

Present Moment Awareness and Self-As-Context Overview



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Hello. In this module, we'll be working on the concepts of present moment awareness and self-as-context.

Present Moment Awareness and Self-As-Context



Address the survivor's propensity to focus on the past and the future



Live life in the present

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



These processes of ACT address the trauma survivor's propensity to spend lots of energy focused on memories of the past and worries about the future as well as being defined by the person's trauma history.

We'll explore the fact that, although it can be useful to reflect on past events in order to learn from them and to plan for the future, many individuals who present for therapy related to a history of trauma focus excessively on the past or on an imagined future rather than living their lives in the present.

References

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



Trauma Survivors

Have problems remaining in the here and now

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



And many of the problems that bring trauma survivors to treatment have, at their core, some type of problem with remaining in the here and now.

References

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

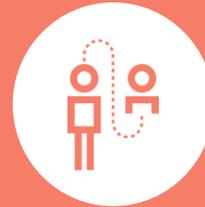
The Present Moment: Essential for ACT Processes



Defusion



Acceptance



Self-as-context

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



And within the ACT model, being in contact with the present moment is essential for the processes that we've talked about before, like defusion and acceptance as well as what we'll talk about today, experiencing the self as the context for one's experiences, and then using all of these skills to live consistently with one's values.

Mindful awareness in the present moment can be cultivated through a variety of formal and informal exercises and practice.

References

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

Conceptualized Self or Self-As-Content



Labels, evaluations,
and roles



Conceptualized self

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



Now, it's normal that all individuals who have the ability to use verbal behavior end up defining themselves by a variety of labels, evaluations, and roles, both positive and negative.

Within ACT, this is known as the conceptualized self or self-as-content. And it's natural to see yourself from the point of view of the conceptualized self. In fact, this is how we talk about ourselves and our experiences every day.

But inflexible and ineffective behavior can result if one is overly attached to this perspective of being defined by the self-as-content.

References

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



**Individuals aren't their
content, labels, or history**

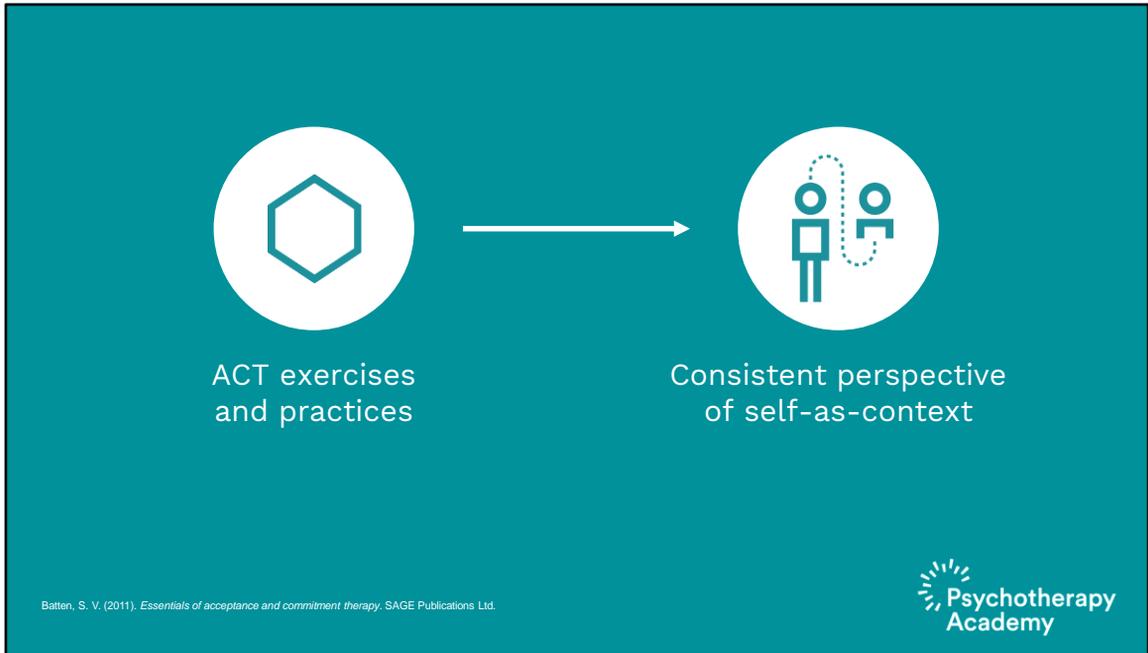
Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.



When individuals experience and recognize that they are not their content, labels, or history, then they can open up to try new things, move forward, and behave flexibly and effectively.

References

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



Although working on these processes can seem rather abstract at first, the ACT model suggests several exercises and practices by which one can learn to experience a consistent perspective of self-as-context where one is not fundamentally defined by the content of one's thoughts, feelings, evaluations, or history.

In this module, I'll be providing much more background and grounding to be able to help your clients connect with the present moment and their own experience of a self that is not defined by their history or content.

References

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

Key Points

- To approach life with psychological flexibility, individuals need awareness in the present moment.
- Behavior becomes constricted when it's aligned with fused self-labels.
- ACT experiential exercises help trauma survivors come into the present moment and make effective behavioral choices.

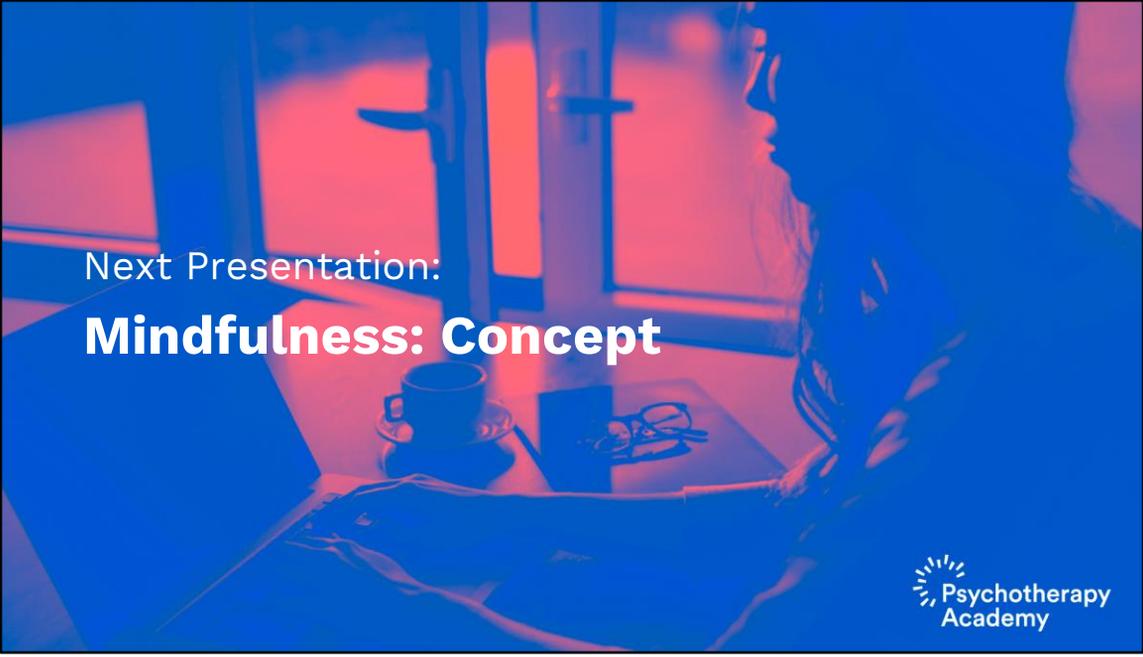


So, some key points.

In order to be able to approach life with psychological flexibility, individuals need to be living with their awareness in the present moment and not determine their behavior based on rigid verbal constructions of who they are and what they are capable of.

Behavior becomes constricted when it's aligned with fused self-labels rather than responding flexibly based on what is workable in any given moment.

And there are a number of experiential exercises used in ACT to help trauma survivors come into the present moment and make effective behavioral choices that are not simply based on their verbal conceptualizations of themselves.



Next Presentation:

Mindfulness: Concept

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Mindfulness: Concept



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**There's no moment other
than the present moment**

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

 **Psychotherapy
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Within the ACT model, there is no moment other than the present moment.

Although humans can remember things that have happened before and imagine and plan for things that have yet to happen, the past and the future are really just hypothetical constructs. The only moment we have is now and now and now.

References

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

Using Verbal Language



Learn from
the past



Plan for
the future



Take effective action
only in the present

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

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Because of our ability to use verbal language, we can learn from analysis of what has gone well or poorly in the past and we can often plan effectively for things in the future. However, the only perspective from which we can take effective action is the present, the here and now.

References

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.



The more attention we give to the past and the future rather than the present, the less able we are to behave with psychological flexibility and to respond appropriately to the natural consequences of our immediate environment.

References

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.



Problems When Focus Isn't on the Here and Now

Depression

- Focused on the past

Anxiety

- Worried about the future

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.



If you think about it, many of the problems that bring people into therapy have at their core some sort of problem with keeping attention and focus on the here and now.

For example, people who are depressed are often focused on things that happened or did not happen in the past. And individuals with anxiety disorders, for example, are often consumed with worries about the future.

References

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

Lack of Contact With the Present Moment



Daydreaming



Ruminating



Dissociation



Substance use



Self-injury

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.



Lack of contact with the present moment can be demonstrated as daydreaming, ruminating, or even dissociation. And in extreme cases, individuals can go to great lengths to remove their contact with the present moment through behaviors like substance use or self-injury.

So, what does it mean, exactly, to be in contact with the present moment or to practice mindfulness?

References

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

Mindfulness



Participatory nonjudgmental observation of the present



Has a purposeful quality



Has a vital, creative, and connected quality

- Luoma, J. B., Hayes, S. C., & Walser, R. D. (2007). *Learning ACT: An acceptance and commitment therapy skills-training manual for therapists*. New Harbinger Publications.

- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.

- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.



One definition that I particularly like describes mindfulness as participatory nonjudgmental observation of whatever is occurring in the present.

And Kabat-Zinn adds the specification that there is a purposeful quality to mindfulness. Just being swept away by the moment is not the same as being connected to the present moment.

And from an ACT perspective, Luoma and colleagues suggest that contact with the present moment can be described as having a vital, creative, and connected quality.

References

- Luoma, J. B., Hayes, S. C., & Walser, R. D. (2007). *Learning ACT: An acceptance and commitment therapy skills-training manual for therapists*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

Being mindful

Being on autopilot

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

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So, being mindful and aware as we go through life, as we make large and small choices, is what ACT suggests as the primary antidote to behavior that might otherwise feel like it's happening on autopilot.

References

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.



Now, one common misconception is that mindfulness is the same as meditation. It's really important to note though that mindfulness practice does not necessarily require formal meditation, although some forms of meditation are certainly consistent with the present moment focus.

References

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

Why Practice Mindfulness



Build the capacity
for staying in the
present moment



Be mindful rather
than reactive

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.



We can practice mindfulness with any activity to which we can bring purposeful, nonjudgmental attention to the experience in a way that builds the capacity for staying in the present moment.

Over time, the idea is that individuals can learn to be mindful of, rather than reactive to, even the most challenging thoughts, feelings, memories, and bodily sensations.

