

Doing ACT effectively with high-performing, busy people

Take away exercises

Spending time with yourself wherever you are

- How am I feeling right now?
- How am I standing, walking, sitting right now?
- How does my body feel right now?
- What am I doing right now?
- What thoughts are being produced by my mind right now?
- If I buy into these thoughts, do I move towards what matters most to me right now?
- What do I *really* need in this moment?
- What is really important to me right now?
- How would I like to be in this moment?
- What do I want to stand for in the face of this situation I am in, right now?

[adapted from: Sinclair, M., Seydel, J., & Shaw, E. (2018). *Mindfulness for Busy People: Turning from frantic and frazzled into calm and composed* (2nd Ed.). Pearson: Harlow]

SLOW down

You can use this acronym in any stressful moment, and it will be particularly useful when you notice you're busying around on autopilot:

- S** Stop whatever you are doing and bring your awareness to your breathing
- L** Let thoughts, opinions, judgments and urges be
- O** Open up your heart, body and mind to what you are feeling
- W** Where is most important for you to put your attention right now? (e.g. taking care of yourself, being present with friends/family, resting the mind, finishing off important work)

[adapted from: Sinclair, M., Seydel, J., & Shaw, E. (2018). *Mindfulness for Busy People: Turning from frantic and frazzled into calm and composed* (2nd Ed.). Pearson: Harlow]

Sense-sational

- Stop, right now, whatever you are doing, wherever you are
- Look up and around you
- Take a breath
- Invite all of yourself in
- Awaken from the dream
- Notice the colours, hear the sounds, smell the scents, touch the textures and savour the taste of your life right now. This is it!

[adapted from: Sinclair, M., Seydel, J., & Shaw, E. (2018). *Mindfulness for Busy People: Turning from frantic and frazzled into calm and composed* (2nd Ed.). Pearson: Harlow]

Getting acquainted with your phone

- First sit, with your phone on a table or other surface, on your lap in front of you or become aware of it in your pocket.
- Reach out and lift your phone up in your hand, notice its weight and acknowledge how your hand and body is now one phone heavier.

- Next, while you hold your phone in hand, gently move it around, flipping it over in the palm of your hand, using your fingers, thumb and hand, notice how its weight becomes lighter and heavier on different parts of your fingers and hands.
- There's the weight of the phone and then there's you noticing its weight.
- Allow its weight to take centre stage in your awareness.
- Now, hold your phone still once again, allow it to rest in the palm of your hand and now run your thumb over its surface in all directions, notice the texture, the smoothness versus the bumps and indentations.
- It is natural for your attention to wander or become distracted, when this happens just gently guide it back to noticing the sensations of your phone in your hand.
- Be aware that you are noticing your phone in this moment.
- There's your phone and then there's you noticing it and your experiences of it.
- Now gaze upon your phone, exploring it with your eyes and sight, noticing its contours, edges, colours and markings.
- Notice the space around your phone and where this space meets its edges.
- Notice its sleek design with wonder and curiosity.
- As you move your phone around in your hand again, notice where the light is reflected, where it shimmers and fades across its surface.
- Should your attention wander or become distracted, perhaps by thoughts about your phone, what emails, messages you may have received on it, simply acknowledge the distraction and then gently guide your attention back to noticing your experiences of your phone.
- Your experiences of your phone change – but the part of you that notices these experiences does not change, it remains constant – simply aware.

[adapted from: Sinclair, M., Seydel, J., & Shaw, E. (2018). *Mindfulness for Busy People: Turning from frantic and frazzled into calm and composed* (2nd Ed.). Pearson: Harlow]

What am I feeling?

- Notice and name how you're feeling emotionally right now (feelings tend to be described in one word such as: happy, excited, bored, frustrated, angry, sad, anxious, stressed) e.g. 'here's a feeling of boredom'. If you aren't too sure what's there perhaps noticing whether the feeling is pleasant, neutral or unpleasant.
- Acknowledge the fact that you are noticing your emotions.
- Notice how you know you are feeling this emotion. Where in your body does this emotion show up (lightness in the heart, tightness in the chest, butterflies in the stomach)?
- Point to the area of your body where this emotion feels the strongest. If you notice that it's all over your body or you can't locate a specific area, then just point to an area in your body at random, or perhaps to the middle of your body or the heart area.
- There it is, that emotion, and then there's you acknowledging it – nothing more than that.
- As you go about your busy days, continue to practise noticing your emotions (the 'good' and the 'bad' ones) and acknowledge the fact that you are noticing them, in the way described above.
- You may notice how you feel when:
 - You speak to your colleague at work, partner at home, etc.
 - You rush around walking from here to there.
 - You catch sight of a stunning cherry tree from the window of the bus as the drivers change shifts.
 - You hear the water boiling in the kettle as you make a quick cup of tea.
 - You're sitting at your desk at work.

