

UNC CHAPEL HILL SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK CLINICAL LECTURE SERIES

ACCEPTANCE, COMMITMENT AND VALUE-BASED LIVING:

An overview of acceptance
& commitment therapy (ACT)
to empower meaningful living



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THE ACT MODEL

1. **Psychological Inflexibility:** potential psychological suffering
2. **Psychological Flexibility:** one path for psychological health
3. Informs intervention strategies to promote psychological health
 - A mindfulness-based therapy from within the cognitive behavioral therapy tradition

(note: health ≠ happiness)

ACT MODEL OF HUMAN SUFFERING: PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLEXIBILITY

Fusion
• thoughts as reality

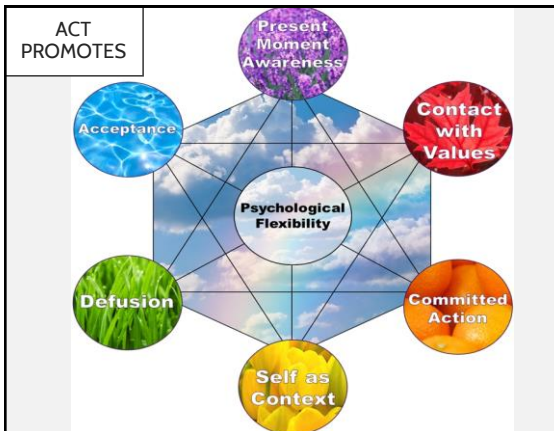
Evaluation
• judgments of self, experiences, world

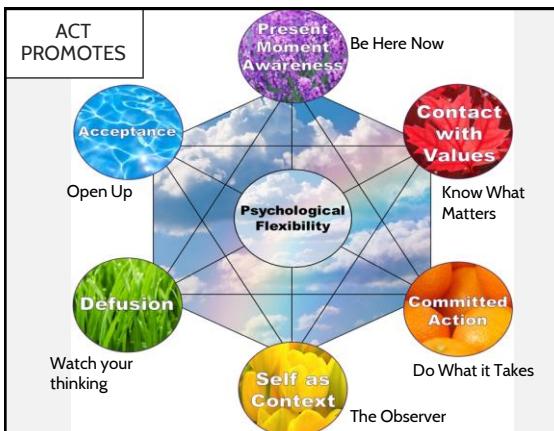
Avoidance
• unwillingness to experience

Reason-Giving
• the “whys” for behavior, who we are, our problems

IS THERE ANOTHER WAY?

- In the place of literal meaning, there are **multiple meanings** (your thinking, what is present, context, history, feelings)
- In the place of evaluations – own your evaluations and **do what works**
- In the place of reason-giving – honest ignorance and **commitment to a course**
- In the place of emotional control – **emotional openness and acceptance**





A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

- SAMHSA placed ACT on the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) in 2011
- Substance abuse
 - Opioid dependence (Stotts et al., 2012; Hayes et al., 2004), Methamphetamine dependence (Smout et al., 2010), self-stigma in SUD (Luoma et al., 2012)
- Anxiety, PTSD, and Depression
 - OCD (Twohig et al., 2010), anxiety disorders (Arch et al., 2012; Craske et al., in press)
 - Experiential Avoidance as a predictor (Kashdan et al., 2012; Plumb et al., 2004)
 - Depression & anxiety (Forman et al., 2007)
 - General distress (Lang et al., 2012), VA roll-out for depression (Walser et al., 2013)
- Behavioral Medicine
 - Chronic Pain (Vowles et al., 2011; Wetherell et al., 2011)
 - Diabetes (Gregg et al., 2007)
 - Weight management (Forman et al., 2013)
 - Smoking Cessation (Bricker et al., 2010; Vilardaga et al., 2018)
 - Cancer and end of life (Rost et al., 2012; Plumb Vilardaga et al., 2019)

MODEL OF INTERVENTION:

OPEN (ACCEPTANCE, DEFUSION)
AWARE (PRESENT MOMENT, SELF)
ACTIVE (VALUES, COMMITMENT)




THIS SOUNDS GREAT!
BUT HOW DO I START?

- Early assessment from an ACT perspective
- 1) Ask what the client wants to be about
 - A start... may not be fully clarified (open, defused values) just yet...
- 2) Ask what gets in the way of that
 - The client's presenting problem as they see it. We then reframe that from an ACT perspective using the model.

Values are Guiding Principles
They help us choose actions that matter most.

