



HIGH FEELINGS

A resource about feelings, substance use, and other ways we cope as cis and trans gay, bi, queer guys.

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INTRODUCTION

This resource can be helpful in decreasing unhelpful thoughts to feel better about ourselves and our lives. By understanding the experiences that can cause chronic stress as GBT2Q+ (gay, bi, trans, two-spirit, queer) guys, we can develop ways to cope that support helpful behaviours and actions.

Using this resource is not meant to stop or even reduce substance use. This resource is meant to support you in developing a greater understanding of the reasons why you may be using substances and allow you to reflect on whether your substance use is helpful or unhelpful. And if unhelpful, what are some strategies you can try to make it more helpful.

- Victor Hing Huynh MSW, RSW

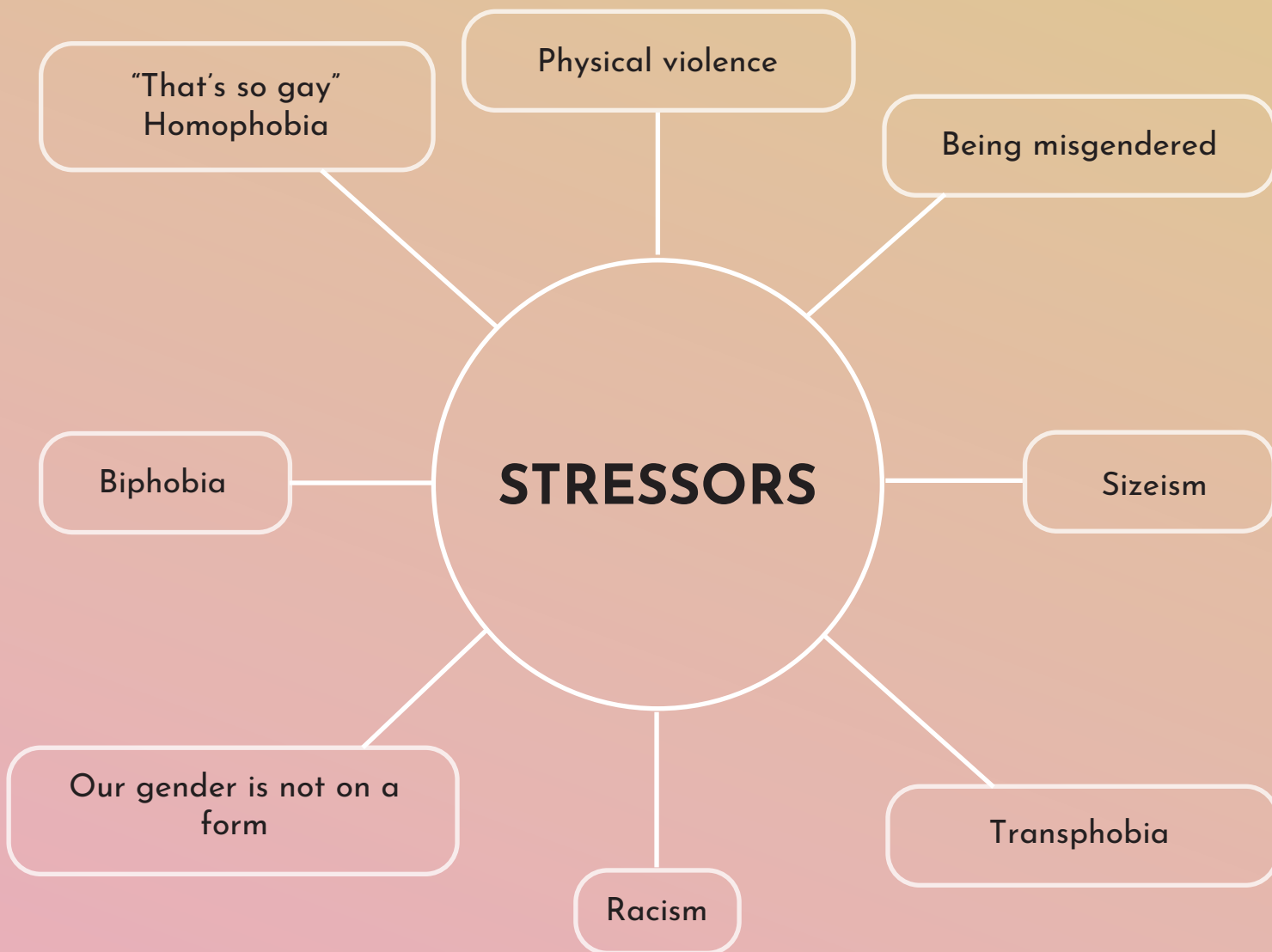
OH HELLO!

