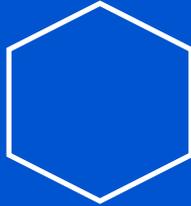




Acceptance - Part I

Dr. DJ Moran

Welcome to Module 2 of Demystifying ACT. My name is DJ Moran.

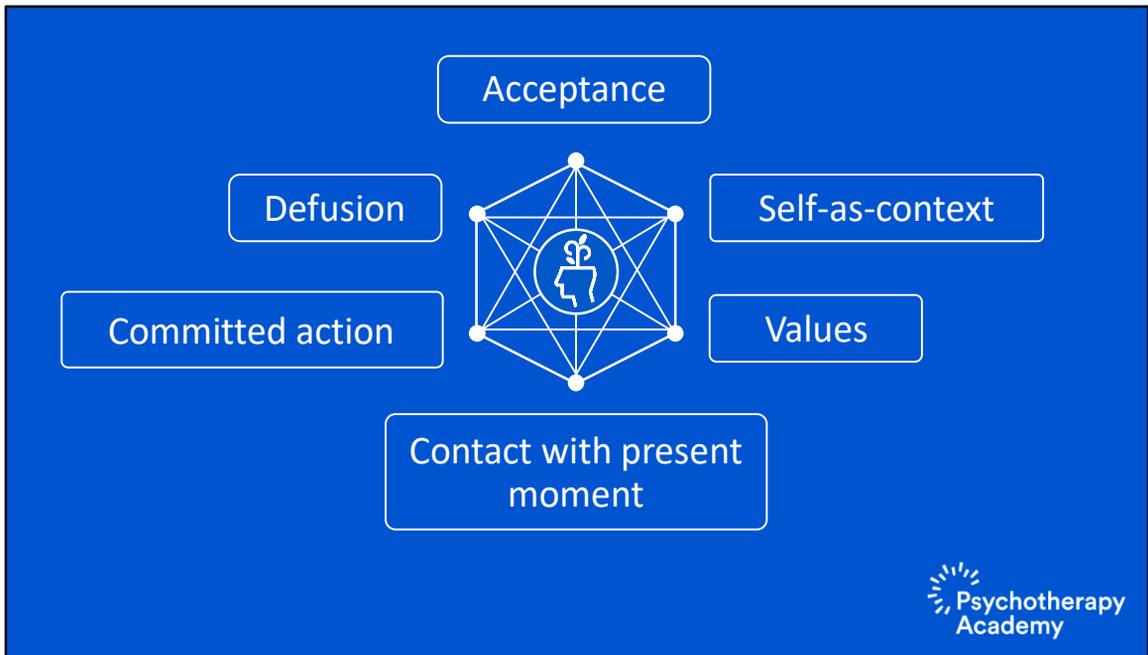


ACT Hexagon

Model used to introduce ACT



And in this module, we will be covering the ACT hexagon part 1. This ACT hexagon model is traditionally used to introduce practitioners to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.



There are six essential components to the ACT approach and they are integrated together to help build psychological flexibility. These six components are acceptance, defusion, self-as-context, values, committed action and contact with the present moment. In this module, we will discuss the first three, acceptance, defusion and self-as-context.



Acceptance

Let's turn to acceptance. We are starting with acceptance with no other reason than the fact that we have to start somewhere. Acceptance is not the most important out of the six components nor is it the component that clinicians always use first in psychotherapy. We had to start somewhere and I just flexibly chose to select acceptance first.

Acceptance according to ACT



Actively contacting psychological experiences
directly, fully, without needless defense
while behaving effectively.

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.



Now, you might have your own definition about what acceptance is all about but we're going to define acceptance specific to the ACT environment. The definitions of words are contextually bound, meaning it might change depending upon the situation. For instance, if I say the word bat, that might make you think of a wooden stick if you're at a baseball game or a winged mammal that sleeps upside down if you're in a cave. You might even think about how people blink their eyes to attract a mate if you're standing in a crowded party. The word bat can be used to describe many different things and the context is what is important for helping the listener understand the meaning.

Acceptance can be similar. You might have your own definition of the word acceptance but in the context of ACT, it means actively contacting psychological experiences directly, fully, without needless defense while behaving effectively.

References

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.

Psychological experiences



Emotions



Sensations



Urges



Flashbacks

Willingness to have these experiences without trying to control them.

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.



Please keep in mind something very specific to the ACT definition of acceptance. The things being accepted are psychological experiences. We are talking about emotions, sensations, urges, flashbacks and other private events. We're talking about a willingness to have these experiences without trying to control them. It is important to highlight the focus on psychological experiences for acceptance because acceptance can be criticized in a particular way if you don't understand the ACT definition. I've heard criticisms such as someone saying, well, I work in a domestic violence shelter. Are you telling me I have to teach the women that I care about to simply accept getting hurt and beat up by their significant other? And the answer is of course not. There are thousands of great clinicians in the ACT community and of course, none of them are going to think that is a good idea at all.

References



Accept what you
cannot change



Courage to change what
you can

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.



The idea is to accept the things that you cannot change like your psychological experiences but build the courage to change the things that you can. The idea of ACT is to help impart the wisdom to know the difference.

Does anyone feel a prayer coming on right now? Reinhold Niebuhr's the Serenity Prayer resonates very well with the ACT approach. Accept what you can't change and change what you can.

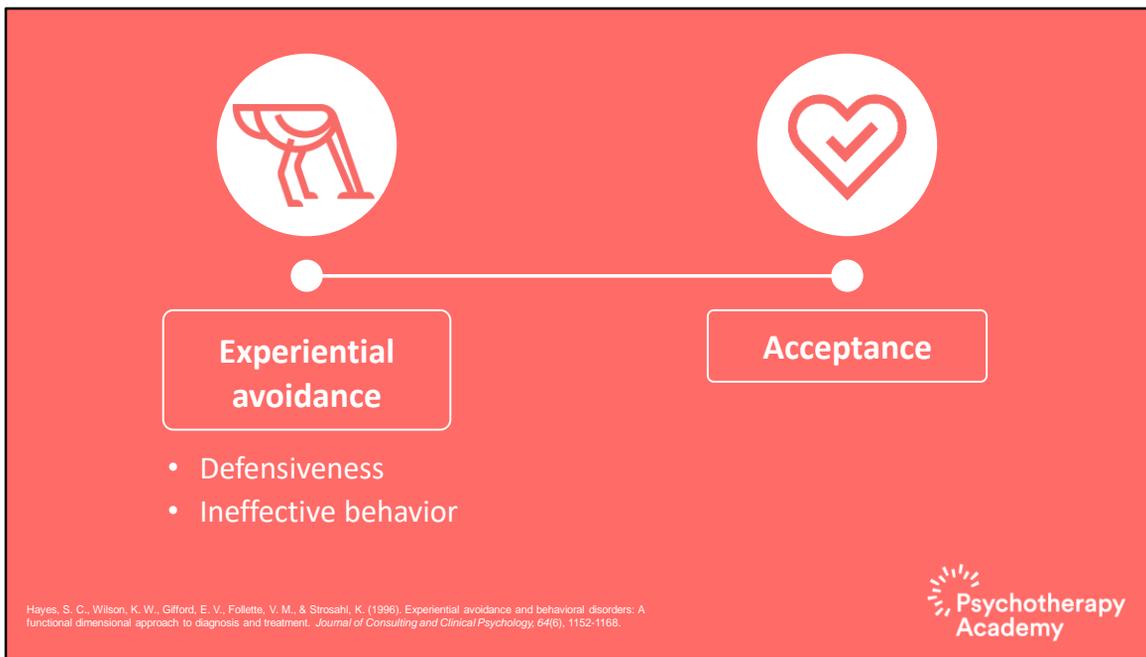
References

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.



- It is difficult to change your emotions
- The attempt to get rid of them exacerbates the problem

And every person would do well to realize whether playing the role of clinician or client it is often very difficult to simply change your emotions outright while still maintaining solid behavioral health. When people are feeling anxious, angry or sad, oftentimes the attempt to get rid of those private events exacerbates the problem.



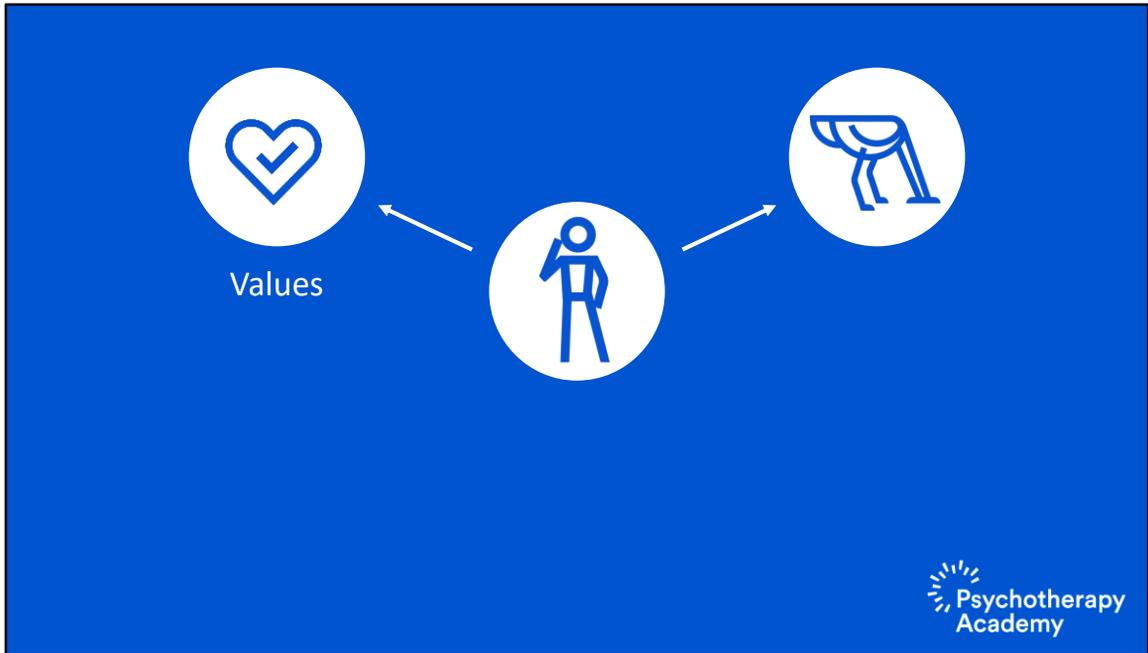
When people engage in experiential avoidance which is on the other side of the spectrum from acceptance, they are not willing to contact their feelings, sensations or urges and they try to defend against having these experiences and in doing so do not behave effectively on their important values.

References

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64(6), 1152-1168.

