

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Anger Group

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ACT on Life Not on Anger by Georg Eifert, Matthew McKay, and John Forsyth

HEAT (Honorably Experiencing Anger and Threat) protocol created by Andy Santanello and Sharon Kelly (www.contextualscience.org/protocols_and_interventions)

ACT Made Simple by Russ Harris

Mind and Emotions by Matthew McKay, Patrick Fanning, and Patricia Zurita-Ona

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Overview of ACT

ACT Core Processes

Acceptance

Acceptance is the active and willing experience of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, or action urges that have been previously avoided. It is the process of allowing these internal experiences to be as they are without attempting to judge, change, control, reduce, or eliminate them. This includes typically unwanted internal experiences such as negative emotions or uncomfortable bodily sensations. ACT often uses the word “willingness” when explaining this concept to clients, as the term acceptance can be mistaken with putting up with something or resignation.

The opposite of acceptance is experiential avoidance. This can take on many forms including literally avoiding situations that cause discomfort, attempting to control others, or attempting to change internal experience.

Defusion

Defusion is the process of recognizing the literal function of cognitions instead of their derived cognitive relational functions. Thoughts are viewed as discrete events created by the mind instead equating them with reality. Put another way, defusion asks people to view thoughts as simply thoughts and not the events they refer to. Much of our thought content is verbal rules that are based on either past experience or verbal learning, both of which may not always be accurate. These verbal rules become automatic and are difficult to change. A defused stance permits a wider repertoire of behavior. The term ‘deliteralization’ is sometimes used to describe defusion, as the process allows one to reduce the literality of thoughts.

The opposite of defusion is cognitive fusion. When one is cognitively fused, thoughts are treated as highly important, equated with reality, and requiring reaction. This fusion reduces the amount of behavior that is based on direct contact with the environment thus limiting the effectiveness of how one reacts.

Self-As-Context

Self-as-context entails seeing oneself as an observer that is experiencing thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and action urges. We are experiencing different contexts and stimuli over the lifespan.

The opposite of self-as-context is the conceptualized self (sometimes referred to as self-as-concept). The conceptualized self includes the narratives that a person creates about themselves; roles, history, and self-descriptions. The conceptualized self is relatively immutable and insensitive to changing cues from the environment. In fact, people often selectively attend to stimulus that is consistent with their conceptualized self.

Contact with the Present Moment

Contact with the present moment, more commonly known as mindfulness or mindful awareness, is basic present moment awareness to both internal and external stimulus. It is a choice to become aware of the here and now. Mindfulness is a non-judgmental awareness. Mindful attention to the present moment allows one to be able to make decisions based on current environmental cues.

The opposite of contact with the present moment is dominance of the conceptualized past and future. It is also experiencing the now through the lens of our judgmental thoughts.

Values

Values are life directions that are chosen as important to a person and serve as a guide for one's behavior. Increase in actions that support valued life directions is ultimately the desired outcome of ACT. All of the other ACT processes are used to support this outcome. Values are chosen by each person and are not based on any ultimate truth or on others' values. Values are not concrete goals; they cannot be fully achieved, thus there is no end to their usefulness in direction giving. To illustrate, "being a caring friend" is an ACT value while "listening to my friend talk about a bad break-up" is an action that supports that value. Values allow for delayed consequences, planning, and motivation to do things that don't provide direct pleasure.

The opposite of values is one of two things: a) lack of values clarity or b) minimal contact with chosen values. These can lead to behaviors that support non-valued ends and reduce life vitality.

Committed Action

Committed action is the act of implementing value-directed behavioral goals in the face of emotional obstacles. Traditional behavior therapy techniques such as implementation of a reward system, behavioral activation, or exposures can be used to support committed action in ACT.

The opposite of committed action is unworkable or non-valued action. Unworkable action can often come in the form of attempts to control thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, or uncontrollable aspects of the environment.

Learning ACT

There are fundamental differences between ACT therapists and therapists in other more control focused orientations (i.e., anger management courses, CBT for anger). ACT is focused on accepting internal experiences (thoughts, feelings, urges, sensations) while most other cognitive behavioral interventions attempt to teach clients how to control these experiences.

In light of this, it is recommended that clinicians seek out self-study or training in ACT before trying to carry out this protocol. It is important to realize that one can deliver all the exercises and metaphors as written in this manual but not be doing ACT. To begin, it is highly recommended that one should read the following three texts:

ACT Made Simple: An Easy-to-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (2009) by Russ Harris.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Second Edition: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change (2011) by Steven Hayes, Kirk Strosahl, and Kelly Wilson.

ACT on Life Not on Anger (2006) by Georg Eifert, Matthew McKay, and John Forsyth.

A Note about ACT Exercises

ACT is at its core an experiential therapy. The metaphors and exercises in these sessions illustrate the concepts of ACT. After each exercise, ask clients to discuss with the group their experience with the exercise. Guide an experience-near conversation (“what did you notice?” or “what parts were difficult/easy?”) and steer away from an analysis of the exercise (“I liked/did like it”). Didactic instruction on the concepts can also be included but should be used sparingly. It is more important that clients have experiential contact with the concepts then to “get” them. Confusion is okay and explanation should be suspended when appropriate.

A Flexible Approach

The following is a general protocol for eight, weekly, 1 ½ hour sessions of an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy group for problematic anger. There is

an inherent difficulty in turning any personal interaction, such as ACT, into a manualized treatment. Thus, please be flexible. If the group is demonstrating fusion in the first session the therapist should be flexible and respond to it in an ACT consistent manner, and make sure that creative hopelessness gets covered. If the group is unclear why it might be worth feeling uncomfortable and not responding to anger action urges make sure to link the work to the clients' values. Each session of the treatment manual will have core intervention strategies, but because this manual will not fit all clients' needs, it may be tailored to meet the needs of the particular clients in the group. Tailoring of the treatment may involve shifting components in this treatment manual to different sessions than indicated, or adding material to support the components that are already suggested in this manual. It will be important to provide balance between following the manual, attending to a stuck point for one person in the group, and moving the entire group forward.

Anger Group Screening

Hello. This is _____ calling from _____. I'm calling because your therapist, _____, passed on your name in regards to the Anger Group we're starting on _____ beginning on _____. I wanted to see if you're still interested in our group and if you are tell you a little bit about it to see if it might be a good fit for you.

Our anger group is an eight week group. Each of the groups builds upon the last week of material, so it is important that you are able to make it to most if not all of the groups. We look at our experience of anger in a non-blaming, non-judgmental way. Really this group is about figuring out which anger behaviors have gotten in the way of you leading a happy and meaningful life, and learning to tools to experience our anger without those problematic behaviors.

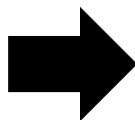
A bonus about our group is that what you learn can be easily applied to other emotions. If you want to change how you react to emotions like sadness, anxiety or shame, you can use the same skills we will teach you in this group.

So, do you think you would like to commit to this 8 week group?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Anger Consequences Questionnaire

	In the last two months, being angry has made me:	Never	One Time	Two Times	Three Times	Four or More Times
1	Depressed					
2	Anxious					
3	Feel like hurting someone					
4	Feel like breaking something					
5	Get into a physical fight					
6	Get into an argument					
7	Have trouble with the law					
8	Break something					
9	Drink alcohol					
10	Use other drugs					
11	Get drunk					
12	Hurt someone					
13	Hit someone					
14	Say nasty things					
15	Drive recklessly					
16	Do something dumb					
17	Overeat					
18	Keep to myself or stay away from people					
19	Hurt myself physically					
20	Hit a wall or something					
21	Hurt my job					
22	Feel like killing myself					
23	Feel physically ill					
24	Get into an accident					
25	Feel bad about myself					



Please turn over and complete other side

Anger Consequences Questionnaire, continued

		Never	One Time	Two Times	Three Times	Four or More Times
26	Feel ashamed					
27	Feel dumb					
28	Feel embarrassed					
29	Hurt my work or my schoolwork					
30	Make my friends mad at me					
31	Damage a friendship					
32	Make my friends afraid of me					
33	Get into a fight with my family					
34	Feel tense					
35	Drive too fast					
36	Feel uptight					
37	Drive unsafely					
38	Feel nervous					
39	Feel guilty					
40	Feel like hurting myself					
41	Tell someone off					
42	Yell or scream at someone					

Session 1

Overview

Questionnaires
Welcome and Group Guidelines
Participant Introductions
Deconstructing Anger
Anger Myths
Overview of ACT
Introduction to Mindfulness
Present Moment Exercise: Breath Focus
Homework: Daily Mindfulness Practice and Log

Questionnaires

Participants complete a demographic questionnaire. Participants also complete the Anger Actions Questionnaire and AOQ (or other chosen measures). Explain to participants that these questionnaires are used to help patients and clinicians track their progress throughout the group.

Welcome and Group Guidelines

- Welcome group
- Introduce clinicians
- Group structure (8 weeks, 1 ½ hours, questionnaires at beginning and end), guidelines (see handout), homework, and commitment
- Discuss how ACT is a different approach to anger than anger management (less focus reducing anger, but changing life for the better, this is because emotions and thoughts are hard to control but we have control over behaviors, sounds difficult but we will give you the tools)
- Discuss experiential exercises and expectations for debriefing (what is a mindfulness exercise, will ask for volunteers, want specific information about their experience not whether they liked/disliked exercise)
- Group Format
 - Present Moment Exercise
 - Homework Check-In
 - Brief Material Review
 - New Material
 - Assign Homework

Participant Introductions

Please share your first name and one thing you think would be better in your life without your anger behavior. For example, “I would get along better with coworkers and feel less lonely at work” or “my partner would trust me more and we could get married” or “I wouldn’t have to be so worried that I might get a probation violation for my behaviors.”

Deconstructing Anger

Threat and the Fight-or-Flight Response

Everyone has an evolutionary instinct to react to life threatening situations by going into “survival mode.” Maybe you’ve heard this called the stress response or the fight-or-flight response before. Survival mode works well when it is triggered in situations that are actually life threatening, like if a bus is coming at us or for soldiers in combat. However, survival mode doesn’t work as well in other situations.

The fight-or-flight response includes heightened arousal, hostile thinking patterns, a loss in the ability to engage in self-monitoring or other inhibitory processes, and resulting behavior produced to respond to this perceived severe threat. Let’s break these down into five parts.

Five Parts of Anger

Pre-Anger Feelings

Emotions and physiological sensations that precede anger. Pre-anger emotions are usually painful or tender emotions such as pain, shame/guilt, fear, anxiety, sadness, hurt, hopelessness, loneliness, or feeling misunderstood. Body sensations can include: tension in stomach, shoulders or jaw, feeling hot, heaviness, agitation, headache, shakiness, etc. Anger helps to mask these feelings and sensations. It is often a more comfortable emotion to experience.

