



ACBS World Conference  
**SAN FRANCISCO**  
— June 14-19, 2022 —

Maximizing the Achievement of Children and  
Adolescents in Their Performance Endeavors  
Using the ACT Matrix

# Disclosures:

I have not received and will not receive any commercial support related to this presentation or the work presented in this presentation.

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# Today's Agenda

- Workshop learning objectives
- Contextual Considerations
- Kids and performance
- ACT Matrix Overview
- Building the Foundation
- Teaching Kids the ACT Matrix
- ACT Exercises
- Metaphors, Story Telling, Quotes, and other ACT Gadgetry
- Q & A



# Workshop Learning Objectives

- Teach the **ACT Matrix** and its use for improving **psychological flexibility** to child and adolescent performers and athletes with understandable, intuitive language and process.
- Integrate storytelling, metaphor, and real-life examples to clarify understanding and use of the ACT Matrix for child and adolescent performers and to enhance their development of psychological flexibility.
- Implement methods encouraging young performers to incorporate the ACT Matrix in life domains, not just performance and sport, to achieve overall psychological flexibility and well-being.



# Contextual Considerations



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# A Few Contextual Points

- Acceptance and Commitment **Training**, instead of Therapy or Treatment.
- **Performers/athletes**, instead of patients/clients.
- Other language considerations.
- Children and adolescents.
- Individual, group, and team training.





# Contextual Terminology

Words avoided:

**Meditation**

**Mindfulness**

**Yoga**

.....A turn-off for some young people.

Substitute words used:

**Present**

**In-the-Moment**

**Focus**

**Zone**

**Flow**

Choose words carefully. It's a contextual decision.



