



# “New Normal” after Cancer Treatment

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# Normal Emotional Reactions



Anger

Denial

Depression

Shock

Guilt

Sadness

Fear

Acceptance

Existential

# Existential Concerns

## Dynamic trajectory

- managing the diagnosis,
- ups and downs of treatment
- recovery after treatment

Both patients and caregivers express desire to find meaning

- comfort in their religious faith
- cope with physical and health changes
- savor every remaining moment while alive

Higher levels of existential well-being (e.g., less fears associated with death) report better quality of life (QoL) and lower emotional distress





# Fear of Recurrence

- 22-99% of cancer patients reported moderate to high FCR
- Fear is an emotion
- The fear of recurrence can be real and is entirely normal
- When we experience fear our brain can go on to automatic pilot which was designed to keep us safe
- Responses can include: fight, flight, freeze





# Risk Factors

- Lack of space to have conversations about concerns and coping after treatment
- Hyperawareness of physical changes can lead to intense fear and anxiety
- Reduced sense of control, autonomy, or choice during recovery after treatment
- Lack of access to supports to process meaning, spiritual, or philosophical inquiries

# Foster Psychological Safety

Feeling held by others around use

- Validation
- Positive support vs. toxic positivity
- Authentic negative emotions

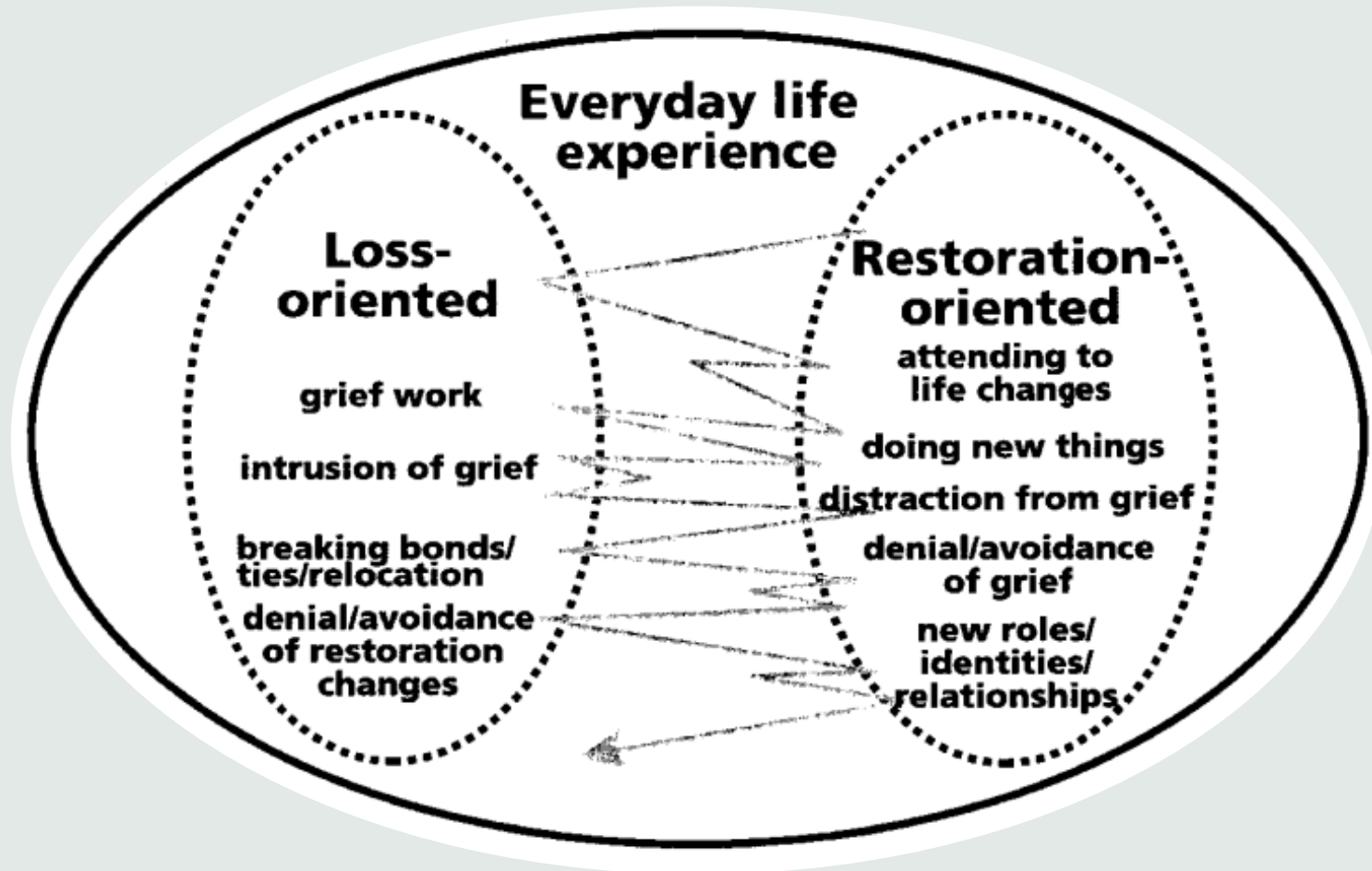
## “stress inoculation”

