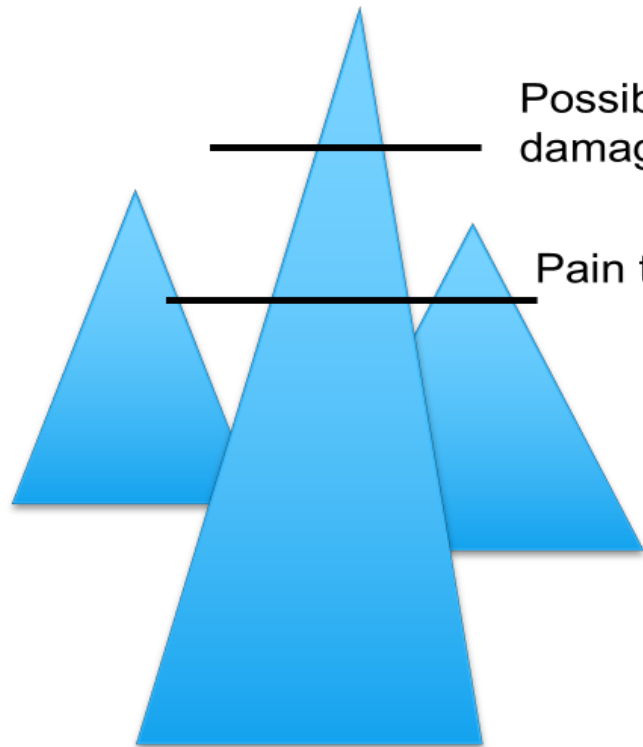




# Pain Is About Protection

Before our pain condition



Possible tissue damage

Pain threshold

Before we started with our persistent pain condition, we may have been able to:

- climb a hill or mountain
- sit all day in the office
- run a few kilometers or a marathon
- clean the whole house in one go
- Do the mowing, weeding and all of the garden in a day

**Helpful** - a sensitive system

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## Pain Is About Protection

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Back then we could tolerate.....

- Getting back and bum ache from sitting for a long time
- Legs shaking from running for a long time
- Continuing with the activity for too long and aching a few days afterwards
- Doing a few things at once

But this isn't dangerous to us, it helps to build strength and tolerance.

We also have our pain threshold mechanism that comes to warn us before we do any tissue damage and if we're super-human we can possibly push a little further even past this!!!

