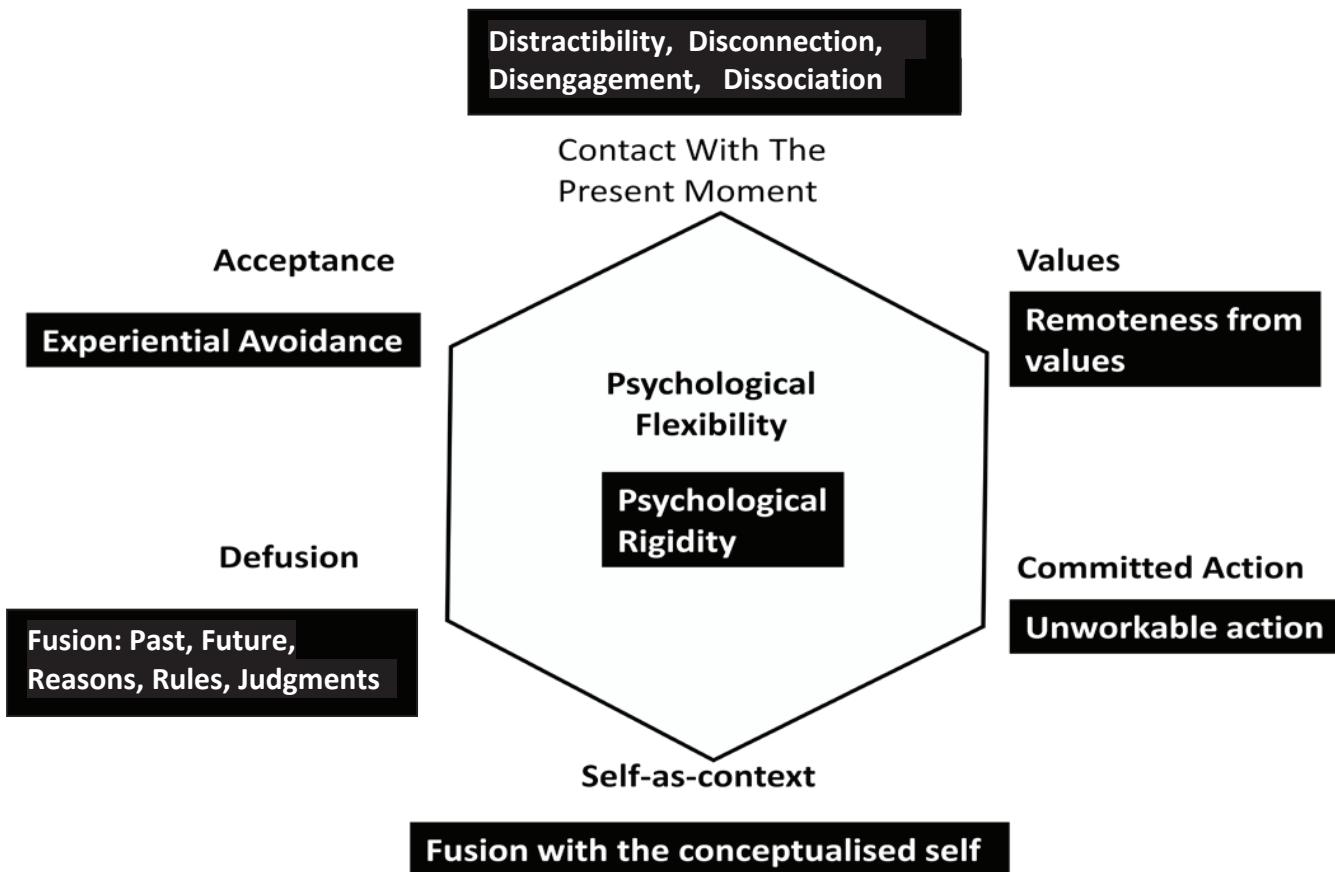


# Russ Harris: ACT Training Part I

[www.actmindfully.com.au](http://www.actmindfully.com.au)



2

Psychological Flexibility has two 'strands':

- The ability to be psychologically present and open to experience (be present, open up)
- The ability to control your actions to serve valued ends (be present, do what matters)

The aim of the ACT Practitioner:

- The aim of the ACT practitioner is to *model, instigate and reinforce Psychological Flexibility*

ACT therapists/coaches are primarily doing one of two things:

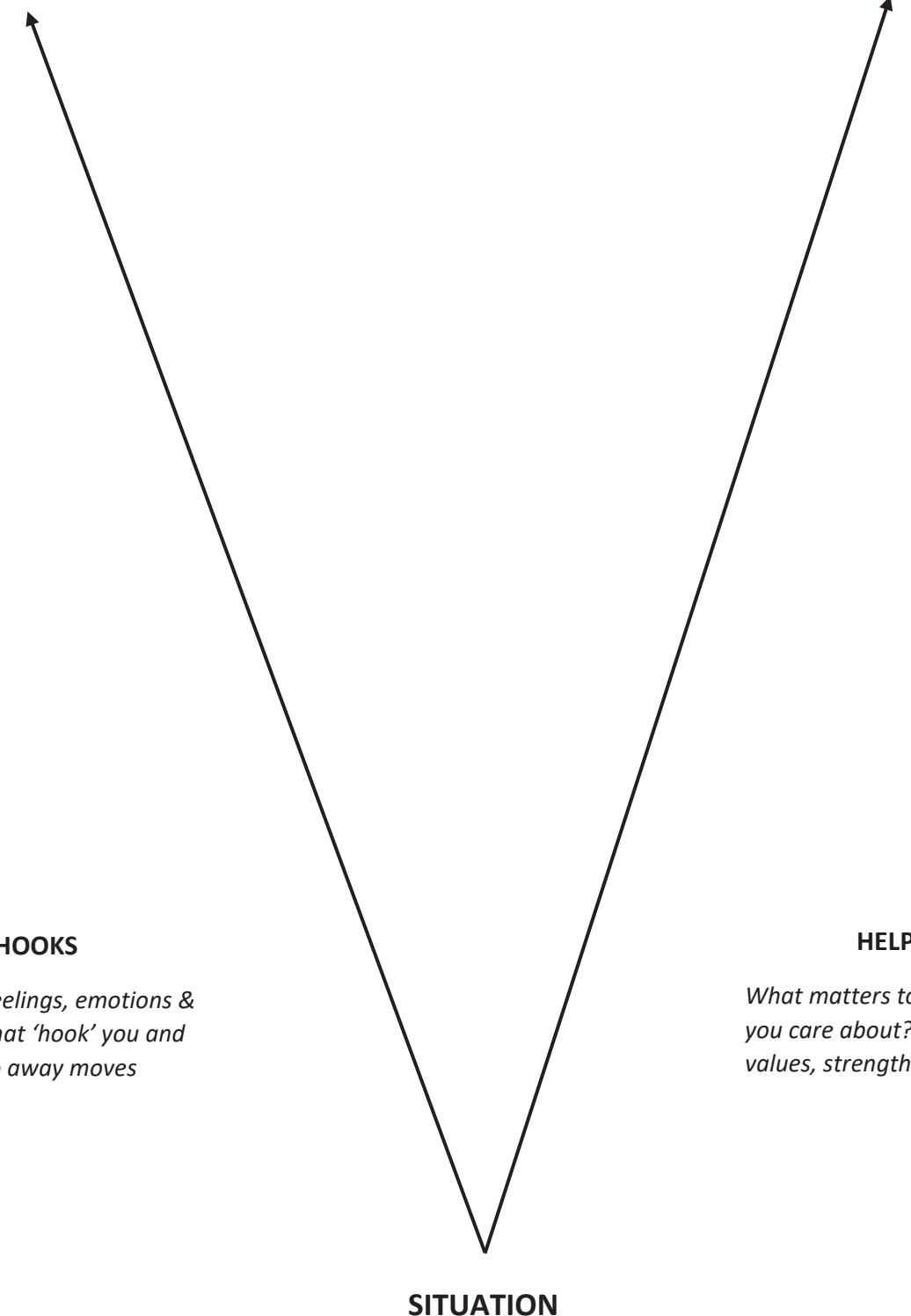
- Developing psychological flexibility in the moment with the client
- Working to get there - developing an alliance where this can occur or supporting practice outside the room.

