



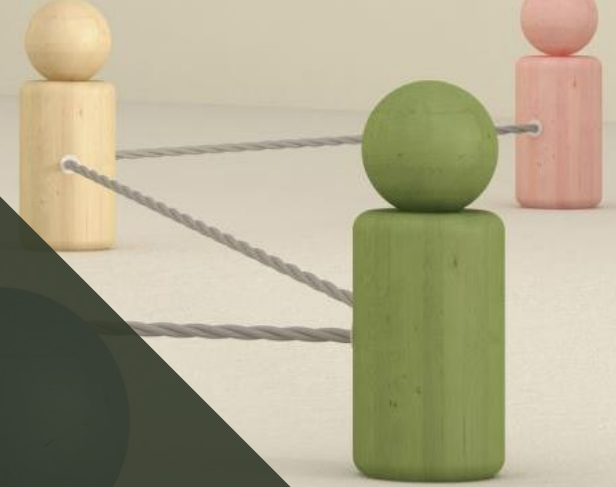
# Welcome to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy!

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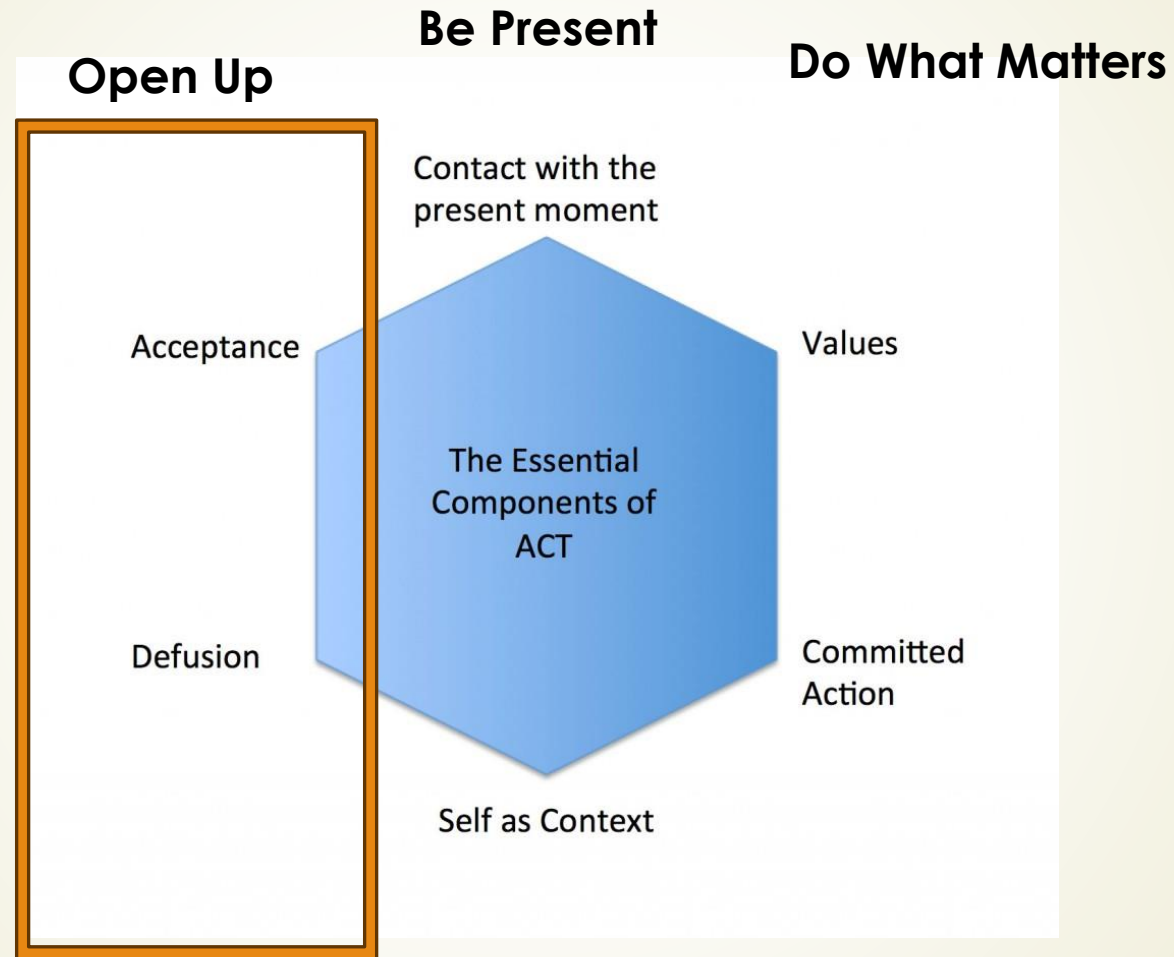
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## *Session 4: Open Up: Acceptance and Defusion*