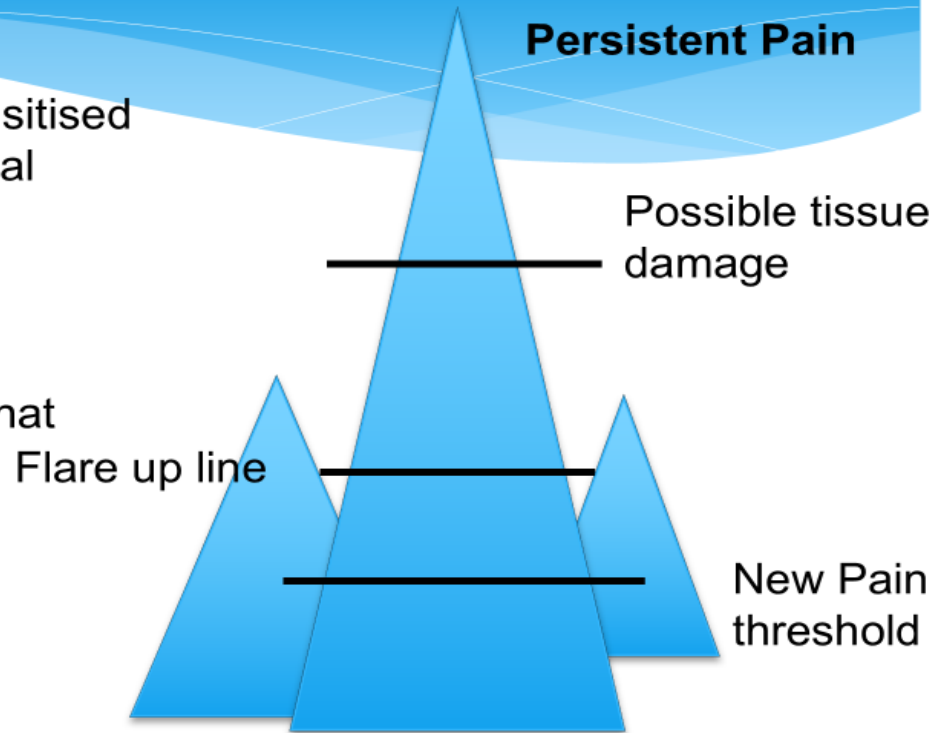
# Pain Is About Protection

In our current pain state, with our sensitised nervous system, we have an additional protective mechanism, the flare up.

...and this is way before possible tissue damage would occur

Our brains are protecting us so well that it hurts now when attempting to:

- sit on a chair for a short while
- walk up a small hill
- doing a few garden tasks
- or even when we think about emptying the dish washer



**Unhelpful** - a sensitive or over sensitised system – persistent pain

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## Pain Is About Protection

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- The problem is that we overdo protection
- Remember pain is about protection, not damage.
- Pain doesn't mean we have to stop doing most things in our life.
- We need to re-learn and re-wire our thinking to drop the struggle and accept that we don't need this over-protective response anymore.
- We need to learn to cope differently
- There is nothing about us that needs fixing before we start doing.

**THE DOING (and understanding) is the FIXING**

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## Common Pain Coping Styles

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There are many ways of coping but two common coping styles we see in our patient groups are:

### **A – Persistence Coping Styles**

“no pain, no gain”

“grin and bear it”

“I’m not giving in”

### **WE MAY BE OVERDOING OUR ACTIVITY**

- These are all strategies and thoughts that involve persisting in the face of pain and can be helpful initially.
- It’s normal to experience pain and sometimes we want to keep pushing to do the things that are important
- But because we get better at making pain the longer we have it; this strategy can backfire.

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# Common Pain Coping Styles

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## **B – Avoidance Coping Styles**

