

**Acceptance -**

**How do I actually use and teach it now?**



**Worldconference 2022**

**San Francisco**

**Beate Ebert,**

**Clinical Psychologist**

# INTENDED OUTCOMES

You will

- understand the process of acceptance as concrete steps and dimensions and you will know how to do it successfully
- train others (clients, workshop attendees) in acceptance successfully
- foster the process of acceptance in any conversation (even without doing an explicit exercise)

# WHAT WE WILL DO TOGETHER

Some exercises

Look at an area in your life

Acceptance in the context of the Hexagon + acceptance-pivot

How come we get stuck?

The process of acceptance in steps

How to do acceptance in session

Important information we get when we accept

Barriers and pitfalls

# GOOD TO READ

- Feldman Barrett, L. (2021). How emotions are made. The secret life of the brain.
- Hayes, S.C. (2019). A liberated mind: how to pivot towards what matters. Penguin Random House, New York

There are only a few skills in life as important as the skill of acceptance.

**If you wish to feel strong and healthy, you have to eat your greens – even though you might rather want to try out that new burger place. If you want a loving relationship with your spouse, you have to focus on being kind and attentive – especially when you would rather just want to scream and shout.**

Simply said, acceptance is the ability to feel the full range of your thoughts and emotions without needless avoidance or clinging in the service of what matters the most to you.

# TRY IT OUT

Get aware of a part of your body that you like

Get aware of a part of your body that you don't like

# TURN TO THE PERSON NEXT TO YOU

- Look at the person - get aware of her
- Be aware of the person and also of the part that you like about yourself
- Be aware of your partner and also of the part that you don't like about yourself
- Be aware that your partner does the same

What did you notice?

Did you stay in contact with yourself? With the other person?



# WHY IS ACCEPTANCE SO DECISIVE?

The three main barriers for a fulfilled life are

1. Behavioral avoidance
2. Emotional avoidance
3. Rule governed behavior

EMOTIONAL  
AVOIDANCE:

WE GET NUMB TO  
OUR OWN  
EXPERIENCES

- IT HURTS BUT WE  
DON'T STOP



# CAN YOU THINK OF AN AREA IN YOUR OWN LIFE, WHERE IT HURTS, BUT YOU DON'T STOP?

- write down a few notes for yourself
- any idea what you are avoiding?



# ACCEPTANCE

- comes from Latin „ac-cipere“ - „receive something actively“
- it is a process we can practice
- in the ACT sense = a conscious openness for our own experiences, including willingness for uncomfortable experiences
- it's not about feeling GOOD, it's about FEELING good