But in order to build that capacity, it can be helpful to work with the client on many different forms of practicing mindfulness and contact with the present moment. I will introduce several examples in the next video.

References

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

Key Points

- It's normal for the mind to flip between past, present, and future.
- The client is unlikely to make significant changes without practicing new skills and behaviors in the present moment.



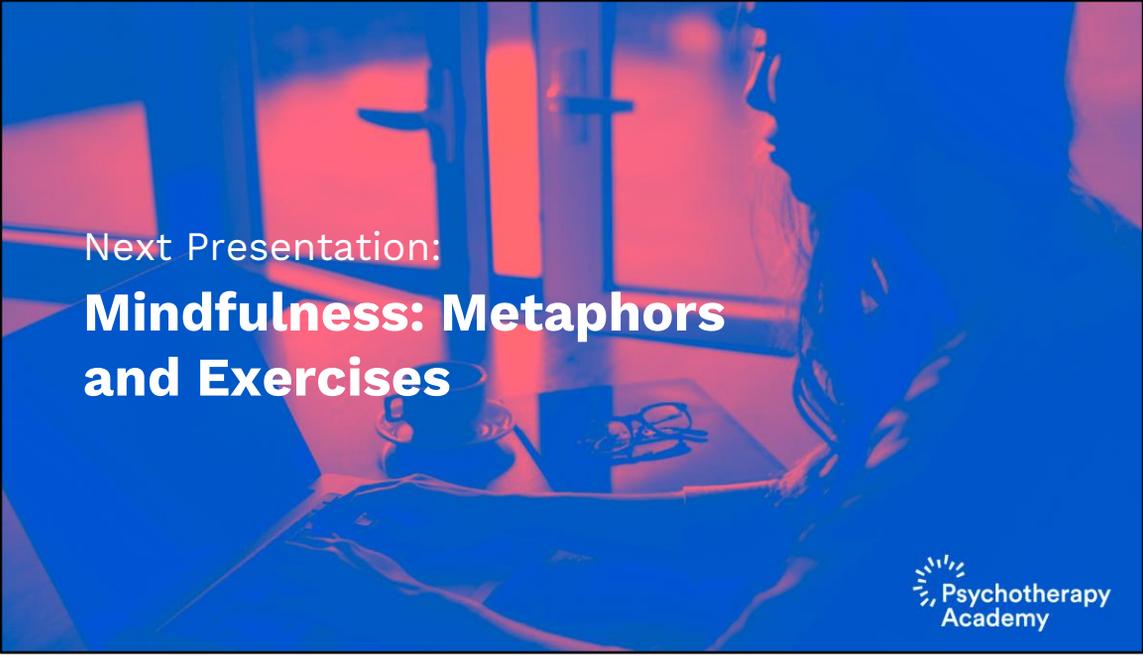
So some key points. Although it's normal for the mind to flip between past, present, and future throughout the day, without sufficient time spent in contact with the present moment, the client is unlikely to be able to make significant changes without practicing new skills and behaviors in the present moment.

Key Points

- Mindfulness includes being nonjudgmental, curious, and purposeful in one's attention.
- It's not synonymous with meditation.



Mindfulness includes characteristics of being nonjudgmental, curious, and purposeful in one's attention and is not synonymous with meditation.



Next Presentation:

Mindfulness: Metaphors and Exercises

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Mindfulness: Metaphors and Exercises



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The Present Moment: Fundamental for ACT Skills



Remember that it's not enough to just conceptually understand it



Train this skill more explicitly in session



Provide between-session homework

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The ability to focus in the present moment is fundamental to practicing almost all of the ACT skills that a trauma survivor will need for his or her recovery. But it's not enough to just conceptually understand what mindfulness or present moment awareness are.

It's a skill that has to be practiced so that the client can learn to discriminate when they are or are not in contact with the present moment. Again, this is one of those ACT processes that is difficult to explain just through verbal instructions. So, this is an area where the therapist will likely want to train the skill of mindfulness more explicitly during the session as well as providing between-session homework for the client.

References

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

Ways to Practice Mindfulness



The client's
imagination



Awareness of
the 5 senses



Body-focused
mindfulness

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



Now, there are an infinite number of ways to practice mindfulness, whether it's in the client's imagination, through awareness of the 5 senses, or through body-focused mindfulness. In the next few minutes, I'll provide examples of each of those modalities.

References

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



Closed Eyes Mindfulness Exercises

Triggering for trauma survivors

Offer option with eyes open

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



However, closed eyes mindfulness exercises, especially ones focused on the body, may be triggering for some trauma survivors.

So, I generally would not start off with the body-focused exercise in trauma treatment unless the client had already indicated that they were familiar with doing breathing exercises or something like yoga.

And even with imaginal exercises, I will always offer the client the option to do the exercise with their eyes open. I just suggest that if they're going to keep their eyes open, that they look down toward the floor and allow their eyes to unfocus slightly, rather than trying to do an imaginal exercise while looking around the room or looking at me.

References

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

How to Begin Mindfulness Exercises



Close your eyes or
look down at the floor



Ground your feet



Be in a comfortable
position



Take 2 deep breaths

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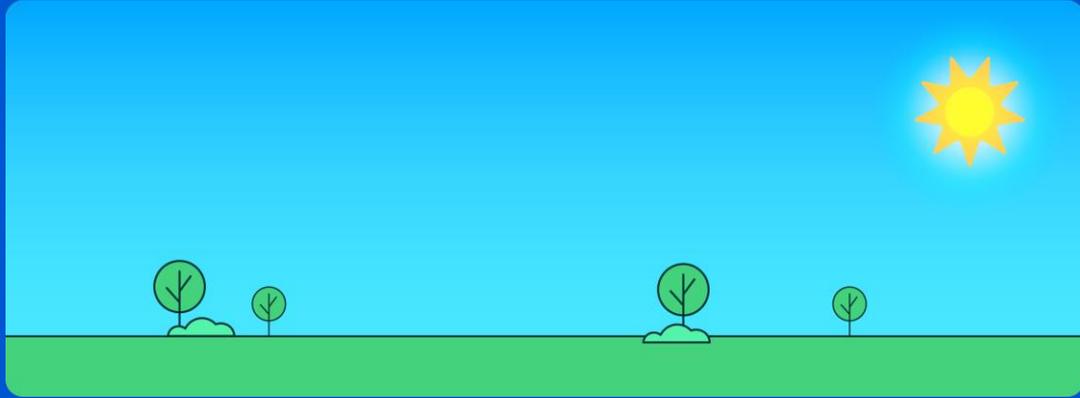


And at the beginning of most exercises, I usually ask the person to close their eyes or look down at the floor, you know, try and ground their feet on the floor, be in a comfortable position where they can sit comfortably without moving for a few minutes, and then start by taking 2 deep breaths, bringing their attention to the present moment. Then I move into the more specific exercise.

References

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

Clouds in the Sky



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So here, I'll start with one of my favorite imaginal exercises, which is called "Clouds in the Sky." And so after getting them grounded and taking those 2 deep breaths, I might start something like this:

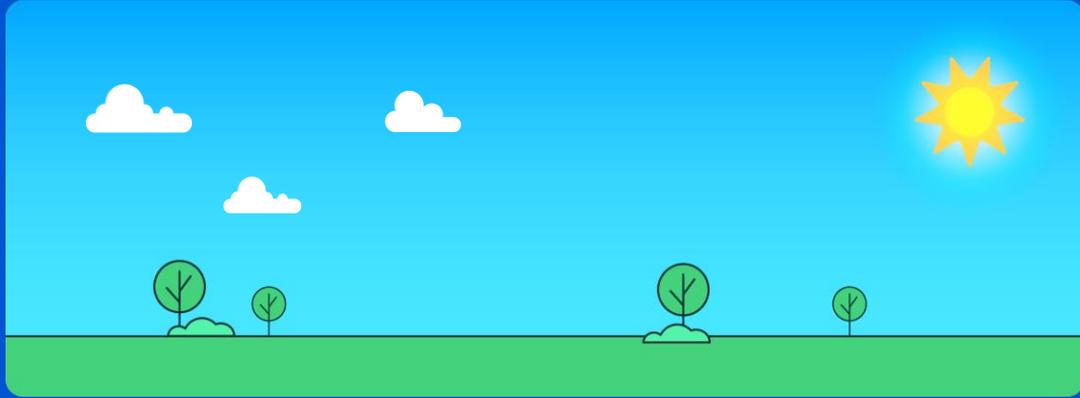
So, now that we've gotten grounded and centered here in the moment, I'd like to see if we can practice becoming mindful today of the range of thoughts that might go through our minds at any given time.

So if you're willing, I'd like you to try to imagine that you're looking up into the sky. It's a bright blue sky. And first, you just become aware for a moment of that exact shade of blue.

References

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

Clouds in the Sky



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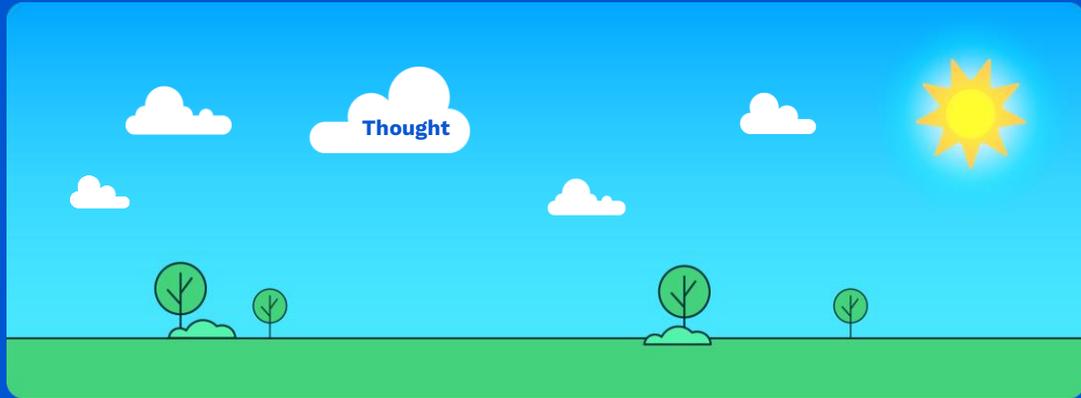
And as you look up into the sky, you begin to see large fluffy clouds moving slowly from one edge of the sky across to the other side. And they keep coming one after another, moving across the sky. Just watch that sequence of events of the clouds moving for a moment.

And what I'd like to ask you to do now is to begin to become aware of whatever thoughts are popping into your head from moment to moment. And as you begin to mindfully become aware of those thoughts, I'd like you to picture taking each thought as it arises and placing it on a cloud and watching it go by.

