



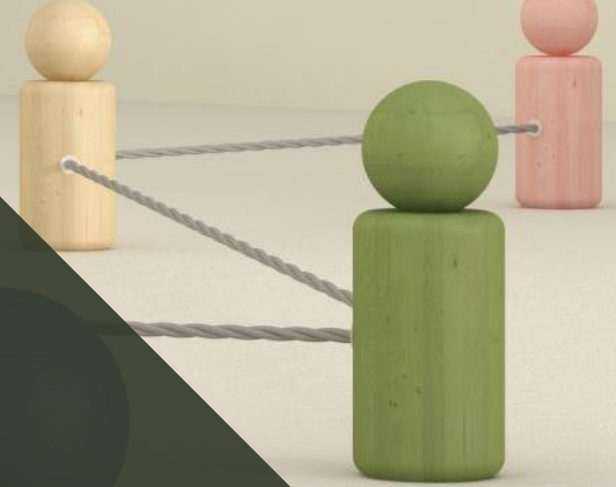
Welcome to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy!

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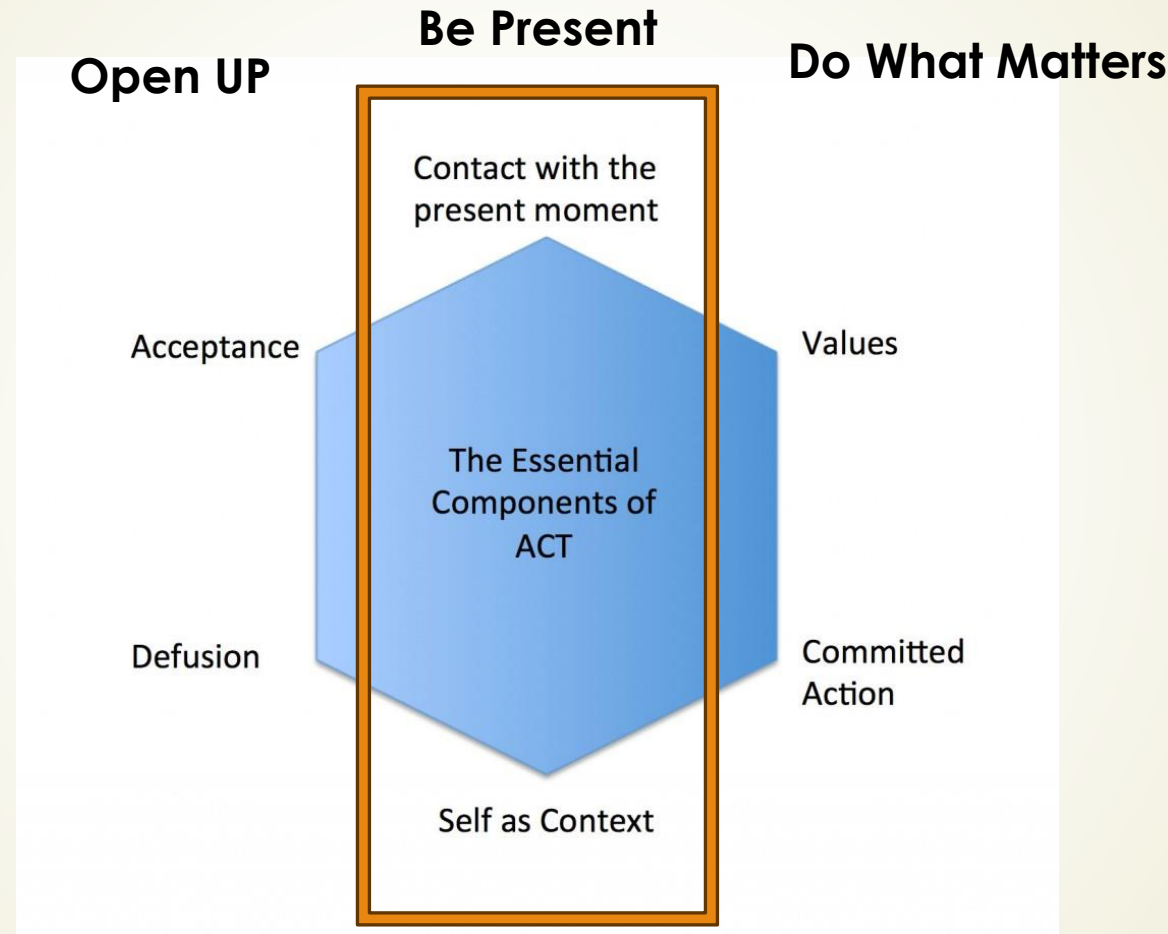
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Session 3: Be Here Now: Present Moment Awareness and Self as Context

1. Describe Present Moment Awareness and Self as Context and their underlying processes.
2. Identify strategies/interventions for each process.
3. Experiential practice with each process.



Psychological Flexibility: The Hexaflex



Be Present

Open Up

Psychological
Flexibility

Do What
Matters

Opening Up

- Able to separate, unhook, detach from thoughts and feelings?
- Able to make room for thoughts and feelings, and allow them to be there?