Ever walk into a space and just feel unwelcome? No one is looking at you or maybe too many people are looking at you?

Life as a GBT2Q+ guy can be full of very visible stressors or sometimes we can be stressed out by things that only we can see or feel.

"Boy, that's stressful!"

Some examples of stressors we may face include...



As GBT2Q+ guys living in a straight dominated society, we may feel constant feelings of exclusion from visible and invisible sources over long periods of time. This can cause us to live in a chronic state of stress called minority stress (Craig and Austin, 2016).

No wonder GBT2Q+ guys are 2-3 times more likely to experience mental health concerns compared to our straight counterparts (Advance, 2020).

Furthermore, 45% of GBT2Q+ men have indicated wanting mental health support related to: depression, eating disorders, body image, anxiety, coming out, relationships, gender, and suicidal thoughts (Advance, 2020).

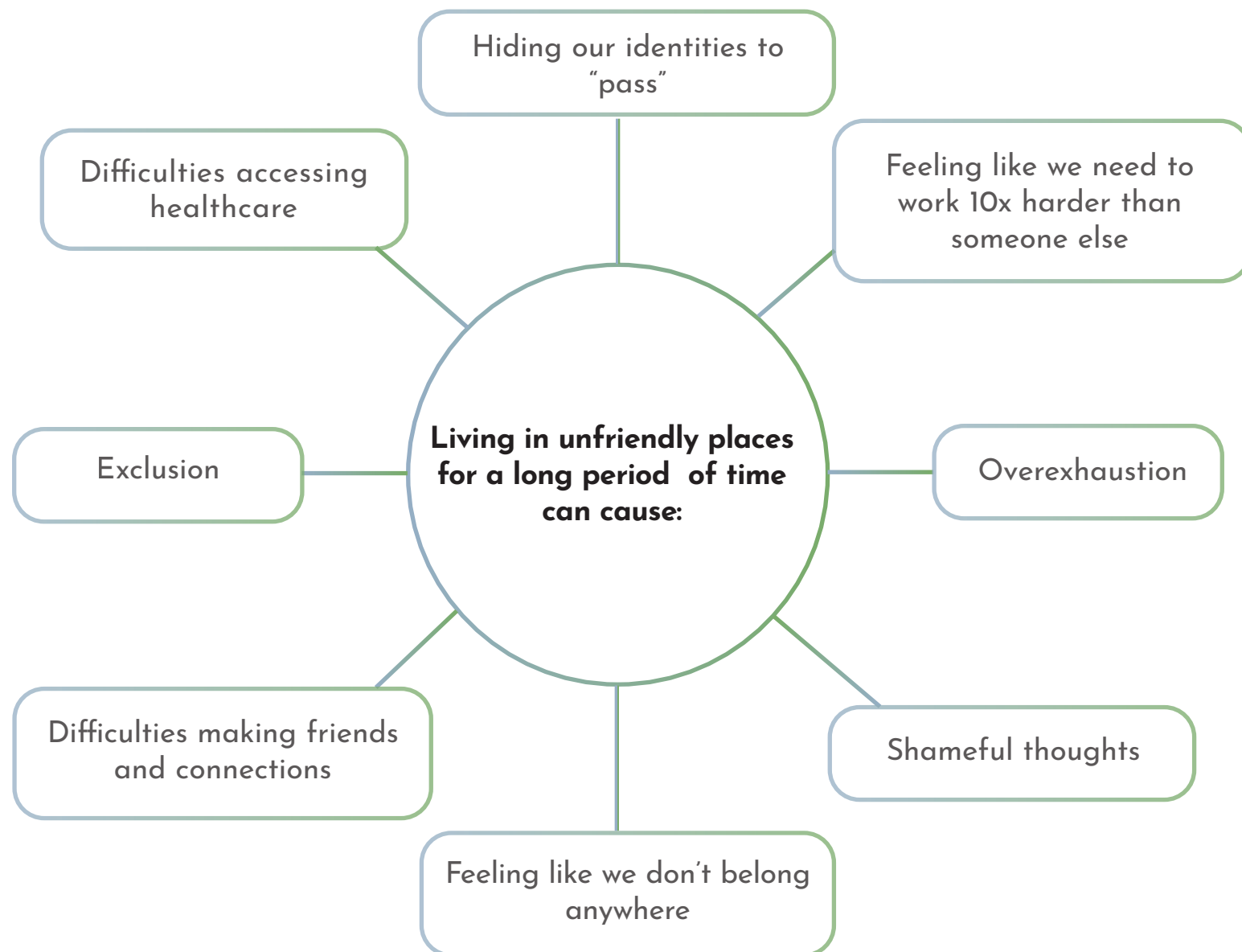


Multiple vulnerable identities experienced at once can compound our minority stress. Within a minority group, the majority can share similar experiences.

UNFRIENDLY PLACES

As minorities, GBT2Q+ men experience interpersonal, social, cultural, institutional and political barriers to our safety and well-being (Craig, 2016).

Unfriendly places are spaces with sustained visible and hidden sources of discrimination.



WELL, THAT SUCKS

We can develop deeply ingrained negative thoughts of ourselves based on the unfriendly places and challenges we are forced to endure and accept every day.