Trigger Thoughts

Painful memories and images elicited by the provoking incident. You are likely to interpret the actions of others or circumstances as threatening. Recalling these past hurts, failures, and losses can lead to a desire to avoid them through anger. Other qualities of trigger thoughts are that they tend to be very all-or-nothing and judgmental. Things and people are good/bad, right/wrong. There is one victim (usually you) and someone else is to blame. In addition broad labels are used for yourself and others: stupid, incompetent, selfish, crazy, lazy, wrong, jerk, etc. You may have a hard time keeping in mind what is *actually* happening versus what you think is or might happen.

Anger Feeling

Can be gradual or a sudden surge of feeling. This is survival mode or fight-or-flight mode. It includes: pounding/rapid heartbeat, blood pumping harder, fast breathing, trembling, clenched face/jaw/shoulders, feeling generally tense or on edge, dizziness, and feeling hot or sweaty.

Impulse to Act

Very quickly after the anger feeling arrives, an impulse to act is right on its heels. Often we forget that the anger feeling and the impulse to act are two distinct entities. We also often don’t realize that the impulse to act is different from acting. You may feel like there is a point where you go into auto-pilot and can’t control becoming aggressive or passive-aggressive. It takes commitment

to look closely and notice the difference. Impulses to act are usually based on past history and what you've done before- essentially habit.

Anger Behavior

Now let's make sure we notice that up until now, everything that has been going on is internal. You haven't actually done anything yet.

At this point people who don't have good tools to work with their anger (which is a lot of people!) do one of two habitual ways of avoiding anger feelings:

- 1) Act Out Anger: The mounting pressure is now discharged with aggression. This can be things like: shouting, blaming, putting others down, name calling, hitting, and breaking things. It can also be more subtle behaviors like rolling eyes, looking disgusted, saying judgmental things, gossip, sarcasm, withdrawal and the like. Another way some people act out anger is to turn it on themselves.
- 2) Suppress Anger: This is basically the opposite of acting out. When the intensity of anger arises we seize up. People may have heard of the addition to the fight-or-flight response- freeze. You may try to numb out in different, often self-destructive ways.

Note that you can cycle through these five anger stages again and again during a single anger episode. Our goal in this group is to teach you skills to work with anger at each of these points and also to widen the gap between anger urges and anger behavior.

Share Arthur's story (ACT on life; pp. 41) or another example, use the board to illustrate

Five Anger Myths

Myth 1: Anger and aggression are instinctual to humans.

Myth 2: Frustration inevitably leads to aggression.

Myth 3: Venting your anger is healthy.

Myth 4: Anger is always helpful.

Myth 5: A person's anger is caused by others.

Overview of ACT

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) gets its name from its two core messages: accept what is out of your personal control, and commit to action that improves and enriches your life. The aim of ACT is to maximize human potential for a rich, full and meaningful life. We do this in three main ways:

Be Present

Bring yourself into the here and now, which we call mindfulness, so you can react effectively to life in the moment.

Open Up

Use psychological skills that we will teach you, which we call acceptance and defusion, to deal with your painful thoughts and feelings without getting stuck in them. Learn to change your relationship to these painful experiences rather than continuing the futile attempt to control them.

Do What Matters

Clarify what is truly important and meaningful to you, which we call values, and then use that knowledge to guide, inspire and motivate you to change your life for the better.

ACT applies to anger in the following way: Anger is energy, and if we allow it to naturally arise in our body and mind without manipulating it, it will dissipate much faster than we would expect. When you start to work with the energy of anger, at first it's very intense. But over time you can learn to loosen the tight shell of resistance to the energy, and gradually the whole situation will soften. Then we can move forward with what's important to us in our lives.

Introduction to Mindfulness

Mindfulness is simply the practice of purposely focusing your attention on the present moment—and accepting it without judgment. It is not simply relaxation, but more of an opening up to your experience as it is. As we practice mindfulness throughout the group, you will begin to experience how mindfulness may be helpful in living with your anger, and in many other places in your life. For now we would like you to just notice for yourself what you experience as you go through the exercise. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

Present Moment Exercise

Breath Focus

Find a relaxed, comfortable, upright position in your chair. Keep your back upright but not too tight, hands resting wherever they're comfortable. And you can notice your body from the inside. Noticing the shape of your body, the weight, the touch. Let yourself relax, become curious about your body seated here. The sensations of your body, the touch, the connections with the floor or the chair. Relax any areas of tightness and tension. Just breathe softly into

them. And now begin to tune into your breath. Feeling the natural flow of breath. You don't need to do anything to your breath. Don't need to make it long or short, just natural. Notice where you feel your breath in the body. It might be in your belly, maybe in your chest, throat or nostrils. See if you can feel the sensations of breath, one breath at a time. When one breath ends, the next begins. Now as you do this you might notice that your mind will start to wander. If this happens this is not a problem, it is very natural. Just notice that your mind has wandered. You can say "thinking" or "wandering" in your head softly. And then gently redirect your attention right back to the breathing. So we'll stay with this for some time in silence, just a short time. Noticing our breath, from time to time getting lost in thought, and returning to our breath. See if you can be really kind to yourself in the process. (Silence for 1-2 minutes). And once again you can notice your body, your whole body being here. Let yourself relax even more deeply and then offer yourself some appreciation for doing this practice today. Whatever that means to you. When you are ready open your eyes and come back to the group.

Exercise Debriefing

- Is this different than what you would normally do? How so?
- What did you notice?
- What was your mind doing during the exercise?
- Was it difficult to remain on task? What made it so? Thoughts? Body? Feelings?

Homework: Daily Mindfulness Practice and Log

Group Guidelines

1. It is important to be on time for group. This will eliminate disruptions and lead to a more comfortable and focused group.
2. This is a closed, 8-week group with content that builds on itself each week. It is important to make the commitment to attend each week.
3. What is said in group stays in the group. Please do not share the stories of others with people outside of the group; you may, however, share your own experience if comfortable.
4. Group members are here to work on changing their anger behaviors. Therefore, we find it helpful if people refrain from anger-glorifying statements. Group leaders will redirect such statements.
5. Speak from your own experience rather than giving advice to others. Use "I" statements to share with others.
6. Refrain from using any alcohol or non-prescription drugs before group.
7. Please turn off or mute cell phones. Even phones on vibrate can be distracting.
8. Please refrain from cross-talking and side conversations. Also, please wait for people to finish their speech before commenting.
9. We will be asking for people to share about their experiences and homework throughout the group. We may ask you to volunteer at times. While you can choose to pass at any time, we find that people get the most out of the group when they participate fully.

Five Parts of Anger

Pre-Anger Feelings

- Shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, sadness, hurt, hopelessness, loneliness, feeling misunderstood, etc.
- Body sensations: tension in stomach, shoulders or jaw, feeling hot, heaviness, agitation, headache, shakiness, etc.

Trigger Thoughts

- Recall of past hurts, failures, and losses
- Judgmental
- All-or-nothing: good/bad, right/wrong
- I am a victim
- Someone else is to blame
- Labels: stupid, incompetent, selfish, crazy, lazy, wrong, jerk, etc.

Anger Feeling

- Gradual or sudden
- Survival mode (or fight-or-flight mode)
- Body sensations: pounding/rapid heartbeat, fast breathing, trembling, clenched jaw, muscle tension, feeling hot, etc.

Impulse to Act

- Quick to follow anger feeling
- Based on past history
- Habit

Anger Behavior

- Aggression: shouting, blaming, putting others down, violence, breaking things, rolling eyes, looking disgusted, saying judgmental things, gossip, sarcasm, etc.
- Passive/Avoidance: non-communication, cryptic or vague communication, avoiding, ignoring, procrastinating, obstructing, being late, making excuses, self-pity, blaming others, withholding, acting helpless, etc.

Mindfulness Practice Log

Remember, mindfulness is the practice of purposely focusing your attention on the present moment—and accepting it without judgment.

As you practice these short exercises at home you will undoubtedly find your mind becoming distracted. Your mind may even say things like “this exercise is useless” or “I’m not doing this right.” We encourage you to commit to practice all the way through one guided exercise each day, no matter what your mind says. When you notice your mind has strayed from the exercise, simply bring yourself back gently and without beating yourself up. That is all that you need to do to do mindfulness.

Use CD tracks 1, 2, or 3 to practice mindfulness this week.

DAY OF THE WEEK							
TRACK #							
WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?							

Session 2

Overview

Present Moment Exercise: Body Scan

Creative Hopelessness

Anger Payoffs

Assessing the Costs of Anger

Control as the Problem

Homework: Costs of Anger Behavior Log

Present Moment Exercise

Body Scan

Sit up comfortably in your chair, place your feet firmly on the floor, and allow your hands to rest on your lap. Allow your eyes to close gently. Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. When you are ready, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, especially to the sensations of touch or pressure, where your body makes contact with the chair. The intention of this practice is not to feel any different, relaxed, or calm; this may happen or it may not. Instead, the intention of the practice is, as best you can, to bring awareness to any sensations you detect, as you focus your attention on each part of the body in turn. Now as we did last week, bring your awareness to your breathing. Take a few moments to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Now I'd like to you bring your attention to focus on your toes. Just notice what there is to be felt there. Perhaps you notice warmth or coolness, heaviness or lightness. And perhaps you feel nothing at all; that's okay too. Just place your attention on your toes. Continue to bring awareness, and a gentle curiosity, to the physical sensations in each part of the rest of the body as I go through them. Your mind will inevitably wander away from the breath and the body from time to time. That is entirely normal. It is what minds do. When you notice it, gently acknowledge it, and then gently return your attention to the part of the body you intended to focus on. Now rest your attention on your feet, lower legs, upper legs, buttocks, lower back and belly, upper back, arms and hands, shoulders and neck, your chin, your cheeks, your eyes, and your forehead. You can even notice sensations in your scalp. Now that we have scanned through the parts of the body, let's spend a few moments being aware of a sense of the body as a whole, and of the breath flowing freely in and out of the body. As we come to the end of this body mindfulness, I invite you to take a few deep breaths and open your eyes when you are ready.

Exercise Debriefing

-What did you notice?

-What was it like to focus so closely on your body?

Homework Review

Review

Last week we started off by deconstructing anger. We first talked about how anger is actually five different pieces of experience. Then we talked about common myths associated with anger.

