

# Children & Context

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# Overview

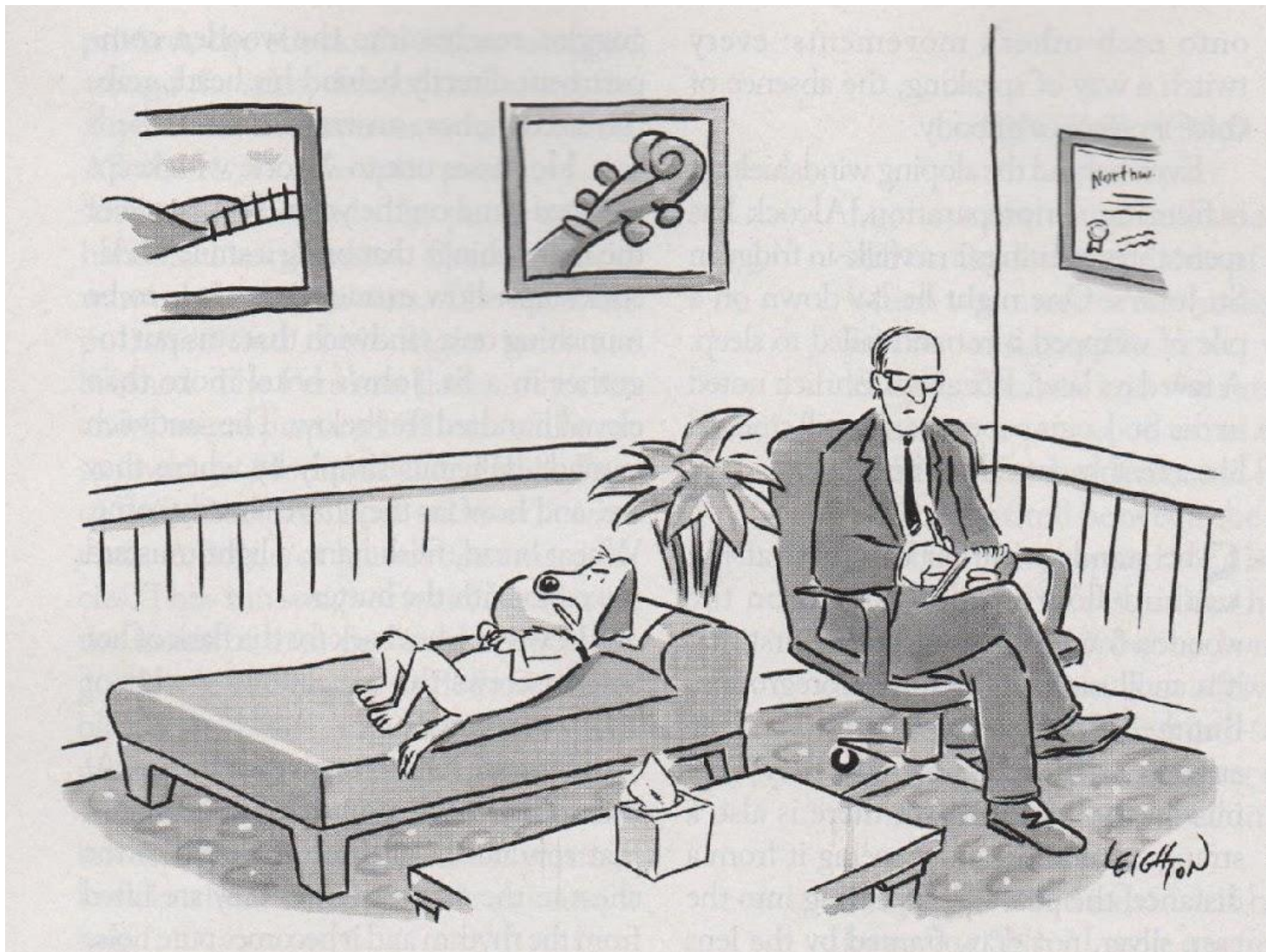
- The Action Heroes as a tool for use with children, family & school contexts
- Being flexible & creative
- The contexts of child development and of parent private events
- Some in-session 'speeches'



# Context Sensitivity

“The degree to which we notice and respond to the various elements of the context”

Villatte, Villatte, & Hayes. 2016. p. 383



“And then it hit me: I’m salivating  
over a  $\xi\#\!\mu\%$  *bell*”

# The Action Heroes

- You can find visuals of the Action Heroes at:
- [www.actionheroes.com.au](http://www.actionheroes.com.au)