Guiding Principles ARE:	Guiding Principles are NOT:
The direction (ongoing actions)	The destination (goals or achievements)
What matters to us in our hearts	Just morals or "shoulds"
A sense of meaning	People, places, activities, or feelings
How we want to act	How we want others to act toward us



Example: We don't achieve "being caring," but we can be caring in many situations.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR VALUES

Places to start – an easy heuristic:

- **Connection**
 - With another person? Something in nature? Some activity (eating, drinking, music)?
- **Caring**
 - About something, someone, or some activity? Expressing concern or affection for self or others?
- **Contribution**
 - To your environment/work, health, happiness, others' well-being? Looking after nature, your body, mind or spirit?
 - Across life domains (family, work, health, spirituality)

EXAMPLE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Being Caring or Nurturing	Understanding Myself	Living with Integrity
Expressing My Talents	Mentoring or Teaching Others	Being Creative
Challenging Myself	Being Responsible or Reliable	Being Free/Independent
Being Kind	Intimacy/sharing Inner experience	Being Honest /Genuine
Caring for My Body	Preserving the environment	Being Physically Active
Being Practical	Learning	Deepening my Spiritual Beliefs
Contributing to the World	Exploring or being adventurous	Connecting with Nature
Appreciating	Being passionate	Growing as a Person
Promoting Justice	Leaving a Legacy	Helping or Supporting Others
Improving my Skills	Expressing Humor	Being Useful or Industrious
Being Self-Disciplined	Being Adaptable	Being Hopeful
Questioning Norms	Living Simply	Being Tolerant/Open to New Ideas
Taking Risks	Following Tradition	Being Guided by Reason



My Guiding Principle:

ONE Small Thing
I can do in service of
this principle between
now and next week:

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF VALUES?
CASE FORMULATION: ABC OF ACT

A: Situation
What did you notice?

B: Response
What did you do?

C: Consequence
How did it work?

External Event; or Private Experience (memory, thought, feeling)

- Approach
- Avoid/ Attempt to control

Private Public

AWAY from internal experience?
Or TOWARD meaningful living?

Asking many questions that help clients examine their own behavior

WHY THE FOCUS ON AVOIDANCE / ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL?

LIGHT AND DARK SIDES OF LANGUAGE

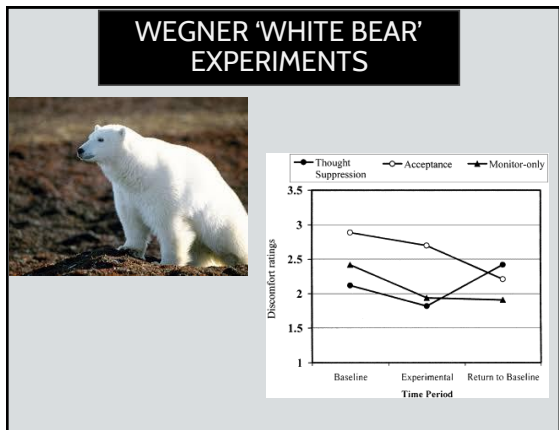
<p>Reasoning Communicating Problem-Solving</p> <p>Past & Future: here now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan• Learn <p>Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self directed rules• Experienced as choice• Remote & verbal consequences• Guide action long term	<p>Over-extension of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problem-solving• Evaluation, judgment <p>Past & Future: here now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rumination• Worry• Relive trauma (PTSD) <p>Context of literality (fusion)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thoughts = reality• Thoughts → actions
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With the amazing abilities of our minds, suffering can occur even when we are physically safe.


The diagram consists of four red-bordered boxes. Top-left: A photo of a brown pickup truck. Top-right: A photo of a wrecked, crushed car. Middle-right: A red box with the text "Car" in quotes. Bottom-center: A red box with the text "CAR" in all caps. Bottom-right: A photo of a woman holding her head in her hands, appearing distressed. Red arrows point from the truck to the wrecked car and from the wrecked car to the "Car" box. Green arrows point from the "Car" box to the woman and from the woman to the "CAR" box. A green arrow also points from the "CAR" box back to the truck.

IN OTHER WORDS

- When people feel bad, they carry around verbal descriptions of the hurt
- These descriptions keep the person in contact with the hurt
- People don't like hurting
- *They want to avoid the hurt*
- *They try to control their thinking about the hurt*

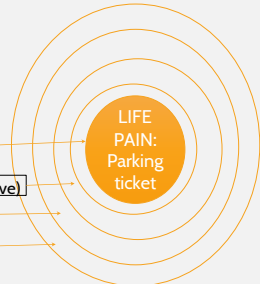


- Problem:
 - The language based relationship of “not thinking about X” means X is in the rule
- Result:
 - Even during “Avoid Anxiety” – Anxiety is in the room



PAIN VS. SUFFERING

PAIN IS INEVITABLE
SUFFERING IS OPTIONAL



- Life pain happens. Pain doesn't feel good. And yet...
- What if we could shift the energy to work on reducing suffering?