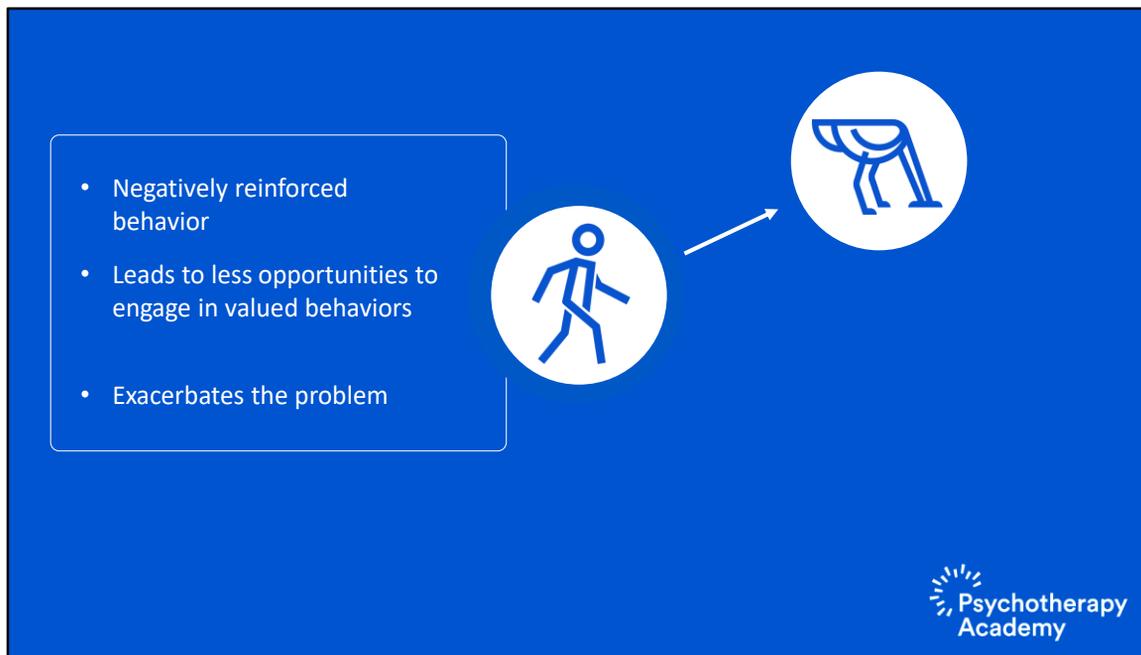


Let's take a look at an example. Suppose someone gets nervous before meeting a group of people. Suppose their heart starts to race and their hands start to shake whenever they're going to meet up with a lot of folks. Would you diagnose them with social phobia? I would recommend that you don't. You'd have to diagnose the majority of people on this planet. It's part of the human condition to get nervous when meeting a group of strangers. Just getting nervous around a lot of people isn't a clinical issue yet.



But suppose a person gets invited to a family reunion and keep in mind this person really values family relationships and would like to get to know more relatives. And suppose this person gets the invitation to go to a banquet hall and meet over 100 family members at this reunion.

The day comes and they're wearing their most splendid outfit and they walk up to the door of the banquet hall and they hear the din of conversation from inside. And then their heart starts to pound and their limbs start to shake. And then they realize, and this is important, that they have learned through society and their upbringing that they are feeling anxiety and that this is a negative emotion. And they've convinced themselves that such experiences should be avoided.

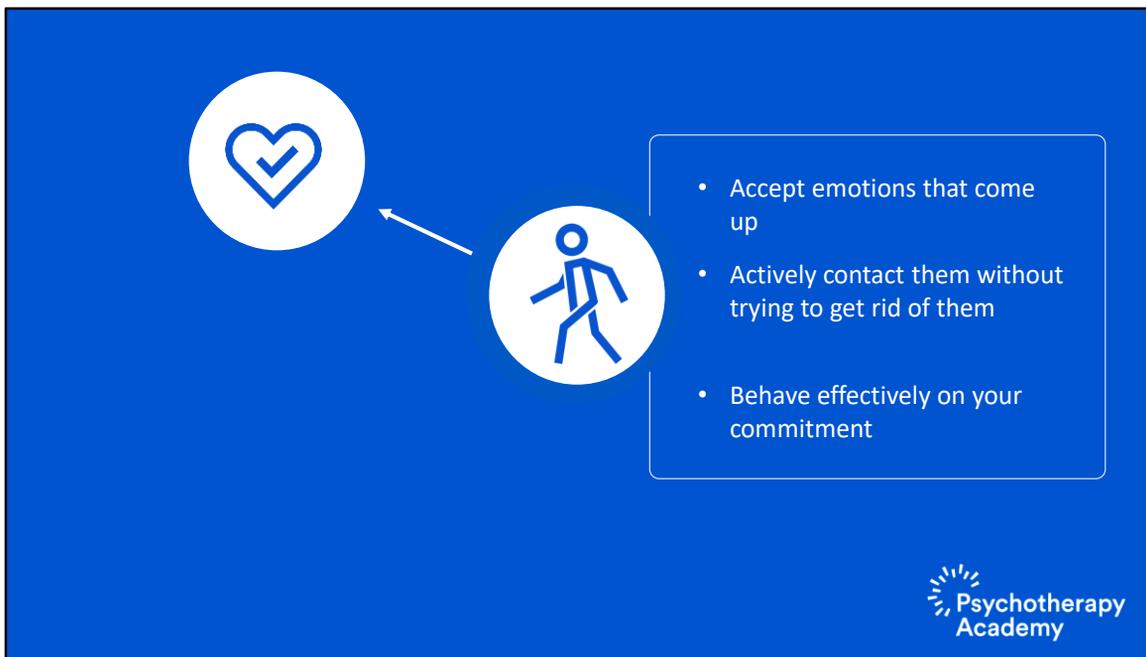


So instead of going inside the banquet hall, they turn on their heels and they head back to their apartment and play video games for the rest of the day. Without going too deeply into the parasympathetic-sympathetic nervous system perspective, such a move will get them back to homeostasis. They'll feel comfortable again if they leave and they wouldn't be dealing with any more so-called negative emotions if they do that.

This homeostasis is comfortable to them and removes the aversiveness of their heart pounding and their limbs shaking. And it makes them want to continue staying home. In fact, this is a negatively reinforced behavior. Next time they feel nervous, they'll avoid those private experiences again with a greater probability. The removal of the aversive experiences increases the likelihood of avoiding such social situations. Now, that is social phobia.

Keep in mind we said that this person values family but they are letting emotional control lead to experiential avoidance. They are not living a life that they find valuable.

And let's take it a bit further. When the client is at home alone feeling less stress, are they actually learning any of the social skills that would benefit them in order to become a better interacting family member? The answer is no. So experiential avoidance is not only reinforced, not only does it lead to less opportunities to engage in valued behaviors but it also exacerbates the problem. The next time they have an opportunity to do what's meaningful in their life, they will actually be less likely to do it.



So what can be done? Well, what if the person learned to accept the emotions that come up when committing to doing something of value and meaning. Just allow the feelings to happen. Actively contact them without trying to get rid of them and then behave effectively on your commitment of interacting with loved ones from your family at this reunion. Suppose the client could do something else. Perhaps when they hear that noisy plenary room with over 100 people talking to each other, what if they simply accepted the fact that their heart is pounding and their limbs are shaking and their butt is sweating and they willingly walk into the room even in the presence of those obstacles? And what if they could commit to shaking hands with 15 people at that family reunion? And during their first few handshakes, they might even feel even more nervous and stumble upon their words. But what if they stayed committed to doing what they value in the face of these emotional reactions without avoiding them?

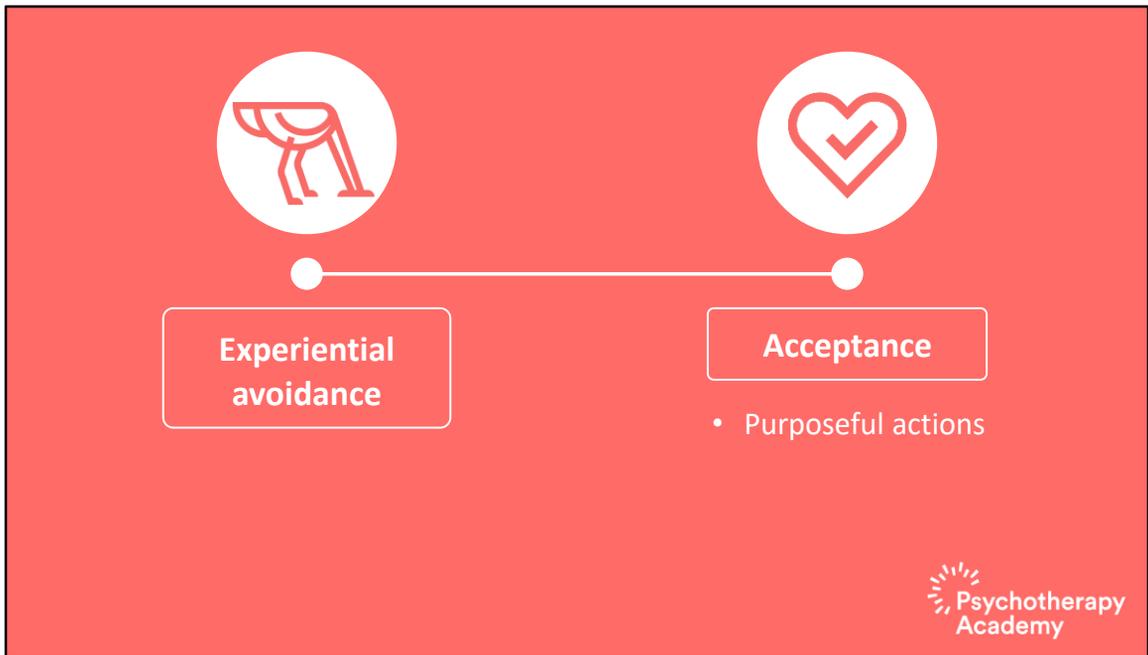
What would happen is their commitment would more likely help them build better social skills so they could engage in those meaningful behaviors and their acceptance approach would help them stay in that provocative environment for a longer period of time which would counter-condition the anxious responses and perhaps help them get back to that similar homeostasis we talked about if they avoided the event. Human beings don't panic forever. They'd potentially get back to a more moderated state but accepting how they feel has to happen first.



Engaging in valued behaviors is the primary objective.



And getting back to the moderated state isn't the primary objective. Engaging in valued behaviors is.



The results of this approach help the client have more vitality because they are following through on the purposeful actions in their life and learning to engage in behaviors even in the presence of private events that society taught them to perceive as negative.

Values

ACT is about living a life of meaning and purpose in the present moment.

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The diagram features a purple rectangular background. On the left, a white circle contains a heart with a checkmark inside, with the word 'Values' written below it. On the right, a white circle contains a stick figure walking towards the left. A white arrow points from the walking figure towards the heart. Below the circles, the text 'ACT is about living a life of meaning and purpose in the present moment.' is written in white. In the bottom right corner, the 'Psychotherapy Academy' logo is displayed, consisting of a sunburst icon and the text 'Psychotherapy Academy'.

ACT is not about symptom reduction as a primary goal. It is about living a life of meaning and purpose in the present moment. And when you do that, you develop a different relationship with emotions and sensations. The symptomatology so to speak is actually not symptoms. They're part of the human condition that we all experience. But this human condition that we're talking about will likely be viewed in a more workable manner and the person will move forward with what they care about in their life. They will become more psychologically flexible which is related to reducing suffering and improving quality of living.

Key Points

- Acceptance means actively contacting psychological experiences directly, fully, without needless defense while behaving effectively.
- The focus is on private experiences. If there are public obstacles, ACT would encourage committing to changing what you can.



There are 3 key points in this module. One, acceptance means actively contacting psychological experiences directly, fully, without needless defense while behaving effectively.

Two, the focus of acceptance is on private experiences. So if there are public obstacles that you can work with, the ACT approach would encourage committing to changing what you can.

Key Points

- Experiential avoidance exacerbates a client's clinically relevant issues.
- Acceptance can be used to have a new relationship with emotions and sensations and commit to having a purposeful life.



And three, experiential avoidance which is on the other side of the spectrum from acceptance actually exacerbates a client's clinically relevant issues. So acceptance can be used in clinical work for people to learn how to have a new relationship with their emotions and sensations and commit to having a purposeful life.



Next Presentation:
Acceptance - Part II

Acceptance - Part II

Dr. DJ Moran

Acceptance according to ACT



Contacting psychological experiences
without needless defense
while behaving effectively.

