

## Beginning to Use ACT with PTSD



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Welcome to Module 2. In this module, I will begin walking you through the actual process of conducting ACT with posttraumatic stress disorder.

## No One Protocol or Session Structure for All Clients



Every client is different



ACT requires flexibility based on presenting concerns and the case conceptualization

Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



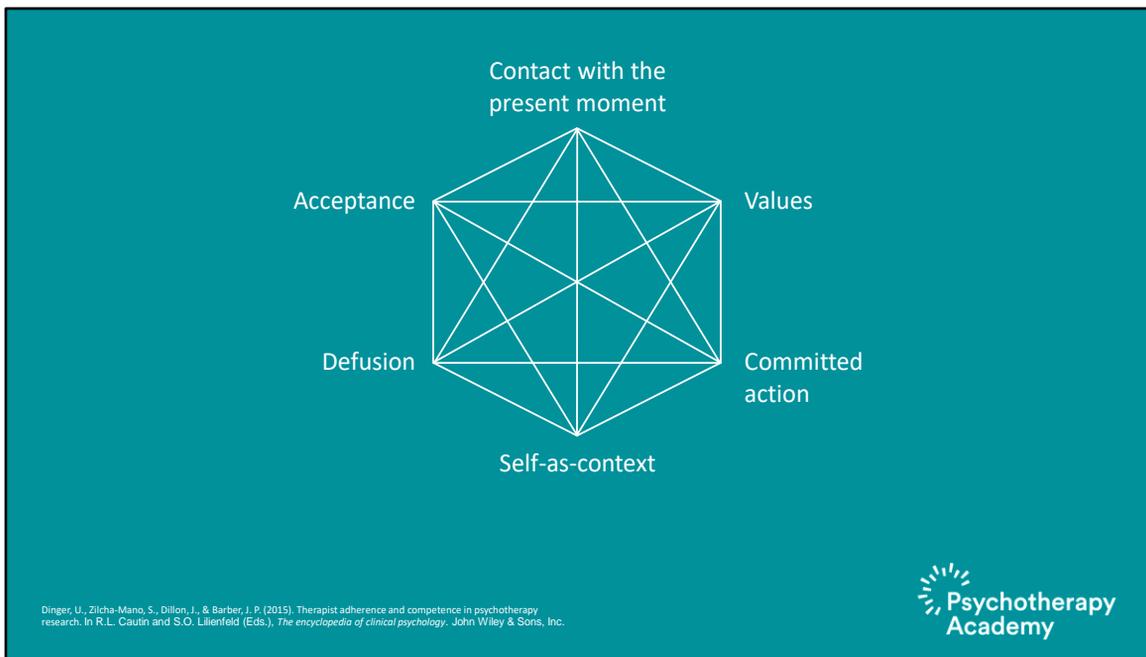
But before I get into that, I think it's important to note that there is no one protocol or session structure that should be used with all clients. Every client is different. And although you'll see protocols presented in a certain way, in reality, you might modify that for a given client.

So, I'm going to walk you through one potential topic-by-topic structure in the remainder of this course, but that's not to say that it's the sequence that should always be used with all trauma clients.

ACT really requires flexibility based on presenting concerns and the case conceptualization that you arrive at.

### \*References\*

- Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



But the beauty is that you can truly start anywhere within that hexaflex model I described earlier, that hexagon that has acceptance, defusion, present moment contact, self-as-context, values, committed action. There's no real right or wrong answer about where to start.

But when you're conducting a training on ACT, I have to start somewhere.

**\*References\***

- Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



Walk through a protocol from beginning to end

Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



And in fact, when you're first learning ACT, I really think it's important to walk through a protocol from beginning to end—honestly, probably a couple of times before you really start modifying anything—because here's how it can go.

**\*References\***

- Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

## Learning ACT



Walk through a protocol before  
modifying anything

Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



You hear me say, well, ACT is really flexible and you can start anywhere you want. And so by the end of this course, you're really comfortable with the acceptance and the values pieces. And so you end up focusing mostly on acceptance and values.

### \*References\*

- Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

## What Can Happen?



End up only doing things you're comfortable with



Don't challenge yourself to learn



Risk eclectically applying random pieces of ACT

Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



Well, what can happen is you end up only doing the things that you're comfortable with and not really challenging yourself to learn the other parts of the treatment that are actually part of the full model.

And it is the full model that the evidence rests on, not just applying small pieces of the model. So, I think it's really important especially when you're learning ACT to not just skip around because you have the risk at that point of just becoming sort of eclectically applying random pieces of ACT.

### \*References\*

- Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



I think it's important here to remember the distinction between adherence and competence. And when you're learning psychotherapy, my philosophy is that you move from adherence to a given treatment into competence.

So, therapist adherence refers to the extent to which a therapist uses the specific techniques of a particular therapy approach.

And then competence is the degree of skillfulness in their delivery.

So, adherence is: Can you go through a protocol and deliver the exercises and the homework assignments and say the right things, in general, so that you're adhering to the treatment protocol and philosophy?

Competence is being able to flexibly apply those things on the fly.

**\*References\***

- Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

## Move Through Adherence Into Competence



Understand ACT



Practice all the components



Be prepared for the unexpected

Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



And I think it's really important to work in a focused way to move through adherence into competence. Because if you have a relatively straightforward client, you might be able to, you know, sort of take things a little bit more on the fly. But without truly understanding the theoretical underpinnings of ACT and having practiced all of the different components, you will not be as well prepared to address those unexpected things that happen that aren't written about in the protocol.

### \*References\*

- Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

## Adherence and Competence Are Essential



Enable you to address the  
real-world client



Become competent, then apply  
the principles more flexibly

Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



So, both adherence and competence are essential to treatment integrity. And that's especially important when conducting studies on the efficacy of a specific form of psychotherapy.

Adherence and competence are also important so that you can address the real-world client who is there in front of you with the real-world challenges that shift from session to session.

So, once you've become competent, then you can experiment with applying the principles more flexibly on a case-by-case basis. But if you jump too quickly into the flexible application, you're likely to be using just a hodgepodge style that doesn't truly reflect ACT and, therefore, is likely to be less effective.

### \*References\*

- Dinger, U., Zilcha-Mano, S., Dillon, J., & Barber, J. P. (2015). Therapist adherence and competence in psychotherapy research. In R.L. Cautin and S.O. Lilienfeld (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of clinical psychology*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

## Key Points

---

- There is no one official protocol or sequence for presenting ACT concepts and treatment.
- Move through adherence into competence.



So, to review the key points: There is no one official protocol or sequence for presenting ACT concepts and treatment. However, in order to learn ACT and move through adherence into competence,

## Key Points

---

- Work through a specific sequence or protocol to ensure you understand the concepts.
- Over time, you can apply them in a more flexible way.



it's useful to challenge yourself to work through a specific sequence or protocol to ensure that you truly understand the concepts. Then over time, you can apply them in a more flexible way that is still theoretically consistent with the ACT model.



Next Presentation:

## **Rationale and Key Concepts: Values Clarification**

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

# Rationale and Key Concepts: Values Clarification



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

## Introducing ACT: Individuals Who Have Experienced Trauma



Remember that facing the challenges of trauma can be difficult



Introduce the concept of values

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



There's no one right or wrong sequence for introducing ACT concepts and principles in the treatment of posttraumatic problems in living. But since I can't teach you everything at once, I'm going to go ahead and describe one common way of using ACT with individuals who have experienced traumatic events.