1. Describe Acceptance and Defusion and their underlying processes.
2. Identify strategies/interventions for each process.
3. Experiential practice with each process.
4. Summarize the workshops and processes.



# 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?

# Acceptance

## Processes:

- ▶ Support openness and curiosity toward painful experiences
- ▶ Experience emotions without defense
- ▶ Does not require “agreement” or “enjoyment”
- ▶ Acceptance is “willingness” and not “want”

## Common challenges:

- ▶ Bias against “settling”
- ▶ Experiential avoidance of thoughts/feelings/experiences/people **as they already are**
- ▶ Actively fighting against things **as they already are**

## Process examples:

- ▶ Quicksand Metaphor
- ▶ Unwelcome party guest metaphor
- ▶ Battlefield Metaphor – evoke your white flag!



# In-session mini-practice

- ▶ “Can we take a moment and make space for what you are experiencing?”
- ▶ “Can you rest your hand on the area of your body where you feel this the most?” (compassionate hand)
- ▶ “Would you be open to taking some deep breaths to make some space for this experience?”



# Battlefield Metaphor

- ▶ Imagine the battle that you have been waging with your experiences.
  - ▶ How has this been for you? How much has it cost you?
  - ▶ How will you know when enough is enough, when you've lost too much to keep fighting?
  - ▶ Is this battle a reflection of who you want to be in this life?
- ▶ Just as the rules of war state, you have a "white flag" that you can evoke at any time. In popular culture, a white flag used in battle suggests "surrender." But in fact that is not what it is designed to do. A white flag implies ceasefire or pause to facilitate negotiation. A white flag can also mean that you are no longer willing to fight. The costs of raging war are not worth even the possibility of winning. Or, perhaps, "winning" is no longer an option because too much has been lost already.
- ▶ If you were to show your white flag today and make the choice to no longer fight against this experience, what will you lose? What might you gain?
- ▶ If you are not longer using your time and energy to fight, what could you be doing instead?
- ▶ I invite you to evoke your white flag now, just for the rest of the day. Call a ceasefire, consider a pause in your defenses. Allow yourself to live the rest of the day without the burden of fighting.
- ▶ Tomorrow, you can choose if you would like to resume the battle, or renegotiate the terms...

# Cognitive Defusion

- ▶ Processes:
  - ▶ “The mind” is an ongoing process that you can observe
  - ▶ Observe thoughts as ideas/options rather than as facts or truths
  - ▶ Objective perspective toward thoughts
  - ▶ Looking “at” thoughts versus “from” thoughts
- ▶ Common Challenge:
  - ▶ Fusion: “buying to” what the mind is telling as fact or truth and acting upon it  
*\*this is challenging since essentially ‘buy in’ to most of what our mind tells us to do and it works!*
- ▶ Process examples:
  - ▶ Junk mail metaphor OR Social media/email scrolling metaphor
  - ▶ [“I’m having the thought that...” exercise](#)
  - ▶ [Choice point exercise](#)





