**ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT THERAPY**

**CONTACTING THE PRESENT MOMENT**

*Be Here Now*

**ACCEPTANCE**

*Open Up*

**VALUES**

*Know What Matters*

**DEFUSION**

*Watch Your Thinking*

**COMMITTED ACTION**

*Do What It Takes*

**SELF-AS-CONTEXT**

*Flexible Perspective Taking*

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**Taking a history in ACT**

- Identify main external barriers – i.e. situations, relationships, events -- and how these problems impact. What does this stop you from doing (or being)?
- Identify fusion (past/future/self/rules/reasons/judgments)
- Identify experiential avoidance (emotions, memories, images, thoughts, sensations)
- Identify unworkable action (what is the client doing that doesn’t help or makes life worse)
- Identify values & goals (important life domains, values, valued activities, values-congruent goals)
- Identify strengths and resources and areas of life that are working well
- Identify past life history directly relevant to the current issue
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’s important to you in the big picture, what you want to stand for in life, what strengths and qualities you want to develop, and then using those values to help you take action to make your 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.
- Agree on number of sessions

Mindfulness

- ‘Paying attention with openness, curiosity and flexibility’
- At the ‘core’ of mindfulness is contact with the present moment
- The basic instruction is ‘notice X’ - where X is anything that is present, here and now
- The first step in defusion is ‘notice your thoughts’
- The first step in acceptance is ‘notice your feelings’
- The way to access the observing self is to ‘notice who is noticing’

Self-As-Context

- The meaning of Self-As-Context has recently changed. In all current ACT textbooks, SAC is defined mainly in terms of the ‘observing self’ or ‘observer self’. But as these books are revised, this will change. Now the term has come to mean ‘flexible perspective taking’ and 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

- ’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
- 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 card trick/ naming the story)
- contacting the observing self (‘continuous you’/ notice who’s noticing)
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entanglement with Thoughts</th>
<th>Life-draining Actions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle with Feelings</th>
<th>Avoiding Challenging Situations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
THE ‘THIRD WAY’ OF RESPONDING TO THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

What thoughts and feelings are problematic for you, in your life today?

We grow up learning two main ways of responding to thoughts and feelings: ‘Automatic’ or ‘Control’. Unfortunately, if these are the only two ways we know, this will hold us back in life.

1. ‘AUTOMATIC’ MODE
What do you do when you are in ‘AUTOMATIC’ mode – when you let your thoughts and feelings control you, as if you are a robot following a program? In other words, what do you do when you let your thoughts and feelings push you around, pull you down, overwhelm you, hold you back, keep you stuck, or otherwise dictate how you behave?

When you respond to thoughts and feelings in ‘AUTOMATIC’ mode, does it take you closer to the life you want, or further away?

2. CONTROL MODE
What sort of things do you do when you are in ‘CONTROL’ mode -- actively trying to avoid, fight or get rid of unwanted thoughts and feelings? (For example: distracting yourself; drugs; alcohol; medication; junk food; cigarettes; TV; books; internet; sleeping; procrastination; avoiding people, places, tasks or challenges; being hard on yourself; putting up with it and hoping it will go away; seeking advice; gambling; getting angry; blaming yourself or others; computer games; exercise; prayer; meditation; yoga; positive thinking; dieting or bingeing; self-harming or risky behaviour, constructive problem-solving; procrastination; giving up or quitting; making ‘to do’ lists, fantasising about the future, etc.)

If any of these things improve your life in the long term, keep doing them!
But consider this: do these methods get rid of your unwanted thoughts and feelings, so they never come back again?
How many of these methods give you some relief in the short term, but keep you stuck or make your life worse in the long term?
When you have over-relied on these methods, what have they cost you in terms of health, money, wasted time, relationships, missed opportunities, or increased emotional pain?

