

12TH WORLD CONFERENCE ASSOCIATION FOR CONTEXTUAL BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE

WORKSHOP

The ACT of Self Forgiveness, 7 steps to unburdening yourself and engaging with life

Without Self Forgiveness we can be stuck in what may be an inescapable maze

Recent study into forgiveness has found that forgiving yourself can be far harder than extending or even seeking forgiveness from others.

This experiential workshop is designed to extend the work of Worthington et al (2013) to a generalizable ACT based therapy for all participants.

The workshop will identify the factors leading to being stuck in self blame and provide a flexible structured set of responses including:

- Transcendent perspective taking and present moment experience;
- Values based analysis provides the bases for compassionate response to shame guilt remorse and restoration;
- Acceptance and willingness open up pathways to getting unstuck from self blame based anxiety (worry) and depression (rumination);
- Relapse prevention is assisted by identifying stuck thinking and its secondary benefits that may have been in “protecting” us.
- The workshop provides opportunities for self compassion, self-respect leading to self acceptance and the conclusion now I can trust myself to take valued life action.

The Workshop will focus on Seven Steps:

- 1 Identify the Burden**
- 2 Taking a transcendent perspective**
- 3 Values and transgression - shame, guilt , remorse , restoration**
- 4 Getting unstuck**
- 5 Self Forgiveness**
- 6 Values for Action**
- 7 Take committed action based on self forgiveness**

Grant Dewar - University of Adelaide Australia – grant.dewar@adelaide.edu.au

INTRODUCTION

Step 1 Identifying our burdens

Exercise 1

Identify a scenario that causes you to get stuck in a way that you continuously or repeatedly blame yourself , feel ashamed of, guilty about, or are remorseful of. Outline the scenarios key points:

Identify the thoughts emotions and bodily sensations that arise when your thoughts become dominated by this scenario

Thoughts

Emotions

Sensations

Identify your most common actions/responses to this scenario

Avoidance?

Withdrawal?

Unworkable action?

Opting out?

Racing thoughts?

Step 2 TAKING A TRANSCENDENT PERSPECTIVE

An Overview effect has recently been identified by those who view the earth from space.

That is in the vastness of space the earth stands out as a miracle of life, organic movement and colour. Suddenly the planet is seen as a whole and all people and in fact all life forms become part of a whole ecosystem. The atmosphere which forms our normal perception of the sky is a single gossamer thin whole within which weather happens. This effect has caused many who experience it, to develop a new sense of value regarding our common experience rather than what divides us.

Exercise 1 Mediation on perspective taking

From a place of distance, vastness, clarity, stillness

Now if you can observe your own consciousness, in that consciousness you will find a transcendent overview.

There is a part of you that is the observer of your life that which constantly observes your experiences, emotions, thoughts and sensations.

This form of awareness is pure and objective.

When you tap into it, you will find it has the quality of being open, curious and nonjudgemental.

This transcendent experience, like the sky, forms the context for you life experience.

Your day to day experience and thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, worries and rumination form the content of your story, which like the weather which is continually changing.

Exercise 2 Good Bad or More?

- Think of all the good aspects of yourself that you and others that know you would be able to identify.
- Think of all the bad aspects of yourself that you and others that know you would be able to identify.
- Which one of these stories is you?
- Is there More? - If every story in your life was told would there still be more?

Exercise 3 Transcendence and Perspective taking

Cultivating your capacity for transcendent perspective taking will allow you the capacity to observe with openness interest and curiosity and non judgement your whole life experience.

You can in that place understand how our internally different frameworks of thinking lead to conflicting decisions e.g. fast and slow thinking, or organising versus meaning making thinking.

Utilising the above exercises can assist you to get in touch with the here and now and take a present moment perspective.

Consider the scenario for which you have not forgiven yourself using:

- **Openness**
- **Presence**
- **Acceptance**
- **Lightness**

1. What disconnects you from a transcendent perspective?

2. What stories/responses do you commonly get stuck in?

3. How do you close down openness, interest, curiosity and non judgement?

Step 3 Values and Transgressions

That which is most unforgivable is that which deliberately contravenes our values. Consider the following list of values compiled by Russ Harris in the Happiness trap. Identify the values that you hold to be important that may have been areas that have been undermined or transgressed in the scenario you have identified:

