Mind Tricks :

Why do I do things that I know are not good for me?

A 45-minute webinar for **supporting mental fitness**, with a 15-min Q&A for CPA Alberta

Dr. Bill Howatt

President, Howatt HR

May 2021

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Dr. Bill Howatt Ph.D., ED.d., Post Doc UCLA

Founder and President
Howatt HR Consulting

30+ Years of **experience**

Mental Fitness Index (MFI)

ACCREDITATION CANADA

Psychological Health and Safety Certification

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

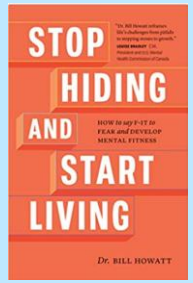
Contributor

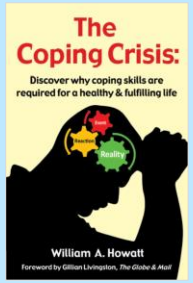
UNB

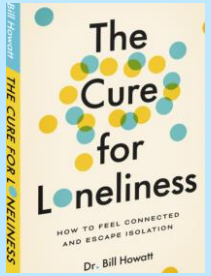
Psychological safe leader certificate

Certified Management Essentials (CME)

Mental fitness and Pathway to coping courses

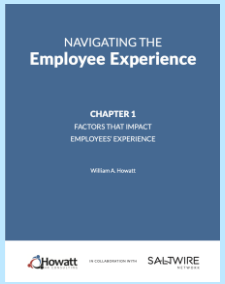






Author of over 400 articles and over 40 books

- Chair National CSA Standard on substance impairment in workplace
- CSA OHS Standards steering committee member
- Former Chief Research Workforce Productivity, CBOC
- Former Chief of Research and Develop, Morneau Shepell
- Pacific University Research Advisory Board
- Regularly contributor Chronic Herald and Talent Canada
- Co-creator Employee Recommended Workplace Award



Howatt HR CONSULTING

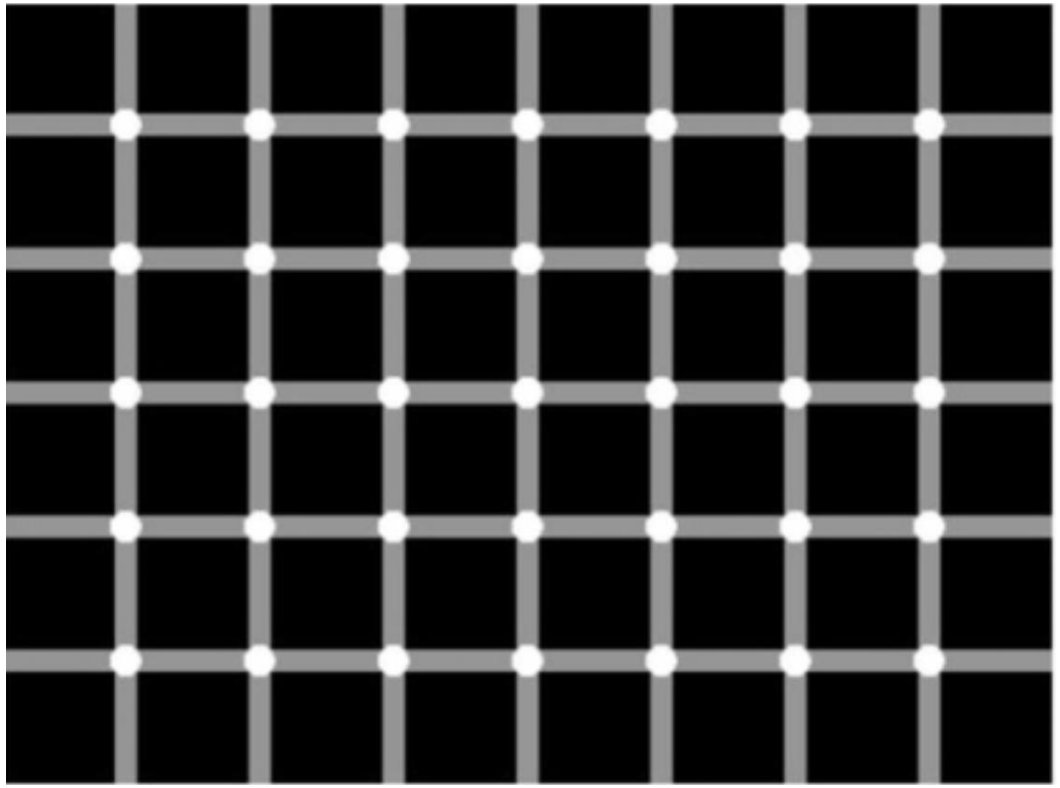
Learning Objectives

- ❑ Explore how mental health outlook influences decision-making
- ❑ Describe mental tricks
- ❑ Discuss how at-risk behaviours are by-products of mental tricks
- ❑ Examine how to counter mental tricks and convert them into prosocial skills

Goal: This short course will show how to prevent at-risk behaviours from becoming habits or addictive behaviours and how to replace them with prosocial skills that support mental health and long-term happiness.

Mind Trick Icebreaker 2

In 20 seconds, count the number of black dots



Section 1

A deeper understanding of mental health

How do you define mental health?

- Mental health refers to cognitive, behavioural, and emotional well-being.
- Mental health influences how we think, feel, and behave.
- Good mental health means absence of a mental disorder.
- A person with good mental health is comfortable with their station in life.

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Mental illness negatively impact day to day functioning and quality of life

- Mental illness may be caused by chronic psychosocial stress, genetics, environment, or belief in one's inability to cope.

- Mental illness often generates symptoms (i.e., emotions and thoughts) that distract a person’s confidence in their ability to function at their desired level.