Being Present

- Able to engage fully in here-and-now experience? Ability for task-focused attention?
- Aware of own thoughts and feelings? Able to empathize? Able to take perspective on self and self-story?

Doing What Matters

- Able to be clear about and connected with values?
- Able to take and sustain values-guided action?
- Able to set goals? Sufficient skills to achieve goals?



Contact with the present moment/Present moment awareness

- ▶ Processes:

- ▶ Engage/observe the “here” and “now”
- ▶ Incorporate a curious and non-judgmental stance
- ▶ The “present” is the **only** place we have control and can take action – spend as much time here as possible and return here as often as needed for coping

- ▶ Common challenges:


- ▶ Avoidance of the present: communication use of avoidance strategies, etc.
- ▶ Defer to the past (“then”); Defer to the future (“there”)
- ▶ Biases toward mindfulness or meditation – toward the practice itself and one’s ability to do it

- ▶ Process examples:

- ▶ Mindfulness exercises – very flexible in the what, where, when, how!
- ▶ Deep breathing
- ▶ 5 senses exercise
- ▶ Ice cube
- ▶ Engage as often as possible in session to strengthen the “mindfulness muscle” and encourage the same at home



Mindful exercises: general steps

- ▶ Choose an activity with your client – ideally one that is easily accessible
 - ▶ Walking, cooking, washing dishes, brushing teeth, listening to music
 - ▶ Identify the sensory experiences that are available
 - ▶ Sensory experiences are the connections with the “here and now”
 - ▶ Clarify the objective of the exercise
 - ▶ Prepare for distraction and compassionately return to the exercise
 - ▶ Guide through an example in session
 - ▶ Connect with values
 - ▶ Set a specific goal – one time or repeated
- 



In-session mini-practice

- ▶ “Can we pause and notice what just happened here?”
- ▶ “As you think about/discuss ‘X’, what is happening in your body right now?
Can you place your hand/draw your attention to that place
- ▶ “What is coming up for you right now?”
 - ▶ In your body? On your mind?



Mindful Music

Appalachia Waltz

Yo-Yo Ma, Edgar Meyer, Mark O'Connor

Self as Context (The Observing Self)

- ▶ Processes:
 - ▶ There is an "I" that is experiencing "X" versus "I am 'X'"
 - ▶ Observing self versus Thinking Self
 - ▶ Requires present moment awareness to "observe with non-judgment"
 - ▶ Cultivate acceptance and defusion (stay tuned!)
- ▶ Common Challenge:
 - ▶ Self as *content*; Conceptualized self
 - ▶ Seeing self as *defined by "X"* versus rather than seeing self as *holding space for "X"*
- ▶ Process examples (very metaphor heavy...):
 - ▶ Sky/Weather metaphor
 - ▶ Conference table metaphor (may be similar to IFS and "parts")
 - ▶ [Stage show metaphor](#)
 - ▶ Dropping Anchor



In-session mini-practice

- ▶ “There’s ‘X’ and there’s a part of you noticing ‘X.’”
- ▶ “Can you breathe deeply, and observe yourself breathing?”
- ▶ “I wonder if we can take a moment and look at this like a curious scientist, observing what is happening and taking some notes...”



Sky/Weather Script

“The observing self is like the sky, while thoughts, sensations, and images are like the weather. The weather constantly changes throughout the day. And whatever it is, the sky always has room for it. No matter how bad the weather, no matter how violent the thunderstorm, no matter how severe the sun, the sky cannot be damaged in any way. Even hurricanes and tsunamis, which may wreak death and destruction on the land—even they are unable to hurt the sky. And of course, as time passes, the weather will change again and again, while the sky remains as pure and clear as ever.”

Dropping Anchor

Dropping Anchor: A Script

In the ideal scenario, before starting this exercise, you've asked the client what she's experiencing and she's been able to tell you what thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories are showing up; this means you can refer to them specifically. For example: "There's a very painful memory showing up right now, and a lot of sadness and a lot of anger." But if the client is too distressed to speak, or unable or unwilling to say what thoughts and feelings are present, then you can refer to them with non-specific terms such as "pain" or "painful thoughts and feelings", or "emotional storm", as in the script that follows.

- **There's something very painful or difficult showing up for you** right now. I can see how much you're struggling with it; how difficult it is for you. And I really want to help you handle it. So please would you follow my instructions?
- Okay. First, just see if you can push your feet hard into the floor. Push them down. That's it. Feel the ground beneath you.
- Now sit forward in your chair, and straighten your back. Feel the chair beneath you; notice your back supporting you.
- Now slowly press your fingertips together, and as you do that, gently move your elbows and your shoulders.
- Feel your arms moving, all the way from your fingers to shoulder blades.
- Take a moment to **acknowledge there's a lot of pain here** that you're struggling with ... you didn't ask for it ... but here it is ... and it's challenging and it's difficult and you want it to go away, and yet it's not going ... Silently acknowledge to yourself what type of pain it is ... For example, say to yourself "Here's sadness" or "Here's anxiety" or "Here's a painful memory" (*If the therapist knows what the pain is, he can specifically mention it.*)

