

Interpersonal Mindfulness Processes in ACT – Russ Harris ACBS World Con 2017

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IMPACT: Interpersonal Mindfulness Processes in ACT

- Aims:
- How to work at an interpersonal level to model, instigate and reinforce psychological flexibility
- Emphasis on authentic self-disclosure
- Highlighting the relationship itself
- Playing with the 4 IMPACT questions

Hayes, Strosahl, Wilson – 99

Three levels to track a session:

- 1. ACT-relevant behaviour in session
(psychological flexibility & rigidity)**
- 2. Reports of ACT-relevant behaviour
happening outside**
- 3. Interpersonal**

Interpersonal Focus

Not often ‘center stage’ in training or books

NB: “Mindfulness For Two” – Wilson & Dufrene

Especially useful if:

- a) Session is about relationship issues
- b) Tension/conflict between client & therapist
- c) Problematic client behaviour in session makes it hard to work together

THE WHOLE ACT MODEL RESTS ON?

Workability

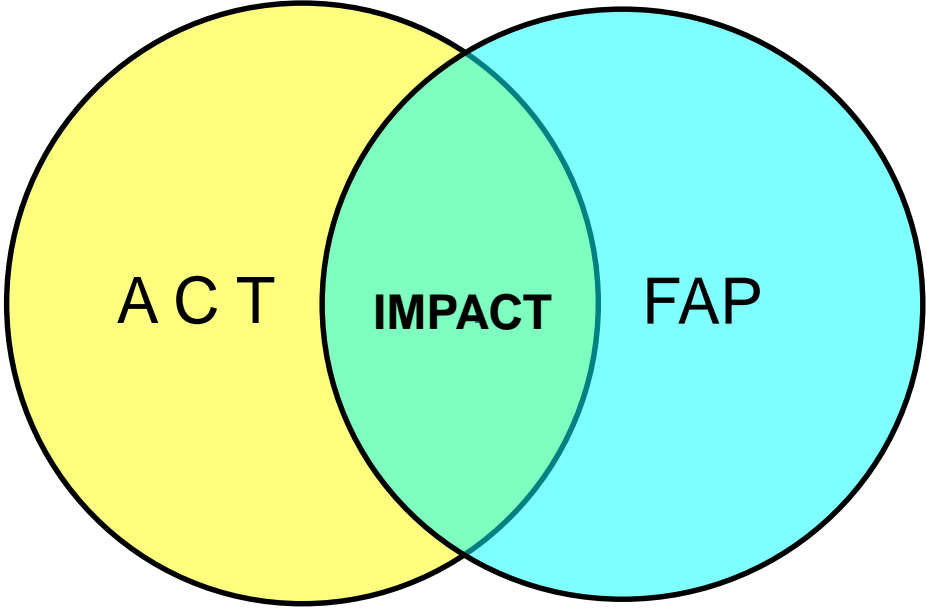
**Is this working to build the
life you want?**

IMPACT: interpersonal level

Workability

Is this working to build a strong team/alliance?

Does this work outside the therapy room to build the relationships you want?



IMPACT: Interpersonal Mindfulness Skills In ACT

The 4 questions:

- *What are you doing?*
- *What's showing up?*
- *How's this working?*
- *How is this useful?*

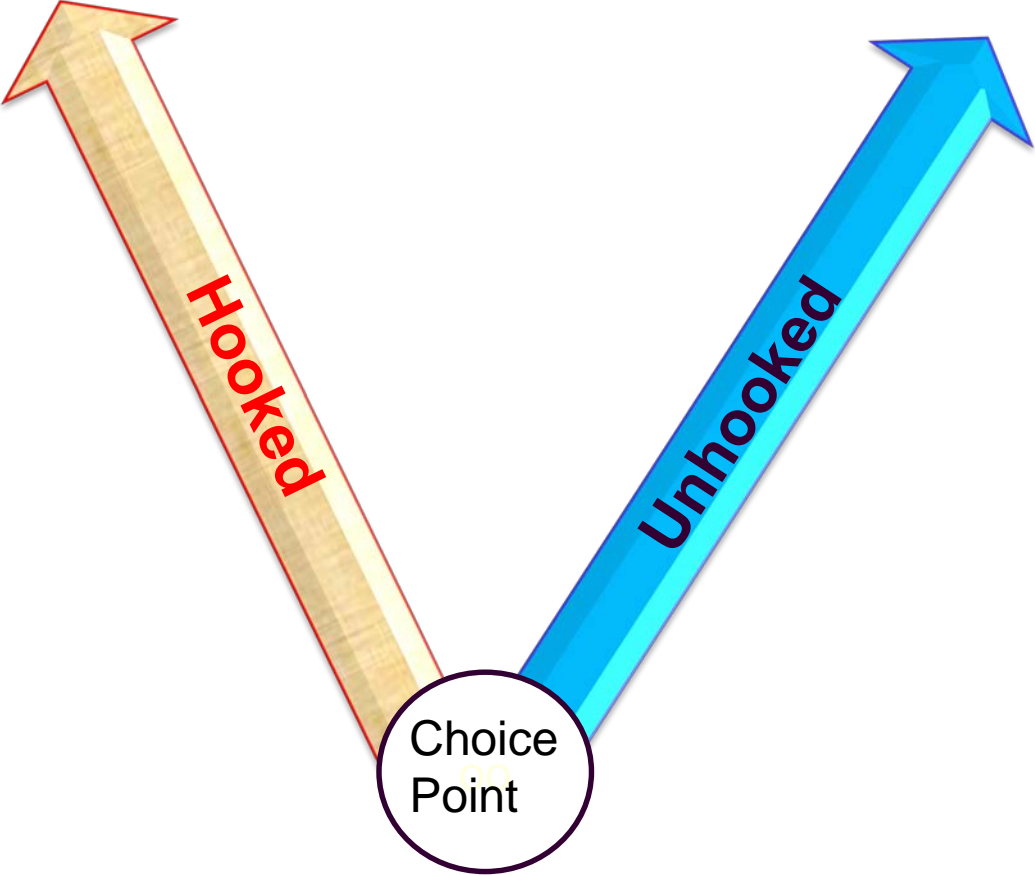
These are more than just 'questions'
Include observations, comments, self-disclosure

AWAY

What I do
that's ineffective,
behaving unlike the
person I want to be

TOWARDS

What I do (or want to do) that's effective,
behaving like the
person I want to be



