

The ACT of Self Forgiveness: and the adult experience of Adverse Childhood Events

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Self-forgiveness has been demonstrated to be beneficial for both psychological and social wellbeing. RFT and ACT reveals that language in and of itself creates suffering and attendant struggle with burdens of shame, guilt, remorse, and regret.

Research into Adverse Childhood Events indicates that high rates of Morbidity and Mortality in adults - with the loss of up to 20 years of possible life years are associated with the experience of 6 adverse events abuse (emotional, physical, sexual); witnessing domestic violence; parental separation or divorce; and growing up in a household where members were mentally ill, substance abusers, or sent to prison, neglect and community violence.

These phenomena may be more widespread than suspected.

Struggle with exposure to such events creates the internal arena in which self-blame flourishes, and further self-loathing and self-disgust. This may also provide a place of opportunity to develop effective responses regarding self-forgiveness.

This workshop is designed to demonstrate a, novel approach to self-forgiveness focused on intrapersonal transgressions against the self in the context of unworkable responses to life events. The therapeutic approach describes seven principles which include: identification of the burden; taking a transcendent perspective; identification of personal values and identification transgressions against those values; ACT therapeutic responses; granting self-forgiveness; putting values into action; making an ongoing commitment to self-forgiveness.

Participants will be provided with a principles-based framework, promoting self-forgiveness to clients and possible client populations which may be beneficial recipients of targeted therapy.

Educational Objectives:

1. To provide a basic introduction to:
 - a. Adverse Childhood Events – International Questionnaire
 - b. Identify the Importance of ACE to Morbidity and Mortality
 - c. Self- forgiveness for intrapersonal offence and responses to Adult Experience of ACE

2. Analyze a novel approach to self-forgiveness focused on intrapersonal transgressions against the self.

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3. Describe the therapeutic approach and its seven principles which include: identification of the burden; taking a transcendent perspective; identification of personal values and identification transgressions against those values; ACT therapeutic responses; granting self-forgiveness; putting values into action; making an ongoing commitment to self-forgiveness.
4. Explain a principles-based framework, promoting self-forgiveness to clients and possible client populations which may be beneficial recipients of targeted therapy for Adverse Childhood Events.

Participation and Privacy

Participation in the exercises of this workshop is purely voluntary.

Content of your writing/reflections do not need or have to be shared within the workshop.

If you and others do share reflections please maintain the confidentiality of that content.

You are free to ask questions at any point in the workshop or after .

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The ACT of Self Forgiveness - Seven Principles

Step	Content
1. Identification of Transgression	Developing a clear identification of the transgression and its context and subsequent burdens – how did we act in a way that was not consistent with our values, how do we now respond and take responsibility. To what extent do we experience shame, guilt, self-blame, remorse? Identify common actions in response to getting in contact with this offence – avoidance, withdrawal, unworkable action.
2. Taking Perspective	Perspective taking exercises Mindfulness, Awareness, Development of Compassionate presence. Developing Openness, Presence, Acceptance, and Lightness in response to our experience
3. Values and pathways	Values Inventory Identifying to what extent the transgression contravened our values Understanding the process of contact with painful experiences and the need for a values-based perspective and response Understanding the context of the transgression
4. Getting unstuck	Utilising ACT to get unstuck Understanding and addressing Shame, Guilt, Regret, Remorse Revisit Perspective taking. Use ACT Matrix Get in touch with here and now Identify how painful experiences can be used to highlight and clarify values Identify pathways of Acceptance and Willingness in taking responsibility Determine how to become more open to experiences Identify pathways for values-based action
5. Granting Self-Forgiveness	Mindful approaches to acceptance of self-forgiveness How would you take a perspective that helps normalise the transgression and its effects? Development of Compassionate presence, Self-acceptance and Self-respect – how would you treat your best friend and wounded stranger.... How would you respond to the child within how would the child respond to you? Identify how you would coach yourself to respond differently if the situation reoccurred Identify alternate pathways Identify targets for restoration, repair, and renewal
6. Action plan	Identifying Values based pathways for Self-forgiveness Development of Choice points for future situations which involve: Same contexts or repeated private events Establish alternate pathways - taking workable action Develop SMART goals for values-based action toward restoration, reparation and renewal Utilise expressive writing to assist in the development and maintenance of values in action.
7 Commitment to Self-Forgiveness	Make a commitment to bring it all together for continued process of renewal and relapse prevention.

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Work Sheet 1

Principle 1 Identifying our burdens

Lean into distress and discover the values within....

