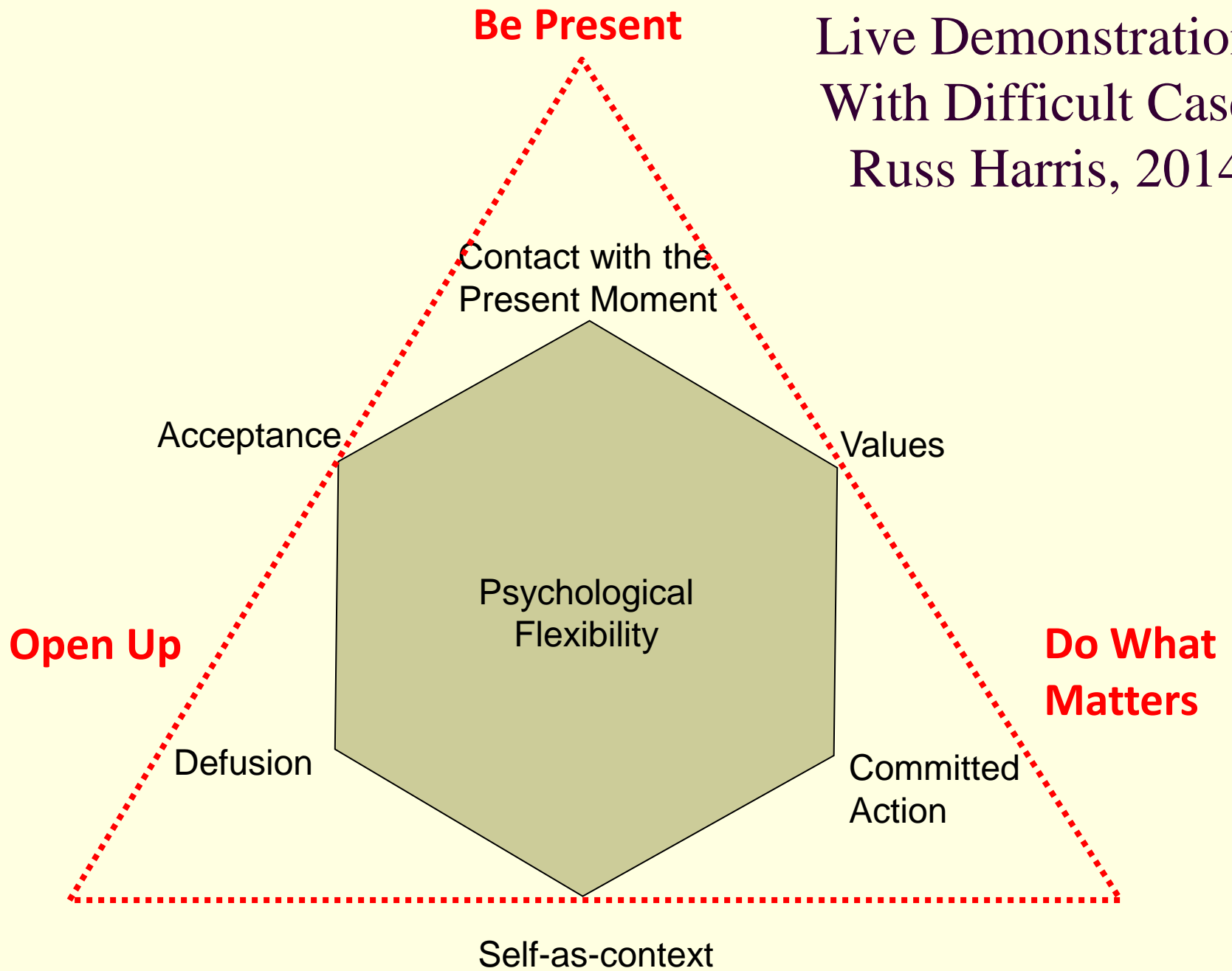


Live Demonstrations
With Difficult Cases
Russ Harris, 2014



Setting Up Sessions

- *Informed consent: what is ACT?*
- *Permission to “press pause”*
- *Permission to try out new skills*
- *Permission to set an agenda*