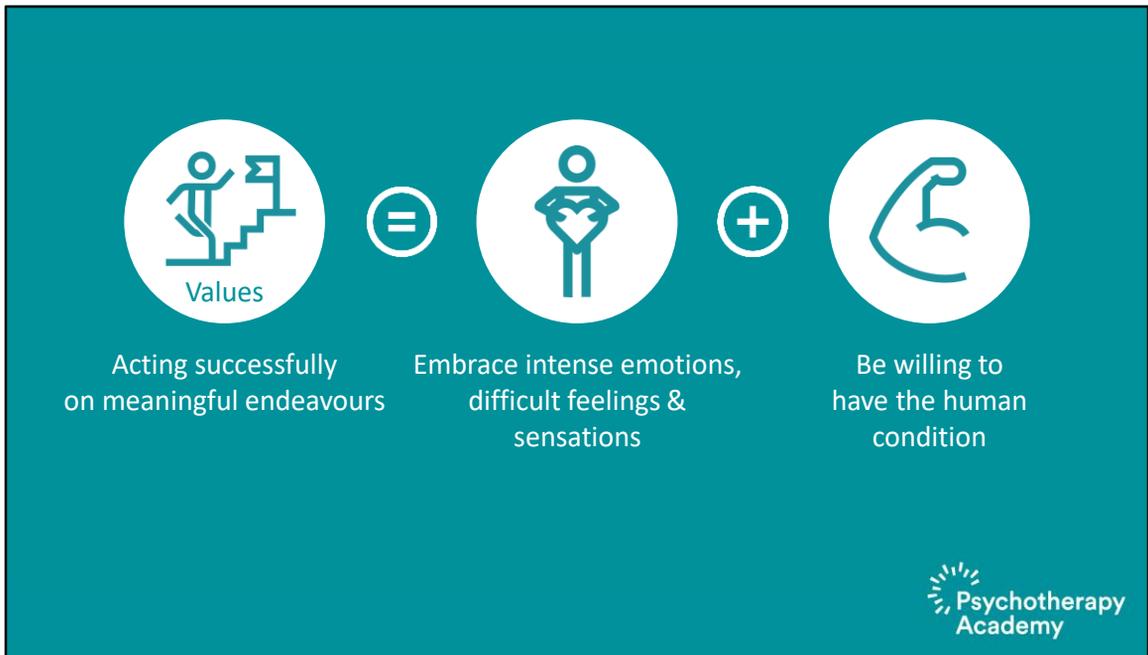
Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.



Acceptance according to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is defined as actively contacting psychological experiences directly, fully, without needless defense while behaving effectively.

References

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.



In other words, to reinterpret this definition, acceptance suggests that if you want to act successfully on meaningful endeavors in this life, you must embrace the idea that emotions are going to get lit up and you'll have difficult feelings and sensations. And in order to act successfully, you'll have to look directly at those private experiences and say, bring it on. I'm willing to have the human condition. But this is a culturally deviant approach if you think about it.

We are often taught to avoid having our emotions, sensations and urges



Ellis: therapy applications to reduce negative emotions.



Important journals: methods for diminishing negative emotions.



Dalai Lama: reducing the power of negative emotions.



At least in Western culture, we're often taught by parents, guardians, teachers and just society in general to avoid having our emotions and sensations and urges and so on. The way we use language that describes how we feel often encourages us to get rid of how we feel. Consider how we sometimes talk about negative emotions. Albert Ellis, a giant in the field of evidence-based therapy, talks about how we can use cognitive behavioral therapy applications to reduce negative emotions. Flagship journals in the realm of empirically supported psychological treatments publish about methods for diminishing negative emotions. Heck, even the Dalai Lama wrote an article in 2015 about lessening the power of negative emotions. None of this is a criticism of the techniques.

We are often taught to avoid having our emotions, sensations and urges



Language often encourages non-acceptance or experiential avoidance



We are influenced to try to instead have a “positive emotion”



Avoidance leads to trouble

But we're simply highlighting the idea that the way we use our language often encourages non-acceptance or experiential avoidance. If we're having an emotional experience and we label it negative, we're often influenced to try to instead have a positive emotion and that avoidance leads to trouble.



Looking at emotions as natural rather than negative.



We'd prefer as ACT therapists that people look at our emotions as natural rather than negative. They're natural. Given our current situation and past history, of course, we feel a certain way.



People avoid these emotions by doing things that are clinically relevant.

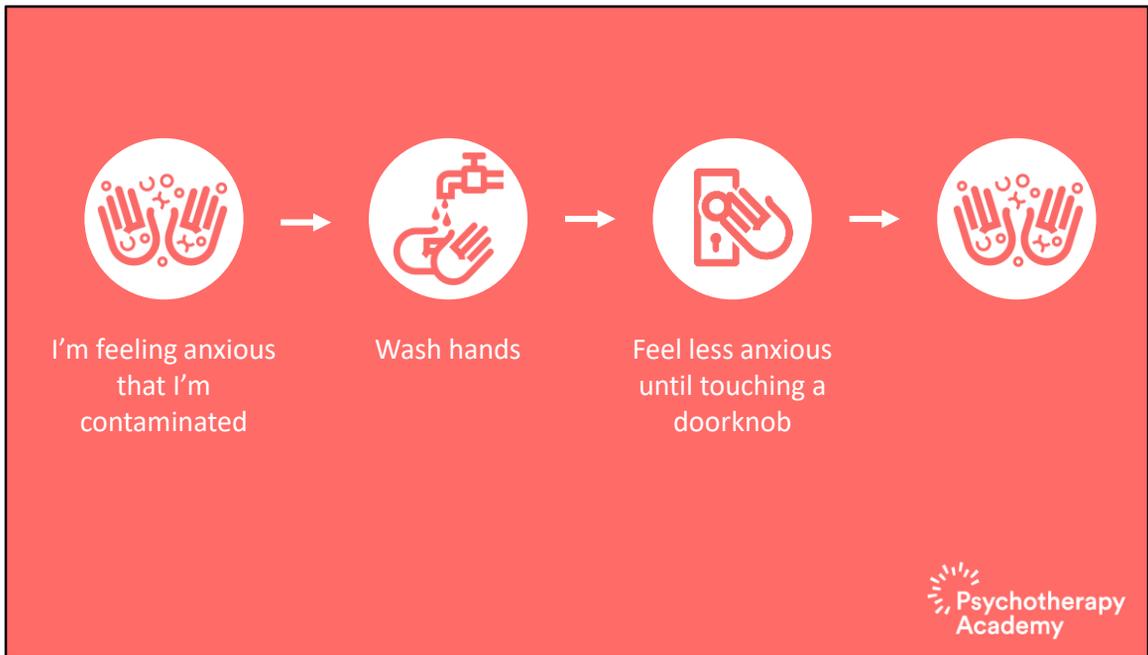
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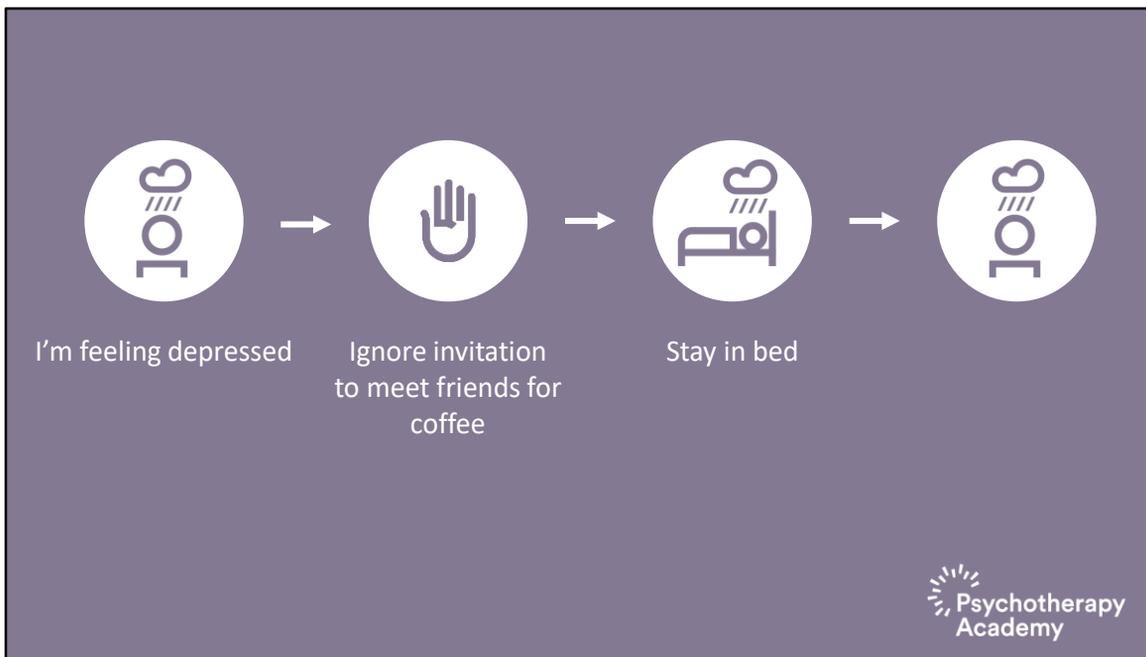
And a lot of times, people try to avoid these natural emotions by doing things that are clinically relevant because society taught them that they are having negative emotions.



For instance, a person may say, I don't want to feel irritated with myself. So maybe I'll crunch some pain killers and wash them down with scotch. And that makes them feel euphoric and mellow for a few hours. But then they come down from that high and they're irritable again with new withdrawal symptoms and the concerns that they're becoming dependent on drugs. So guess what they do to solve those concerns. Take more drugs and alcohol.



Another person may say, I'm feeling anxious that I'm contaminated with all these germs on my hands. So maybe I'll wash my hands with hot water and bleach and steel wool. And that makes them feel less anxious until they touch a doorknob in order to leave the bathroom and their anxiety returns again related to their contamination. And they get not only anxious about the germs but they get anxious on how they're not handling their anxiety very well. So guess what they do to solve that concern. Wash their hands some more.



Suppose another person says, I'm feeling depressed so I'm ignoring the invitation to meet friends for coffee. I have nothing good to contribute to any conversations we'll potentially have anyway. So they stay in bed with the weight of the sadness about their problems all week perhaps hoping they'll solve the issue of their depression by wallowing in their sadness. And that just doesn't typically work. Later, the next week, they get asked to coffee again but they're ashamed that they haven't done anything with their time that week. And they know that they don't have anything to say when they meet with their friends again. So guess what they do to solve that concern. They avoid social interactions by staying in bed for another week and sink down deeper into the spiral of depression.



Substance abuse



OCD



Depression

Non-acceptance or experiential avoidance
contributes to clinical problems



Surely, these conceptualizations of substance abuse, obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression do not fit all people dealing with these clinically relevant concerns. But this kind of perspective does map on to how non-acceptance or experiential avoidance contributes to clinical problems.

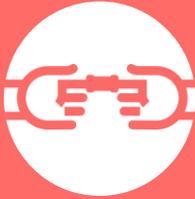
ACT therapists



- Engender acceptance for private events
- Contact the human condition without trying to avoid those experiences
- Use metaphors



ACT therapists aim to engender acceptance for all relevant private events contributing to people's suffering. ACT therapists would invite the clients to simply consider having the irritation, having the urges, having the extreme weight of depression, noticing how that feels in that present moment, contacting the human condition as it has been given to them without trying to avoid those experiences because the avoidance moves are actually making the problem worse. The ACT therapist is often going to teach this by using metaphor because metaphors are words that you can access in the therapy room to evoke or elicit experiences people might have had in the past or that they can actually have in the treatment room. Didactically telling a person to accept their emotions wouldn't work as well as metaphorically bringing up learning experiences where acceptance was needed in the past or can be workable in the present moment.



Chinese finger cuffs metaphor

You are in this situation that you didn't ask for, that you want out of

Trying to get out of the situation

- The harder you pull, the stucker you get

Stop struggling and start accepting

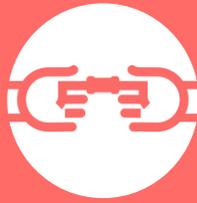
- You stop making the problem worse
- You get room to try new things
- This may allow you to get out of the situation



A classic ACT metaphor related to acceptance uses Chinese finger cuffs. You can show the client these finger cuffs and say, sometimes, on your journey in life, you don't know what is going to happen next on your path. But sometimes, something unexpected appears and you may have been taught to avoid these things because they're scary or dangerous. But this event couldn't be avoided because it's on your path. It's what happens to you. It's part of the human condition. And now, you're in this situation that you didn't ask for, that you want out of. So you try to get out of the situation. And if we take a closer look at the situation that you're in, the harder you pull, the stucker you get. Maybe your life situation is like this finger cuff. The cuff is a tube of woven wicker. And if you get into this situation, then the friction gets a part of your fingers and as you pull to get out, the tubes start to constrict on your fingers and it gets tighter and tighter the more you pull.