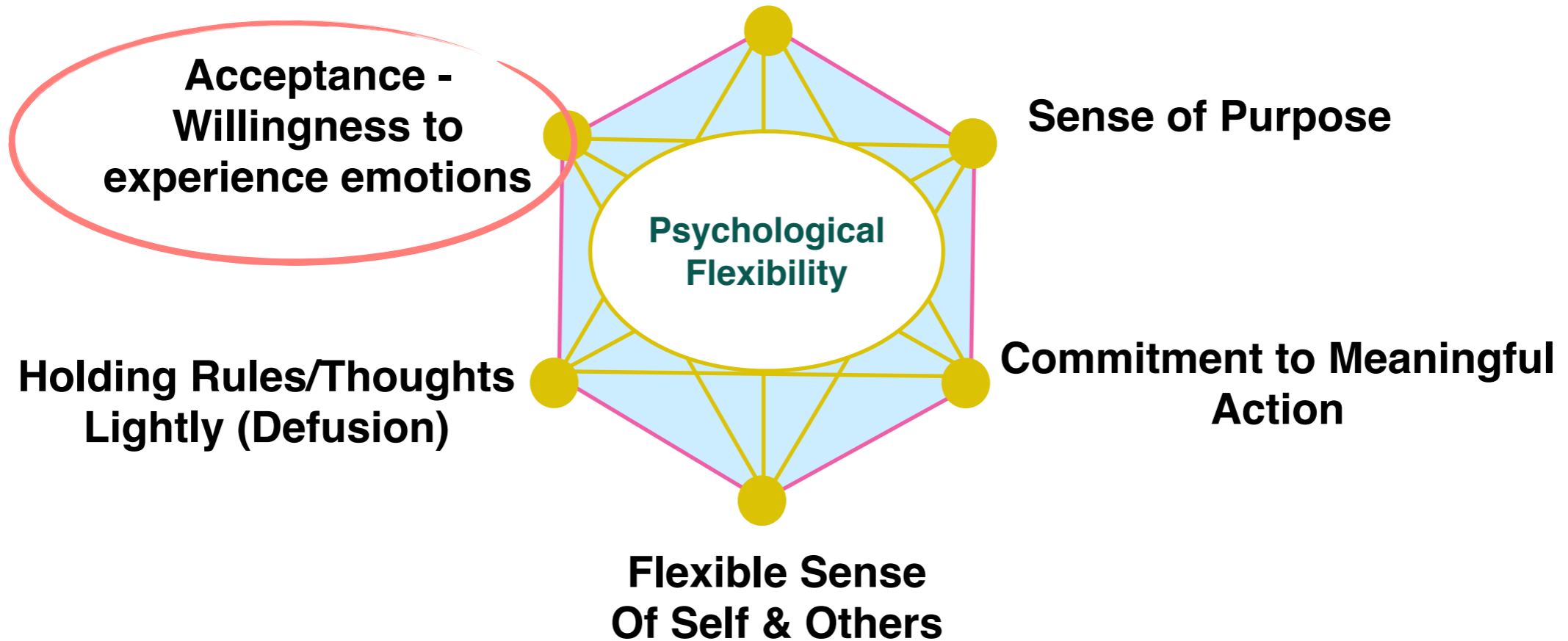


pexels-kampus-production-8931732

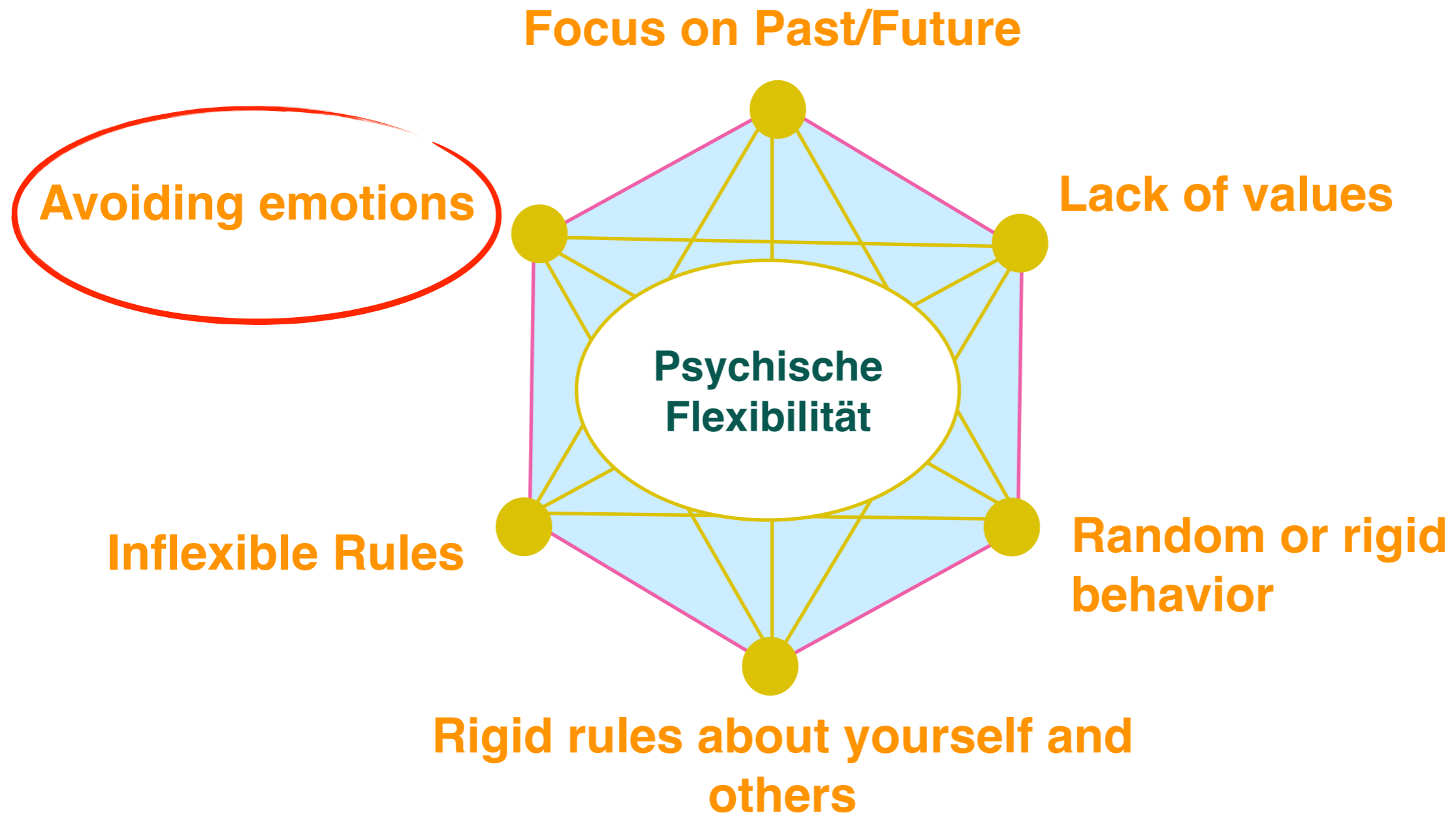
**WE TAKE THE WHOLE PACKAGE - EVEN IF WE DID NOT ORDER IT!**

# Flexible Hexagon

Focus on the Present ...