Do you wish to go through life with only those two ways of responding to difficult thoughts and feelings – ‘automatic’ or ‘control’ -- or are you open to a ‘third way’ that is radically different?
### ACT Made Simple

#### PRAGMATISM
If you go along with that thought, buy into it, and let it control you, where does that leave you? What do you get for buying into it? Where do you go from here? Can you give it a go anyway, even though your mind says it won’t work?

#### WORKABILITY
If you let that thought dictate what you do, how does it work in the long run? Does buying into it help you create a rich, full, and meaningful life?

#### SECONDARY GAINS
When this thought shows up, if you take it at face value/go along with it/let it tell you what to do, what feelings, thoughts, or situations might it help you avoid or escape from (in the short run)?

#### FORM AND LOCATION
What does that thought look like? How big is it? What does it sound like? Your voice or someone else’s? Close your eyes and tell me, where is it located in space? Is it moving or still? If moving, in what direction and at what speed?

#### COMPUTER SCREEN
Imagine this thought on a computer screen. Change the font, color, and format. Animate the words. Add in a bouncing ball.

#### INSIGHT
When you buy into this thought, or give it all your attention, how does your behavior change? What do you start or stop doing when it shows up?

#### NAMING THE STORY
If all these thoughts and feelings were put into a book or movie, titled “the something something story,” what would you call it? Each time this story shows up, name it: “Aha, there’s the XYZ story again!”

#### NOTICING
Notice what your mind is telling you right now. Notice what you’re thinking.

#### THE OBSERVING SELF
Take a step back and look at this thought from your observing self.

#### INTERESTED
That’s an interesting thought.

#### MEDITATIVE
Let your thoughts come and go like: passing clouds; cars driving past your house; etc.

#### YOUR MIND IS LIKE ....
- a “don’t get killed” machine
- a word machine
- radio “doom and gloom”
- a masterful salesman
- the world’s greatest story teller
- a fascist dictator
- a judgment factory

#### THOUGHTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THOUGHTS</th>
<th>THE CLASSICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m having the thought that ... Say it in a silly voice. Sing it. Say it very slowly. Repeat it quickly over and over. Write thoughts on cards. Passengers on the Bus Metaphor. Thank your mind for that thought. Who’s talking here: you or your mind? Leaves on a Stream Exercise. How old is that story?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### BULLYING REFRAME
What’s it like to be pushed around by that thought/belief/idea? Do you want to have it run your life, tell you what to do all the time?

#### PROBLEM SOLVING
This is just your mind problem solving. You’re in pain, so your mind tries to figure out a way to stop the pain. Your mind evolved to solve problems. This is its job. It’s not defective; it’s doing what it evolved to do. But some of those solutions are not very effective. Your job is to assess whether your mind’s solutions are effective: do they give you a rich and full life in the long run?

#### WORKABILITY
If you let that thought dictate what you do, how does it work in the long run? Does buying into it help you create a rich, full, and meaningful life?

#### FORM AND LOCATION
What does that thought look like? How big is it? What does it sound like? Your voice or someone else’s? Close your eyes and tell me, where is it located in space? Is it moving or still? If moving, in what direction and at what speed?

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#### NOTICING
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#### THE OBSERVING SELF
Take a step back and look at this thought from your observing self.

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**Figure 7.1 Summary of Defusion Techniques**

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**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?

**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**
Quick sand
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.

**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?

**FEELINGS**

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

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

**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?

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Figure 8.1  **Common Acceptance 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.

In ACT, values come first: then goals.

Once values are clarified: short term, medium term and long term goals are set:

SMART goals, and Live Person’s goals!

Some Values Clarification Exercises

The Magic Wand

7-day Documentary

Values worksheets e.g. Bull’s Eye, Valued Living Questionnaire

Childhood dreams

Role models

1 Week to Live

What gives you a sense of meaning/ purpose/ fulfillment?

