motivation for doing it clearly written on the schedule. Then use our Habit Tracker to monitor your success over the days and weeks. Catch yourself doing something right, and make sure to think about little rewards for all of your successes!



GOALS

Use the Wheel of Life to identify a realistic goal you can set to move your life forward in a meaningful way, despite your pain. Achieving our goals is dependent on whether we take action. Use the table below to understand the "why" you are going to do something hard to make change. What is the meaningful motivation to do this?

GOAL:

WHAT WILL THIS NEW BEHAVIOUR/GOAL GIVE ME?



WHY IS IT WORTH IT?



HOW CAN I HANDLE THE WORRY ABOUT NOT ACHIEVING IT?



IF I DON'T SUCCEED, WHEN AND HOW CAN I TRY AGAIN?



HOW WILL I REWARD MYSELF FOR SMALL IMPROVEMENTS?

DAILY PLANNER

DATE _____

6:00	
7:00	
8:00	
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REMINDER

**WHY AM I SETTING THIS
NEW GOAL/HABIT?**

NOTES

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7 DAY HABIT TRACKER

Keeping track of your habits can help you stay on track, notice your success, and achieve your goals. Fill out up to 12 top goals (1 is enough to get started, and add more over time!) and mark them off each day you successfully complete them.

Week of: _____

Habit / self-care step

Ⓢ Ⓜ Ⓣ Ⓦ Ⓣ ⓕ Ⓢ

01

02

03

04

05

06

07

08

09

10

11

12

Reflection Notes

A Note of Self-Kindness

Research has clarified that stopping avoidance is a major part of improving lifestyle which impacts well-being... and pain signal. But like we noted before, change is hard.

To manage change, we must also recognise how easy it is to be negative to ourselves regarding our successes and failures. This is not the time to berate yourself when you're trying something new. Be kind to yourself as you put in hard work.

As you do try new things, remember that research also clarifies that people have to learn the skill of pacing. Pacing means doing enough activity that you can consistently and regularly manage the amount you put in. There may be times where you choose to do more for the right reasons (it meets a value, like attending a special wedding), but that means foreseeing possible boom/bust cycle and preparing for a day of rest following it. When people learn the skill of pacing, including *not doing too much* when you have moments of feeling great, this skill goes a long way towards confidence in self-management strategies.

And lastly, never forget the importance of sleep. Sleep has huge impact on pain signal. If this is an area you struggle, seek specific guidance to support altering your sleep patterns. But we hope that some added activity may help this also!



BUY THE E-BOOK

If you're ready to take the next step towards feeling better, you can buy our full Ebook: **'Making Sense of Pain: What does psychology have to do with it?'**

We believe that psychology sessions can benefit everyone, whether you are looking for additional support managing everyday stress, or struggle with more complex challenges like mental health conditions, pain, or brain injury.



CLICK TO [BUY THE EBOOK](#)



Thank you for reading!

Dr. Amber

