




ACBS World
Conference
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**Self Forgiveness:
Discovering Courage
and Flexibility
to transform
Life Setbacks and
Build the Life you
Value.**

A Workshop

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Timothy Gordon**

Disclosure

Relevant Financial Relationships:

Grant Dewar (Private Practice), is contracted by New Harbinger Press to complete a work book on this topic for 2020

He has not received and will not receive any commercial support related to this presentation

Grant Dewar is a guest Lecturer with the University of Adelaide

Disclosure - No support

Holly Yates (Private Practice), and Stavroula Sanida (Private Practice), have not received commercial or other support for this workshop

Introductions

Stavroula Sanida <http://myworldsinwords.com/>

Holly Yates <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/holly-yates-raleigh-nc/116994>

Grant Dewar <https://www.vitalivingpsychology.com>

Welcome and lets take a moment

Taking a moment to breathe and
bring your attention to being, here, now.

Develop your intention to be present within your
experience in this workshop

We will contact distress and make room for it....

Informed consent and disclosure

Self-Forgiveness is hard work

To be effective - self-forgiveness requires a high level of reflective effort and this effort may bring you into contact with pain

This workshop asks you to consider taking risks - to challenge your skills – safely

It will be interactive and will demonstrate experiential exercises,

Please look after your own needs It is likely you may contact a variety of traumatic events that may have involved you or others and there may be discomfort

To manage this risk I invite you to monitor your discomfort and take action that allows you to be safe in this context.

You are welcome to modify instructions or take alternate action to an exercise, you may engage in any appropriate alternative such as breathing or journaling, leave the room or anything else that is respectful to you and others in the group

You do not have to disclose your experience

Please feel free to discuss this with me at an appropriate time

Risks and Safety in Exercises

You are professionals and know when and how to seek help that suits your needs

Please monitor what is useful for you to engage safely with in this workshop

We will be talking about client experiences of abuse or trauma and we are attempting to acknowledge what it might be like for them

If you wish to use this for your own professional development/experience use something where you are self-critical - but please choose something of emotional intensity of no more 2-3 out of ten

Please remember this is a workshop not a personally focussed therapy session

And still - we acknowledge that even small things may sometimes grow a new life of their own

You like all humans, may not be able to choose the emotions that arise, Please recognise if this is of something too big for you right now

However you are in control of the type of workable responses needed in the context of this workshop

Exercises: Importance of confidentiality and focus on process

Everything we talk about in the room stays in the room

Please disguise any client or personal content

When you are debriefing – we are interested in the process rather than the content

What was it like when the therapist asked you to go there ?

Please share about the process - rather than focussing on the content e.g.

- What was the question like for you?
- Where did that take you?
- What did you notice in that exercise?

Are there any other requirements you want to raise to facilitate your safety and learning?

Aims

- ❖ To provide an introduction to:
 - Evidence based approaches to flexibly responding to life setbacks
 - New ways to deal with adverse life events
 - Providing a view on the contextual behavioural approaches to transforming pain into purpose
- ❖ Practical Exercises that can be readily applied in therapy

Clinical Experience

In over 50 cases of self disclosed Adverse Childhood Events these principles have been applied, responses include –

- ❖ An objective way to approach deep distress
- ❖ A sense of relief and normalisation of distress
- ❖ Ability to take new perspectives on their life experience
- ❖ Facilitation of more workable and flexible responses
- ❖ Application to recovery from Childhood experience
Abuse Physical/Sexual/Emotional , Traumatism, Social and Familial distress, Bullying.
- ❖ Greater flexibility to respond to adult experiences of ACE –
Ineffective and abusive relationships, substance abuse, Anxiety, Depression, OCD, Bipolar disorder
- ❖ Acknowledgement of and effective responses to
Remorse, Regret, Self-blame, Guilt, Shame, Self-loathing and Self-disgust



Responsibility

We are not responsible for those events that happened

however....

We are now responsible for how we respond to those events

Responses to Darkness in our life

Remorse

Regret

Self-Blame

Guilt

Shame

Self Loathing

Self Disgust



How do we categorise these responses?