*“My experience is what I  
agree to attend to”*

**William James**

*The Principles of Psychology*

1890

# Mindful Awareness: Switch On!

- Being in the present moment
- Flexibility & openness
- Not buying into judgments
- “Noticing” creates more openness
- Know your intention

# Switch On to...

- 5 senses
- Body
- Breath
- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Values
- Actions



# **The Defuser: Watch Your Thinking**

# Defusion with Children

- Kids will verbalise their thoughts as facts
- Validate feelings first
- Techniques that kids find useful:
  - Naming the story
  - Sing to a song, silly voice, animated/drawn
  - Leaves on stream
  - Therapist use of language – you & your mind
  - Defusion poems



# Typical Defusion Steps

- So when you are in a challenging situation, what does your Mind tell you?
- Write down on paper
- Name the story
- (Notice what comes up for you as therapist)
- Other ways we can play around with these thoughts
- Feedback on client reactions (you can laugh at these thoughts)

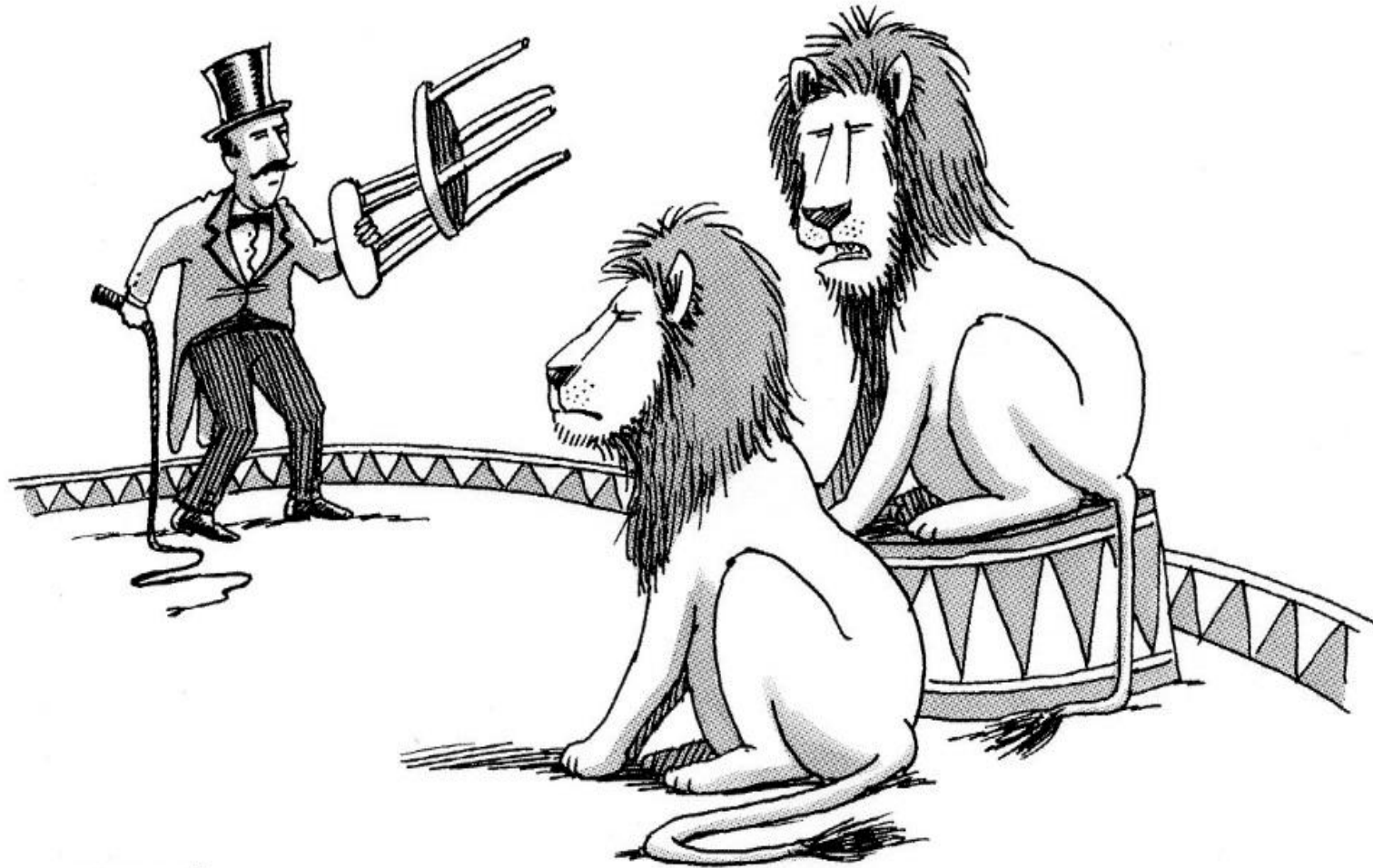
# **Exercise: Creating a Defusion Poem**

# An example poem

What if I hear loud alarms  
And see people waving their arms  
And fires burning on farms.  
It would make me not feel so calm.