[adapted from: Sinclair, M., Seydel, J., & Shaw, E. (2018). *Mindfulness for Busy People: Turning from frantic and frazzled into calm and composed* (2nd Ed.). Pearson: Harlow]

Turning towards our emotions

- Begin by sitting in a comfortable and balanced position. Tune in to your breathing to anchor you in this present moment.
- Bring to mind a situation which is mildly distressing for you, let your mind think freely about this problem for a short while.
- Next, expand your awareness throughout your body and notice what's here right now.
- Notice what emotions are here and their sensory qualities perhaps tightness, heaviness, discomfort somewhere in your body.
- Gently guide your awareness to an area of the body where you feel discomfort more vividly. Be curious to what this really feels like, in this place in your body, right now.
- Gently stay with the discomfort and explore it in more detail, notice the intensity of it, where the discomfort starts and where it finishes, perhaps drawing a mental outline around the sensation, noticing how much space it takes up in your body. Getting a sense of whether it's moving or still, hot or cold, sharp or dull, towards the surface of the body or deep within.
- Allowing your experience to unfold moment by moment, letting go of any urges to try to change your discomfort. Breathing alongside these sensations.
- If you notice any thoughts that distract your attention, see if you can notice these and allow space for these too and guide your attention gently back to the tangible sensations of discomfort in the body.
- If it feels okay to do so, and as you breathe alongside your discomfort, silently say to yourself '*I know this hurts and I can be with it*'.
- If the sensations become too intense, turn your attention back to your breath. When you are ready again return the attention back to the discomfort. Come back to the breath and end the practise whenever feels right for you.

[adapted from: Sinclair, M., Seydel, J., & Shaw, E. (2018). *Mindfulness for Busy People: Turning from frantic and frazzled into calm and composed* (2nd Ed.). Pearson: Harlow]

What's underneath my busyness?

Part 1: Drilling down

- Ask yourself the following questions:
- If I DON'T act on this urge right now (e.g. to go out, work on this project, check and answer emails, check my Twitter and Facebook messages, call a friend, boss, mother, etc.) what am I really concerned might happen?
- And what is the problem with that/what might happen then?
- And what is the problem with that/what might happen then?
- And what is the problem with that?... For example, I will feel 'X' (worthless, failure, rejection, unlovable, vulnerable etc.).

Part 2: Stop stirring the pond

- Right, so there it is, your 'X' (e.g. feelings of worthlessness/vulnerability) with all the busyness, stress, anxiety and frustration whirling around it.
- Now for a few minutes, just sit observing this experience, and any feelings of anxiety, frustration, busyness and stress.
- Let these feelings come and go as they naturally will. Notice the urges to act on these feelings or any urges to take the feelings away. Notice how the intensity of these feelings and urges change.

- Notice any thoughts that arise, maybe about how this is not helpful, you have too much to do, there's not enough time in the day for this mindfulness lark! Allow these thoughts to come and go as if they are passing clouds in the sky of your awareness.
- Now focus in on one of the most intense feelings you have, maybe a feeling of worthlessness, vulnerability or associated fear, anxiety, sadness, general stress or frustration. Locate that feeling in your body; is it in your chest, stomach, head, shoulders, heart, legs? If you feel it all over your body, then hold your whole body in your awareness.
- Hold this feeling of pain in your awareness, like a caring parent will hold a crying child, give it your time and attention right now, you don't have to like it, just hold it.
- Now breathe into the area of your body where this feeling resides, imagine your in-breath flowing around this feeling. As you breathe out let go of all struggle and tension you may have with this feeling, imagine your out-breath carrying this struggle away.
- Again, breathe into and around this feeling. And as you breathe out, let go of all struggle and tension you may have with this feeling.
- Allow this feeling to be here just as it is, allowing the breath to create space around it.
- The feeling may change, or it may not, remember the goal is not to change the feeling but to accept it, it's part of you, it makes you human, we all experience it, let it be.

[adapted from: Sinclair, M., Seydel, J., & Shaw, E. (2018). *Mindfulness for Busy People: Turning from frantic and frazzled into calm and composed* (2nd Ed.). Pearson: Harlow]

Two Teachers

- Imagine someone you care deeply about. Bring them to mind and notice any sensations that may emerge around your heart.
- Imagine that this person is learning a new challenging skill. Perhaps learning to drive, to play the piano, a new language.
- Now imagine that there are two teachers, teaching your loved one this skill. The first is a harsh critical teacher. When your loved one makes a mistake, they shout at them 'No, No, No, what have you done?!, What's wrong with you? You are always making mistakes, you are so useless at this! You're pathetic!'
- What impact would this have on the way your loved one felt? Their performance at learning this new skill? Their motivation to carry on?
- The second teacher understands how difficult it is to learn this skill. They calmly say things to encourage your loved one to keep going like 'Nice effort, keep it going, this is really hard, that's not quite right, what about trying this?'
- What impact would this approach have on the way your loved one felt? Their performance at learning this new skill? Their motivation to carry on?
- Which one of those two teachers would you want your loved one to have?
- Which teacher are you more likely to hear in your own head as you go about your busy life?