Remorse	I have done something that I need to respond to
Regret	I do not like an action/circumstance/experience
Self-blame	I shift responsibility for “X” to my “self”
Guilt	I have broken something
Shame	I am broken
Self-loathing	I intensely dislike or hate myself
Self-disgust	I find myself revolting and repulsive

Correspondence and Coherence vs Function and Flexibility

We are learning organisms

Hard learnt lessons - both appetitive and aversive -
produce behavioural patterns

Frequent or important/overwhelming experiences –
stick

Correspondence and Coherence vs Function and Flexibility

When governed by those rules

- ❖ We take action the **corresponds** to that which we know
- ❖ We behave in a way that is **coherent** in the context we perceive

Correspondence and Coherence vs Function and Flexibility

We will practice using CBS ACT/FAP/CFT moves to examine

- ❖ What is the function of this behaviour?
(e.g. being stuck, beating ourselves up repetitive unworkable action, fixations on what is not here now
- ❖ How do we increase flexibility in our response?

Why does Self-Forgiveness work?

Examining our behaviour in context allows us to go into the darkness with freedom and flexibility

- ❖ Allowing for whatever we experience to be freely observed
- ❖ For processes to be responded to with flexibility

Why does this work?

Self-forgiveness boosts our psychological immune response to challenge and change that is the cycle of Life and Death

Toussaint, L, Webb J, Hirsch J (2017), Self-Forgiveness and Health: A Stress-and-Coping Model, *Handbook of the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness* Lydia Woodyatt et al Eds pp 87-99 Springer

Why does this work?

- ❖ Frequently*, it may be 4-5 sessions before a person has established the genuine trust and rapport needed to reveal their deep experience of distress from Adverse Events
- ❖ It may only be with time that a key stuck point is realized.
- ❖ Self-forgiveness enhances a natural flow of self discovery
- ❖ Principles can then be applied rapidly and flexibly

** A general observation from private practice – Grant Dewar*

Pain Purpose Pathway

In

we find

and

Our deepest pain

Our purpose

Our pathway

Pain Purpose Pathway

and for the pain it brings

provides a means to both

and

Failure is inevitable

Self-Forgiveness

Absorb the pain

Grow from that pain

Pain Purpose Pathway

Self Forgiveness is a necessary behavioural response to the pain that we direct toward ourselves

Self Compassion provides the field of play

Self Forgiveness is a strategy or move within the field of self-compassion



Self-forgiveness - A principles-based response

Identify our Burden

Take Perspective

Values and pathways

Get Unstuck

Grant ourselves Forgiveness

Values in Action

Commitment to ongoing Self Forgiveness

Roles for Reflective exercises

General Approach in Therapist/Client/Observer roles

Therapist: Provide a therapeutic approach – X

Ask: What was that like for you?
Did that exercise have some effect?

Client: Choose scenarios to respond to exercise X
that are safe and exploratory 2/10 level of
challenge

Observer: Observe what happened
Observe the function of responses
Focus on modelling of the process – not content
Provide objective process focussed feedback