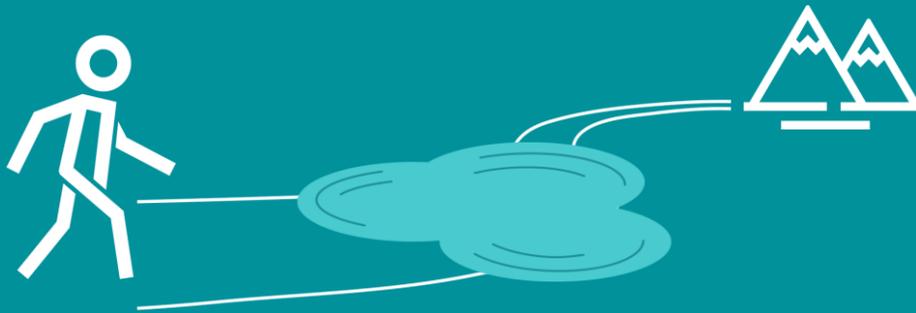
Asking individuals to face the challenges and pain that their trauma histories have led to can be very difficult. And many clients express hesitance to engage in this work.

One method for beginning to ask the client to open up to the work is by introducing the concept of values first.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Inviting Clients to Get Closer to the Life They Want



Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



The idea is that we're not suggesting that the client delve into his or her own pain just for its own sake. But instead, we're inviting them to do that as a way of moving through places where they may be stuck so that they can get closer to the life they want to have.

And this relates to the metaphor that I introduced in the previous module of moving through the swamp in order to get to the desired mountain on the other side.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



**Values: Helpful introductory work  
before diving into the more challenging  
components**

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

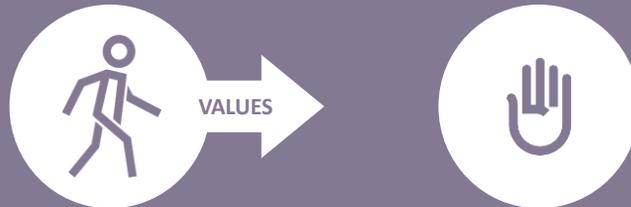


So, what we found is that working through values can be helpful as an initial piece of introductory work before diving into the more emotionally challenging components of ACT. And really having that values orientation serves as motivation for the hard work ahead.

**\*References\***

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Values Clarification



What clients want their life  
to move toward

No right or wrong

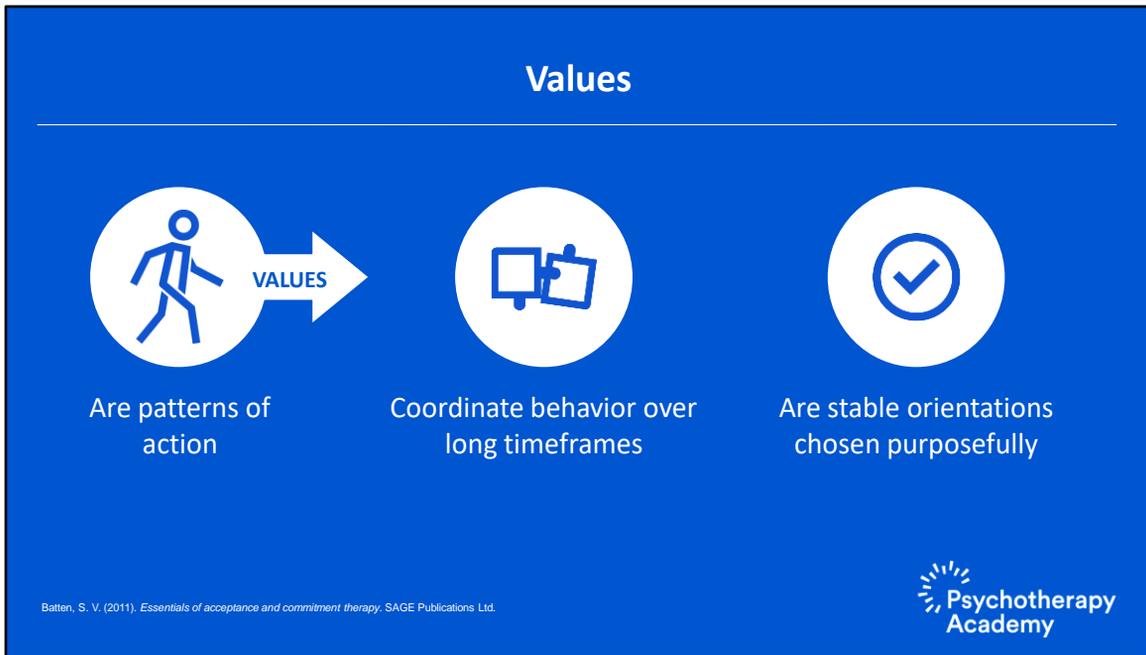
Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

The ACT core process, described as values clarification, is about working with a client to determine what he wants his life to move toward, rather than away from. Values aren't about whether certain choices are right or wrong or good or bad. Values are simply what we consider verbally construed descriptions of what is important to someone and where he or she wants to go in life.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Values, they're seen as patterns of action that provide a sense of meaning and that can help coordinate our behavior over long timeframes. And they're considered to be relatively stable orientations that are chosen purposefully by the individual and are not determined by feelings that may change from moment to moment. Over the course of your life in general, although there may be some change, the type of person that you want to be and the things that are important to you are relatively stable. Values aren't defined by fleeting thoughts or reactions about thoughts, feelings, memories.

**\*References\***

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Everyone Values Something



A history of avoidance:  
Difficulty contacting your own  
values



Success: Living in  
accordance with your  
own values

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



And everyone values something. Some clients may have such a long history of avoidance or punishment by other people for expressing their desires and preferences that they may have difficulty contacting their own values at first. But within ACT, success is defined by living in accordance with your own values, not by achieving specific goals. So, it's really important to help the client decide—well, not so much decide as get in contact with—what is really important to them, what are their individual values.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



## Values

- A general direction



## Goals

- A specific achievable outcome

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



And it's important, in ACT, to distinguish between how we use the term values and how we use the term goals. You know, in regular conversation, you may use those terms interchangeably. But in ACT, each of those two terms has a specific meaning and usage. So, a value is seen as a general direction in which you want to head in your life, whereas a goal is a specific achievable outcome that you can target in service of a value.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



### Values

- Can never be fully attained



### Goals

- Can be written down on a list of things to accomplish

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



If you want to think about a simple way of telling the difference, a goal is something that can be written down on a list of things to accomplish and eventually scratched off when the goal is achieved. But a value is a direction that can never be fully attained. There's always more to do.

#### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Multiple Domains for Values Clarification



Intimate relationships



Friendships



Family relationships



Work



Education



Leisure activities



Physical health



Community

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



And there are multiple domains for values clarification. Some examples, but this is not an exhaustive list, are intimate relationships, friendships, family relationships, work, education, leisure activities, physical health, community, the environment, personal growth. People can come up with any domain they want to identify their values.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Success in Living

---



Choices promote values

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



From an ACT perspective, whether or not you have success in living is defined by the extent to which your choices and behaviors are coordinated over time in a way that promotes those values that you choose to see as important.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Value Directions



These direct and dignify the therapy



Each individual chooses the direction in which their life is headed



ACT focuses on identifying value directions for life

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Value directions both direct and dignify the therapy. Each individual is able to mindfully choose the direction in which his life is headed.

