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Acceptance and Diabetes: Helping patients integrate diabetes into their lives

Mark Heyman, PhD, CDE

Director, Center for Diabetes and Mental Health

Case Studies in Avoidance and Diabetes



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Meet Alana

- Alana is a 21 year old college student who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes about 8 years ago
- She's extremely anxious about and overwhelmed by her school work and to cope she binge eats
- Alana believes that she has to make a choice between managing her diabetes and focusing on school – and school usually wins



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Meet Craig

- Craig is 54 years old and has been living with type 2 diabetes for over 20 years and is currently on dialysis
- He needs to lose weight and lower his A1C before he can get on the transplant list
- Craig's diabetes-related shame and embarrassment is his biggest barrier to making these changes



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Meet Grant

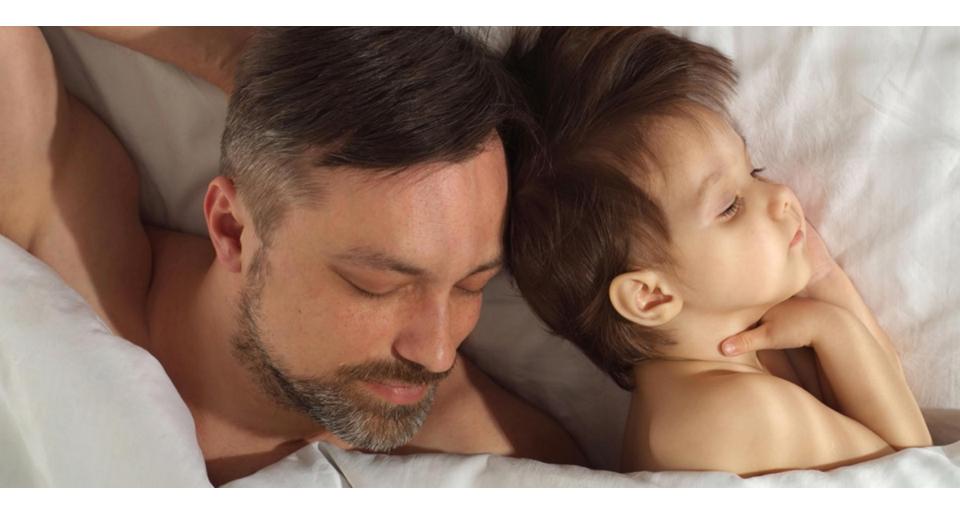
- Grant is 35 years old and was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes about 4 years ago
- Over the past year, he has been in the hospital with DKA because he was not taking insulin regularly
- Grant recently started a new job and has not been able to tell any of his co-workers that he has diabetes



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Avoidance vs. Acceptance

(and how does it relate to diabetes)?



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"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." ~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

Avoidance and Diabetes

- Diabetes can feel overwhelming
- People develop coping strategies for diabetes-related stress
- One of the most common coping strategies is avoidance



Types of Avoidance

- Behavioral Avoidance
- Cognitive Avoidance
- Emotional Avoidance



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Common Presentations of Diabetes Avoidance

- Check blood glucose infrequently and 'forget' to take medications
- Hide diabetes from others
- Cancel appointments with healthcare team
- Mindless food choices



Acceptance and Diabetes

- Negative emotions and thoughts about diabetes are not easy to control
- However people can control how they engage with these negative thoughts and emotions
- Acceptance means 'making room' for discomfort



What Acceptance and Diabetes Is Not

- Enthusiasm about having diabetes
- Ignoring or pushing away negative diabetes-related thoughts, emotions or experiences
- Satisfaction with the status quo



Common Barriers to Acceptance

- Mindlessness
- Cognitive fusion
- Cognitive inflexibility
- Difficulty with distress tolerance





Key Takeaways

- Avoidance is a common coping strategy
- Avoidance takes on many forms
- Acceptance means 'making room' as opposed to avoiding

Polling Question

According to a study published in 2014, which of the following was shown to be an independent predictor of frequency of blood glucose monitoring?

- A. Insulin use
- B. Age
- C. Avoidance behavior
- D. Diabetes duration

Polonsky, W. H., Fisher, L., Hessler, D., & Edelman, S. V. (2014). What is so tough about self-monitoring of blood glucose? Perceived obstacles among patients with Type 2 diabetes. Diabetic Medicine, 31(1), 40-46.



Assessment Tools

- Acceptance of Disability
 Scale (modified)
- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-2)
- Patients' language



Acceptance of Disability Scale (ADS)

ADS is a self-report inventory developed to assess four factors of individuals with physical disabilities:

- Enlargement of scope of values
- Subordination of physique
- Containment of disability effects
- Transformation from comparative values to asset values

Richardson, A., Adner, N., & Nordström, G. (2001). Persons with insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus: acceptance and coping ability. Journal of advanced nursing, 33(6), 758-763.

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ADS and Diabetes

ADS has been used to assess acceptance in people with diabetes by replacing the word 'disability' with the word 'diabetes':

- Enlargement of scope of values: 'There are many things a person with my type of diabetes is able to do'
- Subordination of physique: 'My diabetes affects those aspects of life which I care most about'

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ADS and Diabetes

(cont.)

- Containment of disability effects: 'Almost every area of life is closed to me because of my diabetes'
- Transferring from comparative values to asset values:
 'Though I can see the progress I am making in my rehabilitation, this is not very important as I can never become normal'



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Acceptance & Action

Questionnaire - 2

 AAQ-2 is a 10-item scale that assesses a person's experiential avoidance and immobility and acceptance and action.

Bond, F. W., et al. (2011). Preliminary psychometric properties of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire—II: A revised measure of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance. Behavior therapy, 42(4), 676-688.

