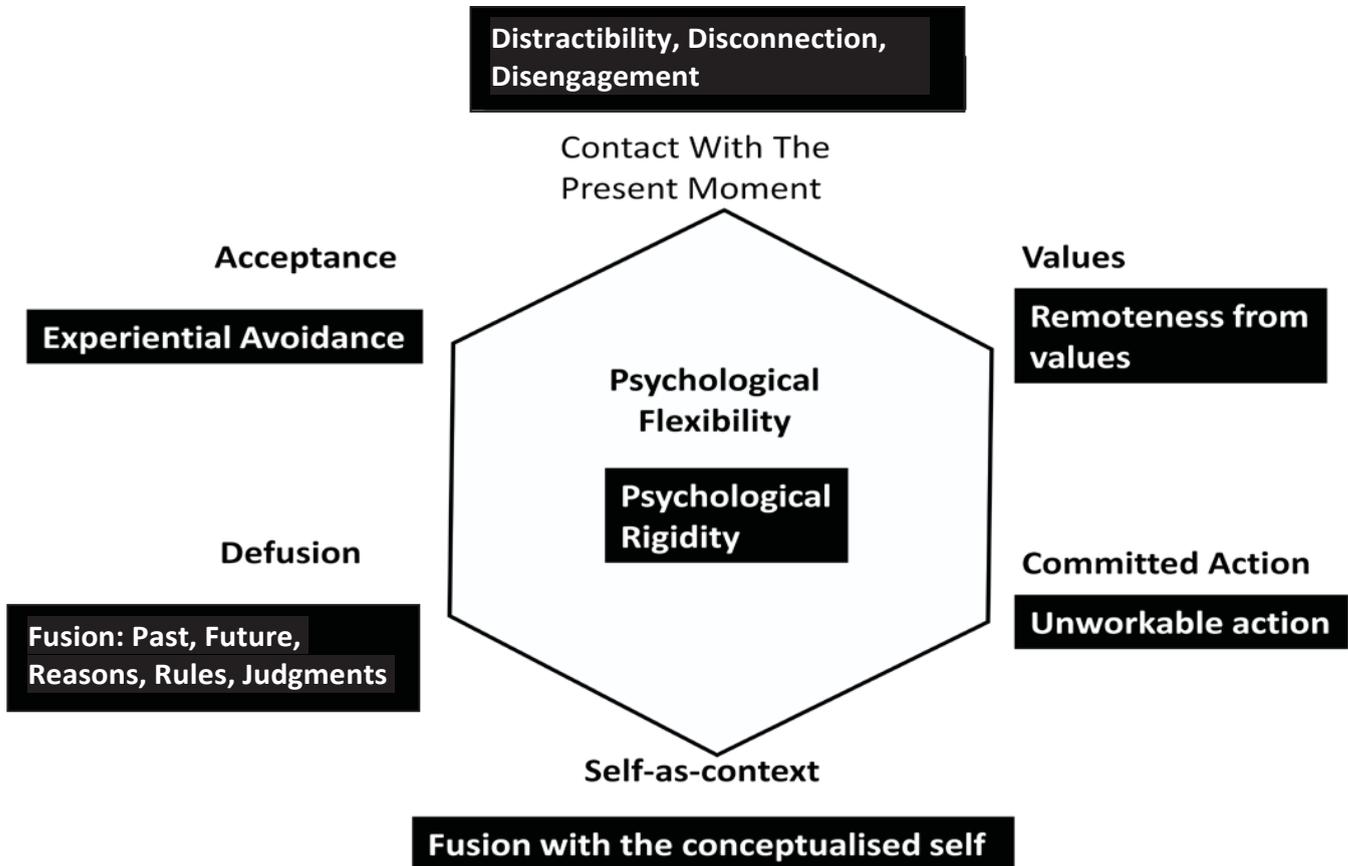


Russ Harris: ACT Training Part 1

www.actmindfully.com.au



Psychological flexibility has two 'strands':

- The ability to be psychologically present and open to experience
- The ability to take effective, values-guided action

The aim of the ACT practitioner:

- The aim of the ACT practitioner is to *model, instigate and reinforce psychological flexibility*

ACT therapists/coaches are primarily doing one of two things:

- Developing psychological flexibility in the moment with the client
- Working to get there - developing an alliance where this can occur or supporting practice outside the room.

What does the client describe as the main problem(s)?

What does the client want from therapy/coaching?

Emotional Goals: What thoughts, images, feelings, emotions, sensations, memories, urges, would he like to have less of? (**NB: We can reframe these as behavioural goals: "So part of our work here is learning new skills to handle these difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively, so they have less impact and influence over you" **)

Behavioural Goals: What would the client like to stop/start; do more/less of? How would he like to treat himself, others, the world, differently? What activities/skills would she like to start, resume, develop? What people, places, events, activities, challenges, would he like to approach rather than avoid? What relationships does she want to improve, and how? What life problems does he want to work on solving?

EXTERNAL BARRIERS. Are there any external barriers (as opposed to psychological barriers) to a rich and full life - e.g. legal, social, medical, financial, occupational problems that require problem solving and/or skills training?

UNWORKABLE ACTION

What is the client doing that makes life worse, or keeps her stuck, worsens problems, inhibits growth, prevents healthy solutions, impairs health, damages relationships etc? (What would we see and/or hear on a video?)

What IMPORTANT or MEANINGFUL people, places, events, activities, situations, goals, problems and challenges is the client avoiding or escaping (e.g. withdrawing from, quitting, procrastinating, giving up on, or staying away from)?

FUSION: (Include examples of specific thoughts, as well as of processes such as 'worrying', etc.)

PAST & FUTURE: (rumination, worrying, fantasizing, blaming, predicting the worst, reliving old hurts, idealizing the past or the future, flashbacks, 'if only ...', why did it happen?, catastrophizing, resentment, regrets etc.)

SELF-DESCRIPTION: (self-judgments, self-limiting ideas about 'who I am' or 'what I can and can't do', self-labels)

REASONS: (reasons the client gives for why she can't, won't or shouldn't change, or why his life can't be improved)

RULES: (about how myself, others, life should be: look for key words such as: 'should', 'have to', 'must', 'ought', 'right', 'wrong', 'always', 'never', 'can't because', 'won't until', 'shouldn't unless' etc.)

JUDGMENTS: (mostly these will be negative, but sometimes positive; may be about anyone or anything: other people, oneself, one's job, one's body, one's thoughts and feelings, the past, the future, or even life itself)

OTHER:

EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE: (Private experiences the client is trying to avoid, get rid of, or is unwilling to have)
THOUGHTS, IMAGES, MEMORIES, EMOTIONS, FEELINGS, SENSATIONS, URGES, CRAVINGS, WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS:

LOSS OF CONTACTING THE PRESENT MOMENT:
The 4 Ds: Distractibility, Disengagement, Dissociation, Dysregulation (emotional)?

VALUES & COMMITTED ACTION
IMPORTANT LIFE DOMAINS: (What life domains and what people does the client care about: e.g. work, study, health, parenting, marriage or other intimate relationship, friends, family, spirituality, community, environment)?

VALUES: (What values seem important within those domains?)

GOALS & ACTIONS: (What values-congruent goals and activities does the client: a) already have; and b) want to pursue? What issues require problem-solving and action planning?)

SKILLS-TRAINING: (What important skills does the client lack or fail to use e.g. problem solving, goal setting, self-soothing, assertiveness, communication, conflict resolution, relaxation, empathy?)

RESOURCES: (Strengths, skills and other personal resources? External resources that can potentially be accessed?)

MY PERSONAL BARRIERS: (What difficult thoughts and feelings show up for me, regarding this client?)

BRAINSTORM: What questions, exercises, worksheets, metaphors, tools, techniques and strategies can I use in the next session? What skills-training may be required? Is values-based problem-solving required for external barriers?

Establish *behavioural goals* for therapy:

- Emotional goals = how I want to feel (or not feel)
- Outcome goals = what I want to have or get (or get rid of)
- Behavioural goals = what I want **to do**
- ASAP – ideally the first session – establish behavioural goals
- A simple way: ‘towards moves’ on the choice point

Behavioural goals = ‘doing goals’ = what you want *to do*

Q: If the work we do here is successful, then ...

- What will you **do differently**?
- What will you start/stop, do more/less?
- How will you treat yourself, others, the world differently?
- What people, places, events, activities, challenges, will you approach, start, resume or contact - rather than avoid, withdraw, quit, or stay away from?

2 Questions We Dance Between:

A: What valued direction does the client want to move in?

B: What is getting in the way?

A: What sort of life do you want to build?

- Values clarification
- Goal setting
- Action planning
- Problem solving
- Skills training
- Exposure

B: What’s getting in the way?

- Dissociation, distractibility, dysregulation, disengagement => Contacting the present moment
- Fusion => Defusion
- Experiential Avoidance => Acceptance

Where to start in ACT?