But there are things that I could do,  
Like sit on the toilet and poo.  
I can tell myself something to make me feel better.  
I could write these thoughts down in a nice, funny letter.  
I could find something nice to hold  
As long as it's not too cold.  
I could find some paper to fold  
Or some really cool play dough to mould.

# Programming



J DATOR

*“Remind me- what’s scary about a chair?”*

# The Matt Smith Story



Matt Smith is a big, fat idiot

OK



# What if....?

OK

I can't stand this anymore

OK

An Example of 1-2-3

'I can't stand this'

Elaborating with 7-8-9

“I’m having one of those

‘I can’t stand this’

ideas right now”

# Acceptance

- “Good” & “bad” feelings
- Philosophy towards feelings
  - Avoidance → Acceptance
- We need to learn how to best manage our feelings in the short- and long-term
- Acceptance means approaching our feelings
- Metaphors:
  - blue brick; grey door; angry shoelace



# Emotion Regulation

- The client agenda – control it, get rid of it
- Where this fits within Acceptance concept.
- Teaching a repertoire of skills
  - Matched to emotional state
- Fitting skills within context of workability
  - What is the function of this action?
  - How well does this action meet the intended function?



# **Exercise: Feeling as Object**

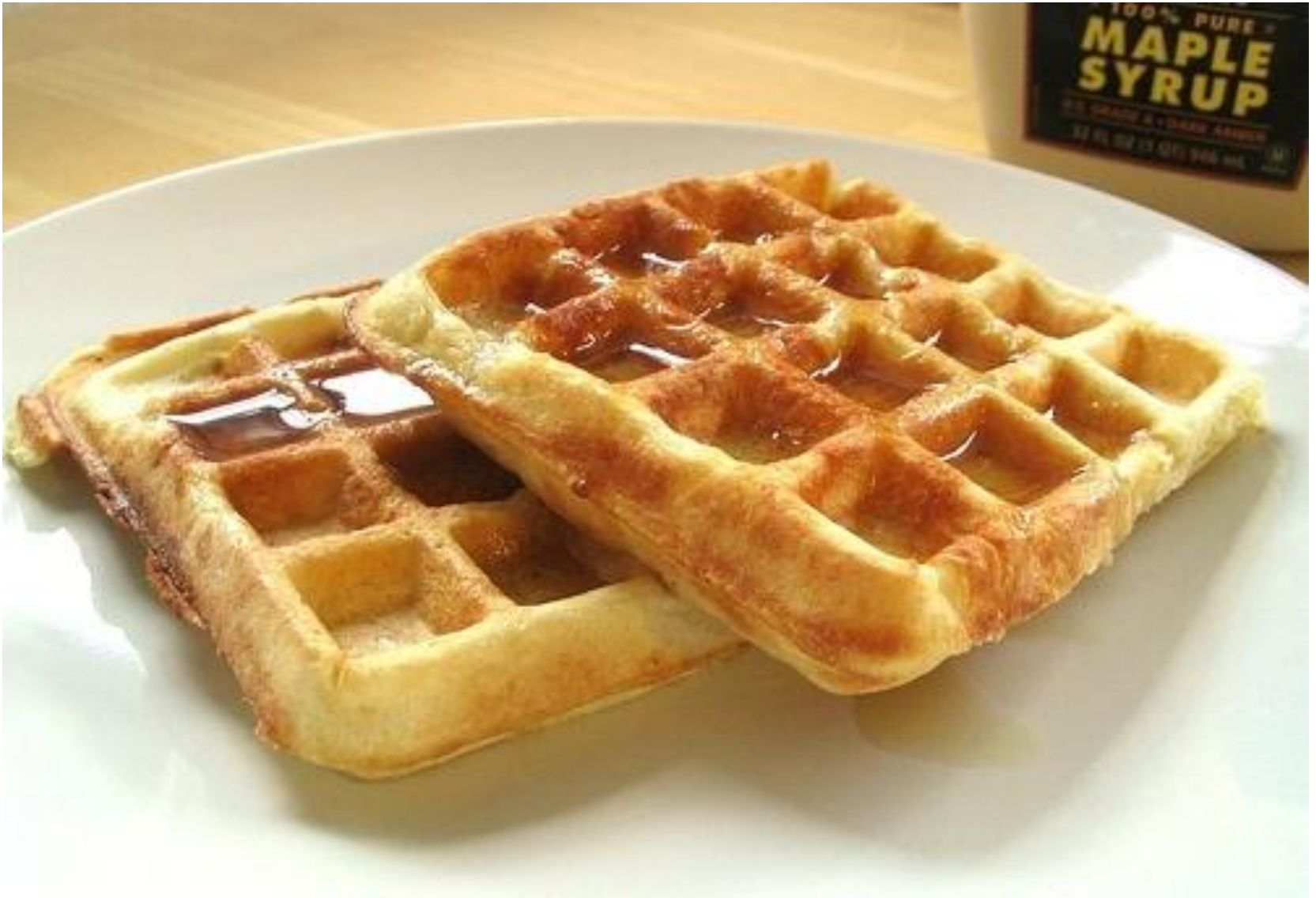
# Cognitive Development as Context

We are *born*  
psychologically inflexible

# Basic 4-year-old Thinking

- Egocentric
- Rigid
- Binary
- Literal
- Fused





Under stress  
*we all regress*

## Chronological Age



## Functional Age



Given this tendency to regression,  
the parent asks...

“Functionally, how old is my  
child at this moment?”

and

“How old *am I*?”



# So, in any challenging situation...

- What am I going to focus on (**attention**)?
- What action am I going to take (**intention**)?
- And, what's going to guide these decisions?

# Perspecta: Look Differently

- Person (I-You)
- Place (Here-There)
- Time (Then-Now)
- Self-map, drawing
- Naming the “You”

# Flexible Perspectives

- Can be subtly laced throughout our language
- Notice that you are noticing (observer self)
- You are more than just...
- The self map
- The function of self-definitions
- How can we bring one self into a different context?
- Can bring in Self-compassion



# Sensitivity to Inner and Outer Contextual Cues: S.O.B.E.R. Parenting

- Stop
- Observe
- Breathe
- Expand
- Respond

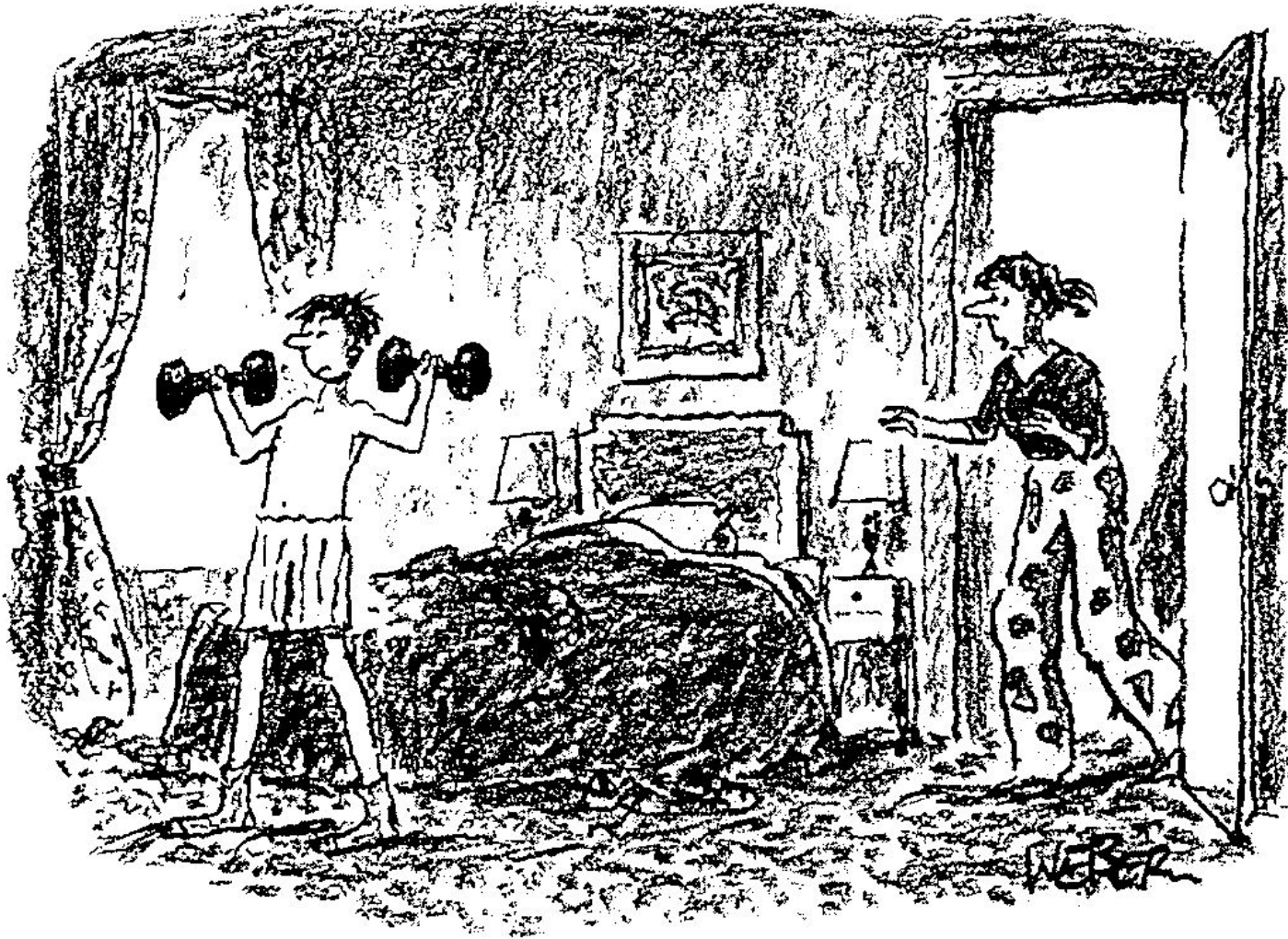
# Sensitivity to Inner and Outer Contextual Cues: S.O.B.E.R. Parenting

