

Exercise 23 - The Time-Traveller's Log

Past	Present	Future
Loss	Vitality	Threat

Instructions: The purpose of this exercise is to consciously notice the temporal location of our thoughts and bring our attention back to the here and now. Start by tuning into your mind and noticing your thoughts and feelings. Notice whether the thoughts are in the past, future or present. Touch the timeline to indicate where your thoughts are located. Feel the sensation of the paper sliding under your fingertip. Track your thoughts on the timeline until they return to the present.

Fusion with distressing thoughts can often involve a form of psychological time-travel. We can get caught up in negative ruminations about the past and worries about what might go wrong in the future. Time-travelling between the past and the future can lead to distressing emotions and temporal displacement; we spend our time in rewind or fast forward and lose sight of what is happening in the here and now.

Dwelling in the past usually involves reliving, replaying or post-mortemming. It can be associated with themes of perceived loss, failure and trauma. Slipping into the future involves scanning, calculating and rehearsing. It can be associated with themes of perceived threat and insecurity.

Time-travelling can happen unconsciously and automatically. we could find ourselves reliving a past mistake, leading to real-time feelings of failure, despair or depression. We could slip into a scenario about an imagined future conflict, experiencing real-time feelings of anxiety, anger or vengefulness.

When we tune into and observe our thoughts, we shift our attention to the here and now. The act of observation itself can only happen in the present. Noticing, observing and tracking thoughts therefore has a centripetal effect on attention and shifts our focus back to the present.

Attending to the present involves tuning into and noticing our moment to moment experiences, It is often associated with improved attention, concentration and feelings of vitality. This attention to the present moment is also known as Mindfulness.