References

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

Clouds in the Sky



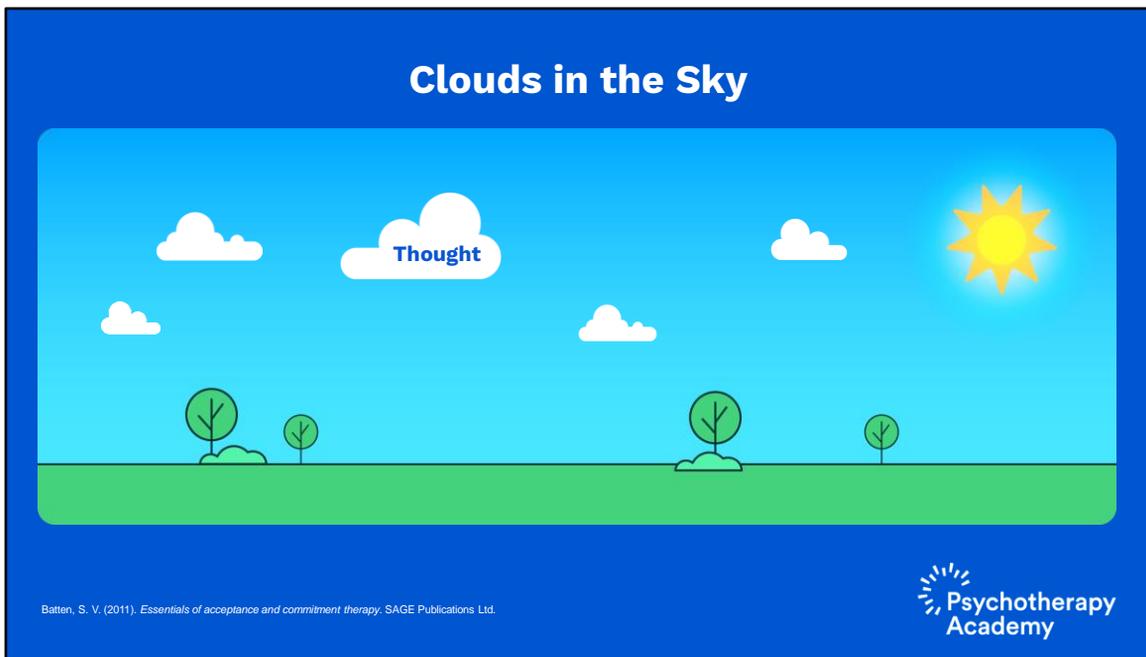
Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

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Just take each thought as it comes up, place it on a cloud, and let it float to the other side of the sky and out of your field of vision. You might choose to represent each thought on the cloud with a word, a phrase, or an image. The form does not matter, just the process. So, try that for just a minute.

References

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



And if you find yourself becoming distracted from the exercise or thinking that you can't do this, then as soon as you notice that, just take that thought and place it on a cloud.

Watch it go by and return to the process. You may have to do this over and over again, and that's okay.

There's no finish line. It's just an opportunity to practice being mindful of your thoughts and to detach from them, rather than becoming hooked on them or buying into them. So I'll pause here.

References

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

Clouds in the Sky: In Session



Have longer
pauses



Ask the client
how it's going

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



If I were doing that in session, I would let that go on. I would have the pauses be longer. I might have the person actually tell me how it's going—whether they're able to imagine the sky, how it's going with the clouds, whether they're getting distracted. But you can see generally how that flows.

References

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

Clouds in the Sky: Different Imagery



Leaves floating
down a stream



Boxes on a
conveyor belt



Train cars on
a train track



Toy soldiers
walking in line

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



And it's important to note that the same exercise can be done with different imagery, like leaves floating down a stream, or boxes on a conveyor belt, or train cars on a train track, or little toy soldiers walking in line holding signs.

References

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



**Find the imagery that
works best for each client**

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



So the therapist can work over time to find imagery that may work best for each individual client.

References

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



Difficulty Labeling Feelings

Use a list of feeling words

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



And for those clients who may have difficulty labeling what it is they're feeling, you may need to do some more shaping. And using a list of feeling words over time may help with getting labels for them to put on their thoughts and feelings as they go by.

References

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

Five Senses Mindfulness



Sight



Smell



Touch



Taste



Sound

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



Another type of simple mindfulness exercise that you can do is what I call 5 senses mindfulness.

And again, your 5 senses, in this case, are your sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound, assuming the person has all of these senses. And you can do 5 senses mindfulness with really any sort of object or thing that a person can hold or touch. So you can do it with a piece of food, for example.

A lot of times, people suggest a raisin or one of those small clementine oranges or something like that. Again, it doesn't make any difference what the thing is. It can be a piece of chocolate, too.

References

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

Five Senses Mindfulness



Leave taste for last when using a piece of food



Move through each of the senses



Take 20 to 30 seconds to focus

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



And the only thing I would suggest, if you're using a piece of food, is that you leave taste for last because, obviously, that's the end of the object, or at least part of it.

So again, just sort of moving through each of those 5 senses, having them take, you know, 20, 30 seconds to just focus on mindful awareness of each of those senses.

References

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



Five Senses Mindfulness

Examples

Lotion

- Look at the lotion
- Smell it
- Touch it
- See if it makes sounds

Music

- Focus on the sound

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



Or you could do the same thing with lotion, you know. Somebody could have some lotion. You could look at the lotion, smell the lotion, touch it.

See if it makes sounds as you rub it between your fingers. Obviously, with some inanimate objects like lotion or other objects that have been sitting around, you may choose not to taste. That's okay. There's nothing magical about doing all 5 of the senses.

Or as I mentioned earlier in the course, you can also listen to a piece of music and practice, you know, specifically focusing on the sound part of the senses with that.

References

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

Key Points

- Being in contact with the present moment is difficult to instruct verbally.
- There is an unlimited number of mindfulness exercises that can be designed.
- Mindfulness exercises can include watching thoughts go by or interacting with an item focusing on each of the 5 senses.



So, some key points.

Being in contact with the present moment is something that is difficult to fully instruct verbally. It's definitely a process that is more effectively contacted through practice.

Fortunately, there is an unlimited number of mindfulness exercises that can be designed and they're limited only by the creativity of the therapist and the client.

Common mindfulness exercises can include watching thoughts go by as clouds in the sky or leaves on a stream, or exercises where the client interacts with an item focusing on each of the 5 senses in turn.

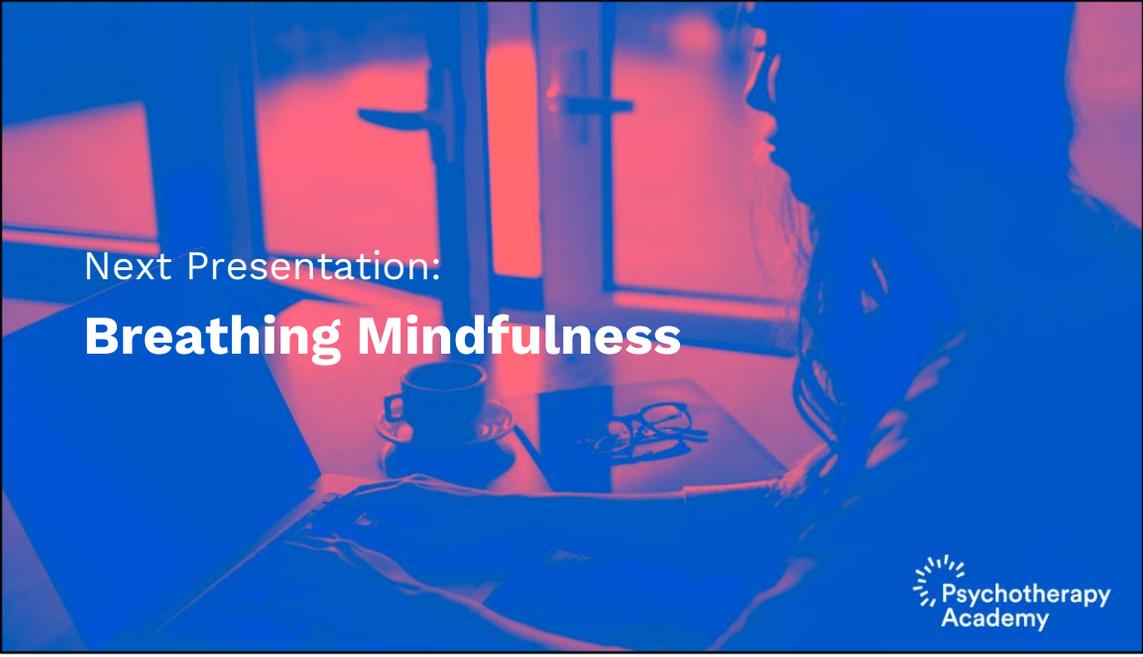
Key Points

- Somatic exercises can be effective, although they may be triggering.
- Therapists should proceed carefully with exercises focused on bodily sensations.



Physical or somatic exercises can also be effective, although they may be triggering for some clients.

So the therapist should proceed carefully before embarking on exercises that include a focus on bodily sensations, especially with clients who are prone to dissociation or extreme avoidance.



Next Presentation:

Breathing Mindfulness

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Breathing Mindfulness



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Another common mindfulness exercise is breathing mindfulness.

Breathing Mindfulness: How to Begin



Get comfortable
in the chair



Put your feet
on the floor



Take a couple of
deep breaths

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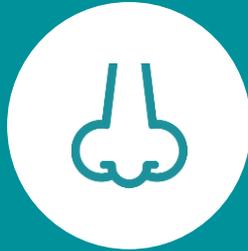


And you can do this in a number of different ways, but here's one way that that might go. Again, you know, have the person get oriented in the chair, feet on the floor, comfortable.

Start by taking a couple of deep breaths and then it might go something like this:

References

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



Focus on breathing

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



So this time, as we work on becoming centered and grounded in the moment, I'd like to ask you to focus for a few minutes on your breathing.

And as you become grounded in your chair and ready to begin the exercise, go ahead and shift your attention to your breathing.

You might start by taking a few deep breaths, noticing how far you can comfortably expand your lungs and chest as you breathe in and how your muscles and the air interact as you breathe out. So, go ahead and take a few deep breaths.

References

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



Tips for Therapists

Practice breathing at the same time

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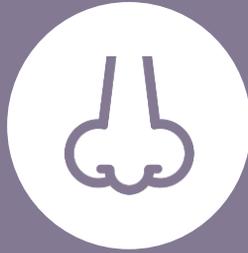


Then you pause while they do that.

And I think it's helpful for the therapist to practice breathing at the same time, again, both so you know what it is that you're asking your client and for pacing purposes.

References

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



Notice sensations as you breathe in

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And then you can tell them, “Okay. Now you can return to just breathing as you normally would, not too shallow, not too deep. And notice the range of sensations that happen in your nose, your mouth, your throat, and your chest as you breathe in, as the air swirls around in your lungs and then rises back up to your throat and out again. Just spend a little time becoming aware of these sensations as you breathe in and out, in and out.”

And then I would probably pause for a good minute or so to let them do that.

References

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



Pay attention to the air

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



“Now, shift your attention from your body to, instead, pay attention to the air itself. For example, see if you can notice that the air you breathe out is a little warmer than it was just a few seconds ago as you were breathing in.”

And now, I’ll be quiet for a few minutes and allow you to take in the totality of the experience of breathing recognizing that this is an opportunity to be mindful of an experience with many layers that’s going on all the time, whether you choose to be aware of it or not.

And then I would just pause quietly for probably 2 minutes or so.

References

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

Breathing Mindfulness: Tips



Do a shorter amount of time if you need to



Be mindful of the experience as it is



Practice along with the person

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



If it's really early in the practice for the person or you think this is going to be really difficult, you can do a shorter amount of time, 30 seconds. But the goal is just to practice being mindful of the experience as it is, with whatever arises. And as the therapist, I recommend that you practice along with the person.