And one of the really unique aspects of ACT is its focus on explicitly working with a client to identify value directions for life. And moving toward one's values dignifies the hard work of willingness and committed action in the present moment.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



**Each individual has the right to  
determine what's important**

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



The ACT approach is inherently respectful of individual differences and begins with the assumption that each individual has the right to determine what is important to him or her. And that's distinguished from the expectations of one's culture or authority figures. It's not for the therapist to say what's right or wrong. It's for the client to choose what is important to them.

**\*References\***

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Key Points

---

- When working with trauma survivors, it's useful to provide a brief introduction to values.
- Values clarification work focuses on identifying what the client wants out of life.
- By identifying core values, the therapist and client will have a touchstone to remember what's at stake.



So, to summarize the key points: Although many ACT protocols in books introduce values work later in the therapy process, when you're working with trauma survivors, it's sometimes useful to provide a brief introduction to the concept of values before diving into more emotionally challenging material.

Values clarification work focuses on helping the individual to identify what he or she really wants out of life and what areas are most important to the person as an individual, not defined by what other people or the culture would say should be important.

And by identifying a few core values that are important to the individual, the therapist and client will have a touchstone to help remember what is at stake as they begin more trauma-focused work.



Next Presentation:

## **Values Clarification With PTSD: Exercises and Metaphors**

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

## Values Clarification With PTSD: Exercises and Metaphors



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

In this video, I'll give you some examples of exercises and metaphors that can be used to help with values clarification.



## What Is Most Important to You?

### The Compass Metaphor

#### Values

- The direction

#### Goals

- Specific stops

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

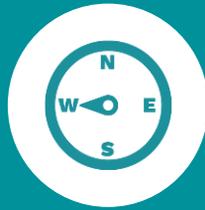


For some people, it may be the case that you could simply ask them, “What is most important to you in these areas?” And they might be able to give you a direct answer. But for many other people, it’s helpful to use exercises and metaphors to help get to those points. One of the most common ones, and one of the clearest ways to talk about values and goals, is what we call the compass metaphor.

The compass is the thing that tells you direction: north, south, east, west. And this common ACT metaphor makes the distinction between values and goals because it describes a value as a direction you might find on a compass with the goals being the specific stops along the way. So, for example, if I ask you, “Which direction is most important to you to go? Which direction provides you the most meaning?”

#### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



## Your Internal Compass

There's always more west to go

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



And you know, you have that compass and your internal compass says, “Going west is important to me.” And so you’re starting in New York City and going west is important to you. And so you might say the goals along the way are: “First, I want to go to San Francisco, then I want to go to Tokyo, and then I want to go to Vienna.” Those are each stops and specific goals along that value of going west.

But the thing is that there’s always more west to go. Even once you get to Vienna, you can keep going. There’s always more west to go. And that’s how it is with real values in your life as well.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Being an Engaged Parent Is My Value



Identify some specific goals in the service of values



Ask, "How will that look?"



Know that there will always be more to do

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



So, for example, you might say, "Being an engaged parent is my value. That's what's important to me." And so we might then dig in and identify what are some specific goals that would be in the service of those values. And so examples might be, you know—Okay. So, being an engaged parent, how will that look? Well, it might mean that when my kid comes home from school, I listen to them. I actually actively listen to them about how their day was. It might be if you have a small child reading a book with them each night. It might be making a healthy dinner so that they can be physically healthy and you can spend time with them during dinner. All of these things are specific goals that can be along the way of being an engaged parent. But you're never done being an engaged parent. There's always more to do.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



## Values

- Are the direction that informs behavior



## Goals

- Demonstrate how you're living those values
- Can be accomplished

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



So, values are the direction that informs behavior. And then goals are the specific stops along the way that demonstrate how you're living those values. One of those things can be accomplished. So, the goals can be accomplished. You could put read a book tonight. You could put that on the list and you could check it off when you're done. But the general idea of moving in the direction of being an engaged parent is never finished.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



## The Stranded on a Desert Island Exercise

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



I'm going to give you a longer exercise now that we call the stranded on a desert island exercise. And this exercise capitalizes on the fact that end of life or when somebody leaves, those are natural times for reflection. And so we like to do this one as a closed eyes exercise or you may not have the person do closed eyes exercises. They can just choose to look down at the floor or at a spot where they can leave their eyes on focus. So, I'll walk you through a script here of how we might use the desert island exercise. And you might try it yourself.

### \*References\*

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## The Stranded on a Desert Island Exercise



Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Imagine that you're on a long flight over a large body of water. And suddenly, halfway through the flight, your plane is forced to make a crash landing onto a desert island. Everyone on the flight, including you, is able to survive landing, but nobody back home knows that you're still alive. It will be several weeks before you're eventually rescued. So, in the meantime, your family and friends go ahead and have a memorial service in your honor.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## The Stranded on a Desert Island Exercise



Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



And so first, I'd like you to go ahead and imagine what the service would look like and who might be there. And I'll pause for a moment while you do that. Look around and see if you can identify a few of the details. And next, I'd like you to imagine that people begin to stand up to speak in your honor. However, rather than the universally positive things that are usually more likely to be spoken in a memorial service, all of these people say what they would say based on how you have actually been living your life. They can magically see exactly what you've been valuing with your actions and they speak the truth about that.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## The Stranded on a Desert Island Exercise



Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



And I'll be quiet for a moment while you imagine what they might say and then you can notice how it is for you to hear those things spoken by your loved ones. And for the purpose of this video, I'll pause just for a moment here.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## The Stranded on a Desert Island Exercise



Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Psychotherapy  
Academy

So, for the purpose of this video, I'm only going to be quiet for a moment. But in reality, you might actually be quiet for a couple of full minutes so that the client can truly engage with this imaginal exercise.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## The Stranded on a Desert Island Exercise

---



Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Next, I'd like you to imagine that you and the others have miraculously been rescued from the island. And you now have the chance to start over and begin your life again based on your values, what's important to you, and the insights you've gained from what you heard at the memorial service.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Find Those Actions That Demonstrate Your Values



Live your life in a way that's more consistent with your values



Find some examples of how that will look

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

So, imagine moving through the next many years actually living with your actions as those that your values would suggest you do. So, you're going to actually find those actions that demonstrate your values. And instead of living based on avoidance or what may be driving you sometimes in your day-to-day life now, you actually are able to live your life in a way that is more consistent with your values. So, just picture that for a moment and find some examples of how that will look.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



And now imagine that eventually you die at a ripe old age and your loved ones hold another memorial service for you. Listen now to what it is that your family and friends have to say and notice how it is to hear these things this time.

**\*References\***

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Discuss what they noticed in each of those scenarios

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Again, for the purpose of this video, I'm pausing only for a moment, but in reality, you might pause for a couple of minutes while your client imagines that in detail. And then you would ask them to open their eyes and discuss with you what they noticed in each of those scenarios—both in terms of what was said and how they responded to hearing what was said.

**\*References\***

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



- Identify the discrepancies on those 2 sets of tombstones

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



So, a shorter version of the exercise that we just went through with the desert island can be conducted by asking the client to imagine what would be written on his tombstone in the 2 sets of circumstances that I just described. It can actually be useful to provide 2 handouts with an outline of a tombstone on them and to ask the client to write different variants of what might describe the client's behavior recently.

Like, "Here lies Susan. She spent her life scrolling through her phone 8 hours a day." Or in the circumstance where the person takes the opportunity to start living a life of value, it might be something more like, "Here lies Susan. She did what she could to be a good friend to everyone around her." So, the act of having to identify discrepancies on those 2 sets of tombstones and write them plainly in black and white can be very powerful.

#### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Awareness of how avoidance and misaligned behaviors  
can keep someone from living a life of value

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Both the desert island and tombstone exercises give your clients an opportunity to juxtapose this awareness of how avoidance and misaligned behaviors can keep someone from living a life of value and the fact that now is the best time to make a change to avoid additional missed opportunities and pain.

**\*References\***

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Identifying Values and Facing the Person's Traumatic History



“What if finding different ways to relate to those experiences could be like the work of moving through the swamp?”

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



Then, in order to make the connection between identifying these values and the work of facing the person's traumatic history, the therapist can ask the client something like, “And so, do you remember that story about the swamp that I described before? What if working through some of your thoughts, feelings, and memories related to the trauma and finding some different ways to relate to those experiences could be like the work of moving through the swamp in order to get to the other side and your values are the mountain across the way? If that were the case, would that make it worthwhile to work on some of that trauma stuff even if it's hard?” And then being open to wherever that conversation goes.

### \*References\*

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

## Key Points

---

- To help identify client values, the therapist capitalizes on the natural qualities of activities that reflect directional movement.
- Living a life that's consistent with one's values is never done.
- There's always another opportunity to change the trajectory we're on.



So, the key points: When using metaphors to help identify client values, the therapist can capitalize on the natural qualities of activities that reflect directional movement or reflection on how life has been lived.

And it's important to remember that living a life that's consistent with one's values is never done until we've taken our last breaths.

There is always another opportunity to change the trajectory we're on in order to get closer to a life of value.



Next Presentation:

## Challenges When Working With Values Clarification

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

# Challenges When Working With Values Clarification



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

## Starting the Conversation About Values



With trauma survivors, there can be more challenges

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



So, for some people, starting the conversation about values in a direct way can go really smoothly. You can describe the process, perhaps give the compass metaphor, and maybe they're ready and they know what's important to them.

But with trauma survivors oftentimes, there can be more challenges than that. So, I'm going to talk to you now about some common difficulties that therapists may encounter when they're working with values clarification in the context of posttraumatic stress disorder or other posttraumatic problems in living.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Challenge: Watch the Process Carefully



Make sure the client isn't overintellectualizing values



Point out that the idea isn't to get a perfectly written description



Get a description that speaks to the person

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



And so with certain clients, for example, one challenge that you might find is that you need to watch the process carefully to make sure that the client isn't overintellectualizing values to the extent that the heart of the process is being lost.

So, if you have a client who is highly verbal and seems more focused on providing the exact, technically perfect description of his values, that can be an opportunity to notice the process and maybe point out that the idea isn't to get the exact, perfectly written description.

The idea is to get a description on paper that speaks to the person and helps orient them and remind them what's important.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## The Tombstone Exercise: The Client Dissects the Description



The client picks apart  
the logic



They're  
overintellectualizing



The words aren't what's  
important here

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.

- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



Or maybe you're giving the tombstone exercise and the client dissects the description of that exercise and picks apart the logic of it or dissects the descriptions of values versus goals that you were talking about in a way that makes it difficult to engage with the process.

That can be a sign that the person is overintellectualizing the process. And maybe you need to find a way to get to it more directly and point out that the words are not what's important here. It's connecting with what's important.

Values clarification is really less about getting the most beautiful description of a life value and it's more about getting to the heart of what would make the client's life worth living.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



Prevent the client from identifying values just to get approval from others

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



It's also really important for the therapist to intervene to prevent the client from just identifying values based on what he or she believes will lead to approval by others.

So, some clients may be used to trying to get approval from their parents or their culture, their religious institutions, or even the therapist. We call this term, in behavioral psychology, *pliance*. Think about the word “compliance,” for example.

#### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Pliance: Rule-Governed Behavior



An individual follows a rule because they've been reinforced by others for that in the past



They might identify values that they think would be important to others

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



Pliance is the word that we use to describe rule-governed behavior where an individual follows a rule because they've been reinforced by others for following rules in the past.

And so, if somebody has been, in their life, reinforced for following rules in a variety of ways, then they may be more likely to identify values that they think would be important to others, to follow those social rules about how one is supposed to live life.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Pliance: An Example



Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



An example from a client that I worked with is that we're working on this process and she kept saying that she wanted to go to college and get a degree. And so each week, we would identify a step that she could take in order to start to sign up for a community college class as a first step. And each week, she would come back and she would have a reason why she didn't get around to doing that, that it didn't happen. Week after week of her setting this goal and saying this was her value but then not following through...

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

“It seems like it’s not really something that you even want to do”

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician’s guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

Psychotherapy Academy

...I finally said, I think, in a moment of sort of frustration, something to the effect of like, “Oh, it kind of seems like it’s not really something that you even want to do.”

And she then was able to identify that in fact, she’d only been setting that goal primarily because she looked up to me and she thought it would be something I would want her to do. In fact, it probably was something that I wanted her to do. I wasn’t asking her to do it.

#### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician’s guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Choosing Something Out of Pliance



Trying to please  
someone else



Not truly connecting with  
what's important

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

This was something she was choosing, but she was choosing it out of pliance and trying to please someone else as opposed to truly connecting with what was important to her. Once we let go of those goals, we were able to focus on things that were more connected for her and that she was, in the end, more successful with.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Priorities Change Over Time



Realize that values may come into conflict with one another



E.g. being an engaged parent vs being a strong worker



Work on shifting priorities and shifting the balance

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



One thing to realize about values is that priorities change over time and you have to balance them over time.

And there are times when certain values that you have may come into conflict with one another. Being an engaged parent and being a strong worker at work, well, sometimes, you're not going to be able to do both of those things at the same time. And that's normal. And so it's okay to work on, shifting priorities and shifting the balance between those things. It doesn't mean that one or the other isn't still important. It's just that sometimes you have to shift your attention and your energy.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## A Metaphor: Swallowing and Breathing



Both are important



You can't do both at the same time



You shift naturally back and forth

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



A metaphor for this is that in order to live, both swallowing and breathing have to be important. But you can't do them both at the same time. And so, you have to learn how to—sometimes you focus on swallowing and then in the next moment, you focus on breathing. And you can shift naturally back and forth between both. And they are both equally important to being able to survive.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## When the Client's Values Differ From the Therapist's



The client gets to choose what's important to them



"As long as it's not focused on hurting yourself or someone else, I'm here to support you"

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



It's also possible that in some circumstances, the client's values may be significantly different from those held by the therapist. The client gets to choose what's important to them. It's not up to us. So, it may be very different from what I may find to be how I want to live my life or how I even would like that person to live their life based on what I can see. And it's not up to me to decide. It's up to the client.

In general, it's not a tremendous problem when the client and the therapist hold different values as long as you can look at it for what it is, which is that person's life, and they get to live in the way that's important to them. And when I introduce values, I point that out to the client like, "You get to decide your values. It's not up to me. And as long as it's not focused on hurting yourself or someone else, I am here to support you."

