

CHRONIC PAIN IS A SYNDROME

SESSION 3 OVERVIEW:

Chronic pain is a syndrome. In other words, it is maintained by many causes. The right hemisphere of our brain is responsible for processing information about bodily states and negative emotions. It causes most of the distress felt when in physical or emotional pain. Chronic pain involves increased activity in parts of the right hemisphere associated with emotional processing. There are two key brain functions that maintain pain: attention and memory. These functions work together in chronic pain. Chronic pain starts out as an experience requiring attention, but ends up as a memory. There are four types of attention: open, selective, sustained, and alternating. The ability to utilize and move flexibly between different types of attention is an essential element to good mental health. Additionally, we have two types of memory: semantic and procedural. Semantic memories are of events (what happened and when), whereas procedural memories are of feelings (emotional reaction to what happened). Normally, semantic and procedural memories get stored in a unified way but when you are traumatized, this may not occur. This results in emotional responses presenting during events that are similar or based around past experiences and vice versa. It is imperative to learn how to harness attention and memory in order to change pain.

AT HOME PRACTICE:

Session 3 Assigned Exercise: Brain Training 1 – Guided (Mental Healing)

This exercise uses a combination of imagery and guided suggestions to change the brain activity that maintains pain. Brain Training 1 uses a combination of visual and auditory stimuli. Researchers have shown that sufferers of chronic pain can control specific brain regions responsible for this by viewing images of their brain in pain and thinking of it in different ways. Complete this at least once daily for the next three weeks. Give this exercise a chance to work! It may take up to a week to notice differences in your pain experience. Be sure to be actively listening with your non-noise cancelling earbuds!