References

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

Key Points

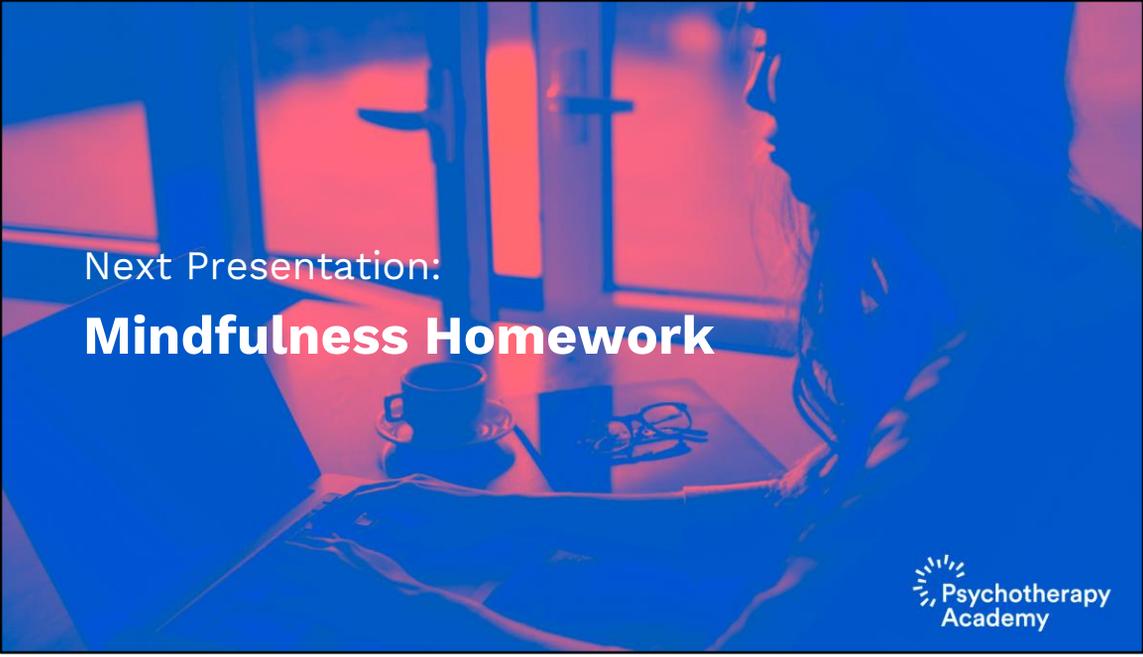
- Breathing exercises are another common vector for practicing mindfulness.
- The goal is to practice being aware of the experience in the present moment.



So some key points:

Breathing exercises are another common vector for practicing mindfulness. Breathing is an activity that is always present in any circumstance, whether in the therapy setting or as the person is in his or her natural environment.

The goal is to practice being aware of whatever the experience is in the present moment, both physically and mentally, without necessarily changing the breathing pattern in any way.



Next Presentation:

Mindfulness Homework

 Psychotherapy
Academy

Mindfulness Homework



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Mindful Practice of Daily Activities



Walking



Washing dishes



Chopping vegetables

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A classic mode for practicing mindfulness is to be mindful while practicing everyday activities like walking, washing dishes, chopping vegetables—anything you would normally do in a day.

So, for the homework activity following the introduction of a focus on present moment awareness, you could ask the person to choose one thing each day that they will do mindfully.

References

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

Mindful Practice of Daily Activities



Identify the activity
ahead of time



Ask them to practice for
5 to 10 minutes each day

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It can be useful if they identify what that activity will be ahead of time so that they don't forget. It could be the same activity throughout the week each day or it could be a different activity each day. It doesn't really matter. But you may want to ask them to practice mindfully engaging for 5 to 10 minutes each day as a starting place.

References

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

Mindful Practice of Daily Activities



Have them keep a log



Address common barriers

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Have them keep a log, either on a piece of paper or in the notes function on their phone, where they rate their effectiveness at doing the activity mindfully each day along with any comments about what went well or what was a barrier to their mindfulness practice so that you can see changes over time and problem solve ways to address common barriers to implementation of this practice. And you can just have them rate it on a simple 0 to 10 scale.

References

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

Real-World Mindfulness: No Need to Carve Out Time



- Be mindful of anything you're doing
- Practice 5 senses mindfulness
- Be mindful of thoughts and feelings

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The beauty of real-world mindfulness is that you don't need to carve out a specific period of time during the day to do the homework. Mindfulness practices can be worked on and refined at any time and, truly, in any circumstance. And it doesn't matter what the activity is.

You can be mindful of anything you're doing. You could practice 5 senses mindfulness while sitting still or while doing literally any activity. Or you could practice being mindful of thoughts and feelings while vacuuming the floor, while taking a walk, or even while interacting with another person.

References

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

Being Mindful When Interacting With Somebody

Focus on what's there in the present moment:

- From the other person
- From your own thoughts and feelings

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Think of how much of the time when we're interacting with somebody else we're thinking about something that person just said or we're already imagining what we're going to say next. So, you can practice being mindful, even when you're interacting with another person, simply focusing on what is there in the present moment, either from the other person or your own thoughts and feelings as they arise, and just coming constantly back to the present.

References

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

Practice Mindfulness at Any Time



Focus your attention
on the activity



If your mind
wanders



Gently bring it back
to the activity

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The type of activity is honestly irrelevant, I promise. You can practice mindfulness at any time. The important thing is to focus your attention on the activity, and when you realize you're off in your mind creating a grocery list or thinking of something you should've said earlier in the day, then you gently bring your mind back to the activity that you're doing.

References

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



Practice in session with the client

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And so you can really practice this and give those instructions in session with the client so that they start to incorporate them and learn them at an experiential level. And then they can practice that on their own, when they're at home or in their regular life.

References

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

Practicing Mindfulness

- Multiple times throughout the day
- In a variety of contexts
- Through multiple modalities

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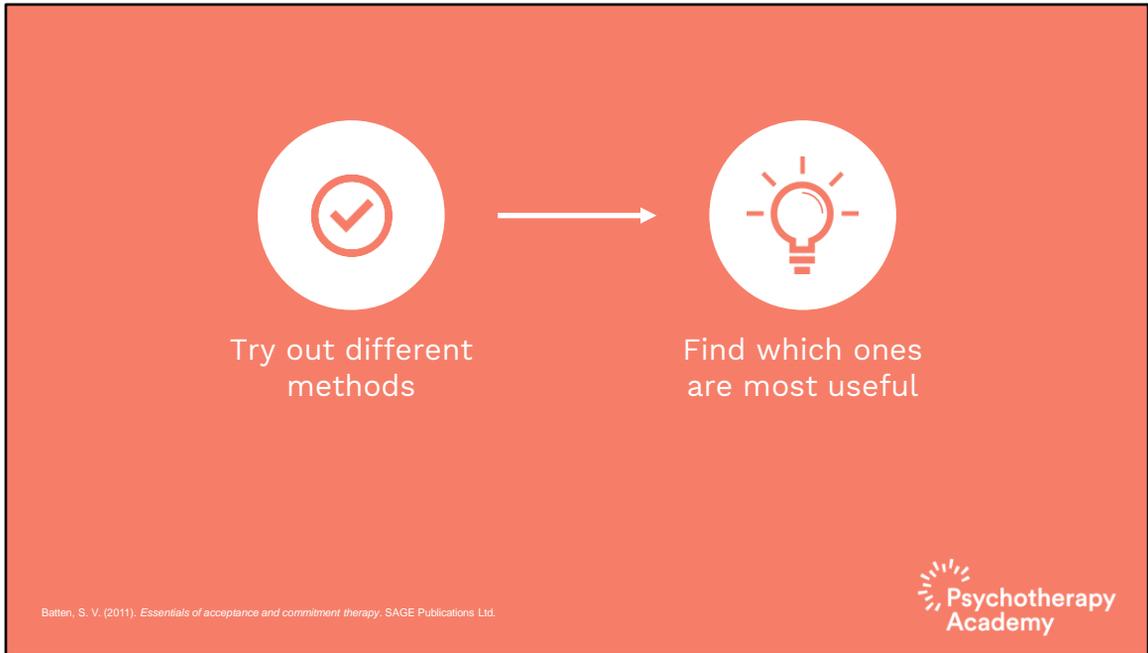


And over time, by practicing mindfulness multiple times throughout the day and in a variety of contexts, individuals increase their ability to generalize mindfulness skills to be used in any situation. And if possible, this really should also include practicing mindfulness over time at least through multiple modalities, somatic or body-focused mindfulness, imaginal, activity-based mindfulness, eyes open, eyes closed.

Not everybody will respond to all of those modes and that's fine. But if you can have the person practice through more than one modality, they're going to be more likely to be able to generalize that across contexts.

References

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



But because there are currently no data to suggest that one type of mindfulness is more important or effective than another, the most important thing is for the client and therapist to try out multiple different methods and find which ones are most useful for that individual.

References

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

Practicing Mindfulness at the Beginning of Each Session

- ✓ Helps normalize mindfulness
- ✓ Centers both the client and therapist
- ✓ Builds that mindfulness muscle

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



It can be very useful both for a general practice of present moment awareness and for grounding of both the client and the therapist to practice a brief, even 2-minute mindfulness exercise at the beginning of each session.

Not only does doing that help normalize mindfulness and build that mindfulness muscle for the client, but it also really helps center both the client and therapist at the beginning of the session from whatever they were rushing from or doing before the session.

References

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



**Demonstrate multiple examples
of how to do mindfulness**

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



And by demonstrating multiple different examples of how to do mindfulness, you're more likely to eventually stumble on 1 or 2 practices that really connect for the individual.

References

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

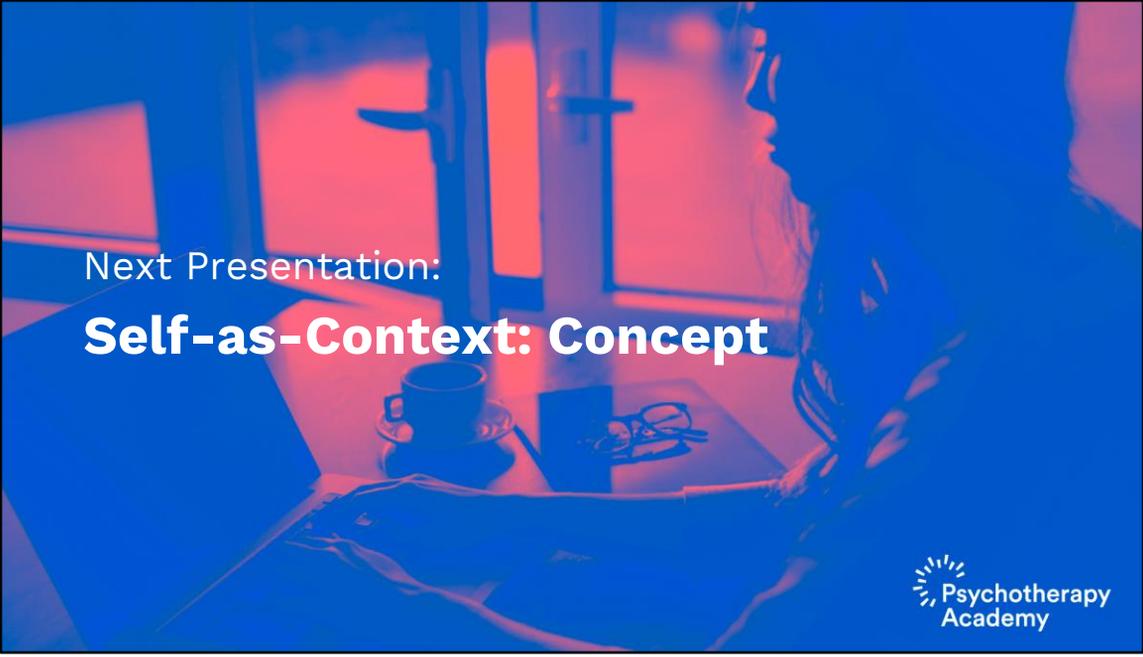
Key Points

- One type of exercise for between-session practice is to do 5 to 10 minutes of mindful attention while engaging in any daily activity.
- Over time, the client will be able to generalize these skills from neutral situations to more difficult content.