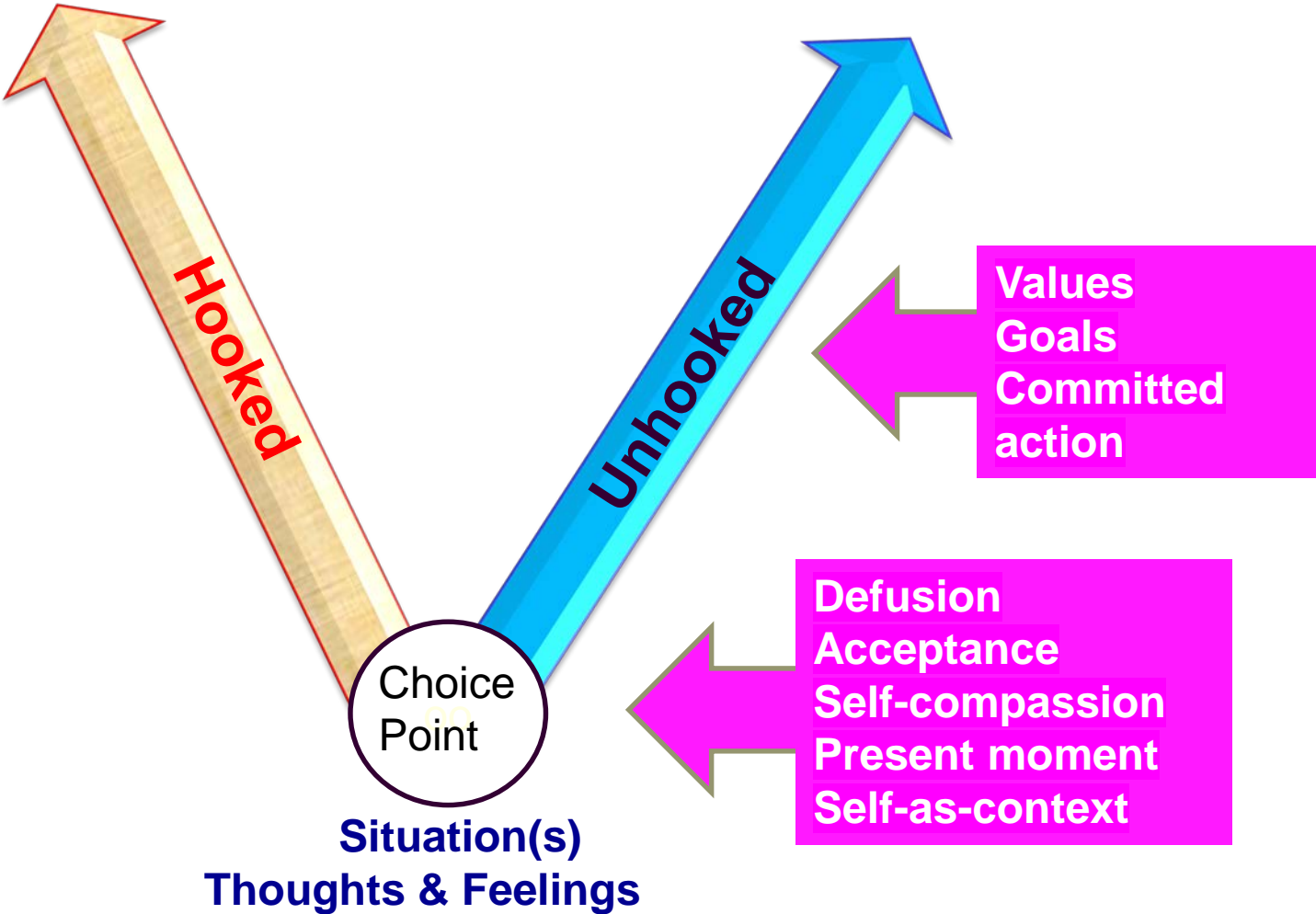
**Situation(s)
Thoughts & Feelings**

AWAY

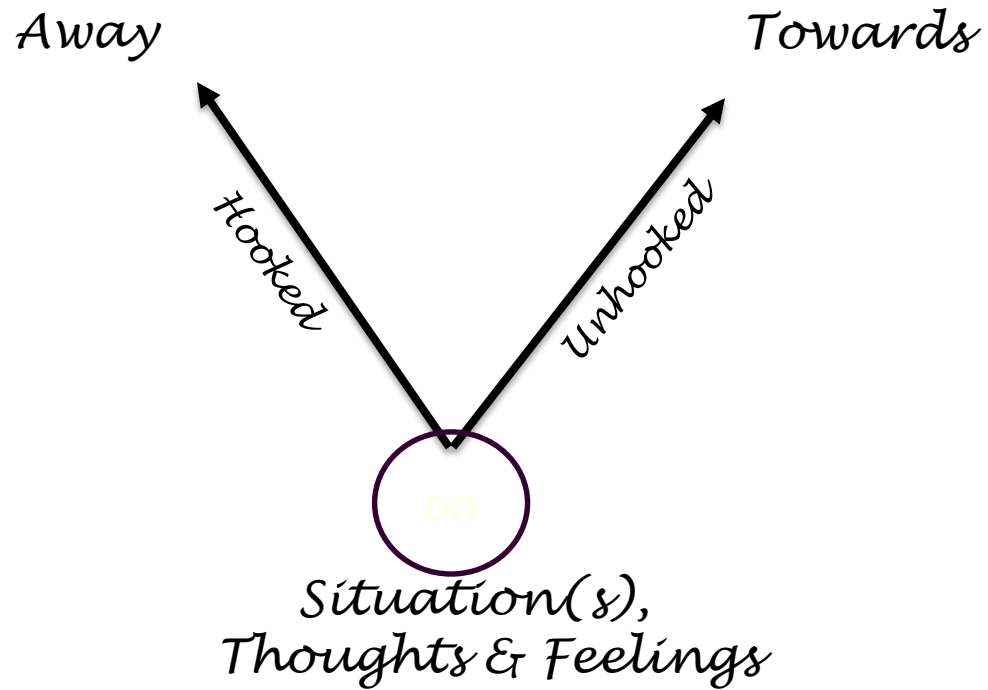
What I do
that's ineffective,
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person I want to be