Creative Hopelessness

Last week we talked about how we usually do one of two things when anger shows up: act out or suppress. These are ways of trying to control and/or avoid our anger rather than experience it. Now let's take a look at all the ways you have tried to manage and control anger. When anger arises, what do you do with the feeling? The thoughts?

Lead a discussion around previous coping strategies. Write answers on the board. Be sure that participants hit the major control and avoidance strategies.

Ignore it	Act tough
Negative self-talk	Withdraw from relationships
Promise you'll change	Put up a wall
Alcohol, drugs	Become cold and distant
Medications	Shouting
Tell yourself not to react	Violence
Relaxation	Sarcasm
Anger management therapy	Driving fast/aggressively
Eating	

Anger Payoffs

Some of these anger behaviors certainly have positive effects for us.

- Discharging anger by acting out helps us to reduce the short term effects of stress. We feel less worry, frustration, physical pain. We momentarily forget all of our unmet needs and disappointments.
- As we discussed last group, anger often starts with pre-anger feelings which can be very uncomfortable. Anger helps to hide this emotional pain.
- Anger gets us attention. Often times, people listen when we're angry.
- Punishment or revenge can feel good in the short term.
- Anger can get others to change. In chaotic families, we often learn to use anger to get what we want or need. People feel coerced by blowups or the threat of blowups.

Assessing the Costs of Anger

So no doubt anger behavior has some benefits, yet if you're here in this group you have probably noticed that your anger behavior has had some significant

costs in your life. Let's take a few minutes to really look at what toll struggling with your anger has taken.

- Interpersonal
- Career
- Health (hypertension, heart disease, chemical abuse)
- Energy
- Emotional (decreased social support, lonely)

Hand out costs worksheet and also complete on the board. Lead a discussion around the personal costs of anger behavior. Discuss how short-term payoffs often lead to long term costs.

Taking both the positives and costs of anger into account, how well have anger behaviors worked in your life. Have they made anger go away in any long-term, meaningful way? Have any of them added to the costs of anger? Are you missing out on very important part of your life?

Control as the Problem

Controlling Thoughts, Feelings, and Bodily Sensations

The one thing that all of the above solutions have in common is that they attempt to control anger, to make anger feelings go away. But the problem with control strategies is that they work just long enough to keep painful feelings away, but in the long run you're left with anger and the feelings that are underneath anger. Most people have fallen into this trap about their emotions, even us. The good news is that there is another option. But first let's take a close look at how control works with feelings and thoughts.

It's possible that internal and external experiences have two different sets of rules. The typical strategy for addressing a problem in the external world is control (i.e., if you have a problem, find the cause and get rid of it to make the problem go away). For example, if you're hungry you can cook something or go out to eat. If you don't like what we're talking about in group you can leave and you don't have to listen any more. If you come across something like a hot stove, you can avoid it or pull you hand away when you accidentally touch it.

But if we look very closely, does that actually apply to internal experiences? For example, if you don't like what you're thinking, can you just get rid of it? If you don't like what you're feeling, can you walk away from the feelings or sensations? It's possible that our internal experiences—our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations have different rules.

Let's first look at thoughts. I want you commit these three numbers to memory. 1...2...3... Done? Okay, now I want you to forget them. If you're having problems doing that, try to replace them with different numbers. Maybe 4, 5, 6. Okay, who was able to forget the numbers? Maybe thoughts fit these two rules: "once it's in, it's in" and "if you don't want it you got it." Have these rules played out for you in terms of your anger?

Let's try another couple of exercises with our thoughts. I want to you do the best that you can not to think about warm, delicious chocolate cake. I'm going to give you 30 seconds to do it. You can try whatever way you want. Ready, GO! Were you successful? If distraction worked, how long do you think you could keep that up? If you feel like you were successful, how did you know you weren't thinking about chocolate cake? Didn't you have to think about chocolate cake to check to make sure you weren't thinking about it? See our minds are tricky. Does this happen when you're trying to suppress angry thoughts?

Now let's try a couple of exercises that look at our feelings. Imagine you are sitting on the platform of a dunk tank, but this is not a normal dunk tank, this dunk tank is full of hungry sharks. And, instead of the usual trigger to drop you in, suppose I had you hooked up to the best polygraph machine that's ever been built. This is a perfect machine, the most sensitive ever made, and when you are all wired up to it, there is no way you can experience any anxiety or distress without the machine knowing it. If you do get anxious, the tank dunks you in with the sharks! What do you think would happen? Your life is at stake here. All you need to do is have no anxiety at all.

But it's not just negative emotions. Let's say I say to you, "The next person you see outside this room, I want you to fall in love with them. If you fall in love with that person, I'll give you 10 million dollars." Could you do it? Really, truly fall in love. What if you came back to me in and said, "I did it." And then I said, "Sorry, it was just a trick. I don't have 10 million dollars." What are you going to do next? Could you fall out of love just as quickly? I imagine that anyone in here that has been broken up with has lived the answer to that question. So the point of this is it's not just getting rid of negative emotions that is difficult, but it is equally difficult to create emotions, even ones you like, in any kind of predictable, systematic, controllable ways.

So now you might be able to see that you cannot control your feelings. Just like we assessed the costs of anger, can anyone see the costs of trying to

control our thoughts and emotions? It can create suffering. When we struggle with our thoughts and emotions we add suffering on top of the pain that comes with everyday life. Regular old pain like not getting what we want, loss, problems with self-esteem. Can you think of a time that struggling with your thoughts or emotions has brought on suffering?

Controlling Others

Another area where we tend to think we have control is other people. It is natural to want to control others. But when you try to control others you're operating under the assumption that others should or have to behave, think, and act like you want them to. The plain and simple truth is that, just like you, others don't want to be controlled. When you try to control others you are sending a message that you don't accept them. You are expressing a mistrust of their judgment.

You mind it telling you two lies here. First of all, that you have the right to control others. This one you may find yourself wanting to arguing with, but the second is the ringer. The second is that you have the ability to control others. You can't force yourself into the mind of others in order to dictate how they act, think, or feel. Not only will others eventually find a way to resist and run from you, but you will be left feeling more frustrated and angry.

As we read these statements I'd like you to think about if you've been caught up in any of these ineffective behaviors:

- I routinely offer advice that is unwanted by pleading, persuading, or lecturing.
- I repeat a point over and over in an effort to get others to align their thoughts and views with mine.
- I communicate by telling rather than discussing.
- I use should, must, you better, and similar statements when communicating.
- I use my anger to get my message across or force compliance in others.
- I use dogmatic statements, stubborn, noncompliance, closed-mindedness, or chilling silence to influence others.
- I impose my choices, beliefs, and standards on others with unyielding stubbornness of conviction.
- I discount the behaviors, values, thoughts, opinions, and choices of others as wrongheaded and in need of my correction.

- I procrastinate or give a halfhearted effort as a way to get back or get even.
- I tend to be impatient with myself and others.
- I feel uneasy about loose ends and strive for closure, even if it hurts me or others.

Three Things We Can Control

So it may feel as if we've pulled the rug from right under you. You may have been spending your whole life trying to control your thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and even other people. What's left?

While you can't control what's inside your skin, you can control what you do with your hands, feet, and mouth, in short the way you respond to the reality of the world. Using a little word play we can call this response-ability. This can be freeing in a way. Now that you know that you can't choose whether you feel hurt or angry, you can focus more energy on figuring out what you want to do with your hurt and anger. You have control over- you're able to respond with- your choices, your actions, your destiny.

Homework: Complete Costs of Anger Behavior Log

Control

CAN'T

thoughts

feelings

other people

CAN

what you say

what you do

As you read these statements think about if you've been caught up in any of these ineffective behaviors:

- I routinely offer advice that is unwanted by pleading, persuading, or lecturing.
- I repeat a point over and over in an effort to get others to align their thoughts and views with mine.
- I communicate by telling rather than discussing.
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- I discount the behaviors, values, thoughts, opinions, and choices of others as wrongheaded and in need of my correction.
- I procrastinate or give a halfhearted effort as a way to get back or get even.
- I tend to be impatient with myself and others.
- I feel uneasy about loose ends and strive for closure, even if it hurts me or others.

Costs of Anger Behavior Log

This week please log your anger behaviors once each day. Then, take some time to log what your anger behavior has cost you. For example, acting out can be very bad on our relationships and suppressing can make it difficult for our needs to get met. You may want to think about the following areas of your life: relationships, career, health, energy, and emotions.

Day	Anger Behaviors	Costs

Session 3

Overview

Present Moment Exercise: Mindful Observation of Thoughts

How the Mind Creates Anger

Defusion as an Alternative

Ways to Defuse from Thoughts

Action as an Alternative

Homework: Values Epitaph and Defusion Practice and Log

Present Moment Exercise

Mindful Observation of Thoughts

Start by taking a series of slow, deep breaths. Imagine that your mind is a medium-sized white room with two doors. Thoughts come in through the left door and leave out the right door. Pay close attention to each thought as it comes. Watch each thought until it leaves. Don't try to analyze or hold onto it. Don't believe or disbelieve it. Just acknowledge having the thought. It's just a moment in your mind, a brief visitor to the white room. If you find yourself judging yourself for having a certain thought, just notice that. Notice your mind judging and allow that thought to gently pass through the white room. The key to this exercise is to notice thoughts rather than getting caught up in them. Keep watching thoughts. And if you find yourself starting to interact with your thoughts, just notice that. Bring yourself back to a stance of watching. Just do that each time. As an observer of your thought as they pass in and out of the white room, you can let them have their brief life. Each thought does not require you to act, it doesn't make you do anything, and it doesn't mean anything about you. The important thing is that you let them leave when they are ready to go. Then just allow the next thought into the room.

Exercise Debriefing

-What did you notice?

-Was it difficult or easy to just watch your thoughts from a distance?

-Is this different than how you've treated your thoughts in the past?

-Did you experience any change in emotions during this exercise?

Homework Review

Review

Last week we looked at the costs of anger. We also looked at all of the ways we have tried to discharge or suppress anger and the payoffs and costs to those methods. We figured out that there is one rule about our experience inside our skins (thoughts, feelings, body sensations) and another for those outside (our actions- what we do with our hands, feet, and mouth).

How the Mind Creates Anger

Our minds have been designed to evaluate everything around us. This helps us to look out for danger and ultimately stay safe. Evaluative minds lead us to look for food, shelter, warmth. Our minds are great that way. Our minds also evaluate every single thing as pleasurable or painful, good or bad. (On some occasions we will evaluate something as neutral. In this case we probably don't pay any further attention.) This evaluation happens very quickly, so quickly most of the time we don't even notice it.

So our minds are powerful tools. Unfortunately, they are also very good at manufacturing unnecessary pain. All of our minds' habits that work wonderfully in some situations and don't actually help us in others. Let's take a look.