# In-session mini-practice

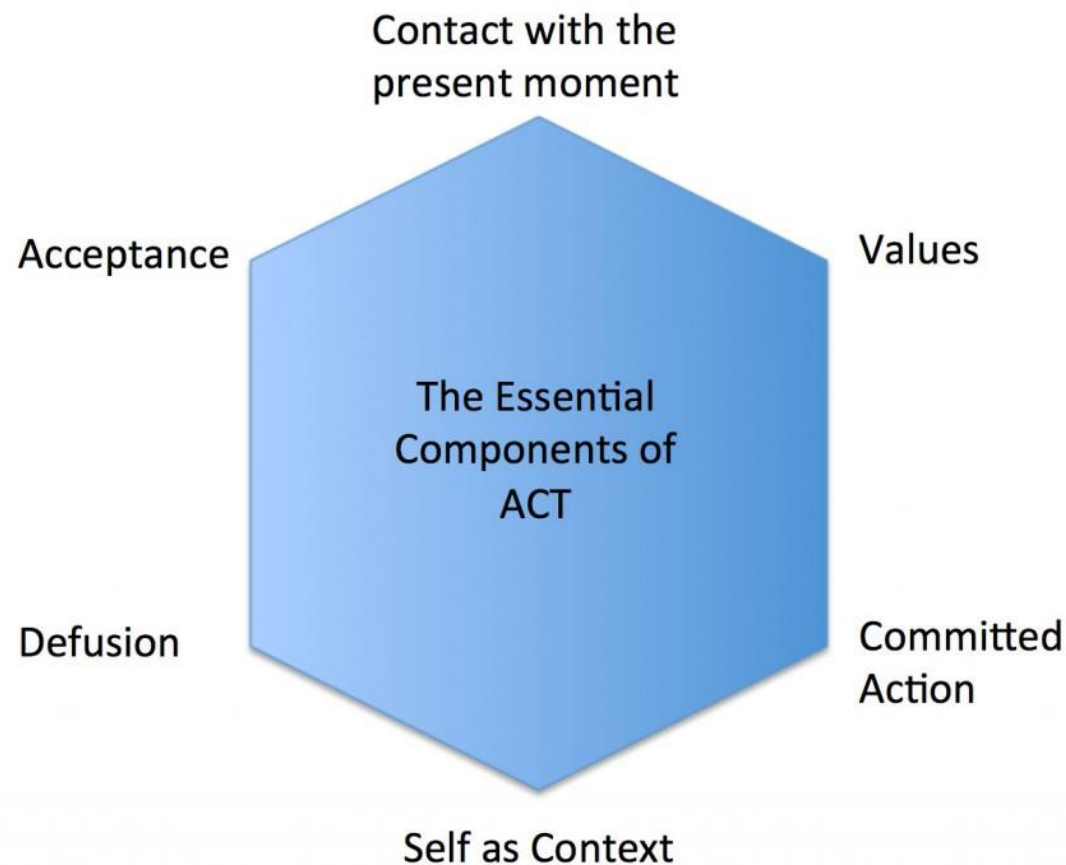
- ▶ “It sounds like your mind is telling you...”
- ▶ “Your mind is really intent on holding onto this...”
- ▶ “What is your mind telling you about this situation right now?”

# Junk mail/scrolling metaphor

- ▶ I wonder if we can relate to your thoughts in a different way. Can we try an exercise?
- ▶ How often do you check your mail/email/social media?
- ▶ Do you read everything that you see? Open every piece of mail/click on every link?
  - ▶ Why not? How do you decide what to attend to?
  - ▶ But, what about the mail/links that say 'IMPORTANT!' or 'OPEN NOW!' What do you do with those?
  - ▶ How does it feel to leave them unopened or unclicked?
- ▶ So, there are situations where you can have 'IMPORTANT!' content coming in and you are able to not engage. You make choices based on what gets your attention and emotional resources. Some you review and some go in the trash.
- ▶ What if your thoughts are like the junk mail/emails? You sort/scroll through your 'inbox' and engage with the thoughts that are helpful and pass or trash the ones that are not? You can use the same guidelines you do with your mail: this thought is unhelpful/unhelpful in this moment, and for my life to move forward in a meaningful way?
- ▶ We can try this right now. Can you name aloud some of the thoughts you are having and we can see which thoughts feel important to spend time on and which thoughts can be saved for later or go in the 'trash?'