- Mental illnesses are clinical in nature that meet criteria as defined by the DSM-V.

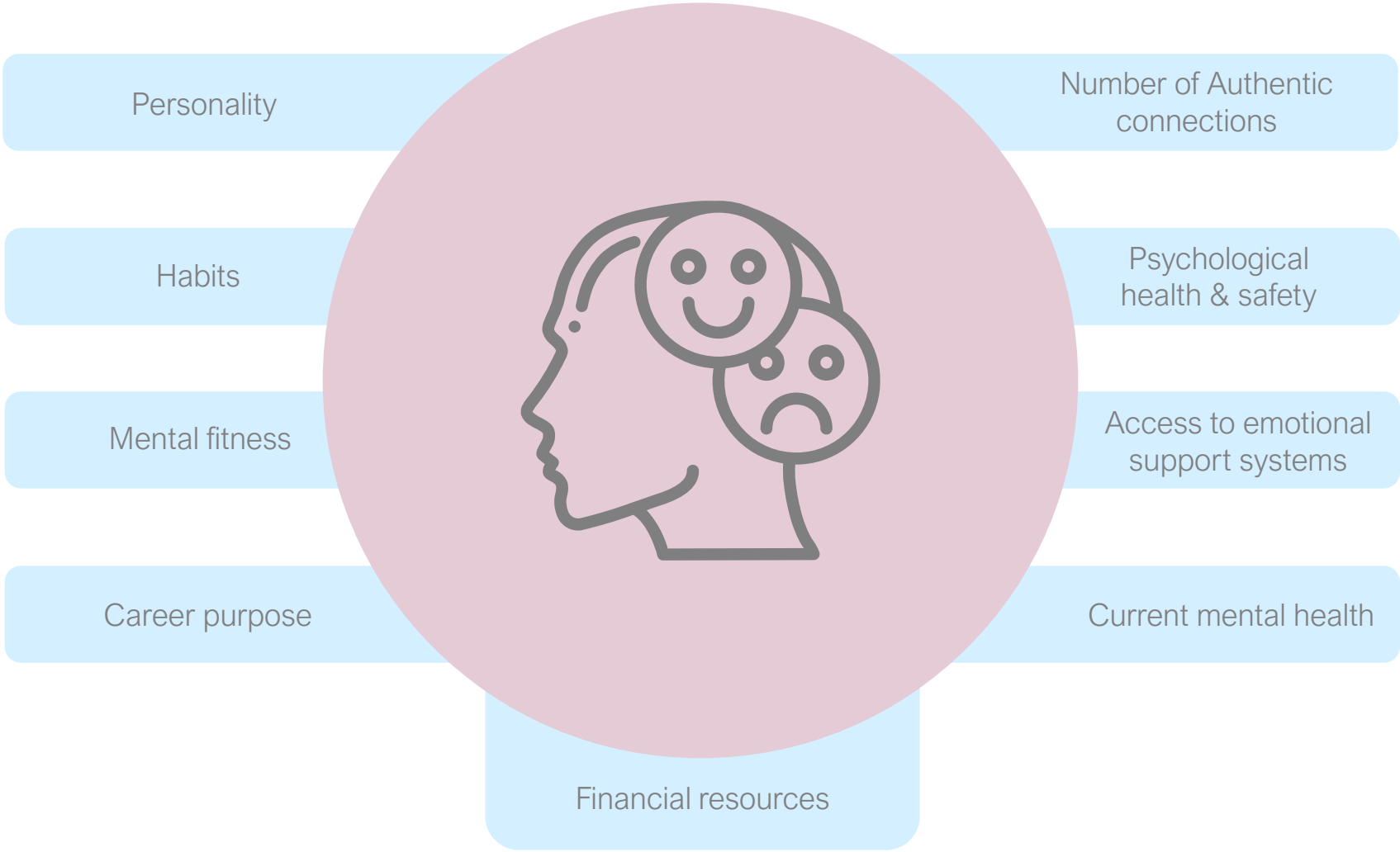
Howatt HR CONSULTING

What is your general mental health outlook?

Mental health outlook influences how you view your life experiences.

There is a direct relationship between the degree one practices mental fitness (i.e., intentional actions to promote mental health) and the degree they experience positive mental health.

Different elements can influence our mental health outlook



What is your mental outlook today?