Thoughts: A Bridge from Events to Feelings

Most of us grow up thinking that events are the causes of our emotions. When something good is happening we are happy, when something bad is happening we feel negative emotions. What this doesn't take into account is our powerful mind. We can have the same "sensory input" or event and feel many different ways. Can anyone think of an example that shows how our beliefs about a situation have a big impact on our emotions?

Event → Belief → Feeling

Anger Trigger Thoughts

There are certain types of thoughts that tend to trigger anger feelings more than others. Usually they have a certain flavor to them. Something like this: You've been HARMED (victimized) DELIBERATELY, and the other person is WRONG (unfair, etc.) and should have behaved differently.

Your trigger thoughts may take on certain themes. Do any of these sound like a familiar tape that plays over and over in your mind?

- People ignore your needs
- People don't see or understand you.
- Peoples demand or expect too much.
- People are inconsiderate or impolite.

- People take advantage of you.
- People try to control you.
- People are selfish.
- People are stupid and thoughtless.
- People shame and/or criticize you.
- People keep you waiting.
- People are uncaring and/or ungenerous.
- People are manipulative.
- People are threatening or coercive.
- People are mean and cruel.
- People disrespect you.
- People are unfair or unjust.
- People are lazy or don't do their share.
- You're helpless and stuck and have no choice.
- People are incompetent.
- People are irresponsible.
- People don't help.
- People don't do the right thing.

Here are some more ways our thoughts can create or intensify anger feelings:

Judgment

As we just mentioned, being able to judge and evaluate has kept us safe for centuries.

But the same mind starts to judge other people and their behavior as right or wrong. With judgment, our minds are stating indisputably that something or someone is absolutely and objectively good or bad. It is no longer about our subjective feelings of pleasure and pain. It's no longer opinion. This is when we mistakenly believe we have a right to or the ability to control others. We demand or command people to act the ways we want them to. It's like turning your personal preferences into the equivalent of the Ten Commandments. You start using words (either in your mind or aloud) like "should," "have to," and "ought to."

With unchecked judgment you constantly compare things to a standard of what you think should be. And nothing can ever live up to that standard. You feel entitled: "bad things shouldn't happen to me!" Perfectionism creeps in: "That's not the right way to do it, you should do it my way." And fairness rules all: "I don't care how it really is; it's not fair, it's not right when things

aren't equal." These types of judgments keep us stuck, because we are not accepting reality.

Cause and Effect: Assuming Intent and Blaming

Our minds have a tendency to try to figure out cause and effect. When situations are unclear and ambiguous our minds do their best to explain them. Our minds work to find the underlying causes of events, to learn the answer to the question "Why?" Minds do this so we can act more effectively in the future.

This lead to two big problems. First of all, these tendencies lead us to assume others' intentions. This can lead to an attempt at mind-reading. If we don't know why something has happened, we try to guess others' intentions, feelings, and motives. Unfortunately, we are often wrong. Many times other people don't even realize how something they do or say may affect you. They're too busy taking care of themselves, and attending to their wants and needs.

Secondly, we begin blaming others for our pain. When we are in pain, we look for the cause so we can stop it. It can be very, very difficult to admit that we are the cause of our own pain. Or that we don't have control over something that has caused us pain. Therefore, our minds start playing the blame game. Figure out who we can blame so we can guilt or bully them into fixing it. The blame game is used in both passive and aggressive ways of interacting. Unfortunately, blame does not undo the past or fix the pain. Instead, it keeps us stuck and unwilling to act in ways in which we *do* have control.

Labeling: Toxic and Global Labels

Our minds are also very good at labeling things and placing them into categories. It helps us to understand the world around us and to be able to communicate our understanding to others.

On the other hand, our mind can become a global judging machine. People are stupid, no one does anything right, I'm the only one who knows how to do it right, etc. We often use these global labels to justify our anger or taking revenge on someone.

These habits of our minds to evaluate situation and people cause a lot of problems. It affects our communication with others, creates resentments, and triggers destructive behavior.

Defusion as an Alternative

Now you might think to yourself, “I get it now. The way to not get angry is to make sure I don’t have trigger thoughts.” If you think back to our examples last week (what are the numbers?), you’ll remember it’s very hard to stop or change our thoughts. Instead we’re going to look at a few ways to disengage from what our minds do automatically. In ACT, we call this defusion. Rather than fusing with, or getting stuck to, our thoughts we step back. Thoughts are simply creations of our mind. We don’t need to treat them as reality.

Ways to Defuse from Thoughts

Thoughts as Spam Email

You may have heard of a type of spam email called “phishing.” The initial ploy in phishing is actually quite simple: you are sent an email message that results in a powerful emotional response. For example, you are informed that someone appears to be using your credit card illegally or there is a new virus out there that from which you are not protected. The email asks you for private information like your SSN, credit card number, date of birth, and driver’s license number so they can help keep you protected. Of course, this is all so they can steal your identity. What if your mind sometimes acts like this phisher? It can put an upsetting message in front of you and get you to impulsively attach to a thought, emotion, memory, or body sensation. Like the phisher, your mind will tell you that what it has to say is the absolute truth and requires a response. Like the email, you don’t have to respond to your internal experience. Slow down, step back. See if you can notice where responding will take you. You might be able to start to notice when your mind is throwing these at you, just as you’ve learned to spot spam emails. These experiences probably have some things in common. Are they all-or-none, negative, provocative, urgent? Remember that the mind is not you, the mind is a tool. But it isn’t a helpful tool 100% of the time.

Say Thoughts Aloud

Sometimes when we say the same thing over and over again it can lose its meaning. Let’s try this now. Let’s all say the word anger over and over again as fast as we can for 30 seconds. Okay, did anyone lose the meaning of the word anger? Did it start to sound like nonsense? Some people have found that

doing this with stuck thoughts can be helpful. Feel free to add a funny voice when you're trying this.

Categorizing Thoughts

Rather than getting caught up in what you're thinking try to step back and observe what your mind is doing. Simply look at each thought and put it in a category such as worry, judgment, planning, reminiscing, etc. When you feel upset, just ask yourself "What is my mind up to?" and find the right label. Say to yourself, "Now my mind is having a _____ thought."

Labeling Thoughts

Describe your thoughts as something your mind is producing rather than something you are or something you do. For example, "I'm having the thought that _____." You can take it one step further and say to yourself "I notice that I'm having the thought that _____." You can do this with feelings, memories, body sensations, and feelings too.

Treating Mind as a Separate Person

Notice that your mind does not always agree with you. You can give your mind a name and take your mind's opinion into account just like you would a friend's. What does Susie have to say about this?

Would someone be willing to try an exercise with me? We're going to take your mind for a walk. You walk around the room and do whatever it is that's important to you, go wherever you want to go. I'll be your mind. (The goal here is for the client to simply walk at whatever speed and whatever direction the client desires. The client is to play the "human," and the therapist will play "the mind." While walking, the therapist verbalized the sort of evaluative second-guessing chatter that the client gets from his or her mind on a daily basis. The therapist can use provocative content or anger themes that have arisen for this and other clients in group. The goal is for the client to keep walking despite this steady stream of negative chatter. If the client stops or tries to talk back to the mind, the therapist immediately says, "Never mind your mind." This is a signal that the client has been pulled into the distressing content and needs to defuse and keep walking.)

Turning of the Hand

Each time you have a painful thought, let go of it by turning your hand over as if you're letting go of a small stone you've been carrying. Tell yourself, "There's a thought... I let it go."

How Helpful is That Thought?

Ask yourself, “Is this thought helping me go in the direction I want to go?” Think back to your epitaph. Look at the consequences of being your thoughts, rather than having your thoughts. Simply allow the thought to be there and keep moving.

Mindful Observation of Thoughts

At the beginning of group we did an exercise helping us to defuse from thoughts using mindfulness. You can do this exercise in any number of ways. You could imagine thoughts as people in a parade, leaves floating down a stream, words on a teleprompter, clouds in the sky, people on an escalator or moving walkway, train cars on a train- anything really.

Action as an Alternative

Trigger thoughts can make us feel helpless. These thoughts try to trick us into thinking we have no control over the situation (which sometimes we don't) and our actions (a place where we always have control).

Problem Solving

Sometimes the actions we take are about simple problem solving. Let's say you have a friend that is always late for your dinner dates. You find yourself feeling uncomfortable and awkward sitting at the table alone for 25 minutes. Eventually that turns to anger. There are definitely a few things you could do rather than admonish your friend every time they come late. Let's face it, other people rarely change when you want them to. Your anger may distress them briefly, but they usually quickly return to old patterns. So you can choose to defuse from thoughts and take control in situations where you can. In this example, bring a book, ask the friend to meet at your house, include others so you have someone to talk to while you're waiting, or pick up your friend on the way.

Introduction to Values

A motivator to choose actions other than angry behaviors is to focus on our values. In a nutshell, we can choose to respond in ways that give us a meaningful and vital life. The first step to doing so is clarifying your values.

Values Epitaph

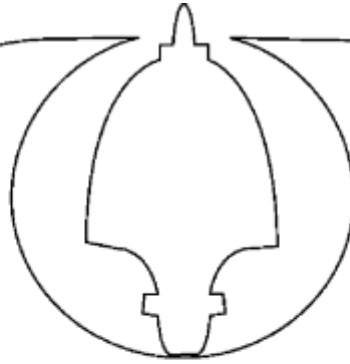
A gravestone often has a sentence or two describing what people have been about in their lives. Perhaps right now anger has dictated a lot of your actions. Maybe your epitaph would say something like this:

Here lies Megan. She spent her life trying to push down her hurt, sadness, and feelings of inadequacy through anger behaviors. She wanted to be closer to others, but she pushed them away by trying to tell them what to do so she wouldn't have to deal with angry feelings.

If you think your epitaph might say something like this I'd like you to take a few moments to consider what you would rather have it say. Let's be honest, this isn't a hypothetical exercise. What you'll be remembered for, what defines your life is up to you. It depends on the actions you take. You are responsible. So think big!