# Kids and Performance



# Performance Anxiety



# Parental Pressure



*“Don’t sweat it. That’s Little League—your dad comes, you choke.”*

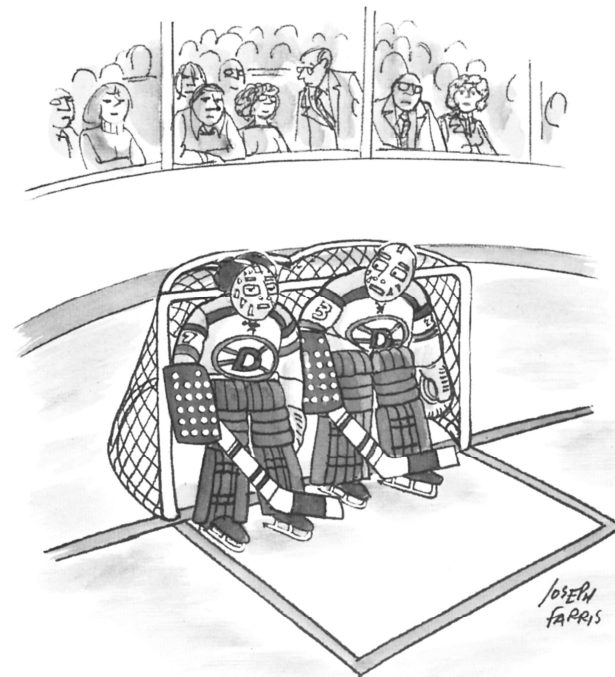
# Adults Living Through Kids



*"Hang your fading hopes and dreams on your children's high-school teams!"*



# Helicopter/Snow-Plow Parents



*"Really, Mother, I don't need any help!"*

# Over-Reactive Parents



*"If you can get his parents to go ballistic, he can't hit a thing."*

# Mind-Chatter and Emotion

## THE LANGMORE REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL INNER DEBATE TEAM

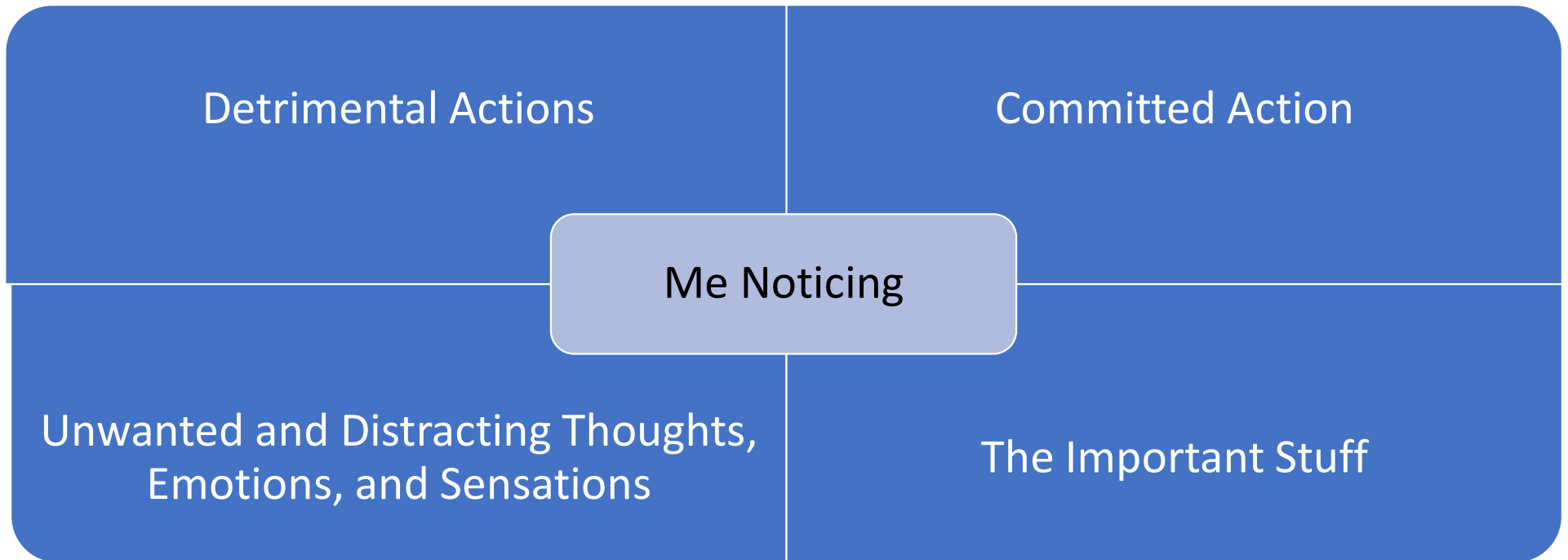


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# ACT Matrix Overview



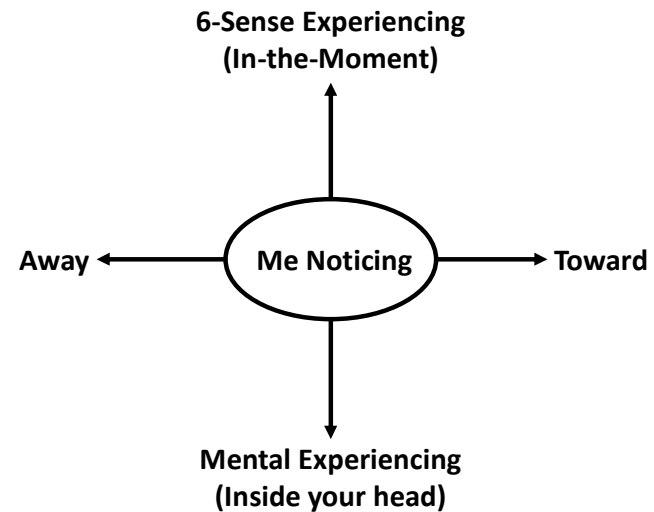
# Repeat Suggestion

- Explain ACT as “Acceptance and Commitment ***Training.***”
- “***Therapy***” and “***Treatment***” can have a negative connotation for children and adolescents (adults as well).
- Consult your favorite Relational Frame Theory (RFT) resources for further understanding.....



# ACT Matrix: What is it?

- Simplification of ACT
- Unencumbered by confusing terminology
- Intuitive
- Easily internalized and portable
- Improves self-awareness
- Trains “Psychological Flexibility”
- Empowers



# Psychological Flexibility Defined

“...the ability to feel and think with openness, to attend voluntarily to your experience of the present moment, and to move your life in directions that are important to you, building habits that allow you to live in accordance with your values and aspirations”

(Hayes, S.C., 2019).



# Rephrasing “P.F.” for Young Performers

You’re calm, focused, and in  
In the zone, allowing for optimal  
Performance.