Traumatized

Strained

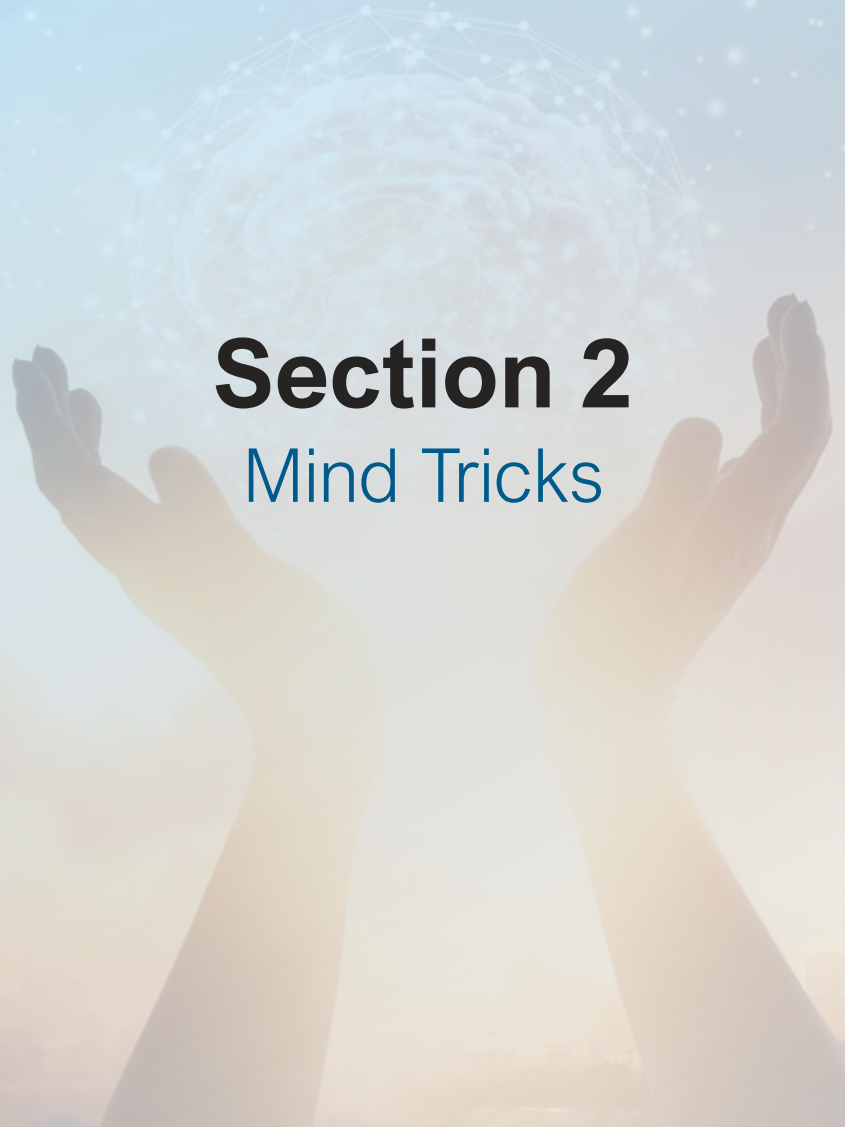
Worried

Tentative

Excited

What is the possibility someone whose mental health outlook is concerning will be more likely to be looking for feel-good behaviours to cope?

Howatt HR CONSULTING



Section 2

Mind Tricks

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Some basics about how the brain works

49% of the time our brain wanders

We have 12,000 to 70,000 thoughts per day

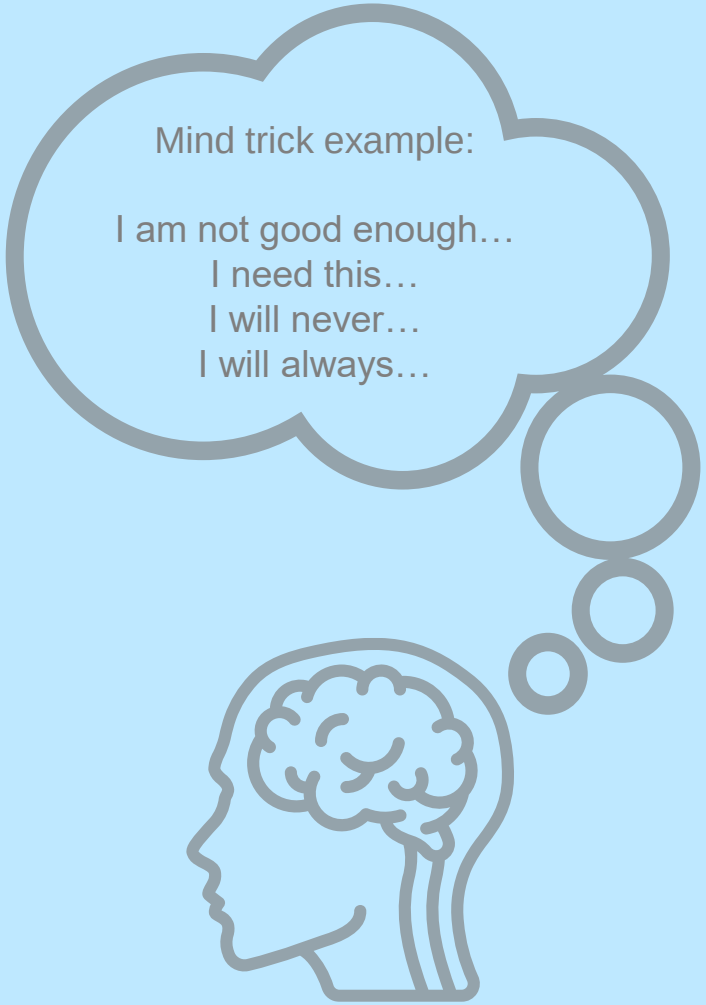
Each automatic thought is nothing more than a thought

Many automatic thoughts are negative or wrong

40% - 60% of our behaviour run automatically; we call them **habits**

Why is it helpful to be aware of automatic thoughts?

Mind tricks can influence our emotions and mood



How mind tricks influence our behaviour

Have you ever asked yourself, “Why do I engage in behaviours I know are not good for me?”