Imp.	Value	Descriptor	Red	Amber	Green
/10	Acceptance	to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life etc			
/10	Adventure	to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences			
/10	Assertiveness	to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want			
/10	Authenticity	to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself			
/10	Beauty	to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment etc			
/10	Caring	to be caring towards myself, others, the environment etc			
/10	Challenge	to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve			
/10	Compassion	to act with kindness towards those who are suffering			
/10	Connection	to engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others			
/10	Contribution	to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others			
/10	Conformity	to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations			
/10	Cooperation	to be cooperative and collaborative with others			
/10	Courage	to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty			
/10	Creativity	to be creative or innovative			
/10	Curiosity	to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover			
/10	Encouragement	to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others			
/10	Equality	to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa			
/10	Excitement	to seek, create and engage in activities that			

The ACT of Self Forgiveness, 7 steps to unburdening yourself and engaging with life

		are exciting, stimulating or thrilling			
/10	Fairness	to be fair to myself or others			
/10	Fitness	to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing			
/10	Flexibility	to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances			
/10	Freedom	to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise			
/10	Friendliness	to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others			
/10	Forgiveness	to be forgiving towards myself or others			
/10	Fun	to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities			
/10	Generosity	to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others			
/10	Gratitude	to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life			
/10	Honesty	to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others			
/10	Humour	to see and appreciate the humorous side of life			
/10	Humility	to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves			
/10	Industry	to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated			
/10	Independence	to be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things			
/10	Intimacy	to open up, reveal, and share myself -- emotionally or physically – in my close personal relationships			
/10	Justice	to uphold justice and fairness			
/10	Kindness	to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others			
/10	Love	to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others			
/10	Mindfulness	to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience			
/10	Order	to be orderly and organized			
/10	Open-mindedness	to think things through, see things from other's points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.			
/10	Patience	to wait calmly for what I want			
/10	Persistence	to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.			
/10	Pleasure	to create and give pleasure to myself or			

The ACT of Self Forgiveness, 7 steps to unburdening yourself and engaging with life

		others			
/10	Power	to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organizing			
/10	Reciprocity	to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking			
/10	Respect	to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard			
/10	Responsibility	to be responsible and accountable for my actions			
/10	Romance	to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection			
/10	Safety	to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others			
/10	Self-awareness	to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions			
/10	Self-care	to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met			
/10	Self-development	to keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experience.			
/10	Self-control	to act in accordance with my own ideals			
/10	Sensuality	to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses			
/10	Sexuality	to explore or express my sexuality			
/10	Spirituality	to connect with things bigger than myself			
/10	Skilfulness	to continually practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them			
/10	Supportiveness	to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others			
/10	Trust	to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable			

Copyright Russ Harris, 2010 www.actmindfully.com.au www.thehappinesstrap.com

Letting yourself off the hook versus genuine self forgiveness

We differentiate between pseudo self forgiveness – or letting yourself off the hook – and genuine self forgiveness.

Letting yourself off the hook with your scenario might be something like this – who cares about what I do – it's my life.

This sort of explanation may be based on the dismissal of responsibility for the problematic outcomes of the event and may be based primarily on defending our self esteem and avoidance of taking committed action.

This may serve a short term purpose of making us feel better about the activities we did engage in – but does not address the concerns about the important deadlines and obligations you may have.

This explanation may help us with a temporary fix to our stuck cognitions but it does not allow us to genuinely move past the issue.

Eventually when the deadline draws nearer or goes past we may be drawn back into ruminative thought or anxious worry.

Such explanation allow us to we forego genuine engagement in solutions and by providing a temporary fix or if the fix fails what may perhaps be creating a worse problem.

Exercise:

Identify how psuedo self forgiveness – letting us off the hook - may be moving away from values..... away from what you may want to be

Who am I to forgive myself?

- **The remembering vs. experiencing self** (Kahneman and Tversky)
 - Our experience of our life is not necessarily how we remember our life
 - We may plan our life around anticipated good memories rather than good experiences
 - These stances may be in conflict or opposition

- **The organising vs. the integrating/meaning making self** (McGilchrist)
 - We need to apprehend and quickly organise our world – we make maps and sketches dividing it into parts
 - However we also need uncertainty, possibility and the whole
 - these two drives and stances may conflict

- **Self as Story vs. Self as Context**
(Hayes and Others)
 - We all have particular views roles or stories about ourselves which may define or limit us
 - We may be more than the sum of our stories and be the context in which life occurs
 - Sometimes we need a story sometimes we need context – when is which needed?