TOWARDS

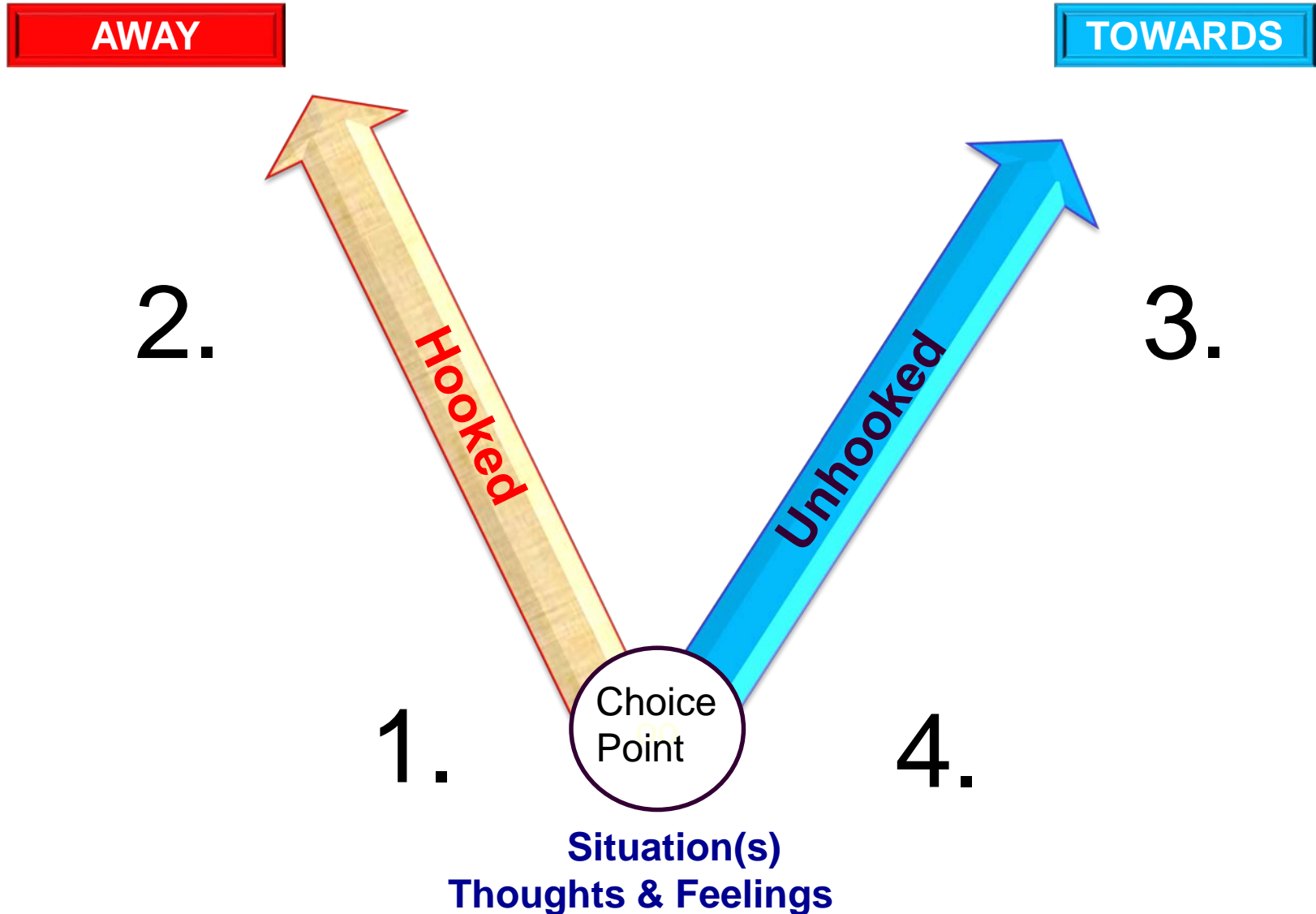
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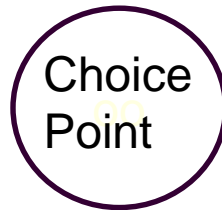
Drawing it by hand ...



4 Areas To Explore (any order)



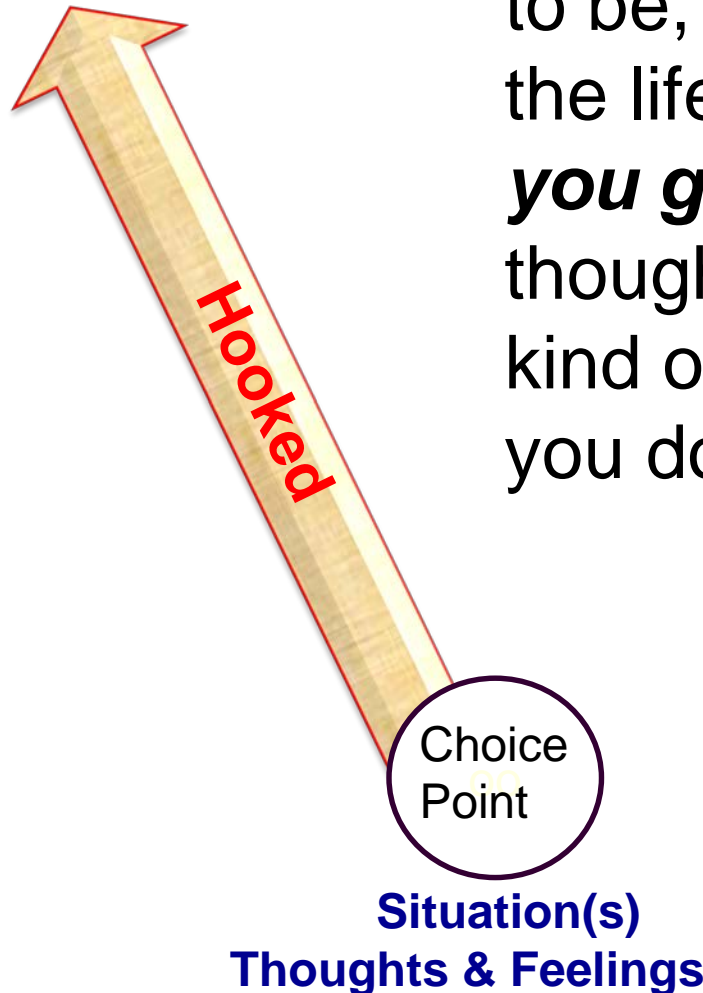
1. What is (are) the challenging situation(s), thoughts & feelings in your life today?