Those with experiences of successfully managing past stressful situations in childhood (e.g., death, illness of a loved one, family relocation, and loss of friendship) are more resistant to adulthood stressors



# Dual Process Model

*“Mastering the tricky art of juggling changes in health while continuing to live”*



# Take Time to Reflect on:

What brings you:

- Joy
- Hope
- Sense of purpose
- Sense of meaning or fulfillment

Tell your doctors about your hobbies, etc. and let them know at follow-up visit if you have been able to resume them

Social Support Network

- Who listens without judgement?
- Join a support group
- Mental health and/or spiritual support







# Benefit of Faith

Also known as:

- spirituality
- moral compass
- Purpose
- legacy or generativity

“I’m not sure where I’m going or what I’m here for. But my belief is strong that I belong here for a reason, that I have something to do and I will find it. There *is* a reason that I’m here.”

“We believe we’re all connected and that there’s, a reason for this.”

“The soul never dies. The body is just like the jacket you are putting on.”

# Internal Locus of Control & Self- Efficacy

“When you think about it what other choice is there but to hope? We have two options, medically and emotionally: give up or **Fight Like Hell.**”



**I Control**  
(Internal)

**LOCUS OF CONTROL**



**Others Control**  
(External)



# Cognitive Reappraisal

“It is just bronchitis, as long as it isn’t pneumonia, you don’t have to worry but it is still annoying because it is a weakness...but at least it’s curable.”\*

"You know I don’t think about [relapse or another cancer]. If it happens, I know it could always happen but...I try not to think about it....I try to keep a positive attitude about it and go for today and worry about tomorrow when it comes.” \*



# Benefit Finding & Post-traumatic Growth

“I don’t think that I would have the attitude that I have. ...I think that totally came from that experience...I’m so optimistic, so positive and willing to live for now.”\*

“Taught me how to face adversity and not feel sorry for myself, and just fight and be strong, and it just gave me a good example.”

“I can cope with this, I can deal with this, and in a way that’s been empowering for me....I’ve had to rise to the challenge.” \*\*

Personal Strength

Close Relationships

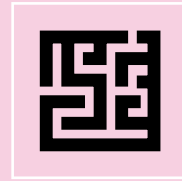
Spiritual Development

New Possibilities

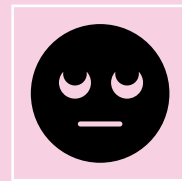
Greater Appreciation for Life



# Coping Styles



**"problem-focused"**  
working to solve the  
problem



**"emotion-focused"**  
accepting and dealing  
with emotions

# Psychotherapy

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Meaning Centered Psychotherapy