1. Experience some type of stress

2. Triggers automatic thoughts
Judgemental of our ability to cope

3. Emotional pain & drivers

4. Inner critic normalizes the idea
Drinking can make you feel better when upset

5. Inner critic reinforces self-doubt
Focuses on feeling better now (eating potato chips)

6. Consequence of negative automatic thought – drives feel good behaviour

Feel good behaviours that can become problems

Food

Cannabis

Illegal drugs

Prescription drugs

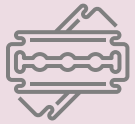
Social media

Alcohol

Tobacco

Shopping

Gaming


Cutting

Suicidal Ideations

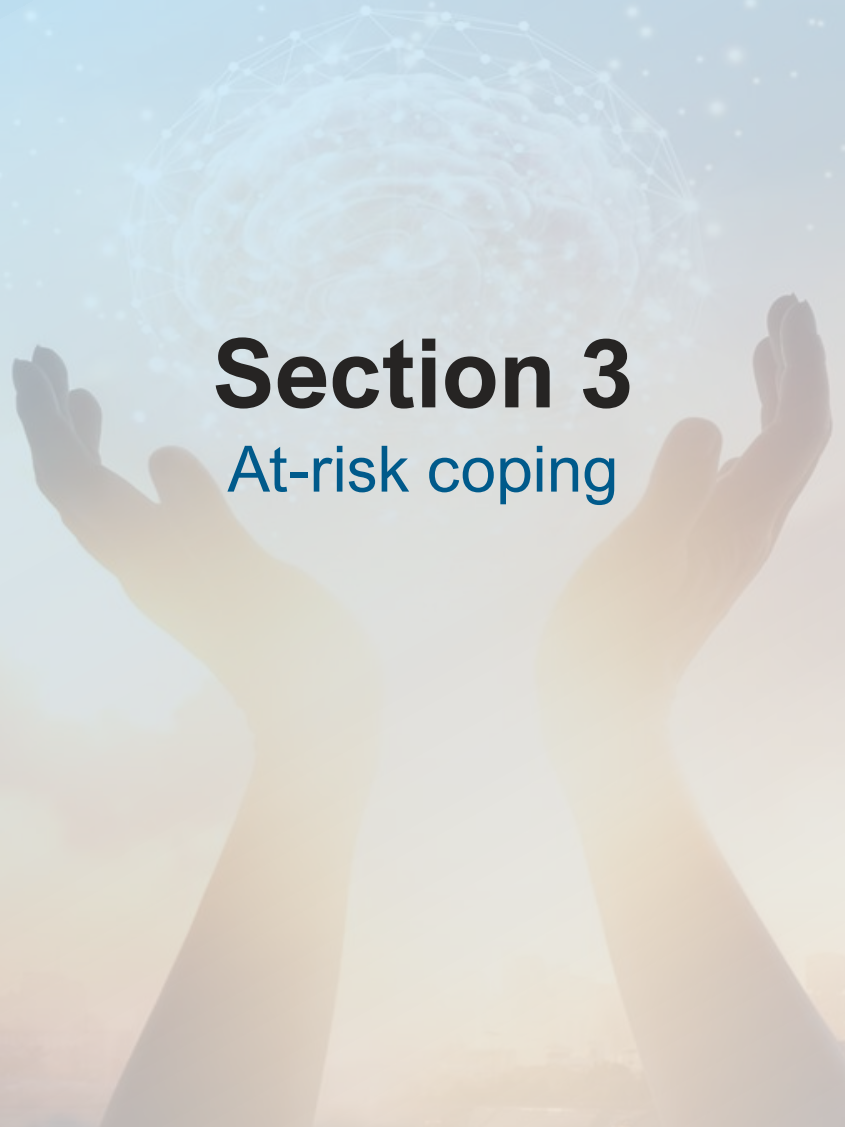
Gambling

Work

Tv

Do you have any examples where you walked through the above six steps to engage in a feel-good behavior

Step	Example	Your situation
1. Stressor	Conflict with a peer at work	
2. Automatic thought	I'm annoying other people	
3. Pain & drivers	Overwhelmed/Sad	
4. Inner critic normalizes the idea	Feel the need to have a drink after work	
5. Inner critic reinforces self-doubt	I need to have this drink	
6. Consequence of negative thought	One drink becomes five drinks	



Section 3

At-risk coping

Stress triggers and sources

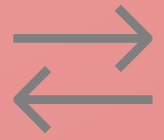
What is a stress trigger?

- Anything that creates pain consciously or unconsciously
- Any emotional pain you would like to have stopped immediately

What are some sources of stress triggers?

Violation of core values

Unwanted change



Negative experience

Loss of a job

A failure

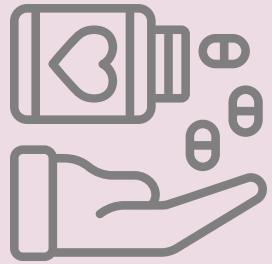
Mind tricks by-products are at-risk behaviours

Mind tricks promote the value of immediate feel-good behaviour

The purpose of at-risk behaviours' are to **stop** emotional pain quickly

At-risk behaviours can grow and create secondary issues like strained relationships

Alcohol, drugs and gambling can become powerful addictive disorders



If you are or some who loves you is concerned about alcohol, drugs or gambling behaviours, complete the DAGS screening tool to self-evaluate where you are and if you could benefit from talking with a mental health professional.

Howatt HR CONSULTING

There are three types of coping skills

Prosocial

- Healthy
- Promote clarity, calm and mental re-charging.
- Prevent or used to cope with stress

Examples:

Time with pets

Gratitude

Exercise

Time with friends

At-risk

- Used to feel good.
- The more you use them, the greater the risk of addiction or harm.

Examples:

Alcohol / drug use

Compulsive Shopping

Technology

Food

Help-seeking

- Used to solve a problem
- Get support for a mental health challenge.