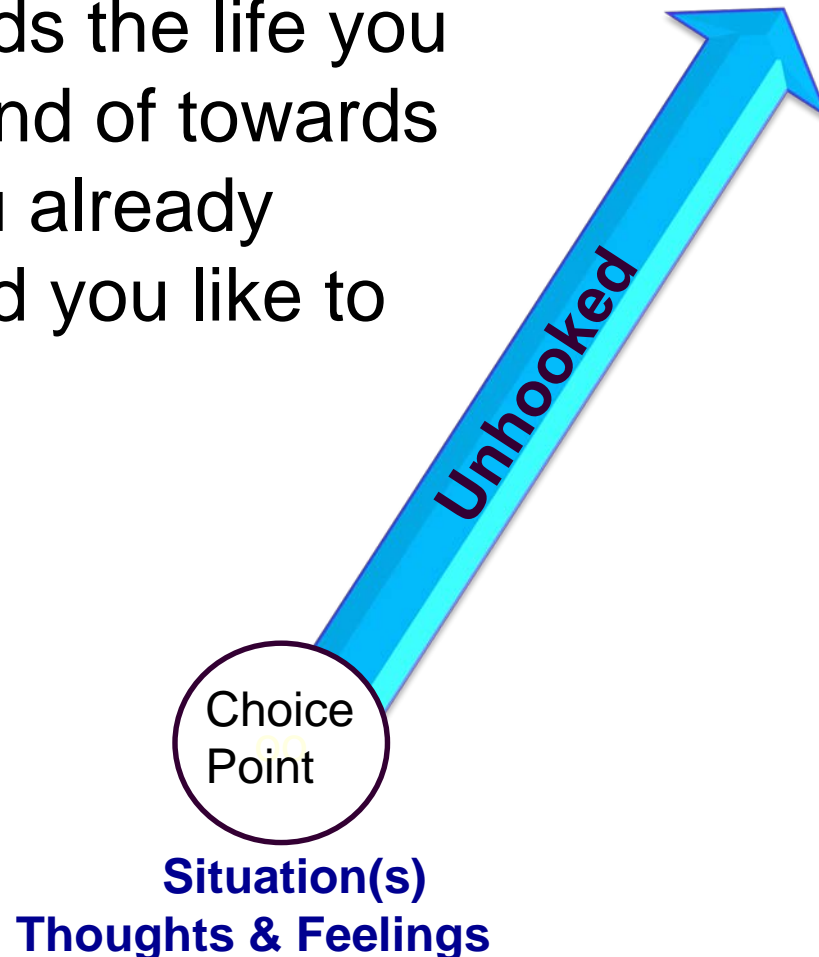
Situation(s)
Thoughts & Feelings

AWAY

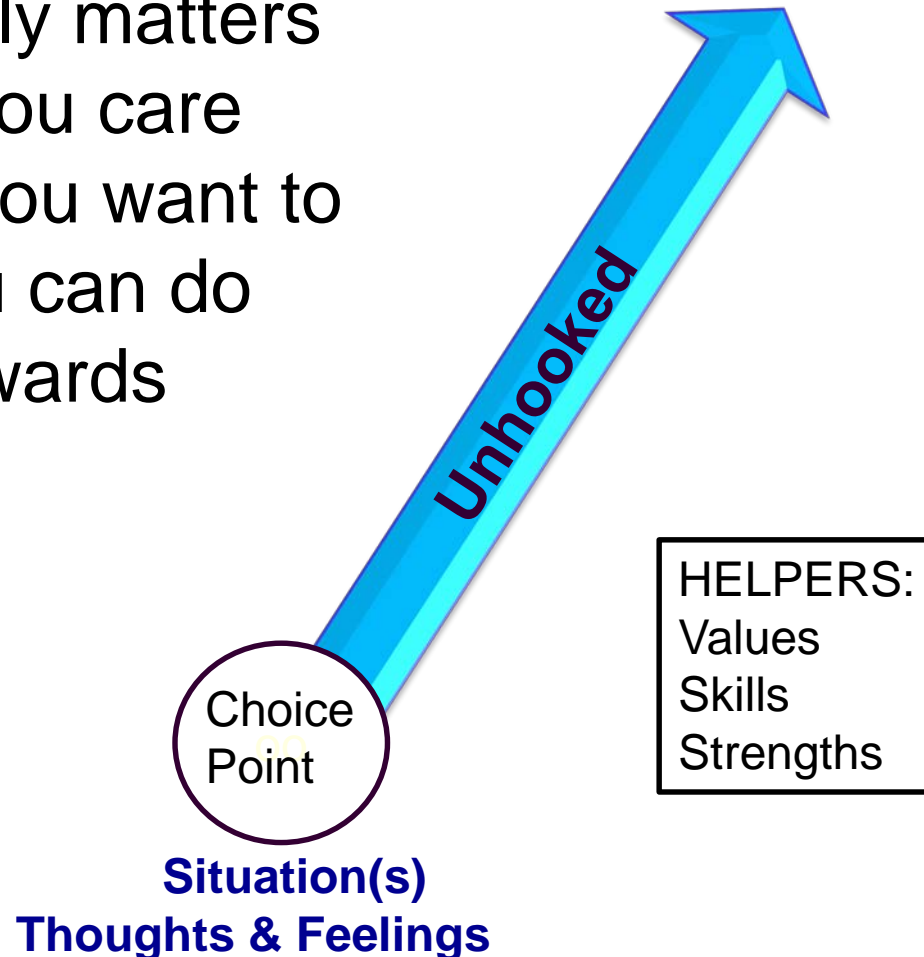
2. Away moves: acting ineffectively, behaving unlike the person you want to be, moving away from the life you want. **When you get hooked** by your thoughts & feelings, what kind of away moves do you do?



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



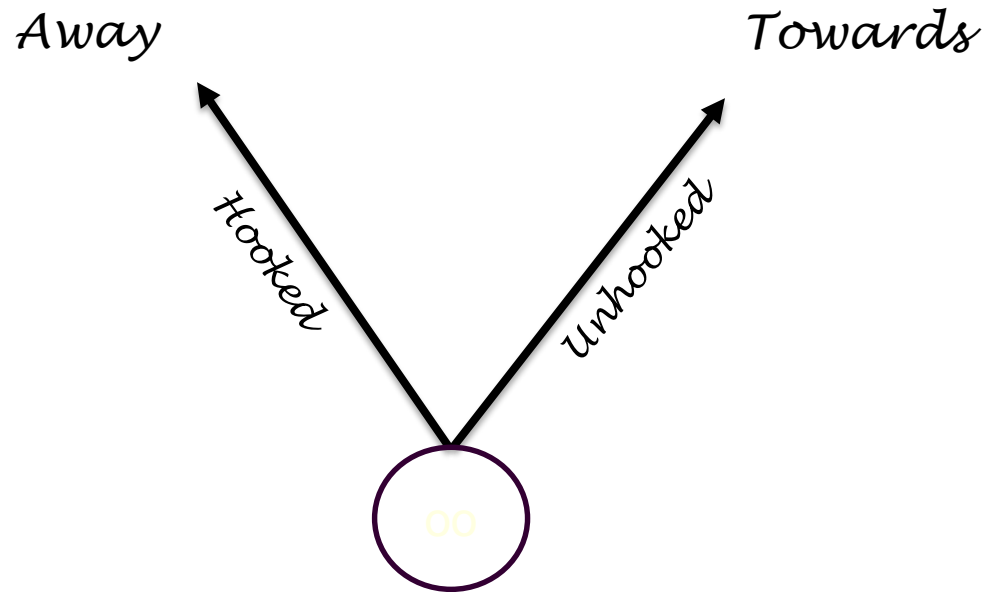
4. Helpers: so our aim here is to develop some unhooking skills, and explore what really matters to you and who you care about and what you want to do differently, so you can do more of these towards moves



Do a choice point on yourself

Situation = challenging therapy session

Drawing it by hand ...



