

Invalidation

In any model of therapy, we can and will invalidate and upset our clients if we say or do things that are insensitive to their pain and suffering (or perceived as such).

Probably the greatest risk for invalidation amongst ACT newbies is leaping in to defusion techniques without first validating the client's suffering, responding compassionately, providing informed consent for ACT, and giving a clear rationale for defusion (what it is & how it helps)

Rationale for defusion

The best way I know of giving a clear rationale for defusion is the hands as thoughts & feelings exercise. [click to download script](#)

Note how this exercise validates the client's experience – it acknowledges the real problems the client has to address, e.g. illness or injury, financial problems, a sick child, etc. These are all included in the exercise – *“Imagine in front of you all the real life problems and challenges you need to deal with. (give examples)”*

Modify & Adapt

Adapt and modify EVERYTHING you see in ACT books, workshops, courses, videos etc. to suit your style and our clientele. There is nothing in any ACT training anywhere that says 'YOU MUST DO IT LIKE THIS'.

For example

‘Naming the story’ is often a simple, powerful, effective technique for defusion.

However, some clients object to the word ‘story’.

If you suspect (or know) the word ‘story’ will be invalidating, don’t use it!!!!

There are dozens if not hundreds of ways getting the same defusion affect without ever using the word ‘story’. For example

Alternatives to the word 'Story'

You could name it worrying, stressing, 'thinking about my son (or wife or job or illness) etc', 'ruminating', 'dwelling on it', 'going over and over it'.

Find a phrase that non-judgmentally describes the mental process and then label the process when you become aware of it – even the phrase 'thinking about my problems' or 'problem-solving' will do it. Even just 'thinking' or 'thoughts'.

Notice and Name

The aim is to first notice then name the cognitive process non-judgmentally: typically these are the first 2 steps in defusion.

Modify, Adapt, Change!

‘Thanking your mind’ and other zany techniques such as singing thoughts are very powerful used in the right context, completely invalidating in the wrong context.

So be sensible, mindful, wise. If you think the client is likely to find it invalidating, don’t do it. (For example, if your client is having horrible memories of sexual abuse, I would advise strongly against ‘Thanking the mind’.) There are zillions of other options.

Remember:

If you don't first a) compassionately and respectfully acknowledge and validate the client's pain and suffering, b) get informed consent for ACT, and c) give a clear rationale for defusion

Then you run the risk that virtually any defusion intervention will backfire or fail or invalidate the client.

The same is true for any ACT process. (And for any intervention form any other model of therapy).