Examples:

EFAP

Psychological support

Peer support

Crisis line

At-risk behaviour driven by a mind trick

"I must have a drink"

Stress trigger

A failure

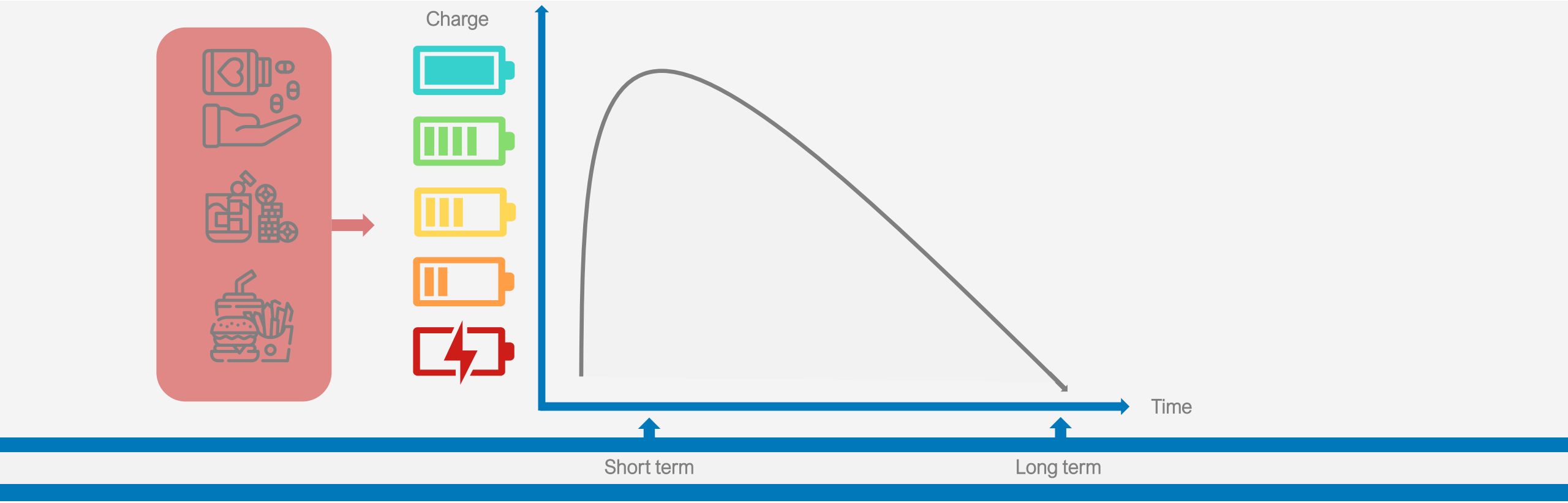
Overwhelms the conscious brain

Emotional Pain

Drives the desire to stop the pain. Automatic thought and urge drive (to get a drink) takes over

Howatt HR CONSULTING

At-risk behaviours facilitate short-term charge with long-term drain risk to physical and mental health



Section 4

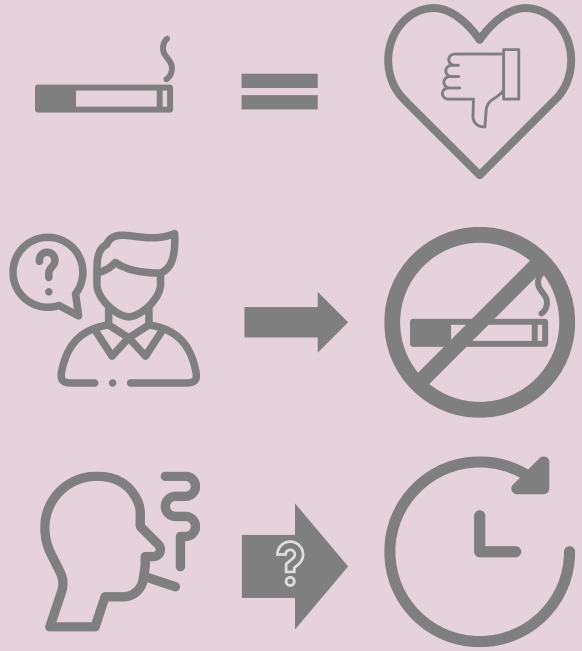
Countering mental tricks

Knowing something is not good for us does not mean we believe we can stop it

We know that at-risk behaviours like smoking have negative consequences.

Many people who smoke would like to stop but are unsure how.

Many times, when a smoker is asked if they see themselves with this habit in 10 years reply, “I hope not.”



Putting off long-term consequences to feel good now is why mental tricks are bad for our long-term health.

Changing at-risk behaviours is hard but possible with a plan, supports, and intention.

One first step to counter mental tricks is; understanding there are things you can do to provide HOPE so you can curb at-risk behaviours.