- Now notice that **as well as this pain**, there's also a body around that pain – a body that you can move and control.
- Straighten your back again, and notice your whole body now – your hands, feet, arms, legs – gently move them, and feel them moving ... Have a good stretch ... Notice your muscles stretching ... Press your feet down and feel the floor.
- Now also look around the room – up down, and side to side - and notice five things that you can see.
- And also notice three or four things you can hear – sounds coming from me or you or the room around you
- And also notice you and I, working here together, as a team.
- So notice, **there's something very painful here** that you're struggling with, and at the same time see if you can also notice your body in the chair ... and gently move that body, have a stretch... that's it, take control of your arms and legs.
- And also notice the room around you.
- And also notice you and I here, working together as a team.

This goes for as long as needed until the client is grounded. The therapist brings the exercise to an end by asking questions such as:

- Do you notice any difference now? Are you less caught up in the emotional storm? Are you less hooked by these difficult thoughts and feelings? Are you less 'swept away' by the storm? Are you less 'pushed around' or "jerked around by these feelings?
- Is it easier for you to engage with me, to be present, to focus?
- Do you have more control over your actions now - over your arms and legs and mouth? Check it out, move your arms and legs, have a stretch; do you notice you have control?

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Case Conceptualization

What does the client want from therapy/coaching? What does he/she describe as the main problem(s)?

Are there any external barriers (as opposed to psychological barriers) to a rich and full life - e.g. legal, social, medical, financial, occupational problems that will require active problem solving and/or skills training?

UNWORKABLE ACTION
What is the client doing that makes his life worse, or keeps her stuck, or worsens his problems, or inhibits her growth, or prevents healthy solutions, or worsens health, or damages relationships etc?

What people, places, events, activities, situations and challenges is the client avoiding or escaping (e.g. withdrawing from, quitting, procrastinating, or staying away from)?

FUSION: (Include examples of specific thoughts, as well as of processes such as worrying, etc.)
PAST & FUTURE: (rumination, worrying, fantasizing, blaming, predicting the worst, reliving old hurts, idealizing the past or the future, flashbacks, 'if only ...', why did it happen? etc.)

SELF-DESCRIPTION: (self-judgments, self-limiting ideas about 'who I am' or 'what I can and can't do')

REASONS: (reasons the client gives for why she can't, won't or shouldn't change, or why his life can't be improved)

RULES: (about how myself, others, life should be: look for key words such as: 'should', 'have to', 'must', 'ought', 'right', 'wrong', 'always', 'never', 'can't because', 'won't until', 'shouldn't unless' etc)

JUDGMENTS: (mostly these will be negative, but sometimes positive; may be about anyone or anything: other people, oneself, one's job, one's body, one's thoughts and feelings, the past, the future, or even life itself)

OTHER: (any other unhelpful cognitions: beliefs, ideas, attitudes, assumptions, etc. Include anything the client says that upsets, annoys, confuses or scares you, or makes you feel stuck.)

EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE: (Private experiences the client is trying to avoid, get rid of, or is unwilling to have)

THOUGHTS/IMAGES/MEMORIES: _____ FEELINGS/ SENSATIONS/URGES: _____

VALUES & COMMITTED ACTION
IMPORTANT LIFE DOMAINS: (What domains of life seem most important to this client - e.g. work, study, health, parenting, intimate relationship, friends, family, spirituality, community, environment)?

VALUES: (What values seem important within those domains?)

GOALS & ACTIONS: (What values-congruent goals and activities does the client: a) already have; and b) want to pursue?)

NEED FOR SKILLS-TRAINING: (What important skills does the client lack or fail to use e.g. problem solving, goal setting, self-soothing, assertiveness, communication, conflict resolution, time management, relaxation, empathy?)

NEED FOR TRAINING ATTENTION SKILLS: Does the client have the ability for 'task-focused attention': to maintain, shift, broaden, or narrow the focus of attention as required for the task at hand?

RESOURCES: (What strengths, skills and personal resources does the client already have, that could be utilized? What external resources could potentially be accessed?)

MY PERSONAL BARRIERS: (What difficult thoughts and feelings show up for me?)

BRAINSTORM: What questions, exercises, worksheets, metaphors, tools, techniques and strategies can I use in the next session? What sort of skills-training may be required? Is practical problem-solving required for external barriers?



For your review

Favorite Resources

- ▶ [Act Mindfully](#)
- ▶ ACT Made Simple
- ▶ The Happiness Trap (text and illustrated versions) – Russ Harris
- ▶ ACT with Love – Russ Harris
- ▶ Get Out of Your Mind and into Your Life – Steven Hayes
- ▶ Big Book of Metaphors
- ▶ ACT questions and Answers
- ▶ Association for Contextual and Behavioral Science

Today's References

- ▶ Strosahl, K., Robinson, P., & Gustavsson, T. (2012). Brief Interventions for Radical Change
- ▶ Harris, R. (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.



Questions?

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