- Stop
- Observe
- Breathe
- Expand or Contract
- Respond

# Sensitivity to Inner and Outer Contextual Cues: S.O.B.E.R. Parenting

- Stop
- Observe
- Breathe
- *Elaborate*
- Respond

Tolerance

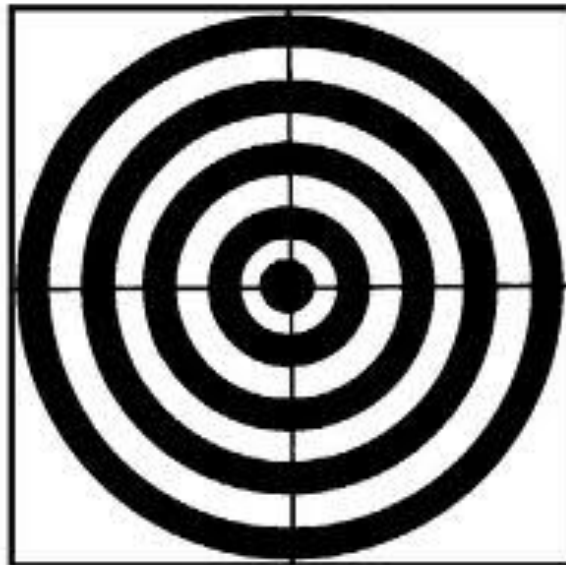


“Let me help you, Dear”



# Values: Know what Matters

- Values = repeated patterns of behaviour
- Values identification (bulls eye)
- The consistency of our behaviour
- Over-investment in a value



# Values

- Moving towards vs. moving away
- Thoughts/Feelings vs. Values
- How do children relate to concept?
- Once “free”, then values guide our decisions to act
- Mind-reading machine, the speech, three wishes, spending lottery winnings



# Exercise: Values

# Context Sensitivity and Committed Action

Choices

&

Decisions



“Kid, you’re gonna have to make a choice”

# Commitment, Acceptance, and Willingness: Two Sides of the Same Coin

To Be A Good  
Teammate

Effort, Anxiety,  
Frustration,  
Conscientiousness,  
Sacrifice

# Commitment, Acceptance, and Willingness: Two Sides of the Same Coin

To Be A Good  
Parent

Effort, Anxiety,  
Frustration,  
Conscientiousness,  
Sacrifice

# Commitment, Acceptance, and Willingness:

*It's Your Turn*

My Valued Goal  
or a Value Itself

Unwanted  
thoughts, feelings,  
bodily sensations,  
memories



# Values and Action

Do What Matters!

- Understand your own behaviour
- Values, goals & actions
- Values in the present moment
- Values as decision making guides

# Committed Action

- Integrated into the ACT Matrix
- Behaviour analysis
- Workability
- Problem solving & skills required
- Identifying & overcoming barriers
- Action plans
- Tracking consequences



# Knowing when to use which process

- Where are you in your hexaflex?
- Be open to the present moment
- What language is client using?
- Defuse from right or wrong
- Notice symbolism, metaphor potential
- Use a metaphor
- Check with client



# Some In-session Speeches

- My job is...
- I'm not here to tell you what to do...
- It's all because you care...
- Do you like acronyms?
- There are 3 main ways we rigidly try to deal with anxiety – distract, avoid, control. Fits with tolerance.



# Thank you!

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