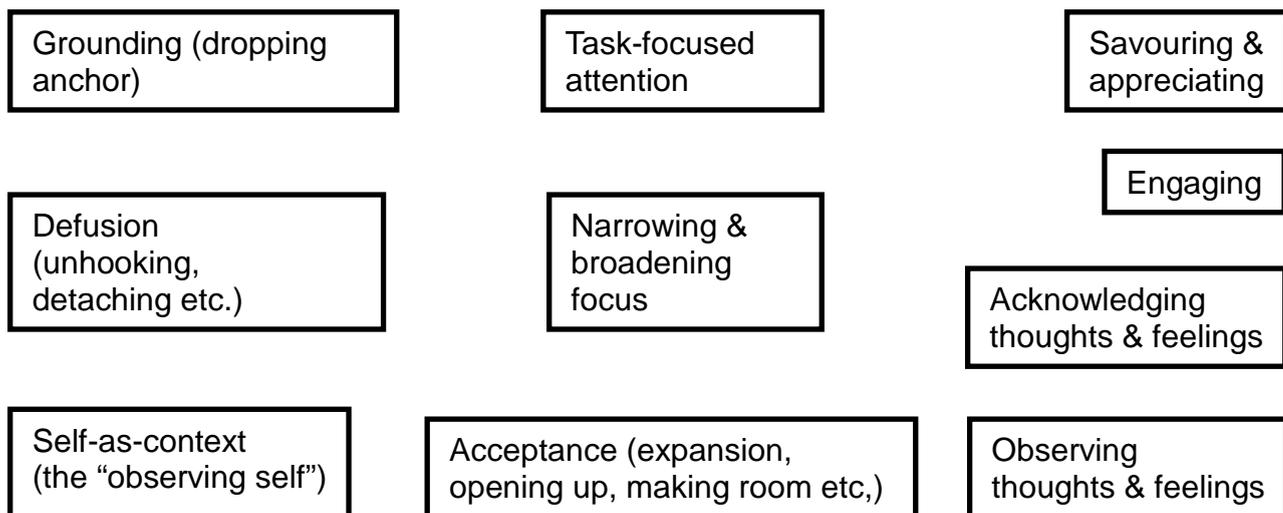
- Most protocols start either from A or from B above
- For clients overwhelmed by thoughts & feelings (extreme fusion, dissociative states, flashbacks, emotional dysregulation, panic attacks etc.): start with grounding (dropping anchor)
- For major grief/loss: self-compassion
- For the poorly motivated: values & defusion from hopelessness
- For clients fixated on feeling good and avoiding pain: “creative hopelessness”

The Challenge Formula

3 approaches to any challenging situation:

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

The MINDFULNESS Toolbox



Setting Up Your Sessions

1. Informed consent
2. Press pause
3. Teamwork
4. Freedom to say no
5. Framing client issues in ACT terms
6. Establishing behavioural goals

Ways to use the choice point:

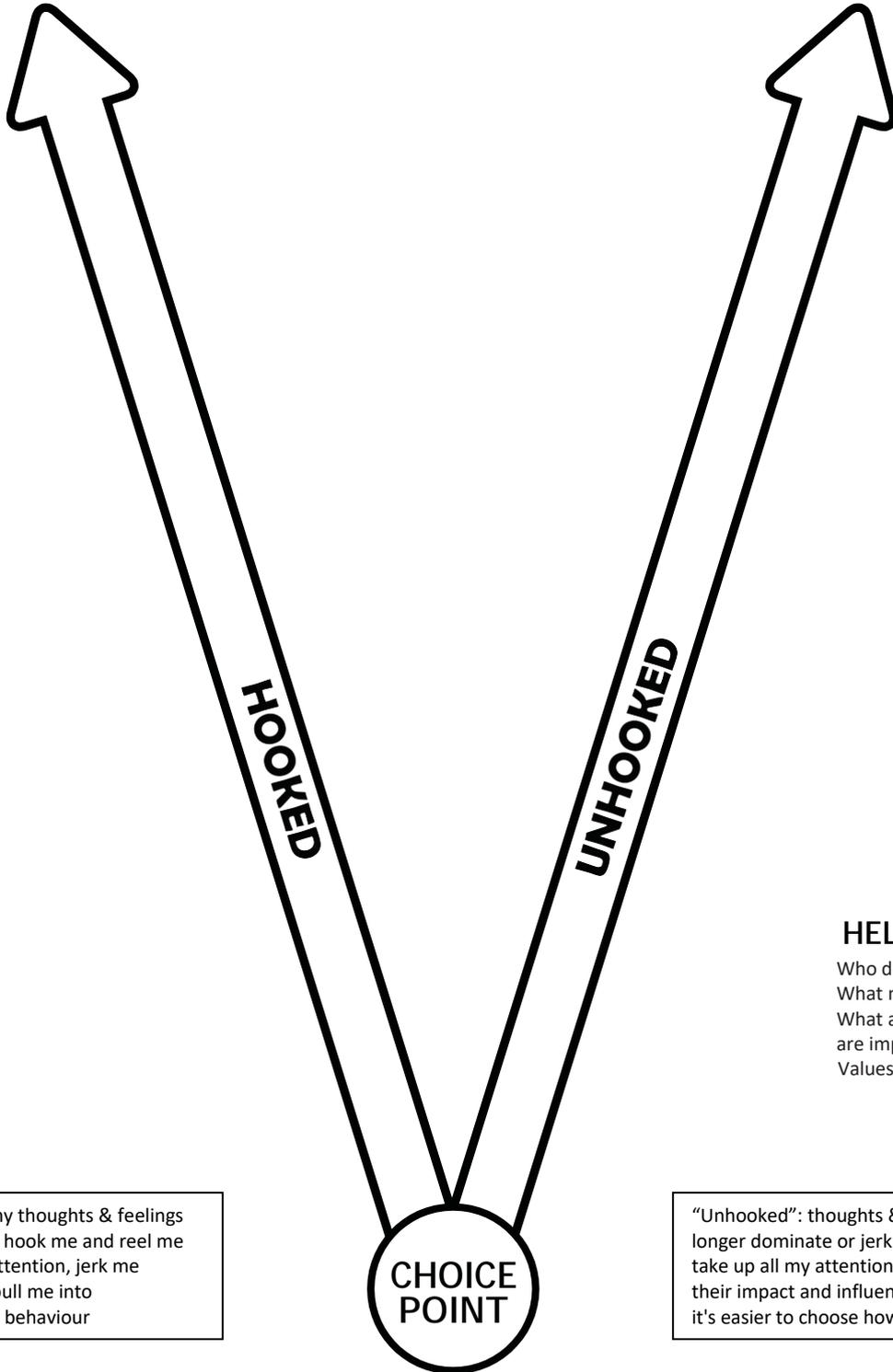
- History-taking: frame client issues in ACT terms
 - Explain the ACT model
 - Build self-awareness
 - Clarify values, set goals, create action plans
 - Problem-solving
 - Start point for "unhooking skills" (defusion, acceptance, present moment, self-as-context)
 - Summarise a session
 - Set homework
- For a 'snapshot' of several or many problems/issues: broad, general overview
- To focus in on one problem/issue: specific, narrow focus

AWAY

TOWARDS

Acting ineffectively,
behaving unlike the
sort of person you
want to be.

Acting effectively,
behaving like the
sort of person you
want to be.



HOOKED

UNHOOKED

**CHOICE
POINT**

Situation(s)
Thoughts & Feelings

HELPERS

Who do you care about?
What matters to you?
What activities and areas of life
are important?
Values, Goals, Strengths, Skills.

“Hooked” means my thoughts & feelings
dominate me; they hook me and reel me
in; take up all my attention, jerk me
around, push and pull me into
ineffective types of behaviour

“Unhooked”: thoughts & feelings no
longer dominate or jerk me around or
take up all my attention. They lose
their impact and influence over me, so
it's easier to choose how I behave.

Informed Consent

- The name “acceptance and commitment therapy” reflects a key message: accept what is out of your personal control, and commit to action that improves your life
- It’s a very active form of therapy/coaching. It’s not just talking about your problems and feelings. Our aim here is to work together as a team, to help you be the sort of person you want to be and build the sort of life you want to live.
- Part of this approach involves learning skills to handle difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively, so they have less impact and influence over you. When we introduce these skills, I’ll ask you to practice them between sessions. You don’t have to do that, of course; but it’s like learning to play a guitar or drive a car: the more practice you do, the better you get.
- ACT also involves clarifying your values: finding out what matters to you, what you want to stand for in life, what strengths and qualities you want to develop, how you want to treat yourself and others.
- It also involves taking action to solve your problems, and do things that make life better.
- I want you to leave here after each session with an action plan: something practical to take away and use to actively improve your life.

Consider adding:

- At times, therapy may seem like a roller-coaster ride; but I’ll be there in the roller coaster car with you.
- I will ask you at times to try new things that may pull you out of your comfort zone – like learning new skills to handle difficult thoughts and feelings - but you never have to do them. You are always free to say no to anything I suggest.