# Inflexible Hexagon



# „PIVOT ACCEPTANCE“

- **Yearning to feel and experience** - we want to feel **good**
  - => Focus on getting rid of pain and discomfort
  - => disconnection from your own body



# „PIVOT ACCEPTANCE“

- Yearning to feel and experience what we want to feel **good**
  - => Focus on getting rid of discomfort
  - => disconnection from your own body - emotional dysfunction

rigid



PIVOT

# „PIVOT ACCEPTANCE“

- Yearning to feel and experience what we want to feel **good**
  - => Focus on getting rid of discomfort
  - => disconnected from your own body - emotional dysfunction



PIVOT

- Greater emotional flexibility, connected with yourself - **feeling** good
  - => Focus on learning from pain and moving on
  - => Liveliness

# „PIVOT ACCEPTANCE“

- Yearning to feel and experience what we want to feel **good**
  - => Focus on getting rid of discomfort
  - => disconnected from your own body - emotional dysfunction



PIVOT

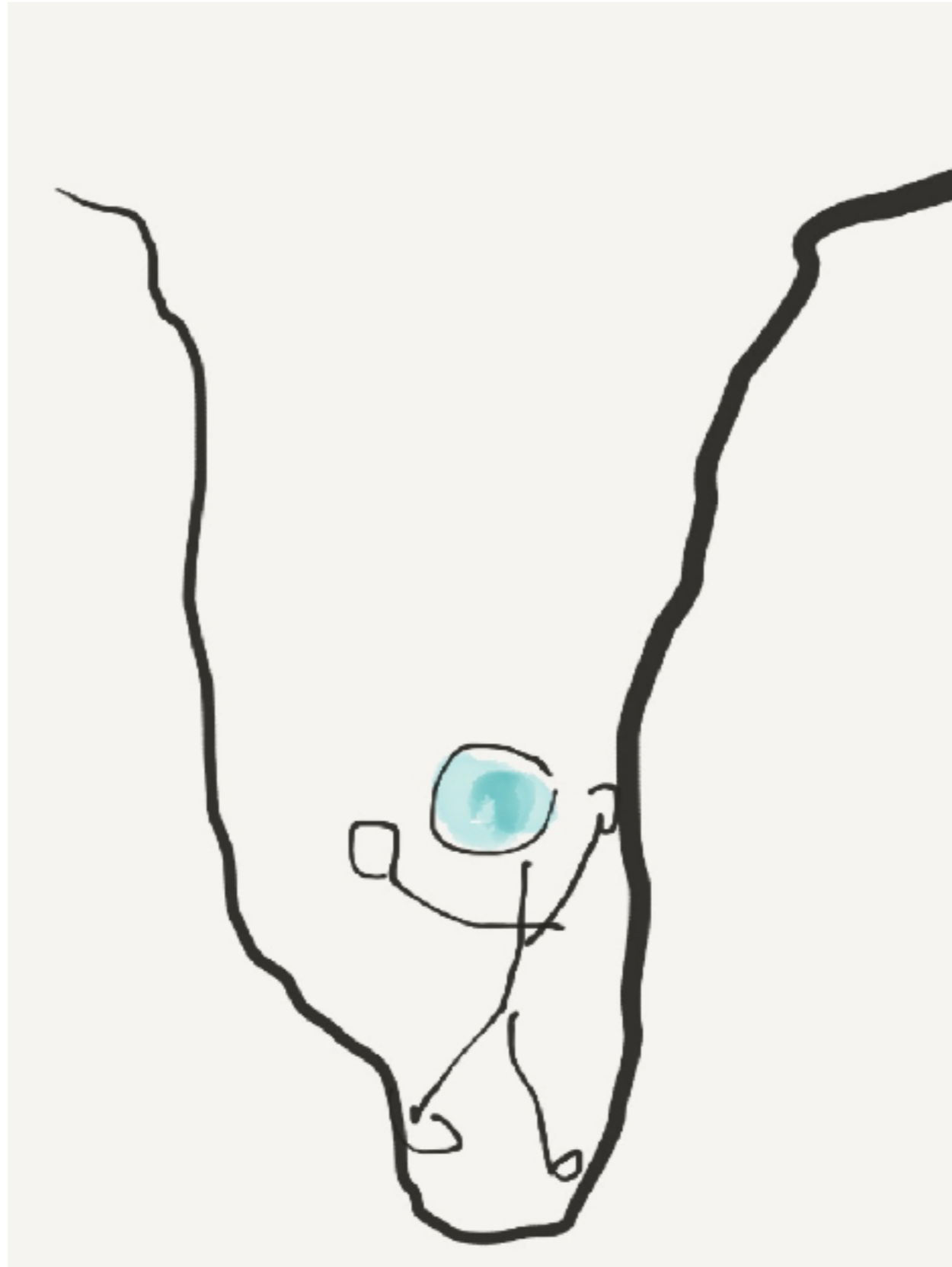
- Greater emotional flexibility, connected to yourself - **feeling** good
  - => Focus on learning from what is moving on
  - => Liveliness