Exercise 1:

Lean into an important artefact of your life that is perhaps older than 18 months
If that artefact has emotional power - allow that experience and make room for it
Describe it to yourself - its Impact, Thoughts, Images, Emotions, Bodily Sensations
Now take some time to write out this experience
Allow space for discomfort while you do this

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2 Taking Perspective

Meditative Practice

- Openness: Bring curiosity and interest to our experience
- Presence: Lean into our experiences with compassion
- Acceptance: Give unconditional positive regard to ourselves
- Light: Shine a light in our darkness, and lighten the burden

To understand and respond to: Remorse Regret Guilt Shame Self Loathing Self Disgust

Reflection

How would you take a perspective that helps to understand:

- who you were at the time of the transgression/distress
- what your intentions were, and,
- the unintended effects of your actions and reactions

What values are hidden in the struggle and pain?

How might perspective transform this experience?

Use of relational frames

From where else can I view this?	Topographical
Past present future view?	Temporal
How is this like that?	Coordination
How does this cause that?	Contingency/Causality
Is this better or worse than that?	Evaluative
How does this fit contribute, build on that?	Hierarchical

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Exercise 2 Your Work

Now reflect on the experience you have identified

Consider some alternate perspectives

Lean into and be present with thoughts, feeling bodily sensations that arise

Consider how these perspectives and experiences might reveal and inform your values

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3 Values and Pathways

- Understand the context of the experience
- Identify to what extent your response to this contravened our values
- Understand that the process of contact with painful experiences needs a values-based perspective

Make a Values inventory -e.g.

Assertiveness to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want

Authenticity to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself

Compassion to act with kindness towards those who are suffering

Courage to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty

Freedom to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise

Friendliness to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others

Honesty to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others

Love to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others

Mindfulness to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience

Trust to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable

Acknowledgement of values allows us to:

- Provide a values-based explanation of our behaviours and responses
- Identify how we may be conflicted in our values and behaviors
- How we may have ignored our values, or, recognize our avoidances and excuses
- Admit and take genuine responsibility
- Provide a validation of our concern regarding the consequences

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Discomfort	Emotion	Values based Need
I have done something that I need to respond to	Remorse	to respond to "X"
I do not like an action/circumstance/experience	Regret	to understand my regret
I shift responsibility for "X" to my "self"	Self-blame	to take appropriate responsibility
I have broken something	Guilt	to restore "X"
I am broken	Shame	to restore myself
I intensely dislike or hate myself	Self-loathing	to be Self Accepting Self Compassionate
I find myself revolting and repulsive	Self-disgust	to understand and heal what sickens me

Exercise 3 Your Work**Using Values to lean into Darkness**

Consider your discomfort and what it reveals about your values

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4 Getting unstuck

ACT moves:

Present Moment Take time to get in touch with what is going on right here and now

Take notice of your breath for 3-5 minutes

Values Identify your key values, How could you live more in line with them

Have you neglected anything that is important for things that are not important?

Defusion on your stories/hot thought

As you go about your day be mindful of those thoughts which are unworkable

Practice transforming those things that capture you

The Observant Self

Meditate on observing your internal experience without getting bound up

Transcendent Perspective exercises –

How is this like or not like that? How would another person view this?

How would you see this in five years? How does this build on or subtract from your values?