“Press Pause”

(This isn’t essential, but I highly recommend you run through this on your first session, because it will give you a very powerful way to interrupt problematic behaviour and reinforce workable behaviour as it arises in session.)

- 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, in terms of dealing with your problems and improving your life, I can just slow the session down and get you to really notice what you are doing?
- For example, I may ask you to pause or slow down, take a couple of breaths, notice what you’re thinking or feeling or saying or doing. That way, you’ll be able to see more clearly what you’re doing, and we can look at ways you can use it outside of this room. Is that okay?
- And can I also “press pause” if I see you doing something that looks like it may be contributing to your problems or making it worse – so we can address it?
- And of course, this goes both ways – you can also “press pause” on me, any time you like.

Teamwork

- The idea here is that you and I are a team, working together, to help you build a better life.

If there is any sign of conflict or tension or opposition, we can then check with the client: Can I just check we are still a team here? We are working together, as a team, with the same aim: to help you build a better life? I’m asking because it doesn’t feel to me like we are. Can we have a look at what’s getting in the way of us working together more effectively?

“Cognitive Fusion” means ...

Our cognitions dominate our *overt or covert* behaviour in a way that is **problematic**

Technically:

“Fusion” means that in response to this cognition, behaviour is so rigid/inflexible that it becomes problematic

“Defusion” means that in response to this cognition, behaviour is flexible.

Layman’s terms: hooked and unhooked

These are not “all-or-nothing” responses.

Can think of them as scales of 0-10 or 0-100

2 Main Presentations of Fusion (or “Getting Hooked”):

- Cognitions dominate our physical actions (overt behaviour) in problematic ways
- Cognitions dominate our psychological actions (covert behaviour) in problematic ways

Three Stages/Steps of Defusion

There is not a fixed sequence or number of steps/stages in defusion, but all defusion techniques begin with #1 below (noticing), and most of them combine this with #2 (naming):

1. Notice

Basic first step in any type of mindfulness skill or practice: notice what cognitions are present. (Notice what you’re thinking/ what your mind is doing/ what thoughts are popping up, etc.) All defusion techniques start with this step.

2. Name

Naming the cognitive process that you have just noticed is usually the second step in defusion. Naming can be simple e.g. “thinking”, “worrying”. It can be playful e.g. “the not good enough story’. It can be self-referential e.g. ‘I’m having the thought that’ or ‘I notice I’m having the thought that’. And it’s often useful to add in words/phrases like “Aha!”, “Here it is again”, “I know this one”.

3. Neutralise

Many defusion techniques include a step that I call ‘neutralising’ (not an official ACT term). This means you put your thoughts into a new context that ‘neutralises’ their influence (‘disarms’ them). The simplest step in ‘neutralising’ is to look at the thought in terms of workability: if you act on this thought/ let it guide you ... will it take you towards or away the life you want/ the bull’s eye/your goal?

Neutralising can also involve any combination of the following strategies:

- Observe the thought as if it is an object
E.g. notice the words/imagery it contains; notice its size and location; notice it coming and going – its movement, speed, direction
- Describe the thought:
Non-judgmentally describe the nature/properties of the thought in terms of the words/imagery it contains; and/or the size, location, movement, speed, direction; and/or other symbolic properties (e.g. ‘hot thoughts’, ‘sticky thoughts’)
- “Play” with the “properties” of the thought; play with its ...
visual properties – shape, size, colour, texture, solidity, lighting
auditory properties – volume, speed, voice, tone, pitch, music
kinaesthetic properties – position, movement, direction, speed
- “Symbolise” the thought:
Write it out, draw it, paint it, sculpt it in modelling clay, dance it, act it out, mime it

Workability & Defusion

- If you let this thought guide you, where does it take you?
- When you let this thought push you around: Do you act like the person you want to be? Do you do the things you want to do?
- When you get hooked by this thought, what happens?
- When you let this thought advise you, do you tend to do towards or away moves?

Defusion = Flexible Responding

Defusion techniques all serve the same purpose; to help us **respond to the thought more flexibly**

We learn to:

- Step out of the content of the thought (it's not about true/false/positive/negative)
- Stop fighting with or trying to avoid the thought (it's not a threat or obstacle)
- Stop obeying the thought (it's not a command or law we have to follow)

Instead, we pay attention to the thought with:

- Curiosity: We see it for what it is - words and pictures
- Openness: We explore whether it's helpful or not
- Flexibility: If it's helpful, we let it guide us; if not, we let it be.

Believability Versus Fusion

Defusion usually leads to decreases in believability (and faster than disputation does).

But we can defuse from thoughts even if we continue to believe them 100%, and they can never be disputed (e.g. 'One day I will die'; 'The plane might crash')

Defusion Versus Disputation

In RCTs comparing ACT to traditional CBT for depression, defusion created faster reductions in believability of depressogenic thoughts than disputation did. Note this happened even though with defusion we are not actively trying to reduce believability! We can defuse from thoughts even when we still believe them 100%! (We can also fuse with thoughts that we don't believe, such as when we are fantasizing)

Defusion Step 1: Noticing & Naming

We notice the thought – whether it be a belief, idea, attitude, assumption, schema, metacognition – and we name it: *'So you have the thought that/ you have the belief that/ you have the cognition that/ your mind tells you that/ you believe that/ this thought shows up that X, Y, Z'*

Defusion Step 2: Neutralising

Instead of looking at the content of the thought – true or false, positive or negative – we look at in terms of workability. What happens if you fuse with it/get hooked by it/ allow it to dominate you? E.g. "If you hold on tightly to (or get hooked by) that thought (or belief/idea/attitude/assumption etc.) – and let it control you (or let it control what you do with your arms and your legs and your mouth) – how does that work for you in the long term?"

In those two steps, the client is already defusing from the thought/belief/idea. (We do not have to waste time and energy debating whether it is true or false, assessing if it is right or wrong, or judging it as positive or negative.)

If the client says holding on tightly to the thought is helpful/workable/facilitates towards moves etc, then we say, 'In that case, there is no problem. Let's move on to something that's an issue.'

If the client acknowledges that getting hooked/holding on is a problem we can then 'sell' defusion: 'So if we could do some work here to help you unhook from these types of thoughts, would that be useful?' We can then go on to more formal defusion practice.

So you've already done some defusion with those first steps – now you can go on to more powerful 'neutralising' exercises The great thing is a client can still defuse from a thought that he 100% believes, and that disputation can never disprove or refute – e.g. 'The plane might crash', 'I might get rejected', 'One day I will die'