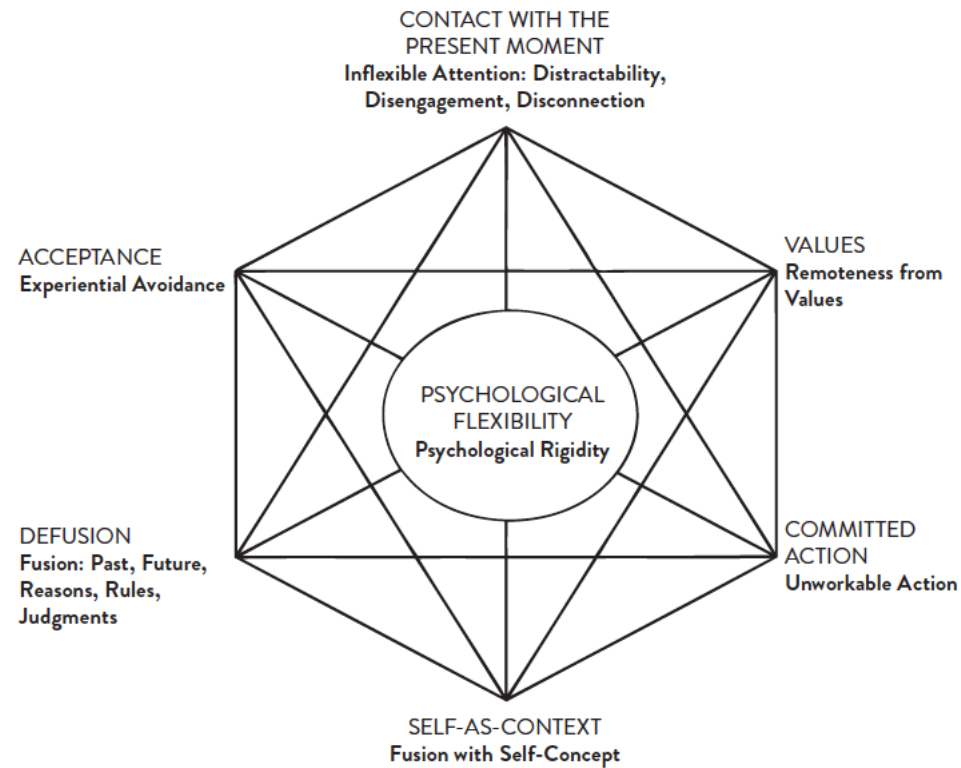
# Bringing it all together...

“Given a **distinction between you and the things you are struggling with** and trying to change, **are you willing to experience those things, fully and without defense, as it is and not as it says it is**, and **do** what takes you in the direction of your **chosen values in this time and situation?**”



## The Six Core Pathological Processes of Psychological Rigidity

The core pathological processes of ACT, as shown in the figure below, are fusion, experiential avoidance, inflexible attention, remoteness from values, unworkable action, and fusion with self-concept. Any or all of these processes can give rise to psychological rigidity.



An ACT Model of Psychopathology





# Common questions



- ▶ Are there any populations or diagnoses excluded?
  - ▶ ACT is about relating differently to experience and not about reducing symptoms (primarily)
  - ▶ Try different activities or strategies and focus on the underlying process you are working on rather than the content
- ▶ How do I start using ACT?
  - ▶ Any way you want to start! ACT is about practice with meaning and intention. Pick up a text or resource, familiarize yourself with the foundational ideas, and "give it a go!"
  - ▶ You can also start with the case conceptualization worksheet
- ▶ What if I feel uncomfortable or my client feels uncomfortable with more experiential work?
  - ▶ Good! That means you are trying something new, which creates opportunities and promotes flexibility.



# For your review

## Favorite Resources

- ▶ ACT Made Simple – Russ Harris
- ▶ 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 - Stoddard & Afari
- ▶ ACT questions and Answers – Russ Harris
- ▶ [Act Mindfully](#)
- ▶ [Association for Contextual and Behavioral Science](#)
- ▶ [PRAXIS CET](#)

## 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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