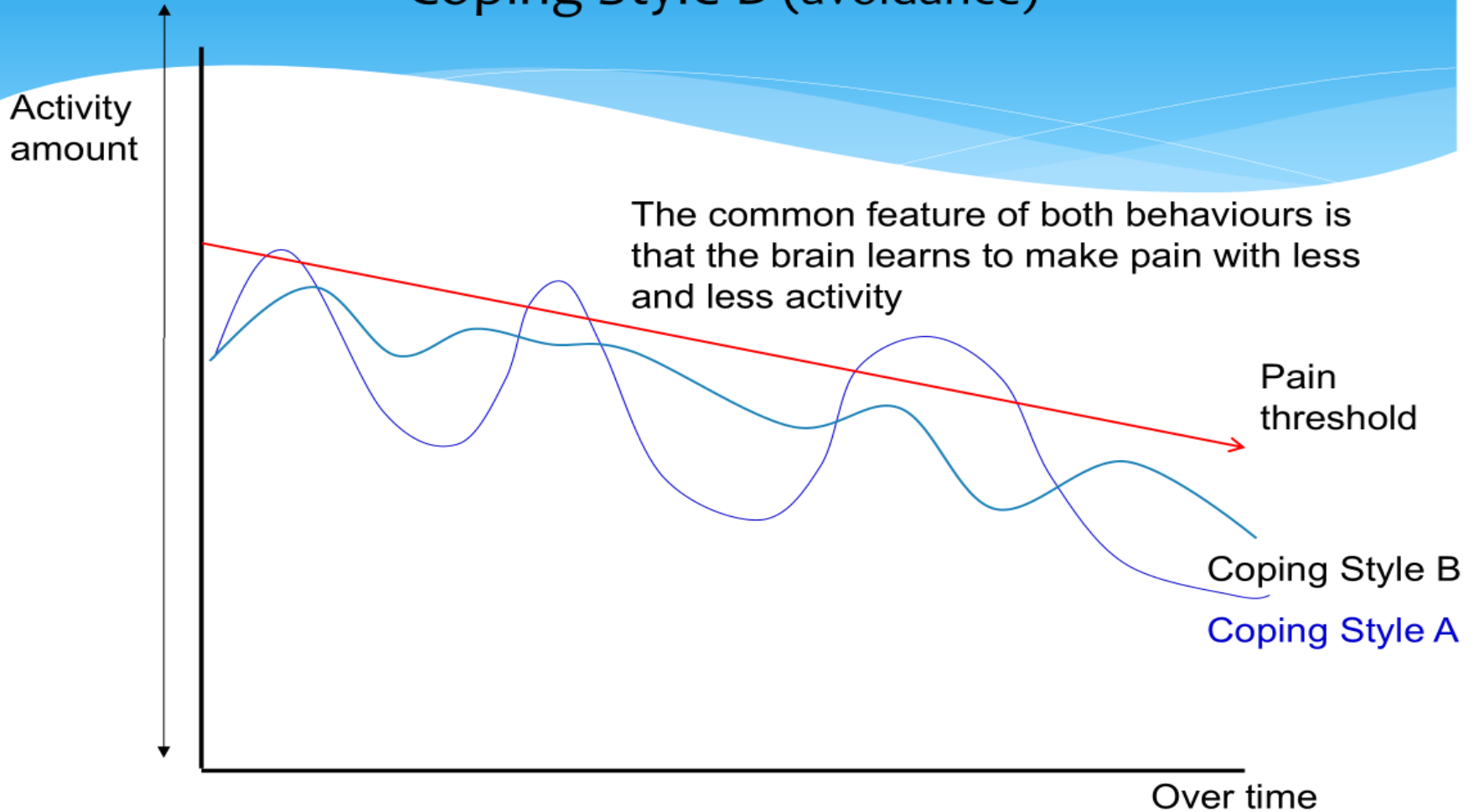
- “If it hurts, don’t do it”
- “I’m doing damage”
- “let pain guide you”

## **WE MAY BE AVOIDING OR NOT DOING ENOUGH ACTIVITY**

- Avoidance is initially helpful, but if we continue to avoid certain things, we may become fearful of them
- Because of the way we adapt, that fear may end up triggering our pain response (remember pain is all about the perceived need for protection).

# Common Pain Coping Styles

Coping Style A (persistence)  
Coping Style B (avoidance)





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## Avoiding meaningful or valued activities like:

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- hobbies
- time with friends/social time
- going on holiday
- being active/exercise
- being independent – dressing/washing/bathing
- cooking

....can also increase our sensitivity by increasing:

- social withdrawal or feelings of isolation/being alone
- a depressed mood
- sense of hyper vigilance

..meaning we don't trust our bodies to be strong and capable; instead, we feel it needs protecting!

What we are trying to find is the balance between avoidance (protection) and persistence (exposure/overdoing).

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# The Boom Bust Cycle

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8KyUmU0SIY>

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# How can we start doing what's important and valuable to us despite our pain?

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## Let's discuss the 3Ps

**Prioritising** activities in order of importance – we will learn with Deb how to identify our values and then we can explore our goals or targets.

**Planning** for each goal or each day/week of activities and trying to stick to 'the plan'.

**Pacing** - spreading out activities that you find difficult can be really beneficial – more about this later.

- Tell other people what you are doing and why
- Inform others of how they can help
- Build in rewards to help you keep going
- Be kind to yourself

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## More About Pacing:

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- Alternating between tasks of various types to avoid overloading one type of movement
- Doing a timed amount of activity irrespective of pain intensity – after working out your tolerance levels
- Breaking activities down into small, achievable stages and building in regular rest / relaxation periods
- Steadily increasing the amount, you do and the type of activity over time

## When might this be useful?

- Alternating between tasks of various types to avoid overloading one type of movement.



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**and this?**

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- Doing a timed amount of activity irrespective of pain intensity



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## and this?