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Values Clarification Can Be Painful



Pain is one of the places that we can find values



If they weren't important, they wouldn't cause us pain



It's important to recognize this with trauma clients

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



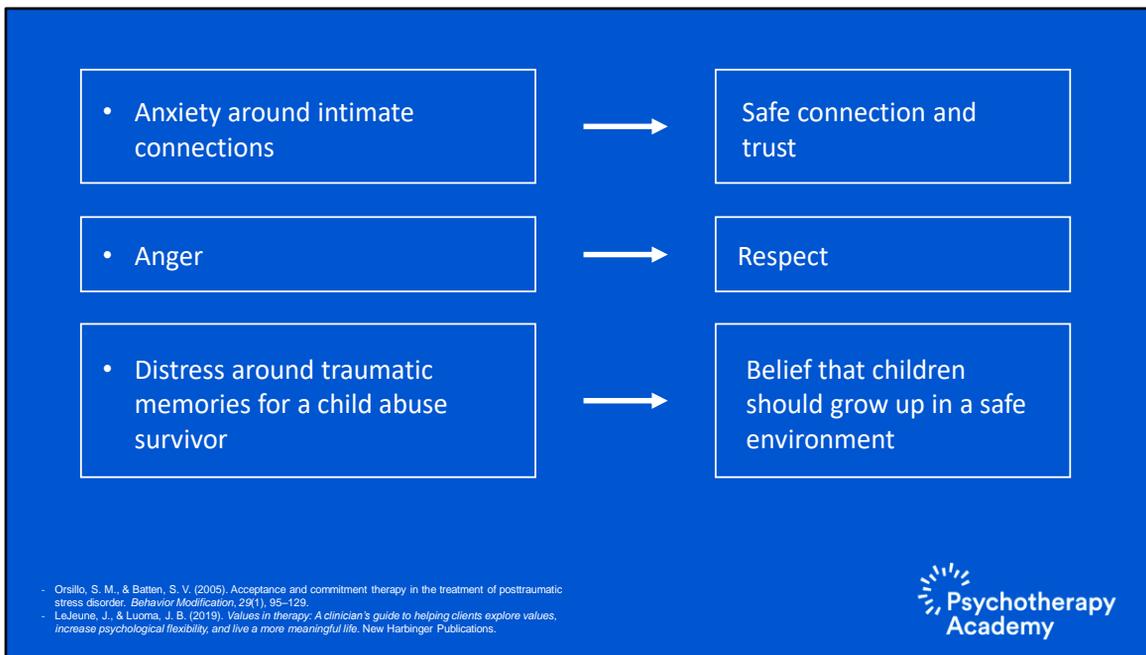
And so although building a valued life is a positive constructive aspect of ACT, the work of values clarification, can also be painful for some people.

In fact, pain is one of the places that we can find values. It's not the case that values are found primarily by chasing positive affect like happiness or joy or satisfaction.

Actually, finding our pain points may also help us identify the things that are important to us. If they weren't important, then they wouldn't cause us pain and distress when they're violated. And this is an important thing to recognize with trauma clients.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



For example, anxiety around intimate connections can show that the person values safe connection and trust. Or anger can point to values of respect that have been disregarded. Or distress around traumatic memories for a child abuse survivor can show just how important the person believes it is that children should be able to grow up in a safe environment.

**\*References\***

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Look at the Flip Side of Pain



Identify what values are there



Listen to that pain:  
What they want to give their energy to going forward

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



And it can be really important to look at the flip side of this pain to identify what values are there because, although a client can never go back in the past and change what's happened, it's important to listen to that pain—not just in the sense of what the person wants to avoid, but what they want to give their energy to going forward. And there are some real lessons to be learned from that pain in terms of the values that are important to the person.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



### Useful for a client who:

- Has low levels of positive affect
- Is unexpressive or emotionally disconnected

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.

- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



This way of moving into values identification can be especially useful for a client who has relatively low levels of positive affect or when you have somebody who's relatively unexpressive or flat or emotionally disconnected.

It may be harder to do the direct, just sort of querying for values clarification.

#### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## A Side Benefit of Exploring Values With Trauma Survivors



We can find or create meaning from every experience



They can move from being a victim to being a survivor

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.  
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.



And as a side benefit to this way of exploring values with trauma survivors, it may also help the client make meaning at some level from the experience. I mean, I don't subscribe to an "everything happens for a reason" philosophy, but I do believe that we can find or create meaning from every experience. By using the pain of a client's history to identify values and what's important to them, he or she can also create additional meaning that they're choosing to gain from the experience. And then that's one of the actions that can move an individual from being a victim to being a survivor.

### \*References\*

- Orsillo, S. M., & Batten, S. V. (2005). Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 29(1), 95–129.
- LeJeune, J., & Luoma, J. B. (2019). *Values in therapy: A clinician's guide to helping clients explore values, increase psychological flexibility, and live a more meaningful life*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Key Points

---

- During the initial values clarification, help the person connect experientially to the things that are important.
- Ensure that the person is identifying what's truly important to them.
- Values can also be identified by looking at the flip side of pain.

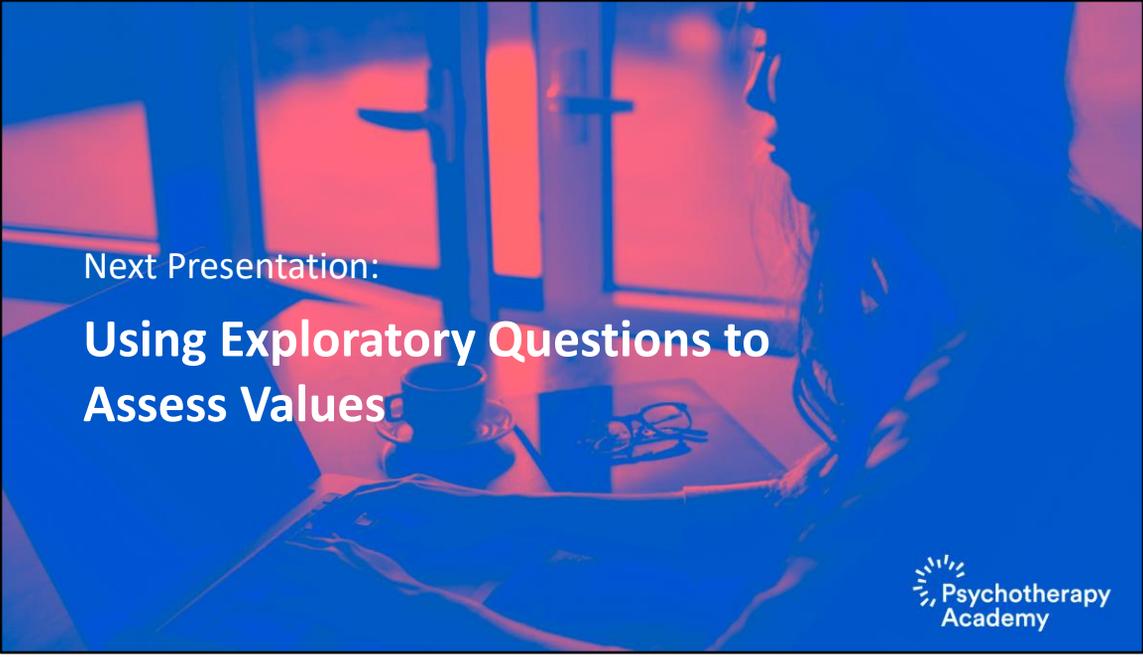


So, to review the key points:

During the work of initial values clarification, it is important to help the person connect experientially, not just intellectually, to the things that are important to him or her.

It's also important to ensure that the person is identifying what is truly important to them as an individual, not just parroting the things they think you want to hear or what their parents or society or religious institutions would generally want them to say.

Values can be identified not only by the things that bring joy and satisfaction but also looking at the flip side of pain.



Next Presentation:

## Using Exploratory Questions to Assess Values

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

## Using Exploratory Questions to Assess Values



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

In this video, I'm going to talk to you about the idea of using exploratory questions to assess values.