### AWAY MOVES

*Behaving unlike the person you want to be, doing things that take you away from the life you want*

### TOWARDS MOVES

*Behaving like the person you want to be, doing things that take you towards the life you want*



*Thoughts, feelings, emotions & memories that 'hook' you and pull you into away moves*

*What matters to you? Who do you care about? What skills, values, strengths can you use?*

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

**Emotional Goals:** What thoughts, images, feelings, emotions, sensations, memories, urges, would he like to have less of? (\*NB: We convert these to behavioural goals with the reframe: "So we'll be learning new skills to handle these difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively, so they have less impact and influence over you" \*)

**Behavioural Goals:** What would the client like to stop/start; do more/less of? How would he like to treat himself, others, the world, differently? What goals would she like to pursue? What activities/skills would she like to start, resume, develop? What people, places, events, activities, challenges, would he like to approach rather than avoid? What relationships does she want to improve, and how? What life problems does he want to solve?

**EXTERNAL BARRIERS.** 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 require problem solving and/or skills training?

**UNWORKABLE ACTION**

What is the client doing that makes life worse, or keeps her stuck, worsens problems, inhibits growth, prevents healthy solutions, impairs health, damages relationships etc? (What would we see and/or hear on a video?)

What IMPORTANT or MEANINGFUL people, places, events, activities, situations, goals, problems and challenges is the client avoiding or escaping (e.g. withdrawing from, quitting, procrastinating, giving up on, 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?, catastrophizing, resentment, regrets etc.)

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

**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:**

**EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE:** (Private experiences the client is trying to avoid, get rid of, or is unwilling to have)  
THOUGHTS, IMAGES, MEMORIES, EMOTIONS, FEELINGS, SENSATIONS, URGES, CRAVINGS, WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS:

**LOSS OF CONTACTING THE PRESENT MOMENT:**

The 4 Ds: Distractibility, Disengagement, Disconnection, Dissociation?  
Deficits in ability to narrow focus, broaden focus, sustain focus, or shift focus?

**VALUES & COMMITTED ACTION**

IMPORTANT LIFE DOMAINS: (What life domains and what people does the client care about: e.g. work, study, health, parenting, marriage or other intimate relationship, friends, family, spirituality, community, environment)?

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

GOALS & ACTIONS: (What values-congruent goals and activities does he: 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, relaxation, empathy?)

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

**MY PERSONAL BARRIERS:** (What difficult thoughts and feelings show up for me, regarding this client?)

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

## DISSECTING THE PROBLEM

This form is to help gather information about the nature of the main challenge, issue, or problem facing you. First, please summarize, in one or two sentences, what the main issue or problem is:

Second, please describe, in one or two sentences, how it affects your life, and what it stops you from doing or being:

Regardless of what your problem is—whether it is a physical illness, a difficult relationship, a work situation, a financial crisis, a performance issue, the loss of a loved one, a severe injury, or a clinical disorder such as depression—when we dissect the problem, we usually find four major elements that contribute significantly to the issue. These are represented in the boxes below. Please write as much as you can in each box about the thoughts, feelings, and actions that contribute to or worsen the challenge, problem, or issue facing you:

<p><b>Entanglement with Thoughts</b> What memories, worries, fears, self-criticisms, or other unhelpful thoughts do you dwell on or get “caught up” in that are related to this issue? What thoughts do you allow to hold you back or push you around or bring you down?</p>	<p><b>Life-draining Actions:</b> What are you currently doing that makes your life worse in the long run: keeps you stuck; wastes your time or money; drains your energy; restricts your life; impacts negatively on your health, work, or relationships; maintains or worsens the problems you are dealing with?</p>
<p><b>Struggle with Feelings</b> What emotions, feelings, urges, impulses, or sensations (associated with this issue) do you fight with, avoid, suppress, try to get rid of, or otherwise struggle with?</p>	<p><b>Avoiding Challenging Situations:</b> What situations, activities, people, or places are you avoiding or staying away from? What have you quit, withdrawn from, dropped out of? What do you keep “putting off” until later?</p>

**YOUR VALUES:** What really matters to you, deep in your heart? What do you want to do with your time on this planet? What sort of person do you want to be? What personal strengths or qualities do you want to develop?