Maybe there's another way to deal with this situation. And this is a counterintuitive move but maybe it's better than putting lots of effort into getting more and more stuck. What we're going to ask you to do in ACT is see if you can just allow yourself to be in this situation directly without defending against it. And guess what happens as you stop struggling with this situation and start accepting that you're in the situation. Allow yourself to contact it fully. Well, the first thing that happens is you stop making the problem worse. And then with the wiggle room that's afforded to you through

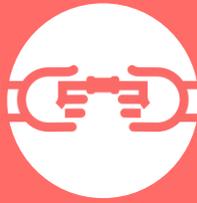
acceptance, maybe you can try new things. Maybe you can buy a self-help book, listen to the wisdom of the sages through the ages or maybe through trial and error, it can become trial and success. And this wiggle room allows you to get out of the situation. But the first step is acceptance, allowing yourself to be in the situation.



Once you're out of it,
sooner or later, it comes back.
This Chinese finger cuff represents
the human condition.



And once you're out of it, guess what happens. Sooner or later, it comes back. Because this Chinese finger cuff doesn't represent psychopathology. It represents the human condition. And the next time you're faced with an issue like this, given your history and given how you've been reared in this culture, you might struggle with it.



Hopefully, acceptance will come back and new behaviors will take place.



But sooner or later, hopefully, acceptance will come back and new behavior is going to happen. And with the wiggle room afforded to you by acceptance, you can get out of the situation so that eventually you'll go back into it.



You can notice that you're in a life situation; something that doesn't have to be avoided.



But hopefully, sooner or later, when you find yourself in a situation that is uncomfortable, you can take a look at it and say, hello, darkness, my old friend. You can notice that you're in a life situation, something that doesn't have to be avoided.



Contacting psychological experiences
without needless defense
while behaving effectively.

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.



You can accept it actively, contacting the psychological experience directly, fully, without needless defense to help you engage in effective behavior.

References

Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. W., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*(6), 1152-1168.



There are many more metaphors used in ACT and different ways to teach acceptance.



There are many more metaphors than the finger cuff metaphor and the ACT community has plenty of books including metaphors for teaching the six components and there are many resources on the Internet telling you about different ways to teach acceptance. This next video will talk about a traditional acceptance metaphor to help out in anxiety issues. There are five more components to this ACT model that we will cover in this module and the next one.

Key Points

- If you want to act successfully on valuable behaviors, it will help to be open to private experiences and willing to embrace the human condition.
- Judging emotions as negative often leads to seeking ways to get rid of them and simply have positive emotions.



For now, there are 3 key points in this video.

One, acceptance suggests that if you want to act successfully on valuable behaviors, it will help to be open to those private experiences and invite them to be part of your experience. It helps to be willing to embrace the human condition.

Two, judging emotions as negative often leads people to seek to get rid of them and simply have positive emotions like being happy.

Key Points

- ACT highlights that emotions are natural. This can help us deal with them more effectively.
- Many ACT interventions use metaphors.



ACT does not denigrate happiness but will highlight that emotions are not negative. They are natural and that can help us deal with them more effectively. And finally, three, many ACT interventions use metaphor to introduce concepts to clients. Metaphors can be easily accessible because they are simply words we have in our language but they bring in experiential learning that is being applied to a new situation. There are many resources in the ACT community to teach you about these metaphorical interventions.

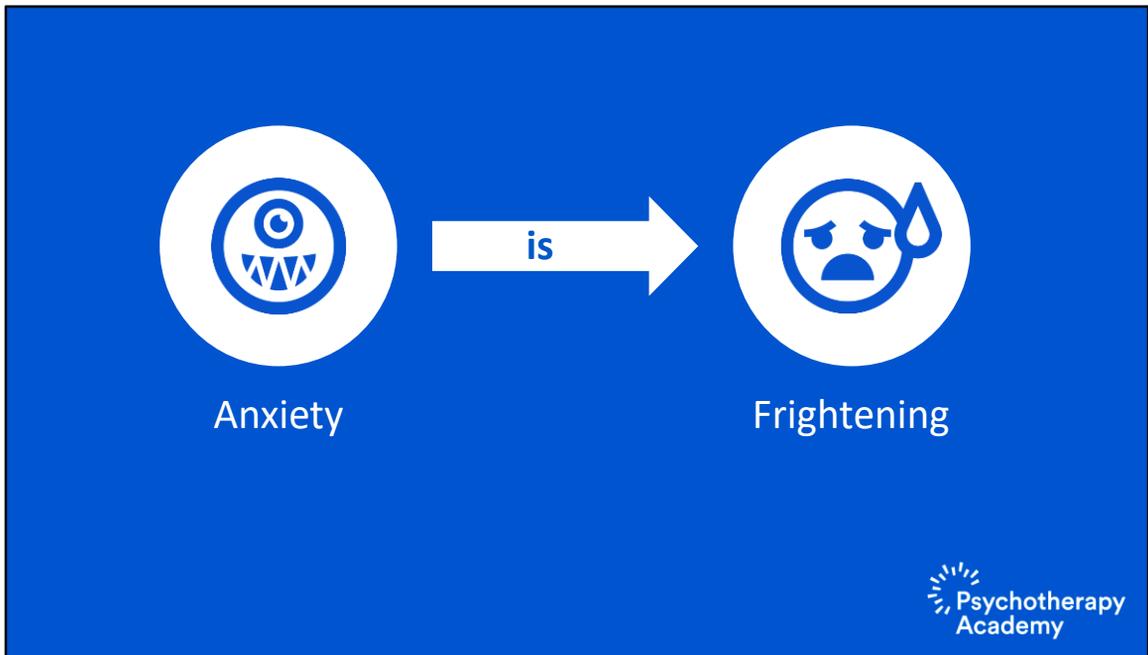
A woman is shown in profile, sitting at a desk and working on a laptop. The scene is dimly lit, with a strong blue color cast over the entire image. In the background, there are windows with a warm, reddish glow, suggesting an indoor setting like an office or a study. On the desk, there is a small cup and saucer, and a pair of glasses.

Next Presentation:
Drop the rope

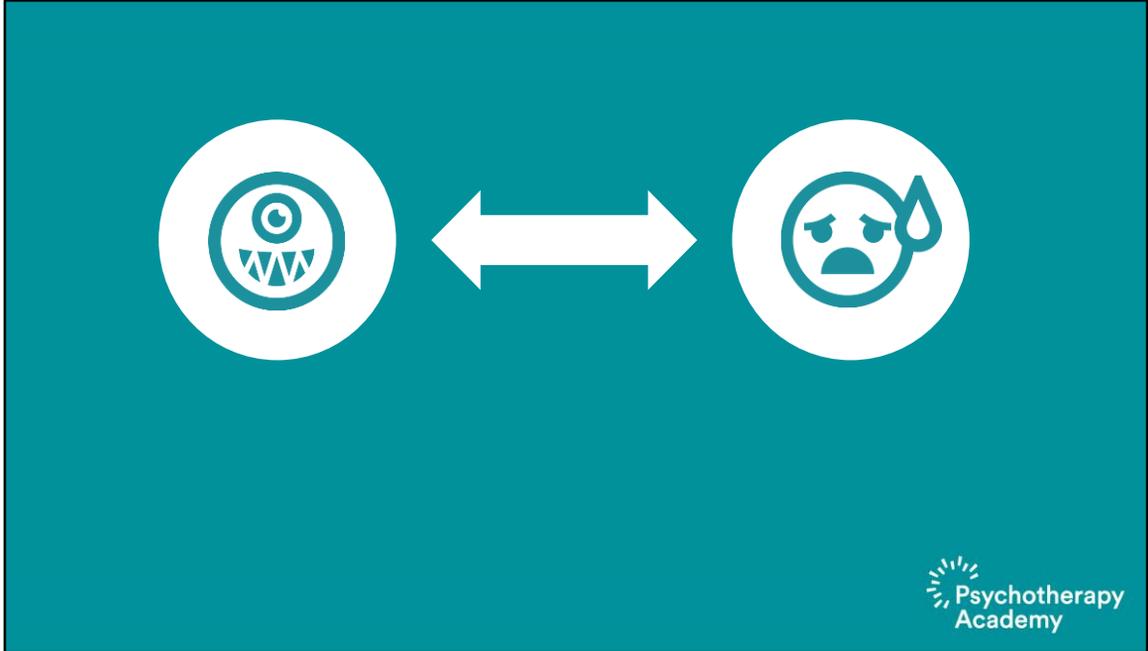
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Drop the rope

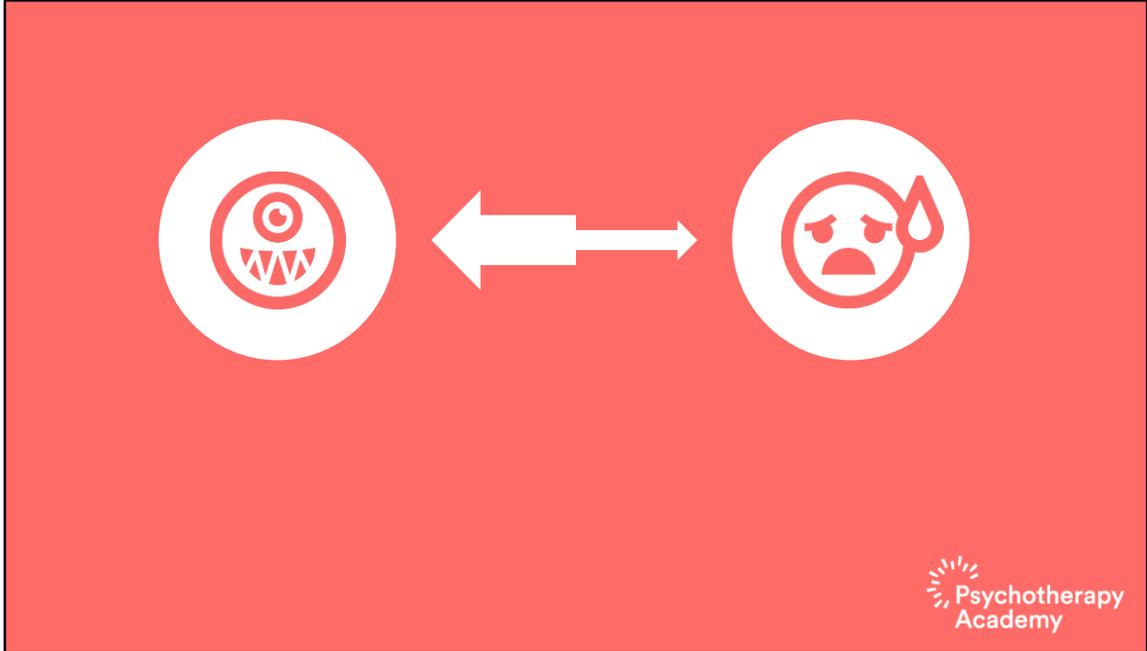
Dr. DJ Moran



Anxiety is frightening. It's downright scary. Sometimes, it seems right to look at anxiety as if it were a monster.