I've given you examples of how to describe values and goals. I've given you some examples of exercises and metaphors, talked to you about looking at pain as a way to identify values.

## Questions: Assessment and Intervention for Values



Advance your case  
conceptualization



Advance the  
relationship

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



But you can also very specifically use carefully crafted questions as both an assessment and an intervention for values. Sometimes, we just think about questions as just a way of advancing the conversation in therapy. But I want to introduce the idea that they can be used specifically as an interventional assessment.

So, the questions that I'm going to go over are an assessment in the sense of advancing your tailored case conceptualization for that individual. But they're also an intervention in the sense of asking deep questions and actively listening in a way that can advance the relationship.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## What would you do if your trauma history were no longer a problem for you?

Examine engagement in values-based activities

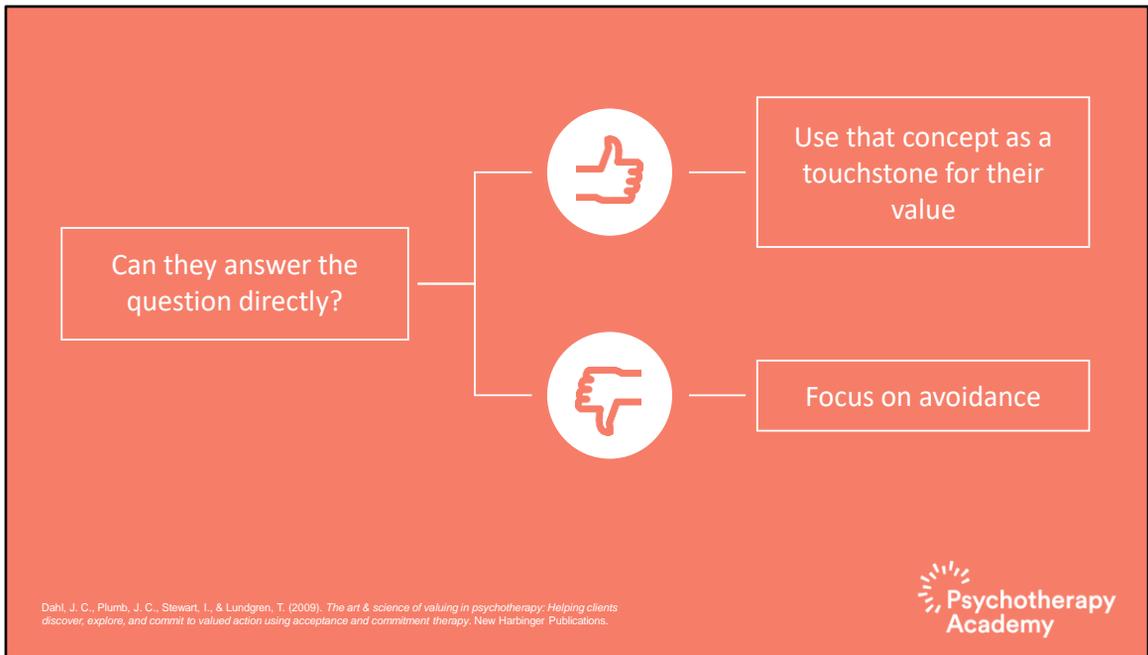
Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



So here's the first example: What would you do if what you've been struggling with related to your trauma history were no longer a problem for you? The aim of this question is to examine engagement in values-based activities, which may be prevented currently by avoidance.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



So if they're able to answer the question directly, "What would you do if what you've been struggling with related to your trauma history were no longer a problem for you?" if they tell you, "I would be back to work because my anxiety wouldn't be so crippling," well, that's great because then you can use that concept, that image of going back to work, as a touchstone for their value, that that's something that's important to them.

But if they're not able to answer that question directly, you may need to really focus on avoidance because they may be so entrenched in avoidance related to their trauma history that they've gotten way out of touch with what's important to them. So, it can point to avoidance as a target that you need to work on.

#### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## What Kind of Life Do You See Yourself Living in 5 Years?



Assess the client's ability to generate goals for the future



Work on defusion if they're not able to do that

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

Next question is: What kind of life do you see yourself living in 5 years? The aim of this question is, first and foremost, to assess the client's ability to generate goals for the future—even if they're distant.

And so, again, if they're able to answer that question directly and they're able to tell you what kind of life they see themselves living in 5 years, that's great. That's a very clear values assessment. If they're not able to do that, then, again, they may be so focused on avoidance or so focused on—they may be so fused with their thoughts about what's possible that it's hard for them to even imagine another alternative, pointing to the importance of working on defusion with this client.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Is There Something You Care About That Your Mind Says Just Isn't Possible?



Assess possible fusion targets around values statements



See their ideas about what's possible



Use defusion techniques

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



Another question is: Is there something you care about that your mind says just isn't possible?

The aim of this question is to assess possible fusion targets around values statements. So, there may be sort of ideas they have about what's possible for themselves or in the world. And because they're so fused, they don't have any distance from those thoughts; they're not able to see any other possibility. And it may help you get to some of those core beliefs that they're fused with where you can use defusion techniques, which we'll get to later in the course.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## What Have These Problems Stopped You From Doing in the Past Week?



Understand how the client's functioning on a daily basis



Assess more recent valued actions negatively affected by avoidance

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



Another question is: What have these problems stopped you from doing in the past week? The aim of this question is to get at, first of all, how the client is functioning on a daily basis and assessing more recent valued actions that have been negatively affected by avoidance. So again now, we're not talking about future-oriented activities. We're talking about in the past week. So it may be able to be a little bit more concrete and easy to get to the answer of this question.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## If They're Able to Say What They Avoided



Gives you an idea  
of what avoidance is costing  
the person



Helps you understand  
something that could be a  
motivator in the future

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



If they're able to say that they avoided going to their child's honors ceremony at school because they couldn't be in the small auditorium, that gives you an idea, first of all, sort of what the avoidance is costing the person and second, something that's important to them: that they would've liked to go to that awards assembly for their child, but they didn't do it. But that helps you understand something that could be a motivator in the future.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## What Life Goals Have You Had to Give Up to Avoid Creating More Suffering?

Assess larger areas of life that are being avoided

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



Another question is: What life goals have you had to give up to avoid creating more suffering? The aim here is to assess larger areas of life that are being avoided in the service of reducing psychological pain, like their thoughts or feelings, memories, or so on.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## “I’ve Given Up on the Idea of Ever Being in a Relationship”



Valued being in a relationship at some point



Decided that it’s too scary, too unlikely to be successful

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



So, if the person says, “I’ve given up on the idea of ever being in a relationship again because you just can’t trust men,” that helps you understand the place that there’s a big stuck point, that being in a relationship is something that this person did value at one point and deep down may still value, but they’ve decided that it is too scary, too unlikely to be successful, that they’ve just totally taken it off the table.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



Don't push on this immediately

Explore it further

Have it as a touchpoint

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

Psychotherapy Academy

So, you may not want to push on this immediately because this is a pretty big thing. So you might not want to, sort of push the idea like, “Oh, so you want to be in a relationship then.” But you could explore that further, understand how they got to that point, and have that as a touchpoint later on as you’re identifying specific values.

**\*References\***

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## Are there things that trigger your PTSD symptoms that you've been successful in doing anyway?