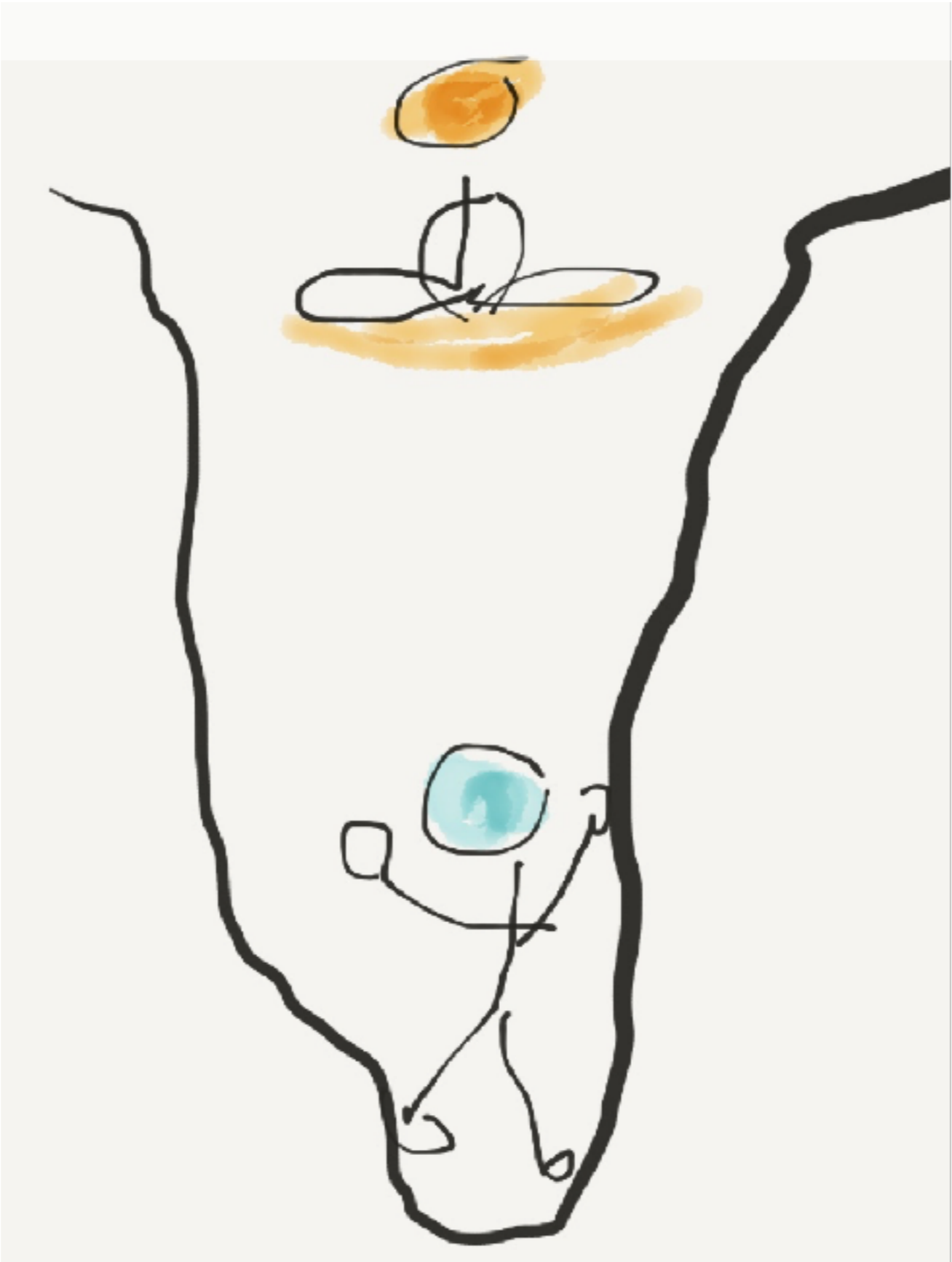
# EXPLORING: POSSIBLE DIMENSIONS OF ACCEPTANCE

- Emotional/Physical
- Mental
- Values/Self
- Social
- Time: Past - Present - Future