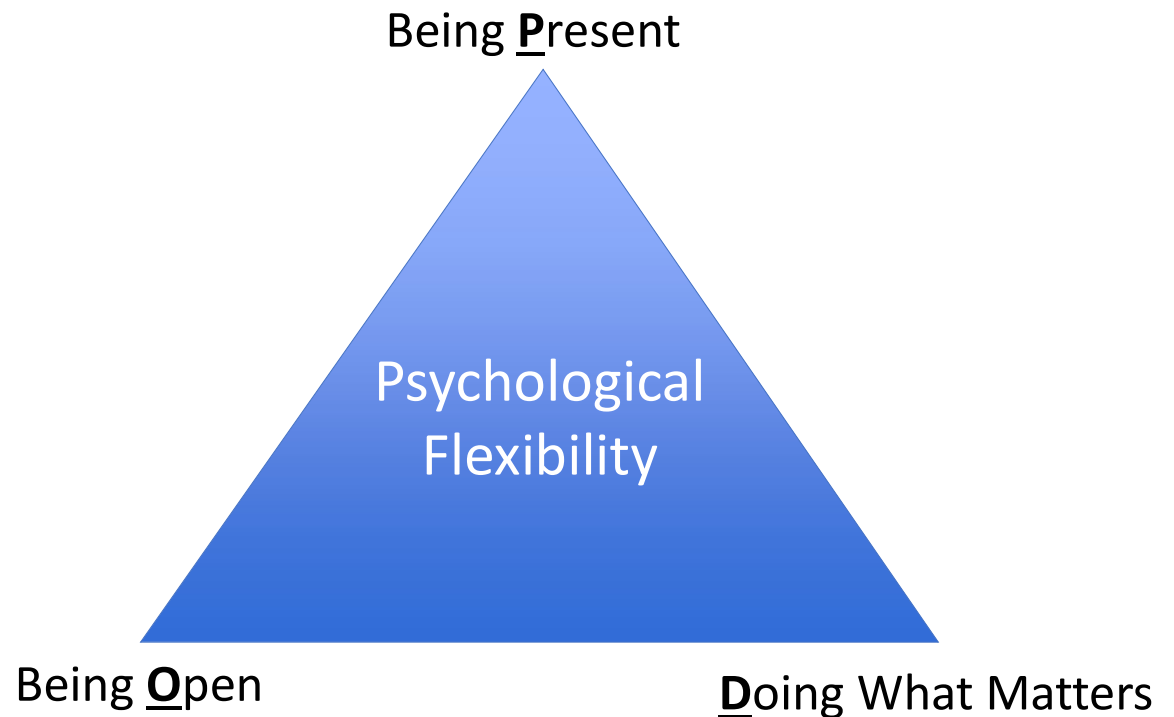
# Other “Psychological Flexibility” Terms (with slightly different meanings)

- Grit
- Mental Toughness
- Resilience
- Calm and Focused
- In-Flow
- The Zone



# The Psychological Flexibility (POD) Pyramid

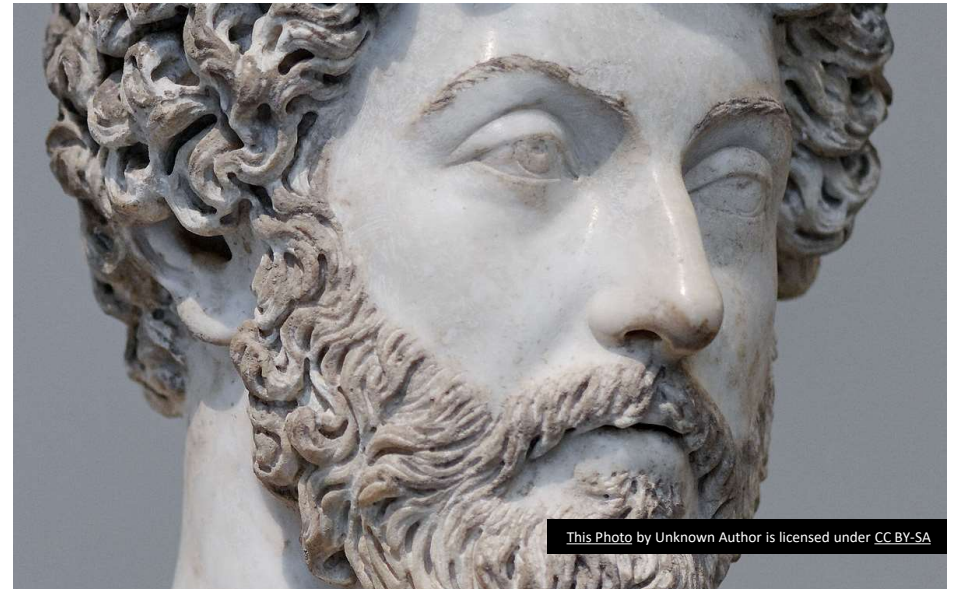
- Present
- Open
- Doing What Matters
- **P.O.D.**



# A Stoic Take

“We must corral not only unnecessary actions, but unnecessary thoughts, too, so needless acts don’t tag along after them.”

--Marcus Aurelius



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# Building the ACT Foundation



# Listening



- First in-the-moment sensory skill trained.
- Explain: Paying attention—here—will improve your performance focus.
- Model what you want them to do. Speak slowly, calmly, and rhythmically.