Assess the potential for values-driven psychological flexibility in the face of anxiety

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



You could also ask, “Are there things that trigger your PTSD symptoms that you’ve been successful in doing anyway?” So the aim here is to assess the potential for values-driven psychological flexibility in the face of anxiety. So, if there are things that the person has been able to do even when they feel anxious or their PTSD symptoms are triggered, that’s really great, in two ways, if you can get some of these examples.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



Look for a value that is exceedingly important



Work with the person on that value going forward

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



First of all, it may show you a value that is exceedingly important to the person. So, for example, if they say, “I never go out in crowds but I did go to my grandson’s baseball game last week. I hate crowds. You know, it triggers my hypervigilance, but my grandson asked me specifically if I would go to his baseball game and so I did it.”

What that tells you is that this person’s grandson is very, very important to him. So, his family and his grandchildren are super important. And you can then use that and work with the person on things related to that value going forward.

#### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



**The person is able to do something that's  
important to them even when they're feeling  
triggered**

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



At the same time, it also shows you that the person is able to do something that's important to them, even when they're feeling triggered, because they may tell you, "Well, I can't do that because I'm feeling too anxious." Well, what this tells you is the person actually can if they choose to. They can do things that are important to them, even when they're triggered. And that's super helpful to know that the person actually does have that ability.

**\*References\***

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

## How Do You See Yourself Now Versus How You Were Before the Trauma?



Assess for changes in self-concept that may function as psychological barriers



Identify actions that seem impossible

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



And then finally, you might ask yourself, “How do you see yourself now versus how you were before the trauma? Is there anything that seemed possible then that doesn’t seem possible now?”

The aim for this sort of question is to assess for changes in self-concept that may function as psychological barriers to engaging in valued action that were important before the trauma and to identify actions that seem impossible.

### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



Look at those pain points to find:

- Where have things changed
- What the person might be motivated to get back in their lives

Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.



Again, it can be really important to look at those pain points to try to find where have things changed because it can show you first of all where the pain was and then, as a result, show you where the values are as well. So, looking at those pain points can show you what the person might be motivated to get back in their lives if they were able to let go of avoidance and fusion around things not being possible.

#### \*References\*

- Dahl, J. C., Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., & Lundgren, T. (2009). *The art & science of valuing in psychotherapy: Helping clients discover, explore, and commit to valued action using acceptance and commitment therapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

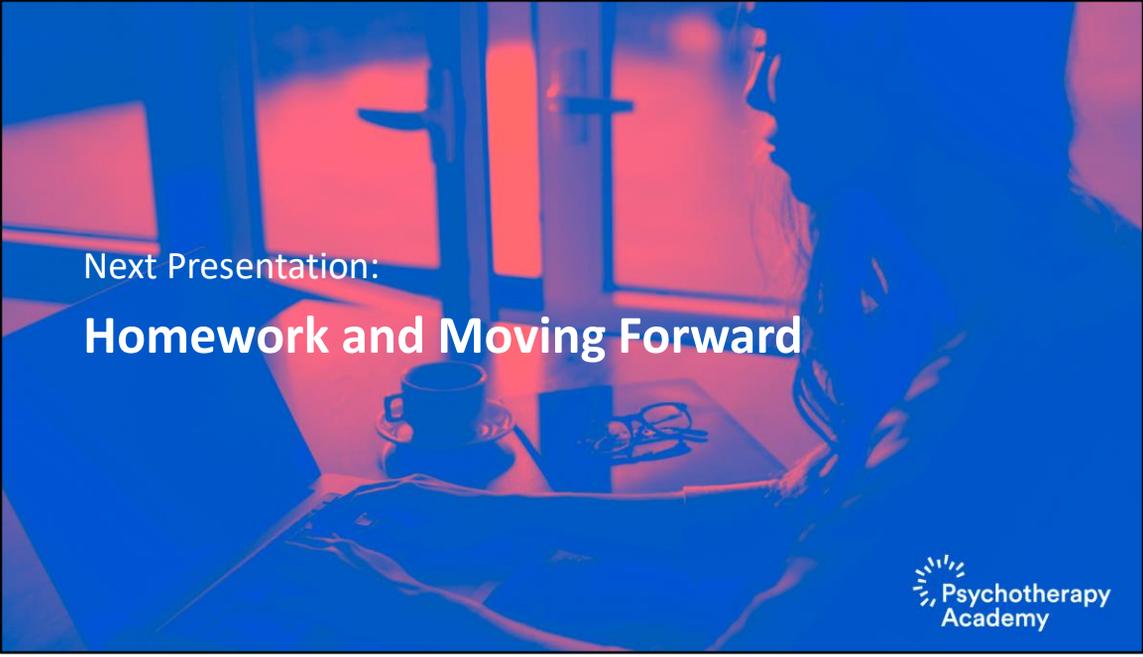
## Key Points

---

- The therapist can gather additional data to identify both the client's values as well as trauma-related barriers.
- Changes in behavior from before the trauma to after the trauma may often reflect avoidance or fusion.



So, some key points: Through the use of thoughtful and careful questioning, the therapist can gather additional data to identify both the client's values as well as trauma-related barriers that are getting in the way of values-oriented action. And changes in behavior from before the trauma to after the trauma may often reflect avoidance or fusion rather than a client's true values.



Next Presentation:

## **Homework and Moving Forward**

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

## Homework and Moving Forward



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

So, I've spoken to you about what you might do in an initial 1 or 2 sessions focused on values clarification with a trauma client. And obviously, it's important what you do in the session.

## Important: Focus in Between Sessions



Integrate what they're learning into their daily lives



Give a values clarification exercise for homework



Use other terms for homework, like “between-session practice”

Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.



But as I've mentioned, I think it's equally, if not more important, to also focus on what the client does in between sessions in order to advance their understanding and integrate what they're learning into their daily lives.

So, after introducing the concept of values and how values can help motivate the challenging work ahead, it can be useful to have the person take on a brief values clarification exercise for homework.

So, for this homework—or remember you can use other terms like “between-session practice” or whatever resonates with your client—but for the sake of expediency, I'll just call it homework.

### \*References\*

- Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.

## Potential Valued Life Domains



Work



School



Intimate relationships



Family



Friendships



Personal growth



Physical health



Community

Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.



You'll want to have a piece of paper in front of you where you've listed out a variety of potential valued life domains.

So, as I've mentioned, this can be work, school, intimate relationships, family, friendships, personal growth, physical health, community, spirituality, religion—whatever you think might be important to this person.

### \*References\*

- Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.

## Identify 3 Moderately Important Areas



Do some exploration with  
over the next week



Write down or circle those 3  
valued domains

Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

And you can ask the person to identify, out of those, 3 areas that are at least moderately important to them that they can do some exploration with over the next week.

Write down or circle those 3 valued domains that they've said they're willing to explore a little bit further. And then you can provide the following instructions, either verbally or you can have it pre-printed on the paper.

### \*References\*

- Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.

## Instructions



Complete this exercise in terms of what's important to you



In each life area, write down a brief description of the overarching value



List 2 concrete goals in the next week

Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.



So, the instructions can read something like this:

Within each valued domain, there's usually something important in these areas that people are working on or would like to be working on.

Values are subjective and what may be important to you is not necessarily important to someone else.

Please complete this exercise in terms of what is important to you.

In each life area, write down a brief description of the overarching value and then list 2 concrete goals that would help you to know that you're living that value in the next week.

### \*References\*

- Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.

## Instructions



Intimate relationship value: Be a loving partner



Goals: Say "I love you"  
Do a kind thing

Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.



An example: Intimate relationship value, being a loving partner. It can be just as short and sweet as that.

Goal: Tell my partner "I love you" each day and do a kind thing for my partner 3 times a week.

