

# EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE

A CONCEPT FROM ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT THERAPY

## What is it?

Experiential avoidance is the tendency for people to use various strategies to avoid unpleasant or difficult thoughts, emotions and sensations in the body. These strategies can lead to problematic patterns that aren't in our best interest.

It's important to note that some of these strategies can be helpful if used in moderation and as a tool, rather than something we rely on to feel better. It's an individual judgment call to determine if you feel any of these strategies are supporting your mental wellness in the long-term.

The acronym **D.O.T.S** (distraction, opting out, thinking strategies and substances & other strategies) can be used to identify experiential avoidance strategies.

**Do any of these resonant with you?**

1

## Distraction

Distraction can be used to take our mind off of difficult thoughts and feelings. Some examples include watching television, social media, video games, reading, exercise, eating food, gambling, drugs, and alcohol.

2

## Opting Out

Opting out occurs when we withdraw, avoid, quit or procrastinate from potentially meaningful, beneficial and important activities, events, tasks, places or people in an attempt to ignore difficult thoughts or feelings.

3

## Thinking Strategies

Thinking strategies can be conscious or unconscious tactics to try to control our difficult thoughts and feelings. Some examples include blaming, analyzing, worrying, dwelling, making to do lists, judging and criticizing.

4

## Substances & Other Strategies

Substances and other strategies can be used to avoid painful experiences. Some examples include using drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, prescription medication, overeating, self-harming and risk-taking behaviour.