Acceptance/Willingness

Make room for uncomfortable thoughts feelings sensations

Committed action

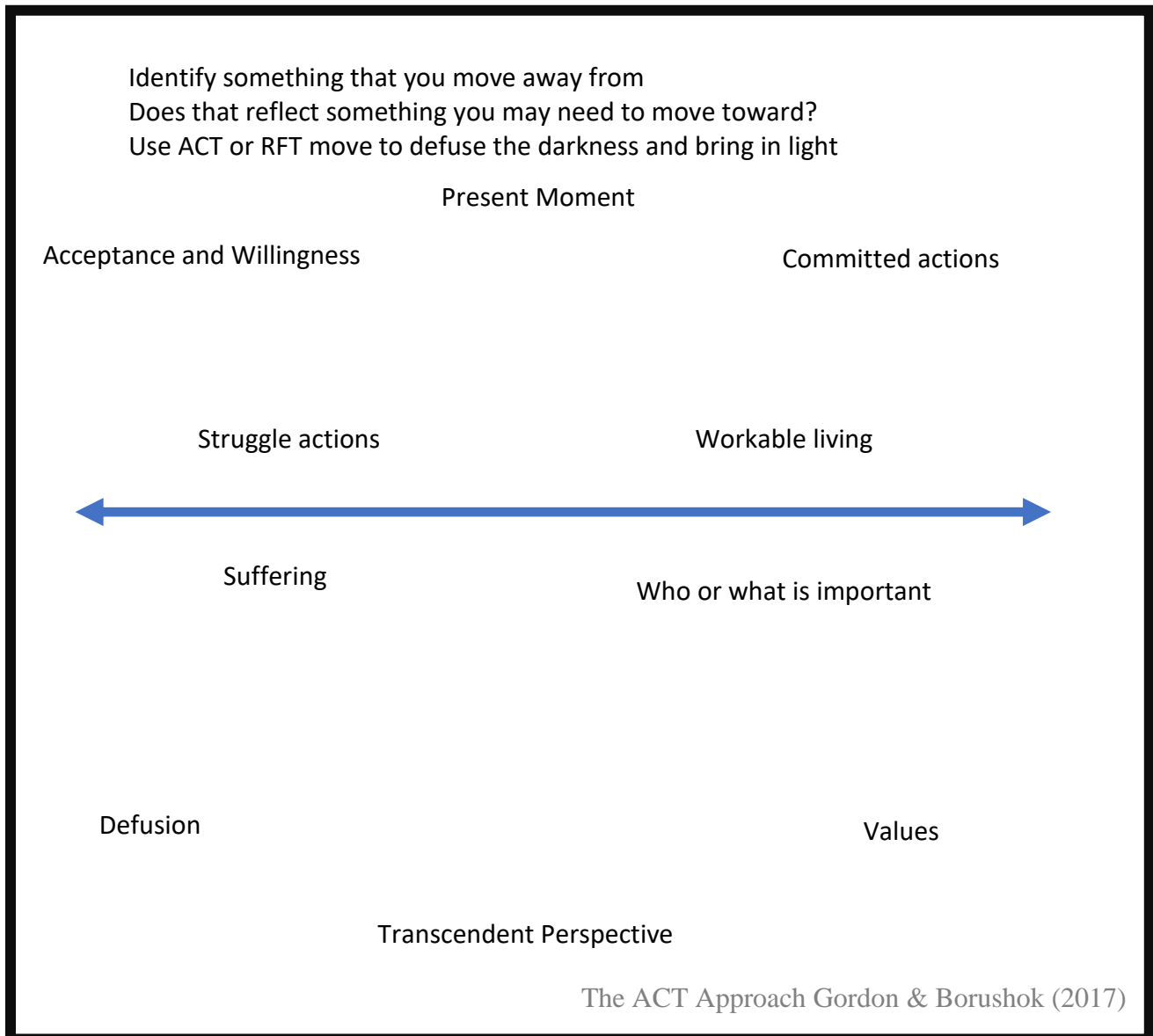
Take action to live out your values in one key area today

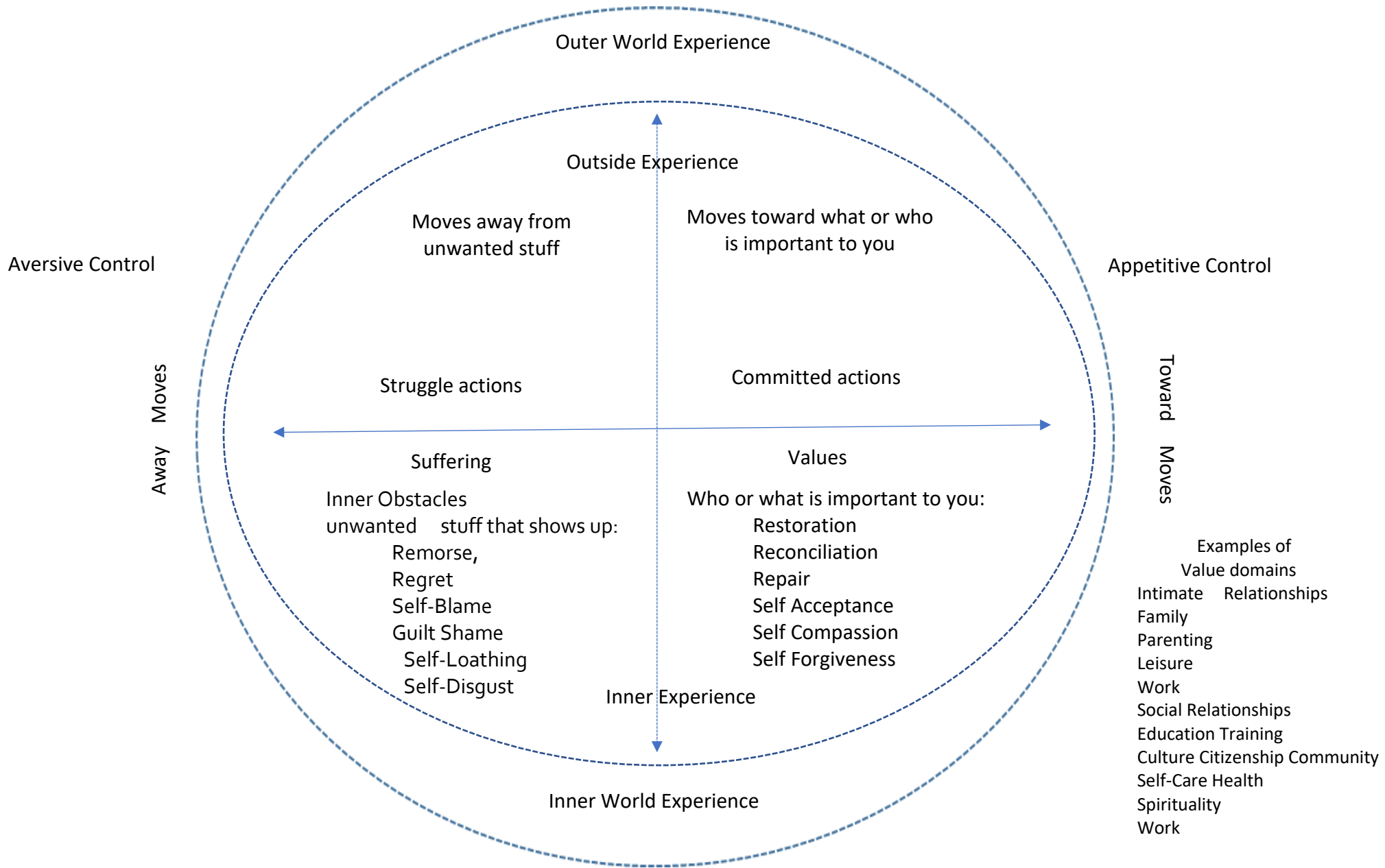
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Getting unstuck Utilizing the ACT Matrix...