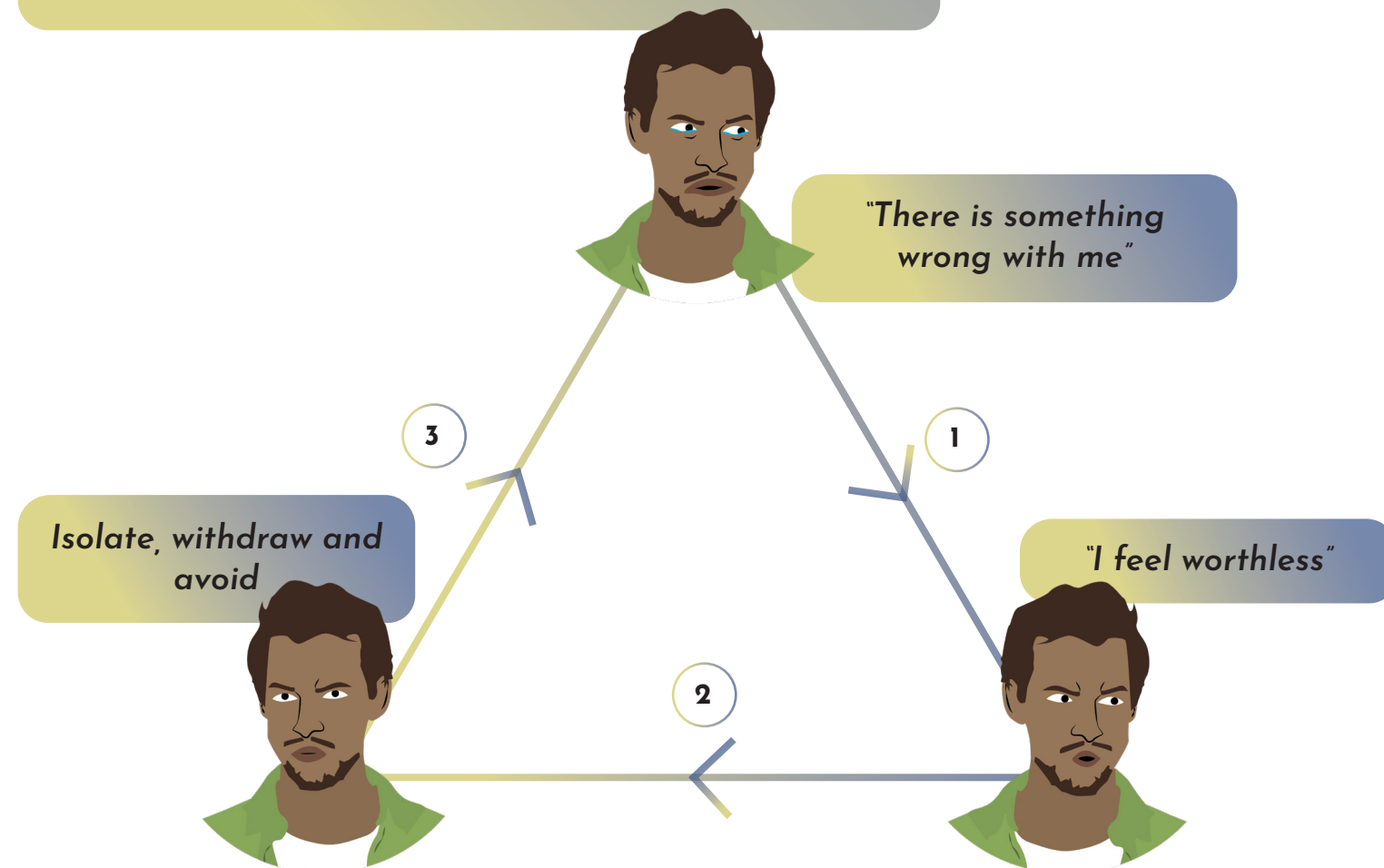


It can feel impossible not to accept the messages that are constantly thrown at us every day. When we begin to believe the lies that people say about us, we do them a favour by holding on to their shame so they can become lighter, while we're weighed down.

Internalizing shame can cause harmful thoughts that create unhelpful patterns.

- 1 Thoughts Affect Feelings
- 2 Feelings Impact the Behaviours we use to cope with challenges
- 3 Behaviours Reinforce Thoughts

- Craig and Austin, 2016



Life as a GBT2Q+ guy can make you feel like you need to constantly behave in a certain way to cope with these unfriendly places.

Exercise: Can you identify any of these thought-feeling-behaviour patterns in your life? They can be either helpful or unhelpful.

STOPP WORKSHEET

Next time you encounter an unhelpful pattern, try interrupting it and STOPP.

<p>Notice the intrusive or distressing thought, image, memory, trigger...</p>	<p>Write your reactions and alternative, more helpful responses in this column. What works for you? What will help? What can you tell yourself? What do you need to remember at those times?</p>
<p>STOP!</p>	
<p>TAKE A BREATH</p>	
<p>OBERVE Describe the feelings, images, thoughts, body sensations, and triggers.</p>	
<p>PULL BACK/ PERSPECTIVE What's the bigger picture? Is this fact or opinion? How would someone else see this? Is there another way of looking at this?</p>	
<p>PRACTICE WHAT WORKS What is the best thing to do right now - for me, for others, and for the situation.</p>	

** Original worksheet courtesy of: <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/STOPPworksheet.pdf> **

I NEED A BREAK

'Practicing what works' can mean engaging with a coping strategy. How do you cope with the unfriendly places you might endure every day? Fill in the bubble with some of your personal coping strategies.



Exercise: Think about how your coping strategies are helpful or unhelpful.

There are a diversity of ways we cope with challenges every day. However, sexual and gender minority groups are 2-3 times more likely to use alcohol and 3-4 times more likely to use substances as a means of coping compared to the general Canadian population (CAMH, 2016).

GBT2Q+ guys use substances for many reasons beyond coping, including pleasure/fun, to create community, to belong, and to enhance sex. Many of us use substances to create connections and to leave our experiences of exclusion behind.

Take some time to reflect...

Why do you use substances? How do the different ways you use substances help you cope with stressors and unfriendly places?