ACT STANCE

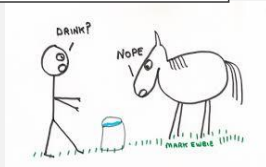
- Suffering happens for all of us -- thanks to our minds!
- We do not "KNOW" -- but have a unique perspective
 - Model tells us what difficulties *may* be in a person's life
- Asking questions, oriented toward successful working in valued directions, allows the client to assess for themselves



Two Mountains Metaphor

ACT STANCE

- Balance:
**Being Active and
Being With** the client
in their suffering

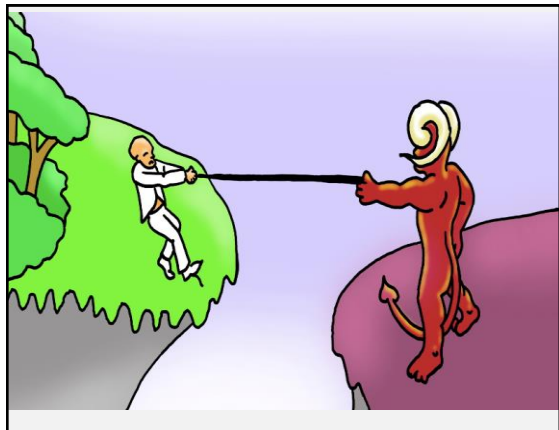


- Allowing change to happen at client's own pace
 - Painful to watch suffering
 - Remember: something is working for that client, maintaining behavior
 - Focusing on values (strengths) can increase quality of life
 - May never remove all suffering

INCREASING AWARENESS:
EXPLORING CONTROL

- **Exploring** attempts at controlling internal experiences
- Increase awareness of tendency to overuse problem-solving, fixing, or controlling strategies
 - External objects, situations –possible (e.g., repaint the room)
 - Internal experience – more tricky (e.g., can you pain over sadness?)
- What has **your experience** been? How has that worked to get you where you want to be?
 - How much effort does it take?
 - How would you choose to use your time?





**AWARENESS
(PRESENT MOMENT)**

- Mindfulness
- Perspective taking
- Flexible attention
- Noticing parts of experience, reactions to it
 - De-mystify, label (e.g., Physicalizing)
 - Practice willingness for parts (e.g., Tin Can Monster)
 - What about tenseness in your chest is 'impossible' to have?
- At home or in session practice
 - Encourage contact with the here and now

OPEN UP (ACCEPTANCE/ WILLINGNESS)

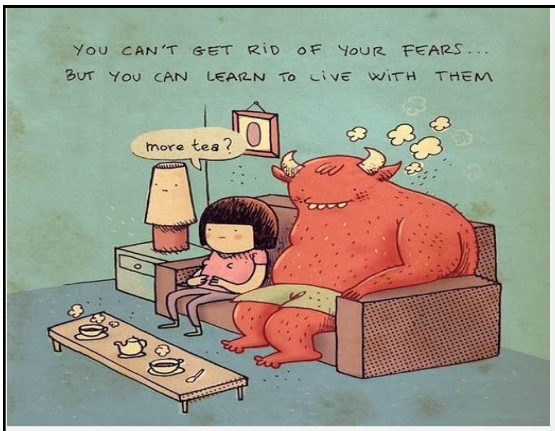
- Allowing, make space for, be with experience
- Chinese Finger Traps – lean in
- Quicksand – increase contact with
- Physicalize it
- Bring the unwanted along for the ride
 - Take your keys with you
- Willingness is not wanting

CAUTION

■ PAIN FOR A PURPOSE:
Values dignify being open to experience

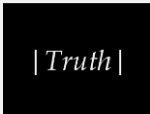
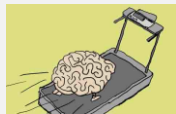
EXERCISE:
YOUR THERAPIST
VALUES

YOU CAN'T GET RID OF YOUR FEARS...
BUT YOU CAN LEARN TO LIVE WITH THEM



OPEN UP (DEFUSION)