Homework: Values Epitaph and Defusion Practice and Log

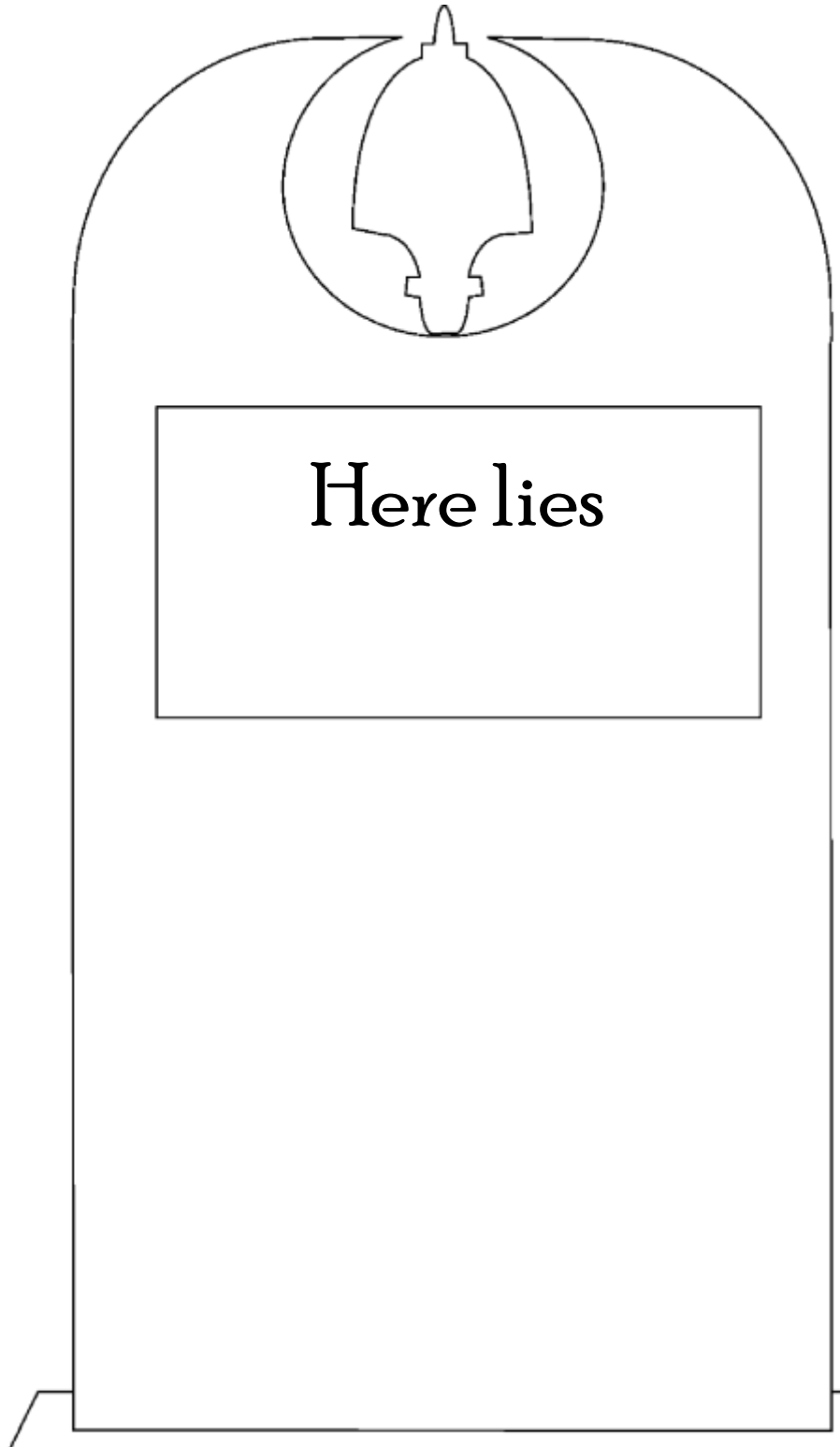
Angry Life Epitaph



Here lies
Megan

She spent her life trying to push down her hurt, sadness, and feelings of inadequacy through acting out her anger. She wanted to be closer to others, but sooner or later she pushed them away by trying to tell them what to do. She felt angry less often, but also very lonely.

Valued Life Epitaph



Trigger Thoughts

Generally

You've been harmed deliberately by someone. That person is wrong and should have behaved differently.

Common Themes

Your trigger thoughts may take on certain themes. Do any of these sound like a familiar tape that plays over and over in your mind?

- People ignore your needs
- People don't see or understand you.
- Peoples demand or expect too much.
- People are inconsiderate or impolite.
- People take advantage of you.
- People try to control you.
- People are selfish.
- People are stupid and thoughtless.
- People shame and/or criticize you.
- People keep you waiting.
- People are uncaring and/or ungenerous.
- People are manipulative.
- People are threatening or coercive.
- People are mean and cruel.
- People disrespect you.
- People are unfair or unjust.
- People are lazy or don't do their share.
- You're helpless and stuck and have no choice.
- People are incompetent.
- People are irresponsible.
- People don't help.
- People don't do the right thing.
- _____
- _____

Defusion Practice Log

Defusion is stepping back from our thoughts and seeing them as creations of the mind. We can take them or leave them.

Use one of the defusion techniques taught in group each day this week. As one choice of technique, use CD track 4 to help with practicing mindful observation of thoughts.

- Defusion Techniques:
- 1) Practice observing thoughts using the CD
 - 2) Treat thoughts as spam email
 - 3) Say thoughts aloud until they lose meaning
 - 4) Categorize thoughts
 - 5) Label thoughts
 - 6) Treat your mind as a separate person
 - 7) Turn your hand to let go of thoughts
 - 8) Ask yourself: how helpful is that thought?

DAY OF THE WEEK							
TECHNIQUE #							
WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?							

Session 4

Overview

Present Moment Exercise: Mindful Eating
Acceptance as an Alternative
Practicing Acceptance
Acceptance Exercise
Mindful Acceptance in Daily Life
Homework: Willingness Practice and Log

Present Moment Exercise

Mindful Eating

One of the benefits of present moment awareness is that it can help us to stay in the moment when we are having positive experiences. Rather than worrying about when the experience will be over or trying so hard to grasp on to it, we can really, truly be there. Today we're going to take something as simple as eating a piece of chocolate in order to try this.

Pick up the piece of chocolate and hold it in the palm of your hand. Look at it. Examine it. Silently in your mind, describe the chocolate. What does it look like? What color is it? How would you describe the texture? Now, feel the chocolate in the palm of your hand. What does it feel like against your skin? Pick it up with your other hand. What does it feel like in your fingers? Is it slimy? Rough? Smooth? Soft? Hard? Squeeze it softly. What do you feel? Smell the chocolate. Describe how it smells. Put the piece of chocolate in your mouth, but do not eat it. What does it feel like on your tongue? What does the texture feel like now? How does it taste? How does the taste compare to the way it smelled? Move it around in your mouth and notice every aspect of the chocolate. Perhaps it begins to melt. Bite the chocolate just once and think about what you taste. Now how does it feel in your mouth? Finish chewing and eat the chocolate. How did it taste?

Exercise Debriefing

- What did you notice?
- How is this experience different than the last time you ate a piece of chocolate?
- What else would you like to do mindfully?

Homework Review

Review

Last week we talked about the ways that the mind creates anger. We also touched on the different ways to defuse, or step back from, our thoughts. Finally, we talked about action as an alternative to fusing with our thoughts and creating/intensifying anger.

Acceptance as an Alternative

Tug-of-War Exercise

Can I please have a volunteer to act out something with me? Okay, grab on to one end of this rope. Thus far the situation you have been in with your anger feelings is like being in a tug-of-war with a monster. It is big, ugly, and very strong. In between you and the monster is a pit, and so far as you can tell it is bottomless. If you lose this tug-of-war, you will fall into this pit and will be destroyed. So you pull and pull, but the harder you pull, the harder the monster pulls, and you edge closer and closer to the pit. This monster (i.e., your anger) has endless energy. So while your arms become tired and you have no energy to deal with anything else in your life the monster just keeps going. Also, you can't do lots of other things because you are tethered to this tug-of-war. Those things you identified on your epitaph, no chance you can accomplish those. So what kind of alternative is there? The hardest thing to see is that our job here is not to win the tug-of-war. Our job is to drop the rope.

The alternative to struggling with our emotions is taking an open, accepting stance towards our thoughts, emotions, and body sensations.

Defining Acceptance

Sometimes people get caught up in the wording. Acceptance? That sounds horrible. I don't want to have these experiences so how can I accept them? Well to start, some people find it easier to conceptualize acceptance as willingness.

Acceptance is NOT...

Before we delve deeper into acceptance I'm going to review a few things that acceptance is not.

- Resignation or giving in
- Admitting defeat or failure
- Tolerating unnecessary personal pain

Acceptance is...

Now let's talk a little bit more about what acceptance really means. Ask yourself, am I willing to experience the uncomfortable sensations of anger (or pre-anger feelings) in order to have access to something bigger and better for my life? Acceptance is about experiencing anger on its own terms. Feeling

exactly what you feel when you feel it. When you aren't willing to experience anger, ironically you add to it. If you learn to tolerate feelings of anger, you don't have to act out or suppress anger. This leaves you with a much more flexible set of actions.

- Being open to one's whole experience
- All-or-nothing
- A choice
- An action, not a feeling
- Something that needs practice (Someone can tell you how to ride a bike, but that does not mean you can do it. A star basketball player can explain a layup, but one can only get there with practice.)

Words That Embody Acceptance

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| ▪ Willingness | ▪ Compassion |
| ▪ Kindness | ▪ Love |
| ▪ Playfulness | ▪ Patience |
| ▪ Softness | ▪ Humor |
| ▪ Gentleness | ▪ Caring |
| ▪ Kindness | ▪ Curiosity |
| ▪ Openness | |

Practicing Acceptance: The Four Qualities of Mindful Acceptance

Paying Attention

Paying attention in the here and now is very difficult. We have distractions coming both from the world around us (work that needs to get done, sounds in the room, others speaking) and also within our own selves (emotions, body sensations, thoughts). Paying attention mindfully simply means taking the reins and noticing, with a gentle curiosity, what's happening as it's happening.

Learning to pay attention, fully and without defense, can liberate you from the habits of your mind and behavior and put you in contact with the world as it truly is in this particular moment.

On Purpose

Paying attention requires an ongoing commitment. As we said, there are many things to distract us. There is absolutely no way to continue paying attention indefinitely. Even those who practice mindfulness all day every day like monks cannot do it. You will surely get pulled back into your old patterns that have kept you stuck. Therefore, whenever we notice we are no longer paying attention, we simply must recommit over and over and over.

In the Present Moment

Even though we clearly live right here, right now, our minds can quickly take us elsewhere. It looks into the past for things we have done wrong, or things

we feel have been done to wrong us. It looks into the future for dangers that aren't even here yet and, in fact, may never come. Don't get me wrong, being in the past and the future has its place (reminiscing, evaluating our lives and behavior effectively, planning, dreaming, hoping). But doing so as an unexamined habit can bring on a lot of unnecessary suffering. If we can focus on the present moment, then all we have to deal with is the now. Another benefit of being in the moment is that we notice more deeply what is going on around us and inside of us. This gives us more accurate information to work with when it comes time to respond.