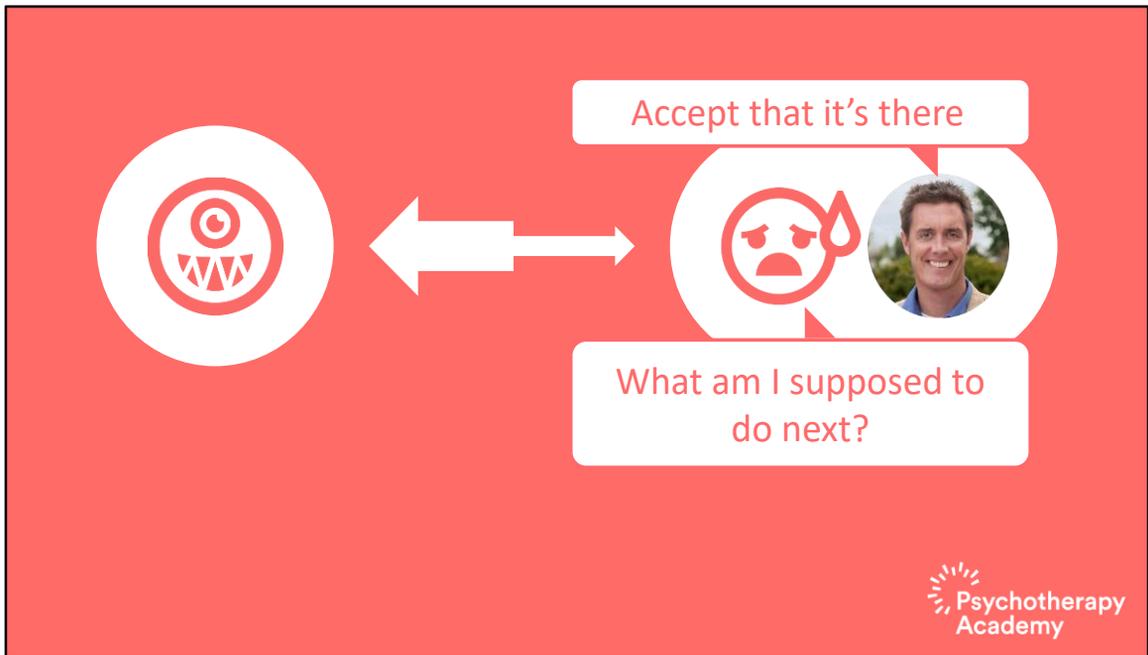
And this monster in you has this rope that binds you both together. And the monster is pulling hard on that rope. You perceive that the monster is trying to pull you into the chasm of doom and that's not where you want to be. You want to pull the monster into the chasm of doom so you don't ever have to see it again. So you pull really hard on that rope but this anxiety monster is strong.



It's tough and it pulls back twice as hard. So you feel yourself struggling but it's still pulling you closer and closer to the chasm of doom. So you work even harder. You try harder to make sure that anxiety doesn't take over your life but it has. You're in the tug of war of your life with this monster. You struggle back and forth day after day.

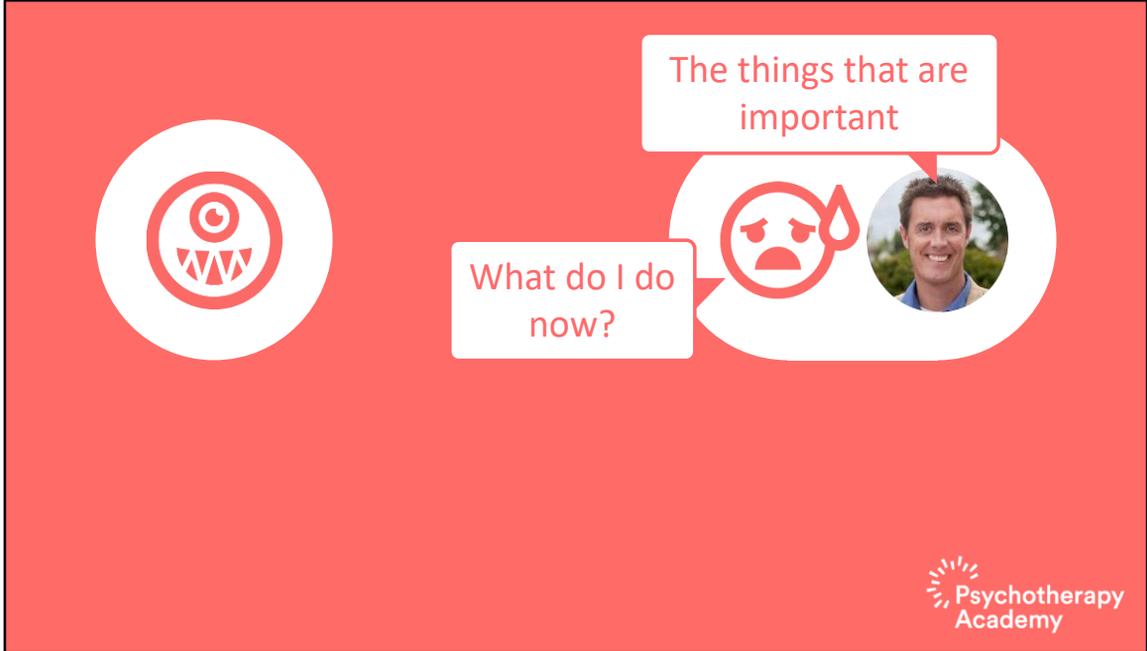


And I want to help you out. And I'm not going to help by tying the rope around me and becoming your anchor person and pulling hard with you. That's not how I'm going to help. I'm simply going to offer some advice. In your tug of war with this anxiety monster, drop the rope. Just let go of the rope.



And you might query, well, what am I supposed to do next? And you might ask, if I drop the rope, then what am I going to do with the anxiety monster?

Just accept that it's there. It's there in your environment.



Oh, what do I do now? Well, now, with your hands and your feet free from having to engage in this tug of war, go on and do the things that are important in your life now that you've been freed up.

The things that are important

What do I do now?

Do the important things in your life even in the presence of anxiety

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You might ask, am I supposed to do that with anxiety around? Yes, that's what you're supposed to do with anxiety around.

With your new freedom, take those hands, take those feet and go do the important things in your life even in the presence of anxiety.

Drop the rope



Allow yourself to have anxiety and do things that are valuable.

Drop the rope.

It's the struggle that makes everything worse. Allow yourself to have the anxiety in your life and go on and do the important things that are valuable and make life worth living. And notice how many other tug of wars you can sometimes be in.

Key Points

- How many times do you struggle with parts of the human condition that you don't allow yourself to embrace?
- Drop the rope.



How many times do you struggle with sadness, anger, humiliation, guilt and all of the other parts of the human condition that we don't allow ourselves to simply embrace as part of our environment but rather we steal moments of value and purpose away from a life well lived so that we can continue with the struggle? Drop the rope.

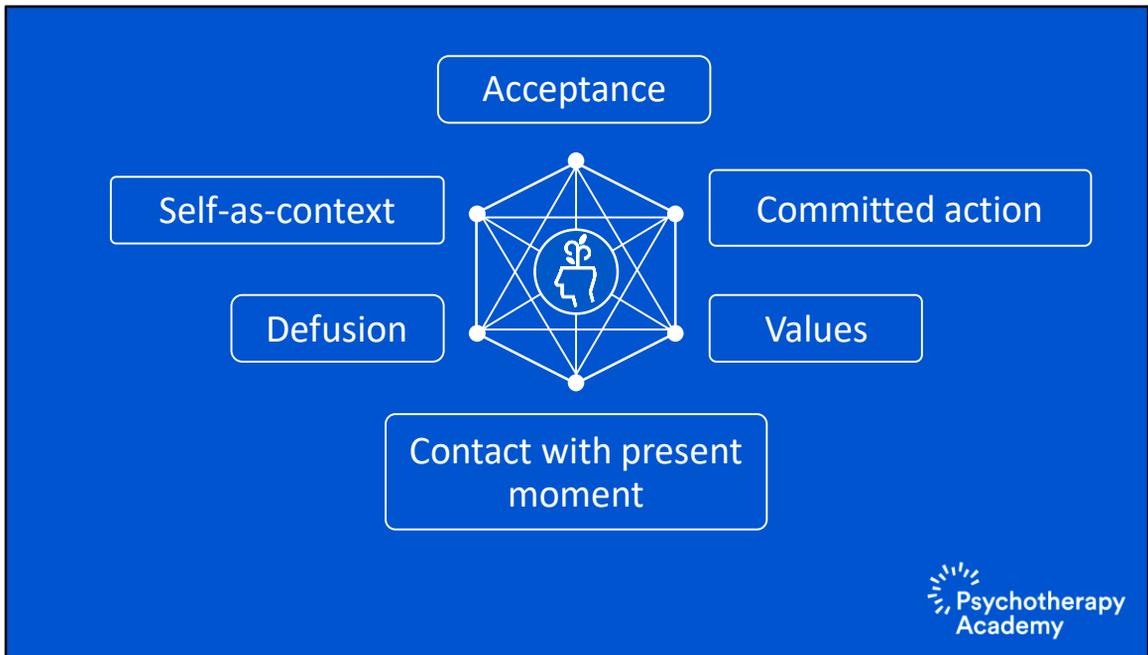


Next Presentation:
Defusion - Part I

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Defusion - Part I

Dr. DJ Moran



The ACT hexagon model shows six essential components to the therapeutic approach and this video will highlight defusion. The reason we'll talk about defusion next is not because it is the second most important part of the model or the second thing you do with clients but just because I flexibly chose to talk about it next. Strategically, I chose to talk about it right after acceptance because defusion is somewhat similar.



Acceptance

Noticing emotions, sensations, urges and flashbacks



Defusion

Being aware of private thinking and not necessarily respond to the thinking

Since we're just talking about this in an introductory fashion, I'll say that acceptance videos were teaching the idea that people can simply notice that they're having emotions, sensations, urges and flashbacks, experiences related to feelings. And in these defusion videos, we'll talk about how people can simply notice that they're having cognitions, private language or thoughts. People can simply be aware of their private thinking and not necessarily respond to the thinking.

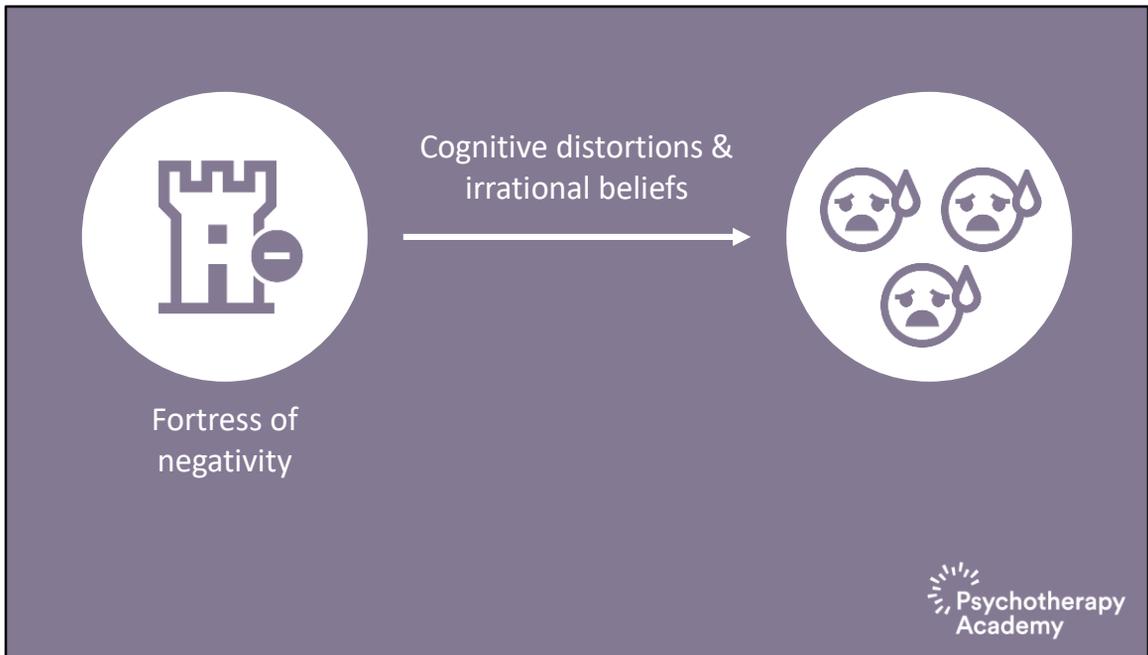
ACT undermines unhelpful language processes

Not aiming to change **what** people think but **how they relate** to what they're thinking.