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Body scanning

- The purpose of this practice is to cultivate a non-judging awareness of your body, moment by moment. Allowing any thoughts, feelings and urges to simply come and go, rise and fall as you remain aware of your body throughout.
- Sit or lay somewhere comfortably. Close your eyes or droop your eyelids and let your gaze rest on a still object or spot, in front of you.

- Begin by bringing your awareness to your feet. Allow your feet to take centre stage in your awareness right now.
- You may notice a sensation at your feet, perhaps the sensation of your feet against the floor or touching the inside of your shoes. You may notice an absence of sensation at your feet. Either is fine the presence or absence of sensation. Remember this practice is not about sensation but about awareness of what is, just as it is.
- As you notice your feet in this way, your mind may give you some thoughts, such as judgments, opinions, and preferences, about the practice itself or about anything else at all. These thoughts may distract you and pull your attention away.
- Simply notice the distraction, perhaps label the distraction thinking, congratulate yourself for noticing this and then gently guide your attention back into your feet.
- There they are again, the left and right foot, and then there is you, noticing your feet in this moment.
- Next allow your feet to dissolve from your awareness and bring your awareness to your legs.
- Acknowledge the position of your legs as you sit or lay as you are.
- Notice the sensations, or absence of sensations at your legs.
- There they are your legs and then there is you holding them at centre stage in your awareness. Just these legs, just this moment.
- Next allow your legs to dissolve from your awareness and then bring your awareness to your arms.
- Again, notice the position of your arms, just as they are right now. Notice any changing sensations, or absence of sensations in your arms.
- Next be as curious and open as you can to notice the sensation of air where it meets the surface of your skin. You may notice the sensation of air against your skin on your face, neck, hands or any exposed or other body part. Stay with this for a few minutes and see what arises.
- Next begin to scan your body from the tip of your head to the tips of your toes.
- Scan up and down and acknowledge any warmer sensations you come across versus cooler ones. It may be warmer where your body makes contact the surface that you are sitting or lying on. Or it may be warmer where different body parts are resting against another. Acknowledging these warmer sensations is much like tipping your hat or nodding your head to a passer-by on the street to acknowledge them – ‘Ah! Warmer sensation I see you’. Keep scanning for these warmer sensations for minute or two.
- Notice where your attention is now. If it is not scanning your body for warmer sensations, then gently bring it back to doing just that.
- When you are ready, bring your awareness to your feet once again, as you did at the start. Maybe marvelling at the amazing ability, you have to expand or narrow your awareness at your will. So, there they are again, your two feet. With the presence or absence of sensation.
- Then there is you observing your feet, in this very moment. Just these two feet, just this one moment.
- When you are ready, bring to mind some of the objects that are around you and gently begin to open your eyes, grounding yourself back into the environment, bringing the same present moment awareness with you as you go about your day.

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The continuous YOU

- To begin, bring your attention to your breath.
- Notice the sensations of your breath being breathed by your body. Track each in-breath from the tip of your nostrils, down into your lungs, and then follow each out-breath as your lungs empty and your breath travels on its upwards journey out of the body.
- Continue to track your in-and out-breath in this way for a minute or so.
- When you're ready, bring to mind a painful memory from when you were a child. Perhaps a time you had a nightmare or felt embarrassed at school, for instance.
- As this younger self, notice what worries are going through your mind, how you feel emotionally and physically, what you can see and hear.
- If you can notice those worries, feelings, sights and sounds, you cannot *be* those worries, feelings, sights and sounds.
- These worries, feelings, sights and sounds change but the YOU that notices them does not change, it never has.
- Notice that there is somebody behind the eyes of this younger self.
- Can you experience being this observer?
- What message would you like to send to this younger self about their suffering and their struggles with it?
- Now bring to mind a painful memory from the more recent past.
- As this more recent self, notice what worries are going through your mind, how you feel emotionally and, in your body, what you can see, hear.
- If you can notice these worries, feelings, sights and sounds, you cannot be these worries, feelings, sights and sounds.
- These worries, feelings, sights and sounds are constantly changing and there is still this YOU that notices them and does not change, it never has.
- Notice that there is somebody behind the eyes of this more recent self.
- Can you experience being this observer?
- What message would you like to send to this more recent self about their suffering and their struggles with it?
- Now, notice what thoughts are going through your mind right now.
- Notice how you feel emotionally and, in your body, what you can see and hear at this very moment.
- If you can notice these thoughts, feelings, sights and sounds, you cannot be these thoughts, feelings, sights and sounds.
- These thoughts, feelings, sights and sounds are constantly changing and there is still this YOU that notices them and does not change, it never has and never will.
- Notice that there is somebody behind your eyes noticing these experiences right now.
- Can you experience being this observer?
- This is the exact same observer that was present with your younger self and more recent self and will be again with your future self.
- What message would you like to send to yourself about any pain you may be suffering right now and your struggles with it?