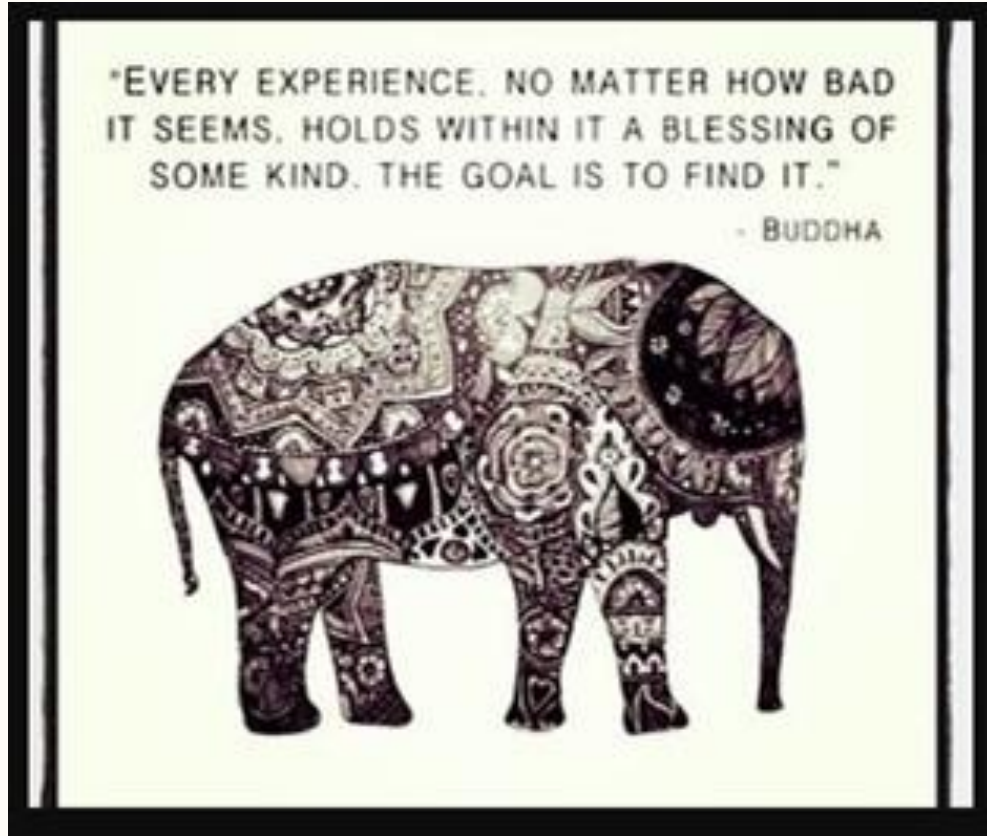
Roles for Exercises Questions?

Brene Brown on Story

“If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive. If you imagine opening up a photo album, and many of the pages are full 8 x 10 photos of shaming events you'll close that album and walk away thinking ***“shame defines that story”***”

If, on the other hand, you open that album and see a few small photos of shame experiences, but each one is surrounded by pictures of worthiness, hope, struggle, resilience, courage, failure, success, and vulnerability, the ***shame experience only part of a larger story that didn't define the album***

Identify a Burden you carry



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

Your Work – life history

From your heart or a tender, vulnerable place
(as much as you are willing)

Describe an important memory or event that elicits unworkable or
intrusive self blame from your:

- ❖ Childhood years
- ❖ Adolescence
- ❖ Young adult hood
- ❖ Current life

Grant's Story

My brother came to visit, he does not do so very often and while it was beautiful time of reconciliation, a shitty gift also dome through the door.....my story about my father's death, Whya have I still not got over it

Dad was dead; he had taken his own life, an ending for him that was a sad, lonely and bitter death. I was 15 years of age, and he and mum had gone through a nasty separation. New laws had just been enacted to allow for no-fault divorce, a liberation for mum and a curse for my father who had been engulfed by depression for all the years of my early life. That morning I had left the house in which my Dad and I lived in alone. On the night the divorce papers were served, he was furious. It was a great humiliation for him. I secretly went to be with my mother. He died in isolation and despair. The next day I returned home. I found his bitter last words and then I found him.

For twenty years I blamed myself for his death. I frequently, sometimes daily, contemplated my own death. This self-blame and shame deeply affected my marriage and the lives of my children

Exercises

Therapist/Client/ Observer and rotate

- T: Ask the client to share their reflections on the experience they have identified
- T: Ask the client to consider What grace or kindness would you offer to an other who experienced this
- T: Ask What would some you care about say to you
- T: Would you be willing to close your eyes and contact that place.... Allow that to drop behind your eyes and see yourself the way you see you
- C: How would you extend that forgiveness to yourself
- T: Coach client to consider how this discomfort and these perspectives might reveal and inform values
- Observer – Focus on Processes that elicit responses

Discovery Work

Now write out current life responses dominated by this Burden

- ❖ Every action/reaction serves a need....

How do we continue to hurt ourselves?