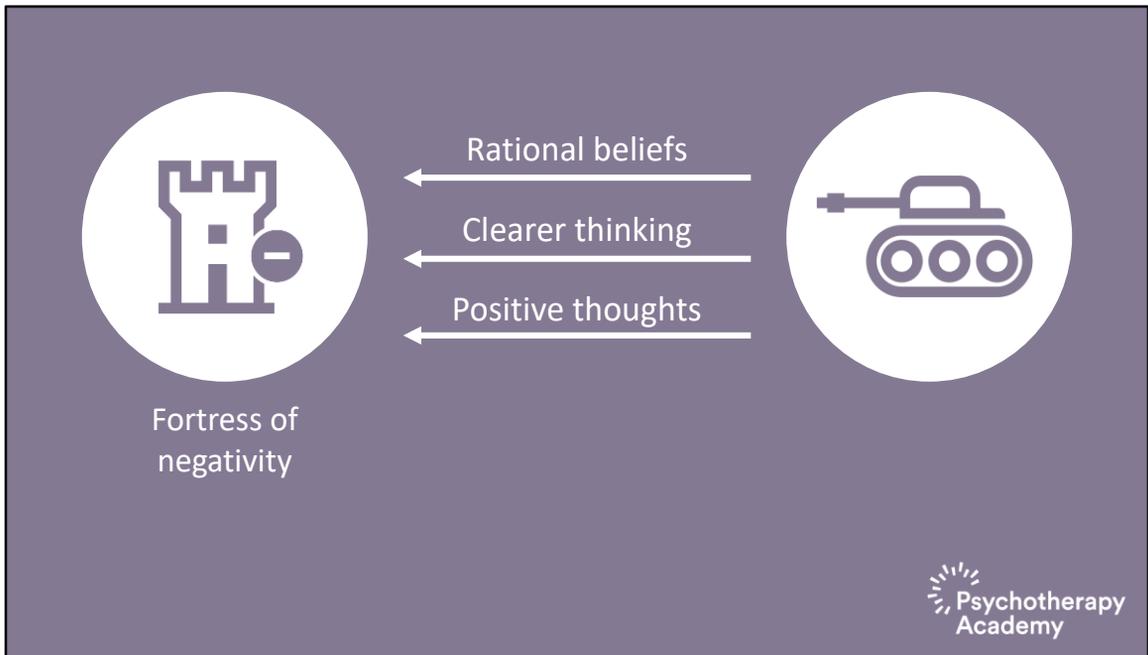


 Psychotherapy
Academy

One of the things we're doing in the ACT model is undermining unhelpful language processes. We're not aiming to change what people think but how they relate to what they're thinking. Let's consider this idea of undermining unhelpful language processes with a creative metaphor.

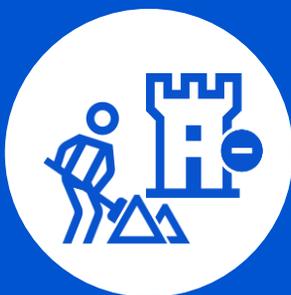


Let's say that somewhere in the phenomenological field of the mind there is the fortress of negativity and this fortress is tyrannical. The other members existing on the phenomenological field are tyrannized by the fortress of negativity because it shoots out catapults of cognitive distortions and fiery arrows of irrational beliefs and it makes living in this phenomenological field really aversive. What to do?



Perhaps the members of the phenomenological field can call on the army of CBT to ride on the fortress of negativity and this army is led by General Tim Beck and General Albert Ellis. And the army of CBT decides to fight back. You're going to shoot fiery arrows of irrational beliefs at us. We're going to fire back more rational beliefs. You're going to give us cognitive distortions. We're going to give you clearer thinking. If you're going to shoot out negative thoughts, we're going to fire back with positive thoughts.

And the whole process is very incendiary, fighting fire with fire. I'm not saying CBT doesn't work but it is an incendiary process and it can be a taxing process for clients.



ACT therapists undermine unhelpful language processes.

What's neat is this army of CBT has a platoon that breaks off from that army and goes around the fortress of negativity. But they put their weapons down and they take out their shovels. And what they start to do is dig out the foundation. They start to weaken it from a different perspective. They take these shovels and they dig a mine underneath the fortress in order to address the problem in a different way.

What ACT therapists are doing is undermining unhelpful language processes, weakening it from below and maybe making that fortress crumble.

ACT undermines unhelpful language processes



Not attempting to change the **form** of your thoughts but the **function** of your thinking.



You see, in ACT, we're not trying to change what you think but how you relate to what you're thinking. The ACT therapist isn't attempting to change the form of your thoughts but rather the function of your thinking. ACT is trying to undermine unhelpful language processes. This is not all that ACT is going to do. You don't just undermine unhelpful language but in future videos, we'll discuss how we leverage language in a helpful manner using values.

Defusion



The process of creating non-literal contexts in which language can be seen as simply an active ongoing process that has a conditioning history and is present in the current moment.

Luoma, J.B., Hayes, S.C., & Walsler, R.D. (2017) *Learning ACT*. New Harbinger, San Francisco, CA



But let's continue talking about defusion. Defusion is defined as the process of creating non-literal contexts in which language can be seen as simply an active ongoing process that has a conditioning history and is present in the current moment.

References

Defusion



- Reduces how impactful thoughts are
- It is not easy

Luoma, J.B., Hayes, S.C., & Walsler, R.D. (2017) *Learning ACT*. New Harbinger, San Francisco, CA



These non-literal contexts will help reduce how impactful thoughts are on overt behavior and emotional responses. Defusing from cognitions is not an easy process especially at first. We can understand how thinking has a significant impact on our actions

References

Thoughts



Automaticity



Power

Because thoughts have two characteristics. One, they happen with a degree of automaticity and two, they are powerful over our actions. They are like the one-two punch of cognition. We'll take a look at those two components of thinking in the following videos.

Key Points

- Defusion: The process of creating non-literal contexts in which language can be seen as simply an active ongoing process that has a conditioning history and is present in the current moment.



There are 3 key points to this video.

One, defusion is defined as the process of creating non-literal contexts in which language can be seen as simply an active ongoing process that has a conditioning history and is present in the current moment.

Key Points

- ACT attempts to undermine unhelpful language, aiming to change how people relate to what they are thinking.
- There are two components to language: Automaticity and power of language.



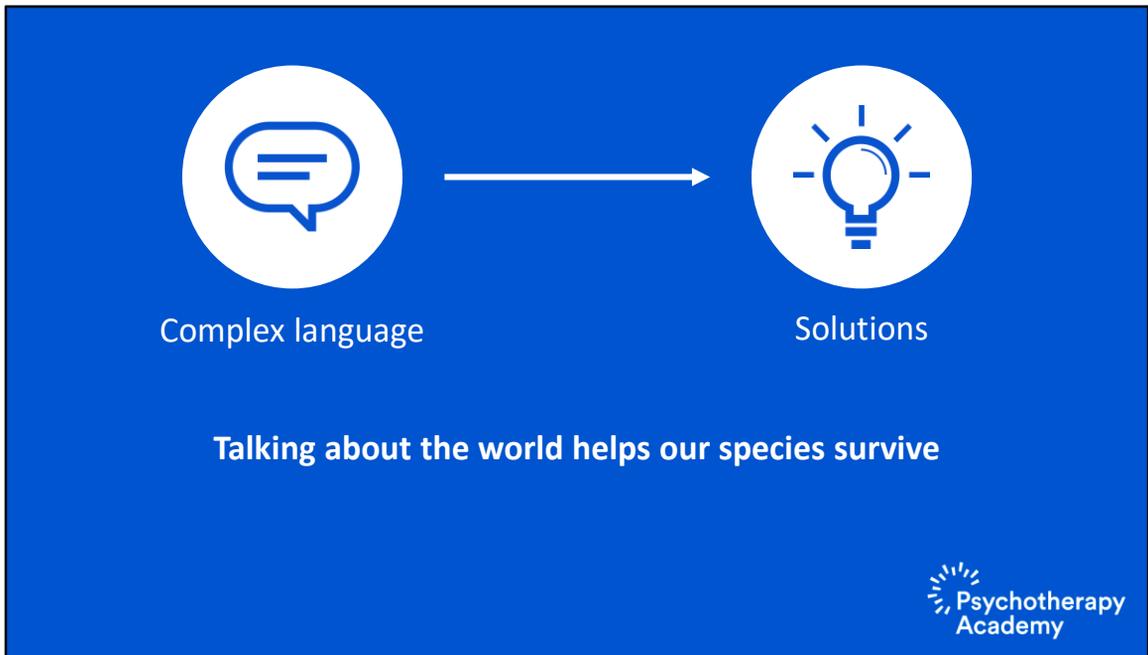
Two, the ACT model attempts to undermine unhelpful language processes not aiming to change what people think but how they relate to what they are thinking. And three, there are two components to language that we address with defusion and those two components are automaticity and power of language.



Next Presentation:
Defusion - Part II

Defusion - Part II

Dr. DJ Moran



The human condition creates a situation for us. We have the ability to use complex language to describe and evaluate our world and then come up with solutions to make the world better for us. This skill of using language is so useful, so very reinforcing. Talking about the world helps our species survive.

Continued use of language: The dark side of thoughts



Can be hurtful



Make us miss
opportunities



Guide us to believe
unhelpful ways to live our
lives



But we get so caught up in our language that people sometimes can't stop using the language. Individuals are constantly thinking and our culture really encourages the continued use of language. And there is a problem with this.

While language is really helpful, there is a dark side. Sometimes, we can't stop using our thoughts and these thoughts that we have can be hurtful or make us so distracted that we miss important opportunities for doing valued actions or guide us to believe unhelpful ways of living our lives.

Cognitive fusion: The one-two punch of cognition



Automaticity: Can't control what you think all the time



The power of language: Thoughts have power over our actions



When a person gets stuck in their language, when they get hooked by unhelpful thoughts, psychologists call that cognitive fusion. And this is a problem because cognitive fusion has two components to it. I call it the one-two punch of cognition. Number one, thoughts happen with a certain degree of automaticity, meaning you can't control what you think all the time. And number two, thoughts have power over our actions.

Let's take a look at how automatic thoughts are. You can't help having your thoughts. Certain events occur in the world and your private language is evoked. Even as you're watching this video, your mind which is just a metaphor for your private verbal events is going to react to what is going on around you. And you're going to have certain thoughts happen automatically you can't control.

Mary had a little...



Automatic language reaction



Observe this. I can predict what you're going to think in just a few seconds. You have no idea what you might be thinking in a couple of moments but I know. As long as you speak English as a first language, your mind is going to do something predictable in a few seconds. Mary had a little. I knew you're going to think that. I knew you were going to think that particular word. Stimuli happen in your environment and it leads to such an automatic language reaction.

Mary had a little...

I tried not to think

I replaced it

*I thought of something
different*



This time, I'm going to say it again and this time, don't think that thought. Do whatever you can to not have that thought for an entire 10 seconds after I finish. It is a bad thought. Ready? Here it comes. Mary had a little. The 10 seconds is up. How did you do? After doing this trick with thousands of people, an overwhelming majority of people say, I tried not to think it but I thought the word lamb anyway. Some people say, I replaced it with another animal. I'll ask them, what animal did you think of? I thought of a goat. Great. You went from a four-legged mammal that you often find on a farm and spell with four letters that says baaa and you went all the way to another four-legged mammal that you often find on a farm and that you spell with four letters that often says baaa. It's really hard for us to come up with replacement thoughts. Some people say, I thought of something totally different. I thought, Mary had a little car. Okay. Then what happened on the 11th second. I checked in with myself and I said, haha, I didn't think lamb. Oh shoot.



It is hard to get rid of thoughts that you typically have under certain conditions.



Do you see how hard it is to just get rid of thoughts that you typically have under certain conditions? And here's the rub.