[adapted from: Sinclair, M. & Beadman, M. (2016). The Little ACT Workbook: An introduction to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: a mindfulness-based guide for living a full and meaningful life. Crimson: Bath]

To Be List

- What kind of person do I want to **be** today (e.g. kind, caring, supportive, hardworking)?
- What aspects of my life do I wish to **be** paying more attention to (e.g. health, relationships, personal development, fitness, work)?

- When I look back on my day, how do I hope to have **been** with myself (e.g. kind, compassionate)?
- What's the most important thing I want to **be** in my life?
- How would I like to **be** at work today?
- How do I want to **be** when confronted with the challenges of the day?

[adapted from: Sinclair, M., Seydel, J., & Shaw, E. (2018). *Mindfulness for Busy People: Turning from frantic and frazzled into calm and composed* (2nd Ed.). Pearson: Harlow]

Growing Older

- Find a comfortable position and close your eyes, or fix your gaze on a spot in front of you if you prefer. Take a few moments to ground yourself, perhaps by bringing your attention to your breathing to anchor you in this present moment.
- Imagine going forward in time many years, seeing yourself grow older.
- Imagine too that you have lived those years completely inconsistent with your 3 or 4 chosen values. Imagine the kinds of things that might have got in the way of you living a life that really mattered to you (busyness, rushing around maybe?).
- Notice what it's like to imagine this, noticing any thoughts and feelings that arise.
- Notice where you feel this most strongly in your body. Stay for a few moments allowing these thoughts and feelings to emerge.
- Take a deep breath and as you exhale, allow this image to fade away.
- Now imagine again that you have grown much older, but this time you have lived a life fully consistent with your values. Imagine what that would look like and the sorts of things you might have done.
- Notice what it's like to imagine this, noticing any thoughts and feelings that arise.
- Notice where you feel this most strongly in your body. Stay for a few moments allowing these thoughts and feelings to emerge.
- Take a deep breath and as you exhale, allow this image to fade away.

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It's a miracle!

Imagine that a miracle has happened and tomorrow morning, when you wake up, you have achieved everything that matters to you in life. Imagine that you feel 100% confident and happy. You never have to prove yourself or impress anyone ever again and you can now do anything in life that you want to. With that in mind, consider:

- What will you do with your life?
- How will you act differently?
- How will you behave differently?
- How will you talk to yourself or others differently?
- What personal qualities will you demonstrate?
- What will others see that is different about you and how you are being?

[adapted from: Sinclair, M. & Beadman, M. (2016). *The Little ACT Workbook: An introduction to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: a mindfulness-based guide for living a full and meaningful life*. Crimson: Bath]

Time for action

Choose one value you would like to work on (you can go back to choose another to work on later). What would you be willing to commit to *doing* that would move you one step towards this value, no matter how big or small the step?

The value I will be working on is:

- Over the next hour the action I will commit to doing is:
- Over the next day the action I will commit to doing is:
- Over the next week the action I will commit to doing is:
- Over the next month the action I will commit to doing is:
- Over the next year the action I will commit to doing is:

As you take committed action towards your values, it is highly likely that you will encounter some undesirable experiences and barriers to your progress. These may involve thoughts (such as 'I can't do this', 'I'll do it later', 'I'm too tired or busy right now') and emotions (such as fear, guilt, shame, frustration, loss, boredom etc). It is important to consider the thoughts and feelings that might show up and how you might stay on track when they do so. So, continue this exercise by thinking through the questions below.

- What thoughts are likely to show up and could get in the way of my progress?
- What feelings are likely to show up and could get in the way of my progress?
- What techniques will I use to respond to these thoughts and feelings when they show up?
- How *willing* am I to experience these thoughts and feelings as I pursue what I really care about (1 = not at all willing, 10 = completely and entirely willing)?
(Remember, anything less than 10 won't do!)

[adapted from: Sinclair, M. & Beadman, M. (2016). The Little ACT Workbook: An introduction to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: a mindfulness-based guide for living a full and meaningful life. Crimson: Bath]

Worksheet: Triggers and Consequences of My Actions

What unwanted experiences do I try to avoid, suppress, control?