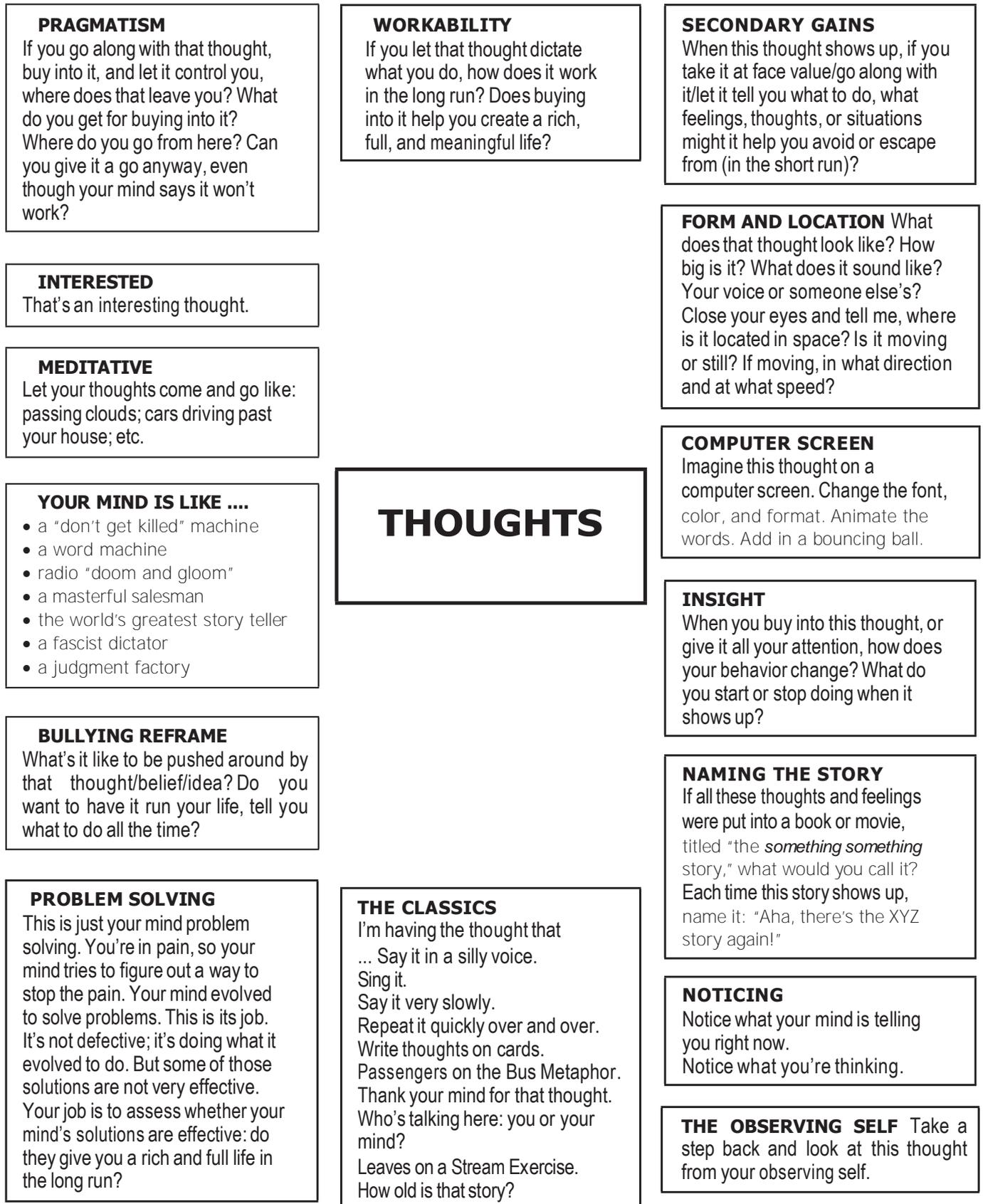


Figure 7.1 Summary of Defusion Techniques

Dropping Anchor: A Script

In the ideal scenario, before starting this exercise, you've asked the client what she's experiencing and she's been able to tell you what thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories are showing up; this means you can refer to them specifically. For example: "There's a very painful memory showing up right now, and a lot of sadness and a lot of anger." But if the client is too distressed to speak, or unable or unwilling to say what thoughts and feelings are present, then you can refer to them with non-specific terms such as "pain" or "painful thoughts and feelings", or "emotional storm", as in the script that follows.

- ***There's something very painful or difficult showing up for you*** right now. I can see how much you're struggling with it; how difficult it is for you. And I really want to help you handle it. So please would you follow my instructions?
- Okay. First, just see if you can push your feet hard into the floor. Push them down. That's it. Feel the ground beneath you.
- Now sit forward in your chair, and straighten your back. Feel the chair beneath you; notice your back supporting you.
- Now slowly press your fingertips together, and as you do that, gently move your elbows and your shoulders.
- Feel your arms moving, all the way from your fingers to shoulder blades.
- Take a moment to ***acknowledge there's a lot of pain here*** that you're struggling with ... you didn't ask for it ... but here it is ... and it's challenging and it's difficult and you want it to go away, and yet it's not going ... Silently acknowledge to yourself what type of pain it is ... For example, say to yourself "Here's sadness" or "Here's anxiety" or "Here's a painful memory" (*If the therapist knows what the pain is, he can specifically mention it.*)
- Now notice that ***as well as this pain***, there's also a body around that pain – a body that you can move and control.
- Straighten your back again, and notice your whole body now – your hands, feet, arms, legs – gently move them, and feel them moving ... Have a good stretch ... Notice your muscles stretching ... Press your feet down and feel the floor.
- Now also look around the room – up down, and side to side - and notice five things that you can see.
- And also notice three or four things you can hear – sounds coming from me or you or the room around you
- And also notice you and I, working here together, as a team.
- So notice, ***there's something very painful here*** that you're struggling with, and at the same time see if you can also notice your body in the chair ... and gently move that body, have a stretch... that's it, take control of your arms and legs.
- And also notice the room around you.
- And also notice you and I here, working together as a team.

This goes for as long as needed until the client is grounded. The therapist brings the exercise to an end by asking questions such as:

- Do you notice any difference now? Are you less caught up in the emotional storm? Are you less hooked by these difficult thoughts and feelings? Are you less 'swept away' by the storm? Are you less 'pushed around' or "jerked around by these feelings?
- Is it easier for you to engage with me, to be present, to focus?
- Do you have more control over your actions now - over your arms and legs and mouth? Check it out, move your arms and legs, have a stretch; do you notice you have control?

HANDS AS THOUGHTS & FEELINGS EXERCISE:

Therapist (sitting side-by-side with the client, both facing the room):

- Imagine that out there in front of you (gesturing to the contents of the room and the far wall) is everything that really matters to you, deep in your heart; everything that makes your life meaningful (or used to, in the past); all the people, places, and activities you love; all your favorite foods and drinks and music and books and movies; all the things you like to do; and all the people you care about and want to spend time with.
- But that's not all. Also over there are all the problems and challenges you need to deal with in your life today, such as ... (therapist gives some examples based on the client's history, e.g. "your conflict with your son", "your financial issues", "your health problems", "your court case", "your search for a job", "your chemotherapy for your cancer")
- And also over there are all the tasks you need to do on a regular basis to make your life work: shopping, cooking, cleaning, driving, doing your tax return, and so on.
- Now please copy me as we do this exercise. Let's imagine that our hands are our thoughts & feelings, and let's put them together like this. (Therapist places his hands together, side by side, palms upwards, as if they are the pages of a book. The client copies him.) Now, let's see what happens when we get hooked by our thoughts. (The therapist slowly raises his hands towards his face, until they are covering his eyes. The client copies him. Both keep their hands over their eyes as the next section of the exercise unfolds.)
- Now notice three things. First, how much are you missing out on right now? How disconnected and disengaged are you from the people and things that matter? If the person you love were right there in front of you, how disconnected would you be? If your favorite movie were playing on a screen over there, how much would you miss out on?
- Second, notice how difficult it is to focus your attention on what you need to do. If there's an important task in front of you right now, how hard to focus on it? If there's a problem you need to address or a challenge you need to tackle, how hard to give it your full attention?
- Third: notice how difficult it is, like this, to take action, to do the things that make your life work, such as (therapist gives some examples based on the client's history, such as "to cook dinner", "to drive your car", "to cuddle your baby", "to type on your computer", "to hug the person you love"). So notice how difficult life is when we're hooked. We're missing out, we're cut off and disconnected, it's hard to focus, and it's hard to do the things that make life work.
- Now, let's see what happens as we unhook from our thoughts & feelings. (Therapist now slowly removes his hands from his face, and lowers them until they drop into his lap. The client copies him.) So notice what happens as we unhook. What's your view of the room like now? How much easier is it to engage and connect? If your favorite person were in front of you right now, how much more connected would you be? If your favorite movie were playing, how much more would you enjoy it? If there's a task you need to do or a problem you need to address, how much easier to focus on it, like this? Now move your arms and hands about – (therapist gently shakes his arms and hands around; client copies) How much easier is it now to take action: to drive a car, cuddle a baby, cook dinner, type on a computer, hug the person you love? (Therapist mimes these activities as he says them; the client usually will not copy this part, but that doesn't matter.)
- Now notice these things (therapist indicate his hands, now once more resting in his lap) haven't disappeared. We haven't chopped them off and gotten rid of them. They're still here. So if there's something useful we can do with them, we can use them. You see, even really painful thoughts and feelings often have useful information that can help us, even if it's just pointing us towards problems we need to address or things we need to do differently, or simply reminding us to be kinder to ourselves. And if there's nothing useful we can do with them, we just let them sit there.

Values

Values are 'desired qualities of ongoing action'.

Colloquially: values are your heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being. Values are like a compass: guide you, give direction, help you stay on track.

Goals versus values: marriage versus being loving

Values-focused life versus goals-focused life

Values are NOT: goals, desires, needs, ethics, morals, feelings, rules, beliefs, codes of conduct

1. Values are here and now; goals are in the future.
2. Values never need to be justified.
3. Values often need to be prioritized.
4. Values are best held lightly.
5. Values are freely chosen.

Once values are clarified: short term, medium term and long term goals are set: SMART goals, and Live Person's goals! Then action plans are created to achieve the goals.

The Mind-Reading Machine

This exercise is a fantasy – if dreams could come true, if magic could happen – what would you love to have happen? *We are not trying to realistically predict the future - it's a magical fantasy to help you get in touch with your values.*

Step 1 - Imagine: I wave a magic wand - and for the next ten years you behave like the sort of person you want to be in every important relationship in your life. Nothing stops you - no thoughts, no feelings, no life events (because this is magic).

Step 2 - Imagine: We are now ten years in the future. For the last ten years you have behaved like the sort of person you want to be in every important relationship in your life. And now I place a mind-reading machine on your head, and I tune it into the mind of someone very important to you, so you can now hear their every thought, just as if you were listening to a radio.

As you tune in this person's thoughts, they're thinking about YOU—and how you have behaved **over the last ten years since the magic happened**. - about what you stand for in life, what your greatest qualities are, and the role you played in their life.

If dreams could come true, if magic could happen, what would you love to hear them thinking? Imagine it now. First they are thinking about what you stand for in life – *(pause 30 seconds)*

And now, they are thinking about what your greatest qualities are – *(pause 30 seconds)*

And now, they are thinking about role you played in their life over the last 10 years – *(pause 30 seconds)*

Repeat for one or two other important relationships, then process as follows:

So what does this exercise reveal about the sort of person you ideally want to be: the qualities you want to develop or use more, the way you want to treat others, and what you want to stand for in life?