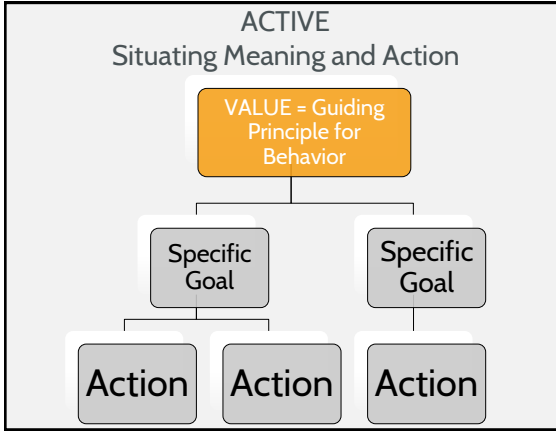
- Catch the process of thinking
- Catching the evaluative process of our minds
 - Language supports this – “I **am** a bad person”
 - All in service of getting “unstuck” from the traps of our minds

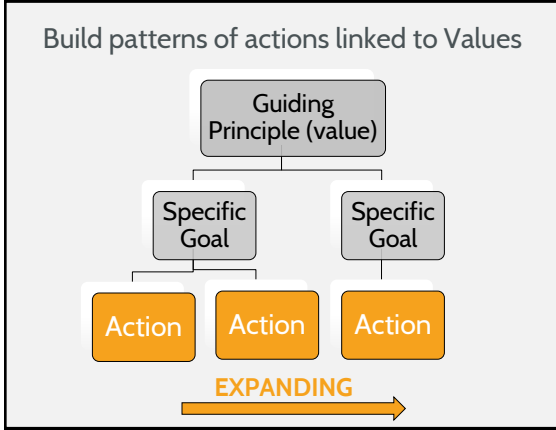


OPENNESS TO THOUGHTS STRATEGIES...
A GOOD START ARE MINDFULNESS EXERCISES AIMED AT
OBSERVING THOUGHTS

AWARENESS (OBSERVER SELF)

- Sense of observing one's own experience
- Observation has been the constant
- Help transcend limitations of a rigid conceptualization of self
- Helpful to strengthen when there has been some 'shift' in sense of self
 - Trauma
 - Acquired disability
 - Re-adjusting to civilian life





GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 1

<p>★ Relationships Guiding Principle: <i>Sharing & being present</i></p> <p>Action: <i>Go to dinner with friends</i></p> <p>When, Where, Who with: <i>Thurs night</i></p>	<p>★ Hobby/Free Time Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: _____</p> <p>When, Where, Who with: _____</p>
<p>★ Work/Community Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: _____</p> <p>When, Where, Who with: _____</p>	<p>★ Health/Well-Being Guiding Principle: <i>Connecting with Nature</i></p> <p>Action: <i>Walk 10 mins</i></p> <p>When, Where, Who with: <i>In mornings in the woods</i></p>

GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 2

<p>★ Relationships Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: _____</p> <p>When, Where, Who with: _____</p>	<p>★ Hobby/Free Time Guiding Principle: <i>Being Playful</i></p> <p>Action: <i>Watch a funny movie</i></p> <p>When, Where, Who with: <i>by myself</i></p>
<p>★ Work/Community Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: <i>Bringing food to a pantry</i></p> <p>When, Where, Who with: <i>Tuesday morns</i></p>	<p>★ Health/Well-Being Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: _____</p> <p>When, Where, Who with: _____</p>

FURTHER CLARIFYING VALUES:
AFTER DOING OPENNESS AND AWARENESS WORK

- Common for clients to use values as rigid guides rather than flexible ones
- With openness and awareness, can start to look at where values become rigid, or values act as indicator for "failure"



Importance of self-compassion
for our (shared) humanness



VALUES RIGIDITY:
EXAMPLE

ACT APPLIED TO COMMON ISSUES

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety/Worry • Workability of avoidance / behaving based on worries • Goes well with exposure techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health/Medical settings • Begin re-orienting to values, even with changes in functioning • A softer, gentler way to increase compliance with medical recs |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Don't have to "feel like it" in order to do what is meaningful • Goes well with Behavioral Activation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acculturation stress • Increase flexibility of values expression • Values are not inconsistent with religious or cultural beliefs |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance Use Treatment • Consistent with Motivational Interviewing • Goes well with emotion regulation model of substance use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving communication/family functioning • Attention to values as a process can improve communication, understanding, and interpersonal functioning |

WHAT TO DO NEXT...

- Get connected
www.contextualscience.org
- Values based dues get you loads of free documents/handouts, protocols, research articles, etc.

Learn More:

- Lots of great texts to read
- One day workshop on Values in particular here at UNC on April 26, 2019

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SELF-HELP RESOURCES/ADJUNCT TO THERAPY