The last time you engaged with substance use as a coping strategy, how did it make you feel while you were doing it? And after?

FEELINGS WHEEL

Identify your feelings on the feelings wheel below (you can pick more than one).



Like any coping strategy, substance use can have many helpful benefits. However, when does a coping behaviour become unhelpful?

Consider how it makes you feel both physically and emotionally.

For more information on how different substance affect you and how to party safer, check out <http://torontovibe.com>.

When we're feeling positive, we're typically leaning into our values. When feeling negative, we could be violating our values.

**** If you find yourself experiencing physical harm during a coping strategy, consider contacting Distress and Crisis Ontario (647-694-4275), Trans Lifeline (877-330-6366), or go to your nearest emergency room. ****

WHAT DO I CARE ABOUT?

Values determine what's most important to us. Our core values highlight what we stand for and guide our behaviours, decisions, and action.

Some common values could be:

- Equity
- Honesty
- Connections
- Community
- Kindness
- Health
- Respect



If we don't know our own values, we could be violating them without even knowing. This can cause internal tension that results in unhelpful thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Let's get deeper.

(Exercise:) Over the next five days, write down some of your personal values below.

- Day 1: 3 values
- Day 2: 5 values
- Day 3: 7 values
- Day 4: 5 values
- Day 5: 3 values

Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	

Refer back to these 23 values when you're feeling any internal tension.

Are you doing something that goes against some of your values? How does that feel? Do those feelings tell you anything?

- Psychology Tools Values Exercise, 2020

FINDING BALANCE

We're always reaching for something, but the unfriendly spaces we live in can greatly complicate how we get it.

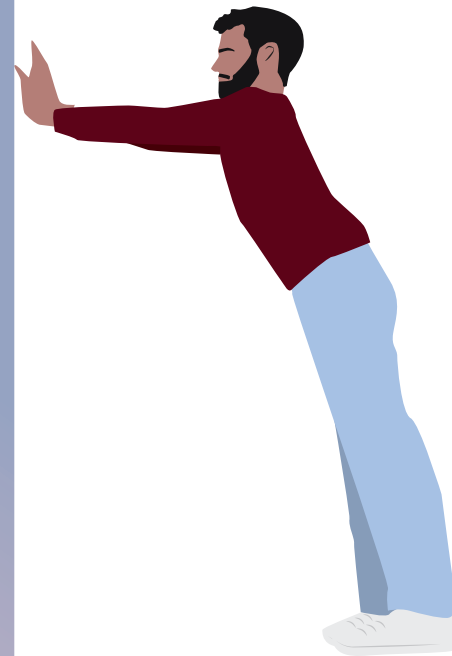
OVEREXTENDING

"That doesn't look comfortable!"

Sometimes we can be really overextending ourselves to get it.

Unfriendly places may make you feel lonely and think that no one likes you. You might stay up and party with others to hold on to connections despite not having a good time.

Overextending can often leave you feeling exhausted and like you're being forced to do something you might not want to do. It can also be related to really leaning into one value, but neglecting your other values.



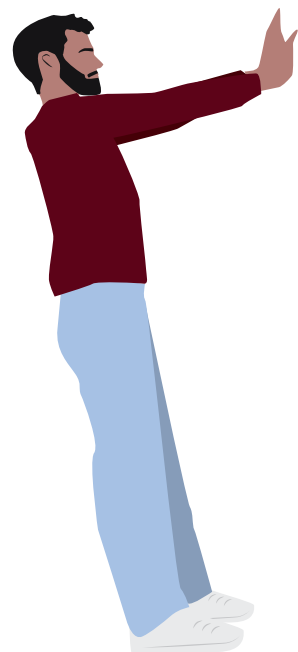
RETRACTING

"Looks like they're going to fall!"

Other times, we could be retracting and not able to reach anything at all.

Unfriendly places may make you feel anxious and think you don't belong. You might withdraw from social engagements, but use substance to try to create connections in other places or to dissociate.