In what context?

What are the consequences?

- ❖ What are our common responses when we contact with this burden

avoidance, withdrawal, other unworkable action...

Drugs, sex, rock and roll, procrastination etc.

- ❖ To what extent do we now experience:

Remorse, regret, self blame, guilt, shame

self-loathing, self disgust

Implementing a Life Map

Making Your
Life Map



3. What do you do to try and avoid, escape, or control difficult experiences?

e.g. blame myself
drink



2. What difficult thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories get in your way?

e.g. loneliness, frustration
fear, self-doubt

4. What actions are you already doing or do you want to be doing to chase your values?

e.g. quality time with family,
enroll in school

1. Who matters to you?

What do you value in your life?

e.g. family, trust
security, love

Escape/Avoid Moves

- ❖ Getting caught up elsewhere
- ❖ Not being present

❖ What Works?

- ❖ Being present with connection in the moment with what is going on now with my brother and family

What Gets in the way in our private experience?

- ❖ Self Blame Guilt

What matters?

- ❖ Family and Connection

Exercises

Rotate Therapist/Client/ Observer

- ❖ T: Ask the client to share their reflections on the current unworkable behaviours/scenario they have identified
- ❖ T: What is the function of this behaviour?
(e.g. being stuck, beating ourselves up repetitive unworkable action, fixations on what is not here now) how does this work currently...
- ❖ T: Ask a question that opens up the life map e.g.
what would it be like if we were not Stuck..... Beating ourselves up.... Not fixated..... Taking useless action....etc

Leaning into our responses and transform them

- ❖ To judge ourselves rather than accept ourselves unreservedly is missing the mark for our life
- ❖ Harsh critical judgement maintains ineffective responses at the heart of psychological inflexibility

We transform our experience

By leaning into the heart of our own darkness
Being willing to turn our pain into purpose
We use our values to hit the mark for our life

(Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006; Hayes - Ted Talk ; Törneke, 2009)

Demonstration

Expanding the story

- ❖ Expansiveness
- ❖ Playful creativeness
- ❖ Opening to new pathways
- ❖ Changing characters and perspective

OPAL – a response to darkness

Openness:

Bring curiosity and interest to our experience

Presence:

Lean into our experiences with compassion

Acceptance:

Give unconditional positive regard to ourselves

Light:

Shine a light in our darkness,

And

Lighten the burden



Exercises

Rotate Therapist/Client/ Observer

- ❖ T: Choose a stance of either **Openness, Presence, Acceptance, Light, Lightness** to facilitate an alternate telling of the story
- ❖ C: Response.... consider **an alternate expansive response**

Exercise

Re Writing the Story

Rotate Therapist/Client/ Observer

- ❖ Now using expansiveness –
- ❖ Can you re write the story and provide a new frame work
- ❖ Are there discoveries to be made-
- ❖ Are there alternate characterisations
- ❖ Observe how a writing exercise may change the context of the story and may allow for a change in behaviour repertoires

Exercise

Re Writing the Story

Once upon a time a yellow seagull was found outside a window. After playing around and acting in improv moves, She made a pause. The blue room caught her attention. “What’s going on in there?”, She wondered.

She had heard so many stories about It. There was one which really intrigued Her. It was “The ghost in the room story”. That ghost might be responsible for peculiar things: tables collapsing or hearts beating faster.

She was determined and afraid. She opened the window and started flying inside. She could feel the vibes in there. She could listen to the echoes of the past stories. She could hear the present noise.

But most importantly she could see the beauty. This blue colour was shining from a dark point. It might stem from the place known as the “shitty gift”, but this mingling made it uniquely beautiful. She made a small nest in there. Not for Her. But as an honouring gift. The blue room could sigh with a dose of relief. It could host the ghost in that nest. And this hospitality made It even more willing to make room for more guests. One of them is me. One of them is you...



Self-forgiveness - A principles-based response

Identify our Burden

Take Perspective

Values and pathways

Get Unstuck

Grant ourselves Forgiveness

Values in Action

Commitment to ongoing Self Forgiveness

Questions?