YOUR VALUES: *What really matters to you, deep in your heart? What do you want to do with your time on this planet? What sort of person do you want to be? What personal strengths or qualities do you want to develop?*

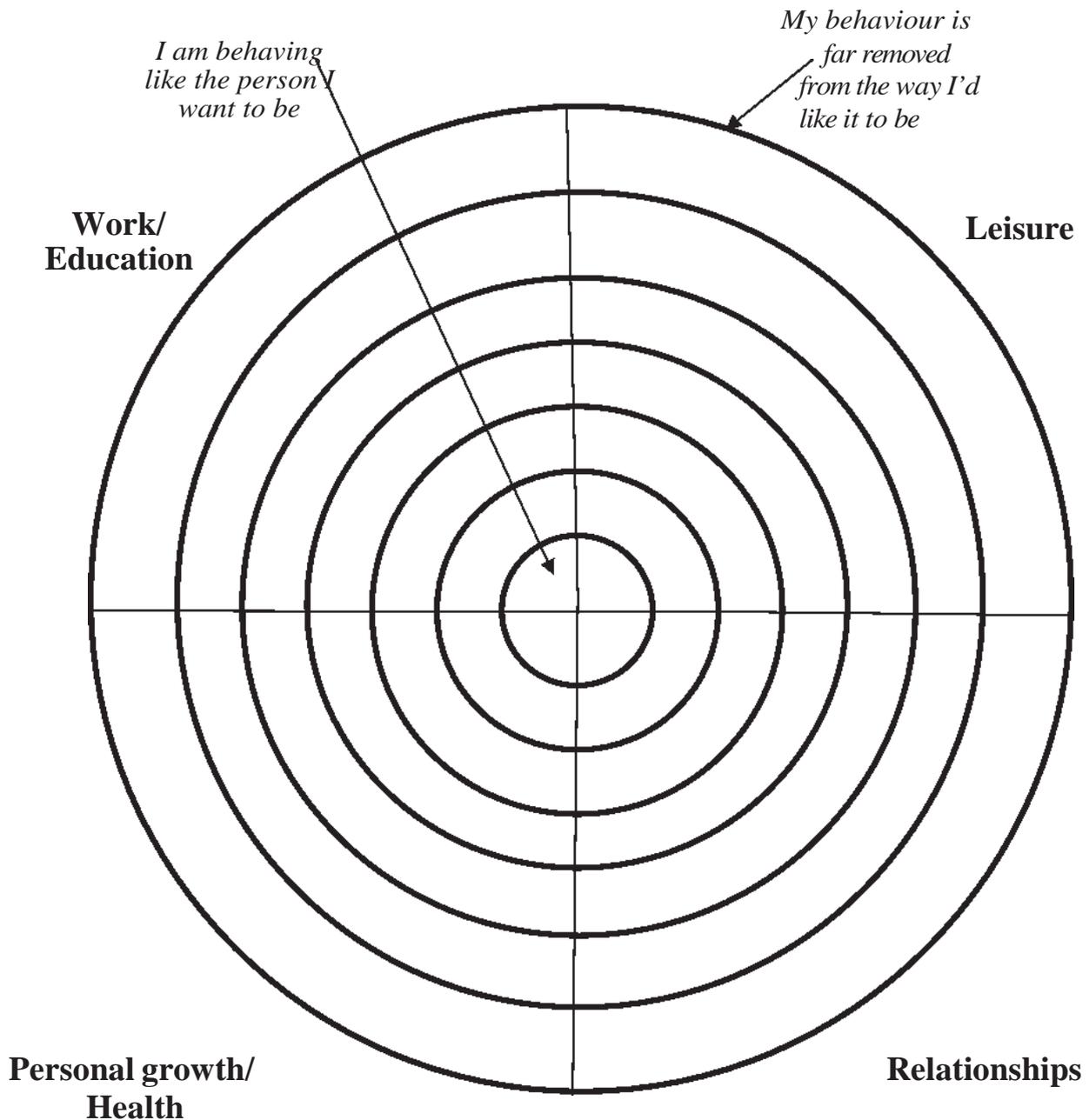
1. **Work/Education:** includes workplace, career, education, skills development, etc.

2. **Relationships:** includes your partner, children, parents, relatives, friends, co-workers, and other social contacts.

3. **Personal Growth/Health:** may include religion, spirituality, creativity, life skills, meditation, yoga, nature; exercise, nutrition, and/or addressing health risk factors like smoking, alcohol, drugs or overeating etc

4. **Leisure:** how you play, relax, stimulate, or enjoy yourself; activities for rest, recreation, fun and creativity.

THE BULL'S EYE: place an X in each area of the dart board, to represent where you stand today.



SPEECHES
Imagine your eightieth birthday (or twenty-first or fiftieth or retirement party, and so on). Two or three people make speeches about what you stand for, what you mean to them, the role you played in their life. In the IDEAL world, where you have lived your life as the person you want to be, what would you hear them saying?

LIFE AND DEATH
a. Imagine your own funeral: imagine what you would like to hear people saying about you.
b. Act out your own funeral--psychodrama style.
c. Write your obituary or fill in a blank tombstone.
d. Imagine you somehow know you only have twenty-four hours to live, but you can't tell anyone: who would you visit, and what would you do?

WEALTH
You inherit a fortune. What would you do with it? Who would be there to share those activities or appreciate the things you buy? How would you act toward all those people who share your new life?

EXPLORING YOUR PAIN
a. Pain As Your Ally: What does this pain tell you about what really matters, what you truly care about?
b. Pain As Your Teacher: How can this pain help you to grow or learn or develop new skills and strengths? How can it help you better relate to others?
c. From Worrying to Caring: What do your fears, worries and anxieties show you that you care about? What do they remind you is very important?

CHARACTER STRENGTHS
What personal strengths and qualities do you already have? Which new ones would you like to develop? How would you like to apply them?

IF ... THEN ...
If you achieved that goal, then how would you change as a result? What would you do differently from there on? How would you behave differently with friends, family, colleagues, customers, and others?

MIND-READING MACHINE
Imagine I place a mind-reading machine on your head, and I tune it into the mind of someone very important to you, so you can now hear their every thought. As you tune in, they're thinking about YOU--about what you stand for, what your strengths are, what you mean to them, and the role you play in their life. In the IDEAL world, where you have lived your life as the person you want to be, what would you hear them thinking?

Clarifying Values

WHAT MATTERS?
What do you really want? What matters to you in the big picture? What do you want to stand for? Is there anything in your life right now that gives you a sense of meaning, purpose, vitality?

THE SWEET SPOT
Vividly recall a rich, "sweet" memory and get in touch with the emotions. What is meaningful about this memory?

DISAPPROVAL
What do you disapprove of, or dislike, in the actions of others? How would you act differently, if you were in their shoes?

MISSING OUT
What important areas of life have you given up or missed out on for lack of willingness?

FORMS AND WORKSHEETS
Valued Living Questionnaire
Bull's Eye
Life Compass
Valued Actions Inventory
List of Common Values

CHILDHOOD DREAMS
As a child, what sort of life did you imagine for the future?

ARTISTIC METHODS
Paint, draw, or script your values.

LIKES
What do you like to do?

ROLE MODELS
Who do you look up to? Who inspires you? What personal strengths or qualities do they have that you admire?

MAGIC WAND
a. I wave this magic wand and you have the total approval of everyone on the planet--no matter what you do, they love, respect, and admire you--whether you become a surgeon or a serial killer. What would you then do with your life? How would you treat others?
b. I wave this magic wand, and all these painful thoughts, feelings, and memories no longer have any impact on you. What would you do with your life? What would you start, stop, do more of, or less of? How would you behave differently? If we watched you on a video, what would we see and hear that would show us magic had happened?

Figure 11.1 Common Values Clarification Techniques

Mindfulness

- A set of psychological skills for effective living, that involve paying attention with openness, curiosity and flexibility.
- At the 'core' of mindfulness is flexible open contact with the present moment
- The basic instruction is 'notice X' - where X is anything that is present
- The first step in defusion is 'notice your thoughts'
- The first step in acceptance is 'notice your feelings'
- The first step in self-as-context (the observing self) is 'notice that you are noticing'

Self-As-Context

- There are two meanings of 'Self-As-Context'. In almost all current ACT textbooks, SAC is defined as or described as the 'observing self' or 'observer self'. But sometimes the term is used in a much broader sense to mean 'flexible perspective taking'; when used in this way it can include a wide range of interventions to develop any or all of the following: the observing self, empathy, compassion, self-compassion, "inner child" work, defusion from the conceptualized self, etc.