Nonjudgmentally

Nonjudgmental awareness can often be the hardest of these qualities of mindful acceptance to learn. Be sure it is a gradual learning process that takes ongoing recommitment like we just discussed. Our minds are constantly judging things. Is this good/bad, right/wrong, fair/unfair, tasty/gross, worthy/unworthy? Our minds are also always trying to figure out who's responsible or who's to blame. This way of thinking helped to keep our ancestors alive. But to constantly judge things that do not need judging

Acceptance Exercise

We have already been practicing mindful acceptance throughout this group. Now that we know a little more about what it is and how to cultivate it I'd like to take you through a brief exercise so we can practice willingness together.

Mindful Awareness of Emotions

Begin by getting in an upright, comfortable posture. It is not our intention here in these mindfulness exercises to relax or fall asleep, but rather to fall *awake*. As we pay close attention to the here and now our lives become more clear and more vital. Now gently close your eyes and begin to find this moment by focusing on the breath. There is no need to change your breathing in any way, just simply watch it go in and out. You may notice that it is easiest to choose a point to focus on your breath. Perhaps at the tip or your nostrils, the back of your throat, the chest as it rises and falls, or the belly as it inflates and deflates. Whatever feels right to you.

Today we are going to practice mindfulness of whatever emotions you are feeling here and now. You can do this at any time, with any emotion. When emotions occur, you can use mindfulness to observe them without getting swept off your feet. Just watch and label the feeling. Give yourself room to describe what you're feeling in detail, as fully as possible.

Begin by acknowledging what you feel in this moment. Give it a label. Sad, content, angry, anxious, bored, or whatever feels right to you. You might even notice a mixture of emotions so feel free to notice and label each one. Observe your emotion to see how strong it is now. Don't block or resist the feeling. Let it be whatever it is and as strong as it is. Every emotion is like a wave; it will

intensify for a while and then gradually subside. Just watch your emotion like you would watch an ocean wave.

Thoughts will inevitably come into your mind. They may be related or unrelated. No matter the thought, just give them a brief notice. Say to yourself “there’s a thought” or simply “thinking,” and choose to return your awareness to your current emotions.

As you get closer to your emotion you may notice it takes up a certain amount of space in your body. If you’d like you can see this space filled in with a certain color. Then you can watch the color change as your emotion changes. You may find it easier to draw an outline around where you feel the emotion most deeply, maybe in your chest, belly, throat or somewhere else. Draw that line now and notice how it too changes as your emotion plays out. Remember, the point of this mindful watching is to observe what your emotion does naturally, without you intervening in any way. Just allow it to be. You have become a curious observer, a watchful scientist. You allow your emotions to come and go. If you are the sky, they are the weather.

Mindful Acceptance in Daily Life

Practicing mindful acceptance in session will surely be helpful in learning to practice acceptance in daily life, but practicing when intense emotions are present can be very difficult. Here is an acronym to help you with acceptance in daily life:

S: Stop whatever you are doing, saying, etc.

T: Take a breath in order to allow the gap between anger urges and anger behaviors to widen.

O: Observe whatever you are feeling. Try to bring a stance of willingness, gentleness, and curiosity to your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

P: Pick a behavior to try instead of your automatic anger behaviors. If there isn’t a behavior that comes to mind, do something simple that is the opposite of what an person acting out or suppressing anger might do. Ideas include: smile, speak softly, relax, disengage (rather than attack), empathize (rather than judge). Can you think of any other alternative actions?

Homework: Willingness Practice and Log

S top

T ake a breath

O bserve

P ick a behavior

Willingness Practice Log

Willingness is taking an open, accepting stance towards our thoughts, emotions, and body sensations. It is: kindness, playfulness, softness, gentleness, openness, compassion, love, acceptance, patience, humor, and curiosity.

Use the following log to track your willingness practice for the next week. Identify one thought, feeling, or body sensation each day on which you choose to practice willingness. Even if it is just for a few moments. Then write down what you noticed.

If you'd like you can use CD Tracks 5 or 6 to help practice willingness.

DAY OF THE WEEK							
THOUGHT, FEELING, OR BODY SENSATION							
WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?							

Session 5

Overview

Present Moment Exercise: The Sky and the Weather

Self-as-Context

Values

Peak Moments Exercise

Values Card Sort

Homework: Values Clarification

Present Moment Exercise

The Sky and the Weather

Imagine you are observing yourself and you are the sky. Imagine that your thoughts and feelings are like the weather. The weather changes continually, but no matter how bad it gets, it cannot harm the sky in any way. The mightiest thunderstorm, the most turbulent hurricane, the most severe winter blizzard – these things cannot hurt or harm the sky. And no matter how bad the weather, the sky always has room for it – and sooner or later the weather always changes. Now sometimes we forget the sky is there, but it is still there. And sometimes the sky can't be seen – it is obscured by clouds, but high enough above those clouds – even the thickest, darkest, thunderclouds – the clear sky is still there, stretching in all directions, boundless and pure. More and more, you can learn to access this part of you: a safe space inside from which to observe thoughts and feelings come and go like the weather.

Exercise Debriefing

-What did you notice?

-Where you able to observe thoughts and emotions as separate from you?

Homework Review

Review

Last week we discussed how willingness can be an alternative to constantly struggling with thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. We discussed and practiced the four qualities of mindful acceptance.

Self –As-Context

What is Self-As-Context?

In everyday language, we talk about the “mind” without recognizing that there are two distinct elements to it: the thinking self (the part of us which is always thinking, generating thoughts, beliefs, memories, judgments, fantasies, plans, etc.) and the observing self (the aspect of us that is aware of whatever we are thinking, feeling, sensing, or doing in any moment). The observing self is the concept that we are not the content of our experience -- we are not our

thoughts, our feelings, our experienced sensations, the things we see, or the images that pass through our heads. The observing self is a viewpoint from which you can observe thoughts and feelings, and a “space” in which those thoughts and feelings can move. We access this “psychological space” through noticing that we are noticing, or becoming conscious of our own unconscious. It is a “place” from which we can observe our experience without being caught up in it.

Advantages of The Observing Self View

- Allows for a possibility of a more helpful perspective – you can defuse from troubling thoughts and feelings when you can recognize a self that is more constant than or larger than transitory phenomena.
- If you want to stop running from your pain, experience this ‘place inside’ where no matter how great the pain is, it cannot harm you.
- This is a place from which you can observe your experience, without being caught up in it. In this space, thoughts and feelings do not control actions. This facilitates conscious choice.

Values

Need for Values

We have been working to decrease the amount we get pushed or pulled around by our thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. Today we’ve even asked you to pull back from parts of your definition of self. So what is left to guide our actions. The answer is: our values! If our life is guided by values that we choose – we are in total control and not governed by those other internal events that we cannot control. And we’re no longer at the mercy of impulsivity. Values give our life direction, meaning, and purpose. They guide us away from emotion driven behavior and towards spending our precious energy on what really matters to us.

Defining Values in ACT

You may have heard lots of talk about values from your parents, your school, religious, and even the media. ACT has a very particular way of defining values that seems to be helpful.

First of all, values are never-ending. They are like the directions on a compass. If you were to follow a compass and head east, you would never actually arrive at the place called “East.” You never really achieve your values – they are a constant source of direction. For example, if you value being a good parent, you never are really done being a good parent – there are always more good parent things that you can do. Understanding that values are like directions can be

helpful in two ways. First, unlike a goal that takes time to achieve, the moment to take a step in the direction of your values you are living according to your values. Goals are more like “getting to Florida.” You are either there or you aren’t, and you can check it off your list when you’re done. So once you start logging in online to buy your ticket to Florida or tie up your shoes to start walking there, you are living your value of heading east. Second, values as being never-ending is especially helpful when you “misstep,” because you can immediately change your course when you realize you are headed in the wrong direction. There is no all-or-nothing thinking that is so common when we deal with goals. Goals are important as they serve as milestones in our valued direction, but they are in the service of the larger value.

Next, you get to pick your values. There is no right or wrong choice here—these are not my values, your parent’s, or your friend’s values—and you are welcome to change them at any time. Values are kind of like like our taste in pizzas. If you prefer ham and pineapple but I prefer salami and olives, that doesn’t mean that my taste in pizzas is right and yours is wrong. When you are picking and living your values ask yourself if you would value the same directions if no one ever knew your values or actions. If no one else ever knew you were living these values, would they still be important to you? We ask you to pick your values as if no one was watching. Your values can be the same as what others values, but you should own them.

Finally, chances to live your values are everywhere. Sometimes, we may not feel as if we are living our values during our day to day routines, but you have choices each moment in your life on what actions you take. For example, I can live my value of being helpful to others whether I’m at work, at home, or standing in line at Six Flags. I can live my value of compassion if I’m happy and content but I can also live it when I am sick, frustrated, or drained.

So you can see that having a sense what your values are is very important. Therefore it is very important that you complete your homework this week. Please take at least one hour to sit down and complete the worksheet. You may find it helpful to use track 7 on the CD to get mindful and grounded in the exercise.

Peak Moments Exercise

In this exercise we are going to look at some of our peak memories in order to tap into our values. I'm going to invite you to look back at different points in your life where you have felt vital and connected to your values. A peak memory is a particular situation in your life that says something about your identity. It is a time that you remember because it was something you care about, something that really matters to you. Let's begin about looking at childhood. As you think about your early life, is there any particular moment that comes to you because it says something about you? Just take a moment to think about it. Then write briefly on your piece of paper what it is about. Just jot down a couple of bullet points or sentences so you can remember later. Now let's look at your teenage years. Is there any particular memory that stands out because it really highlights something that mattered to you then? Now go ahead and write this moment down. Let's take a look at your early 20s. Is there any time where you felt really good about yourself because you were doing something that mattered to you or you learned something about yourself? Just take a moment to write them down. Now continue this exercise on your own for each part of your life. You can split it up into 5 or 10 year segments. Remember you are writing about moments that attempt to capture an essence of who you are or who you want to be. *(Pause for 5 minutes)*. When you're all done look at each of these moments. Do you see any themes or commonalities? If you do, you may have found a value that is important to you, something that you can use to guide your actions.