Retracting can often leave you feeling like you're trying to reach a goal, but not making any progress at all. It can also be related to not engaging any of your values.



BALANCE

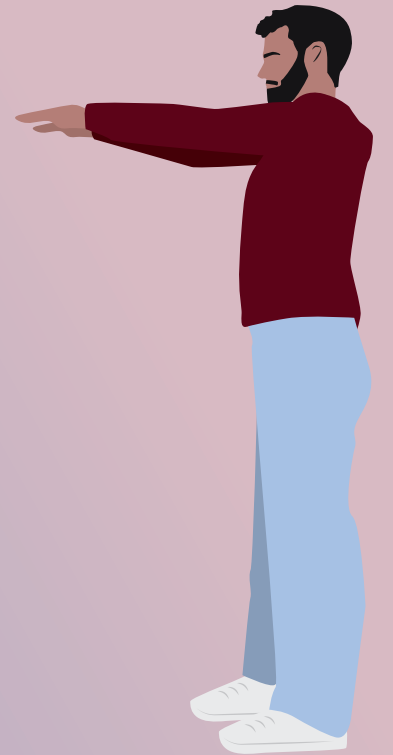
"Great form!"

In finding balance, you might consider setting aside specific times during the week to use substances, and/or never using alone to ensure you're working towards your values. Balance looks different for everyone, so find coping strategies that align with your values.

Let's find ways to extend and retract based on your values to find a comfortable position to cope with the unfriendly places you exist in every day.

Based on your values, what are coping strategies that might satisfy as many of your values as possible?

Are there places you can go to where you might not even feel the need to overextend or retract?



WHEN I'M PUSHED TOO FAR

Ever feel like you're just trying to stay afloat to survive another day, instead of living your day?

Unfriendly places can become so overwhelming and cause us to live in a constant state of coping.



Remember that idea of minority stress?

Living in a "straight" world can cause GBT2Q+ men to live in a state of chronic stress due to continuous stigma from internalized homo/bi/trans/queer-phobia, and expectations or experiences of rejection and discrimination (Meyer, 1995; Pierce and Kumaresan, 2006).

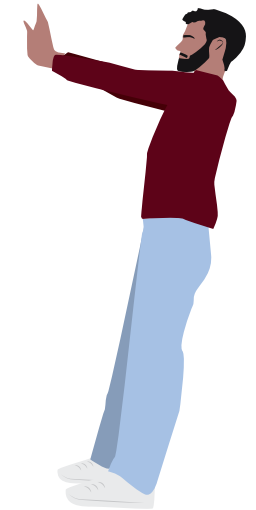
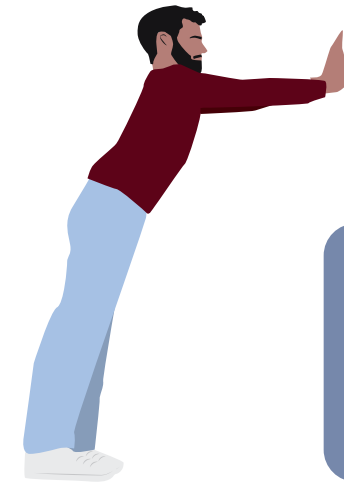
Living in a state of chronic stress can cause us to become stuck in a cycle of unhelpful thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Engaging in behaviours that constantly go against our values can greatly amplify unhelpful thoughts and feelings.

We might get to a point where the next unfriendly event can cause a breaking point.

RETRACTING

"I can't keep pushing back! I'm about to fall!"



OVEREXTENDING

"I can't fight forever."

"I'm in distress."



If we're living in a state of constant stress and can't seem to catch a break, it's only natural to reach a breaking point.

Exercise: Are there certain experiences that push you to your breaking point? These may indicate personal values, stressors, and/or unhelpful coping strategies.