The Observing Self (Self-as-context)

- 'Strengthens' or 'enhances' defusion/acceptance/contact with the present moment
- Becomes a 'short cut' for the above: e.g. 'look at this from your observing self'
- Facilitates defusion from the conceptualised self, and gives a stable sense of self
- Increases willingness for exposure to feared private experiences(e.g. traumatic memories)
- For trauma survivors: a part of you came through unharmed
- Transcendence is an important part of any spiritual journey

Three types of interventions for the observing self:

- metaphors (chessboard/ documentary of Africa/ stage show)
- defusion exercises aimed at defusion from the conceptualized self (the good self & bad self exercise/ naming the story)
- directly contacting the experience of the 'observing self' ('continuous you'/ 'notice that you're noticing'/ the 'I am' exercise)

Join the D.O.T.S.

We all try to avoid or get rid of difficult thoughts & feelings. The aims of this exercise are a) to find out which methods you use, and b) how they work in the long term. NB: *Please **do not** start judging these methods as 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', 'positive' or 'negative'.* The aim is simply to find out if these methods are workable – i.e. do they work in the long term to give you a rich and meaningful life? (Obviously, if any of these methods *do* improve your life *in the long term*, keep doing them!)

What are the main thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, emotions, urges that you do not want?

D - Distraction: what do you do to distract yourself from, or 'take your mind off' painful thoughts & feelings? (e.g. movies, TV, internet, books, computer games, exercise, gardening, gambling, food, drugs, alcohol)

O - Opting out: what *important, meaningful or life-enhancing* activities, events, tasks, challenges, or people, do you avoid, quit, escape, procrastinate, or withdraw from? (If they're not *important, meaningful or life-enhancing*, then opting out is no problem!)

T- Thinking strategies: how do you try (consciously or not) to think your way out of pain? Tick any of the following that you have done, and write in any others:

Worrying; Dwelling on the past; Fantasizing about the future; Imagining escape scenarios (eg leaving your job or your partner) or revenge scenarios; Thinking 'It's not fair ...' or 'If only ...'; Blaming yourself, others, or the world; Talking logically and rationally to yourself; Positive thinking; Positive affirmations; Judging or criticizing yourself; Giving yourself a hard time; Analyzing yourself (trying to figure out why you are like this); Analyzing the situation (trying to figure out why this happened); Analyzing others (trying to figure out why they are like this); Planning; Strategizing; Constructive problem-solving; Making To Do lists; Repeating inspirational sayings or proverbs; Challenging or disputing negative thoughts; Telling yourself 'This too shall pass' or 'It may never happen'.
Other thinking strategies:

S – Substances & other Strategies: what substances do you use put into your body to avoid or get rid of pain, (include foods, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, naturopathic and herbal remedies, and prescription medication)? Any other Strategies you use to get rid of or avoid pain (e.g. yoga, meditation, having affairs, aggressiveness, Tai Chi, massage, exercise, picking fights, dancing, music, suicide attempts, self-harming, prayer, smashing things, staying in bed, self-help books, seeing a therapist, mindfulness)?

Most of these strategies give short term relief. But do they get rid of your unwanted thoughts and feelings, so they *never come back*?

Now clearly, some of these methods are helpful, *if you use them flexibly, moderately, sensibly* – in which case, keep using them! However, when you have over-relied on these methods – used them excessively, rigidly, or inappropriately - what have they cost you in terms of health, money, wasted time, relationships, missed opportunities, work, increased pain, etc?

So how many of these methods give you some relief from pain *in the short term*, but keep you stuck or make your life worse *in the long term*: 'none' 'a few' 'about half' 'most' 'all'?

You've tried very hard for a long time to get rid of these thoughts & feelings. No one can call you lazy. But in the long term, they keep coming back! And unfortunately, often what you do to get rid of them makes life worse in the long term. This is a vicious cycle. Most people find it very painful when they realise they are stuck in it. What feelings does this bring up for you? Can you take a moment to acknowledge just how painful and difficult it is to be caught in this vicious cycle? (Is there something kind you can say to yourself?)

Given that a) no matter what you do, painful thoughts and feelings, *keep coming back*, and b) trying very hard to avoid or get rid of them often makes life worse *in the long term* – would you be open to learning a 'new way' of responding to them; a method that is radically different to everything else you've tried?

PUSHING AWAY PAPER EXERCISE:

Therapist (sitting side-by-side with the client, both facing the room, both holding sheets of paper):

- Imagine that out there in front of you (*gesturing to the contents of the room and the far wall*) is everything that really matters to you, deep in your heart; everything that makes your life meaningful (or used to, in the past); all the people, places, and activities you love; all your favorite foods and drinks and music and books and movies; all the things you like to do; and all the people you care about and want to spend time with.
- But that's not all. Also over there are all the problems and challenges you need to deal with in your life today, such as ... (*therapist gives some examples based on the client's history, e.g. "your conflict with your son", "your financial issues", "your health problems", "your court case", "your search for a job", "your chemotherapy for your cancer"*) And also over there are all the tasks you need to do on a regular basis to make your life work: shopping, cooking, cleaning, driving, doing your tax return, and so on.
- Now please copy me as we do this exercise. Let's imagine that this sheet of paper is all those difficult thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories that you'd like to get rid of. Now hold it tightly at the edges like this, and push it as far away from you as you possibly can. (*Therapist holds the paper tightly at the edges with both hands, and stretches his arms out, pushing the paper as far away as possible. The client copies him*). This is what your culture tells you to do – get these thoughts and feelings away from you. Friends tell you to do this, doctors, therapists, counsellors, women's magazines; everyone. Right? But hey (*therapist says this next part humorously*) it looks like we aren't really trying very hard here; let's push harder. Push as hard as you possibly can. Straighten those elbows, dislocate those shoulders; let's get these thoughts and feelings as far away as possible (*The therapist and client maintain this posture for the next section of the exercise: holding the paper tightly by the edges, arms straight, holding it as far from the chest as possible.*)
- Now notice three things. First, how tiring is this? We've only been going for less than a minute, and already it's tiring. Imagine doing this all day; how much energy it would consume?
- Second, notice how distracting it is. If the person you love were right there in front of you, how hard would it be to give her your full attention? If your favorite movie were playing on a screen over there, how much would you miss out on? If there's an important task in front of you right now or a problem you need to address or a challenge you need to tackle, how hard to focus on it?
- Third: notice while all your effort and energy is going into doing this, how hard is it to take action, to do the things that make your life work, such as (*therapist gives some examples based on the client's history, such as "to cook dinner", "to drive your car", "to cuddle your baby", "to type on your computer", "to hug the person you love"*). So notice how difficult life is when we're struggling with our thoughts and feelings like this. We're distracted, we're missing out on life, it's hard to focus, we're exhausted, and it's so hard to do the things that make life work.
- Now, let's see what happens when we drop the struggle with our thoughts & feelings. (*Therapist now relaxes his arms, drops the paper into his lap. The client copies him. Typically the client will express a sigh of relief "Ahh – that's better".*) Big difference, huh? How much less tiring is this? How much more energy do you have now? How much easier is it to engage with and focus on what's in front of you? If your favorite person were in front of you right now, how much more connected would you be? If your favorite movie were playing, how much more would you enjoy it? If there's a task you need to do or a problem you need to address, how much easier to focus on it? Now move your arms and hands about – (*therapist gently shakes his arms and hands around; client copies*) How much easier is it now to take action: to drive a car, cuddle a baby, cook dinner, type on a computer, hug the person you love? (*Therapist mimes these activities as he says them; the client usually will not copy this part, but that doesn't matter.*)
- Now notice these things (*therapist indicate the paper in his lap*) haven't disappeared. We haven't gotten rid of them. They're still here. But we've got a new way of responding to them. We're handling them differently. They're no longer holding us back, or bringing us down, or jerking us around. And if there's something useful we can do with them, we can use them. You see, even really painful thoughts and feelings often have useful information that can help us, even if it's just pointing us towards problems we need to address or things we need to do differently, or simply reminding us to be kinder to ourselves. And if there's nothing useful we can do with them, we just let them sit there.

NAME your feelings

- Notice
- Acknowledge
- Make room
- Expand awareness

Steps In Acceptance

IDENTIFYING 'PROBLEMATIC' FEELINGS/EMOTIONS/SENSATIONS

- Notice, identify them
- Where are they? What are they like? Observe them with curiosity
- Name them (non-judgmentally)
- Validate & normalise them

NORMALISING

- Life is painful
- The 'reality gap' => a big gap between what you want and what you've got => naturally this hurts
- Inevitability of fear/anxiety when you step out of your comfort zone
- Psycho-education on emotions
- Q: How would you expect someone else to feel under these circumstances?

CONSEQUENCES OF FUSION

- When you get pushed around/ dominated/hooked by these feelings, how does your behaviour change?
- If I was watching on a video, what would I see or hear?

CONSEQUENCES OF EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE (CREATIVE HOPELESSNESS)

- Do you ever try to get rid of them? What sort of things do you do to make them go away?
- How long do they go away for? How soon do they return?
- Do those strategies you use(to avoid) have any long term drawbacks/costs/side-effects?

NEW POSSIBILITY.