80th birthday/ Wedding anniversary/ Retirement party

Funeral/Eulogy/Tombstone

Explore pain: what does this tell you about what really matters to you?
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:
RESOURCES

2-day introductory workshops (ACT training part 1), & 2-day advanced workshops (ACT training part 2)

ACT 1-day Masterclass Workshops, throughout Australia, all year round: [www.actmindfully.com.au](http://www.actmindfully.com.au)
These advanced level 1-day workshops are run by leading ACT authorities from around the world. They are designed for those who have completed both the part 1 and part 2 basic ACT training. So far confirmed for 2012: John Forsyth – Compassionate Use of Exposure Strategies in ACT; Robert Zettle – ACT for Depression; Ann Bailey – ACT With Borderline Personality Disorder; Robyn Walser – ACT With Trauma; Louise Hayes – ACT With Youth And Adolescents

Public Workshops: ‘The Happiness Trap’ and ‘The Weight Escape’
We now run self-development workshops for the general public. The 2-day Happiness Trap workshops for happiness, confidence and vitality, and the 1-day Weight Escape workshops for weight loss and wellbeing, are open to everyone and anyone. For details: [www.thehappinesstrap.com](http://www.thehappinesstrap.com)

Free Online Resources to Use With Books
There are a stack of free resources – for both professionals and the public - to use with all Russ’s books, on the ‘Free Resources’ pages of both [www.thehappinesstrap.com](http://www.thehappinesstrap.com) and [www.actmindfully.com.au](http://www.actmindfully.com.au)

The Reality Slap – by Russ Harris
The ‘reality slap’ takes many different forms. Sometimes it is so violent it’s more like a punch: the death of a loved one, a serious illness, a major injury, a freak accident, a shocking crime, a disabled child, the loss of a job; bankruptcy, betrayal, fire, flood, divorce or disaster. Sometimes it’s a little gentler: envy, loneliness, resentment, failure, disappointment, or rejection. But whatever form it takes, one thing’s for sure: it hurts! And most of us don’t deal with the pain very well. This book will show you how ACT can help you to:
- find peace in the midst of your pain
- find calm in the midst of your chaos
- use your painful emotions to cultivate wisdom and compassion
- find fulfilment even when you can’t get what you want
- heal your wounds, and come through stronger than before

The Happiness Trap – by Russ Harris
An ACT-based self-help book, aimed at everyone and anyone; now published in 22 languages and 30 countries.

ACT With Love – by Russ Harris

The Confidence Gap – by Russ Harris
An ACT look at confidence, success, and peak performance, especially suitable for life coaching and executive coaching, and for those folks who are not struggling with major clinical disorders. (That’s why, in this book, ACT stands for Acceptance & Commitment Training rather than Therapy.)

ACT Made Simple – by Russ Harris
An introductory textbook on ACT, packed full of practical information, presented in an entertaining, accessible, easy-to-read style. (Russ originally wanted to call it ‘ACT For Dummies’.)

Annual Australia & New Zealand ACT Conference: [www.anzact.com](http://www.anzact.com)
The 2012 ANZACT conference is in Melbourne, Nov 16-18. In July 2013, the world ACT conference will be in Sydney.

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 $1.00) Membership entitles you to a vast array of free resources, plus access to a world-wide email ‘chat group’ for ACT therapists to support and learn from each other.
GOOD SELF/BAD SELF EXERCISE
SIDE A: The Bad Self
Write in large letters at least three or four negative self-judgments below:

I am ....

I am ....

I am ....

I am ....

You’re Not Who You Think You Are! - an exercise created by psychologist Daniel. J. Moran

1. I am ..............................................................................................................

2. I am ..............................................................................................................

3. I am ..............................................................................................................

4. I am ..............................................................................................................

5. I am ..............................................................................................................

6. I am ..............................................................................................................

7. I am ..............................................................................................................

8. I am ..............................................................................................................

9. I am ..............................................................................................................

10. I am ..........................................................................................................
GOOD SELF/BAD SELF EXERCISE
SIDE B: The Good Self
Write in large letter at least three or four positive self-judgments below:

I am ....

I am ....

I am ....

I am ....