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- Breaking activities down into small, achievable stages and building in regular rest / relaxation periods



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## There is no one way to pace

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Flexibility in context is crucial - we need to be flexible, problem solve and adapt

Questions to ask ourselves are:

- What ways can I use pacing and the 3 P's principles in my daily life?
- What are my goals when using these strategies?
- What might be the short-term effect of using this approach?
- If I needed to, could I change the strategies I use?
- Where is this approach workable and where is it not so workable?
- Or are there other ways to adapt and modify my activities?



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## Getting Started – What are my Tolerance Levels and Baselines

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In the **coming weeks** have a think about what you would be doing if pain was less of a problem for you.

Start by picking an activity that you want to do more of, something you value, e.g. walking, sitting, driving, craft activity etc.

**Next week** we will think about tolerances and baselines – this is that amount of the activity that you can do and know that the pain won't flare up.

In future weeks we will be thinking about values lead goal setting using your tolerances or base lines to guide you.

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## Try running a conversation like this through your mind or write it down:

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**How long can I walk before I flare up?**

I can walk for 30 mins but pay for it the next day.

**Can I walk for 20 mins without a flare up?**

No, I'll still pay for it.

**Can I walk for 10 mins without a flare up?**

Probably not, definitely not up hills.

**5 mins on a flat surface?**

Probably

**3 mins on a flat surface?**

Definitely. (This is a 'safe' starting point from which to grade your walking activity over time)

The baseline is low, but there is a 'safe' starting point that you can build up from over time.

# My Tolerance Levels and 3Ps

What activity would I like to do?		
Any restrictions		
	On a 'good day'	On a 'not-so-good-day'
Walking Tolerance		
Sitting Tolerance		
Standing Tolerance		
How would I use the 3Ps (plan, pace and prioritise) & my new tolerance knowledge to plan this activity differently?		

## Some handy tips:

- Try not to go over your 'good day' tolerances even on a very good day
- On a 'not-so-good-day' consider still working towards your tolerances as you now know it is not harmful. Consider scaling it back a little but still having a go.
- Give yourself permission to stop at your tolerance times and even consider stopping a few minutes before this to reduce the pain volume.
- Use timers or other measures to guide you.
- If you know there is a lot on, consider doing a little less so that you still have some energy and vitality left for another activity or another day.

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## How to pace activities

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- It's helpful to plan your baseline increases in advance
- Remember to only add a bit more, but not much more
- If your pain is super sensitive, be gentle and don't increase too many baselines at once.
- Go back a few baselines if you have a setback, illness, time not doing the activity
- Be aware of unhelpful negative thinking.
- Don't be tempted to break the plan and push on ie: on a good day try not to do more than your base line or go beyond your tolerance levels.

