

**NAME:** Leaky Canoe

**INTENTION:** This exercise employs a helpful metaphor to create and explore creative hopelessness

**MATERIALS:**

1. Worksheet
2. Pens / Pencils
3. White board for group discussion

**SCRIPT:** (Written instructions for Group Leader)

Provide worksheet. Read or ask client to read the metaphor. With a group I will usually focus on one column at a time and ask clients to suggest responses.

***So, destinations might include the kinds of things you want to do in life (raise kids, go to Paris, get a college degree). It might also be about personal qualities you would like to develop in yourself (creativity, compassion, or playfulness). When you think about your “best life” what kinds of things would you want to be included?***

***Leaks are the thoughts and feelings that distract you from moving towards your destination. What are these for you?***

***Patches are the things we do that give us some temporary relief from our leaks but at the cost of moving us further away from our destination. What are your favorite patches.*** It is helpful to be validating, working to normalize all responses – we can understand the logic of cutting or suicide as desperate attempts to patch a leak.

**DISCUSSION:** Possible questions or topics to address

- Rather than to complete the activity and then process at the end, this activity offers opportunities to process, validate, normalize, and illustrate concepts in response to the responses that arise.
- Destinations
  - When you look at this list of destinations, how much have you been paddling in these directions?
  - What has stolen your focus?
- Leaks
  - Have people had these leaks before in life?
  - What typically happens? Do they come and go, get bigger and smaller?
  - Do the leaks change weather you do something or not?
- Patches
  - Validate & normalize patches – we can understand the logic of cutting or suicide as desperate attempts to patch a leak.
  - Notice that actions are not inherently patches
    - I can watch TV that gets me closer to my destination or use it as a patch.
    - I can use therapy or medication as a means of getting to a destination or as a patch.
  - Patches are not inherently “bad”
    - Sometimes they are the best we can do while we get our bearings, they just aren’t much of a lifestyle.
    - This is the problem with “symptom management”. Even if symptoms go away, people are often left feeling empty or unfulfilled if they are not moving towards a destination.

# WHEN IS A SOLUTION A PROBLEM?

Anger, sadness, anxiety, despair, and pain are not problems; they are a normal part of being human. When we treat thoughts, feelings, and body sensations like problems we often find ways to “fix them” that come at a high cost to our lives. Many times our “solutions” are worse than our “problems”.

It’s like patching a leaky canoe with a patch that works for awhile and then makes the leak worse. Patching a leak sounds like a good idea, and at times it seems to be working. However, over time you notice that the water in your canoe keeps getting deeper. As you spend more and more energy trying to fix the leak, you spend less and less time paddling your canoe. You may even forget where you were going. Your life becomes an endless attempt to stay ahead of the leak as you float aimlessly about, pushed this way and that by the wind and waves, but never really get any closer to the life you want to live.

Use this metaphor and the table below to identify your “DESTINATIONS, LEAKS, & PATCHES”.

<b>DESTINATIONS</b>	<b>LEAKS</b>	<b>PATCHES</b>
Where do you want to go in your life? What kind of person do you want to be? What do you want to accomplish or experience while you are alive?	What uncontrollable thoughts, feelings, or issues distract your attention from focusing on your destination?	What do you do to make yourself feel more comfortable at the cost of getting further away from the life you want to be living?