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

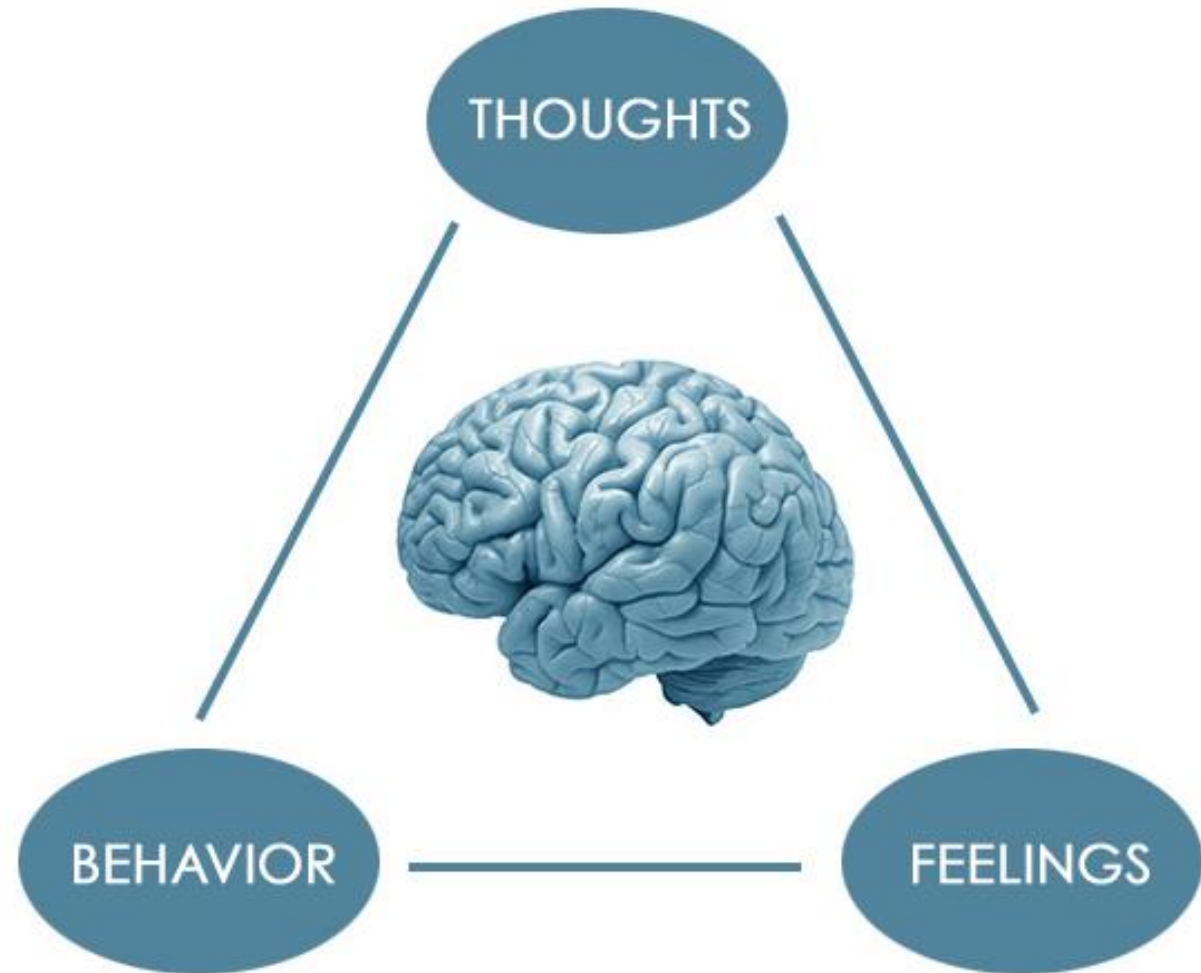
–Viktor Frankl, in *Man’s Search for Meaning*





# Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

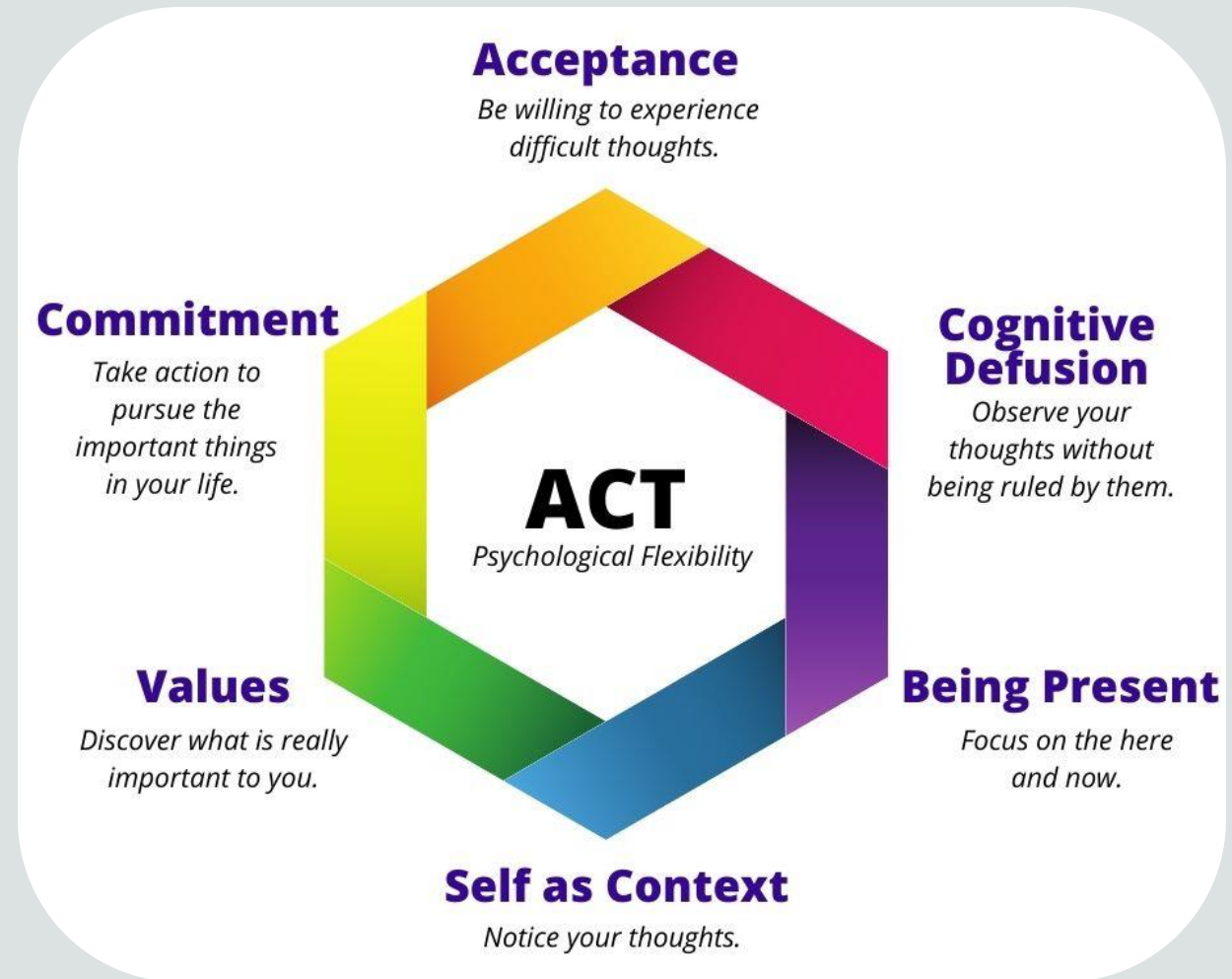
Modify thoughts and behaviors to impact mental health and emotions



# Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)

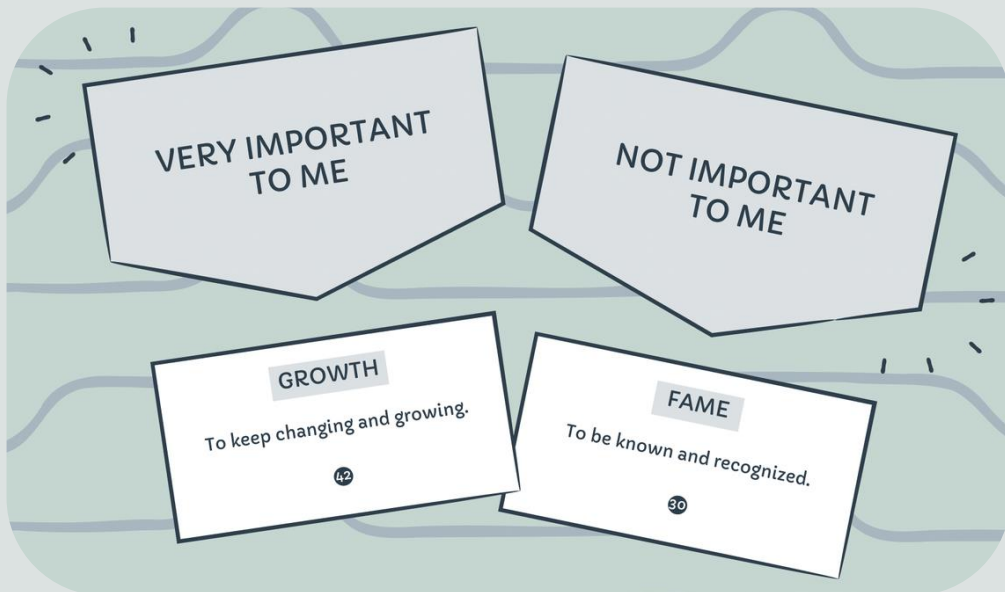
- Focus on values-oriented thoughts and actions
- Strategies: experiential, defusion, mindfulness, and relaxation