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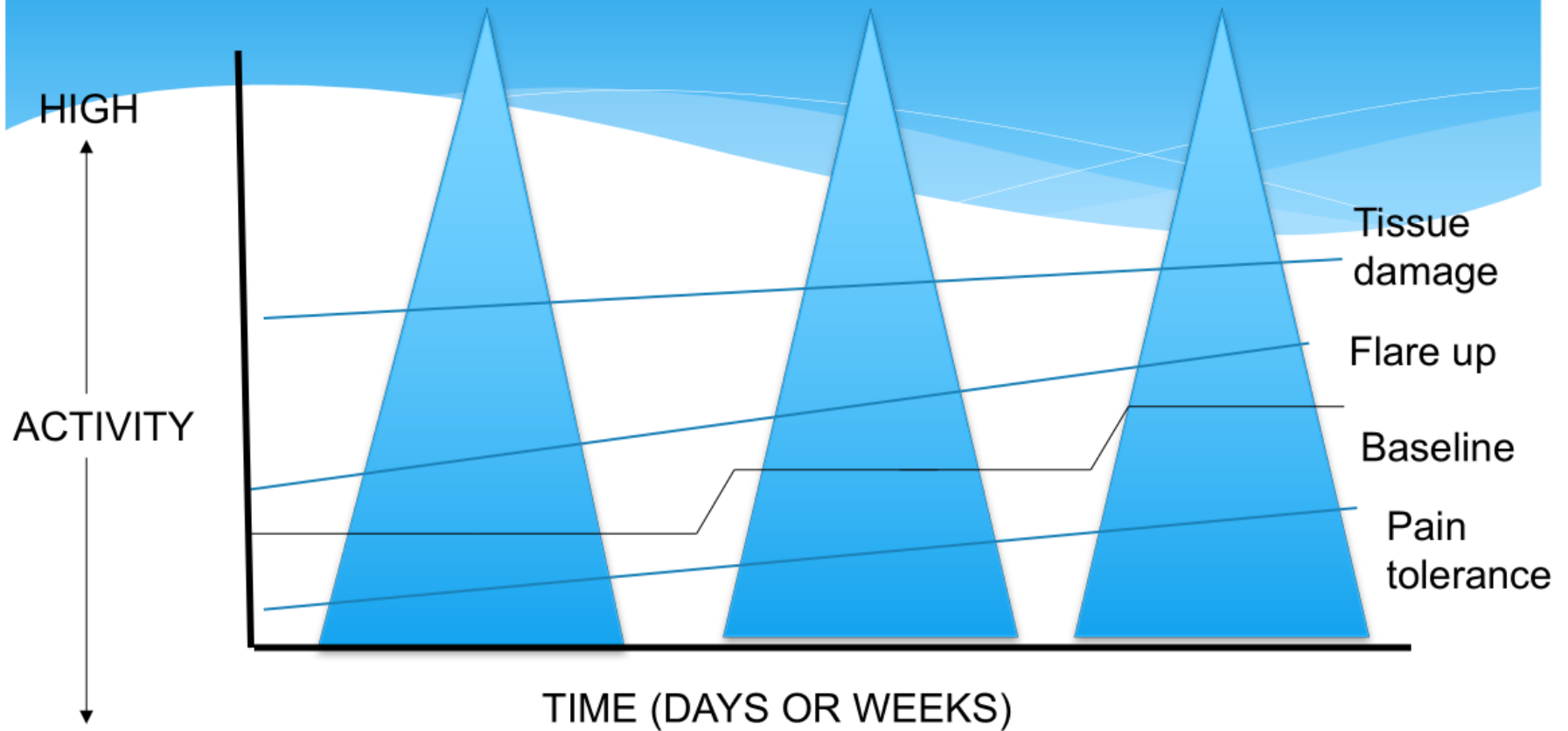
## Benefits of Pacing (and activity modification)

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With these methods, activities will initially take longer to achieve, but the benefits mean:

- Tasks can be completed without causing a 'flare up' of your condition
- Achieving activities can improve mood – feeling more productive
- Feeling more in control and less anxious
- Increased activity improves physical fitness and independence

# Pacing up your activity level (step by step)



BASELINE - increases in planned steps

FLARE UP- line gradually lifts because you are training the brain that this activity is safe

PAIN TOLERANCE - slowly lifts as the nervous system becomes less sensitive

TISSUE DAMAGE - becomes less likely as the tissues get stronger and fitter

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## Meaningful Activities (what do you value?)

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Now that we have thought of our tolerance levels/baselines and how to pace, plan and prioritise, have a think about some of the things you did before you had pain that you no longer do or wish you could do?

Do you find you are avoiding a lot of the activities that you once enjoyed or avoiding trying new ones?

Can you think of movements, thoughts, emotions or habits that have become linked with your pain?

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## Activities you may consider the 3 P's approach for may include:

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Sitting, walking, riding my bike

Walking the dog, resuming my work tasks

Cooking, vacuuming, doing the dishes

Going to the cinema, having dinner with friends

Playing with the kids, sleeping, shopping

In the coming sessions we will set some SMART GOALS that are driven by what you value.

We will consider our tolerance levels and base lines when we do this for a more self-soothing graded approach to activity.