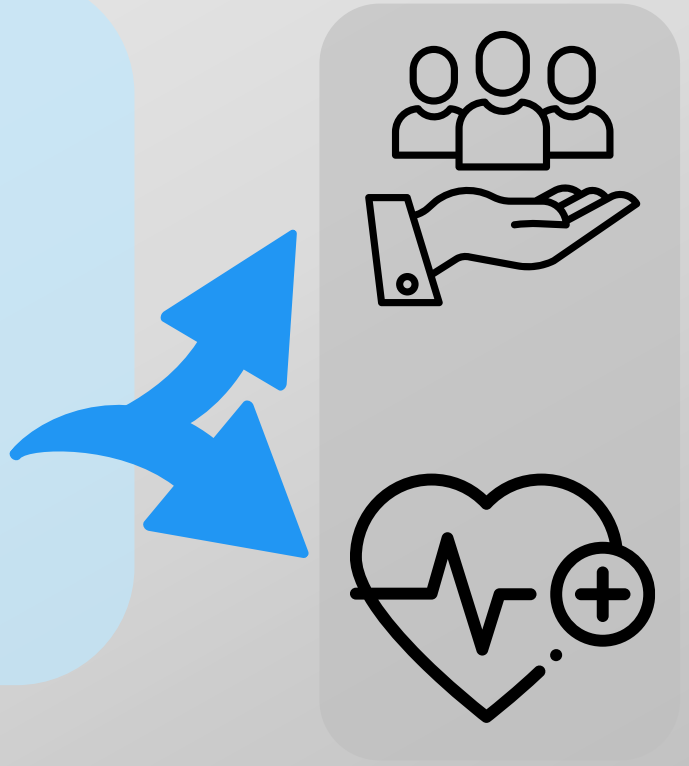
Howatt HR CONSULTING

How to counter at-risk behaviours

Self-awareness

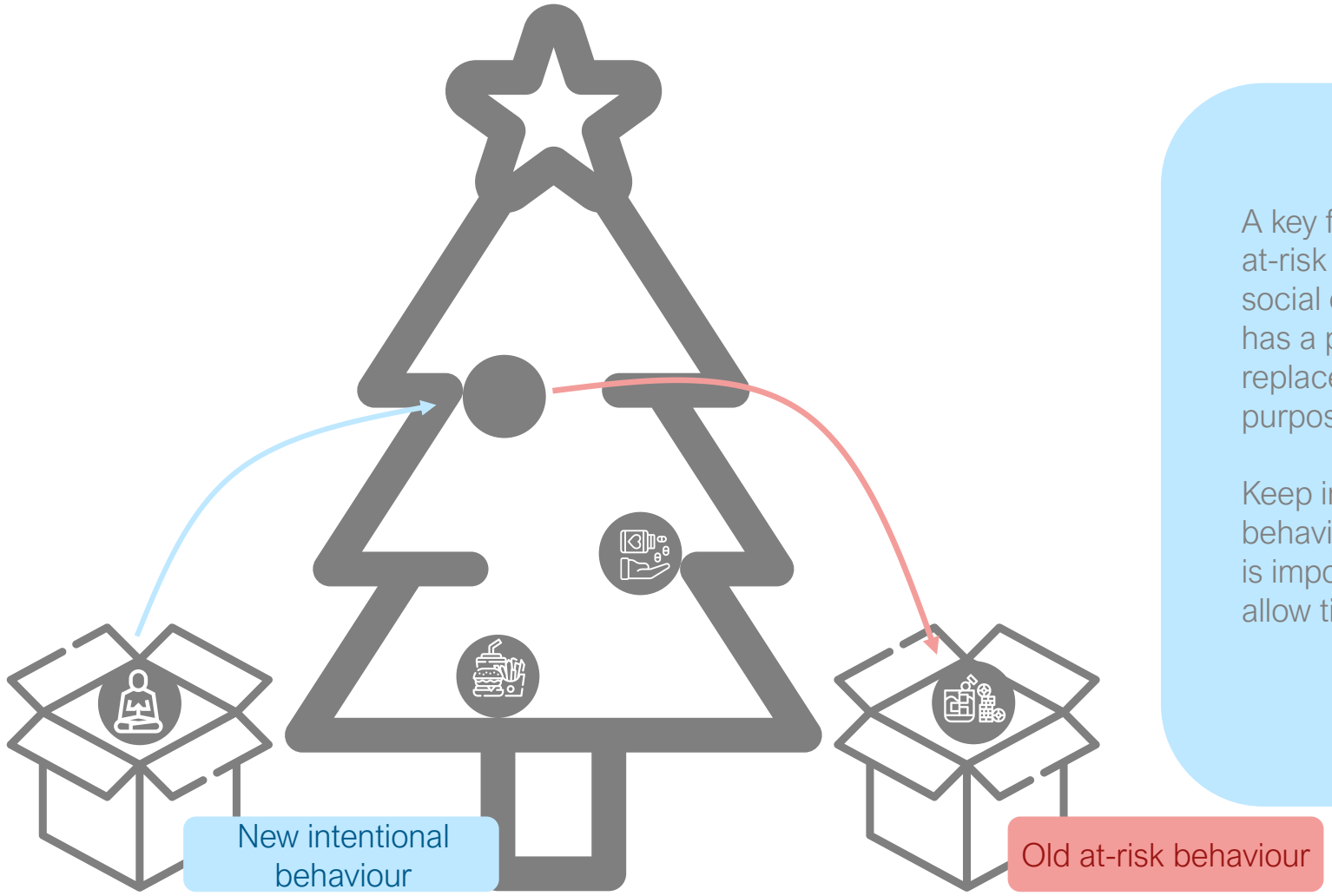
Do you have one at-risk behaviour you are concerned about today?

- If yes, name the behaviour and state why you are concerned.
- Determine your motivation and commitment to change.
- What are two possible consequences of this at-risk behaviour to your health or social supports?



Think of someone who has never run a marathon. It takes work to build the endurance necessary to do so. Countering some at-risk behaviours requires a commitment to make change

Replacing at-risk behaviours with prosocial coping skills can look like switching a Christmas tree decoration



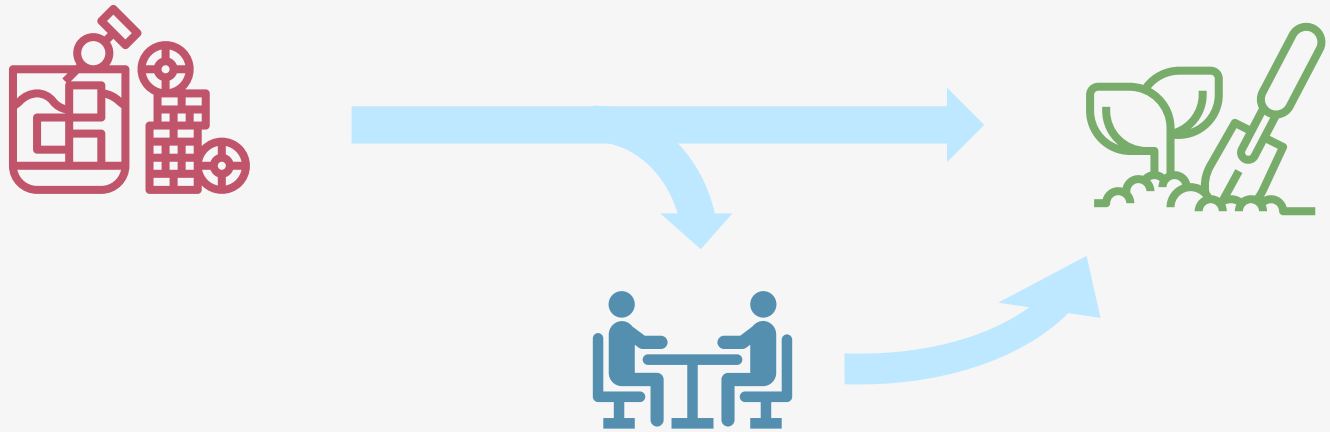
A key factor when replacing an at-risk behaviour with a prosocial social coping skill is to be aware it has a purpose and will need to be replaced by something to fill its purpose.