Exercise

Identify how different perspectives have informed decision-making in ways that were not values consistent

Key Features underpinning lack of self forgiveness

A lack of genuine self forgiveness can cause us to get stuck in our thinking – and three keys to getting unstuck may be dealing effectively with:

- Shame
 - Self oriented - I Am Broken
- Guilt
 - Action oriented - What have I Broken?
- Remorse
 - Contrite regret – wanting to put wrongs right

Shame is the sense that something about us – our self - is fundamentally wrong or damaged.

This often leads to a global or all round condemnation of self.

- This is further underpinned by feelings of unworthiness or having no fundamental self worth.
- Outcomes of this are a fear of blame, thinking may focus on rumination or constant thought churning on a sense of shame.
- If the shame is associated with a past event or life circumstance there may be ongoing worry about that.
- If there has been a failing whether perceived or real there may be self judgement regarding loss or transgression of a specific value or valued situation.
- This may translate into a fundamental rejection of self or of others which will assist in the avoidance of reminders or confrontation of shame.

Possible Responses to Shame

Experience	Unworkable Response	Details	Viewpoint/perspective	Response/ Exercise
Shame	<p>Global condemnation of self</p> <p>No self worth</p> <p>Fear rumination worry</p> <p>Self and Other rejection</p> <p>Blame self judgement</p> <p>Avoidance</p>		<p>What is the story we are stuck in?</p> <p>What Values Have been Transgressed?</p> <p>What is being avoided/rejected</p> <p>Would we talk to others as we talk to ourselves</p> <p>Would we allow others to talk to us as we talk to ourselves</p> <p>Where is our attention?</p> <p>Are our actions values consistent?</p> <p>Observation and perspective taking</p> <p>Acceptance and willingness to experience discomforts</p>	

Guilt

Guilt rather than being focussed on the person is focussed on the act or context for wrongdoing.

That is the act of wrongdoing is bad rather than the person.

Individual responses usually include negative thoughts about the context of wrongdoing, aspects of specific blame and self judgement for the transgression.

This may lead to fear and embarrassment associated with context/reason for guilt. Often there will be avoidant behaviour of matters associated with guilt.

Importantly guilt can assist the person to identify who they have transgressed against or what is a specific value or valued situation.

Problematic thinking

IDENTIFYING GUILT

Experience	Unworkable Response	Details	Viewpoint/perspective	Response/ Exercise
Guilt	Context specific blame		What are our/others values – how have they been transgressed	
	self judgement		What is our here and now response	
	Fear		What are we willing to accept	
	Embarrassment		What are we willing to go through	
	Avoidance		What is our perspective	

Remorse as a possible response to Shame and Guilt

The shame and guilt have both cognitive and affective components.

The extent to which these remain in this domain of thinking rather than in taking some sort of beneficial action may indicate the extent to which shame and guilt may be debilitating and associated with disordered depression, anxiety and perhaps anger.

Remorse is characterised as a stance which includes regret sorrow and contrition but further extends to the process of taking reparation for an identified transgression.

To be genuinely remorseful contains the element of willingness to take meaningful action to repair a wrong associated with a transgression or act of wrongdoing.

Identify how values may inform restoration of relationship with self and others - people family community. -

Steps in remorseful action

Steps in remorseful action	Workable Responses
<p>Identification of transgression</p> <p>What was transgressed?</p>	
<p>Underpinning values</p> <p>You</p> <p>Other (person/Community)</p>	
<p>Point of change</p> <p>What changes are needed?</p>	
<p>Acknowledgement</p> <p>How can this wrong doing be best acknowledged?</p>	
<p>Acceptance of responsibility</p> <p>What is your level of responsibility</p>	
<p>Requirement for action</p> <p>What action is required?</p>	

STEP 4 **Getting unstuck**

ACT techniques for dealing with both anxiety (worry) and depression (rumination)

identify how this thinking has kept us stuck and what its secondary benefits may have been in “protecting” us

identify opportunities for self compassion, self-respect leading to self acceptance.

Exercise

In whatever way we acted in our scenario – let us bring compassionate presence to our observation

Sit with, embrace, bear light / illuminate, bring openness interest curiosity and non judgement.

Breathing into and creating space for compassionate presence

Struggle and Suffering ?