- So when these feelings show up, either they push you around/control you/ hold you back/ bring you down ...
- Or you try hard to avoid/get rid of them, which in the long term makes things worse.
- And the more that happens, the more you get you stuck, the harder life gets.
- I don't know how to stop painful feelings showing up. Everybody has them. But I do know a different way of responding to them .
- So that when they show up, you don't have to get caught up/ pushed around/ overwhelmed bythem...
- And you don't have to struggle with them or fight them, either.
- It's a new way of handling painful feelings, so they have much less impact and influence over you.
- It's radically different from everything else you've tried. Would you be interested?

ALWAYS LINK ACCEPTANCE TO VALUES

- Pushing Away Paper exercise demonstrates how acceptance facilitates values-based living
- If clients don't get this link, expect resistance.

Self-compassion: 6 Elements

- Contact the present moment: notice & acknowledge your painful thoughts & feelings
- Kindness: pursue the value of kindness towards yourself: words, thoughts, imagery & action
- Defusion: defuse from harsh judgmental self-talk
- Acceptance: open up and make room for painful thoughts and feelings
- Validation: validate your pain as a normal & natural part of being human
- Connectedness: notice and empathise with others' pain; recognize your own pain as something you have in common with others; reveal your pain to compassionate others

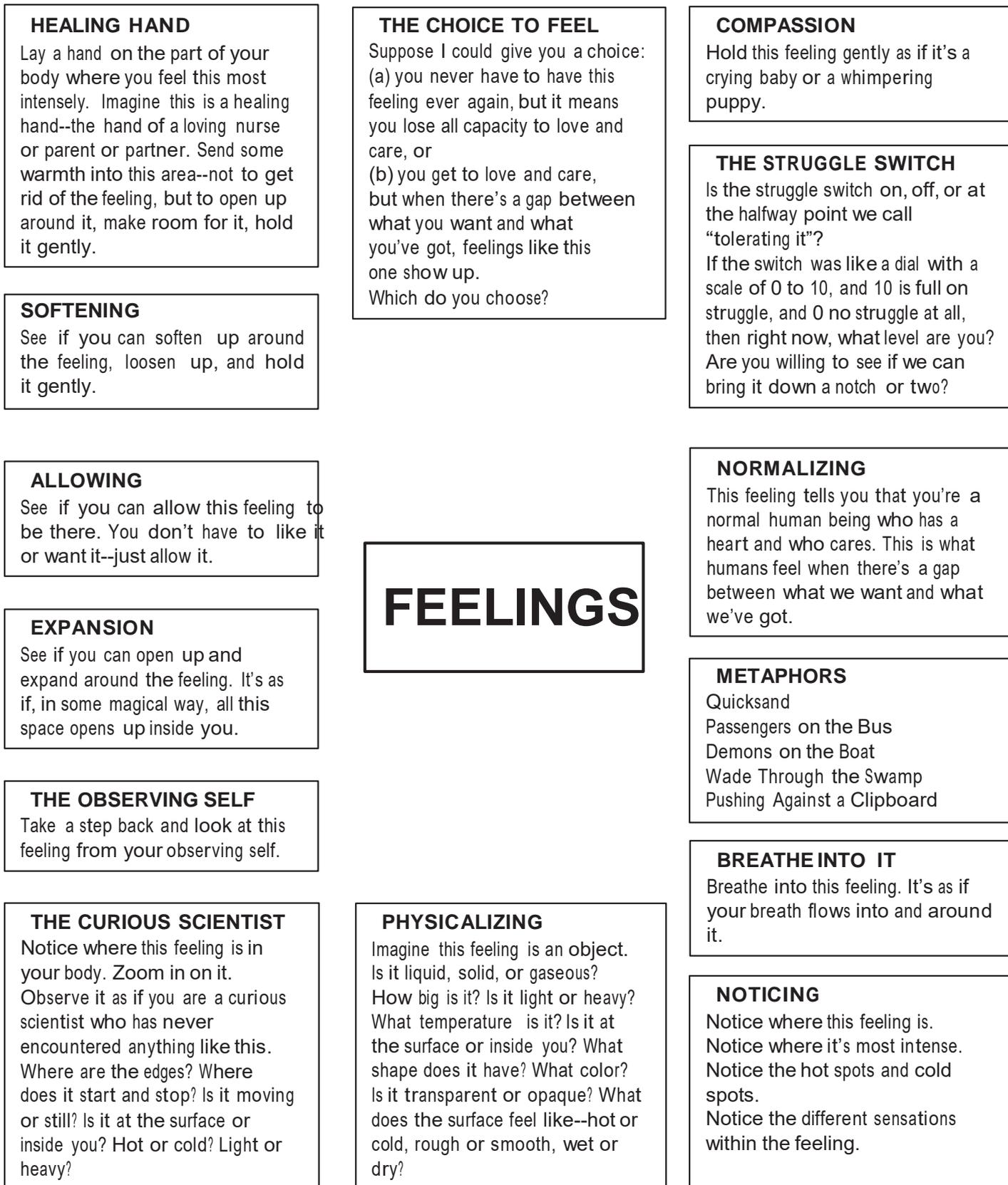
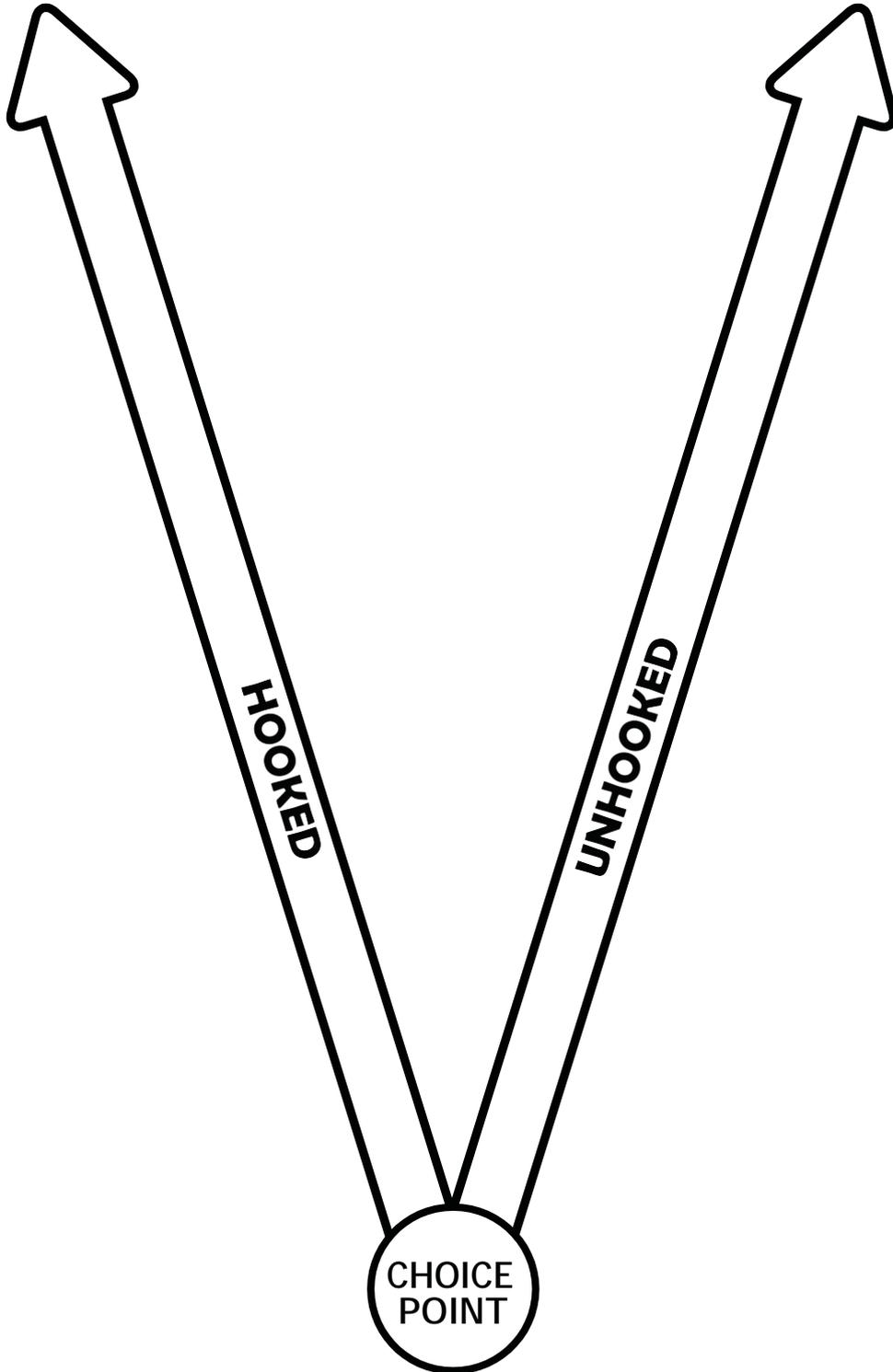


Figure 8.1 Common Acceptance Techniques

AWAY

TOWARDS



Situation(s)
Thoughts & Feelings

***** Part 2 of your ACT training *****

ACT for Depression & Anxiety Disorders

Do you want to help your clients find rapid relief from suffering? And go on to build richer, fuller lives?