INFORMED CONSENT

- ACT is a very active form of therapy/coaching – not just talking about problems.
- Learning skills to handle difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively, so they have less impact and influence over you
- Clarifying your ‘values’: what kind of person you want to be, how you want to treat yourself and others, what you want to stand for in life
- Taking action: to solve problems, and do things that make life better
- I want you to leave here at the end of each session with a plan of action – something you can take home and do between sessions that will make a positive difference
- *NB Modify this as needs – e.g. in grief work, this would sound very different*

Setting Up Sessions #1- Permission To Press Pause

Can I have permission to 'press pause' from time to time - so if I see you doing something that looks like it might be really helpful or useful, I can point it out, and get you to really notice it? And can I also 'press pause' if , I see you doing something that looks like it might be making your problems worse, so we can address it?

Setting Up Sessions #2 – Trying New Things

Part of this approach includes learning new skills to handle thoughts and feelings more effectively. Is it okay if at times ask you to try some of these things in session?

*At times I might ask you to do an exercise that seems **a bit awkward or uncomfortable**, and you are always free to say no. I'm only going to suggest these things if I think they'll be helpful to you.*

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Setting Up Sessions #3 – Setting An Agenda

Are you okay if we take a couple of minutes at the start of each session to establish a focus or an agenda for the session? To pick one important problem or area of life that we can make the main focus so we can come up with an action plan to improve it?

The reason for this, is it makes our work much more efficient. If we're trying to deal with several different problems all at once, it's very hard to deal effectively with any of them.

Setting Up Sessions #4 – If client-therapist conflict/tension

Can I just confirm we are a team here? Working together? My aim in this room is to help people build better lives. Is that your aim too?

So we are a team, working together, with the same aim: to help you improve your life?

Great. So if at any point either one of us feels like we are not working together as a strong team, can we kindly 'press pause' and point it out?

Great. So can we focus in on one area of your life to work on for today's session?

Be Present

What's going on?
What's showing up?

How's this working?
How can you use this?

Left to loosen

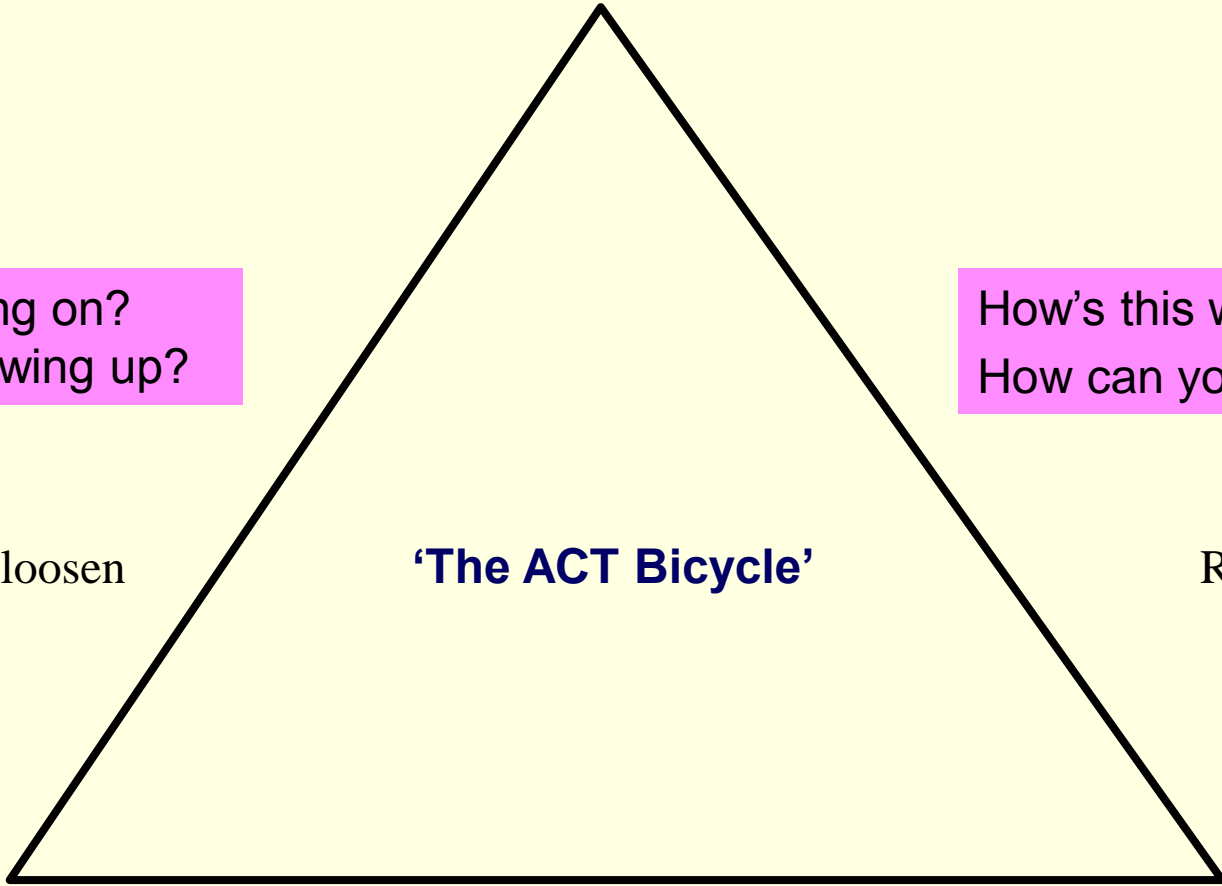
'The ACT Bicycle'