❖ ACT postulates that most if not all psychological suffering is due to unworkable:

- **cognitive fusion**
getting caught up and entangled in your thoughts

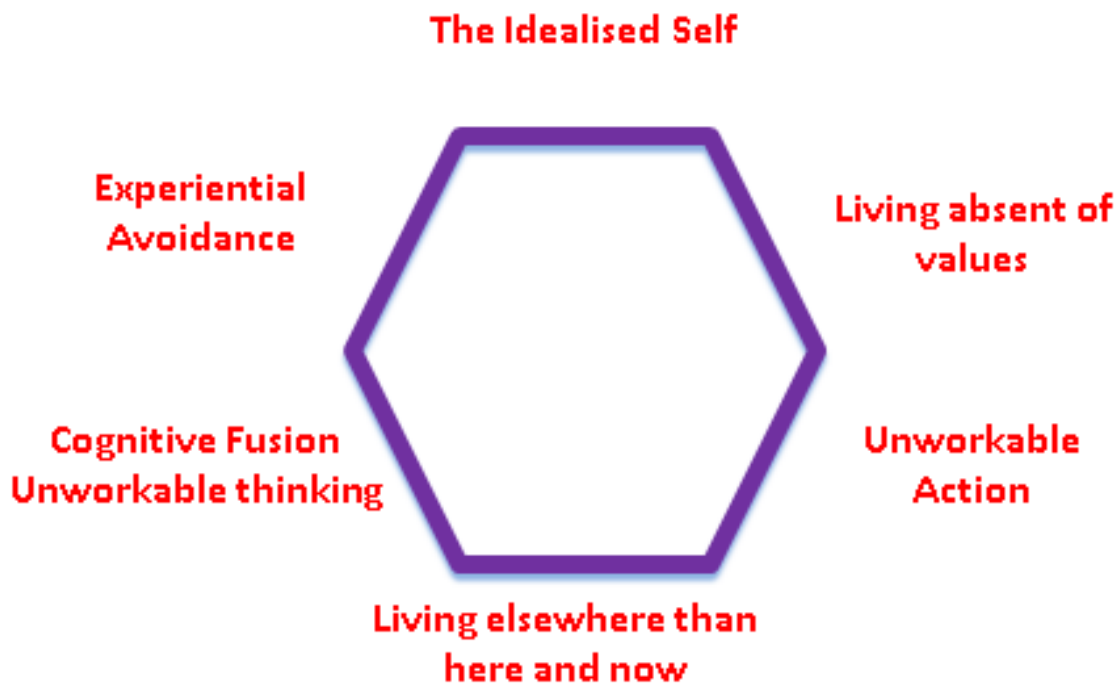
and

- **experiential avoidance**
trying to avoid or get rid of unwanted private experiences, such as thoughts, feelings, memories etc.

Cognitive Fusion and Experiential Avoidance are neither 'good' nor 'bad' in and of themselves

Struggle occurs when experiential avoidance and cognitive fusion have 'become unworkable' or 'problematic' that is when they pull us into a self-defeating struggle with aspects of our life.

The basis of suffering



Developed from ACT in a Nutshell © Russ Harris 2008

www.actmindfully.com.au

russ.harris@actmindfully.com.au

9

Our greatest challenge is sorting out what is useful and what is not useful in what our mind is saying

Experiential avoidance and Cognitive fusion are intimately connected – you won't get one without the other. Basically, your mind says something is bad or wrong, and tells you that you need to do something about it. If we treat all that our mind says as fact and "the truth" we can end up in all sorts of trouble think about some of your wildest thoughts.....

- ❖ Being fused with the judgment that:
 - ❖ What I did is unforgiveable
 - ❖ I must carry the burden
 - ❖ If anyone knew I could not.....
 - ❖ I am unworthy

If our mind treats (thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations etc) as 'bad' or 'wrong', and then tells you that you have to get rid of or avoid them, If you 'fuse' with those cognitions then you are set up for unworkable 'experiential avoidance'. You can fuse with all sorts of other cognitions, that will set you up for a struggle with other aspects of your life (apart from your private experiences).

However control of our thinking is illusory when struggle encompasses:

- ❖ unwanted thoughts and feelings
- ❖ negative self-judgment, low self-esteem, self-loathing etc ourselves life, others, and the world
- ❖ Unworkable struggle and attempts to control will inevitably lead to suffering!

What is a vital life?