NB Anything in ACT can become aversive if

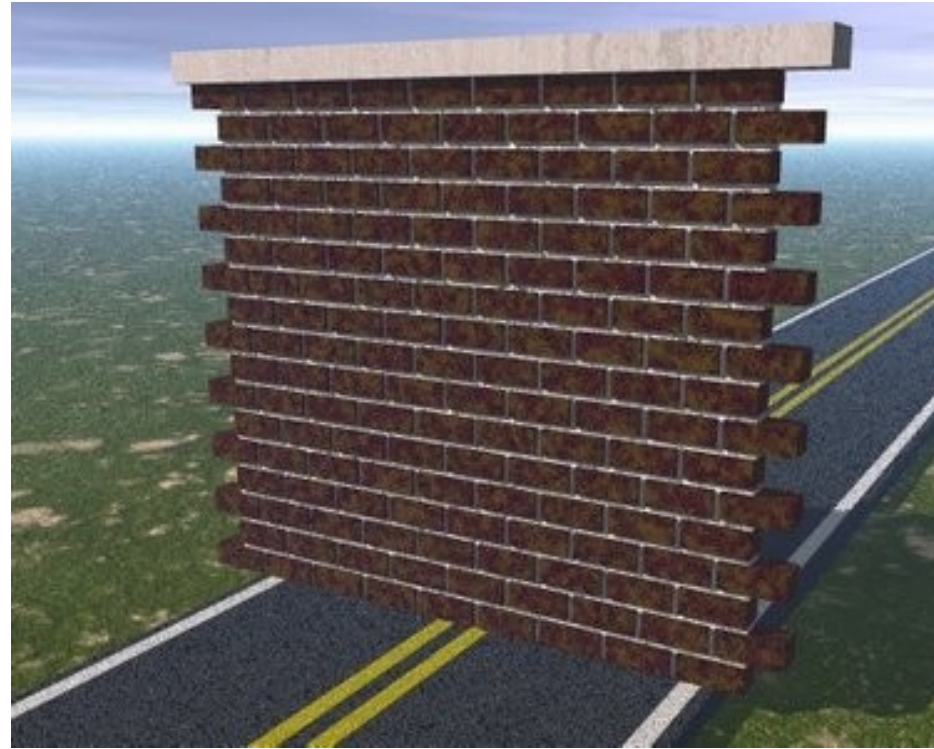
- Therapist is rigid, authoritarian, dogmatic, unrelenting, etc.
- We aim to be ...
- Non-judgmental
- Open & Curious
- Flexible
- Experimenting & exploring

Therapeutic Relationship





How do you see your client?



INFORMED CONSENT – MODIFY!!!!

- ACT is a very active form of therapy/coaching – not just talking about problems.
- Learning skills to handle difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively, so they have less impact and influence over you
- Clarifying your ‘values’: what kind of person you want to be, how you want to treat yourself and others, what you want to stand for in life, what gives you a sense of meaning or purpose
- Taking action: to solve problems, and do things that make life better
- I want you to leave each session with an action plan – something you can do between sessions to improve your life

Setting Up #1 – Press Pause

Can I have permission to press pause from time to time - so if I see you doing something that looks like it that looks like it might be really helpful or useful, in terms of dealing with your problems and improving your life, I can press pause – get you to just slow down, notice what you're thinking and feeling and saying and doing, so you can reflect on it, and think about how to do more of it?

And can I also press pause if I see you doing something that looks like it might be contributing to your problems or making life harder? So we can address it and see if there's something more helpful you can do instead??

And please feel free to do the same to me.

Setting Up #2 – We Are A Team

The idea is that you and I are a team; that we are working together, with the same aim, to help you (repeat the agreed goals of therapy)

If no specific goals, then:

To help you build a better life and handle these difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively

Setting Up #3 – Trying New Things

Part of this approach includes learning new skills to handle thoughts and feelings more effectively. Is it okay if at times ask you to try some of these things in session?

*At times I might ask you to do an exercise that seems **a bit awkward or uncomfortable**, and you are always free to say no. I'm only going to suggest these things if I think they'll be helpful to you, but you certainly don't have to do them.*

Setting Up #4 – Team Building

Is it okay if I press pause at times and get us to look at what's happening here in the room, in the way that you and I are interacting with each other?

Especially, to highlight things that seem helpful in terms of us building a strong team? And also – and of course, I hope this won't happen, just want to be sure that if it does we're prepared for it - can we look at anything that seems to be getting in the way of us working together?

And of course, you can do the same.

IMPACT: Interpersonal Mindfulness Skills In ACT

2 Technical terms...

'Ubs' & 'Wubs'

Ubs - ***Unworkable Behaviours*** (***AWAY MOVES***)

Wubs – ***Workable Behaviours*** (***TOWARDS MOVES***)

Our Aim In ACT:

Instigate, model & reinforce psychological flexibility

“Redirect Ubs & Reinforce Wubs” =>

Technically: ‘differential reinforcement’

Never know in advance what will be reinforcing.

Make an educated guess & track the results.

Common Ubs & Wubs

Any behaviour could be workable or unworkable, depending on the context.

Generalising

Common *unworkable* behaviours (Ubs) in session?

Common *workable* behaviours (Wubs) in session?

For each of the following client behaviours, come up with:

a) context where it functions as a Wub, we want to reinforce

b) context where it functions as an Ub, we want to redirect

- client cries
- client says 'You're an idiot'
- client says, 'Yes, I'll definitely do that. I feel so inspired'
- client says, 'You're a great therapist. This is really helping'
- client says, 'I feel like punching you'
- client goes silent
- client says 'This is a waste of time'
- client says 'Aha! There's my not good enough story again!'

How Might We Reinforce Wubs?

attention, curiosity

-approval, positive regard

-acceptance, respect

-empathy, compassion

-openness, vulnerability

-caring, understanding

-others?