So some key points. One core type of exercise that the therapist can recommend for between-session practice is to do 5 to 10 minutes of mindful attention while engaging in any sort of daily activity, rating their ability to stay mindful during the practice on a scale of 0 to 10 along with any notes about things that went well or were barriers to the practice.

Over time, by practicing multiple types of mindfulness in session with the therapist and by doing real-world present moment awareness between sessions, the client will be able to generalize these skills from neutral situations to even more difficult content.



Next Presentation:

Self-as-Context: Concept

 Psychotherapy
Academy

Self-as-Context: Concept



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Consequences of Verbal Language



- Labels applied to describe ourselves
- E.g., good or bad girl

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As I've mentioned throughout this course, a number of consequences flow from our ability to use verbal language to describe, categorize, and evaluate the world.

One of those follow-on effects is that beginning very soon after we've learned descriptive words like good or bad, we come to apply those types of labels to describe ourselves as well.

So, a child may pretty quickly go from describing herself as a girl to describing herself as a good girl or a bad girl, and then later on, to the label of a good girl or a bad girl who's afraid of the dark.

References

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



These self-descriptions of characteristics, evaluations, and roles go on and on as they're elaborated over time and throughout our lives.

And this set of labels that we each have for ourselves is known within ACT as the conceptualized self.

References

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



The Conceptualized Self

Problematic only if overly attached to it

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



And it's important to note that the conceptualized self is, itself, neither good nor bad in and of itself.

It's problematic only when we become overly attached to this conceptualization and truly believe that we're defined by those labels in a firm or unchanging way.

References

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

The Conceptualized Self



A way of looking
at oneself



The impact of labels
depends on how firmly the
individual believes them



The attachment
to labels keeps
people stuck

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



Everybody has a conceptualized self, a way of looking at themselves and thinking about themselves and describing themselves to others.

But the impact of these labels comes with how firmly the individual believes them.

Again, the labels themselves are not the problem. It's the attachment to those labels that can keep people stuck in roles and judgments, rather than in direct experience and moving forward based on values.

References

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

Labels: Attachment to Self-Concept



This process is escalated after a traumatic event



Labels are reinforced by the individual's experience



Behaviors become more shaped by these descriptors

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



This is a normal process. And there's no way to stop our minds from attaching these descriptions and labels to our self-concept over time.

But imagine how this process can get escalated after a traumatic event, not only labels like victim or survivor, which can have an array of implications for subsequent behavior either way, but also things like dirty, or failure, or doomed, or a variety of idiosyncratic verbal descriptions.

As these labels are generated and reinforced by the individual's experience or by society, the person's behaviors can become more and more shaped by these descriptors rather than by which behaviors are most workable.

References

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

Labels Due to Trauma



Especially entrenched after repeated trauma



More complex based on other people's reactions to trauma



Invalidating: "You're overreacting"

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



And these labels can be even more entrenched and problematic when they arise due to ongoing trauma, like child physical or sexual abuse or domestic violence, due to the repeated experiences that bring up this content.

And the content can become even more complex based on other people's reactions to the trauma.

If the person is invalidated by those around them when they disclose their trauma history, then there may be labels like overreacting or liar layered on top of those descriptors that are directly related to the trauma.

References

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

Self-as-Context



Recognize that individuals
aren't their content



Open up and
behave flexibly

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

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Within ACT, we operate on the belief that when individuals recognize that they are not their content, labels, or history, then they can open up to try new things, and move forward, and behave flexibly and effectively.

References

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

Self-as-Context: Skills Required



Defusion



Present moment
focus

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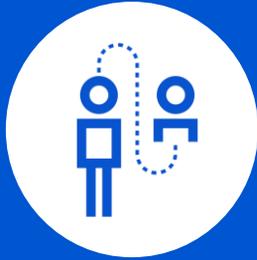


The process of contacting this place of what we call self-as-context requires skills of both defusion and a mindful present moment focus—both things that we've covered already.

References

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

Self-as-Context: The Goal



Distinguish the person
from their programming

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



So, the goal of this phase of ACT is to assist the client in distinguishing the person from their programming.

And their programming is really everything that has happened, or been said to them, or been told to them, or that they've read or thought or seen on TV or in a movie over time.

References

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

Self-as-Context



This reinforces the work of defusion



There's another way to relate to internal content

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



And so this work reinforces the work of defusion, reminding the client that so much of that cognitive content that arises naturally is just arbitrary based on that programming that we've all gotten.

And if the client can learn through experience that he's not defined by his sadness or shame or anxiety or troubling memories, then maybe there's another way to relate to this internal content.

References

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

A Sense of Self

Defined by content

- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Memories
- Bodily sensations

VS

Transcendent

- Always present
- Safe
- Not determined by thoughts, feelings, labels, and memories

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



The alternative we would suggest to experiencing a sense of self that's defined by the content of one's thoughts, feelings, memories, and bodily sensations is to find a place or a space, an experience, a perspective in which one can conduct with a transcendent sense of self that has always been present and that is safe and not determined by transient thoughts, feelings, labels, and memories.

References

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



Trauma Survivors

Can choose a perspective in which their identity isn't defined by the content of their experience

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

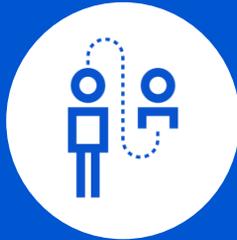


So, if the trauma survivor can identify and choose a perspective in which their identity is not defined by the content of their experience, then the perceived danger of experiencing those difficult private events is reduced.

References

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

Self-as-Context



Transcends thoughts, feelings, and labels

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



And so this perspective, in which one is able to connect with a consistent sense of self that transcends thoughts, feelings, and labels, is known in ACT as self-as-context.

References

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

Key Points

- There's a distinction between the sense of self defined by content and experiences and the one that's consistent over time and doesn't rely on private experiences.



So some key points.

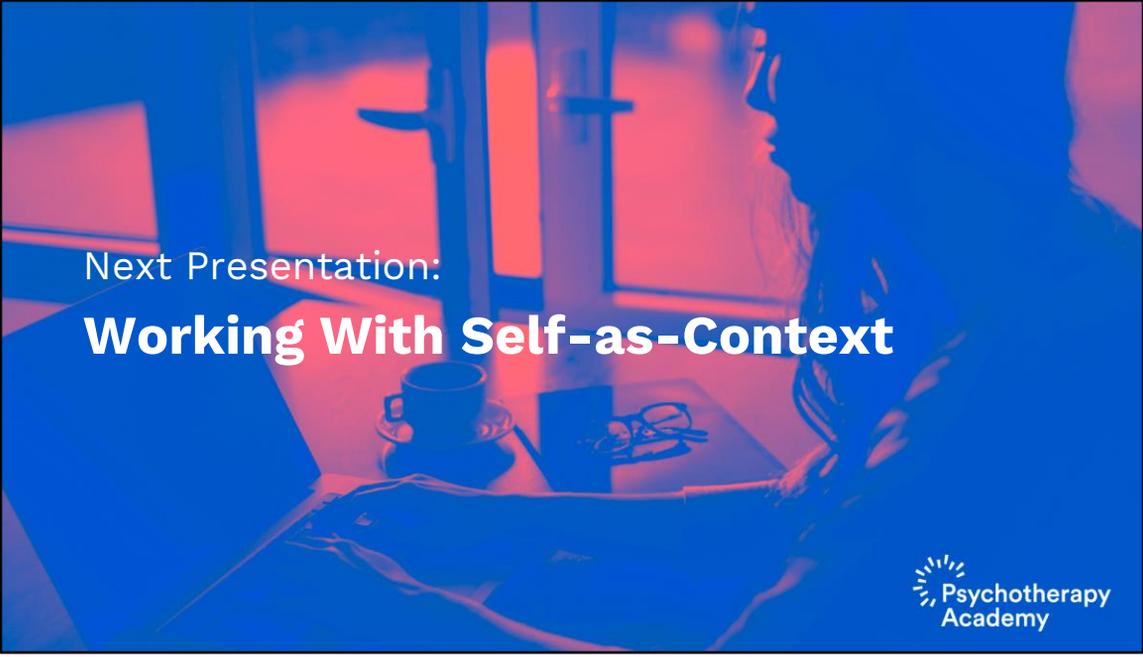
Within ACT, a distinction is made between a perspective in which a person's sense of self is defined by the content and experiences of the person's thoughts, feelings, memories, and self-evaluations vs a perspective in which the fundamental nature of who a person is is consistent over time and does not rely on impermanent private experiences.

Key Points

- For trauma survivors, finding a safe perspective can be essential to respond more effectively.



Especially for trauma survivors, finding that safe place or perspective from which to experience thoughts, feelings, and memories can be essential to being able to respond more effectively when that trauma-related content is present.



Next Presentation:

Working With Self-as-Context

 Psychotherapy
Academy

Working With Self-as-Context



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Self-as-Context Work



Isn't simple for clients or therapists



Has a basic concept, "You aren't your thoughts and feelings"



Looks for opportunities to reinforce the experience of self-as-context

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Because of its abstract nature, self-as-context work is not always simple for clients or, sometimes, even for therapists. But as long as the client can understand the basic concept of "You are not your thoughts and feelings," the therapist can, if needed, move on to other domains and just look for opportunities to reinforce the experience of self-as-context more organically throughout the later work of therapy, referring back to the basic concepts as necessary.

References

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

Self-as-Context: How Labels Constrain Life Choices



Being labeled
shy or nervous



Avoiding social
situations

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It's important, though, as you work to understand this perspective of self-as-context, to note that it's not just negative labels or content that can be problematic.

It may be easier to imagine examples like how a person who connects with labels of shy or nervous might make choices that constrain his life by avoiding social situations after a history of negative interpersonal situations.

References

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

Self-as-Context: How Labels Constrain Life Choices



Being labeled independent
or self-sufficient



Becoming overly self-reliant
and not accepting help

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But it can be just as constraining to fuse with a label like independent or self-sufficient.

For the trauma survivor who has coped with interpersonal trauma by becoming totally self-reliant and not needing other people, this can also lead to ineffective coping when situations come along where the person would really benefit from asking other people for help.