- ❖ remaining psychologically present with whatever is happening right here, right now, in this moment

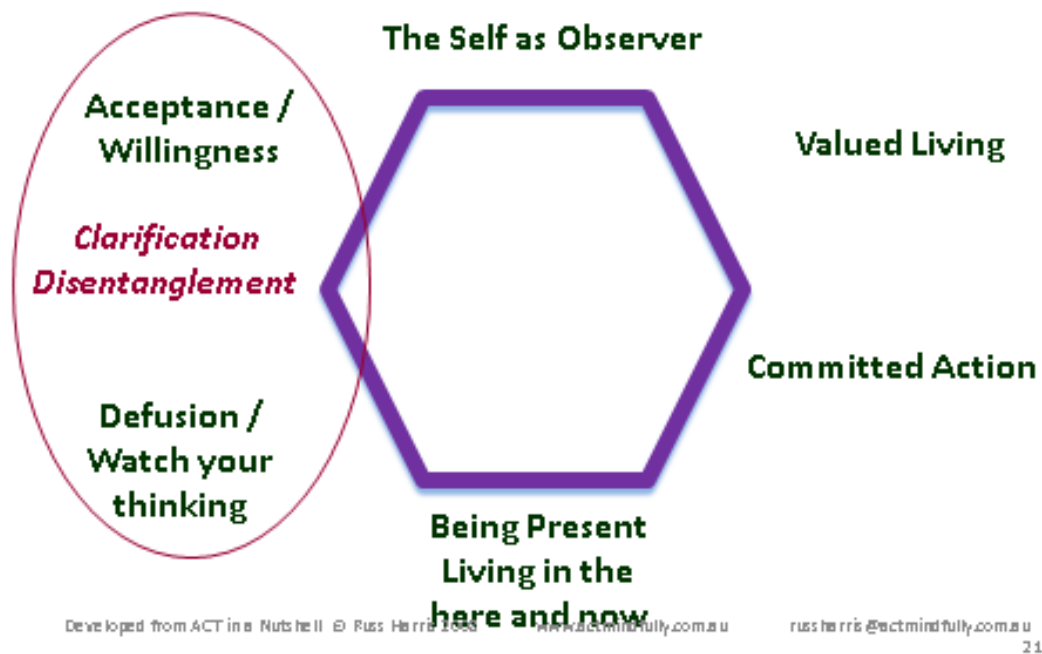
STEP 5 Self Forgiveness

Exercise

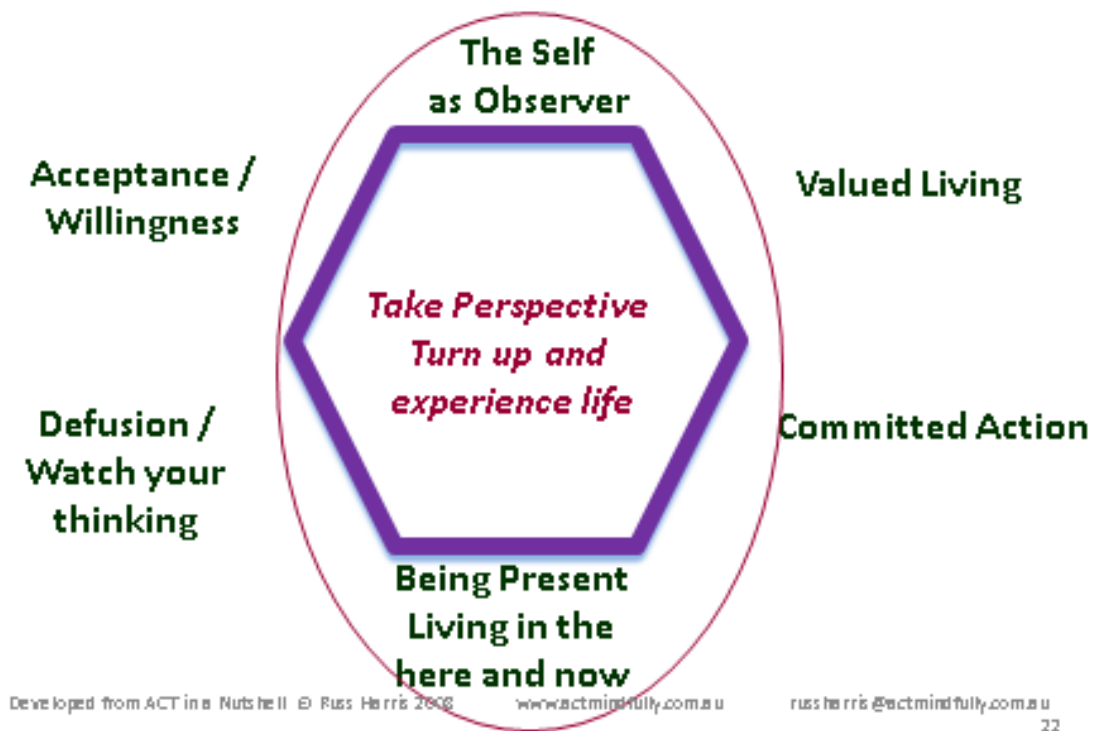
identify particular circumstances that involve hurt in relation to your scenario:

- ❖ Utilise ACT techniques to revisit revue and reframe
- ❖ identify means by which to drop burdens and to choose alternate thinking and action

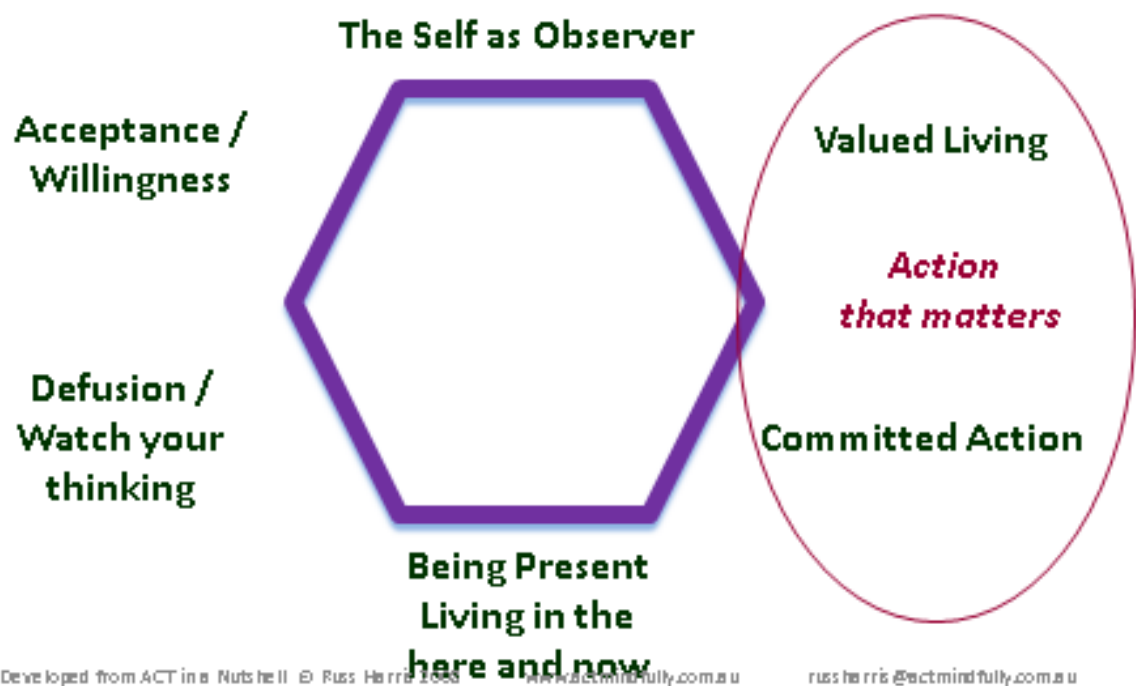
THE PRINCIPLES OF ACT



THE PRINCIPLES OF ACT



THE PRINCIPLES OF ACT



Radical Acceptance

Acceptance brings willingness to experience uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or physical sensations

- ❖ In the service of response flexibility
- ❖ Bring openness curiosity and non judgment to your observation of private experience
- ❖ Making room for private experience – dropping unnecessary struggle

Painful feelings and sensations may arise from a variety of triggers:

- ❖ Spontaneous feelings/thoughts
- ❖ Spontaneous memories
- ❖ Physical sensations

Many people spend redundant effort in experiential avoidance of these sensations

Acceptance Means:

- ❖ Opening up and making room for painful feelings and sensations.