***NB things that reinforce Wubs,
also often reinforce Ubs!***

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The 4 questions:

- *What are you doing?*
- *What's showing up?*
- *How's this working?*
- *How is this useful?*

These are more than just 'questions'
Include observations, comments, self-disclosure

IMPACT Questions go both ways

What are you doing? What am I doing? What are we doing?

What's showing up for you? What's showing up for me? What's showing up for us both?

How's this working for you? For me? For the team?

How's this useful for you? For me? For the team?

Exercise in pairs: *play* with the first 2 IMPACT questions

What are you doing? (Public behaviour)

What's showing up? (Private behaviour)

Use questions, comments, observations, & self-disclosure

SLOW

S.L.O.W.

- Slow down
- Lean in
- Open up
- Warm lighting

Now *play* with the other 2 questions

How's this working?

(Towards or away? Behaving like the sort of person you want to be, or not? Taking your life in the direction you want, or not? In line with your values, or not? Helping us to be a team, or not?)

If 'Towards' – what values are you living?

If 'Away' – what values are you neglecting?

How's this useful?

(How can you apply this? Where, when, with whom, doing what etc.?)

SLOW

To reinforce a Wub => any combo or variant of ...

- Do you notice how/what you are doing differently, now?
- I notice What do you notice...?
- What's that like for you? What's showing up?
- For me, it's like ... What's showing up for me is ...
- Is this a towards move or an away move?
- How do you think this is affecting us as a team?
- How could you use this, outside this room – when, where, who, what? What difference might it make?
- Is it okay if we do more of this sort of work in our sessions?

Contact With The Present Moment

What are you doing?
What's showing up?

Acceptance

What's showing up?
Notice, name, allow

Values

How's this working?
Towards or away?

Psychological
Flexibility

Defusion

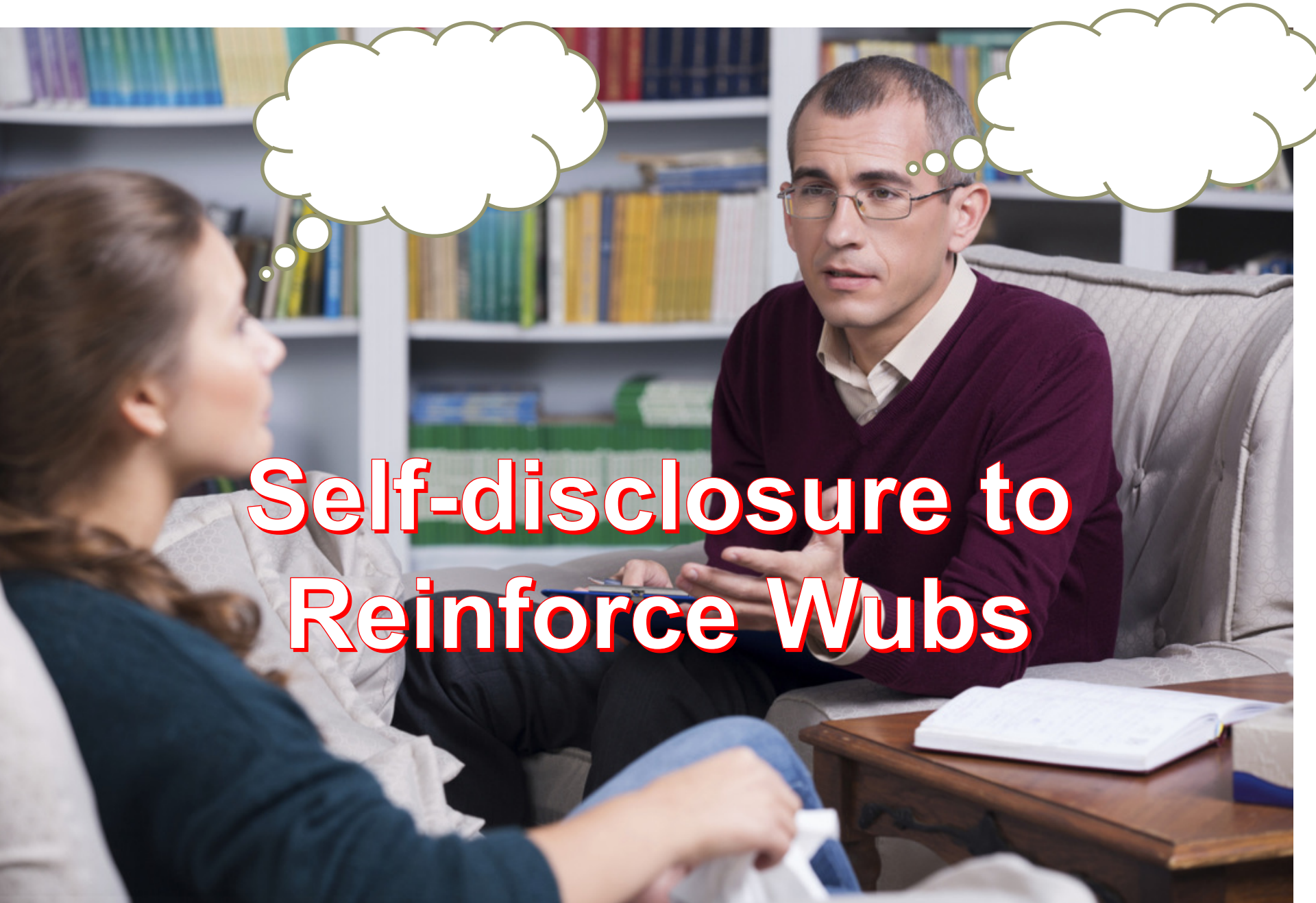
What's showing up?
Notice, name, allow

Committed Action

How's this useful?
Specify actions

Self-as-context

There's a part of you
noticing everything



Self-disclosure to Reinforce Wubs

Positive Reinforcement of Wubs Through Self-disclosure

- That means a lot to me
- Thank you, I really appreciate that.
- I really appreciate your willingness to work with/trust me on this
- That deeply touches me. That makes my heart sing. That moves me.
- I feel moved/humbled/ inspired/privileged.
- I feel much more engaged and connected with you now.
- Before, it felt like there was a barrier between us, and now that seems to have lifted. Do you notice that?
- I appreciate your: honesty, openness, courage, trust, commitment, willingness etc. What's that like for you?

Positive Reinforcement of Wubs Through Self-disclosure

- I can see how hard this is for you, and I really appreciate the effort you're making.
- I feel like we're a much stronger team now. What you're doing here is building the team. Do you sense that?
- I feel like we're really working together now. Before I felt like I was an obstacle in your way.
- When you listen/respond/pay attention to me like this, I feel like you care about what I have to say/I feel like you care about building the team/ I feel like you're working with me rather than against me.
- Wow! I have to say, that inspires me. This is a beautiful moment.

