# Flexible Perspective taking: an experiential exercise for ACT therapists

This exercise requires some preparation with your client before launching into what tends to be a very emotional experience for clients. Ideally you will have already practiced some defusion so your client is somewhat familiar with how you work. This exercise is a different approach that may raise lots of mindy analysis initially wondering what the therapist is doing, why and what might happen in the process. Hence the importance of preparing you client for the possibility of uncomfortable emotions and body sensations unexpectedly showing up.

**Your mind’s private events**

Firstly take some time to seek your client’s consent to proceed with the exercise. Informed consent: you could say something like this………

*T: “Today I would like to try something different with you, it will involve you and me standing in the room and being willing to notice any unexpected thoughts, feelings and body sensations that show up during the exercise. I will guide you slowly and gently, is it okay we proceed with this?”*

Next, place several pieces of blank paper on the floor of your room:



**Standing in your mind**

*T: I would like you to imagine that these pieces of paper represent everything your mind is telling you, all the very private events you are experiencing in your mind right now. The analysis, judgements, self criticisms, what if’s, whatever is happening. Have you got that?”*

*“I now invite you to stand in your mind and see if you can get really involved in these thoughts, imagine you are being entangled in them like a fish being entangled in some fishing line, trying desperately to get away.”*



*Catch yourself in your chatter machine, drawing into the entanglement and just notice what that is like.*

*Notice your thoughts, feelings and sensation, have you felt like this before, what does it remind you of?*

Now slow down the pace to give your client breathing space, ask him to slow down and breathe, just breathe in this experience and notice. Give your client the space to do this, slowing yourself down is important so you can notice any tell tale signs of physical signs of discomfort that need to be defused even further.

*T:”What is happening now, what do you notice, I would really like to know what this is like for you being in the entanglement and where it keeps you?”*

**Standing Outside Your Mind**

Next ask your client to take a small step out of her mind.



“*Just step back from the chatter and watch”*

*“What is happening now, what do you notice?”*

Give your client time to be with whatever she is experiencing. Once again, slow down the pace to give your client breathing space, ask her to slow down and breathe, just to breathe in this experience and notice.

Take your time to unpack your client’s experience

**Stepping Even Further Back From Your Mind**

**“***Okay, now I would like you to step even further back from your mind and I wonder if you can imagine your are watching this play out as a movie or a play and you are in the audience observing.”*

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*“As you are in the audience, what do you notice?”*

*“What are you seeing as you watch you being one of the actors?”*

*Theatre is just a story, just like the story your mind tells you over and over. This story is an illusion of mindy language, keeping you stuck”*

*“Would you keep seeing the same play time after time and not be open to a different experience?”*

*“Would that get a bit boring after a while? Or would you like to experience other more exciting plays?”*

Give your client time to be with whatever she is experiencing. Once again, slow down the pace to give your client breathing space, ask her to slow down and breathe, just to breathe in this experience and notice.

**Take your time to unpack your client’s experience**

You might want to ask your client the following questions:

*“Could you look at your thoughts in another way and give them a sense of space?”*

*“What are the costs of entanglement for you and your life, the costs of your avoidance?*

*“If your struggles were solved, what would you be doing?*

*“Would you be willing to open up, expand out with all your feelings, sensation, thoughts and memories and begin to live the life you have been longing for?”*

**NOTE from Mary**

These are general guidelines for your practice. Part of being an ACT therapist is opening up to your creative self and take the risk to do something different. Be brave and bold in your practice.