Acceptance is not

- ❖ Resignation, Failure , Toleration, Putting things aside, Getting on top of things, Taking control

Acceptance is a posture:

- ❖ Being willing to go through/sit with
- ❖ Accepting physical reactions might not be pleasant but are natural
- ❖ I can make room for these sensations
- ❖ I can observe these thoughts and not be caught up in them

Defusion Key Techniques

- ❖ Name the story, I'm having the thought that ...

- ❖ I notice I'm having the thought that ..., Thank your mind for that thought
- ❖ Is that you talking or your mind talking? Radio Doom & Gloom
- ❖ Silly voice/ Singing it/ Speed it up/ Slow it down, Repetition
- ❖ Leaves on a stream , Clouds passing, Sign posts on a highway
- ❖ Writing thoughts on cards/ hands as thoughts
- ❖ TV/Computer Screen
- ❖ Which passenger is controlling the bus?, Which pirate is steering the boat
- ❖ BULLYING REFRAME : What's it like to be pushed around by that thought/ belief/ idea?, Do you want to have it run your life, tell you what to do all the time?
- ❖ That's an interesting thought, How old is that story? Where does it come from?
- ❖ What is the name of the story?

PRAGMATIC

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

WORKABILITY

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

SECONDARY GAINS

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

FORM & LOCATION

- ❖ What does that thought look like? How big is it? What does it sound like?
- ❖ Your voice, or someone else's? Close your eyes and identify, where is it located in space?

- ❖ Is it moving or still? What direction & speed?