So, the value is being a loving partner and then we've got 2 specific goals that are in line with that value that you can do over the next week.

Remember values can never be attained. They're only lived. Whereas, the specific goals can be regularly attained.

### \*References\*

- Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.

## Instructions



List 2 internal barriers



Rate your current  
success in living that value from  
0 to 10



Remember, if you don't fully  
achieve the goals, we'll  
discuss that

Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.



Now, list 2 internal barriers, like thoughts or feelings or physical sensations, that could get in the way of living the value.

Finally, rate your current success in living that value from 0 to 10.

Try to do this exercise in the next day or so, so that you have most of the coming week in order to practice movement toward those goals that you identified. It's also okay if you don't fully achieve the goals that you set for yourself. When you come in the next session, we will discuss what worked well, what didn't go so well, and we'll learn from the experience either way.

### \*References\*

- Meyer, E. C., Hermann, B. A., & Walser, R. D. (2019). *Acceptance and commitment therapy for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorders in veterans*. Unpublished treatment manual.

## Key Points

---

- Provide a semi-structured initial values clarification exercise to work on between sessions.
- Such an exercise could include:
  - Choosing 2–3 value domains,
  - Writing a description,
  - Choosing goals,
  - Identifying barriers, and
  - Rating consistency.



Some key points: It can be useful to provide a semi-structured initial values clarification exercise for the client to work on between sessions.

Such an exercise could include choosing 2 to 3 value domains, writing a brief description of the domains, choosing 2 small goals within each domain, identifying potential barriers to completing those goals, and rating the level of consistency between the client's behaviors and their values in each domain.

## Key Points

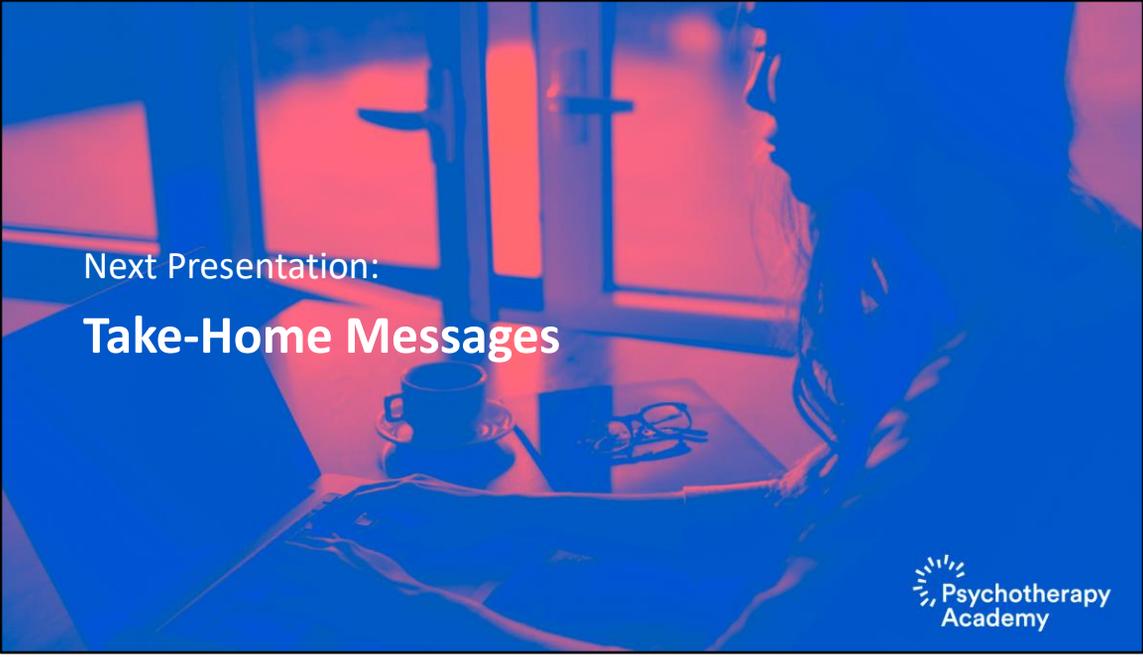
---

- Follow up on this homework.
- There will be useful information to glean from their experience of the exercise.



It is important to follow up on this homework at the beginning of the following week.

Whether the client followed through with the homework or not, there will be useful information to glean from their experience of the exercise and commitments or even their avoidance of those same things.



Next Presentation:

## Take-Home Messages

 Psychotherapy  
Academy

## Take-Home Messages



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

I'd like to summarize the take-home messages from Module 2.



Know that there's no 1 right or wrong sequence when applying ACT concepts



Don't begin your work in ACT without a planful sequence of skills



Choose a structured or semi-structured ACT treatment protocol at least a couple of times



There is no 1 right or wrong sequence to use when applying ACT concepts to PTSD or posttraumatic problems in living once you're fully practiced in all of the ACT principles and techniques.

However, I do believe that there is a danger to beginning your work in ACT without working your way through a planful sequence of skills. The best way to do this, in my experience, is to choose a structured or semi-structured ACT treatment protocol and to work your way through it at least a couple of times. This will help you move from initial adherence to a protocol to competence in a larger theoretically-driven approach.

## ACT Core Process: Values Clarification



Start with a brief introduction of values work



Help increase the client's motivation



The ACT core process described as values clarification is about working with the client to determine what he wants his life to move toward rather than away from. By starting with a brief introduction of values work, you can help increase the client's motivation to move through the more complex trauma-specific work ahead.

## ACT Core Process: Values Clarification

---



Values:  
Directional markers



Goals:  
Specific targets



Values are seen as directional markers that help guide an individual's life. And we use the term goals to describe the specific targets along the way that can be accomplished in the service of those values.

## Metaphors & Exercises



Visualize the difference and interrelation between values and goals



Reflect on how they've lived life vs behaviors now



The compass metaphor provides an easy way to visualize the difference and interrelation between directional values and specific goals.

Thought exercises, such as the desert island exercise and the tombstone exercise, can provide a way for the client to reflect on how they want to be able to look back and see that they've lived their life vs how they may be choosing to orient their behaviors now.

## Values Clarification Can Be Exciting and Painful



Work with the client on identifying core values in an individualized way



Don't base them on an intellectual belief or pliance



Use the client's own history as an inroad to understanding their values



Values clarification can be exciting and generative for some clients. It can also be painful and challenging for other clients who may not have been living a life based on their true personal values for some time.

It is important for the therapist to work with the client on identifying those core values in an individualized way, not based on an intellectual belief of what should be important, or based on pliance with following the perceived rules of what the client thinks others around them would find important. Even the client's own pain and difficult history can provide an inroad to understanding what values are most important to him or her as an individual.

## The Therapist Listens in an Active Way



The therapist should not just rotely go through values clarification exercises with the client. Instead, he or she should truly listen in an active way.

By asking powerful questions, the client and therapist can work together to suss out, not just the content of the value directions, but also the potential barriers that may be getting in the way of executing toward those values. Such barriers may include avoidance, fusion with specific thoughts about what is possible, and tightly held content around self-concepts based on the person's history of trauma.

## Homework



Provide a semi-structured values-related exercise as between-session practice



Help the client commit to small, values-driven goals



Explore this in the following session



Finally, after introducing the process of values clarification, the therapist should provide a semi-structured values-related exercise as between-session practice or homework so that the client can continue to reflect on values and refine their statements related to valued life domains. It can be especially helpful for the client to commit to small, values-driven goals before the next session that can be explored in the following session, whether the person was able to follow through with those goals or not.