What are the **emotions** that trouble you the most and you'd most like to reduce or get rid of? Try to identify an emotion, rather than a thought or a physical feeling. For example, anger, anxiety, sadness or jealousy.

The emotions I'd like to get rid of are ...

1.
2.
3. etc.

What are some of the **thoughts** that tend to cause you upset and you'd like to reduce or get rid of? Try to identify a thought here, rather than an emotion. Thoughts usually come in a collection of words that pop into our minds but might also be images or memories. For example, 'Something bad is going to happen', 'I'm not good enough', 'I shouldn't have said/done that' or 'I'm a failure', etc. These thoughts might be about yourself, other people, the future or the past, or a different situation entirely.

The thoughts I'd like to get rid of are ...

1.
2.
3. etc.

What are some of the **physical sensations** that feel uncomfortable and you'd most like to reduce or get rid of? For example, an increased heart rate, hot flushes, physical shakes, persistent fatigue or aches and pains, or discomfort in your stomach, etc.?

The physical sensations I'd like to get rid of are...

1.
2.
3. etc.

The strategies I have used to avoid, get rid of or 'fix' unpleasant emotions, thoughts or physical sensations

Consider and list which of the following types of strategies you have used:

Avoidance: Have you ever avoided or withdrawn from people, places, activities, situations or events because you felt bad or wanted to avoid feeling bad? For example, avoiding job interviews or work meetings, avoiding large groups of people, avoiding parties, avoiding being alone, avoiding dates, staying in bed?

Taking your mind off it: How have you tried to distract yourself or keep your mind off unwanted emotions, thoughts or physical sensations? For example, watching TV, working non-stop, exercising excessively, playing computer games, using your mobile phone, listening to loud music.

Things you've used to try to feel better: For example, using food, alcohol, medication, drugs, gambling, sex, self-harm, researching your condition online, getting reassurance from doctors.

Thinking strategies: How have you tried to think your way to feeling better when unwanted emotions, thoughts or physical sensations show up? For example, rationalising, worrying, thinking about the past, fantasising about the future, analysing yourself or your situation, imagining certain escape scenarios, day dreaming, thinking positively, thinking negatively, criticising yourself or blaming others, blocking certain thoughts.

Doing more of certain things: For example, exercise, relaxation, yoga, deep breathing, positive self-talk, complimentary medicines, psychological therapy.

List all the different strategies that you have used, in the table below, and consider three further questions for each of them:

1. Did this strategy help you to feel better in the shorter term?
2. Did this strategy help you to feel better in the longer term?
3. Were there any other effects or consequences of using this strategy upon your quality of life?

What specific strategy have you tried?	Did it make you feel better?		Were there any other costs on your quality of life?
	In the shorter-term?	In the longer term?	
<i>e.g. distracting myself by keeping busy with work</i>	<i>Yes - it kept my mind occupied</i>	<i>No - I felt exhausted</i>	<i>I was too tired to spend time with friends</i>
			Etc.

[Worksheet adapted from: Sinclair, M. & Beadman, M. (2016). *The Little ACT Workbook: An introduction to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: a mindfulness-based guide for living a full and meaningful life*. Crimson: Bath]

Name the 'Busy' Story and Access What Matters to You

Often, when we are overwhelmed in the desire to achieve, we are not just blinkered/fused by one thought. There can be a whole host of thoughts, often in the form of judgements, evaluations and comparisons, going on at any one time. It can be incredibly helpful to name this story and to access what is meaningful to you amid this challenging situation.

In a challenging situation, by naming the story, you give yourself some space to connect with your inner values and intentions in relation to the situation. You can name your story and access what matters to you in five steps:

A. Write down all the unwanted judgements, evaluations and comparisons you have about this challenging situation. Then fold this piece of paper.

B. On the 'front cover' write 'Here is the _____ story again!' to acknowledge the main theme for you. For example, fill in the blank space with 'not enough' or 'terrible family', or 'I'm overwhelmed'.

(Note: It's important to encapsulate the name of the story in just two words. Sometimes clients will call their stories protracted things like 'there's just so much to do and I can't trust anyone to do it as good as me'. Now, that's a very long story, and it will most likely make you more blinkered, rather than less. So, we could take that theme and reduce it to the 'too much' story or the 'distrustful me' story – something that summarises the main theme yet brings it down to two words.)

C. On the top part of the 'back cover', write down the three qualities you want to embody in this challenging situation, for example connection, compassion and courage. This is what truly matters to you.

D. On the bottom part of the 'back cover', write down three small actions you can take that would reflect these qualities. For example, taking three connected breaths, listening attentively and responding compassionately to a loved one. These are your small toward moves rooted in your values.