Keep in mind, the at-risk behaviour will always be there. It is important to be intentional and allow time for new habits to form.

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Replacement and social supports recruiting plan

Once you determine what at-risk behaviour you want to curb, the next step is to determine what prosocial behaviour(s) you will replace it with.



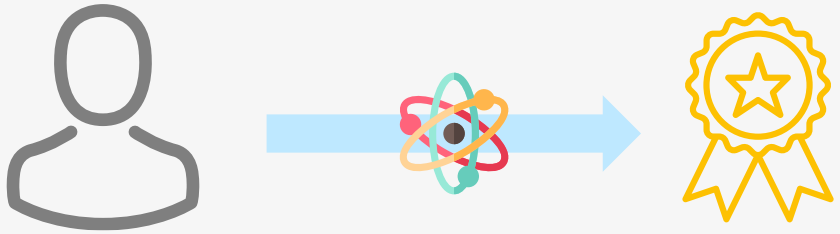
Before attempting to counter at-risk behaviours that involve drugs, do a safety-first check & discuss with your MD or local drug dependency agency.

They will help you determine the best way to stop, based on your usage and risk of having a physical addiction.

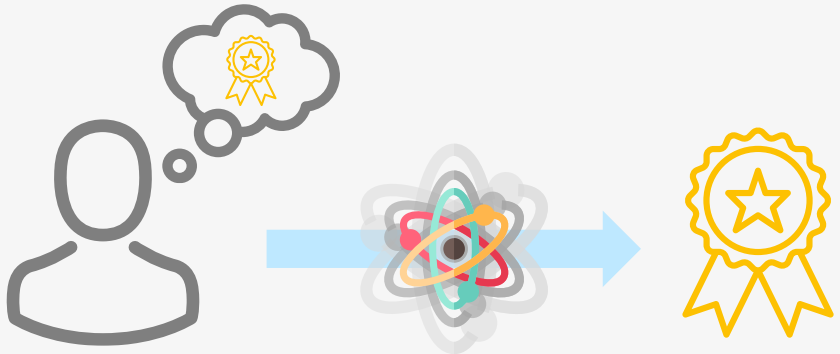
Whether you require professional support or not, it is beneficial to have someone you trust (e.g., family, friends) to provide support and encouragement, and help hold your accountability

Dopamine's job is to motivate our drive to achieve a goal - the problem is it does no differentiate good from bad

Dopamine is the reward chemical that motivates us to get on track to get a reward.



In many cases, anticipating the outcome can increase dopamine levels that strengthen urge and drive



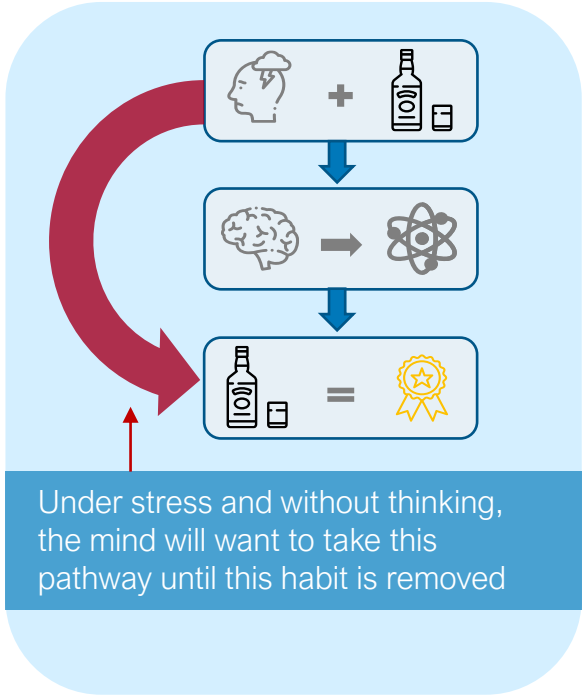
It is helpful to understand that dopamine is the neurochemical that drives us to want more of what we are seeking that will give us a reward.

Method 1 – Awareness

6 methods to counter mental tricks

Awareness | Self-compassion | Self-efficacy | Challenging urges | Delayed gratification | Unlearning

- Habits, positive or negative, operate unconsciously.
- Habits have strong neural pathways that make them feel more difficult to break.
- Neural pathways create automatic-reward pathways.
- The reward pathway reacts when a stimulus is presented, and the body considers it to be rewarding



Howatt HR CONSULTING

Method 2 – Self-compassion

6 methods to counter mental tricks

Awareness | **Self-compassion** | Self-efficacy | Challenging urges | Delayed gratification | Unlearning

- Once you decide you want to stop an at-risk behaviour, bursts of guilt, shame and disappointment are common.
- Self-compassion is the ability to give yourself a break. Accepting that it is normal to have some slips when trying to replace a bad behaviour.

