

**NAME:** Arm's Length

**INTENTION:** This exercise is creates a helpful metaphor to explore the repertoire limiting consequence of experiential avoidance.

**MATERIALS:**

1. Object with some weight, ideally something that is symbolic of issues a client is avoiding.

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

Show your client or a volunteer in the group an object. Ask: How heavy do you think this is (wait for some estimates – a pound or two). ***I want you to hold this*** (hand client the object) ***at arm's length. Imagine that you cannot let go of it, but you want to keep it as far away from you as possible... How heavy is it now? What if you needed to do this for a whole hour... what about a whole day... how heavy would it be then?***

***Holding the object at arm's length, I want you to:*** suggest some functional tasks (**turn off the lights, move a chair, shake hands, wipe off a table, wash your hands, play chess**).

- Very often as the person performs these tasks you will observe them bring the object closer to their body. If not, you can ask: ***What could you do to make this object easier to carry?***

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

- In life we all experience things that can get heavy to carry. The weight of things is often related to how we carry them. In this example what made the object heavier?
- Are there issues that you carry in your life that you would prefer to keep at arm's length? In what ways do you do this (avoiding, suppression, etc).
  - In the beginning getting some distance from these issues often feels like a relief. What happens over time?
- In this example, what happened when you had to do things (turn off the lights, move a chair, shake hands, wipe off a table, wash your hands, play chess)?
  - Does holding your issues at arm's length ever interfere with activities in your daily life?
- This is a common issue we trade short-term relief for long-term costs to our function; we live smaller lives so we don't have to come into contact with difficult thoughts and feelings. When you look at your life what have the long-term costs been? What kinds of things have you given up, pulled out of, or let slide in order to keep your feelings at arm's length?

**EXAMPLES:**

- This activity can be individualized in many creative ways. For example, a student who was avoiding homework assignments to reduce his anxiety can use school books as the object.