Isn't that what a lot of psychotherapies ask clients to do?



Thinking something
irrational



Change it to a rational
thought

It is hard to come up with a new thought



Isn't that what a lot of psychotherapies ask clients to do, to try to think something else? Instead of thinking something irrational, try to change it to a rational thought. I'm not saying it's impossible. I am saying that under certain stimulus conditions that evoke irrational beliefs it's going to be hard to come up with a new thought to replace it.

Cognitive fusion: The one-two punch of cognition



Automaticity: Defusion helps with
this



The power of language

There's a certain degree of automaticity to our language and we have to respect the fact that clients are going to continue to have the thoughts that they have when provoked. The Acceptance and Commitment Therapy component of defusion helps with this. But before we can talk about the interventions, we have to talk about the second part of the one-two punch of cognition, the power of language. And we will do that in the next video.

Key Points

- The ability to use complex language helps our species survive.
- We almost can't stop using language. We can't stop thinking. Sometimes significantly problematic thoughts impede a life well lived. We call this cognitive fusion.
- Thoughts occur with automaticity.



For now, there are 3 key points in this video.

One, the ability to use complex language to describe, evaluate and problem solve in our world is so useful that it helps our species survive in this dynamic world.

Two, our language is so well reinforced that we almost can't stop using language. We can't stop thinking.

And this has a dark side because sometimes we can't help but think significantly problematic thoughts that impede a life well lived. We call this cognitive fusion.

And three, one of the components of cognitive fusion is that our thoughts occur with automaticity, meaning thoughts are not always in our control.



Next Presentation:
Defusion - Part III

Defusion - Part III

Dr. DJ Moran



Language has power over your behavior and emotions. That power can be reduced.



Words are powerful. We know that through experience and we also know that through behavioral science. To have a life well lived, to be more psychologically flexible, it is helpful to understand how powerful language is on your own behavior and emotions and how that power can be reduced by your own personal skills. Let's talk about how powerful language is first.



Take a look at this lemon. Notice it there. It's a really juicy lemon. It's overripe, really bright yellow. When you shake it, you could feel how much juice is on the inside and you could thud it down on a cutting board or a table.



And the next thing you can do is go ahead and get a really sharp knife and see if you can slice this lemon in half. And as soon as you cut into the lemon, it just sprays out citric acid and you can smell the lemony freshness coming from this overripe fruit. And you start to slice that lemon down. And as you cut it, all of a sudden, this lemon juice starts to splay out all over the table or the cutting board. As you slice it down even further, you cut it in half and both sides of the lemon start to rock back and forth in this lemon juice puddle. Now, what I'm going to ask you to do is go ahead and take this half of the lemon and I'm going to take the other half of the lemon.



And what we're going to do now is go ahead and put it up against your lips. Squeeze that lemon so you start to have that really sour lemon juice go into your mouth. Notice the tingles on the sides of your tongue and your jaw. Now, squeeze it again and really drink down the sour lemon juice. And now, with your tongue, just go ahead and lick the inside of that lemon.



Are you salivating?

And my question to you now is: Are you salivating? I would imagine if you have a past history of interacting with lemons, you're probably salivating a little bit more than you were before this exercise. And here's the catch. I'm guessing there's probably not actually a lemon in the room. All you saw was a screen with a lemon on it and heard my voice but there was no citric acid dropped on the receptor sites of your tongue to elicit the salivary response.



The power of language: Words change you



That's the power of language. Just the mere language about lemons actually elicits a psychological response. Just words change you reflexively.

Think about how that's true for so many other words in your life, how I can mention certain types of phrases, concerns, issues. I can even engage in insults and offensive terms and it would change you psychologically. That's how powerful words are.



Are you salivating now?



Are you salivating profusely right now? Because I would imagine you aren't. And why not? You just repeated lemon over two dozen times. And the funny thing is if you kept that up you'd get dry mouth. If you said it for another minute, you'd get cotton mouth while talking about lemons.

Hopefully, you noticed in that exercise that the words started to lose their meaning.

The power of language



Arbitrary sounds
and noises



Relate to and
influenced by those
sounds



Learn to not
get
influenced

Language is like that. It's made up of arbitrary sounds and noises and we learn to relate to those sounds and we get influenced by them. But we can also learn to simply notice that language is present and not get influenced by the language. See if you can embrace this take home point.



You don't have to be influenced by words.

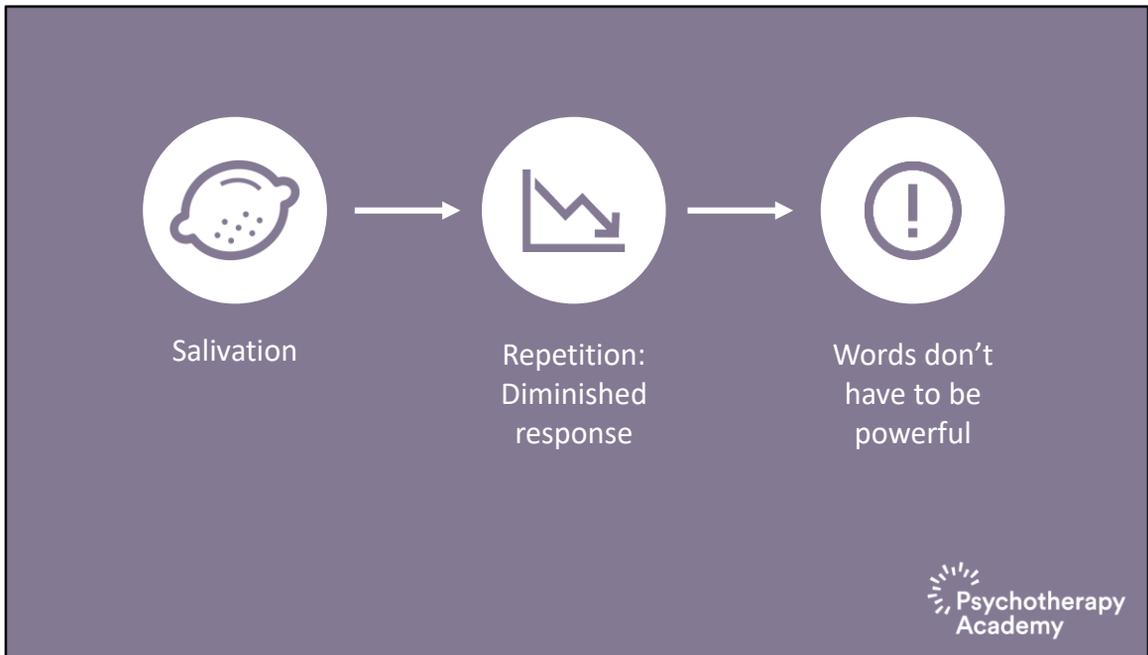


Learn to defuse:

We can simply **look at** thoughts and words rather than **from** thoughts and words.

You don't have to be influenced by the power of words. We must compassionately understand that each and every one of us who engage in language will often get influenced by words others say to us and the language we use on ourselves.

But we can learn to defuse from those words. We can simply look at thoughts and words rather than from thoughts and words.



To go back to the lemon exercise, in one context, I talked about lemons and you salivated. It had power over your psychological responses. But in a different context, repeating a word which was previously powerful actually had a diminished response. You actually could have gotten dry mouth while repeating lemon, lemon, lemon over and over. This tells us something very important. Words can be powerful but they don't have to be.

Defusion



The process of creating non-literal contexts in which language can be seen as simply an active ongoing process.

Luoma, J.B., Hayes, S.C., & Walser, R.D. (2017) *Learning ACT*. New Harbinger, San Francisco, CA



Defusion is defined as the process of creating non-literal contexts in which language can be seen as simply an active ongoing process.

References

Luoma, J.B., Hayes, S.C., & Walser, R.D. (2017) *Learning ACT*. New Harbinger, San Francisco, CA

Defusion exercises in ACT



Psychoeducational



Undermine unhelpful
language processes



Words don't have
to be impactful

Luoma, J.B., Hayes, S.C., & Walser, R.D. (2017) *Learning ACT*. New Harbinger, San Francisco, CA



In ACT, we're going to use different exercises to make this psychoeducational point. And before we wrap up defusion, it is important to understand that this exercise using lemons is for psychoeducation. Please don't misinterpret and believe that we're asking clients to repeat clinically relevant words to reduce their impact as if that were the treatment plan. An ACT therapist doesn't ask a person with contamination OCD to repeat germs, germs, germs, germs over and over and expect that it will be curative. The defusion exercises are used to undermine unhelpful language processes, not remove their ability to have an impact outright. When clients are struggling with self-denigrating talk, worries and unhelpful thoughts about the world, an ACT therapist could sometimes say, thank your mind for that thought, and irreverently show that the client can't help but have the thought but that it doesn't have to have governance over the client's behavior.

ACT highlights how words occur with automaticity and power but they don't actually have to be so impactful and change people from having a life well lived. Other components of the ACT model such as values and mindfulness which will be discussed in other videos can help with the defusion process and defusion is a very important process to this model.

Key Points

- Words affect human behavior.
- Defusion teaches people to have a different relationship with thoughts and undermines unhelpful language processes.
- Defusion exercises are often used psycho-educationally and do not aim to eradicate the influence of words.



For now, there are 3 key points to this video.

One, words powerfully affect human behavior and that can be helpful but not all the time.

Two, defusion teaches people to have a different relationship with thoughts and undermines unhelpful language processes.

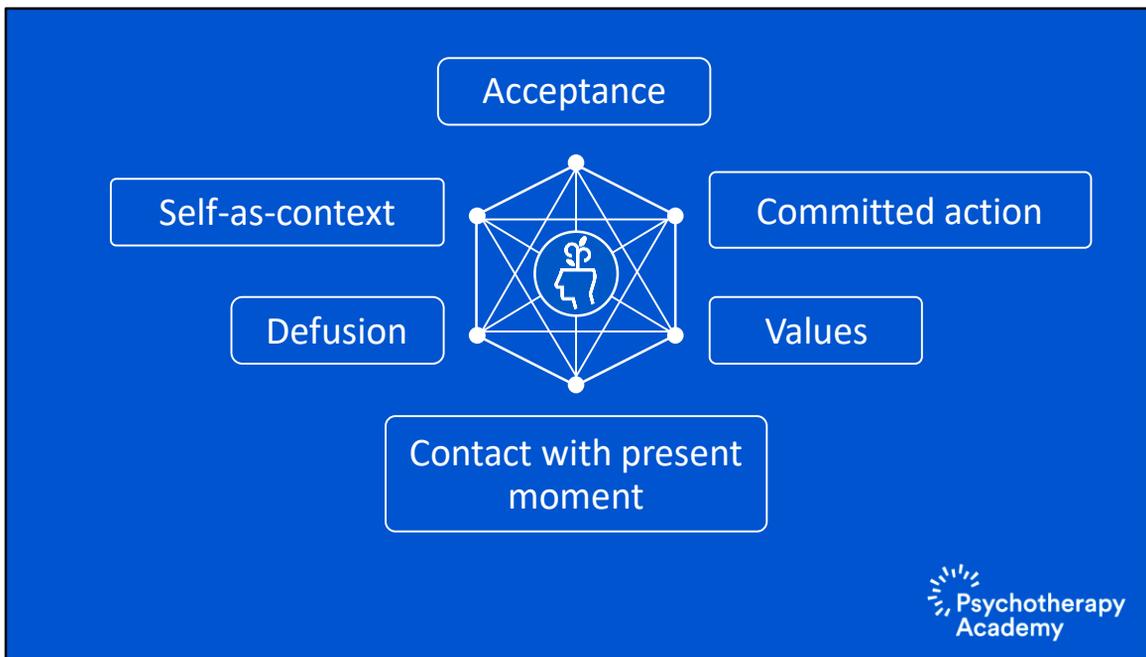
And three, defusion exercises are often used psychoeducationally and do not aim to completely eradicate the influence of words outright.