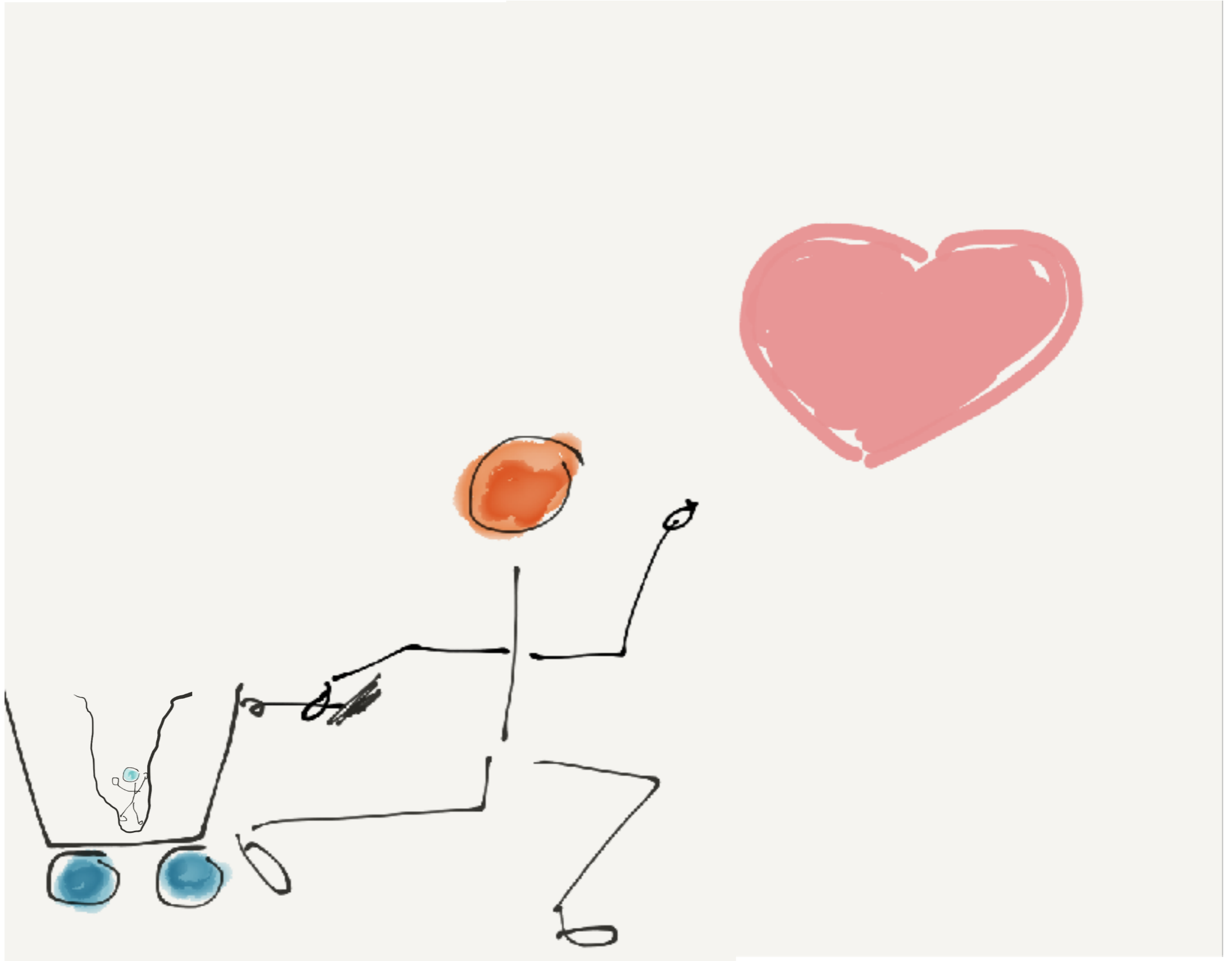
# WHEN WE CANNOT ACCEPT, WE OFTEN FEEL STUCK



# WHAT WE CAN TRY: TO TAKE A NEW PERSPECTIVE



AND FIND A WAY TO MOVE TOWARD OUR VALUES



# WHY DO WE GET STUCK? AND HOW CAN WE GET UNSTUCK?

- It is often difficult to change behavior directly - we all tried that (eat less, do more sports, less online activities...)
- How come somebody is showing a harmful behavior? In which context does does or did the behavior make sense?
- Which context factors could lead to an increase of desirable, new behavior and/or a decrease of old, unhelpful behavior?
- Finding out about these questions is called

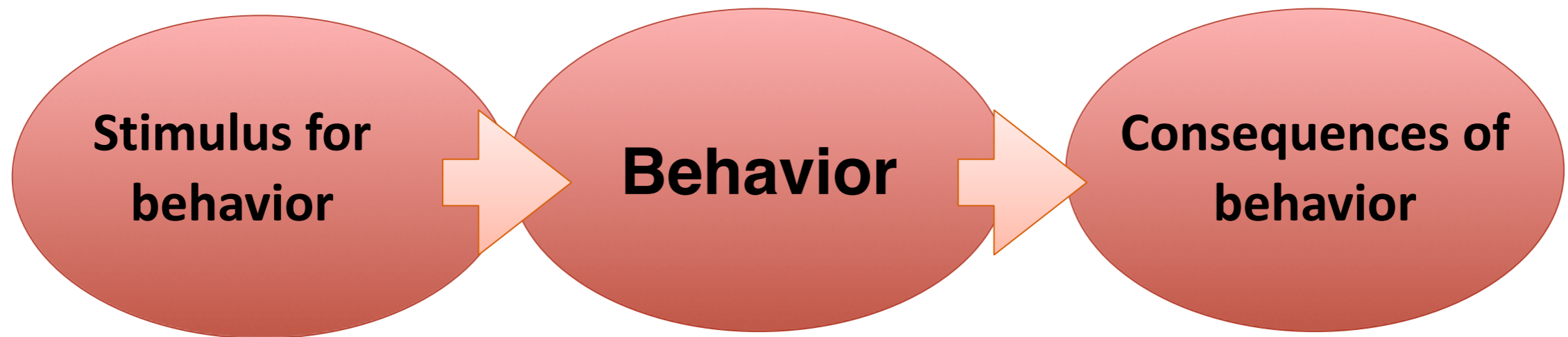


# WHY DO WE GET STUCK? AND HOW CAN WE GET UNSTUCK?

- It is often difficult to change behavior directly - we all tried that (eat less, do more sports, less online activities...)
- How come somebody is showing a harmful behavior? In which context does does or did the behavior make sense?
- Which context factors could lead to an increase of desirable, new behavior and/or a decrease of old, unhelpful behavior?
- Finding out about these questions is called

## FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

# Functional Analysis



# PLEASE LOOK AT YOUR OWN AREA

- what happens before your do this behavior?
- what happens after your behavior?