- Notice how inner world experiences relate to outer world behaviors
- Describe moves away and moves towards
- Identify Values vs Stuff that gets in the way
- Explore how painful experiences (moves away) can also be used to highlight and clarify values
- Reveal pathways for valued and committed action (moves toward)
- Use Relational frames to understand experiences within oneself

Exercise 4 Your Work





(Gordon & Borushok 2017, Wilson, Polk, & Schoendorff, 2014)

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5 Granting Self-Forgiveness

How would you speak to a child who was hurt and who needed support and guidance?

How do you speak to yourself ?

Consider why you have punished yourself.....

Consider the usefulness of forgiving yourself.....

Exercise 5a Your Work

Identify the critic – allow them to speak

Identify the person being criticised - allow them to speak

What do both really want?

Allow room for understanding mediation and reconciliation

Make room for Self-Forgiveness

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Having compassionately:

- Identified our responses to our experiences
- Taken perspective on experiences of Remorse Regret Guilt Shame Self Loathing Self Disgust
- Acknowledged effects and harms
- Taken responsibility for behaviours that don't work
- Reviewed our values
- Developed and made room for workable perspectives

We then start the journey of values-based self-forgiveness

- confirmed by active responses to our distress and our goals

Exercise 5b Your Work

How might you bring self-forgiveness to the context of your life experience?

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6 Creating an Action plan

Respond to discoveries...

Consider the work of Restitution, Renewal, Recovery, Reconciliation

The Use of Expressive Writing

- Describe, and make room for responses to adverse events
- Put aside for a while
- Then come back and take a values based perspective

The work of self-forgiveness includes:

- Ongoing affirmation through self-compassion, self-acceptance and self-worth
- Committed action that acknowledges self-discovery
- Taking consistent steps that move towards values
- Apply the ACT Matrix for self-forgiveness to daily experience
- Develop SMART goals for values based action for restitution, restoration, repair and renewal.....

What can I specifically do?

How do I measure it?

Is it achievable?

How is it relevant?

By what time?

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Exercise 6 Your Work

Self-Forgiveness in Action

Reflecting on the work you have done:

What is something you can focus on from today's work that you can take into your valued future ?

Dropping a burden?

Transforming an experience?

Bringing light to darkness?

Doing what you value?

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An ongoing commitment to self-forgiveness

- A new sense of ourselves can bring a danger of overwhelming regret ... *why did I not do this years ago ... ?*
- New challenges, new responsibilities, new discoveries will require new responses ...

Revisit principles ...

1. Identify our transgression
2. Take Perspective
3. Revisit our values
4. Get Unstuck
5. Grant ourselves Forgiveness
6. Values for Action
7. Make a commitment to ongoing Self Forgiveness

Cultivating a forgiving internal dialogue

- Use Expressive writing
- Continue to develop a compassionate presence, self-acceptance and self-respect
- Accepting that things are what they are and being willing to find a way through
- Coach yourself to respond to yourself with values-based self-forgiveness that helps you live a flexible and responsive life

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Exercise 7 Your Work

Review your life goals

Journal your expressive writing to create a space to develop wisdom

Continue to develop choice points for future situations which involve the same contexts or experiences

Establish alternate pathways to deal with reminders and experiences

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Self-Forgiveness as the Hero's Journey