Minds tricks can fool you into thinking at-risk behaviours are your best or only choice

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Method 3 – Self-efficacy

6 methods to counter mental tricks

Awareness | Self-compassion | **Self-efficacy** | Challenging urges | Delayed gratification | Unlearning

- Stopping an at-risk behaviour often means being open to learning a new skill
- Self-efficacy defines how confident we are in our knowledge and skills to be successful
- If you are not confident but try and still fail, accept that you do not need to do this by yourself.
- Breaking bad habits is hard. We can do it when we allow our self time to learn and when need support to learn new skills if required.
- As you develop your self-efficacy and self-confidence and can move past *potato chips*, you strengthen your self esteem.

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Method 4 – Challenging urges

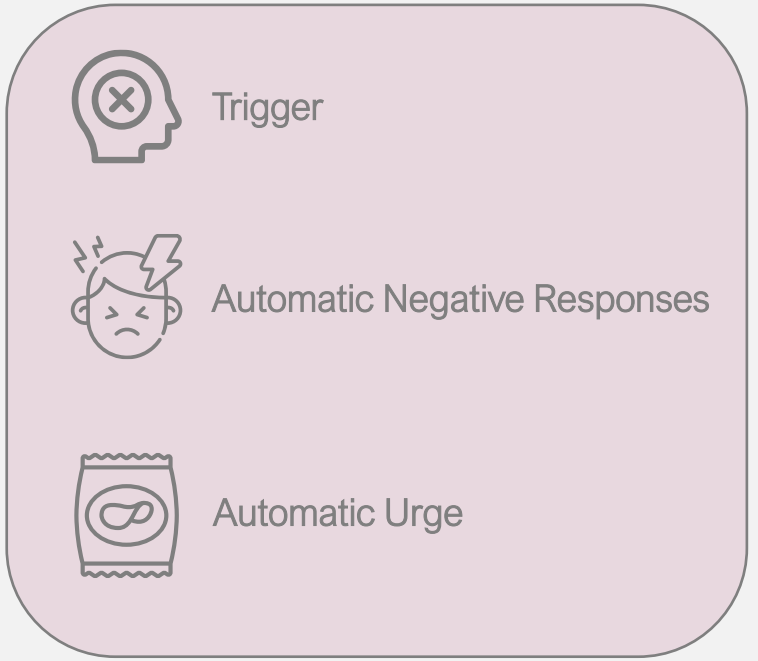
6 methods to counter mental tricks

Awareness | Self-compassion | Self-efficacy | **Challenging urges** | Delayed gratification | Unlearning

- Urges are powerful and can be confusing.
- If the stress trigger fires off pain and overwhelms the mind, the unconscious brain tries to rid the emotional pain quickly and looks for feel-good options.
- The frequency, duration and intensity of urges are highest when there is a strong neural pathway in place – a habit.

Micro-skills for curbing urges

- Stay calm
- Anticipate **Past Anchoring**
- Know the potato chips urge is a learned neural pathway
- **Move past an urge.** Change your focus from feeling to fact



Howatt HR CONSULTING

Method 5 – Delayed gratification

6 methods to counter mental tricks

Awareness | Self-compassion | Self-efficacy | Challenging urges | **Delayed gratification** | Unlearning

- Gratification teaches the value of immediate reward
- Instant gratification can seem hard wired to behaviour once a powerful urge arises
- At-risk behaviours develop strong neural pathways that release dopamine
- Delaying gratification is intentional self-control to resist the urge/immediate reward.
- The more you train DG, the stronger it becomes.
- There can be short term discomfort when stopping an at-risk behaviour

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Method 6 – Unlearning

6 methods to counter mental tricks

Awareness | Self-compassion | Self-efficacy | Challenging urges | Delayed gratification | **Unlearning**

- The brain is neuro-plastic, we can change its wiring when we focus on long term health
- The brain can create new prosocial neural pathways by unlearning old dopamine pathways that are at-risk
- It can take 200-plus days to make a new habit automatic
- Commit to the process, not the finish line. Time, self-direction and objective monitoring are key

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Preparing for unlearning

Targeting an at-risk behaviour you want to change	
Checklist	Action completed
Aware of at-risk behaviour you want to stop and why	☑
Have determined options to replace it with a new prosocial behaviour	☑
Recruited social supports	☑
Completed safety check	☑
Completed counter 1 review - Awareness	☑
Completed counter 2 review – Self-compassion	☑
Completed counter 3 review – Self-efficacy	☑
Completed counter 4 review – Challenging urges	☑
Completed counter 5 review – Delayed gratification	☑

Unlearning at-risk behaviours

Make a list of the benefits of sticking to decisions

Keep a daily log that tracks progress.

Write your top three important core values. If health makes you list, this can be a positive anchor.

Where possible, remove temptations from your environment.

Unlearning is a process. It's important to focus on the process and allow time for new habits to mature

Stressor	Old at-risk Behaviour	New prosocial behaviour
Work demand	Daily drinking	Exercise

Week	1	2	3	4	5
Old behaviour urges	High	High	Moderate	Low	Low
New Behaviour perceived benefits	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High
Social support required	High	High	Moderate	Low	Low

Notice that there is often a short period of feeling uncomfortable as old urges lower in intensity, which they will in time as you unlearn. The new prosocial behaviours' benefits are realized and it may take a few months. But with a focus daily on health as a core value it will, in time, happen.

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Develop your action plan to stop a targeted at-risk behaviour and replace it with a new prosocial coping skill

Planning worksheet example

Target at-risk behaviour to stop	Motivation – Why you want to stop	Replacement behaviour	Support system	How you will get new knowledge and skills	When will you start	How will you record daily progress	How will you calculate success

Daily log example

Daily log	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Old behaviours urges							
New behaviour perceived benefits							
Social support required							

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Questions?

Howatt HR CONSULTING

Howatt
HR CONSULTING
www.howatthr.com
Thank you!