

# Application of the Six Core Processes of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to a Fitness Walking Program

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## Background

There is growing support for the application of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to health-related issues, including empirical support for the use of ACT in pain management,<sup>1</sup> weight management,<sup>2</sup> smoking cessation,<sup>3</sup> diabetes management,<sup>4</sup> and physical activity<sup>5</sup>. Theoretically, mindfulness-based therapies seem especially well-suited to behavioral medicine, given the emphasis on accepting unwanted internal events and committing to behavior change in their presence.

## Fitness Walking and Six Core Processes: Elements of the Manual

### Acceptance and Mindfulness Cluster

#### ◆ Acceptance

◆ Participants are encouraged to practice acceptance of internal barriers to walking as an alternative to controlling negative feelings about exercise. Acceptance of unpleasant physical sensations while performing physical activity is also discussed. Every session begins with mindful breathing exercises.

#### ◆ Cognitive Defusion

◆ Participants struggling with fitness may be fused with negative thoughts about state of one's health. Defusion from these thoughts is encouraged through various exercises.

#### ◆ Self-as-Context

◆ The manual presented a view of the self as the context in which thoughts occur in order to facilitate acceptance and defusion; mindful awareness of thoughts while walking and thoughts about walking allows participants to recognize that negative internal experiences do not define the self.

### Commitment and Behavior Change cluster

#### ◆ Values

◆ Values discussion occurs early in the protocol and is included in various sessions. Participants consider the values that led them to join the group and examine whether fitness is, in and of itself, a value, in service of another value (e.g. family), or both. Values are presented as compass points, and group leaders ask participants to note if other values emerge during the course of participation in the group.

#### ◆ Present Moment Contact

◆ Present moment contact is offered as an alternative to the experiential avoidance often associated with physical activity among individuals with low levels of cardio-respiratory fitness. Participants engage in mindful breathing exercises during each session and are encouraged to notice thoughts and sensations during these exercises as well as while walking.

#### ◆ Committed Action

◆ The manual clarifies the relationship among goals, values and behaviors. Although walking is a salient values-based action, participants are also asked to identify additional behaviors to perform in service of their identified values.

## Current Study

The current study involved development of a manual targeting cardio-respiratory fitness. The protocol was for an eight session, ten week group therapy program for fitness walking. The manual included a significant amount of psychoeducational material related to cardiorespiratory fitness and walking; to promote adherence, elements of ACT, most prominently the six core processes of cognitive flexibility, were woven into the manual.

### How the Processes are Discussed

◆ Given the interrelated nature of the core processes, they are not typically discussed in complete isolation, but as facets of the same process. The manual covers how facilitating flexibility in one area could lead to growth in another.

◆ Metaphors and exercises are crucial to explaining and illustrating ACT concepts

### Other Elements of the Manual

◆ Additional ACT concepts  
 ◆ Creative hopelessness  
 ◆ Control is the problem

#### ◆ Psychoeducational elements

◆ Definition of fitness  
 ◆ Benefits of cardiorespiratory fitness  
 ◆ How to achieve fitness  
 ◆ Walking techniques  
 ◆ Walking safety  
 ◆ "How to" information about monitoring heart rate and rate of perceived exertion

<sup>1</sup> see Johnston, Foster, Shennan, Starkey, & Johnson, 2010; Carbonell-Baeza, Aparicio, Chillon, Femia, Delgado-Fernandez, & Ruiz; <sup>2</sup>see Lillis, Hayes, Bunting & Masuda, 2009; <sup>3</sup>see Hernández-López, Luciano, Bricker, Roales-Nieto, & Montesinos, 2009; <sup>4</sup>see Gregg, Callahan, Hayes, & Glenn-Lawson, 2007; <sup>5</sup>see Butryn, Forman, Hoffman, Shaw, & Juarascio.