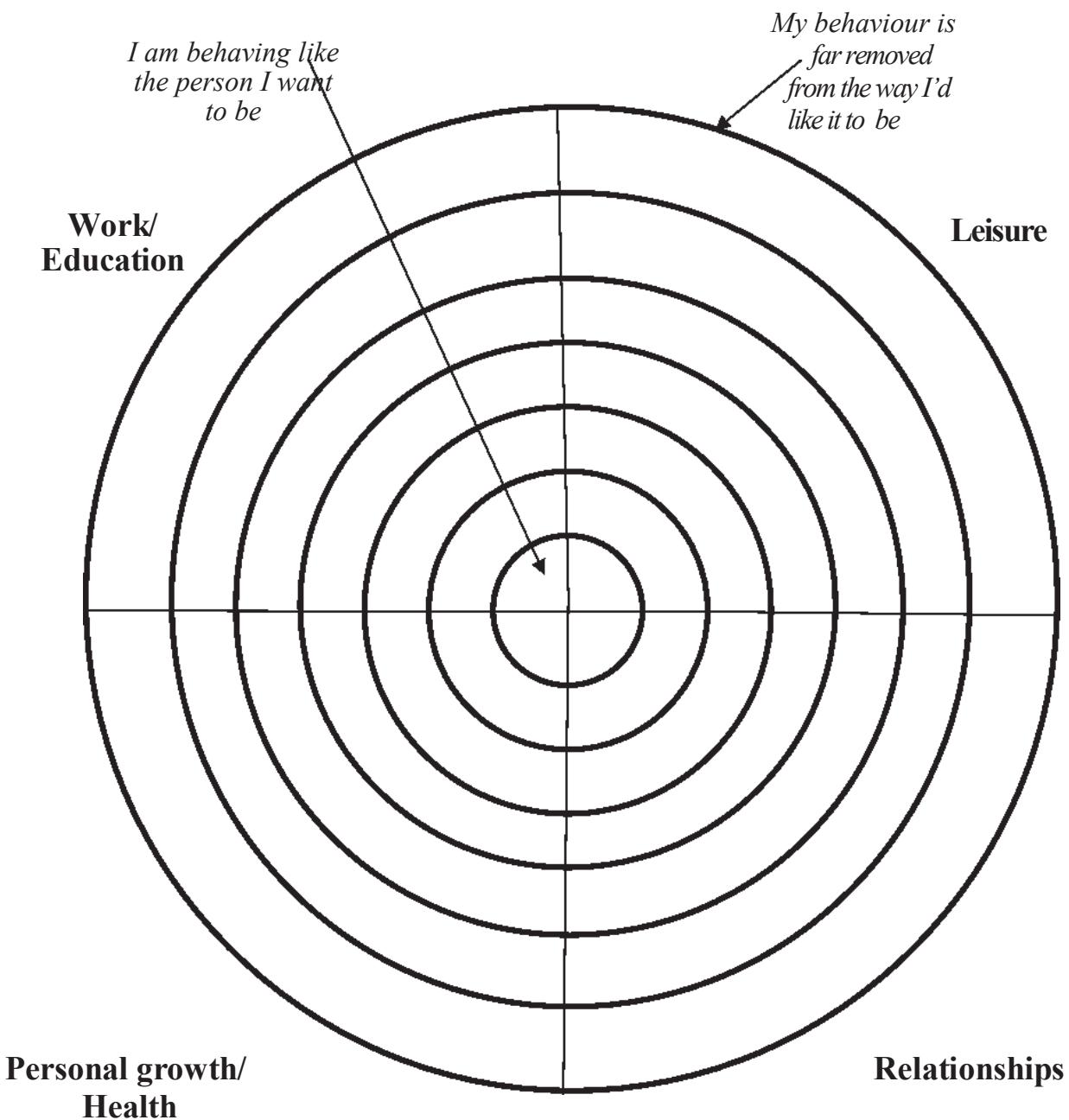
**1. Work/Education:** includes workplace, career, education, skills development, etc.

**2. Relationships:** includes your partner, children, parents, relatives, friends, co-workers, and other social contacts.

**3. Personal Growth/Health:** may include religion, spirituality, creativity, life skills, meditation, yoga, nature; exercise, nutrition, and/or addressing health risk factors like smoking, alcohol, drugs or overeating etc

**4. Leisure:** how you play, relax, stimulate, or enjoy yourself; activities for rest, recreation, fun and creativity.

**THE BULL'S EYE:** make an X in each area of the dart board, to represent where you stand today.



## Setting Up Sessions

### #1 – Pressing Pause

- *Can I have permission to **press pause** from time to time - so if I see you doing something that looks like it might be contributing to your problems worse, I can pause you and **shine a light** on what's happening, and we can address it?*
- *And can I also **press pause** if I see you doing something that looks like it might be really helpful or useful, in terms of dealing with your problems and improving your life? So again we can **shine a light** on it, and see more clearly what you're doing, and think about ways you can use it outside of this room?*

### #2 - Trying New Things

- *I mentioned already that part of this approach includes learning new skills to handle thoughts and feelings more effectively. Is it okay if at times ask you to try some of these things in session?*
- *At times I might ask you to do an exercise that seems a bit weird or strange, and you are always free to say no. I'm only going to suggest these things if I think they'll be helpful to you, but you certainly don't have to do them.*

### #3 – Setting an Agenda

- *Are you okay if we take a couple of minutes at the start of each session to establish a focus or an agenda for the session? To pick one important problem or area of life that we can hone in on, and make the main focus of the session, in order to improve it?*
- *The reason for this, is it makes our work much more efficient. If we are talking about several different problems at once, it's very hard to deal effectively with any of them.*

➤ Once client agrees, set an agenda – e.g. use the ‘bull’s eye’ and pick a quadrant – or ask the client to nominate a single problem/ goal/ domain of life/issue/relationship to focus on

### #4 – Team Building

- *Very often the problems that show up in your interactions with other people outside this room, also tend to show up here in our sessions too. Is it okay if I press pause at times and get us look at what's happening here in the room, in the way that you and I are interacting with each other?*
- *To get you to notice things that you're doing that seem helpful and things that seem unhelpful, in terms of us building a strong team/alliance? And can I ask you at times to try out new skills or strategies here in the room with me, so that you can then take them and use them with other people outside this room?*

➤ Bring this in at any point where the session becomes about relationship issues. If there is any sign of conflict or tension or stuckness, check with the client: *Can I just check we are a team here? We are working together, as a team, with the same aim: to help you build a better life?*

### #5 – Being Real

- *Can we make this a place where we can both be real with each other? I want you to be real with me – and give me honest feedback about whether what I am doing is helpful or not etc. And I want to be real with you, too. Am I allowed to give you honest feedback?*
- *Sometimes that can be confronting – but there are very few people in the world that will give you honest feedback. One of the most powerful things about coaching/counselling is that you will, if you allow it, get honest feedback from someone else in a kind way, with no other agenda than to help you build a better life*

## **Informed Consent**

- The name reflects a key message: accept what is out of your control, and commit to action that improves your life
- It's a very active form of therapy/coaching; it's not just talking about problems
- 'Learning skills to handle thoughts and feelings more effectively, so they have less impact and influence over you'
- 'Clarifying what matters to you, what you want to stand for in life, what strengths and qualities you want to develop, how you want to treat yourself and others'
- 'Taking action to solve problems, face challenges, and do things that make life better'
- Requires practice between sessions – like learning to play guitar
- At times, may be a roller-coaster ride. (Pre-empt urge to drop out, if relevant.)

## **Mindfulness**

- 'Paying attention with FLEXIBILITY, OPENNESS, CURIOSITY and KINDNESS' (FLOCK)
- At the 'core' of mindfulness is contact with the present moment
- The basic instruction is 'notice X' - where X is anything that is here and now
- The first step in defusion is 'notice your thoughts'
- The first step in acceptance is 'notice your feelings'
- To access the observing self, 'notice that you are noticing'

## **Self-As-Context**

- There are two meanings of 'Self-As-Context'. In almost all current ACT textbooks, SAC is defined as or described as the 'observing self' or 'observer self'. But sometimes the term is used to mean 'flexible perspective taking' - and when used this way it can include interventions based around developing any or all of the following: the observing self, empathy, compassion, self-compassion, "inner child" work, and defusion from the conceptualized self.