**** If you find yourself experiencing physical harm during a coping strategy, consider contacting Distress and Crisis Ontario (647-694-4275), Trans Lifeline (877-330-6366), or go to your nearest emergency room. ****

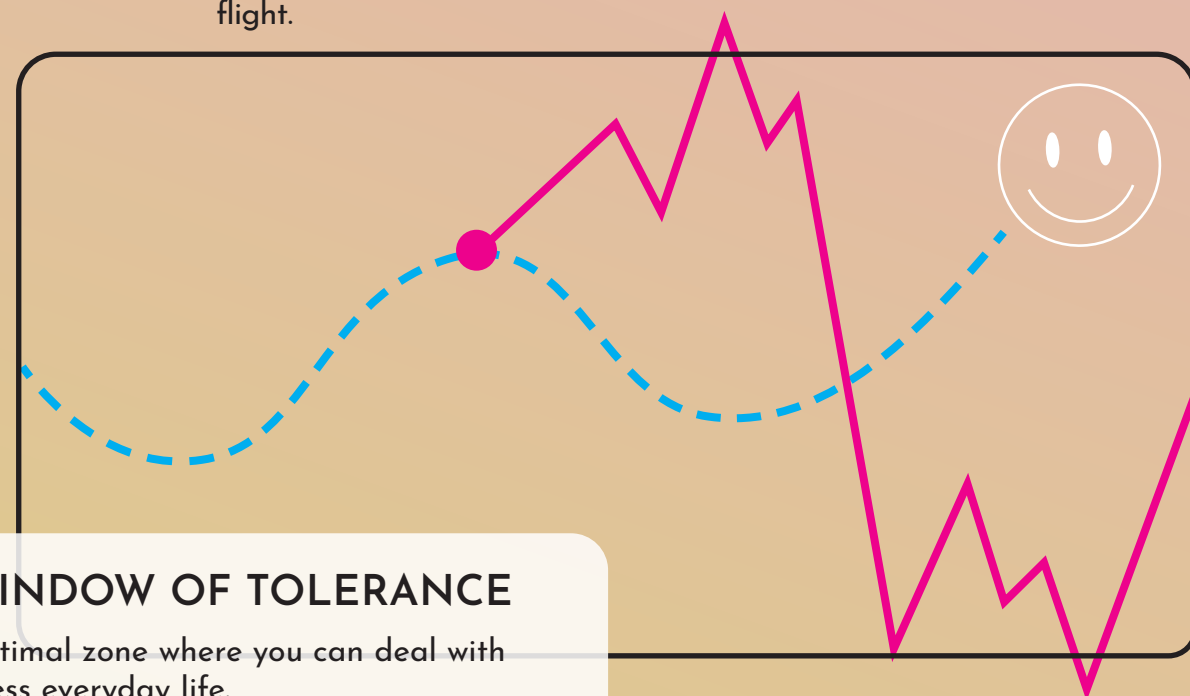
DOING MY BEST

Most of the time, you may feel capable of tolerating the unfriendly places you live in every day. But if you reach a breaking point, you may feel a need to do something drastic to feel relief. This may cause you to be in a state of hyperarousal, followed by hypoarousal.

WHAT IS SMOOTH SAILING?

HYPERAROUSAL

Excessive activation energy. Feeling panic and impulsive. Survival responses in the form of fight and flight.



WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Optimal zone where you can deal with stress everyday life.

HYPOAROUSAL

Freezing and numbing response. Emotionally flat. Lack of energy and boundaries. Desensitization.

--- Smooth Sailing

● Dysregulation

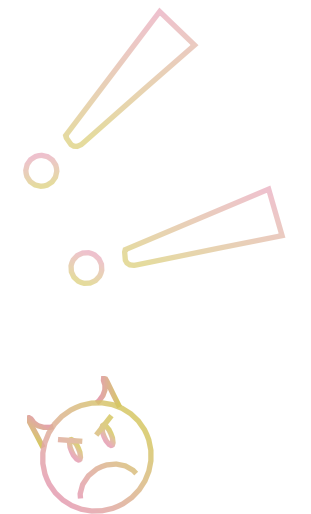
— Fight/Flight/Freeze

Substance use is a very common coping strategy amongst GBT2Q+ guys to dull or forget the pain when living in a constant state of minority stress becomes too much (National LGBT Health Education Centre, 2020).