E. Carry this piece of paper around with you for the next week and notice when you are caught up in the content (A). Then bring yourself back to acknowledging the name of the story (B) and what's most important to you in relation to the story (C and D).

[Exercise adapted from: Leonard-Curtin, A. & Leonard-Curtin, T. (2019). *The Power of Small: Making Tiny yet Powerful Changes when Everything Feels Too Much*. Hachette Ireland: London]

Five small everyday mindfulness skills you can apply today

1. In a conversation, notice your mind's tendency to jump ahead in time and plan ahead. Deliberately come back to mindfully listening to what the other person is saying to you. Notice the words they are using, their tone of voice and their facial expression. When it is your turn to speak, notice what you genuinely feel, and speak in a way that is guided by this rather than in a non-conscious automatic way.

2. When you are eating, take a moment to notice the food before you put it into your mouth. Simply notice, in as much detail as possible, the qualities and textures, as if it were the first time you've ever seen this particular food.

Once you start eating, pay attention to what the food tastes and feels like. If you can, slow down your natural rate of eating just a tad and see if this makes any difference to your experience of eating. Consciously tune in to your body to notice when you become full and stop eating before you become overly full.

3. When you are outside, deliberately tune in to your senses of seeing, hearing and feeling. Notice five things you can see – paying vivid attention to colour, texture and shape. Notice four things you can hear, such as traffic, birds or a distant hum. Notice three things you can feel, such as the air against your skin, you might notice that you're carrying some tension or strain in your body, or the feeling of your clothes against your skin.

4. On a usual route that you take to or from work, either via car, public transport or on foot, consciously decide to take this route without headphones or making calls, then deliberately tune in to your five senses and aim to notice three things that you haven't noticed before.

5. Listen to a piece of music. Close your eyes and pay attention only to the music. Notice what you feel as you listen. Notice what thoughts arise within you, yet keep coming back to the music. Notice the sounds and the space between sounds. Notice if this experience is different to when this music is in the background as you go about your daily life.

[Handout adapted from: Leonard-Curtin, A. & Leonard-Curtin, T. (2019). *The Power of Small: Making Tiny yet Powerful Changes when Everything Feels Too Much*. Hachette Ireland: London]

World

Join the DOTS

Distraction:

Opting out

Thinking:

Substances/Self-harm/Other:

Away

Unwanted Mental Experiences

Troublesome thoughts:

Difficult emotions:

Uncomfortable bodily sensations:

**5 Senses
Experiencing**

Toward

Work/
Education

Recreation

Health/
Personal growth

Relationships

**Mental
Experiencing**

Values:

Family

Intimate
Relationships

Parenting

Friends

Education

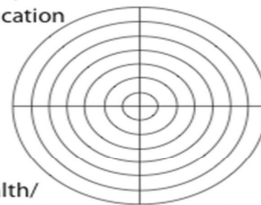
Work

Recreation

Spirituality

Citizenship

Health



A Guide to Using The ACT Matrix with Bull's-Eye

1. 5 Senses V's Mental Experiencing & Toward V's Away

How much time do I spend in my **5 senses**, actively connected to what I can see, hear, smell, taste and feel, in the present versus how much time do I spend time travelling to the past or future in my **mind**?

How much of my actions are primarily motivated by trying to move closer **toward** who and where I **want** to be versus trying to get **away** from what I **don't want**?

2. The Bull's-Eye

If a **video camera** were following you around, how much would the **actions** it recorded you doing be **in line** with what the **ideal you** would do in each of these four areas? How are you measuring up to how you want to be in this area of your life? Don't consider how you think I think you should be or how you think your family, partner, or friends think you should be. The only gauge is how you're doing in relation to how you truly want to be. Place an X where you are in relation to where you want to be. An X in the bullseye means you are living 100% in line with that value. Now choose one area that you most want to move closer toward the bullseye in.

3. Identifying Unwanted Mental Experiences- Identify your Top Three Unwanted Thoughts, Emotions & Bodily Sensations

Thoughts are often strings of words that generally involve a judgment, evaluation, or comparison of ourselves, others, or the world. Our minds are rarely politically correct and can often give us a hard time. As much as possible, write down your thoughts exactly as they would appear in your mind. Common thoughts people struggle with include *I'm not good enough*, *There's no point in trying*, and *Things don't work out well for me*.

Emotions are generally a word that can sum up how we're feeling overall and aren't tied to a particular part of the body. Examples would be 'sad' or 'anxious.'" **Bodily sensations** are an unwanted feeling tied to a particular part of the body, such as sweaty palms, racing heart or tension.

4. Identifying strategies used to avoid pain- Identify your Top Three in each Category

Distraction is any activity we engage in to try to get away from an unwanted mental experience e.g. Internet, keeping busy, cleaning etc.