## **The Observing Self (Self-as-context)**

- 'Strengthens' or 'enhances' defusion/acceptance/contact with the present moment
- Becomes a 'short cut' for the above: e.g. 'look at this from your observing self'
- Facilitates defusion from the conceptualised self, and gives a stable sense of self
- Increases willingness for exposure to feared private experiences (e.g. traumatic memories)
- For trauma survivors: a part of you came through unharmed
- Transcendence is an important part of any spiritual journey

## **Three types of interventions for the observing self:**

- metaphors (chessboard/ documentary of Africa/ stage show/ sky and weather/ thinking self and observing self)
- defusion exercises aimed at defusion from the conceptualized self (the good self & bad self exercise/ naming the story)
- contacting the observing self ('continuous you'/ notice who's noticing/ 'I am' exercise)

## INFORMED CONSENT

- ACT is a very active form of therapy or coaching – not just talking about problems.
- Learning skills to handle difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively, so they have less impact and influence over you
- Clarifying what matters to you, what you care about, the sort of person you want to be, how you want to treat yourself and others, what you want your life to be about
- Taking action: to solve problems, and do things that make life better
- So my aim is to have you leave here at the end of each session with an action plan – something you can take away and do in between sessions, to make a positive difference in your life.

## HANDS AS THOUGHTS & FEELINGS

- Imagine in front of you is everything that matters: the people, places, activities you love etc. And all the real life problems and challenges you need to deal with
- Now pretend your hands are your thoughts & feelings. Now copy me – get caught up in your thoughts
- Notice 3 things: 1) How much are you missing out on? 2) How disconnected and disengaged are you from the people and things that matter? How difficult is it to focus on the task at hand or the problem you need to address? 3) How difficult is it to take action, to do the things that make your life work? (give examples)
- Now slowly separate from your thoughts & feelings
- What's your view of the room like now? How much easier is it to engage and connect? How much easier is it to take action?
- Notice these things (i.e. hands) haven't disappeared. If you can use them, do so. After all, often thoughts and feelings have useful and important information that can help you. And if there's nothing useful you can get from them, you just let them sit there.

## PUSHING AWAY PAPER

- In front of you is everything that matters: the people, places, activities you love etc. And all the real life problems and challenges you need to deal with
- This paper is all the thoughts & feelings you don't want. Push them away, hard!
- Notice 3 things: 1) How tiring is it? 2) How distracting is it; how difficult is it to fully engage or connect with the things and people that matter? How difficult is it to keep your attention focused on the task at hand or the problem you face? 3) How difficult is it to take action, to do the things that make your life work? (give examples)
- Now rest it on your lap.
- How much less effort is that? How much easier is it to engage and connect, or keep your attention focused on the task or problem facing you? How much easier is it now to take action?
- Notice your thoughts & feelings (i.e. the paper) haven't disappeared. But you have a new way of responding to them, so they don't hold you back or tie you down or stop you taking effective action and engaging in your life. And if there's something useful you can do with them use them. Often thoughts and feelings have useful information that can help you – but you can't effectively access that information while you're busy struggling with them. And if there's nothing useful you can get from them, you just let them sit there.

## **2 Questions We Continually Dance Between:**

*Q: What valued direction does the client want to move in (towards moves)?*

- Values clarification
- Goal setting & Committed Action (includes skills training/ problem solving)

*Q: What is getting in the way?*

- Fusion => Defusion
- Avoidance => Acceptance
- Automaticity => Awareness/ engagement

### **Defusion Versus Disputation**

*In RCTs comparing ACT to traditional CBT for depression, defusion created faster reductions in believability of depressogenic thoughts than disputation did. Note this happened even though with defusion we are not actively trying to reduce believability! We can defuse from thoughts even when we still believe them 100%! (We can also fuse with thoughts that we don't believe, such as when we are fantasizing)*

#### **Defusion Step 1:**

We acknowledge the thought – whether it be a belief, idea, attitude, assumption, schema, metacognition – and we restate it plainly:

E.g. 'So you have the thought that/ you have the belief that/ you have the cognition that/ your mind tells you that/ you believe that/ this thought shows up that ..... X, Y, Z

#### **Defusion Step 2:**

Instead of looking at the content of the thought – true or false, positive or negative – look at what happens if you fuse with it. E.g.: If you hold on tightly to (or get hooked by) that thought (or belief/idea/attitude/assumption etc.) – and let it control you (or let it control what you do with your arms and your legs and your mouth) – how does that work for you, long term?

There are many variants on step 2, eg.:

- Does holding it tightly/getting hooked by it help you to be the person you want to be?
- In the long term does holding it tightly/getting hooked by it take you towards or away from the life you want (or towards/away from your values)?
- If you let this thought dictate your actions, how does that work in terms of creating the life you want?

In those two steps, the client is already defusing from the thought/belief/idea. (We do not have to waste time and energy debating whether it is true or false, assessing if it is right or wrong, or judging it as positive or negative.)

If the client says holding on tightly to the thought is helpful/workable/facilitates towards moves etc, then we say, 'In that case, there is no problem. Let's move on to something that's an issue.'

If the client acknowledges that hooked/holding on is a problem we can then 'sell' defusion: "So if we could do some work here to help you unhook from these types of thoughts, (or loosen your grip on them) would that be useful?" We can then go on to more formal defusion practice.

So you've already done some defusion with those first steps – now you can go on to more formal defusion exercises. The great thing is a client can still defuse from a thought that he 100% believes, and that disputation can never disprove or refute – e.g. 'The plane might crash', 'I might get rejected', 'One day I will die'

### **DEFUSION – A MAJOR PARADIGM SHIFT**

- It's not the thought content that is the problem, in ACT. The problem is fusion.
- Always normalize & validate thoughts
- Always affirm that we don't choose the vast majority of our thoughts – they just 'show up'
- Be clear that no one has ever found a way to stop unhelpful thoughts from appearing - but we can learn to respond differently to them when they 'show up'.
- It doesn't matter how positive or negative the thought is.
- Positive thoughts can be really unhelpful, and negative thoughts can be really valuable, depending on the context.
- Even the most negative of thoughts is not a problem if we are defused from it.

