

[00:00:00.570] - Chris Johnstone

The central shift this course aims to support is from being disengaged, discouraged, defeated or disillusioned towards feeling more engaged, encouraged, enlivened and empowered to take action for positive changes you hope for. I think of this as a shift from D to E - whatever your starting point, we're looking at what helps you move in this direction or maintain and nourish your energy and engagement if you're already at the E end of the scale.

[00:00:32.700] - Chris Johnstone

That doesn't mean we have to be up at this top end all the time. In any change process, you start from where you are - you feel how you feel, however, that is. If you do feel discouraged or at a low ebb, do you hope to find and nourish your energy, commitment and ability to act? Active hope training is about how we can be active in support of that hope. A key part of that involves identifying what gets in the way, looking at what might block our response or hold us back.

[00:01:06.930] - Chris Johnstone

And then we'll focus on what helps us counter that, what nourishes and builds and cultivates the kind of response-ability you and I might hope for. So what gets in the way? A tool we'll use a lot in this course is the sentence starter - or open sentence - where we speak or write the first part of a sentence seeing this as like a springboard and then seeing what words naturally follow that, for example: "I'd like to do something about..." Or: "an issue I want to address is..." These sentence starters invite you to name the issue or issues you'd like to address, then to look at what gets in the way, see what follows the words: "But what I find hard is..."

[00:01:57.420] - Chris Johnstone

Here's Patricia from Spain, who on a recent course with me described what she finds hard when facing her concerns about the world:

[00:02:05.700] - Patricia Canas

When facing my concerns for the world, what I find hard is the feeling of powerlessness. As well is, sometimes, many times, things that happen in the world feels and looks so huge that it's like 'what can I do myself? I'm just a little person and what can I change?'

[00:02:27.900] - Chris Johnstone

We're going to be looking at several of the blocking factors in the way of positive change. What Patricia is describing here is one of the biggest, the feeling that we're so small and the problems are so large that we can't do anything. Indeed, the Mental Health Foundation, in a survey asking over 2000 people how they felt about world problems, found that powerlessness was by far the commonest response, felt by more than half the people they surveyed. Each of us will have a sense of what's within our power, what we can do, and also what's beyond our power, what's beyond our ability.

[00:03:08.400] - Chris Johnstone

When we look at issues that seem beyond our power to do much about the experience of powerlessness can pull our mood down and be a factor in depression. That's one of the reasons why many people just turn away. This closing down of our response is reinforced by common sayings like there's no point thinking about things you can't change if it's beyond your control, just let it go. I wonder what might have happened if Nelson Mandela or the Suffragettes had thought that way? To find a way of changing something, you need to give it your attention. Even if it's frustrating when you can't see how to move forward, if you look for a way, you're more likely to find one. There's a deeply important insight here, and it's about the sequence of learning new skills. Before you can do something, it often seems beyond you. One way of thinking is to paint a picture of yourself a particular way where you accept that this is just how things are and some things are beyond you, and you just stay within that picture of how things seem. You might even think thoughts like the idea of me doing that is not in the picture. It's just not going to happen.

[00:04:29.760] - Chris Johnstone

But reality isn't a fixed picture. It's more like a movie film of constantly changing frames. Have you ever had the experience of feeling defeated, of not believing you can do something yet at a later point

in time, finding that you can? If we feel defeated at one point in time, we can take on the project of training ourselves, seeking out the skills, information and resources that help us grow our ability.

[00:05:00.550] - Chris Johnstone

Psychologists refer to this way of thinking as a "growth mindset". In this course, we're applying the growth mindset to our ability to make a difference in the world so that whatever your starting point, you can nourish and cultivate your capacity to contribute to positive change. I know from my own experience that it's possible to have big shifts. I've also seen that happen again and again with people who have come on courses I've run. An outcome study I carried out years ago showed that with this sort of training, people not only felt strengthened in their belief that they could make a difference, they also found this deeply healing as being able to contribute to positive change makes our lives more meaningful and satisfying.

[00:05:49.490] - Chris Johnstone

So let's look further at the skills, insights and practices that can help us move this way. Whenever you face a blocking factor, consider the shift in perspective from: "this is how things are" - where you see things as a fixed picture - to: "this is how things are at the moment" - where you see reality is more like a sequence of constantly changing frames.

[00:06:14.600] - Chris Johnstone

In Chapter two of Active Hope, Joanna Macy and I describe three threads that you can follow that help when you're struggling. When I pick up a thread, it gives me something to follow that takes me on a journey somewhere different. It moves things on. The first thread we're going to look at is seeing the situation you're in as similar to an adventure story. These often start from difficult places where the main character or characters feel defeated. It might even seem hopeless, but there's something they deeply hope for and they're active in heading towards that. If they don't know how to proceed, the next step is to go on a quest of learning, of seeking out what might help them find a way. In my quest of creating this course, I interviewed people and asked them the question: "when facing your concerns about world issues, what do you find helpful?" Here's what Molly Brown, co-author, with Joanna Macy, of the book "Coming Back to Life", had to say:

[00:07:20.150] - Molly Brown

I'm so small and the problems are so big. The flipside of that is - I have a mantra that I say a lot to myself - "I can't do everything". Now, that sounds like a negative instead of a positive... You're supposed to be all affirmations and all, but for me, it's very comforting. It's like, no, I can't do everything. So what's mine to do? And what's Chris's to do? And what's Georges to do? And what's Mary Lou's to do? And, you know, it's like, all I can do is my part. And having the humility and the lack of grandiosity that lets me say, OK, that's all I can do, but I'm going to do it.

[00:08:09.950] - Chris Johnstone

I love these questions: "what's mine to do?" And: "what's yours to do?" Each time we play our part in supporting our hopes for the future, we can think of that as offering our gift of active hope where that gift is our contribution to the process of making our hopes more likely. Every time we take an action or make a choice that supports our hopes for the future, we're offering a gift of active hope. Some gifts might seem very small parts in a larger process, like giving our attention to an issue that's painful to look at or giving a damn and caring about what happens.

[00:08:51.590] - Chris Johnstone

Also giving time to consider what we might be able to do and giving our support to those around us in their process of finding what's theirs to do. There are skills that can help us find, develop and offer our gifts. Together, we're going on a quest to more deeply understand both what might hold us back and also what might help us counter that.