Éirinn go Brách.



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Take Perspective



Engaging in a forgiving internal dialogue:

- How would you take a perspective that helps to understand:
 - who were you at the time of the experience*
 - what your intentions/needs were, and,*
 - the unintended effects of your actions/reactions*
- What values are hidden in the struggle and pain
- How might perspective transform this experience

Exercise

Therapist, Client, Observer

Taking another perspective on this burden –

T: ask the client to take a perspective e.g. the wise you, the superhero you, the adult you, the best friend that you could have for you

Are there alternate experiences that arise from this perspective of the other you?

Consider how these reflections might reveal and inform more workable responses to the burden

Values and Pathways



Values are the compass that assist us to find our way out of the swamp of unforgiveness toward ourselves

values provides a reference point
to:

- Contacting painful experiences
- Explore the context of the transgression and responses
- Identify how we wrestled with our experiences and internal conflicts

Leaning into the darkness

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

Exercise

Therapist, Client, Observer

T: Ask the client to identify a values informed need in response to distress.

Ask client to identify the voice that is informed by pain –

now ask - Is there a voice informed by compassion

C: Identify values that inform this need – how might this assist in the development of alternate responses?

O Observe feedback function and flexibility

Leaning into the darkness

Emotion

**Who is speaking –
Name the voice**

**Is there an alternate
Compassionate Voice?**

Remorse

Regret

Self-blame

Guilt

Shame

Self-loathing

Self-disgust



Getting Unstuck

The curious paradox is
this....