Exercise in NEW pairs: *play* around
with all 4 IMPACT questions
Use self-disclosure to reinforce Wubs

What's going on? (*Public behaviour*)

What's showing up? (*Private behaviour*)

How's this working? *Towards or away?*

- *If 'Towards' – what values are you living?*

- *If 'Away' – what would a 'towards' move be?*

How can you use this?

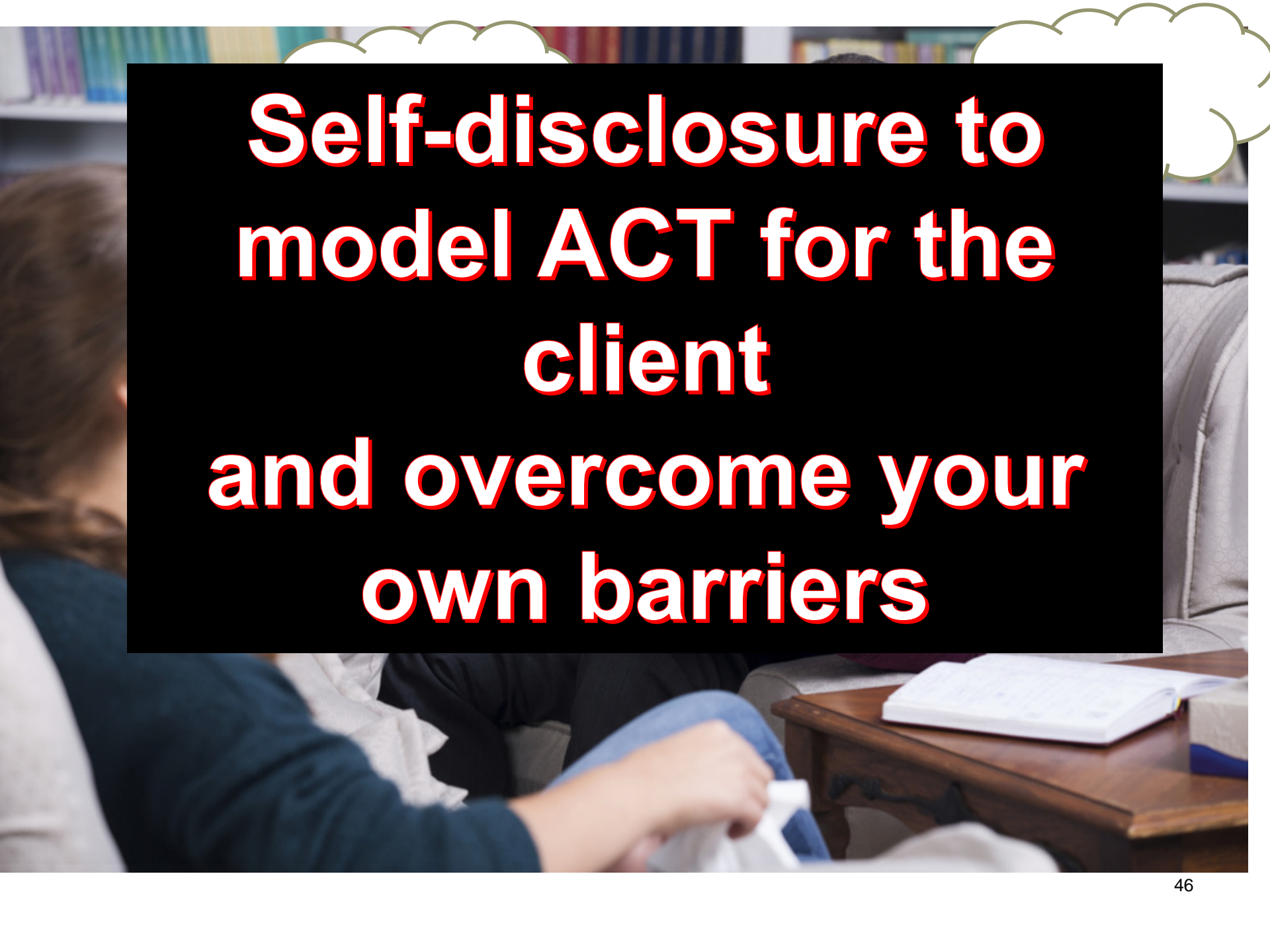
Redirect Ubs => any combo or variant of...

- Can I *press pause* on what's happening here?
- Do you notice?
- What's showing up for you?
- Here's what I notice
- What's showing up for me right now is
- What's this like for you?
- For me this is like ...
- Is this a towards move or an away move?
- How do you think this is affecting us as a team?

This ain't easy!!!

Why Don't We Address Problematic In-Session Behaviours?

- What stops you?
- Add these thoughts and feelings on to your choice point

A photograph of a person sitting at a wooden table with an open book. The person is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and is looking down at the book. The background shows a bookshelf with colorful books. A black text box with white and red text is overlaid on the image. The text reads: "Self-disclosure to model ACT for the client and overcome your own barriers".

**Self-disclosure to
model ACT for the
client
and overcome your
own barriers**

Contact With The Present Moment

Can I *press pause*, please. I'm willing to be wrong but I think something is going on here that seems a bit problematic.

Acceptance

I'm feeling pretty anxious about it. My heart's racing.

Values

But my aim in here is to help people live better lives – so if I ignore this, I'm not being true to myself and I'm doing you a disservice.

Defusion

My mind's telling me you'll be upset or angry, or think I'm rude, or make a complaint about me, or this will damage our relationship.

Committed Action

So even though I'm feeling really nervous, I'm going to tell you what I've noticed.

Self-as-context

Non-judgmentally describe the specific behaviour. Then 'How's This Working?' or 'What's showing up?'

Psychological
Flexibility

Role Play: Unhooking Yourself

- Client will role play a behaviour that the therapist finds difficult. (Therapist will take 30 seconds to tell the client what to say and do in the role play.)
- => I'll say 'GO'
- Client does the behaviour for 30 seconds
- => I'll say 'SLOW'
- Therapist: ten seconds to do a *silent* SLOW
- Therapist: "press pause" and run through the steps on the slide, in any order, in your own words
- Before we start, everyone take two minutes to write a non-judgmental description of the client behaviour, to use in the role play

Contact With The Present Moment

Can I *press pause*, please. I'm willing to be wrong but I think something is going on here that seems a bit problematic.

Acceptance

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Psychological
Flexibility



Self-disclosure to Redirect Ubs

Redirecting Ubs Through Self-disclosure:

"I'm willing to be wrong about this", "Am I reading that right?", "I'm not sure, but it seems to me like ..."