References

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

The ACT Model



Not just letting go of negative stories



Gain tools to step back from self-related context



Behave more effectively in situations

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Within the ACT model, we're not simply trying to help the person let go of negative stories that they've bought into about themselves.

We're also working with them to gain the tools to step back from all types of self-related content, even content that the person's society might think as more desirable, so that they can behave more effectively in a variety of situations.

References

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

Identifying the Self-as-Context Perspective



Individuals aren't defined by their thoughts, feelings, and labels



No emotion, thought, or memory is so strong that it can destroy the individual

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



Although the work of identifying the self-as-context perspective may initially be challenging for both therapists and clients alike, it can be fundamentally transformative when individuals recognize, as an experience and not just verbally, that they're not defined by their thoughts, feelings, and labels.

This recognition can be experienced really as expansive as individuals come to find that they're big enough to hold all of their experiences and that no emotion, thought, or memory is so strong that it can destroy or harm them.

References

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

How Do Clients Demonstrate Self-as-Context?



They can recognize that they're operating from an assumption



E.g., "I can only respond in a certain way"



They can recognize attachment to the conceptualized self

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The therapist will start to know that the client has truly caught on to this concept when the client is able to recognize herself that she's operating from an assumption. Maybe that she can only respond to things in a certain way because that's how she's always responded in the past. Or she catches herself when she finds herself saying something that implies attachment to some piece of that conceptualized self.

References

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

Self-as-Context: Connect With a Different Perspective



Experiences can
be safely observed



You don't have to
run from them

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So in this ACT component, the therapist works with the client to connect with a different perspective, a sense of self that's not determined by thoughts, feelings, or any other private experience. Because if there's some place from which these experiences can be safely observed, then maybe you don't have to run from them.

References

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

The ACT Model



There's no pain that's so great that the person can't contact it



No thought, feeling, or memory is permanent

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



The ACT model proposes that there's no pain that is so great that the person can't contact it because no thought, feeling, or memory is uniquely real or permanent.

The only thing that abides, that is consistent, is the sense of I that provides the context from which each of these things can be observed.

References

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

Key Points

- The work of self-as-context can seem abstract at first.
- Work on introducing the idea that we limit ourselves when we buy into any thoughts, emotions, labels, or memories.
- Return to this component of ACT in vivo later in therapy when relevant examples present themselves.



So, some key points.

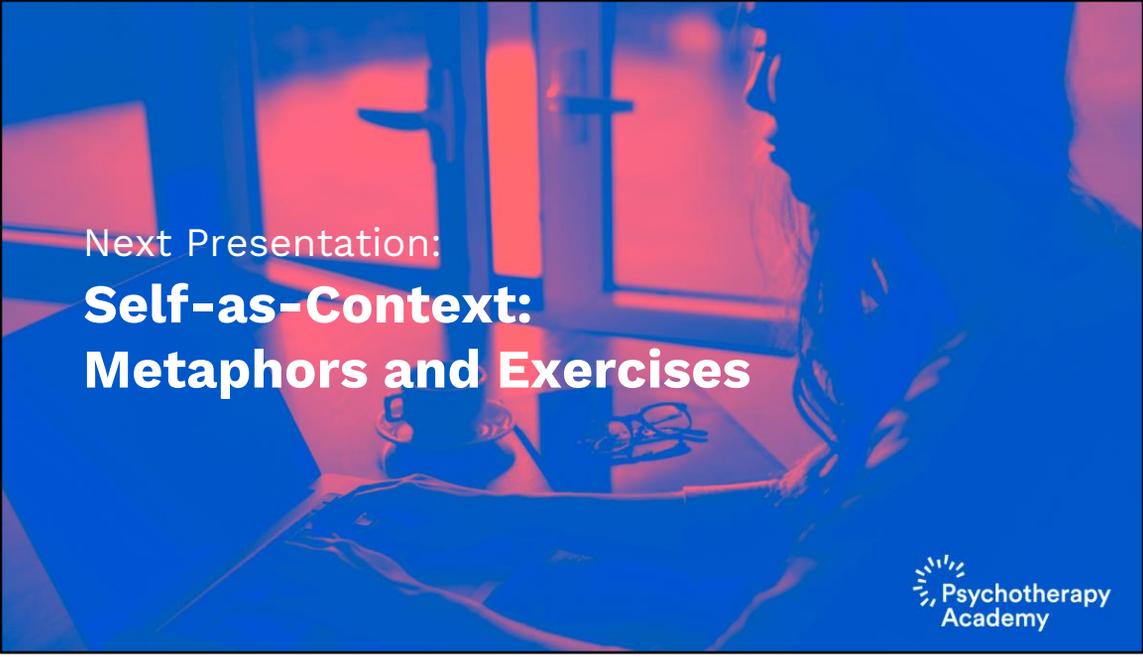
The work of self-as-context can seem abstract at first and may not click with every client immediately. If that's the case, then the therapist can simply work on introducing the idea that we limit ourselves when we buy into any thoughts, emotions, labels, or memories as being central to who we are and can then return to this component of ACT in vivo later in therapy when relevant examples present themselves.

Key Points

- Demonstrate that it's not just negative content or trauma-related thoughts that are problematic.
- Any content that we hold too closely can contribute to being stuck.



And it's important to demonstrate that it's not just "negative content" or trauma-related thoughts that are problematic to fuse with, but that any content that we hold too closely as defining who we are can contribute to being stuck and unable to respond flexibly.



Next Presentation:

**Self-as-Context:
Metaphors and Exercises**

 Psychotherapy
Academy

Self-as-Context: Metaphors and Exercises



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

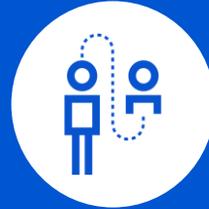
In this video, I'll go through several examples of self-as-context exercises and metaphors.

You should be able to use at least one of these with any given type of client, depending on whether they might respond better to a theoretical exercise or a more visual metaphor.

Asking Progressive Self Questions



The changing content of private experiences



A consistent perspective to observe it

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So, here's one that I call asking progressive self questions.

At the most basic level, targeted interventions in the self-as-context component of ACT attempt to contrast the constantly changing content of private experiences with a consistent perspective from which a person can mindfully observe this ever-changing content.

References

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

Asking Progressive Self Questions

The observer



The things that
are observed

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



For example, in a session, the therapist may ask a series of questions to illustrate the distinction between the observer and the things that are observed. So, here's how that conversation might go.

References

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

Asking Progressive Self Questions



“What can you notice in your body?”
“Who’s noticing that tension?”



“I’m feeling tense”
“I am”

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



So the therapist might ask, “And what can you notice in your body right now?” “*Well, I’m feeling tense and it’s hard to breathe.*”

“And who’s noticing that tension and shortness of breath?” “*I don’t know if I understand your question. I mean, I am. Is that what you mean?*”

References

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

Asking Progressive Self Questions



“What’s a feeling you’re having?”
“Who’s noticing those feelings?”

“I’m feeling nervous”
“I am”

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



“Okay. And can you tell me a feeling you’re having right now?” *“Ummm, I guess I’m feeling nervous and kind of confused.”*

“And who’s noticing those feelings of nervousness and confusion?” *“I...I am. Who else would be noticing them?”*

References

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

Asking Progressive Self Questions



“Can you share a thought?”
“Who’s noticing those thoughts?”



“Things are never going to get better”
“I am”

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



“And what about thoughts? Can you share a thought you’re having right now?” “Well, I’m having the thought that things are never going to get better.”

“And who’s noticing that thought here and now?” “I am. But what’s the point of that?”

Then the therapist might say something like this: Well, we can go on and on with this. And we could identify an infinite number of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories that pass across your awareness, right?

References

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

Experiences Come and Go

There's a part of you that's able to notice them:

- It's always there
- It stays safe

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



Because that's what our experiences do. They come and go, come and go. And lots of times, it seems like those experiences, those thoughts, those feelings are the problem.

But what I'm trying to help you contact here is, although these experiences come and go constantly, there's a part of you there that is able to notice them.

That's the part of you that you were referring to when you answered my questions by saying "I am." There's a part of you that's always there, always aware of everything, and that stays safe, regardless of which experiences are present.

References

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



**Go into that perspective
where you're not defined by
your thoughts and feelings**

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



And I'd suggest that we try to do some more work together to go into that perspective where you're not defined by your thoughts and feelings. Because I think that might give us a safer place to do this work rather than if your whole being is determined by those ever-changing experiences, which is how your life has been going a lot of the time recently.

References

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



Metaphor: The House With Furniture in It

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



Another metaphor that can be used to demonstrate the distinction between content and the context in which the content is held is “the house with furniture in it” metaphor. In this metaphor, the client is encouraged to visualize a house with several rooms in it. Any type of house will do. The client might first be asked to imagine that the house is empty of any furniture or decorations.

References

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



However, over time, various pieces of furniture are placed in different rooms of the house. Some of these furnishings are what the client would label as stylish or attractive. Other furnishings might be labeled by the client as hideous, or old fashioned, or some other undesirable description.

The client should be asked to imagine all types of furniture cycling in and out of the house over the years, over and over, while the house itself remains structurally unaltered.

References

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

Metaphor: The House With Furniture in It

	The contents of the house: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Come and go• May be desirable or undesirable		The house: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the context• Is the observing self• Remains stable and consistent
---	---	---	--

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



And after doing this for a couple of minutes, the therapist can then point out to the client that, although the contents of the house came and went with both desirable and undesirable items, the fundamental nature of the house remained unchanged.

The house is simply the container or, as we've been calling it, the context that holds all of the pieces of furniture.

Similarly, the observing self, that context, that self-perspective, can hold any type of private experience: a thought, a feeling, a memory, even trauma-related thoughts and feelings and memories that the client may have. The pieces come and go, but the container or context remains stable and consistent.

References

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

Another Self-as-Context Exercise



A box or a container



Tissues or disposable pieces of paper

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



Another example of an exercise we might use. You'd need a box or a container of some sort to put on the floor between the client and therapist. Often, an office trash can or a cardboard box works well for this purpose. And again, if you're doing this work through a video teleconference, you can do this just with a bin or a container that you're holding in front of you that the camera can see. And you'll also need several tissues or disposable pieces of paper.

References

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

Another Self-as-Context Exercise



Identify a thought, a feeling, or a memory that they've been struggling with



Have a tissue represent that difficult private experience



Throw it into the container



Ask the client for a reaction to looking at that initial tissue in the container

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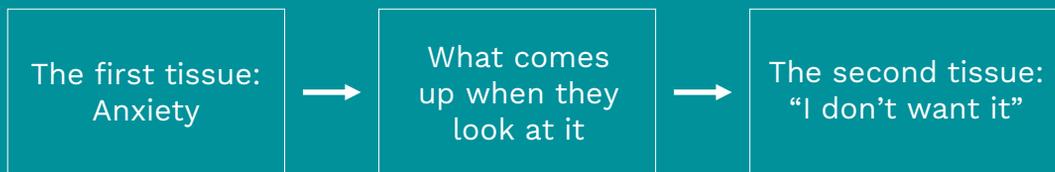
So, the therapist starts by asking the client to begin by identifying a thought, a feeling, or a memory that he has been struggling with. And so, a tissue—I'm going to say tissue, but you could use pieces of paper as well. So, a tissue is brought out to represent that difficult private experience. And the therapist may even cough or spit into the tissue in sort of a dramatic way to represent its perceived unpleasantness.