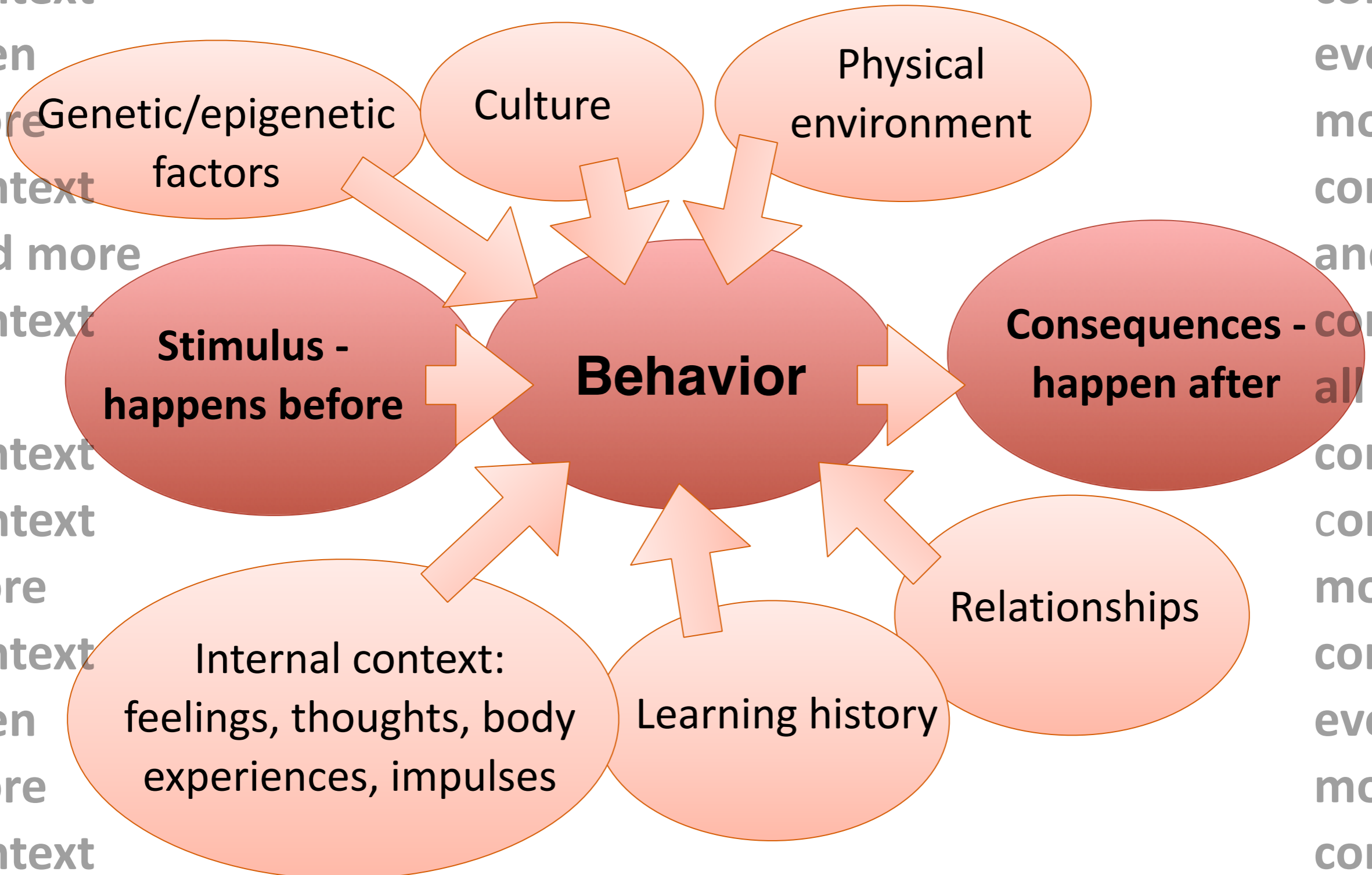


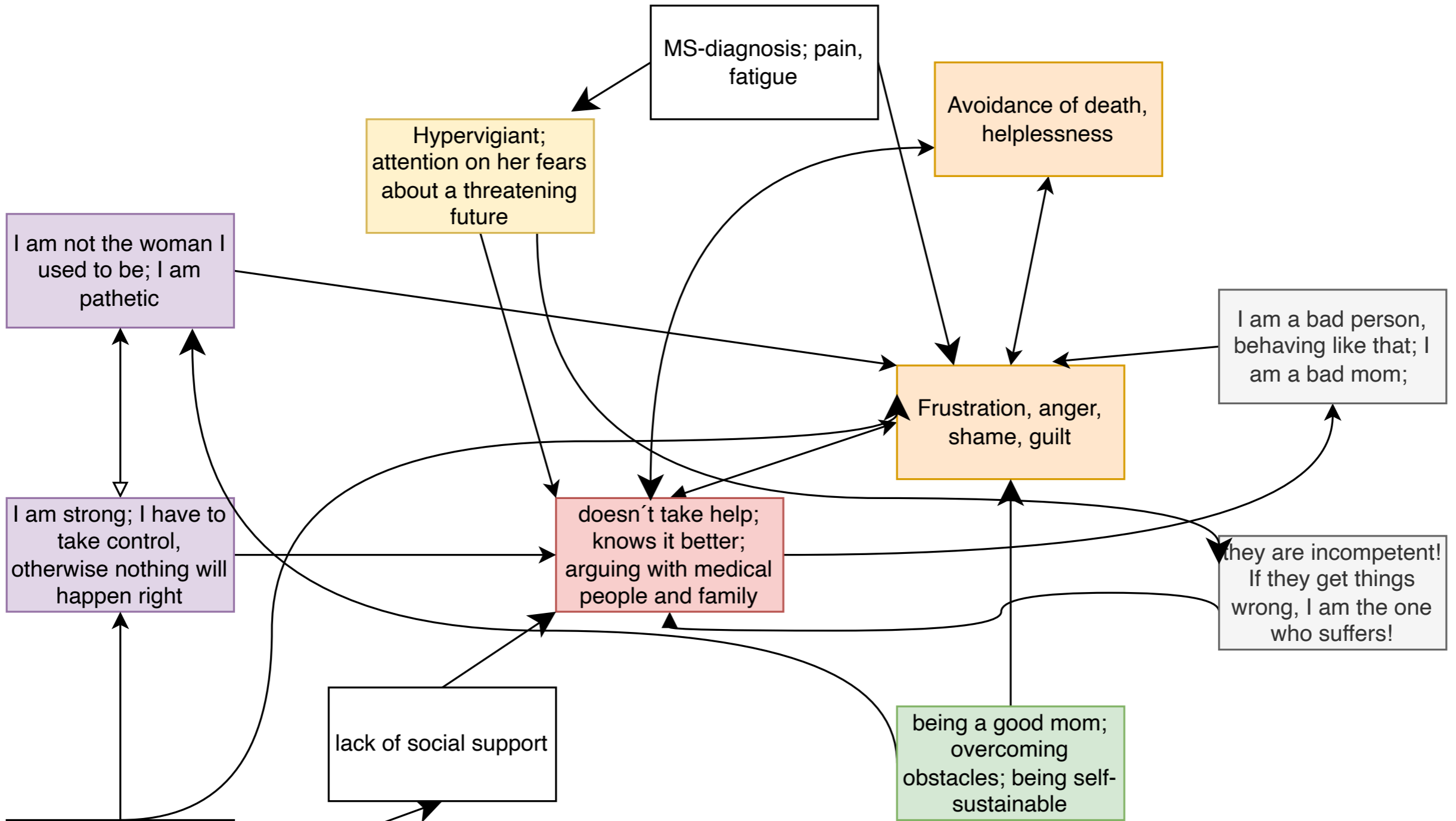
pexels-pixabay-159710



pexels-mart-production-7699367

# Functional Analysis





Starting with SAC to give her a safer space (first in the therapeutic relationship, then for herself)  
 experience of: she is all of that, strong, arguing, weak, etc. (strategic positioning)  
 Add Acceptance, naming and giving space and sorting emotions; Hy: will link to childhood neglect; will strengthen her for confronting helplessness with illness and death  
 Add values: what could make it worth, what could she learn and how does she want to create her last years?



Brain tries to predict our future  
and next actions in every  
moment ...

**BRAIN LOVES  
COHERENCE!**

So it predicts what it knows from  
the past - and to make sure we  
are prepared it predicts the  
worst.

**OUR EMOTIONAL PATTERNS  
ARE AUTOMATIC AND FIT  
INTO THE PREDICTIONS**

WE THINK OUR EMOTIONS ARE THE TRUTH  
AND ACT ACCORDINGLY!



ACCEPTANCE EXERCISE: BREATHING WITH A „YES“

OR: DEALING EFFECTIVELY WITH EMOTIONS



# ACCEPTANCE EXERCISE: DEALING EFFICIENTLY WITH A DIFFICULT EMOTION

- Please think of the area you wrote down and notice if an emotion shows up that is difficult for you. You can go with a slight idea of an emotion or with a body experience.
- Where is the center of this experience in your body? Please breathe in and allow your breathing to flow to this experience or emotion and bring some space there, as if you would blow up a balloon; then please breathe out with a little „yes“ inside, „yes, for this one breath I am willing to notice the difficult feeling in my body“;
- Breathe in again, and allow your breath to flow to the difficult emotion and to give it a little more space, breathing out with a „yes“, „yes, for this one breath I am willing to notice the difficult feeling in my body“.
- Nothing else is more important right now than the difficult feeling and your breathing, moving in and out, giving a little more space with every breathing in, breathing out with a „yes“; there is nothing to achieve, nothing else to do, instead of breathing and noticing.
- What are you noticing, when you are doing that? Does the difficult emotion change? Does it become bigger? Or smaller? Does it stay the same? Any of that is fine. There is nothing special, that should happen.
- Take some more breaths and finish the exercise for yourself. Is there anything different now, after the exercise?

# UNCOMFORTABLE FEELINGS CAN FEEL THREATENING





# STANDS FOR

- an emotion, an impulse, physical pain....
- it can be clear, you can name it (sad, angry, hurt, anxious, aggressive etc.)
- or difficult to name (fuzzy, tense, full, empty, weird, stuck, overwhelming etc.)