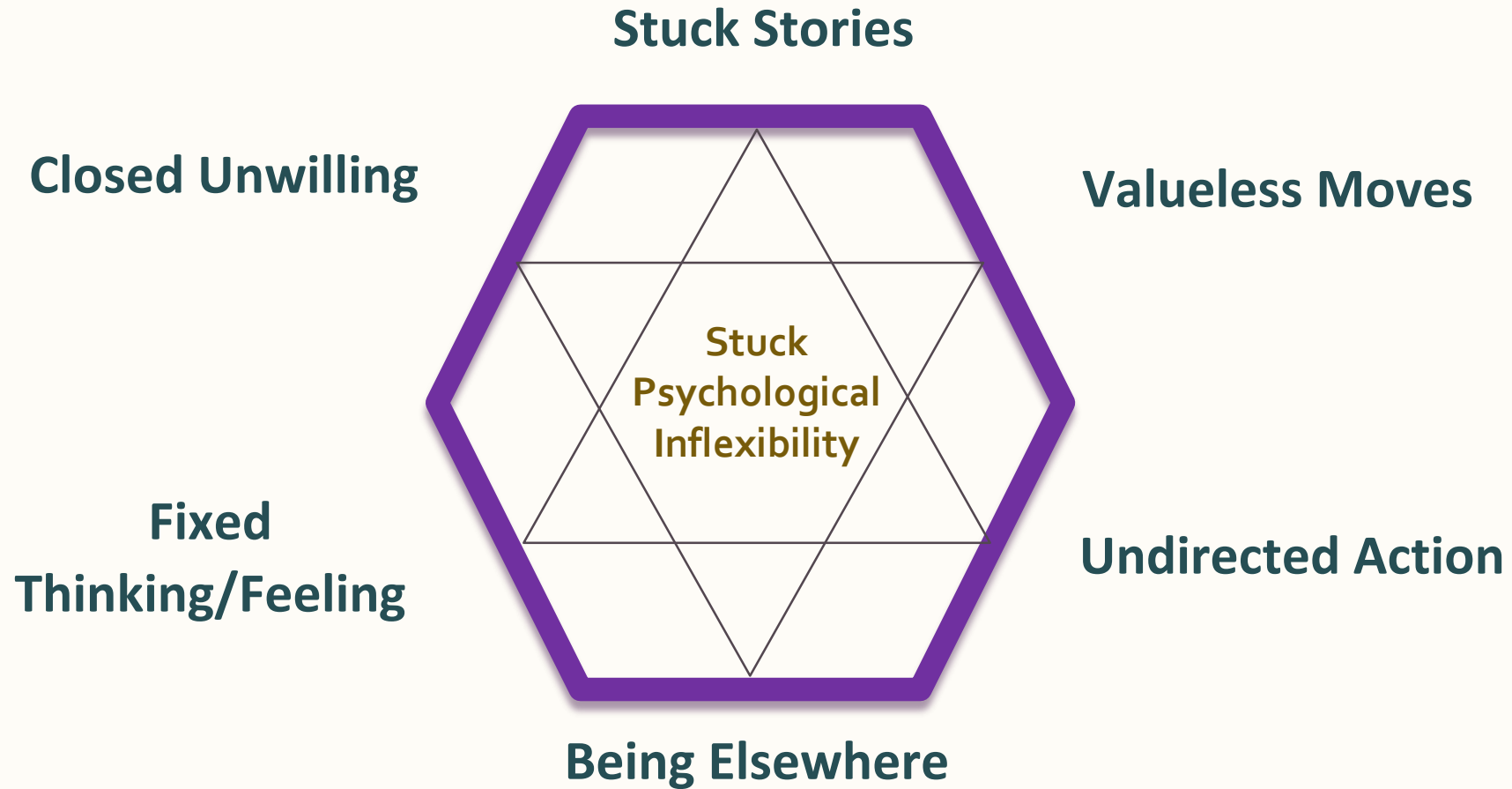
It is only when I accept
myself

just as I am....

then I can change.....

Carl Rogers

Getting Unstuck: Psychological Flexibility





Moves	How does this work Aversion/Appetite Away/toward
Stuck Stories	
Closed Unwilling	
Fixed Thinking/Feeling	
Being Elsewhere	
Valueless Moves	
Undirected Action	
Other Unworkables	



Exercise

Therapist, Client, Observer

T: Ask the client to identify

What is aversive/appetitive in their experience

Can they Describe their moves away from or toward

C: Can you identify the way these move work?