Right to move

Open Up

Do What Matters

Center to balance



Setting An Agenda & Staying ‘On Topic’

- Once client agrees, set an agenda – e.g. use the ‘bull’s eye’ and pick a quadrant to work on – or ask the client to nominate a single problem, goal, or aspect of life to focus on.
- Every time the client goes off topic: “Can I press pause for a moment – and get you to notice how your mind is pulling you off track here? Is it okay if we come back to the main topic for now? If we have time, we can address this other issue later.”

The Resilience Formula

4 approaches to any problem situation:

1. Leave
2. Stay & change what can be changed
3. Stay & accept what can't be changed & live by your values
4. Stay & give up & do stuff that makes it worse

There is a huge 'reality gap' here.
What do you want to stand for in the face of it?

It Doesn't Work!!!!!!

What do you mean, it doesn't work?

What were you expecting it to do?

=> ***'Hands as thoughts and feelings'*** exercise

(Copy me) Imagine your hands are your **thoughts and feelings**

Imagine in front of you is everything that matters: the people, places, activities you love etc (give examples). And also the **problems/challenges** you need to face/deal with, and the important tasks you need to do. (give examples)

Now (copy me) see what happens when we get all caught up in our **thoughts and feelings**

Notice 3 things: 1) How much are you missing out on? 2) How disconnected and disengaged are you; how difficult to stay focused, keep your attention on the task? 3) How difficult is it to take action, to do the things that make your life work? (give examples)

Now (copy me) slowly separate from your thoughts & feelings

What's your view of the room like now? How much easier is it to engage and connect; to keep your attention focused on the task at hand? Move your arms around: how much easier is it to do the things that make your life work (give examples)

Notice these things (i.e. hands) haven't disappeared. If you can use them, do so. Many thoughts and feelings give us valuable information we can make good use of. But if you can't make use of them, just let them sit there.

Notice this doesn't magically solve your problems. But if there are things you *can* do to solve your problems, this makes it much easier to do them. And if you have problems that can't be solved, this helps you make your life as good as possible whilst living with them.

Mandated/Coerced Clients: 5 Steps

1. Normalise: e.g. “Most people feel upset or annoyed”
2. Validate & empathise: e.g. “Of course you feel that way! I’d feel the same!”
3. Declare your values: e.g. “My aim is to help people have better lives”
4. Q: “What possible outcome from this would make it feel like a good use of your time?”

Mandated/Coerced Clients: 5 Steps

Step 5: The 'Free Will Switch' (adapted from Kelly Wilson)

'Off' = you are here for others/ waste of your time/ nothing in it for you

'On' = you are here for yourself/ can make free use of my resources/ something of value in it for you

'On' or 'Off', you are still in the session: it just determines if it's a waste of your time or not.