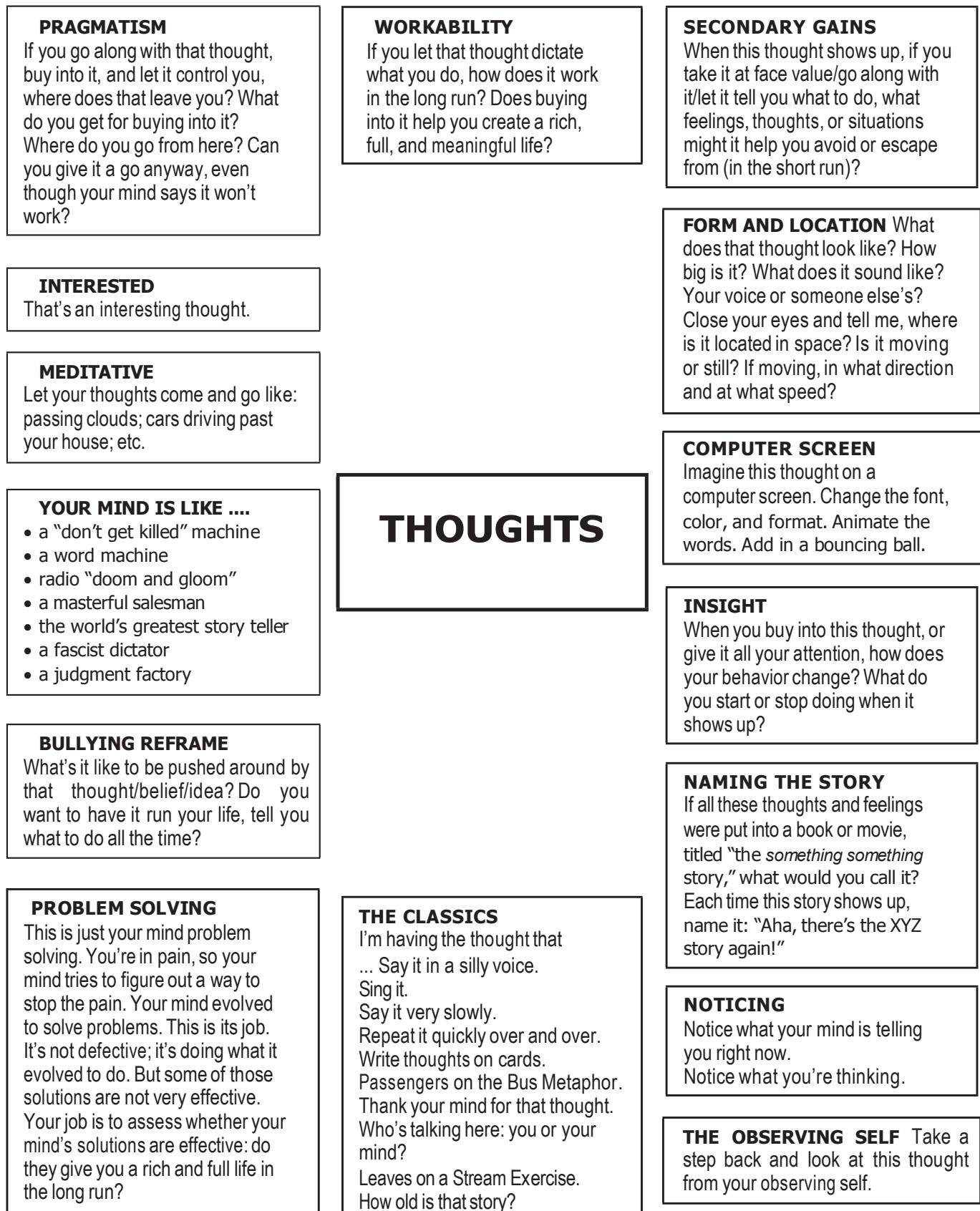


Figure 7.1 Summary of Defusion Techniques

## Values

Values are 'desired qualities of ongoing action'.

Colloquially: values are your heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being. Values are like a compass: guide you, give direction, help you stay on track.

Goals versus values: marriage versus being loving

Values-focused life versus goals-focused life

Values are NOT: goals, desires, needs, ethics, morals, feelings, rules, beliefs, codes of conduct

1. Values are here and now; goals are in the future.
2. Values never need to be justified.
3. Values often need to be prioritized.
4. Values are best held lightly.
5. Values are freely chosen.

Once values are clarified: short term, medium term and long term goals are set: SMART goals, and Live Person's goals! Then action plans are created to achieve the goals.

## The Mind-Reading Machine

This exercise is a fantasy – if dreams could come true, if magic could happen – what would you love to have happen? *We are not trying to realistically predict the future - it's a magical fantasy to help you get in touch with your values.*

Step 1 - Imagine: I wave a magic wand - and for the next ten years you behave like the sort of person you want to be in every important relationship in your life. Nothing stops you - no thoughts, no feelings, no life events (because this is magic).

Step 2 - Imagine: We are now ten years in the future. For the last ten years you have behaved like the sort of person you want to be in every important relationship in your life. And now I place a mind-reading machine on your head, and I tune it into the mind of someone very important to you, so you can now hear their every thought, just as if you were listening to a radio.

As you tune in this person's thoughts, they're thinking about YOU—and how you have behaved ***over the last ten years since the magic happened.*** - about what you stand for in life, what your greatest qualities are, and the role you played in their life.

If dreams could come true, if magic could happen, what would you love to hear them thinking? Imagine it now. First they are thinking about what you stand for in life – (pause 30 seconds)

And now, they are thinking about what your greatest qualities are – (pause 30 seconds)

And now, they are thinking about role you played in their life over the last 10 years – (pause 30 seconds)

*Repeat for one or two other important relationships, then process as follows:*

So what does this exercise reveal about the sort of person you ideally want to be: the qualities you want to develop or use more, the way you want to treat others, and what you want to stand for in life?

<b>WHAT MATTERS?</b> What do you really want? What matters to you in the big picture? What do you want to stand for? Is there anything in your life right now that gives you a sense of meaning, purpose, vitality?	<b>THE SWEET SPOT</b> Vividly recall a rich, “sweet” memory and get in touch with the emotions. What is meaningful about this memory?
<b>DISAPPROVAL</b> What do you disapprove of, or dislike, in the actions of others? How would you act differently, if you were in their shoes?	<b>MISSING OUT</b> What important areas of life have you given up or missed out on for lack of willingness?
<b>FORMS AND WORKSHEETS</b> Valued Living Questionnaire Bull's Eye Life Compass Valued Actions Inventory List of Common Values	<b>CHILDHOOD DREAMS</b> As a child, what sort of life did you imagine for the future?

<b>MIND-READING MACHINE</b> Imagine I place a mind-reading machine on your head, and I tune it into the mind of someone very important to you, so you can now hear their every thought. As you tune in, they’re thinking about YOU—about what you stand for, what your strengths are, what you mean to them, and the role you play in their life. In the IDEAL world, where you have lived your life as the person you want to be, what would you hear them thinking?	<b>Clarifying Values</b>
<b>LIFE AND DEATH</b> a. Imagine your own funeral: imagine what you would like to hear people saying about you. b. Act out your own funeral--psychodrama style c. Write your obituary or fill in a blank tombstone. d. Imagine you somehow know you only have twenty-four hours to live, but you can't tell anyone: who would you visit, and what would you do?	<b>WEALTH</b> You inherit a fortune. What would you do with it? Who would be there to share those activities or appreciate the things you buy? How would you act toward all those people who share your new life?
<b>EXPLORING YOUR PAIN</b> a. Pain As Your Ally: What does this pain tell you about what really matters, what you truly care about? b. Pain As Your Teacher: How can this pain help you to grow or learn or develop new skills and strengths? How can it help you better relate to others? c. From Worrying to Caring: What do your fears, worries and anxieties show you that you care about? What do they remind you is very important?	<b>MAGIC WAND</b> a. I wave this magic wand and you have the total approval of everyone on the planet—no matter what you do, they love, respect, and admire you—whether you become a surgeon or a serial killer. What would you then do with your life? How would you treat others? b. I wave this magic wand, and all these painful thoughts, feelings, and memories no longer have any impact on you. What would you do with your life? What would you start, stop, do more of, or less of? How would you behave differently? If we watched you on a video, what would we see and hear that would show us magic had happened?
<b>CHARACTER STRENGTHS</b> What personal strengths and qualities do you already have? Which new ones would you like to develop? How would you like to apply them?	<b>ARTISTIC METHODS</b> Paint, draw, or sculpt your values.
<b>IF ... THEN ...</b> If you achieved that goal, then how would you change as a result? What would you do differently from there on? How you would behave differently with friends, family, colleagues, customers, and others?	<b>LIKES</b> What do you like to do?
	<b>ROLE MODELS</b> Who do you look up to? Who inspires you? What personal strengths or qualities do they have that you admire?