And that tissue that represents whatever the thing that the person has been struggling with is thrown into the container. And then you can show the bottom of the container. And there, it's sitting in the container. And then the therapist asks the client for a reaction to looking at that initial tissue in the container.

References

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

Another Self-as-Context Exercise



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



And the client gives whatever thought, or feeling, or urge that comes up as he thinks about that initial item. So, whatever shows up next—so say the first thing was anxiety. Okay. So the first tissue that is in there represents the person’s overwhelming anxiety.

And then the next thing that comes up when you ask them to look at that is “I don’t want it.” And so then the therapist takes a second tissue and that second tissue represents “I don’t want it.” And you throw that into the container. Wad it up or just toss it in. And then do that repeatedly.

References

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

Another Self-as-Context Exercise



The next tissue:
Whatever reaction shows up



The container begins
to fill up over time

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What is the next reaction? Either a thought, or a feeling, or an urge—whatever shows up for the person.

And each subsequent reaction is represented by the next tissue or piece of paper.

And over time, after doing this repeatedly, the container begins to fill up with tissues and papers until maybe that first tissue isn't even visible anymore.

References

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



**Reinforce concepts from
earlier in treatment**

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And the therapist can use this as an opportunity to reinforce concepts from earlier in treatment when we discussed that it's not possible to avoid or get rid of any private events in any permanent way. All we can do is add new ones on top of the old.

References

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



Self-as-Context

Hold whatever is presented, nonjudgmentally
and without attachment

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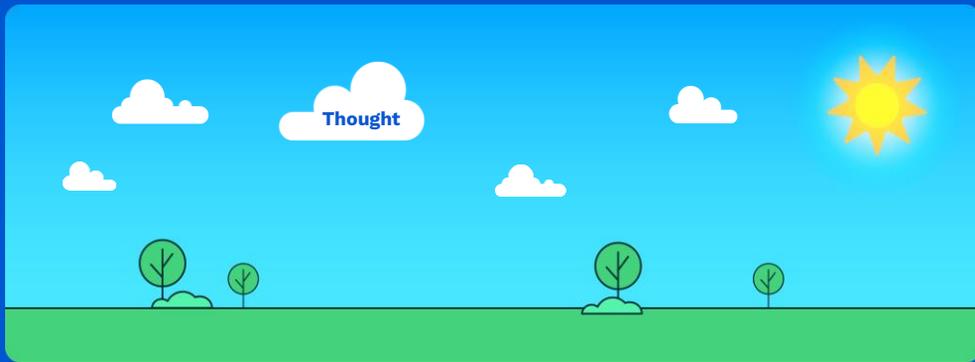
So, you can also then reinforce the messages of self-as-context. The container itself is not changed in any meaningful way by whatever type of items are thrown into it. Its job is simply to hold whatever is presented. And it actually does that effortlessly, nonjudgmentally, and without attachment.

References

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

The Clouds in the Sky Exercise

Expand it to have the self-as-context component



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Finally, earlier in this module, I gave you the clouds in the sky exercise as a way of practicing mindfulness. And you can actually expand that to be having a self-as-context component as well.

So, if you were doing the clouds in the sky exercise after a period of mindfulness, the therapist can ask, “And who is watching all of this unfold? Who is noticing the color of the sky and the words on the clouds?” And if the client is able to state something to the effect of “I am,” then the therapist can clarify that that is the observing self-perspective.

References

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

The Clouds in the Sky Exercise



The conceptualized
self or content



A transcendent observing
self: Self-as-context

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The therapist can also elaborate that even on days when the sky is especially cloudy and the person may not be able to see the sky directly, we all know that the sky is still there. And within the parameters of this metaphor, the words written on the clouds are the conceptualized self or content. And the process of simply observing the content and watching the clouds go by is ongoing self-awareness. The sky itself is that transcendent observing self, the self-as-context. The fundamental nature of the sky is not affected by the clouds. And that sky is big enough to hold all of them, even when they're at their stormiest.

References

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

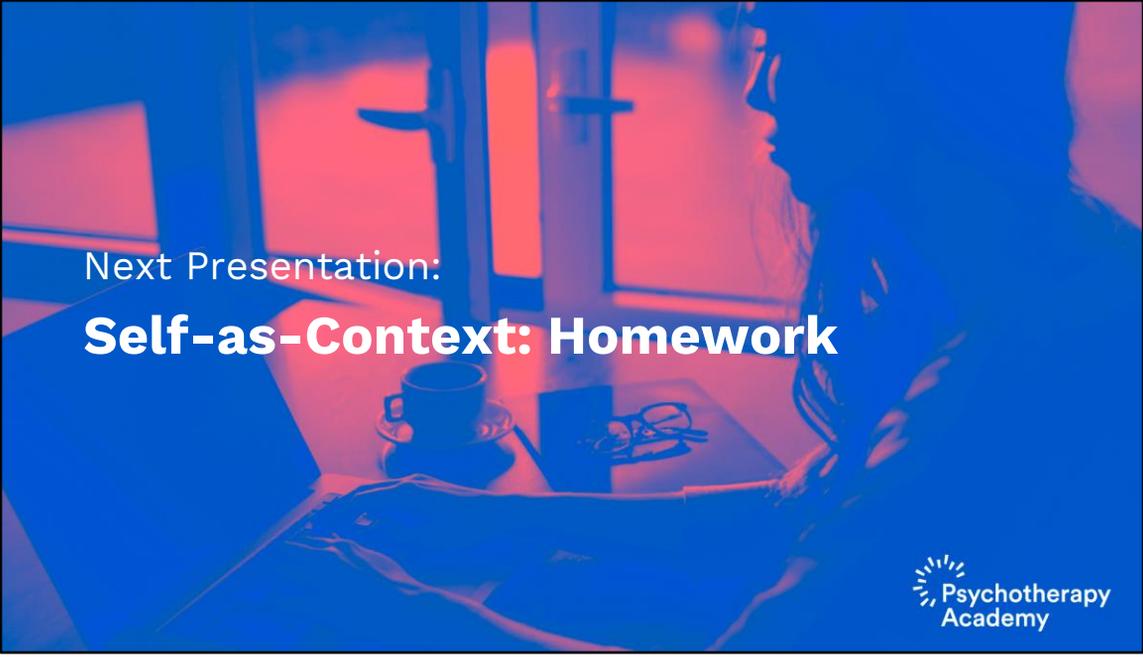
Key Points

- Different exercises and metaphors can be created to help the person connect with the sense of self-perspective.
- Some exercises focus more on contacting the observer self.
- Other exercises introduce more of the concept that the self-as-context is the nonjudgmental container.



So, some key points. A variety of different exercises and metaphors can be created to help the person connect with the sense of self-perspective that is consistent regardless of experiences, labels, or content.

Some exercises may focus more on contacting that observer self, the I, that is always there watching whatever the person is experiencing while other exercises introduce more of the concept that the self-as-context is the nonjudgmental container for all of the person's thoughts, feelings, and memories. And that container is big enough to hold it all, even the content and experiences that are related to the person's experience of trauma.



Next Presentation:

Self-as-Context: Homework

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Self-as-Context: Homework



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

In this section, I'll provide 2 types of potential homework exercises related to self-as-context. The first exercise is focused more on self-as-content or the conceptualized self. And the second one is focused more on finding that self-as-context perspective.

Knowing Your Conceptualized Self: Instructions

- ✓ Give the client a piece of paper
- ✓ Complete the sentences based on:
 - What they think about themselves
 - What they think others might say about them

Follette, V. M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding life beyond trauma: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems*. New Harbinger Publications.



The first one is called knowing your conceptualized self.

And for this, you'd want to give the client a piece of paper with the following instructions. Something like, "Please complete the sentences below based on both what you think about yourself and what you think others might say about you."

References

- Follette, V. M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding life beyond trauma: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems*. New Harbinger Publications.

Knowing Your Conceptualized Self: Prompts



- “My physical characteristics would be described as...”
- “I was born and raised in...”
- “My dominant culture would best be described as...”

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And then you can have a number of prompts like these. You can create your own based on what you think might be useful, but here are some examples: My physical characteristics would be described as blank. I was born and raised in the following areas... My dominant culture would be best described as...

References

- Follette, V. M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding life beyond trauma: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems*. New Harbinger Publications.

Knowing Your Conceptualized Self: Prompts



- “The best things about me are...”
- “My worst qualities are...”
- “I have the following roles in my life...”
- “I am someone who is...”

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The best things about me are my... My worst qualities are... I have the following roles in my life... I am someone who is blank.

For this last one, use whatever labels you would most frequently use to describe yourself in core ways or what labels you think others might use to describe you. This could include labels related to your history of trauma.

References

- Follette, V. M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding life beyond trauma: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems*. New Harbinger Publications.

Knowing Your Conceptualized Self: Debriefing



The next week, debrief what it was like to write down this content

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And the next week, have the client bring that piece of paper back to you and you can debrief what it was like to write down this content.

Which pieces of content did they find it was easier to take a step back from? And which ones does the client hold on to more tightly? Which ones did they see as more of a core part of who they are at a fundamental level? That can give both of you some information about places where that work on the conceptualized self may be very important to consider.

References

- Follette, V., & Pistorello, J. (2007). Finding life beyond trauma: using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems. New Harbinger Publications.

Finding You Across Time: Instructions



Find 3 photos of yourself:

- At different times in your life, or
- In different situations

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Another exercise would be called “Finding You Across Time.” And for this exercise, you’ll need to find 3 photos of yourself at different times in your life. One could be from your childhood, one from the present, and one somewhere in between.

Or you could pick 3 more recent pictures, but where you were in pretty different situations. These could be physical pictures, or pictures that you have in your phone or on your computer.

References

- Follette, V. M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding life beyond trauma: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems*. New Harbinger Publications.

Finding You Across Time: Questions

- The situation?
- Bodily sensations?
- Thoughts going through your mind?

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And for each of the 3 pictures, answer the following questions:

1. What was going on in this photo? Where were you? How old were you? What was going on in this event and during this time in your life?
2. What bodily sensations were you likely to be feeling during the event where this picture was taken?
3. What thoughts were going through your mind that day and during this event?

References

- Follette, V. M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding life beyond trauma: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems*. New Harbinger Publications.

Finding You Across Time: Questions

- Feelings?
- Urges to act?
- Roles?

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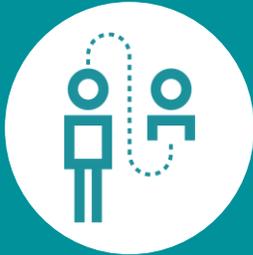


4. What feelings were you having?
5. What urges to act would you have been having?
6. What roles were you participating in at that time?

References

- Follette, V. M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding life beyond trauma: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems*. New Harbinger Publications.

Finding You Across Time: Reflection



There was a part of you observing all of those things that remains constant

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After you've written out the answers to these questions for each of the 3 photos, see if you can sit quietly for 2 or 3 minutes and reflect on the idea that, although these 3 photos were taken at different times in your life with different bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, roles that you were playing and impulses to act, that there was a part of you observing all of those things that remains constant and that is here with you today as you remember back to those events.