Mandated/Coerced Clients: 5 Steps

If client chooses 'OFF', then (NB – this is for adults only – not for teenagers and children!):

a) 'In that case, we may as well end the session, because without your cooperation I'm powerless'

Or b) 'Okay, let's keep going then, but notice how keeping the switch off makes the session drag/
sucks the life out of you/ makes this seem like a total waste of time

Self-compassion: 5 Elements

1. Contact the present moment: notice & acknowledge your painful thoughts & feelings
2. Defusion: defuse from harsh judgmental self-talk
3. Kindness: pursue the value of kindness towards yourself - in words, thoughts, imagery & action
4. Acceptance: open up and make room for painful thoughts and feelings
5. Validation: validate your pain as a normal & natural part of being human, and something you have in common with all humans

Staying On Track 1

1. Permission to start session 'differently' & rationale for doing so (e.g. not making progress, sessions inefficient)
2. Confirm that you are a team, working together
3. Agree to a specific domain/area to work on
4. Your mind will try hard to 'get us off track'. Lets see if we can notice all the tactics it uses.

Staying On Track 2

1. Notice, name and normalise each 'tactic'
Write them down on a piece of paper
2. Ask the client to tick a 'tactic' whenever it recurs
3. If client say 'This won't work because X,Y,Z' then ask, 'Shall we stop the session, because your mind says XYZ – or shall we let your mind say that and carry on?'

Staying On Track 3

1. Return to the agenda repeatedly
2. Repeatedly draw attention to mind's tactics; unhook and return
3. Reinforce any workable behaviour you see – eg point out and comment favourably on functionally positive verbal & non-verbal behaviour e.g. eye contact, body posture, acceptance, defusion, engagement, willingness, vulnerability, commitment, connection with values etc.

Other Useful Tips

1. Ask client to assess their own behaviour in session in terms of workability: 'towards' or 'away' from values (e.g. bull's eye, choice point)
2. Ask client to assess how their behaviour affects the therapeutic/coaching relationship
3. Permission to press pause & rationale for it
4. Rationale for learning to focus, unhook, and refocus

Other Useful Tips

1. Keep noticing and naming habitual cognitive patterns
2. Psycho-education about automaticity versus choice: 'I want you to have a lot more control over what you do – at the moment you seem to be totally controlled by your thoughts and feelings'
3. Have client take ownership of agenda

Other Useful Tips

1. Is it okay if I ask you to try different things here, different to what you normally do?
2. Is it okay to continue, even though you're feeling uncomfortable/ anxious – if this could help you with the problem in question?
3. Seems 'Weird'? Good! That means we are doing something different and new.
4. Do you see how what we are doing here is relevant to the problem in question? How it can help you?

Other Useful Tips

1. What you've been doing works in the short term right? You get some real short term payoffs, such asX,Y,Z. But in the long term, it's not giving you the life you want.
2. So if you want things to be different, you need to do something different. So is it okay if I ask you to try out new patterns of behaviour, here in the room?
3. And of course, your mind will try to stop you. Can you notice how it does that? – etc

Other Useful Tips

1. Your mind is a problem-solving machine. The problem here is that I'm asking you to do something uncomfortable (- specify: e.g. think about your values, answer a question, do a strange exercise). Your mind tries to solve this problem by pulling us off-track (name some of the off-track tactics). Would you be willing to continue with this, even though your mind is trying it's hardest to derail us?

Other Useful Tips

1. Thank you. It means a lot to me that you're willing to continue with this work, even though it's uncomfortable, and you're feeling ... (give examples: e.g. frustrated, anxious, irritated, the urge to go and have a cigarette) ... and your mind's saying (give examples: e.g. this is a croc of shit, this won't help)

Other Useful Tips

1. Notice, in the service of (specify domain/values/goal – if not sure then ‘a better life) you are committing to do this work, even though lots of difficult thoughts and feelings are showing up. What’s that like?

S.L.O.W.

- Slow down
- Lean in
- Open up
- Warmly illuminate