Opting out is avoiding people, activities, or situations in order to minimize or avoid feeling pain e.g. avoiding calls, texts, e-mails, or assertiveness etc.

Thinking- Whereas thoughts are generally strings of words that appear in our mind that we have little or no control over, such as the thought *I'm not good enough*, thinking is how we respond to such thoughts, for example, by ruminating, challenging them, suppressing, them, or engaging in positive thinking.

Substances, self-harm, and other strategies- We look at this from a functional vantage point. Therefore, food, caffeine, and prescription medications may be included as substances if used in an attempt to avoid some internal experience. Similarly, self-harm includes any activity that causes the person harm or damage in the long term; therefore, it may include behaviours like ignoring people or lashing out.

5. Checking workability with three questions

- 1) *Have any of the strategies in the top left quadrant permanently gotten rid of any of the unwanted experiences in the bottom left quadrant?*

The answer is inevitably no.

- 2) *In general, when you use these strategies rigidly or excessively, do they make your unwanted mental experiences better or worse?*

The answer is usually better in the short-term and worse in the long-term.

- 3) *In general, when you use these strategies rigidly or excessively, do you move closer to the bull's-eye or further away?*

The answer is usually better in the short-term and worse in the long-term.

If you've discovered that what you've been doing hasn't been working, are you willing to do something radically different?

[Exercise adapted from: Curtin, A. (2014). ACT for the Masses: Using the Matrix with the General Public. In K.L. Polk & B. Schoenrorff (Eds.), *The ACT Matrix: A New Approach to Building Psychological Flexibility Across Settings & Populations*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.]

Questions promoting awareness of antecedents and consequences (functional contextual awareness)

1. Noticing & describing:

- "What do you notice showing up in your body, right now?"
- "Do those sensations change over time?"
- "What was showing up inside you/where did you feel that in your body?"
- "What thoughts showed up when you were speaking with your boss?"
- "What would your colleagues notice if they saw you when you were anxious?"
- "What are you feeling? What are you thinking right now?"
- "Where in your body do you feel that the strongest?"
- "Is that a thought, an emotion or a sensation?"
- "How is that feeling different from that other feeling you just noticed?"; "Is it bigger, hotter?"
- "Can you name that sensation?"
- "Rather than what your mind says is there, can you describe that emotion, is it light/heavy?"
- "If this feeling was a painting what colours would be on it?"
- "If you drew an outline around that sensation, what shape would it take?"
- "If your colleague was sad, how would he describe the feeling?"

2. Tracking (A-B-Cs):

- "What happened (A) before you got angry (B) with your boss?"
- "What happened after (C) you stormed out of the room (B)?"
- "What effect was there in the short-term; long-term?" (C)
- "When that thought/feeling shows up (A), what urge do you have/what do you do next (B)?"
- "What happens as a result of working longer and harder (C)?"
- "I'm noticing you change the subject (B) when I ask you how you feel (A)."
- "What shows up for you when I ask you that question (A)?"
- "What do you notice happens next between us when you change the subject (C)?"
- "After a day rushing around and multitasking (B), so that you don't fail to do everything (A), do you feel more or less stressed, than before you started (C)?"

Questions promoting pragmatic thinking/making sense for a meaningful life (functional coherence)

1. Normalisation (to help with shame "What's wrong with me? Why am I like this?"):

- "That sounds perfectly normal to me" "It's understandable you'd feel that way".
- "That makes sense given your circumstances/what you've been through".
- "It's understandable, there seems to be some benefits of behaving that way?"
- "If I were in your situation, I would feel the same".
- "Anyone who has been through that would no doubt struggle in the same way also".

2. Assessing workability: (discriminate moves towards or away from what matters):

- "What happens when you work until 2am (B1)?"
- "What happens if you leave work earlier instead (B2)?"
- "Which option is most in line with what you care about? (C)"
- "Does the first option move you towards or away from the person you want to be/the life you want (C)?"
- "How effective is working harder (B) in getting rid of anxiety/failure (A) in the short-term? In the long-term (C)?"
- "How effective is saying 'yes' to everything (B) in moving you towards what's important/ the colleague you want to be (C)?"

Step up! (targeting values)

Values clarification - derive sources of meaning (values) from goals/actions:

Client: "I want to get a promotion"

Practitioner: "If you got that promotion what would that be part of, that mattered to you?"

"If you had that promotion, how would your life be different?"

Client: "I would have more money."

Practitioner: "and, tell me, how would your life be different then?"

Client: "I would have more freedom."

Practitioner: "It sounds like freedom matters to you."

-Keep questioning until the source of motivation is broad enough that it can include a number of different actions.