INSIGHT

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

PROBLEM SOLVING

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

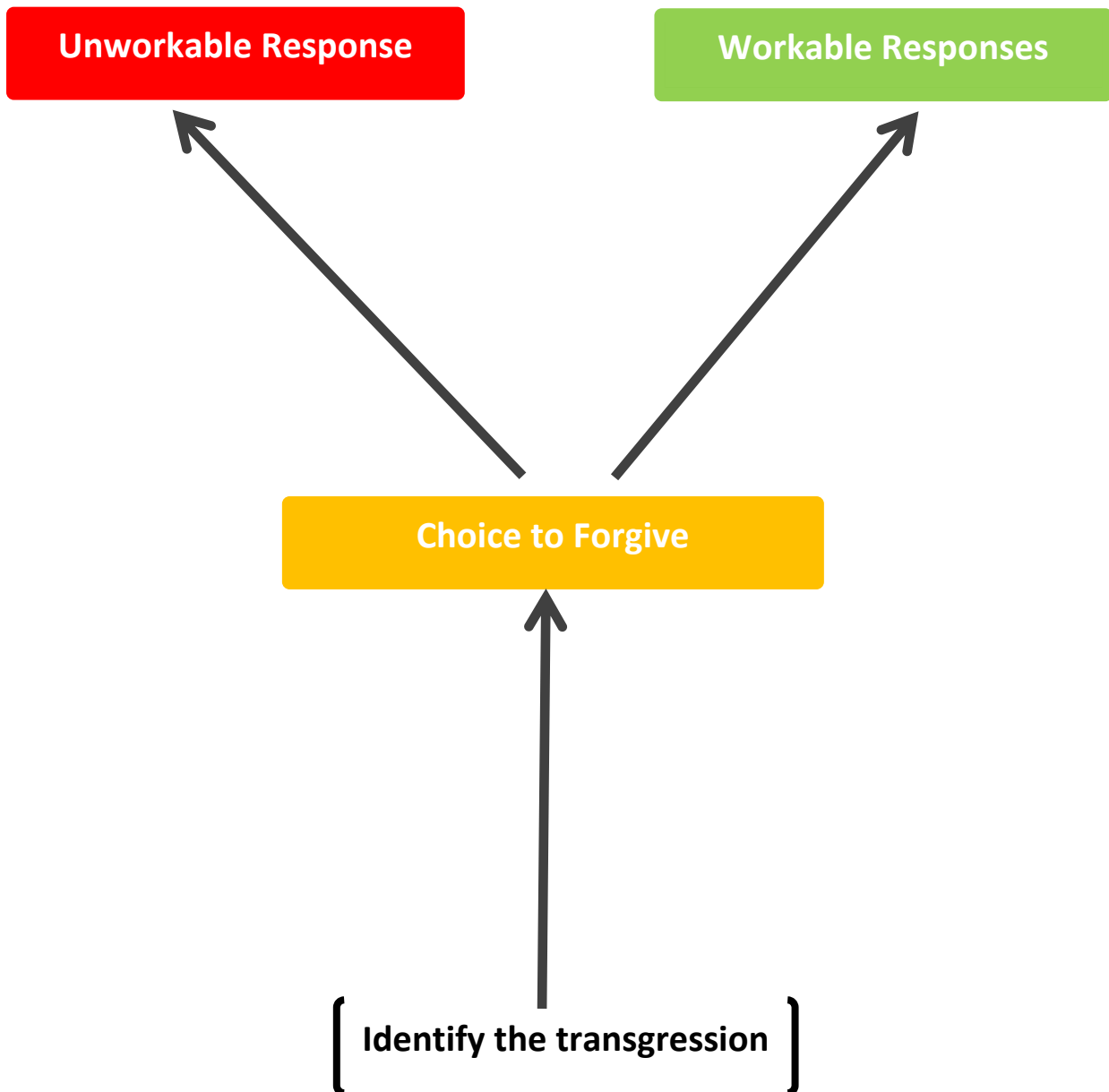
At the Movies

- ❖ Place the story on a movie screen and see it playing out.
- ❖ Now get up and walk out of the cinema while the movie is playing
- ❖ Notice what is going on in foyer
- ❖ Now go back into the cinema and see where the story is at – is it worth watching?

Step 6

Values for Action

Revisit values above with a framework for action – chose an area of choice and response



Identify to what extent are values informing self forgiveness and to what extent self forgiveness allows us to move toward valued living

The 'Choice Point' worksheet – from *The Weight Escape*, © Ciarrochi, Bailey, and Harris, 2014

Refer to the Remorse worksheet and Chart one Action for next week

Action	Description
specific	
measurable	
agreed upon	
realistic	
time-based	

Step 7 Take committed action based on self forgiveness

Your Own Work

Can you answer this question – do I trust myself to act in a values consistent way in the context of the scenario I outlined?

Commitment to Acceptance and Accountability

- ❖ Take Action daily

- ❖ Include in a breathing exercise

- ❖ Transform your relationship with your experience

- ❖ Stacey Kramer offers a moving, personal, 3-minute parable that shows how an unwanted experience can turn out to be a priceless gift.

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/stacey_kramer_the_best_gift_i_ever_survived.html

1. Austin S: A perspective on the patterns of loss, lack, disappointment and shame encountered in the treatment of six women with severe and chronic anorexia nervosa. *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 54:61-80.
2. Bailey A, Ciarrochi J: ACT for health and well-being: Pre-workshop readings.
3. Bailey A, Harris R: *The Weight Escape*: Penguin UK, 2014.
4. Enright RD: Counseling within the forgiveness triad: On forgiving, receiving forgiveness, and self-forgiveness. *Counseling and Values* 40:107-26.
5. Exline JJ, Root BL, Yadavalli S, Martin AM, Fisher ML: Reparative Behaviors and Self-forgiveness: Effects of a Laboratory-based Exercise. *Self and Identity* 10:101-26.
6. Fisher ML, Exline JJ: Self-forgiveness versus excusing: The roles of remorse, effort, and acceptance of responsibility. *Self and Identity* 5:127-46.
7. Harris R: ACT made simple. New Harbinger.
8. Hayes SC: Acceptance and commitment therapy, relational frame theory, and the third wave of behavioral and cognitive therapies. *Behavior therapy* 35:639-65.
9. Hayes SC, Strosahl KD, Wilson KG: *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change*: Guilford Press, 1999.
10. Rollnick S, Miller WR: What is Motivational Interviewing? *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy* 23:325-34.
11. Törneke N: *Relational Frame Theory*. Stockhol: Student litteratur AB.
12. Tutu D, Tutu M: *The Book of Forgiving: The four fold path for healing ourselves and the world*. London UK: W, 2014.
13. Van Vliet KJ, Kalnins GRC: A compassion-focused approach to non-suicidal self injury. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 33:295-311.
14. Wenzel M, Woodyatt L, Hedrick K: No genuine self-forgiveness without accepting responsibility: Value reaffirmation as a key to maintaining positive self-regard. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 42:617-27.
15. Woodyatt L, Wenzel M: Self-Forgiveness and Restoration of an Offender Following an Interpersonal Transgression. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 32:225-59.
16. Worthington EL, Scherer M: Forgiveness is an emotion focused coping strategy that can reduce health risks and promote health resiliency: Theory, review and hypotheses. *Psychology and Health*:395-405.