Values Card Sort

http://www.motivationalinterviewing.org/sites/default/files/valuescard_sort_0.pdf

Now we're going to do another exercise to look at what values may be important to you. You can keep in mind your peak moments as you go through this exercise. There are 83 total cards. Place the cards as they appear in one of the three categories: very important, somewhat important, or not important. You may define the values however you want, and sort according to how you feel today. There are no right or wrong answers and try to avoid judging yourself for what you chose. After all cards have been placed in a category, rearrange the cards in the "very important" column by order of priority. People generally find it helpful to have 5-10 "top values" to use as a compass to guide their decisions and actions.

Homework: Values Clarification Log

Values Clarification Log

Listen to track 7 to help you define your chosen values. Also, attached are some words, along with definitions, that people sometimes like to use when defining values. Take them or leave them. Remember values should be chosen by you, never-ending, and encompass many parts of your life. If you find yourself making narrow values, they are probably goals. Try to widen them and use the examples below to assist.

Examples of Well-Defined Values:

- I want to be well-educated and then pass on my knowledge to others.
- I want to be a loving, kind, responsible parent for my children.
- I want to be a spiritual being.
- I want to be a loving, compassionate, and supportive life partner.
- I want to continually challenge and improve myself as a person.
- I want to contribute to my community by performing acts of charity and volunteerism.
- I want to promote my physical and mental health.
- I want to be there for anyone I care about in their time of need.

Area	Description
Family Relationships	Describe the type of brother/sister, son/daughter, father/mother you would like to be. What would the relationship be like? How would you want to treat others?

<p>Intimate Relationships</p>	<p>What kind of person would you like to be in the relationship? What would the relationship be like? What is your role in the relationship?</p>
<p>Social Relationships</p>	<p>What does it mean to be a good friend? What kind of friends do you want? How would you treat your friends? What is an ideal friendship like for you?</p>

<p>Career and Employment</p>	<p>What type of work would you like to do? Why does it appeal to you? What kind of worker would you like to be? What kind of relationships would you like to have with your coworkers or your employer?</p>
<p>Personal Growth and Development</p>	<p>What do you want to be able to do? What do you want to be like? Would you like to pursue a formal education? Specialized training? An informal education? Why does this appeal to you?</p>

<p>Recreation and Fun</p>	<p>What type of hobbies, sports, or leisure activities would you like to be involved in? Why do these things appeal to you?</p>
<p>Spirituality</p>	<p>What does spirituality mean to you? (It doesn't have to be any kind of organized religion.) Is this an important part of life for you? What would it be like?</p>

<p>Community Life</p>	<p>What is your role in the community? What groups would you like to be a part of? What volunteer work would you do? What appeals to you in these areas?</p>
<p>Health and Self-Care</p>	<p>What do you value in your physical health? What issues are important to you (e.g., sleep, diet, exercise)?</p>

Acceptance: to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life etc

Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences

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

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

Beauty: to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment etc

Caring: to be caring towards myself, others, the environment etc

Challenge: to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve

Compassion: to act with kindness towards those who are suffering

Connection: to engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others

Contribution: to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others

Conformity: to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations

Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others

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

Creativity: to be creative or innovative

Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover

Encouragement: to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others

Equality: to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa

Excitement: to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating or thrilling

Fairness: to be fair to myself or others

Fitness: to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing

Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances

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

Forgiveness: to be forgiving towards myself or others

Fun: to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities

Generosity: to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others

Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life

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

Humor: to see and appreciate the humorous side of life

Humility: to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves

Industry: to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated

Independence: to be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things

Intimacy: to open up, reveal, and share myself -- emotionally or physically -- in my close personal relationships

Justice: to uphold justice and fairness

Kindness: to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or 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

Order: to be orderly and organized

Open-mindedness: to think things through, see things from other's points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.

Patience: to wait calmly for what I want

Persistence: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.

Pleasure: to create and give pleasure to myself or others

Power: to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organizing

Reciprocity: to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking

Respect: to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard

Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions

Romance: to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection

Safety: to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others

Self-awareness: to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions

Self-care: to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met

Self-development: to keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experience.

Self-control: to act in accordance with my own ideals

Sensuality: to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses

Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality

Spirituality: to connect with things bigger than myself

Skillfulness: to continually practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them

Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others

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

Session 6

Topics

Present Moment Exercise: The Facts

Forgiveness

Assertive Communication

Homework: Forgiveness Practice and Log and DEESC Practice

Present Moment Exercise

The Facts

For our present moment exercise we're going to try something a little different today. Please take a piece of paper and write down the facts about a situation where you feel you have been wronged and you are holding some resentment. You don't have to do this perfectly, just write down a few sentences. Who was there? What do you believe should and shouldn't have happened? What emotions were there? Now I'd like you to find a spot on the wall and hold your paper there with your pointer finger. Make sure you are pushing hard so you don't let the paper fall. A resentment can often feel like this, like holding the facts against the person who caused them. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. As you continue to hold your facts up, consider whom this action ultimately hurts. As you hold this resentment consider your ability to do other things besides holding these facts against the wall. Notice that you have little or no freedom to do anything else. Would you be willing to stop pushing the facts to the wall in the service of increasing your freedom? If you are willing to do this right now, simply hold the facts in your hands and note the difference between the experience of doing this versus pressing them against the wall.

Exercise Debriefing

- What did you notice?
- How did you feel when you simply held on to the paper?
- Did you notice a change on how you feel?

Homework Review

Review

Last we discussed the observing-self and the benefits of seeing yourself as a vessel that holds thoughts and feelings. We also discussed what values are according to ACT and you have done a wonderful job working to clarify and define your values.

Forgiveness

Defining Forgiveness

Discuss ACT definition of forgiveness. Forgiveness is one of the most elegant forms of willingness many people who struggle with anger problems are fighting old battles in the hope that the hurt that started these battles will be alleviated; most people have difficulty with forgiveness because it sounds like a change in judgment or evaluation. It sounds like, "I used to think you were wrong, but now I've changed my mind."

Or even worse, it may sound like emotional avoidance: forgetting old angers and hurts, excusing, denying But the word *forgive* actually suggests a more positive way to approach this topic: Taken literally, it means to "give that which came before" It means repairing what was lost. Give and Gift come from the Latin word *Gratis* which means free. In that sense, fore-giving is not earned: it is free.

However, the gift of fore-giveness is not a gift to someone else. Giving what went before is most particularly not a gift to the wrongdoer. It is a gift to oneself. If one cannot give the grace that went before a wrongdoing, even if it was valuable, then life's injustices are made permanent. And they are made permanent by the victim's action-not by the actions of a perpetrator.

What are the costs of holding on to a resentment? Does it ever bring the peace and satisfaction that you are hoping for? Who does it ultimately hurt?

Hook Metaphor

When we are hurt because of the actions of another person or of ourselves, it's like we are caught on a fishing hook. The pain seems to grab us and limit our movement. Our usual reaction to "try to get revenge" by getting the person who may have caused our pain to feel the same pain: by hooking them. However, the problem with this strategy is that we usually wind up sticking them with the same hook that we are caught on. It's like we are on the hook, and they are on top of us. Unfortunately, this keeps us on the hook. You can't get yourself off the hook, let go of the pain, because they are blocking the way. If you are completely invested in keeping the other person on the hook, you are also 100% never going to be able to get yourself off the hook because that person will always be blocking the way out. Forgiveness is letting the person off the hook so that you can get yourself off the hook. It is a gift to yourself, not the other person. It does not require you to change the way you feel, how you think, or whether or not you approve of what happened. It is simply a choice you make to let that person go so that you can move on with your life.

If forgiveness was a choice that you could make, one that would allow you to move past old hurts, would you take it?

Assertive Communication

Assertive communication is a type of communication style characterized by the belief that everyone has the right to express their own legitimate needs. You are allowed to say what you want, express feelings, stand up for your rights, and set appropriate limits.

In order to respond assertively try phrasing your request using what is called a DEESC script. The DEESC script stands for Describe, Express, Empathize, Specify, and Consequences. Try practicing the script for several situations that you just identified. You should try writing the script out and practicing it before you talk to the person.

Describe. Describe the behavior/situation as completely and objectively as possible. Just the facts! "The last time, my brother George came to visit, I cleaned the entire house all by myself."

Express. Express your feelings and thoughts about the situation/behavior. Try to phrase your statements using "I", and not "You". Beginning sentences with "You" often puts people on the defensive, which means they won't listen to you. "As a result, I felt exhausted and angry."

Empathize. Verbally empathize with the other person. "I know you have been tired from working so much".

Specify. Specify what behavior/outcome you would prefer to happen. "I would like the two of us to work on cleaning the house."

Consequences. Specify the consequences (both positive and negative). "If we both work together, the house will be cleaned up faster and we can all enjoy his visit together." Or "If we work together, I will be less tired and irritable."

Homework: Forgiveness Practice and Log

Forgiveness Practice Log

Remember, forgiveness is not condoning or forgetting past wrongs or ignoring hurt and pain. Forgiveness is about letting go so you can move more effectively in your life.

Use CD track 8 to help with practicing the steps of forgiveness. Try to practice at least one time this week. It may help to start with something that you have been thinking about forgiving already, something small.

DAY OF THE WEEK							
WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?							

Assertive Communication DEESC Script

DESCRIBE:

When you... _____

EXPRESS:

I feel... _____

EMPATHIZE:

I understand... _____

SPECIFICS:

I want.... _____

I need... _____

CONSEQUENCES:

If... _____

Then... _____

Session 7

Topics

Present Moment Exercise: Leaves on a Stream

Committed Action

Homework: Committed Action Log

Present Moment Exercise

Leaves on a Stream

Sit in a comfortable position and either close your eyes or rest them gently on a fixed spot in the room. Visualize yourself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with leaves floating along the surface of the water. *Pause 10 seconds.* For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf... let it float by. Do this with each thought – pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Even if you have joyous or enthusiastic thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by. If your thoughts momentarily stop, continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later, your thoughts will start up again. *Pause 20 seconds.* Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. Don't try to speed it up and rush your thoughts along. You're not trying to rush the leaves along or "get rid" of your thoughts. You are allowing them to come and go at their own pace. If your mind says "This is dumb," "I'm bored," or "I'm not doing this right" place *those thoughts* on leaves, too, and let them pass. *Pause 20 seconds.* If a leaf gets stuck, allow it to hang around until it's ready to float by. If the thought comes up again, watch it float by another time. *Pause 20 seconds.* If a difficult or painful feeling arises, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, "I notice myself having a feeling of boredom/impatience/frustration." Place those thoughts on leaves and allow them float along. From time to time, your thoughts may hook you and distract you from being fully present in this exercise. This is *normal*. As soon as you realize that you have become sidetracked, gently bring your attention back to the visualization exercise.

Exercise Debriefing

-What did you notice?

-Were you able to allow your thoughts to pass without getting caught up in them?