“A skilled wood worker doesn’t avoid mistakes, she knows how to fix them, compensate and embrace them”



# Mindfulness & Value Exploration

Mindfulness practices can help ground you in the present moment and ease negative emotions



## UCLA Mindful App



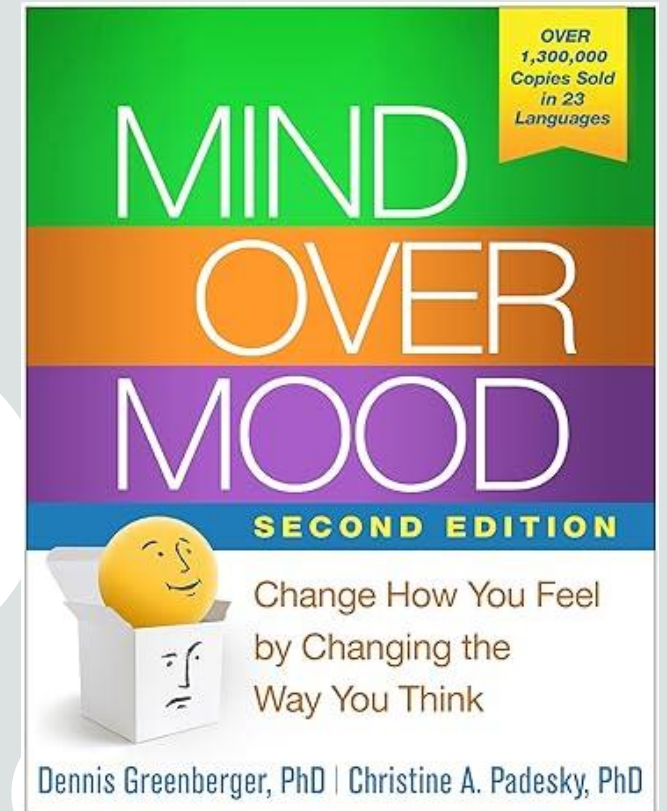
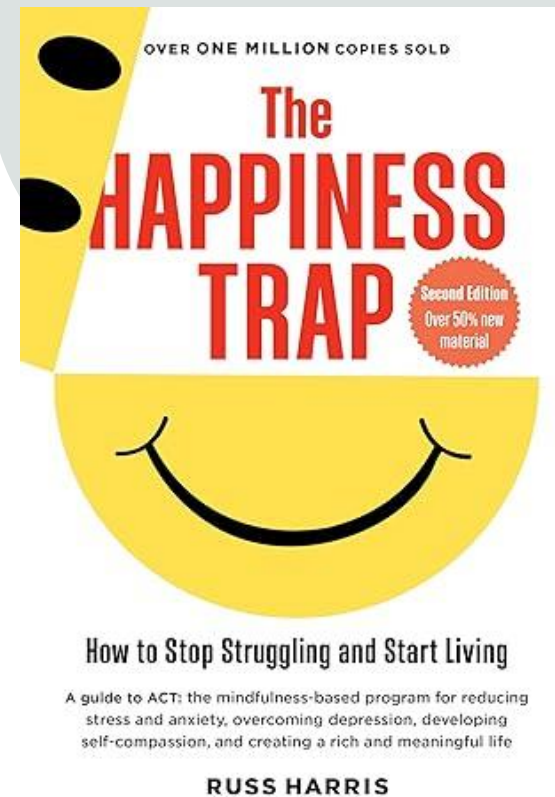
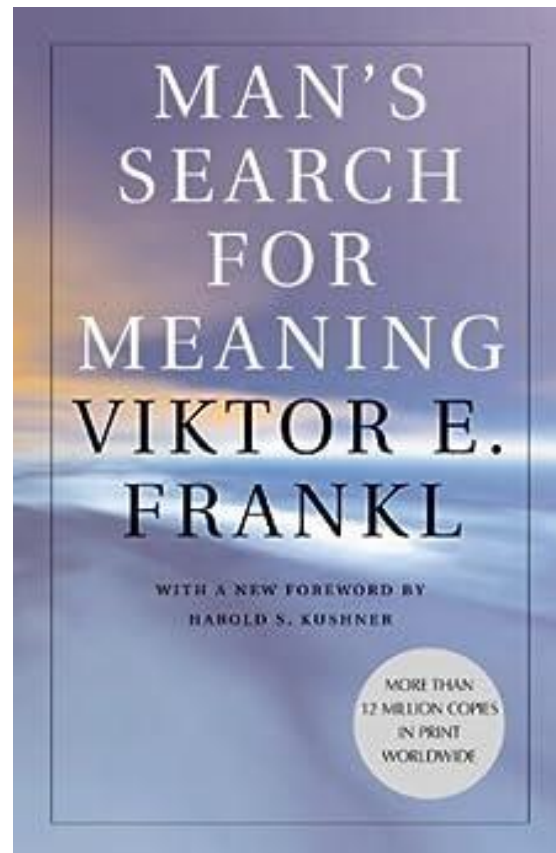
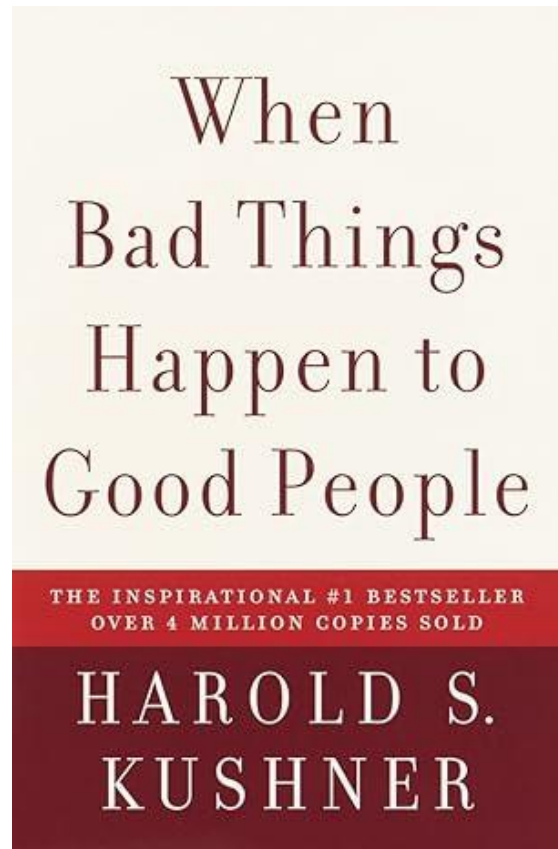


# Meaning Centered Psychotherapy

- **Focus on meaning** – the search is often more important than actually arriving at meaning
- **‘moving from ways of doing to ways of being’**  
Emphasize the importance of our ability to shift from one source of meaning to another
- **Choosing our attitude towards existential feelings**

Topic	
<b>1</b>	Concepts and sources of meaning
<b>2</b>	Cancer and meaning
<b>3</b>	Historical sources of meaning (legacy: past)
<b>4</b>	Historical sources of meaning (legacy: present and future)
<b>5</b>	Attitudinal sources of meaning: encountering life's limitations
<b>6</b>	Creative sources of meaning: engaging in life fully
<b>7</b>	Experiential sources of meaning: connecting with life
<b>8</b>	Transitions: reflections and hopes for the future

# Recommended Reading



# Community Resources

**National LGBT Cancer Network**  
cancer-network.org

**LGBT Cancer Project**  
lgbtcancer.org





# QUESTIONS?

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