O Observe feedback function and flexibility

Getting Unstuck: Psychological Flexibility

The Self as Observer

Acceptance /
Willingness

Valued Living

Defusion /
Watch your
thinking

Committed
Action



Being Present
Living in the here and now

Alternate Moves

**How does this work
Aversion/Appetite
Away/toward**

Contextual Freedom

Accepting/Willing

Free Thinking Feeling

Being Present

Valued Moves

Action that Work

Other workabiity

Exercise

Therapist, Client, Observer

T: Ask the client to identify

What is aversive/appetitive in their experience

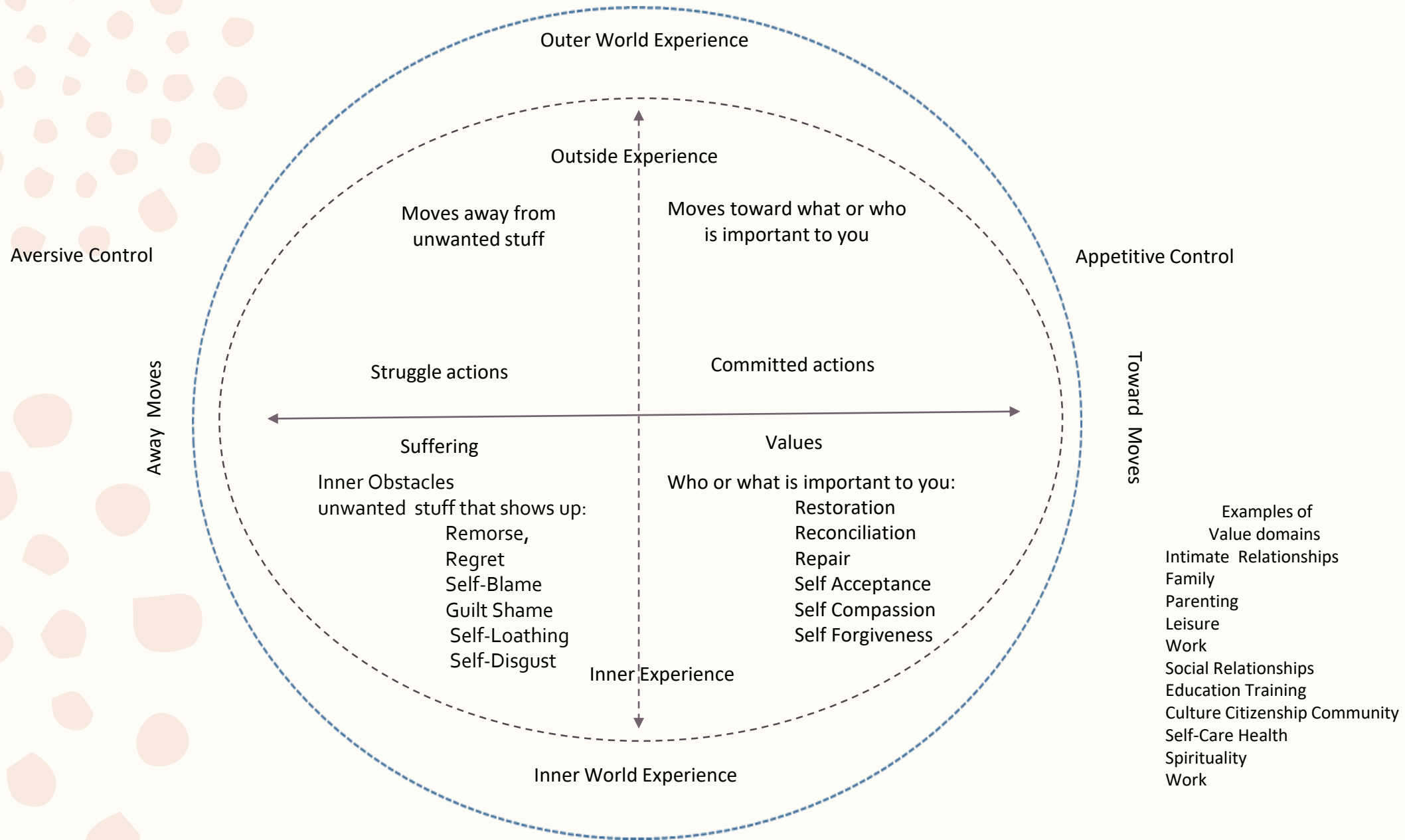
Can they Describe their moves away from or toward

C: Can you identify the way these move work?

O Observe feedback function and flexibility

Getting unstuck Utilizing the ACT Matrix...

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





Granting Self-Forgiveness

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

How do you speak to yourself ?

Consider why you have punished yourself.....

Consider the usefulness of forgiving yourself.....

Your work

Identify the critic – allow them to speak

Identify the person being criticised - allow them to speak

What do both really want?

Allow room for understanding mediation and reconciliation

Make room for Self-Forgiveness





Your Work

Having compassionately:

Identified our responses to our experiences

Taken perspective on experiences of

Remorse Regret Guilt Shame Self Loathing Self Disgust

Compassionately acknowledged effects and harms

Taken responsibility for behaviours that don't work

Reviewed our values

Developed and made room for workable perspectives and responses

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

confirmed by active responses to our distress and our goals

Creating an Action plan

Respond to discoveries...

Develop and explore plans for:

Renewal

Restitution

Recovery

Reconciliation

Self-forgiveness that lasts requires committed action

Expressive writing is a useful response to challenges from where-ever they arise. It assists:

- Self affirmation through exploration of ones values

- Promoting a stance of self-compassion, self-acceptance and self-worth

- To acknowledge and affirm self-discovery

- To informs consistent steps that move towards values

- Applying the ACT Matrix for self-forgiveness to daily experience

Expressive writing as part of committed action to self-forgiveness

- ❖ Secrets have drawbacks
 - Keeping secrets is physical work,
an emotional burden
 - hurts our thinking abilities
 - can produce short-term biological changes and influence long-term health.
- ❖ Describe, and make room for responses to adverse events
- ❖ Put aside for a while
- ❖ Then come back and take a values based perspective

(Pennebaker & Chung, 2007; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016)

Your Work

Reflecting on the work you have done:

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

Dropping a burden?