Figure 11.1 Common Values Clarification Techniques

## **Join the D.O.T.S.**

We all naturally try to avoid or get rid of painful or unpleasant thoughts and feelings. The aim of this exercise is a) to find out which methods you use, and b) what effects those methods may have *in the long term*. NB: Please do this non-judgmentally - with genuine curiosity! Please do not start judging these methods as 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', 'positive' or 'negative'. The aim is simply to find out if these methods are workable – i.e. do these methods work *in the long term* to give you a rich and meaningful life? Obviously, if any of these methods *do* actually improve your life *in the long term*, keep doing them!

**D - Distraction:** what do you do to distract yourself from, or 'take your mind off' painful thoughts & feelings? (e.g. movies, TV, internet, books, computer games, exercise, gardening, gambling, food, drugs, alcohol)

**O - Opting out:** what *important, meaningful or life-enhancing* activities, events, tasks, challenges, or people, do you avoid, quit, escape, procrastinate, or withdraw from? (If they're not *important, meaningful or life-enhancing*, then opting out is no problem!)

**T- Thinking strategies:** how do you try (consciously or not) to think your way out of pain? Tick any of the following that you have done, and write in any others:

Worrying; Dwelling on the past; Fantasizing about the future; Imagining escape scenarios (eg leaving your job or your partner) or revenge scenarios; Thinking 'It's not fair ...' or 'If only ....'; Blaming yourself, others, or the world; Talking logically and rationally to yourself; Positive thinking; Positive affirmations; Judging or criticizing yourself; Giving yourself a hard time; Analyzing yourself (trying to figure out why you are like this); Analyzing the situation (trying to figure out why this happened); Analyzing others (trying to figure out why they are like this); Planning; Strategizing; Constructive problem-solving; Making To Do lists; Repeating inspirational sayings or proverbs; Challenging or disputing negative thoughts; Telling yourself 'This too shall pass' or 'It may never happen'.

Other thinking strategies:

**S - Substances & other Strategies:** what substances do you use put into your body to avoid or get rid of pain, (include foods, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, naturopathic and herbal remedies, and prescription medication)? Any other Strategies you use to avoid pain (e.g. yoga, meditation, having affairs, aggressiveness, Tai Chi, massage, exercise, picking fights, dancing, music, suicide attempts, self-harming, prayer, smashing things, staying in bed, self-help books, seeing a therapist)?

Now consider this: do these methods get rid of your unwanted thoughts and feelings, so they *never come back*?

How many of these methods give you some relief from pain *in the short term*, but keep you stuck or make your life worse *in the long term*: 'none' ..... 'a few' ..... 'about half' ..... 'most' ..... 'all'?

Clearly, some of these methods are helpful, *if you use them flexibly, moderately, sensibly* – in which case, keep using them! However, when you have over-relied on these methods – used them excessively, rigidly, or inappropriately - what have they cost you in terms of health, money, wasted time, relationships, missed opportunities, or increased emotional pain?

Given that a) no matter what you do, painful thoughts and feelings *keep coming back*, and b) trying very hard to avoid or get rid of them often makes life worse *in the long term* – would you be open to learning a 'new way' of responding to them; a method that is radically different to everything else you've tried ?

#### HEALING HAND

Lay a hand on the part of your body where you feel this most intensely. Imagine this is a healing hand--the hand of a loving nurse or parent or partner. Send some warmth into this area--not to get rid of the feeling, but to open up around it, make room for it, hold it gently.

#### SOFTENING

See if you can soften up around the feeling, loosen up, and hold it gently.

#### ALLOWING

See if you can allow this feeling to be there. You don't have to like it or want it--just allow it.

#### EXPANSION

See if you can open up and expand around the feeling. It's as if, in some magical way, all this space opens up inside you.

#### THE OBSERVING SELF

Take a step back and look at this feeling from your observing self.

#### THE CURIOUS SCIENTIST

Notice where this feeling is in your body. Zoom in on it. Observe it as if you are a curious scientist who has never encountered anything like this. Where are the edges? Where does it start and stop? Is it moving or still? Is it at the surface or inside you? Hot or cold? Light or heavy?

#### THE CHOICE TO FEEL

Suppose I could give you a choice: (a) you never have to have this feeling ever again, but it means you lose all capacity to love and care, or (b) you get to love and care, but when there's a gap between what you want and what you've got, feelings like this one show up.

Which do you choose?

#### COMPASSION

Hold this feeling gently as if it's a crying baby or a whimpering puppy.

#### THE STRUGGLE SWITCH

Is the struggle switch on, off, or at the halfway point we call "tolerating it"?

If the switch was like a dial with a scale of 0 to 10, and 10 is full on struggle, and 0 no struggle at all, then right now, what level are you? Are you willing to see if we can bring it down a notch or two?

# FEELINGS

#### NORMALIZING

This feeling tells you that you're a normal human being who has a heart and who cares. This is what humans feel when there's a gap between what we want and what we've got.

#### METAPHORS

Quicksand  
Passengers on the Bus  
Demons on the Boat  
Wade Through the Swamp  
Pushing Against a Clipboard

#### BREATHE INTO IT

Breathe into this feeling. It's as if your breath flows into and around it.

#### NOTICING

Notice where this feeling is. Notice where it's most intense. Notice the hot spots and cold spots. Notice the different sensations within the feeling.

#### PHYSICALIZING

Imagine this feeling is an object. Is it liquid, solid, or gaseous? How big is it? Is it light or heavy? What temperature is it? Is it at the surface or inside you? What shape does it have? What color? Is it transparent or opaque? What does the surface feel like--hot or cold, rough or smooth, wet or dry?