You seem really disengaged, bored, disinterested, angry, resentful.

I'm noticing your body posture here – slumped/clenched fists/arms crossed/frowning/ rolling eyeballs.

When you do this, it seems like you really don't want to work with me/ you really don't trust me on this.

When you do this (aggressive behaviour), I feel anxious, like I need to protect myself from you.

- When you do this ('closing down' behaviour), I feel saddened/a bit helpless – because I really do want to help and I don't feel like I can get through to you or work effectively with you while you keep doing this.

Redirecting Ubs Through Self-Disclosure:

I feel really disconnected from you right now. Are you sensing that too?

- When you keep interrupting me/talking over me, I feel a bit frustrated, and I also feel like you just don't care about what I have to say, like it just doesn't matter to you.
- It feels like there's a barrier between us. Do you feel anything like that?
- It looks like I've lost you here. Your thoughts and feelings seem to have hooked you
- I doesn't feel like we're a team here. It feels like we're in conflict/ not cooperating/ not on the same side. Do you sense that?
- I feel like I'm an obstacle in your way. Am I imagining that?

Be Present

What are you doing?
What's showing up?

How's this working?
How can you use this?

Left to loosen

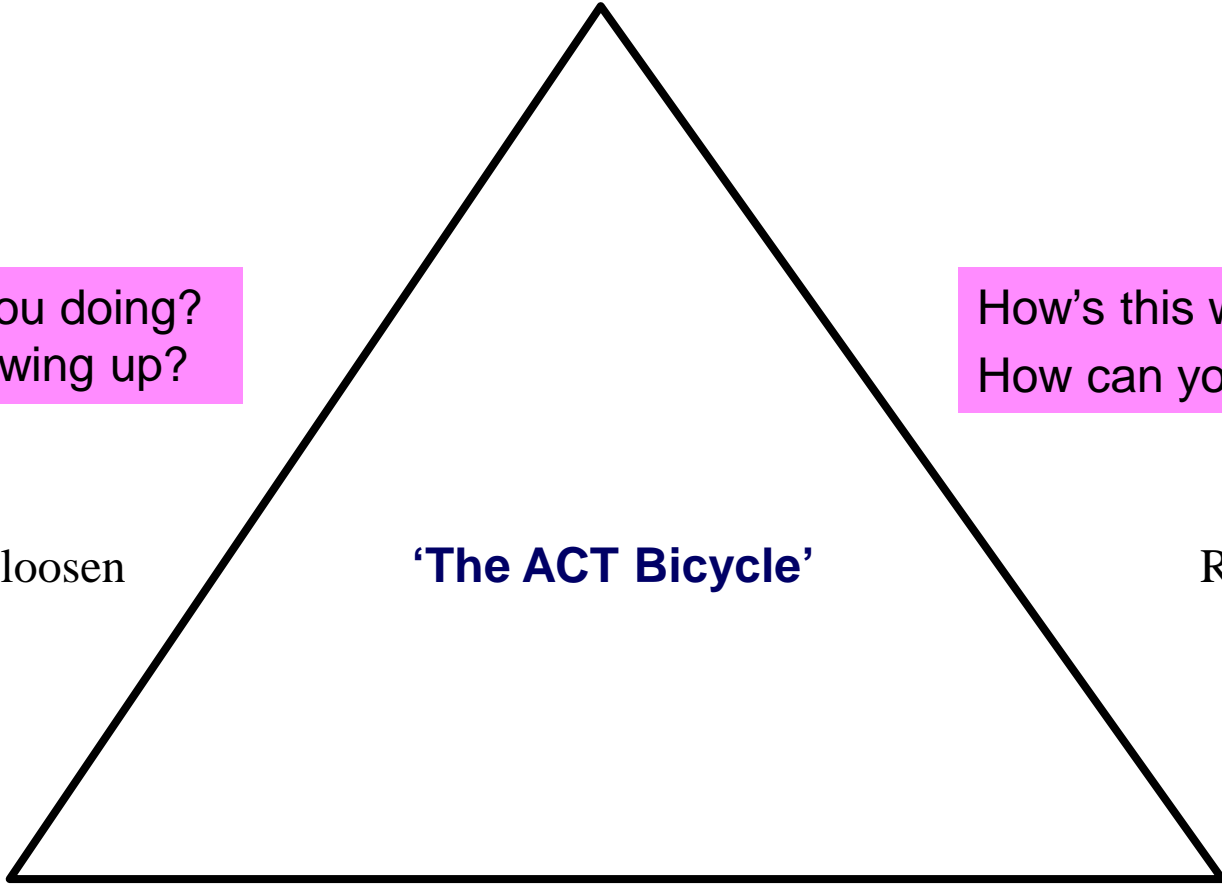
'The ACT Bicycle'

Right to move

Open Up

Do What Matters

Center to balance



Mandated/Coerced Clients: 7 Steps

1. Normalise: e.g. “Most people feel upset or annoyed”
2. Validate & empathise
3. See it from the client’s perspective
4. Declare your values
5. I’m here for you, not them
6. Declare your powerlessness
7. Q: “What possible outcome from this would make it feel like a good use of your time?”

Go In Via The Back Door

A bit of gentle questioning - respectfully and compassionately

E.g. So you came here to stop your partner nagging/
to get your boss off your back/ to stop going to prison

... What's important about that? Why does that matter to you? Suppose you refused to come here: what would happen?

So obviously you don't want to be here, but your relationship/job/freedom really matters to you. Can we make this work about improving that aspect of your life?

Go Through The Motions

Agree with the client:

You don't want to be here, right? You're only here because XYZ has made you come.

So how about we do the bare minimum necessary to get XYZ off your back? Let's just go through the motions here; let's just pretend we're doing therapy.

If the client agrees, it's useful to then do something that doesn't feel like therapy.

For example, pull out a pack of values cards and do a card sort. Listen to some music mindfully. Watch some youtube videos.

Have A “Bitch Fest”

What pisses you off?

Validate and empathise

Slip in ‘reversals’: client says “X is a problem”;
therapist slips in, “So you’d prefer Y?”

Compassionately Wait For The Cracks To Appear

Compassionately & respectfully make a 'holding space' where the client doesn't have to 'do anything'.

The therapist empathises with the client's frustration, annoyance, ambivalence, resistance etc, validates for the client how difficult it is to be in this situation, and waits for the 'cracks to appear'.

Many clients, after a while, will 'let their guard down' – reveal their pain, or suffering or what they find hard.

The therapist can then compassionately follow this lead, and tease out more detail.