

## A8. Pushing Against the Folder Exercise

I invite you to take your folder in both hands. I want you to imagine this folder represents all the difficult thoughts, feelings, memories, and sensations you've been struggling with for so long. And I'd like you to take hold of your folder and grip it as tightly as you can. [Pause.]

Now, I'd like you to hold your folder up in front of your face so you can't see me anymore—bring it up so close to your face that it almost touches your nose. Imagine that this is what it's like to be completely caught up with these thoughts, feelings, or memories.

Now, just notice. What's it like trying to have a conversation or to connect with me while you're all caught up in your thoughts and feelings? Do you feel connected with me, or engaged with me? Are you able to read the expressions on my face? See what I'm doing?

And what's your view of the room like, while you're all caught up in this stuff? [Pause.]

So, while you're completely absorbed in all this stuff, you're missing out on a lot. You're disconnected from the world around you, and you're disconnected from me. Notice, too, that while you're holding on tightly to this stuff, you can't do the things that make your life work. Check it out—grip the folder as tightly as you possibly can.

Can you really connect with loved ones while you're caught up with this stuff? Can you do your job properly?

Now, without letting go of your folder, I want you to try and push it away. Try to get rid of all those difficult thoughts and feelings.

Keep pushing. You can't stand these feelings; you want them to go away; push harder.

Notice how much effort and energy it requires trying to make these thoughts and feelings go away. [Pause.]

So here you are, trying very hard to push away all these painful thoughts and feelings. You've probably tried distracting yourself with TV, music, computers, drink, avoiding people, avoiding work, so forth, and so on.

You've been doing this for years, just pushing and pushing. Are those painful thoughts and feelings going anywhere? [Pause.]

You're able to keep them at arm's length, but what's the cost to you? How does it feel in your shoulders?

While you are doing this, pushing your folder away, would you be able to connect with your friends and family, cook dinner, do your job effectively, or drive your bus of life? Do you think it would be easy to have a conversation and really connect with the other person while you're doing this? [Pause.]

So, trying to push all those feelings away is eating up a lot of effort and energy. This is what you've been doing for so long now, trying to get rid of unpleasant thoughts and feelings. And yet, they keep showing up; they are still having an effect on your life.

Now, rest the folder on your lap for a moment. Just let these thoughts and feelings sit there on your lap. [Pause five seconds.]

How does that feel? Isn't it a lot less effort?

Those painful, distracting thoughts and feelings are still there. But notice the difference: now you can hug someone you love, cook dinner, or drive your bus of life. It's not draining you or tiring you out. [Pause.]

Isn't that easier than constantly trying to push these feelings away or being so caught up with them? [Mime pushing the folder away and holding it up to your nose.]

The difficult feelings are still there. And, of course, you don't want them; who would want all these painful thoughts and feelings? But notice how this stuff is having much less of an impact on you. Now I'm sure in the ideal world you'd like to do this [mime throwing the folder on the floor].

But here's the thing: you've been trying to do that for years. You've clearly put a lot of time, effort, and money into trying to get rid of these thoughts and feelings. And yet, despite all that effort, they're still showing up. They're still here today.

One of the goals of these workshops is to teach you how to be open to experiencing difficult thoughts and feelings instead of fighting with them or trying to avoid them.