



## Mental Flexibility

Experts in behaviour science view mental flexibility not as a personality trait, or a state of mind, but as a set of behaviours that can be changed.



People are usually flexible about some things and inflexible about others so, when you can think about flexibility as "something I do" and not "who I am," you will start to realize that you can make positive changes that may open up opportunities.

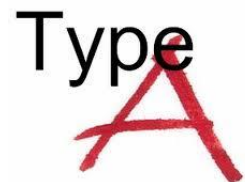
### 4 Ways To Develop Mental Flexibility:

1. Accept Your Behavioural History
2. Identify The Places Where You Can Compromise
3. Practice Flexible Actions
4. Set Small Goals for Mental *Stretching*

#### 1. Accept Your Behavioural History

In Session 3 Type-A characteristics were identified.

These personality traits are not inherited but are predominantly learned behaviours which work for you and that you have honed over the years. The reason that you've developed so many 'take-charge' and perfectionist tendencies is because, throughout your life, you've received lots of powerful praise for this behaviour or it has got you the targets you wanted. These behaviours are not wrong, but can develop some inflexibility in your approach.



#### 2. Identify The Places Where You Can Compromise

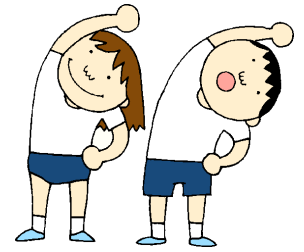
In order to become more flexible, it helps to first recognize and then make a note of situations where you are most frequently inflexible. Observing your own inflexible behaviour lets you notice those situations where you could sometimes stand back a bit and let others take the lead, or maybe, try to see things from the other person's point of view. You're not trying to change your behaviour, just become aware of where you could opt to be less rigid. Jot down these situations for future reference



### 3. Practice Flexible Actions

You may know that stretching after physical workouts as well as regular practice can all help your body to become more flexible. This same philosophy also applies to your mental behaviours.

If you find that you are always the one to do the tasks, e.g. stock the fridge, clean up (because no one does it as well as you do!), or you can't stop working (either at your place of work or home) then try **stretching** your behaviour to once or twice a week and try a new way of interacting with your environment. Ask a family member or work colleague to support you until it becomes easier to let go and become more flexible.



### 4. Set Small Goals for Mental Stretching

Once you've spent some time observing and tracking your inflexible behaviours and you've started to practice being flexible in certain situations throughout your day, the next step is to set small goals for mental *stretching*. Great runners set weekly mileage goals when they're training for a marathon. Successful dieters set reasonable targets for steady weight loss each week. If you want to keep up your motivation and see change quickly, choose how many times you'll be flexible throughout your day or week, write down your goal and put it up somewhere you can see it every day.



#### How Will You Know Whether Your Habits Are Really Improving?

- Make sure to track your practice.
- Jot it down in your planner.
- Text or email yourself a quick note.
- Make a chart and stick it on the fridge/cupboard.



As you see your behaviours moving toward that goal line each week, you'll know that you're moving toward a lasting change which will support your wellbeing.

#### Reward Your Choice to Become More Flexible

Because patterns of inflexible behaviour develop over long periods of time, changing them is a big challenge. During this period of change make use of some extra incentives to keep you motivated.



- Give yourself a treat, a back massages, theatre trip, bunch of fresh cut flowers, something that will make you feel good.
- Using the goals you've set for your mental stretching, build in rewards for sticking to your program each week.
- Adding in incentives will help you start to rewrite your own behavioural history helping you to be flexible instead of being perfect.

#### Learn That Failure Is Great Feedback

- Becoming more flexible is a great wellbeing goal.
- It takes time to learn to let go and to share any of your worries with others.
- As you try more flexible actions each day, notice some of the pressures being lifted from your life.
- There will be days when your inflexibility returns and that's OK for a short while, because now you've got the strategies to go back and stretch those mental muscles!



By increasing your mental flexibility, you become a better listener, a keener observer, a more skilled thinker and a more effective problem solver.