A photograph of a person sitting at a desk, working on a laptop. The image is overlaid with a blue tint. The person is seen from the side, looking at the laptop screen. On the desk, there is a glass of water and a pair of glasses. The background shows a window with a view of the outdoors.

Next Presentation:
Self-as-context - Part I

Self-as-context - Part I

Dr. DJ Moran



The ACT hexagon model shows six essential components to the therapeutic approach and this video will highlight the self-as-context. Self-as-context is difficult to nail down verbally.

Self-as-context: Synonyms



Observing self



Perspective taking/pure awareness



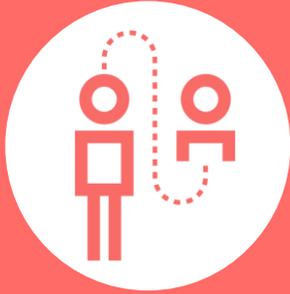
Core you



Transcendent sense of self

There are lots of synonyms for self-as-context because different people are trying to define what it is. Some people call it the observing self. Some people call it the core you. Others say it is perspective taking or pure awareness. Some therapists call it the transcendent sense of self.

Self-as-context



- Something that one experiences
- Locus from which a person's experience unfolds
- No form or verbal content
- Place from which observations are made

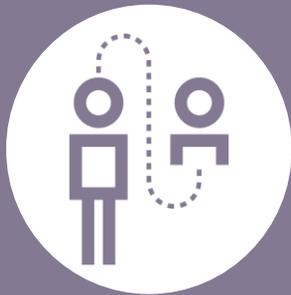
Bach, P. & Moran, D. J. (2008). *ACT in practice: Case conceptualization in acceptance and commitment therapy*. CA: New Harbinger Press.



Language has a hard time defining self-as-context because it really is something that one experiences. Self-as-context is not an object of verbal evaluations. Instead, it is the locus from which a person's experience unfolds. Self-as-context is transcendent in that it has no form or verbal content. Instead, it can be thought of as the place from which observations are made.

References

Bach, P. & Moran, D. J. (2008). *ACT in practice: Case conceptualization in acceptance and commitment therapy*. CA: New Harbinger Press.



**The perspective from which people observe
and accept experiences.**

Again, it is the place or the perspective from which people are able to observe and accept all changing experiences.

What is the client struggling with that leads to inflexibility?



"I'm a bad person"



Sociopathic behavior



"I'm too nervous"



Miserable at their job



"I'm depressed"



Keep acting depressed

In ACT since we're aiming to increase psychological flexibility, it would be helpful to assess what the client is struggling with that leads to inflexibility. Sometimes, people say, I'm a bad person. I'm a real piece of garbage. Other people say, I'm too nervous of a person to actually ask for a raise from my boss. Or another person might say, I'm depressed. And if you listen to what people say, they describe the self with certain concepts like bad person, too nervous, depressed. And you can already see how this will lead to behavioral rigidity, how it will influence psychological inflexibility.

The person saying I'm a bad person may then give themselves permission to engage in sociopathic behavior. The person who is too nervous may never earn what they are worth in their career and be miserable at their job because they link the self to too nervous and too nervous restricts them from actually asking for a raise. The person articulating I'm depressed may continue because of this conceptualized self to keep acting depressed.

When people use language to describe the self in these and many other ways, the ACT therapist will look for these attachments to the conceptualized self to see if it can be loosened.

Attachment to the conceptualized self



Self-as-context work loosens up attachment to the conceptualized self.



Restricts psychological flexibility.



Conceptualized self and self-as-context are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

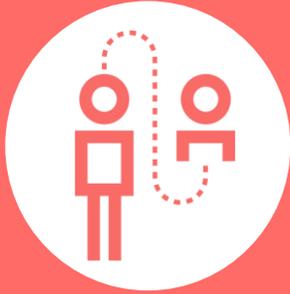


Deleterious impact on a life well-lived.

Self-as-context work helps loosen up attachment to the conceptualized self.

Being attached to the conceptualized self is the other side of the spectrum from self-as-context. When people really buy their own self-descriptions, their behavior may become beholden to that language and influenced to restrict their own psychological flexibility. That can have a deleterious impact on a life well lived.

Self-as-context in ACT



- Flexible view of the self
- Reduce attachment to a concretized self
- Allows for context, where things can just be
- Core self: where content can be observed and accepted

ACT aims to help the client use perspective taking to develop a flexible view of the self. We'll strive to reduce the attachment to the language concepts that describe a concretized self and see if we can experiment with simply looking at the self-as-context.

And the context is not a thing. It is an unformed place where things can just be. The core self, the observing you is a point of view from which all content such as emotions and thoughts can simply be observed and accepted.

In the next video, we will go through a self-as-context exercise called the observing self.

Key Points

- Self-as-context: locus from which a person's experience unfolds.
- There are many names for this process.
- ACT assesses what language a client is struggling with that leads to inflexibility and tries to reduce the attachment to the conceptualized self.



But before we wrap up, there are three important points from this video.

One, self-as-context is the locus from which a person's experience unfolds. It has no form or verbal content but it can be thought as the place from which observations are made.

Two, there are many names even in the ACT community for this process. Most of the time, it is called self-as-context but it is also called the observing self, the core you. Others say it is perspective taking, pure awareness and some call it the transcendent sense of self.

And three, ACT tries to assess what language or self-descriptions a client is struggling with that leads to inflexibility and tries to reduce the attachment to the conceptualized self.



Next Presentation:
Self-as-context - Part II

Self-as-context - Part II

Dr. DJ Moran



Prepare yourself to engage in a meditative exercise. Find yourself in a relaxed posture in a quiet place if you can. And when you are ready, please take a full clean deep breath. And as you exhale, close your eyes. And I'm going to invite you to bring up a memory of something that happened last autumn and take a look around that memory. See the sights. Hear the sounds. Make it as if you were watching a movie and make it very clear to yourself that you were there then experiencing that. And then go ahead and take a nice slow inhale and realize that you are here now experiencing this. And now, I'm going to invite you to bring up a memory of something that happened when you were a teenager. It doesn't have to be a provocative memory, just something that you can bring up very vividly. And take a look around that memory. See the sights. Hear the sounds. Make it very clear to yourself that you were there then experiencing that. And go ahead and take a nice full clean deep breath. And as you do, realize that you are here now experiencing this. Don't let me convince you with my words. See if you can take this as an experienced fact. Something about you has been you your whole life. The you that's here now breathing and listening was there then in that autumn memory and in that teenage memory. Something about you has been you your whole life, unbroken, unchanged, unfractionated. Sometimes, we call this the observing self, the core you. Some people call it the self-as-context. Other people call it pure awareness. Other folks call it the

self-as-perspective. Some people go as far as to call it the soul. Something about you has been you your whole life, unbroken, unchanged. At times, it is helpful for us to be able to get in contact with this observing self. But our language and our experiences often take us away from contacting this self-as-context.



Let's walk through different things that sometimes distract us from our core self. Right now, I'm going to ask you to do a very simple quick body scan. Notice the top of your head. Now, move your attention down through your neck, through your chest, through your waist and the top of your legs, scanning through your knees and the bottom of your legs through your feet down to your toes. You just came in contact with your body but you are not your body. You have a body but your body is not you. You, the core you has remained unchanged throughout your entire life so you are not your body. The body that is here now was not there then in that autumn memory. There have been weight fluctuations, chemical changes, haircuts. It's not the same body and it's certainly not the same body from the teenage memory. The body that is here now was not there then. Therefore, you are not your body.



Let's look in another direction, your sensations. Sometimes, we say things like I am tired, I am exhilarated, I am nauseated. But that's not what you are. Those are sensations that you're having. Those sensations change. The core you remains unchanged. So saying I am excited is not helpful. Being able to say I am having the sensations of excitement seems to be a little bit more on the mark. Your identity isn't wrapped up in your sensations. Let's turn our attention to another area, your roles. You are not your roles. You play them out. You do them. Right now, you are in the role of a listener. Later, you might be in the role of a commuter, a worker, a significant other, perhaps you're a sibling, perhaps not, you're someone's child, you're a friend. Our roles change fairly regularly. Therefore, you are not your roles. You act them out. Your roles can't be you because they change so much. It's like you wear many hats but there's only one head. That's the core self.



Let's turn our attention to another perspective, your emotions. You are not your emotions. You feel them. We know this about emotions. We know that they are going to change. Therefore, your emotions can't be you. Unfortunately, at certain times, we say things like I am happy, I am angry, I'm sad. But that's not a helpful way of speaking because you are not your emotions. You feel them. We'll explore one more area and this is the thorniest out of all of them, your thoughts. You are not your thoughts. You think them. You've had hundreds of thoughts today. They've changed. They're not you. You used to think one thing. Now, you think a different thing. You used to be ignorant about some things. Now, you are more knowledgeable. Your thoughts change. Therefore, they can't be you. The core self has remained unchanged, unbroken, unfractionated throughout your entire life.

Key Points

- You are not your:
 - Thoughts
 - Emotions
 - Sensations
 - Body
- You can choose to experience this core self.



So let's review. You're not your thoughts. You think them. You're not your emotions. You feel them. You're not your roles. You play them out. You're not your sensations. You sense them. You're not even your body. You have one. The same could be said for your urges, impulses, dreams, flashbacks. Those are experiences you experience. They're not you. Sit with this for a few more moments.

And then open your eyes with the knowledge that throughout the day you can choose to experience this core self, this unbroken steadfast self that has been you your entire life.

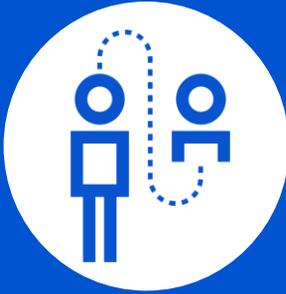


Next Presentation:
Self-as-context - Part III

Self-as-context - Part III

Dr. DJ Moran

Self-as-context in ACT



- Perspective from which we can observe and accept experiences
- Builds psychological flexibility
- Helps relate to thoughts, sensations and emotions in a healthier manner
- The observing self exercise: you are not the content of your life

Self-as-context is the sense of self that is a consistent perspective from which to observe and accept all changing experiences.

We attempt to teach this to our clients in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in order to help build psychological flexibility. To be able to learn to contact the core self helps people relate to their thoughts, sensations and emotions in a healthier manner. In the last video, we went through the observing self exercise and it was excerpted from the first ACT book called *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: An Experiential Approach to Behavior Change* by Hayes, Strosahl and Wilson published in 1999. Going through that exercise helps people realize that they are not the content of their life but rather human existence sets up a context for those experiences while living.



The self as the sky

The observing self is always there making room for difficult thoughts, feelings, and other experiences.



Another metaphor that can help is talking about the self as the sky. The observing self is like the sky. Emotions and thoughts are like the weather. We can embrace the idea that the weather constantly and naturally changes and never actually harms or changes the sky. Thunderstorms, hurricanes, blizzards all happen and the sky is there holding these events. No matter how difficult the weather gets, the storm always passes. Sunny days can be looked at the same way. The sky simply holds all experiences. We sometimes forget that the sky is there. At times, we can't see through the clouds and sometimes we take the sunny days for granted. But the sky is always there simply holding the weather. And just like the sky, the observing self is always there making room for difficult thoughts and feelings and other experiences.

Key Points

- Self-as-context: perspective from which experience unfolds. The place from which observations are made.
- Helps build psychological flexibility because it loosens up attachments to language of the conceptualized self.
- Often taught with meditative or metaphorical interventions.



There are 3 key points in this Self-as-context videos.

One, self-as-context or the core self is the perspective from which a person's experience unfolds. It can be thought of as the place from which observations are made.

Two, the self-as-context helps build psychological flexibility because it loosens up people's attachments to language of their conceptualized self. And when you conceptualize yourself in a certain way such as depressed or anxious, it can influence your behavior to fall in line with that language.

And three, self-as-context is often taught with meditative or metaphorical interventions and will likely grow stronger with such experiential exercises and mindful practice.