Figure 8.1 Common Acceptance Techniques

## NAME your feelings

- Notice
- Acknowledge
- Make room
- Expand awareness

## Steps In Acceptance

### IDENTIFYING 'PROBLEMATIC' FEELINGS/EMOTIONS/SENSATIONS

- Notice, identify them
- Where are they? What are they like? Observe them with curiosity
- Name them (non-judgmentally)
- Validate & normalise them

### NORMALISING

- Life is painful
- The 'reality gap' => a big gap between what you want and what you've got => naturally this hurts
- Inevitability of fear/anxiety when you step out of your comfort zone
- Psycho-education on emotions
- Q: How would you expect someone else to feel under these circumstances?

### IDENTIFYING CONSEQUENCES of AUTOMATICITY/FUSION

- When you get pushed around/ dominated by these feelings, how does your behaviour change?
- If I was watching on a video, what would I see or hear?
- And what happens after that? And then? And then?
- And how does that impact on your life?

### IDENTIFYING CONSEQUENCES of EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE (CREATIVE HOPELESSNESS/CONFRONTING THE AGENDA)

- Do you ever try to get rid of them? What sort of things do you do to make them go away?
- How long do they go away for? How soon do they return?
- Do those strategies you use (to avoid) have any long term drawbacks/costs/side-effects?

### NEW POSSIBILITY.

- So when these feelings show up, either they push you around/control you/ hold you back/ bring you down ...
- Or you try hard to avoid/get rid of them, which in the long term makes things worse.
- And the more that happens, the more you get you stuck, the harder life gets.
- I don't know how to stop painful feelings showing up. Everybody has them. But I do know a different way of responding to them .
- So that when they show up, you don't have to get caught up/ pushed around/ overwhelmed by them ...
- And you don't have to struggle with them or fight them, either.
- It's a new way of handling painful feelings, so they have much less impact and influence over you.
- It's radically different from everything else you've tried.
- Would you be interested in learning how to do that?

### LINK ACCEPTANCE TO VALUES

- Pushing Away Paper exercise demonstrates how acceptance facilitates values-based living
- If clients don't get this link, expect resistance.

## Self-compassion: 6 Elements

- Contact the present moment: notice & acknowledge your painful thoughts & feelings
- Kindness: pursue the value of kindness towards yourself: words, thoughts, imagery & action
- Defusion: defuse from harsh judgmental self-talk
- Acceptance: open up and make room for painful thoughts and feelings
- Validation: validate your pain as a normal & natural part of being human
- Connectedness: notice and empathise with others' pain; recognize your own pain as something you have in common with others; reveal your pain to compassionate others

## The Resilience Formula

*4 approaches to any problematic situation:*

1. Leave
2. Stay & change what can be changed
3. Stay & accept what can't be changed & live by your values
4. Stay & give up & do stuff that makes it worse

## OBSERVING SELF EXERCISE

- Notice your breath (10 seconds pause)
- Be aware you're noticing (10 seconds pause)
- Notice what you're thinking ...
- Be aware you're noticing ...
- Notice what you can hear ....
- Be aware you're noticing ....
- Notice what your mind is telling you ...
- Be aware you're noticing ....
- Notice what you can feel in your feet ....
- Be aware you're noticing ....
- Notice what thoughts you're having ....
- Be aware you're noticing ...
- So there's a part of you that notices everything
- Optional: Life is like a stage show ... and on that stage are all your thoughts and feelings and everything you can see, hear, touch, taste and smell ... and there's a part of you that can step back and watch the show – zoom in and take in the details, or zoom out and take in the big picture.
- *Optional: It's always there, always available. You use it every time you practice mindfulness. It's like a safe place from which to step back and observe your thoughts and feelings, and allow them to freely flow through you – to let them come, and stay and go in their own good time – neither sweeping you nor pulling you into a struggle.*

## Addressing Unworkable Behaviour In Session

### ➤ Contact With The Present Moment

*Can I press pause, please. I'm noticing something that's going on here*

### ➤ Defusion

*My mind's telling me you'll be upset or angry, or think I'm rude, or make a complaint about me, or this will damage our relationship.*

### ➤ Acceptance

*I'm feeling pretty anxious about it. My heart's racing.*

### ➤ Values

*But my aim in here is to help people live better lives – so if I ignore this, I'm not being true to myself and I'm doing you a disservice*

### ➤ Committed Action

*So even though I'm feeling really nervous, I'm going to tell you what I've noticed.*

### ➤ Non-judgmental description of the specific behaviour.

*I've noticed .....*

### ➤ Permission to address the behaviour

*Is it okay if we have a look at this behaviour for a moment –what effect it's having, what's triggering it?*

## **Commitment Exercise**

**PART 1** Pick a value of high importance that you have been neglecting or have lost touch with.

My value(s) is(are) to be ...

What I've been doing that's inconsistent with my value(s) is ....

What that has cost me is ...

(Think of relationships, health, wasted time, wasted money, emotional distress, etc)

**PART 2** My commitment is to take the following action(s). (Be specific: specify when will you do it - day, date, time - and what will you actually do) ....

In order to do what I value, I am willing to make room for (accept and defuse) the following thoughts, images, feelings, urges, memories & sensations:

I am willing to make room for thoughts & images such as:

I am willing to make room for emotions/feelings such as:

I am willing to make room for sensations in my body such as:

I am willing to make room for urges to:

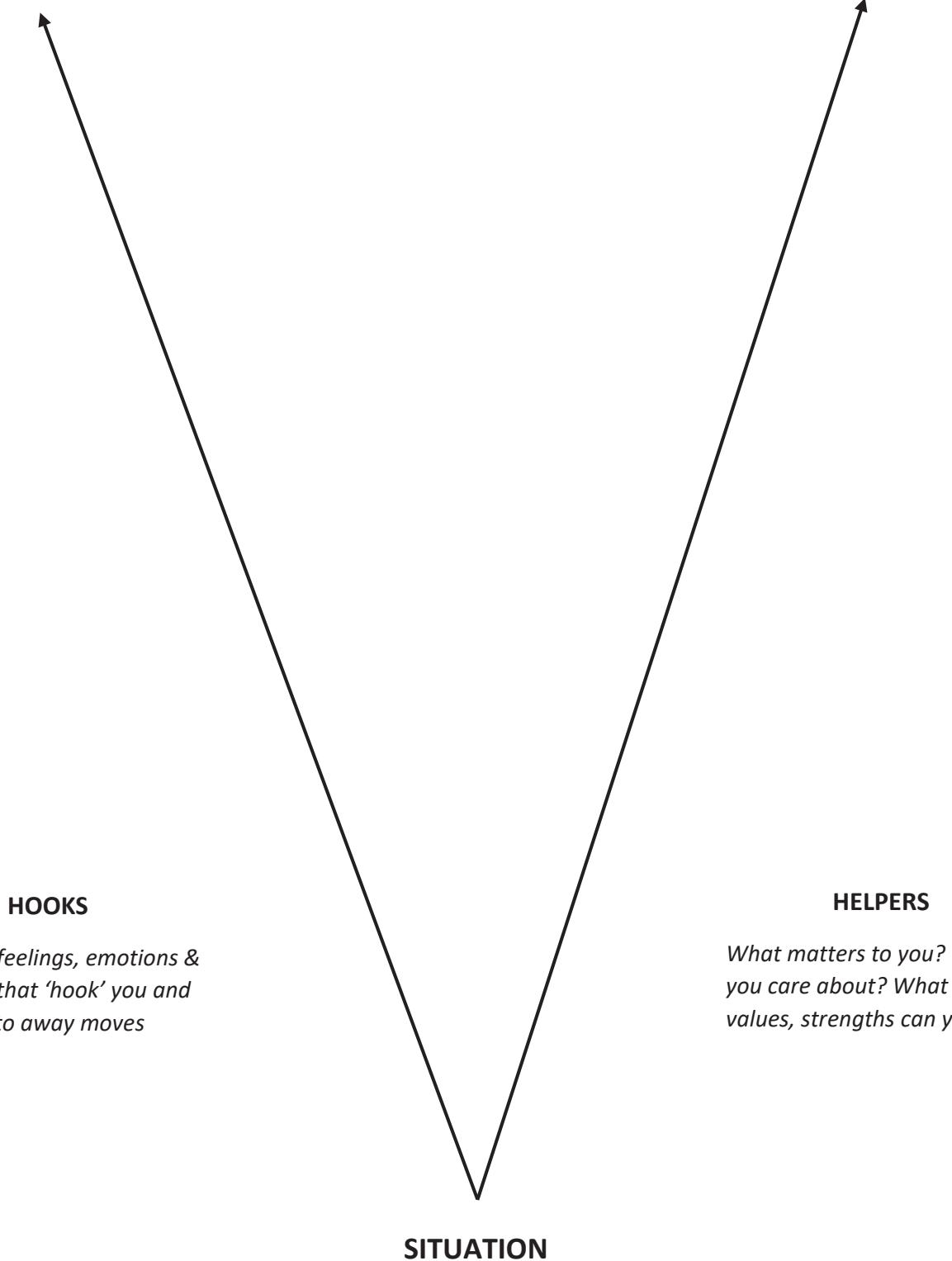
I am willing to make room for memories such as:

### AWAY MOVES

*Behaving unlike the person you want to be, doing things that take you away from the life you want*

### TOWARDS MOVES

*Behaving like the person you want to be, doing things that take you towards the life you want*



**\* \* \* BRAND NEW 2-DAY WORKSHOPS \* \* \***

# **ACT for Depression & Anxiety Disorders**

Do you want to help your clients find rapid relief from suffering? And go on to build richer, fuller lives?

If so, this 2-day advanced level workshop on is for you.

You'll go deeper into the ACT model, take your skills to the next level, and learn specific methods for depression and anxiety disorders.

You'll learn about common stumbling blocks and sticking points, and how to quickly get around them.

And you'll discover a wealth of practical tools and strategies to effectively target depression (major depressive disorder and dysthymia) and the full range of anxiety disorders (from OCD & phobias to social anxiety & panic disorder).

The workshop will include live demonstrations, videos of therapy sessions, and a wide range of experiential exercises.

## **Day 1: ACT for Anxiety Disorders**

- Case formulation and treatment planning made simple
- 5 most common mistakes when treating anxiety
- How to respond when clients say, “I hate this feeling! I just want it to go!”
- How to get to and work with the very roots of anxiety
- How to dissolve worrying and catastrophising
- ‘Mindful ceasefires’: the antidote to ‘panic attacks’
- Exposure: from old school to cutting edge. What is exposure? Why is it essential? What does the latest research tell us about the best way to do it?
- Facing your fears with compassion: the art of flexible exposure
- Defusing obsessions and surfing compulsions
- Releasing the shackles of perfectionism

## **Day 2: ACT for Depression**

- Case formulation and treatment planning made simple
- How to motivate the unmotivated
- What to do when clients say “nothing will work”
- How to set goals when “nothing matters”
- How to find meaning when “life is meaningless”
- Shame-busting: moving from self-contempt to self-compassion
- Working with the ‘inner child’
- Homework horrors: how to get clients active between sessions
- Out of the swamp: how to get clients moving in valued directions
- Suicidality: what reinforces it and how to compassionately undermine it

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### Enhance & Uplift Your Sessions with these Multimedia 8-week Online Courses

#### 'ACT Advanced' – 8-week Online Course

This action-packed, highly practical 8-week interactive online course takes your ACT skills to the next level. It includes numerous video clips of therapy sessions. It will guide and support you to strengthen and streamline your ACT, so you can effectively empower your clients. It covers all the same ground as Russ's advanced-level live ACT workshops (part 2 ACT-training), but in more depth and detail because it goes for much longer. The course runs three times a year. For more info: [www.lmlearningACT.com](http://www.lmlearningACT.com)

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This 8 week interactive online course will take you step-by-step through the use of ACT with the whole spectrum of trauma-related disorders (not just PTSD): [www.lmlearningACT.com](http://www.lmlearningACT.com)

#### The Happiness Trap Online – An 8 Week Personal Growth Course For Wellbeing & Vitality

An 8-week interactive online course, for the general public, starts February 2017: [www.thehappinesstrap.com](http://www.thehappinesstrap.com)

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### Take Your ACT Skills Further With These Specialised Masterclasses

#### ACT For Depression & Anxiety Disorders – with Russ Harris

Brand new 2-day advanced level workshops: Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth. September-October 2017. For more info, go to: [www.actmindfully.com.au](http://www.actmindfully.com.au)

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➤ ***The Happiness Trap – by Russ Harris***

*The best-selling ACT self-help book, for everyone and anyone; now published in 30 languages.*

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*A fun, comic-book version of the original – especially for teenagers and adults who are not into reading*

➤ ***The Reality Slap – by Russ Harris***

*An ACT-based self-help book for grief, loss, crisis, and trauma, with a major emphasis on self-compassion.*

➤ ***ACT With Love – by Russ Harris***

*A popular self-help book, based on the use of ACT for common relationship issues.*

➤ ***The Confidence Gap – by Russ Harris***

*An ACT look at confidence, success, and performance, especially suitable for life and executive coaching.*

➤ ***ACT Made Simple – by Russ Harris***

*An introductory textbook on ACT, packed full of practical information, in an accessible, easy-to-read style.*

➤ ***Getting Unstuck In ACT – by Russ Harris***

*The first advanced-level textbook on ACT. Covers common sticking points for both clients and therapists.*

➤ ***The Weight Escape – by Joe Ciarrochi, Ann Bailey, and Russ Harris***

*A self-help book on ACT for weight loss & wellbeing.*

#### ACT Companion: The Happiness Trap App

A really useful and practical app to use with your clients. Contains over 2 hours of recorded exercises.

Annual Australia & New Zealand ACT Conference: [www.anzact.com](http://www.anzact.com)

The Official ACT Website: [www.contextualpsychology.org](http://www.contextualpsychology.org)

This website is packed full of resources! Membership is via values-based dues – i.e. you pay whatever you think it's worth. (The minimum joining fee is \$10)