Values clarification - derive sources of meaning (values) from the client's focus on what they don't want:

- "If anxiety/failure was not a problem for you, then what would your life be like/what would we see you doing that you're not doing now?"
- "If everybody respected you no matter what, then what would you choose to do that you aren't doing now?"
- "If you could take action, and no one could see, judge or hear about it, what would you do?"
- "If your actions didn't get any type of reward or praise, what would you choose to do?"

Values clarification when clients fail to identify sources of meaning and any specific goal (use perspective taking):

- "Can you think back to a time when your life was meaningful, what was that like?"
- "Imagine you 10 years from now looking back, what would you have liked to have lived for over the last 10 years?"
- "Think of someone who inspires you, what do they stand for, what qualities do you like about them?"

Committed action - identifying meaningful actions/goals:

- "What can you do that would be part of being more collegial with your colleagues?"

- "What is the first thing you could do that will get you closer to an improved work-life balance?"
- "What is the next step you can take towards spending more quality time with your children?"
- "One month from now, what actions would you like to remember having done with spontaneity/adventure/self-care, over the last month?"
- "Do you know a person who is self-caring? What is one thing that they do that is self-caring, that you could also do?"

Committed action - increasing variability of action:

- "What are other things you could do that would also be about taking better care of yourself?"
- "If you can't leave work early tomorrow, what else could you do that moves you towards freedom?"
- "Is there something easier that you could do that also moves you towards being kind to your wife?"

Reinforcing motivation – (easy for high performers to lose motivation)

1. Connecting actions and values:

- "Tell me again why it's important to you to spend time with your children this weekend?"
- "How is talking to me now/pushing back at work today connected to what is important to you?"
- "You said you wanted to be more assertive with your boss, is that what you did when you spoke to her?"

2. Noticing & describing satisfying experiences linked to meaningful actions:

- "How might you feel/what are you looking forward to in spending time with your children?"
- "How are you feeling now as you move towards more independence?"
- "What was it like to be closer to your wife/how were you feeling when you opened up and shared more with her?"

3. Awareness of obstacles and remaining flexible:

Awareness:

- "What might get in the way?"
- "What's happening right now, is there something blocking you from opening up to me/doing what you want?"
- "I remember you wanted to leave work earlier this last week, did something get in your way?"

Making functional sense:

- "What is a good reason to push back at work?"
- "This must be hard for you, what would be a good reason to open up to me now?"
- "I would find that hard also, can you remind us why it was important for you to do that?"

Flexibility:

- "What can you do to not have that feeling of anxiety stop you talking to your manager?"
- "Would you like to try something different right now?"; "Would you be willing to try out some of the skills we have been developing so you can do what matters to you now?"
- "What if this coming week, you looked at that anxiety as a sign of doing something that really matters to you?"

Working with self-stories

N.O.W

To increase awareness, assess effectiveness and increase flexible responding:

-N- Notice (When does that story shows up? What is this story saying? What is it trying to do? How are you responding to it? What happens next? Who is noticing this story?)
(awareness)

-O- Objectify (Name it "Ah! The not good enough story again!" What's the tone, personality? "It's like a passenger on your bus". In what direction is your bus going with that passenger in the driving seat?" Is it taking you towards or away from what matters? Is it helpful right now?)
(awareness/effectiveness)

-W- What now (Given that this story is only part of you - what matters most right now and what can do to move towards that?) (flexible responding).

Responding to challenging clients

- 1. Point to the CRB (sparking curiosity from the client):

e.g. *"I'm noticing that you (objectively describe behaviour ... "keep saying, I don't know, when I ask you questions); do you notice that too?"*

- 2. Normalise behaviour (minimising experience of being criticised/judged):

e.g. *"I understand why you might be doing that, it's completely normal and it makes sense".*

- 3. Assess workability (highlighting goals/values to evaluate how helpful the behaviour is):

e.g. *"I'm noticing that when you respond that way we seem further away from the goals and values that you have chosen to work towards in our work together."*

- 4. Use it as an opportunity to develop skills (if the client agrees):

e.g. *"Would you be willing to try out some of the skills we have been working on together, here and now, so that we can get back on course towards what matters to you?"*

- Evoking tracking and assessing workability

Track A-B-Cs: Point to what's behind (A); the client's response (B); and assess workability of that response in terms of the process and moving towards client's goals/values (C). E.g.:

- *"I notice that you respond with 'I don't know' when I ask you that question."* (B)

- *"I'm wondering what you notice showing up for you when I ask you that question?"* (A)

- *"What do you notice happening between us now, after you respond that way?"* (C)

- *"Do you feel we are still on track, helping you with what brings you here?"* (C)

- *"Do you respond in a similar way to that feeling at work/home?"* (C)

- *"What do you notice happening next when you respond in the same way with colleagues/your partner?"* (C)