**BEFORE YOU PRACTICE  
ACCEPTANCE WITH YOUR CLIENT,  
ASK YOURSELF: AM I WILLING TO  
EXPLORE THIS?**

# THE PROCESS OF ACCEPTANCE

1. Notice and acknowledge
2. Make a choice
3. Explore and notice what happens
4. Evaluate your experience



# I. NOTICE AND ACKNOWLEDGE

You can only start to practice acceptance when you notice and acknowledge your difficult experience: „Oh, I feel  in my body.“

# 2. MAKE A CHOICE

Acceptance is a conscious process and you choose:

„I am willing to explore



now.“

or

„I am NOT willing to explore



now.“

# BOTH CHOICES ARE PERFECT

Trust yourself.

Choosing means that you take responsibility.

You are the boss and you say where it goes, not the feeling.



# IF YOU CHOOSE „NO“ YOU CAN...

- find another time later and make an appointment with yourself
- find a person you trust to get support
- explore what happens when you push



away

# 3. EXPLORE - SOME PRINCIPLES


- slow down
- allow and give space
- feel it in your body
- bring your breath
- let yourself guide by your inner perceptions
- notice what happens
- you can always stop and continue at another time

# 4. EVALUATE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Whatever I told you about acceptance, **do not believe it.**

Explore and evaluate every experience afterwards.

# POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- How does it feel in your body now? (Soft, tight, flexible, stuck)
- What happened to  when you allowed it?
- Did it become bigger? Smaller? Stay the same?
- Is that helpful in the short-term? Would it be helpful in the long-term?

# COMMITTED ACTION

You could take a little time every day to ask:

Is there anything that wants to be explored for 2 or 3 minutes?

P.S.: You can do this with nice feelings too :)

# CLINICAL EXAMPLES

- „I want to get rid of my fear and I hope you can help me with that.“
- „Yes, I have this bipolar disorder. But it is over now and I want to get back to my former efficiency level.“
- „It is not fair that I got this aneurysm. Life is always thwarting me.
- „I have all my problems only because this new boss bullied me out of my leadership position.“
- Own examples?

# MAKE ACCEPTANCE EXPERIENTIAL



# YOU CAN DO IT IN THE CLINICAL CONVERSATION

„It seems like this topic is difficult for you. Can we slow down a little?“

„Would it be o.k. to get more aware what is touched when you say that?“

„Would you be willing to give this experience a few breaths to explore it?“



# OUR EMOTIONS CAN GIVE US GUIDANCE

We can get important information from our uncomfortable feelings:

„This is not o.k.!”

„Prepare well!”

„Ask for help!”

„Take care of yourself!” etc.

But don't forget: **you are the boss! You say where it goes.**



# ACCEPTING IS NATURAL

**Accepting means to allow the fluidity and flexibility of our experiences.**

**Accepting is like a flowing river.**

**Unwillingness is like a dam, it takes much more effort in the longterm.**

ACCEPTANCE EXERCISE: PUSH IT AWAY  
OR TAKE IT TO YOUR HEART

# ACCEPTANCE EXERCISE: PUSH IT AWAY OR TAKE IT TO YOUR HEART

- Please go back to the area in your life where it hurts but you don't stop.
- Please write on a piece of paper, what the most difficult feeling is for you in this area.
- Now you push this paper away with all your power, into your lap or against a wall. You do not want to have this feeling. Observe how this pushing feels in your body - notice how your breath goes.
- Notice where your attention is - how much can you be aware of your environment while you are pushing?
- And could you do something good for yourself, like getting a cup of tea, while you are pushing?
- For how long have you been pushing this feeling away? How would it be to continue this pushing for another couple of years?
- Now please try something new: take the piece of paper and hold it gently to your heart. Try it out.
- How does it feel? Notice your breathing. Is there a difference in your breathing? In your body? A difference in your attention? Could you go and get a cup of tea now and take care of yourself, holding that feeling to your heart? Or what else would you like to do now?
- May be you see now that you can choose, which action you want to continue - the pushing away or the gentle holding to your heart.

IS THERE A COMMITTED ACTION YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE ON IN YOUR OWN AREA?



pexels-arnie-watkins-3068266



pexels-mart-production-7699367

# BARRIERS AND PITFALLS

**„I cannot stand this feeling. When I allow it, it will be overwhelming.“**

Trust yourself, slow down, don't push. Allow. You can stop the process any time.

**"Accepting means that I give up."**

Acceptance is not resignation. It is a conscious, powerful action.

**„Acceptance means that I approve what happened.“**

It does not mean that you approve what happened. It means that you allow the impact, an experience has in your life.

# BARRIERS AND PITFALLS

**„I am not willing to accept this difficult feeling at all.“**

This is fine. Start exactly there. Accept that you are not willing to accept.

**„When I accept this feeling, I will finally get rid of it.“**

This is a pitfall. Your feelings will always come back and you can practice again.

SO WHY ACCEPT?  
IT ALLOWS US TO LIVE A LIFE THAT IS  
VALUABLE TO US!

