

Psychological Flexibility, ACT, and Physical Health: A Brief Workshop

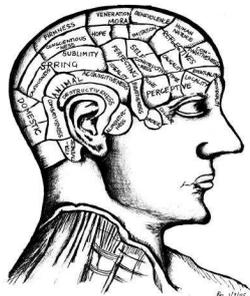
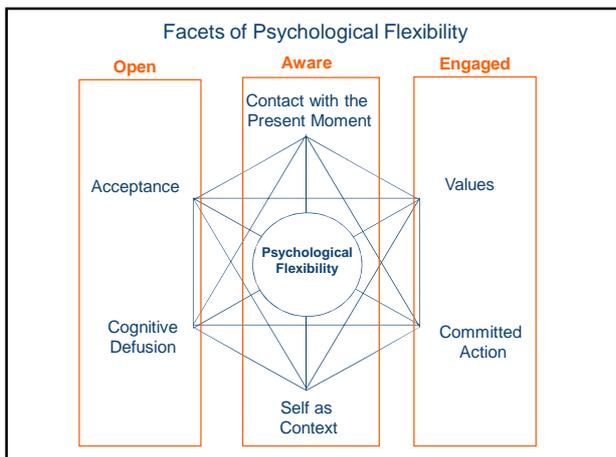
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We're Biased

ACT

- A form of cognitive behavioral therapy with the following features:
 - Focuses on **behavior change**
 - Includes a primary process called psychological flexibility
 - Works both inside and outside literal language
 - Relies heavily on experiential exercises and metaphorical or paradoxical uses of language
 - Emphasizes individual analysis and relationship
 - Is emotionally intensive
 - Includes a particular therapeutic stance
 - Follows a philosophy called **functional contextualism**
 - Has a direct association with a program of basic behavioral science into what is called **"Relational Frame Theory"**

Selected RCTs of ACT in Physical Health

Pain and stress	Dahl et al., 2004
Drug refractory epilepsy	Lundgren et al., 2006
Diabetes	Gregg et al., 2007
Chronic pain	(See later slide)
Pediatric chronic pain	Wicksell et al., 2009
Promotion of physical activity	Butryn et al., 2011

RCTs of ACT in Physical Health - Continued

Smoking cessation	Gifford et al., 2011 Bricker et al., 2014
Headache	Dindo et al., 2012 Mo'tamedi et al., 2012
Multiple sclerosis	Nordin et al., 2012
Tinnitus	Hesser et al., 2012
Cancer	Rost et al., 2012 Hawkes et al., 2012

ACT for Chronic Pain (N = 20 Outcome Studies)

oDahl et al. 2004	oMcCracken & Jones, 2012
oMcCracken et al. 2005	oAlonso et al., 2013
oMcCracken et al. 2007	oWicksell et al., 2013
oVowles & McCracken, 2008	oBurhman et al., 2013
oWicksell et al. 2008	oMcCracken et al., 2013
oVowles et al. 2009	oSteiner & Bigati, 2013
oJohnston et al. 2010	oLuciano et al., 2014
oWetherell et al. 2011	oVowles et al., 2014
oThorsell et al. 2011	oTrompeter et al., 2014
oMcCracken & Gutierrez-Martinez, 2011	oAlonso-Fernandez et al., 2015

Green = RCT = 12

Let's Begin

ACT Therapeutic Stance

- 1) Equal, caring, respectful.
- 2) Fits methods to the needs of the client and situation.
- 3) Uses experiential methods and de-emphasizes literal sense.
- 4) Detects process of flexibility and inflexibility in the moment and supports the former within the therapeutic relationship.

Acceptance



Steps Toward Willingness

Notice an occasion when you are struggling with an undesired emotional experience and do the following:

1. Observe: scan your body, locate sensations there, look for feelings that bother you, focus your attention with curiosity, look at the experience in detail (where are the boundaries, deep or surface, changing or staying the same?)

2. Breathe: hold the emotional sensations and breathing in focus at the same time.
3. Open up: create space for the sensations and allow them to be present, and to come and go, this is not the same as liking or wanting – it is just saying “yes, I will have this feeling.”
4. Repeat: as feelings emerge that invite a struggle, simply observe, breathe, open up.