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Acceptance & Action

Questionnaire - 2

AAQ-2

Below you will find a list of statements. Please rate how true each statement is for you by circling a number next to it. Use the scale below to make your choice.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	very seldom	seldom	sometimes	frequently	almost always	always
true	true	true	true	true	true	true

1.	Its OK if I remember something unpleasant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	My painful experiences and memories make it difficult for me to live a life that I would value.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	I'm afraid of my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	I worry about not being able to control my worries and feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	My painful memories prevent me from having a fulfilling life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	I am in control of my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	Emotions cause problems in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	It seems like most people are handling their lives better than I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	Worries get in the way of my success.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10	. My thoughts and feelings do not get in the way of how I want to live my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Bond, F. W., et al. (2011). Preliminary psychometric properties of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire—II: A revised measure of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance. Behavior therapy, 42(4), 676-688.



Language patients use

Often, the best way to assess acceptance and diabetes is by listening to the language patients use. Some examples include:

- I'm not very good at managing diabetes ...
- I'll focus on diabetes when I feel less overwhelmed ...
- No matter how hard I try, I can't control my feelings about diabetes ...
- I can't handle diabetes ...
- If I felt less anxious, I could manage manage my diabetes ...



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Key Takeaways

Often, the best ways to assess for acceptance is to listen to how people talk about diabetes:

- · Flexible or Rigid
- Empowered or Helpless
- Integrated or Segmented

Polling Question

Which of the following has NOT been shown to be correlated to non-acceptance of diabetes?

- A. Increased HbA1c
- B. Reduced self-care behavior
- C. Depressive symptoms
- D. Diabetes duration

Schmitt, A., Reimer, A., Kulzer, B., Haak, T., Gahr, A., & Hermanns, N. (2014). Assessment of diabetes acceptance can help identify patients with ineffective diabetes self-care and poor diabetes control. Diabetic Medicine, 31(11), 1446-1451.



Tools and Techniques You Can Use

- Creative Hopelessness
- Mindfulness
- Cognitive and Emotional Defusion



Creative Hopelessness

Trying to 'control' difficult thoughts and feelings about diabetes can get in the way of diabetes management and living life

- Ask what the person has been doing to 'control' their diabetes-related thoughts and emotions
- Assess how this 'control' has been working and how it has not been working
- Suggest that 'control' may not be the most effective strategy and that there might be another way

Harris, R. (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

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Mindfulness

Paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgementally

- Mindfulness is the opposite of avoidance
- There are several types of mindfulness including physical, cognitive and emotional
- A primary goal of mindfulness is for the person to be an observer of their own experiences
- Mindfulness can increase capacity for distress tolerance

Harris, R. (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

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Cognitive & Emotional Defusion

Taking a step back and seeing thoughts and emotions for what they are, nothing more and nothing less.

- In a state of fusion, thoughts and emotions can seem like the absolute truth that drives behavior without choice
- In a state of defusion, the person has the ability to choose their behavior rather than having their thought/emotion choose it for them
- Encourage people to use the phrase 'I'm having the thought/feeling that ...'

Harris, R. (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

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Polling Question

In a study conducted in 2007, patients who completed a mindfulness-based intervention had an average A1c reduction of:

- A. .23%
- B. .48%
- C. .86%
- D. 1.8%

Rosenzweig, S., Reibel, D. K., Greeson, J. M., & Edman, J. S. (2007). Mindfulness-based stress reduction is associated with improved glycemic control in type 2 diabetes mellitus: a pilot study. Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine, 13(5), 36.



Key Takeaways

- Acceptance is a skill that can be learned and needs to be practiced
- There are techniques you can teach your patients that can help
- These techniques are experiential you can teach them better if you use them in your own life!

An Update on Alana

- Alana has come to realize that just because she has a thought or an impulse to avoid, she does not necessarily have to 'buy' it
- She is working to accept that sometimes she is going to feel distress and there is not always a way to make it go away
- Alana is starting to understand that she values her health and can make choices to manage her diabetes



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An Update on Craig

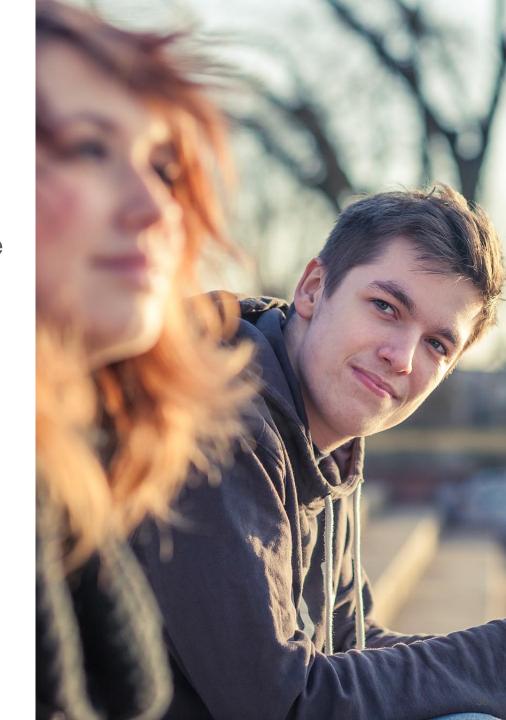
- Even though Craig has some significant health problems he has not let these problems define him
- He has been using his desire to get a kidney transplant as leverage to allow him to accept the challenges he is experiencing on his road to transplant
- Craig has started eating mindfully



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An Update on Grant

- Grant has started taking insulin regularly and, for the most part, has stopped ignoring the fact he has diabetes
- Even though it was difficult, he told his new co-workers about diabetes and was pleasantly surprised by their reaction
- Grant still finds himself struggling with trying to control his negative emotions around diabetes



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"Arriving someplace more desirable at some future time is an illusion."

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn



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