Substance use is a very common coping strategy amongst GBT2Q+ guys to dull or forget the pain when living in a constant state of minority stress becomes too much (National LGBT Health Education Centre, 2020).

GBT2Q+ men who are also people of colour report even higher rates of substance use as their chronic stress can be compounded by multiple forms of discrimination (Paul et al., 2014).

Substance use may be helpful at times to reduce your feelings of distress. However, it's important to check-in with yourself regularly to prevent helpful practices from becoming unhelpful.



Return to your values. Could going against your values send you into a state of panic and impulse, followed by a negative state of feeling low and desensitized?

The more you practice this unhelpful behaviour in times of distress, the more reinforced it becomes, potentially making it become your only option to help cope with distress.

How do you know when you are reaching a breaking point? How does your body feel when you're about to reach that point?

Draw or label how your body might feel.



SMOOTH SAILING

How can you stay in your window of tolerance? That zone where you feel like you can deal with the stress from the unfriendly places you live in every day.

WHAT IS SMOOTH SAILING?



WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Optimal zone where you can deal with stress everyday life.

— — Smooth Sailing

● Dysregulation

— Fight/Flight/Freeze

When you notice those feelings of reaching a breaking point, try engaging with them in a different way. As you engage with those feelings, notice how they might change.

What are some TIPP's for engaging with feelings of distress?

CRISIS SURVIVAL - TIPP



Temperature

Change your body temperature using cold water or ice.



Intense Exercise

Walk quickly. Climb stairs. Jump up and down. Run on the spot.



Paced Breathing

Breathe in to the count of 5. Hold. Then breathe out to the count of 7.



Paired Muscle Relaxation

Tense one muscle group while breathing in, relax the muscle group while breathing out. Move through your whole body from top to bottom. One muscle group at a time.

- Linehan, 2015

Notice any changes in the feelings in your body?

As those feelings of distress may decrease, return to your values and reconsider your helpful coping strategies that you've written in this book. You've had these tools all along!

REACH OUT!

Although you are very capable of overcoming challenges, the unfriendly places and challenges we're forced to endure everyday can, at times, become too overwhelming for us to go at alone. However, you don't have to deal with these stressors on your own.

Check out some of these GBT2Q+ affirming resources and community spaces when you feel like you need an extra boost or some added support:

ACT (formerly AIDS Committee of Toronto)

543 Yonge Street, 4th Floor
Toronto, ON M4Y 1Y5
416-340-2437
ask@actoronto.org

ACT is a community-based organization working to reduce new HIV infections in Toronto and promote the independence, dignity, health and well-being of people living with HIV and AIDS and those at increased risk of HIV. [Contact ACT](#) for further information on mental health and substance use resources tailored to GBT2Q+ guys including [harm reduction support groups](#) and [counselling services](#).

Healing in Colour

Healing in Colour offers a directory of BIPOC therapists who are committed to supporting BIPOC in all their intersections. They aim to revitalize a legacy of healing, liberation work and resiliency practices that have been lost/taken.

LGBT Youthline

Call: 1-800-268-9688
Text: 647-694-4275

LGBT Youthline is a queer, trans, two-spirit youth-led (29 and under) organization providing anonymous peer support and referrals via call, text and live online chat.

National Overdose Response Service (NORS)

1-888-688-NORS(6677) (Canada-wide)
Mobile App: [The Brave App](#) (Global)

NORS is an overdose prevention hotline for Canadians providing loving, confidential, nonjudgmental support for you, whenever and wherever you use drugs.

Rainbow Services @ CAMH

60 White Squirrel Way, 4th Floor
Toronto, ON M6J 1H4
416-535-8501, press 2

Rainbow Services at CAMH provides substance use support and counselling to LGBTQ+ folks who are concerned about their drug and alcohol use.

Togetherall

Togetherall is an online mental health resource commissioned by over 250 organizations globally. They provide online services, including clinical and peer-to-peer support, to millions with anxiety, depression, and other common mental health issues.

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