If so, this 2-day advanced level workshop on is for you.

You'll go deeper into the ACT model, take your skills to the next level, and learn specific methods for depression and anxiety disorders.

You'll learn about common stumbling blocks and sticking points, and how to quickly get around them.

And you'll discover a wealth of practical tools and strategies to effectively target depression (major depressive disorder and dysthymia) and the full range of anxiety disorders (from OCD & phobias to social anxiety & panic disorder).

The workshop will include live demonstrations, videos of therapy sessions, and a wide range of experiential exercises.

Day 1: ACT for Anxiety Disorders

- Case formulation and treatment planning made simple
- 5 most common mistakes when treating anxiety
- How to respond when clients say, "I hate this feeling! I just want it to go!"
- How to get to and work with the very roots of anxiety
- How to dissolve worrying and catastrophising
- 'Mindful ceasefires': the antidote to 'panic attacks'
- Exposure: from old school to cutting edge. What is exposure? Why is it essential? What does the latest research tell us about the best way to do it?
- Facing your fears with compassion: the art of flexible exposure
- Defusing obsessions and surfing compulsions
- Releasing the shackles of perfectionism

Day 2: ACT for Depression

- Case formulation and treatment planning made simple
- How to motivate the unmotivated
- What to do when clients say "nothing will work"
- How to set goals when "nothing matters"
- How to find meaning when "life is meaningless"
- Shame-busting: moving from self-contempt to self-compassion
- Working with the 'inner child'
- Homework horrors: how to get clients active between sessions
- Out of the swamp: how to get clients moving in valued directions
- Suicidality: what reinforces it and how to compassionately undermine it

***** INTERACTIVE ONLINE TRAINING *****

Enhance & Uplift Your Sessions with these Multimedia Online Courses

'ACT for Adolescents' – 6-week Online Course

This advanced level 6 week specialty course teaches you how to adapt ACT for young people. A host of world - renowned experts on the use of ACT with youth – including Darin Cairns (Australia), Chris McCurry (USA), and Sheri Turrell (Canada) - as well as Russ, of course – will share, explain and illustrate their approaches to treating adolescents (from age 10 to 19). For more info: www.lmlearningACT.com

ACT & Mindfulness for Trauma: An In-Depth Integrated Approach

This 6 week interactive online course will take you step-by-step through the use of ACT with the whole spectrum of trauma-related disorders (not just PTSD): www.lmlearningACT.com

The Happiness Trap Online – An 8 Week Personal Growth Course For Wellbeing & Vitality

An 8-week interactive online course, for the general public: www.thehappinesstrap.com

***** LIVE WORKSHOPS *****

Take Your ACT Skills Further

ACT For Depression & Anxiety Disorders – with Russ Harris

Your part 2 ACT training: Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth. Once a year, only. For more info, go to: www.actmindfully.com.au

ACT For Trauma – with Russ Harris

Brand new masterclasses: Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth. Go to: www.actmindfully.com.au

- ***The Happiness Trap – by Russ Harris***
The best-selling ACT self-help book, for everyone and anyone; now published in 30 languages.
- ***The Happiness Trap Pocketbook – by Russ Harris & Bev Aisbett***
A fun, comic-book version of the original – especially for teenagers and adults who are not into reading
- ***The Reality Slap – by Russ Harris***
An ACT-based self-help book for grief, loss, crisis, and trauma, with a major emphasis on self-compassion.
- ***ACT With Love – by Russ Harris***
A popular self-help book, based on the use of ACT for common relationship issues.
- ***The Confidence Gap – by Russ Harris***
An ACT look at confidence, success, and performance, especially suitable for life and executive coaching.
- ***ACT Made Simple – by Russ Harris***
An introductory textbook on ACT, packed full of practical information, in an accessible, easy-to-read style.
- ***Getting Unstuck In ACT – by Russ Harris***
The first advanced-level textbook on ACT. Covers common sticking points for both clients and therapists.
- ***ACT Questions & Answers – by Russ Harris***
My latest textbook. Covers all the trick, sticky questions that other textbooks miss out.

ACT Companion: The Happiness Trap App

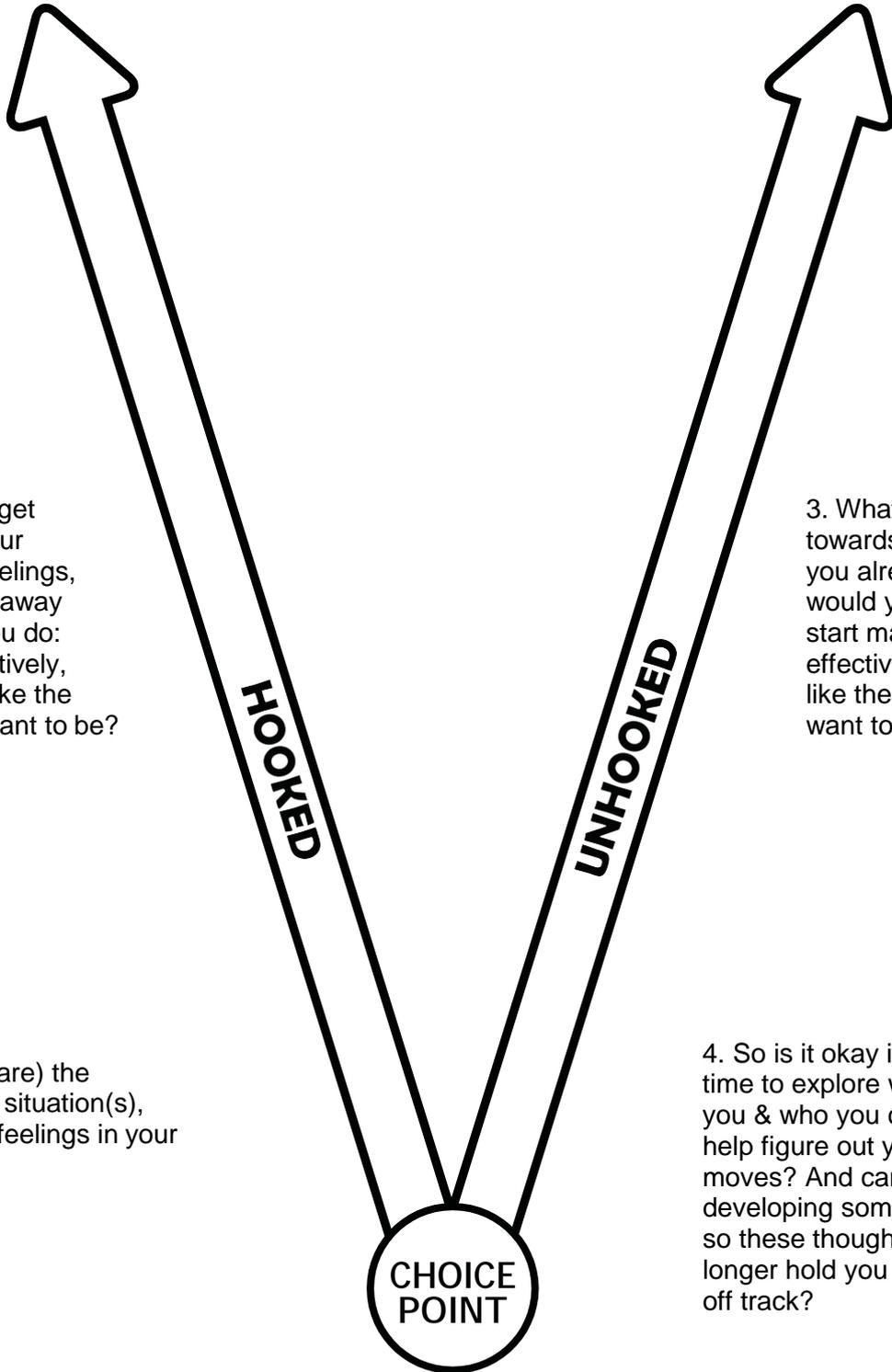
A really useful and practical app to use with your clients. Contains over 2 hours of recorded exercises.

Australia & New Zealand ACT website: www.anzact.com

The worldwide official ACT website: www.contextualscience.org

AWAY

TOWARDS



2. When you get hooked by your thoughts & feelings, what kind of “away moves” do you do: acting ineffectively, behaving unlike the person you want to be?

3. What kind of towards moves do you already make or would you like to start making – acting effectively, behaving like the person you want to be?

1. What is (are) the challenging situation(s), thoughts & feelings in your life today?

4. So is it okay if we take some time to explore what matters to you & who you care about – to help figure out your towards moves? And can we also work on developing some unhooking skills, so these thoughts and feelings no longer hold you back or pull you off track?

Situation(s)
Thoughts & Feelings