References

- Follette, V. M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding life beyond trauma: Using acceptance and commitment therapy to heal from post-traumatic stress and trauma-related problems*. New Harbinger Publications.

Key Points

- Have the client identify aspects of their conceptualized self that they're frequently fused with.
- Be on the lookout for how much of their day-to-day behavior is defined by that content.
- Connect with memories over time to gain contact with a perspective that there's a part of ourselves that remains consistent (self-as-context).



So, some key points. It can be useful to have the client identify aspects of their conceptualized self with which they frequently are fused so that they can start to be on the lookout for how much of their day-to-day behavior is defined by that content.

It can also be useful to practice connecting with specific memories over time in order to gain contact with the fact that although our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and roles change constantly over time, there's a part of ourselves that remains consistent, a perspective that we refer to in ACT as the self-as-context.



Next Presentation:

Difficulties When Working With Mindfulness and Self-as-Context

 Psychotherapy
Academy

Difficulties When Working With Mindfulness and Self-as-Context



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Trauma Survivors



May not respond well to closed eyes mindfulness or self-as-context exercises



May be triggered by body-focused exercises

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As I've mentioned earlier, some trauma survivors, especially those who are early in therapy, may not respond well to closed eyes mindfulness or self-as-context exercises. And some trauma survivors, especially those who've experienced physical or sexual abuse, may be triggered by body or somatically focused exercises.

References

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



Focus on more physical metaphors or exercises

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As a reminder, you can focus on more physical metaphors or exercises with either of these sorts of clients. For example, mindfulness of an orange in their hand, or mindfulness while walking rather than a closed eyes exercise, or the box with stuff in it exercise as opposed to a closed eye self-as-context exercise.

References

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

Difficulty Imagining Scenes



Use physical exercises



Determine early on if your client doesn't do well with imaginal exercises



Make adjustments before the frustration factor is exceeded

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And in addition to being useful for people who are not comfortable closing their eyes with the therapist, these more physical exercises are also more effective for people who have a difficult time imagining images or scenes in their head. For those people, it can be hard to imagine a leaf floating down a stream, much less putting a specific thought on the leaf.

It's important to determine early on if your client is someone who doesn't do well with imaginal exercises so that you can make adjustments before the frustration and trust factor is exceeded.

References

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

How to Modify Mindfulness Exercises

Start with mindfulness of
neutral external things



Build up to challenging
content

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I want to point out, though, that although I'm giving caveats for ways to modify mindfulness exercises for some clients, this shouldn't be taken as suggesting that some clients will simply not be able to connect with the present moment.

What may need to start with mindfulness of relatively neutral external things can be built all the way up to being able to be present and mindful with even the most challenging of content, sensations, or emotions as individuals gain experience with learning mindfulness and related present moment awareness practices.

References

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



Difficulty With Self-as-Context Experiential Exercises

They can move from observing into dissociation

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Some individuals with trauma histories may have significant difficulty with experiential exercises that focus on self-as-context. One common example can arise if the therapist chooses to do a closed eyes exercise to contact the observing self over time.

So, for those with a tendency towards severe avoidance, self-as-context exercises can also quickly move from observing into dissociation because they're explicitly designed to help the person disconnect or detach from his or her content and other private events.

References

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

Difficulty With Self-as-Context Experiential Exercises

Focus on more demonstrative metaphors

- The house with furniture in it
- The progressive self-questions exercise

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So if the case conceptualization suggests that the client may be likely to have this type of reaction, then it's recommended that the therapist initially choose to focus on more demonstrative metaphors that present the main points of self-as-context without necessarily delving into long closed eyes exercises. Good places to start are the house with furniture in it metaphor or the progressive self-questions exercise.

References

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



Use grounding-type activities if the client loses touch with the here and now

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The therapist should also be prepared to quickly come back to grounding-type activities, like a physical 5 senses mindfulness exercise, if the client begins to lose touch with the here and now focus.

References

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

When Trauma Survivors Grew Up in an Invalidating Environment



Find clients having difficulty labeling their experiences



Do preliminary work to help them label their experiences



E.g., use a chart of feeling words

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Another way in which this work can be difficult for trauma survivors is if the individual grew up in an invalidating environment where he or she was not taught how to reliably label his or her own experiences. So, if individuals have difficulty even labeling their experiences to be able to say, “I feel this,” “I think this,” “I prefer this,” “I want this,” then it can be extremely frustrating to ask them to tease out their thoughts and feelings as separate from a sense of self.

For these clients, you may need to do some preliminary work first to assist them in being able to label their own experiences. You may need to work with them on using a chart of feeling words to be able to describe what they’re feeling, for example.

References

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

Trauma Survivors May Be Attached to Negative Labels



They benefit from recognizing they aren't defined by their labels



The therapist shouldn't shy away from this challenging work

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But ironically, it's those trauma survivors who may be most attached to or fused with their negative labels about themselves, like "I'm broken" or "I'm weak." And therefore, they may actually benefit the most from being able to recognize that they are not defined by their labels or history.

So, for this reason, even though this may be especially challenging work for this group of clients, the therapist should not shy away from it just because it can be difficult at times.

References

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

Clients With Concrete Thinking

- ✓ Introduce the concept and experience with a few small exercises
- ✓ Return to the concept when you see specific relevant examples in session

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Some clients are very concrete in their thinking and may have never considered existential or experiential questions about the nature of self. For such clients, it may be confusing and not especially productive to spend much time on this component of ACT upfront.

One approach with such clients would be to introduce the concept and experience with a few small exercises or metaphors, without being attached to achieving any particular clinical outcome, and then returning to the concept when the therapist sees specific relevant examples that have arisen in session.

References

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

Key Points

- Some clients need modifications to begin their work on present moment awareness.
- The ability to practice mindfulness is fundamental to the work of the other core ACT processes.



So, some key points. Some clients will need modifications in order to begin their work on present moment awareness and mindfulness. However, the ability to practice mindfulness is fundamental to the work of the other core ACT processes that are needed to move forward with a more effective life.

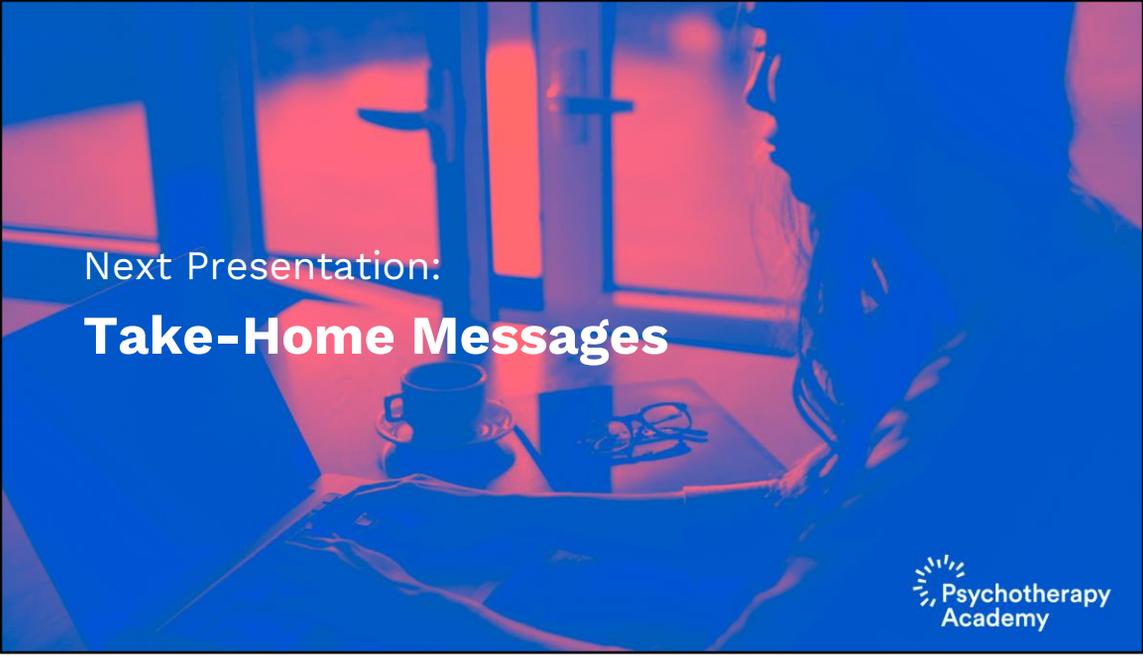
Although there's much more to ACT than simply being mindful, without the ability to move forward from the perspective of present moment awareness, little else will be able to be fully accomplished.

Key Points

- Self-as-context exercises can be modified for trauma survivors. Don't avoid this component.
- Trauma survivors are among the clients that can most benefit from this work.



Some self-as-context exercises may also need to be modified or augmented for trauma survivors to benefit from them, but it's important not to avoid this component of ACT. In fact, trauma survivors are among the groups of clients that can most benefit from this work.



Next Presentation:

Take-Home Messages

 Psychotherapy
Academy

Take-Home Messages



Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Mindfulness: Present Moment Awareness



Nonjudgmental observation
of whatever is occurring



The foundation of the work
between the client and therapist



Mindfulness is a process that can be described as the purposeful participatory nonjudgmental observation of whatever is occurring in the present. Mindfulness is often experienced as having qualities of creativity, vitality, and connectedness. In ACT, present moment awareness is the foundation of all of the work that is done between the client and therapist. One can't truly engage any of the other ACT processes from any place other than the present moment.



Trauma survivors may have difficulty being in contact with the here and now



ACT therapists can engage them in nonjudgmental attention to thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations



With practice, clients can generalize the ability to use mindfulness skills



Many trauma survivors have significant difficulty being in contact with the here and now. And ACT therapists can work with their clients using a variety of tools to be able to engage in nonjudgmental attention to thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

By practicing these skills in and out of session, the client will be able to generalize the ability to use mindfulness skills in order to be able to sit nonreactively with a wide variety of private events, even those that are related to a history of trauma.

Self-as-Content: The Conceptualized Self



It's defined by one's self-evaluations, thoughts, and feelings



It includes the experience of a trauma history



The term self-as-content, otherwise known as the conceptualized self, is a perspective from which the self is defined by one's self-evaluations, thoughts, feelings, memories, and experiences. For trauma survivors, this could also include having one's sense of self defined by the experience or after effects of a trauma history.

Self-as-Context: The Observing Self



It transcends the moment-to-moment content of private experiences



It isn't defined by experiences or labels

The term self-as-context, otherwise known as the observing self, is a perspective from which the self is experienced in a way that transcends the moment-to-moment content of one's private experiences. From this perspective, the person is not defined by any of their experiences or labels.



ACT focuses on finding a different perspective from which to view experiences rather than trying to change them



One of the unique components of ACT is its focus on helping the individual find a different perspective from which to view thoughts, feelings, memories, urges, and bodily sensations rather than trying to change the content of those experiences directly.

Self-as-Context: The Observing Self



Trauma survivors can recognize that their trauma history doesn't define them



The client is the container that holds the experiences



By contacting this observing self-as-context, we hope that individuals will come to recognize that they are not defined by their thoughts, feelings, memories, or evaluations. And trauma survivors are not defined by their trauma histories and do not need to avoid or struggle to try to change or get rid of them. From the self-as-context perspective, the client is simply the container that holds all of the experiences as he or she moves forward in a valued direction.