Transforming an experience?

Bringing light to darkness?

Doing what you value?

Cultivating an ongoing forgiving internal dialogue

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

As we free ourselves we find new territory within...

- ❖ A new sense of ourselves can bring a danger of overwhelming regret ...
why did I not do this years ago ... ?
- ❖ New challenges, new responsibilities, new discoveries will require new responses ...
- ❖ Then we need to continue to revisit values and put the principles into action ...



Your Work - Action for ongoing Self Forgiveness:

Review your life goals

Journal your expressive writing to create a space to develop wisdom

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

Establish alternate pathways to respond to your burdens and challenges



Your Work - Action for ongoing Self Forgiveness:

Review your life goals

Journal your expressive writing to create a space to develop wisdom

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

Establish alternate pathways to respond to your burdens and challenges

Youtube Resources

Unconditional positive regard -- the power of self acceptance | Michelle Charfen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tkkL9w2pw8>

Kelly McGonigal How to make Stress Your Friend

https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend?language=en

Dan Ariely Self Control <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPQhj6ktYSo>

Kathryn Schulz: On being wrong | TED Talk | TED.com https://www.ted.com/talks/kathryn_schulz_on_being_wrong

Kathryn Schulz: Don't regret regret https://www.ted.com/talks/kathryn_schulz_don_t_regret_regret

Jonathan Haidt: Religion, evolution, and the ecstasy of self-transcendence

Http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_humanity_s_stairway_to_self_transcendence?language=en

J.K. Rowling Speaks at Harvard Commencement <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHGqp8lz36c>

Natalie Portman Harvard Commencement Speech | Harvard Commencement 2015

https://www.youtube.com?v=jDaZu_KEMCY/watch?

Ken Robinson: Do schools kill creativity?

https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en

Youtube Resources

Brene Brown: The power of vulnerability www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o

Brené Brown: Listening to shame <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psN1DORYYV0>

Brene Brown: The price of invulnerability: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoMXF73j0c>

Brené Brown: Why Your Critics Aren't The Ones who count www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-JXOnFOXQk

Bravery & Authenticity in a Digital World /w Brené Brown | Chase Jarvis LIVE | ChaseJarvis
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUuXDZERxrk>

Daring Greatly to Unlock Your Creativity with Brené Brown – YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAk4cwjvJ0A>

How To Skip the Small Talk and Connect With Anyone | Kalina Silverman | TEDxWestminsterCollege
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDbxqM4Oy1Y>

Neil Pasricha TEDxToronto - "The 3 A's of Awesome"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajKMkIXN1eg>

Youtube Resources

Russ Harris ACT Mindfully https://www.actmindfully.com.au/free_resources_video

Embracing your Demons https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/Dr_Russ_Harris_-_A_Non-technical_Overview_of_ACT.pdf

Brian Johnson Guide to ACT - Happiness Trap <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAe0hPsv2XY>

Steve Hayes Founder of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Psychological flexibility: How love turns pain into purpose TEDx University of Nevada

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o79_gmO5ppg

Mental Brakes to Avoid Mental Breaks | Steven Hayes – YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnSHpBRLJrQ>

The secret to self-control | Jonathan Bricker | TEDxRainier <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTb3d5cjSFI>

What is the ACT Matrix? (Life Map Adaptation) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrcMyaSgy9A>

The Zen Social Worker Timothy Gordon, MSW Registered Social Worker <https://www.thezensocialworker.ca>

Timothy Gordon Youtube Channel - your self-help guide to a life well lived

The Truly Experiential Therapist: Russ Harris Interviews Matt Villatte - Part 1, 2, 3.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCmL_HHBbJg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8bpECxbdNk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbbXhTomGu4>

Jordan B Peterson 12 Rules for Life <https://jordanbpeterson.com>

Lost Connections Johan Hari <https://thelostconnections.com>

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Questions?