Homework Review

Review

Last week we discussed forgiveness and how struggling with old battles keep us angry, and how only through forgiveness the hurt can be alleviated. We discussed how holding on to anger keep us "hooked" and stuck.

Committed Action

Definition of Committed Action

Committed action means taking effective action, guided by your values. It is important to know your values but only through action your life can become rich, full and meaningful. Values-guided action gives rise to a wide range of thoughts and feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant, both pleasurable and painful. So committed action means doing what it takes” to live by your values even if that brings up pain and discomfort.

Step for Committed Action

1. Choose a domain of life that is high priority for change.
2. Choose the values to pursue in this domain.
3. Develop goals, guided by those values.
4. Take action mindfully.
5. Take each step, no matter how you feel.

SMART Goals

In order to take action effectively, goals should be SMART

S = specific (Is the goal concrete?)

M = meaningful (Does this goal lead me in the direction of my value?)

A = achievable

R = realistic (is the goal obtainable? Is it something I have control over?)

T = time-limited

Identify Steps and Arrange Them in Logical Order

- Having settled on goals, now you need to focus on the steps to take to get there.
- Start with the short-term goal and break it down into smaller intermediate steps. Think of each step you need to take to attain your goal.
- Think about the logical order for the steps. What needs to happen first before the other steps can follow?

(Example: if your goal is to change jobs and eventually become a manager in a larger corporation rather than the small company you are currently working for. This goal includes smaller specific actions such as checking websites for posting on managerial jobs, networking with others in your field, updating your resume, setting up an informational interview at a company that interests you, and making a job application to a potential new employer).

Learning to take small steps is important. Don't get too focused on big long-term goals, they will pull you out of living in the present and might put you in the mindset "I will be happy once I've achieved that goal".

Make a Commitment and Take the Step

- Now it is time to make a commitment to step number 1. Are you willing to accept whatever discomfort your mind and body will give you? Are you willing to commit to your values and to the behavioral and life changes they imply? Are you ready to commit to following through?
- Commit to a day and time to begin step 1. Then, no matter how you feel at that time, do it. This is all about action and doing something different with your life. Unless you take action, nothing will change.
- Public commitments - People are far more likely to follow through on public commitments than private ones. So we will ask you to say out loud exactly what you are committing to. It might feel awkward to make public commitments but as you make your commitment aloud your chances of following through with it will increase.

Driving Your Life Bus

You can think of yourself as the driver of a bus called “My Life. You are headed north toward your Value Mountain (insert a value here). Along the way, you pick up some unruly passengers, like these blaming, critical, anger-related thoughts that your mind comes up with. Other passengers on the bus traveling with you are the feelings of pain and hurt that you contacted in earlier exercises. These passengers are loud and persistent. They frighten and seemingly bully you as you drive along your chosen route. After a while, you realize that when you turned around while trying to argue with these other passengers and calm them down, you missed a road sign and took a wrong turn. Now you find yourself about one hour out of your way, headed south. What do you do? You are, in a sense, lost, but you are not directionless. You could stop the bus and focus on getting your passengers in line. What would it cost you to do? Thoughts and feelings cannot prevent you from turning your bus around and heading north again toward the mountain – unless you give them that power. If getting to the mountain is important to you, then what you need to do is stay in the driver’s seat of the bus and keep on driving north towards the mountains, no matter how much noise those other passengers are making.

Homework: Committed Action Log

Committed Action Log

*Make sure your goal is S*M*A*R*T
(Specific, Meaningful, Achievable, Realistic, Time-limited)*

Value I would Like to work on:
Committed Action:
SMART Steps for committed action:
1 -
2 -
3 -
4 -
5 -

Value I would Like to work on:
Committed Action:
SMART Steps for committed action:
1 -
2 -
3 -
4 -
5 -

Session 8

Topics

Present Moment Exercise: Taking Off the Armor
Barriers to Committed Action and How to Get Unstuck
Final Mindfulness: The Swamp and the Lotus Flower

Present Moment Exercise

Taking Off the Armor

Take a few moments to reflect on this: Up until now, your anger has been acting like a suit of armor, protecting you from feeling your pain, hurt and grief. Unfortunately, this pain, hurt and grief is like a wound that will not heal, until you carefully tend to it. So see if you can now take off your armor, and heal the wound beneath it. Ask yourself, 'What is beneath this anger? What am I really feeling, deep inside?' Scan your body, and notice any strong sensations. Focus on the strongest, most difficult sensation. Observe it like a curious scientist, breathe into it, make room for it, and allow it to be there (as in the mindfulness of emotions exercise). Trace the outline of this sensation with your fingers, 'drawing' the shape of it on your skin. Lay your hand over this area, in the same way that a caring nurse would lay her hand on the head of a sick patient. Feel the warmth coming from your hand into this pain. Breathe into it, and let it be. Soften up around this pain. Allow it to be there even though you don't like it. Feel the warmth spreading from your hand into the pain. Don't expect the pain to go. It may diminish, or it may not. The point is to accept it, not to get rid of it. To make room for it, and allow it to be – instead of trying to 'numb it' with an injection of anger. Silently say the word 'gentle', several times. Treat your pain gently, as if it's a crying baby that needs comforting and soothing. Soften up around it. Let it be. Finally, bring attention back to your breath, and practice mindful breathing for a couple of minutes. Then open your eyes and connect with the room around you.

Exercise Debriefing

- What did you notice?
- Were you able to let go of your armor, if even for second?
- Did you notice any softer emotions underneath your anger?

Homework Review

Review

- The 5 Parts of Anger
- Anger Myths
- Costs of Anger
- Control as the Problem
- How the Mind Creates Anger
- Ways to Defuse from Thoughts

- Willingness/Acceptance as an Alternative
- The Four Qualities of Mindful Acceptance
- Self-as-Context
- Values
- Forgiveness
- Assertive Communication
- Committed Action

Barriers to Committed Action and How to Get Unstuck

Often, when making positive life changes, people commonly encounter psychological barriers.

Negative Thoughts

As you set out to make change, it will be normal for your mind to engage in negative thinking: “I am too busy”, “I can’t do it”, “I will fail”, “It’s too hard”, and so on. This isn’t a problem if we defuse from them, but if we fuse with those thoughts, they can prevent us from moving forward.

Defuse from Reason-Giving

The mind is a reason-giving machine, and as soon as we even *think* about doing something that pulls us out of our comfort zone, it cranks out all the reasons why we can’t do it, shouldn’t do it, or shouldn’t even have to do it: *I’m too tired, I’m too busy, it’s not important, it’s too hard, I’m not good enough, I can’t do it, I’ll fail, I’m too anxious*, and so on. And if we wait until the day our mind stops reason-giving, *before* we do the things that really matter in life ... we’ll never get started. So if fusion with reason-giving is a major barrier to action, then naturally we target it with defusion: e.g. “Aha! Here it is again. The ‘I can’t do it story’. Thanks, mind!”

Avoidance of Discomfort

Change usually elicits uncomfortable feelings, especially anxiety. You will have to accept this discomfort in order to move forward.

Accept Being Stuck

The first step is to accept being stuck. Beating yourself up for getting stuck is not useful and instead you can turn this difficult experience into opportunities to develop self-acceptance and self-compassion. Ask yourself: “Can I accept myself as a human being even though I am temporarily stuck?”, “Can I be kind and caring toward myself instead of beating myself up?”

Cultivate Willingness

The practice of new skills is often boring or tedious; and the pursuit of goals that pull us out of the “comfort zone”, almost always generates significant anxiety. So if we are unwilling to make room for discomfort, then obviously we will not take action. So we can ask ourselves: “Am I willing to feel some discomfort, in order to do what matters?” or “Am I willing to make room for sweaty hands, and a knot in my stomach, and a tightness in my chest, and a voice in my head that tells me scary things, if that’s what I need to make room for in order to do the things that really matter?” If you are unwilling to make room for the inevitable discomfort, you may need to a) work on acceptance skills; b) enhancing the link to your values; or c) setting an easier goal that elicits less discomfort.

Losing Motivation

If you lose touch with your values then you will lose motivation. In order to stay on track, make sure you know what your values are. Make sure you truly connect with your values. Make sure these are YOUR values and not the values of your religion, culture or parents.

Clarify Your Values

Continue to clarify your values and make sure your commitment action goals come directly from your values.

Enlist Support

Social support is often hugely motivating. Can you find a partner, friend, relative, co-worker, or neighbor, with whom you can share his aspirations and achievements? Someone who will encourage and support you? Acknowledge your successes and cheer you on? Is there a group or a course you could join that might serve this purpose? Can you find an “exercise buddy” to go running with, or a “study buddy” to help you with homework?

Use Reminders

It’s very easy for us to forget what our goals are. So how can we create “reminders”? Can we put messages or alerts in the computer, mobile phone, calendar, or journal? Can we ask people in our support network to remind us? Can we stick up notes on the mirror or the fridge or the car dashboard? Can we put a sticker on our watch strap, or an elastic band around our wrist, or a gadget on our key ring, so that whenever we see these things they remind us of our goals? Can we use a recurring event to cue our new behavior: for example,

we might do a breathing exercise for ten minutes immediately after dinner, or as soon as our alarm clock goes off in the morning? Can we schedule the activity into a calendar or diary or onto our daily “To Do” list – and highlight it in some way, to emphasize its importance? (This of course also gives the goal a time-frame, and helps avoid competing activities.)

Avoid Excessive Goals

Make sure your goals don't exceed your resources or you will end up giving up or failing. The necessary resources can be skills, time, money, and physical health.

Questionnaires

Participants complete the Anger Actions Questionnaire and AOQ (or other chosen measures). Remind participants that these questionnaires are used to help patients and clinicians track their progress throughout the group.

Final Mindfulness

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. See if you can get in touch with the present moment. Let yourself just be right here, right now. I want you to imagine that you are on the edge of a giant swamp. As you begin to walk across the swamp you notice there is a mucky layer of mud across the bottom of the swamp. These are the thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations that you encounter in your daily life. Some are uncomfortable. But there is something else in this swamp. Along this swamp are beautiful lotus flowers with hundreds of petals on each flower. I would like to you imagine that each of these flower represents one of your values. Perhaps each flower represents an important relationship in your life or maybe a simple word encompassing a large value for you. Imagine each petal as a committed action step you can take towards your living your values. As you continue to walk through the swamp you realized that within the mud is the nourishment needed for the lotus flowers to remain big, beautiful, and vital. Imagine yourself wading with courage through the murky waters as you gather the beautiful lotus flowers. Know that this is a lifelong journey that can be as vital as you want it to be.