Defusion



Having a Thought

Consider a thought, judgement, or evaluation that stops or upsets you. Distil it down to a few words...

- For the next 40 seconds focus on thinking it like it is true. (notice what this is like)
- Now, for the next 40 seconds, fit it into the following state: "I am having the thought that..." (notice what this is like)
- Now, for the next 40 seconds, fit it into the following statement: "I am noticing that I am having the thought that..." (notice what this is like)

Example Method: Experiment: Get Off Your "Buts"

- "But" means except for the fact.
- This word is often placed between a goal or desirable action and a "reason" in the form of a feeling or thought.
- The word "but" says that the reason makes the action or goal impossible.
- **Change your "buts" to "and" and see what happens.**

Contact with the Present Moment

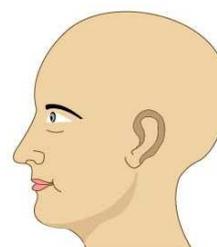


Notice Five Things

1. Pause.
2. Look around and notice five objects you can see.
3. Listen carefully and notice five sounds you can hear.
4. Notice five things you can feel in and around your body.

From: Harris, R. (2008). *The Happiness Trap*. Boston: Trumpeter Books.

Self-as-Context



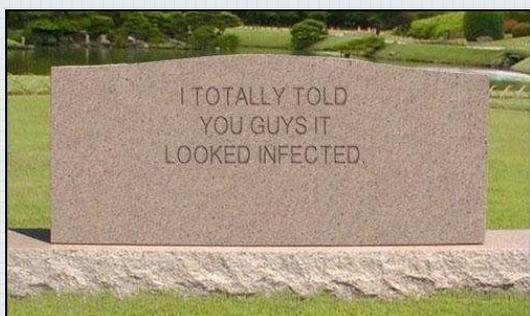
Observer Exercise



Basic Formula for Observer Exercise

- 1) Notice (physical sensations, roles, emotions, thoughts)
- 2) Notice that you are noticing.
- 3) The experiences change & the you who notices does not.
- 4) You have experiences and you are not your experiences (notice the distinction between what is being noticed and who is noticing).

Values-Based Action



Imagine You're 80 Years Old

- Imagine you are 80 years old and looking back at your life as it is today. Complete the following sentences:
- I spent too much time worrying about...
- I spent too little time doing things such as...
- If I could go back in time, what I would do differently from this day onward is...

Rehearsal

Focus



1. Hold a finger and focus on it.
2. Notice what is clear and what is not.
3. Change your focus, look beyond the finger.
4. Now what is clear and what is not?
5. Which way shows more and provides a better view of where you want to go?
6. Sometimes we are stuck AND notice two things.
7. Notice when we are stuck, we can change focus.
8. Notice you can go wherever you want with the finger in front of your face.

Brief Self-as-Observer Exercise

- Close your eyes or set your gaze on a specific point in front of you.
- Notice feelings in your body.
- Notice thoughts in the mind.
- Notice sounds around you.
- Notice that you are noticing feelings, thoughts, and sounds.
- Notice a distinction between the thinking mind and the observing mind.

Role Play



Different functions of Questions

- Analyze
- Clarify confusion
- Dig deeper into a problem
- Produce a solution or fix a problem.
- To know something (in the mind)
- To prepare to take action.
- As for observing or describing
- Focus or change perspective.
- Identify positive guides or goals
- Coordinate a change in behavior.
- Promote action.

Quick Practice

- In pairs.
- Roles include "patient" and "therapist."
- First, practice figuring out the problem.
- Second, practice the following:
 - Ask questions that includes observing rather than thinking
 - Ask questions that brings in goals or values
 - Ask questions that coordinate "doing"
- Switch

Discussion

- What do you observe when we are constantly trying to figure things out?
- And, what do you observe when we focus more on observing and doing?
- Which way seems likely to create more action or engagement?

Focusing on the Present Moment

- Observe
- Describe
- Slow down
- Notice the difference between experience and judgement
- Practice not reacting
- Engage in a small values-based action.

Wrap up

Summary