# Listening Exercise Directions

(Used at meetings, practices and other encounters)

- I'm talking, so what do you need to be doing right now?
- What do you use to listen?
- Look me right between the eyes as I speak.
- Focal points: "Aim small, miss small."
- Redirect if they lose focus. Do it calmly with gestures, eye contact, and few if any words.



# Listening Exercise Follow-Up

- Why did we do that?
- What's the most important performance/game of the season?
- What's the most important day of the season?
- What's the most important moment of the season?
- What's the most important day of your life?
- What's the most important moment of your life?

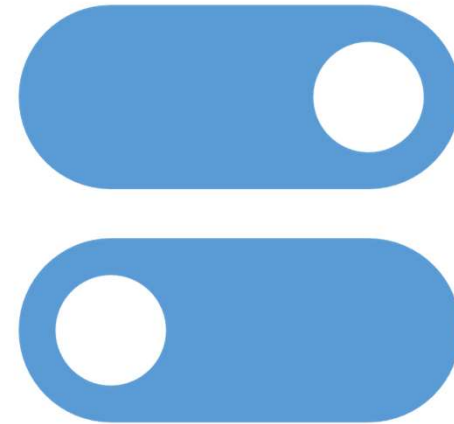
Making the most of each moment is critical to success. Be aware when you've lost contact with the present moment and get back to it.



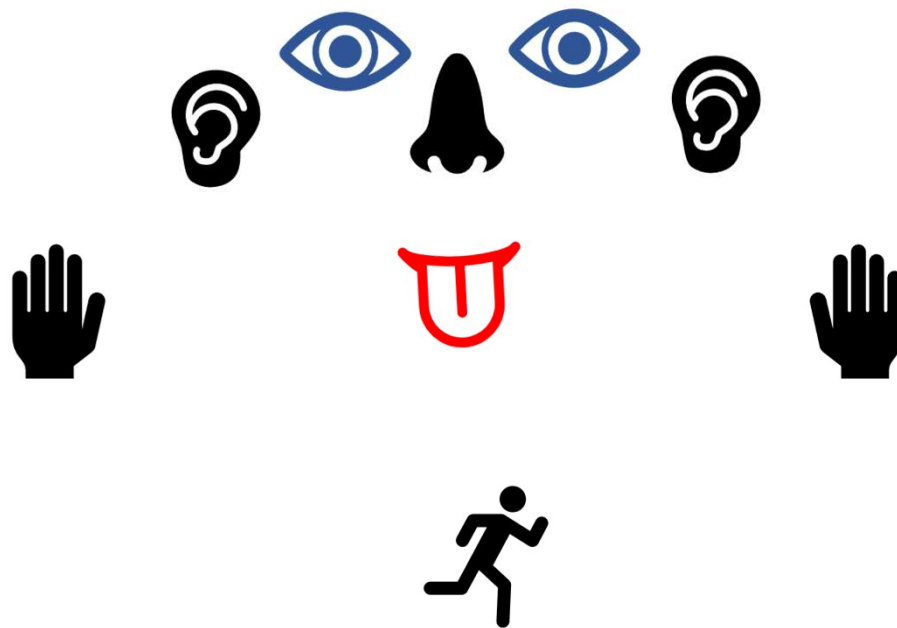
# Flip the Switch

Exercise that trains turning attention from a distraction to a Committed Action

- What needs to be done when focus is lost.
- Tell a joke or do something else that distracts from a task.
- Say “flip the switch.”
- “Time to listen. Focus eyes and ears.”



# Focus—It's About Six-Sense Awareness (In-the-moment)



# Proprioception

“The perception of the position and movement of the body.”

--(Oxford Languages)



# In-the-Moment Exercise





# Useful Metaphor

Is this YOU chasing unwanted—distracting—thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations?



# When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Get Activate

Elite performers activate—

- Under difficult, pressured circumstances.
- When unwanted “inner stuff” shows up.
- Consider Tom Brady.

Others shut down.....

They need to **“flip the switch.”**



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Is this *YOU* while performing???

# My Stuffed Metaphor.....



# Who Do You Want To Be?

Eeyore



Tom Brady



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# What Young Performers Often Want

- “Make my anxiety go away.”
- “Help get my confidence back.”
- “Believe in myself.”
- “Think positively.”



# What They are Told to Clarify ACT Approach

- Many of the things you want are not workable.
- You will learn to relate differently to thoughts, feelings, sensations, and other “inside stuff.”
- We cannot control the inside stuff. Attempts to control them usually intensifies.
- Internal experience disrupts performance only when we let it.
- You will train to accept unwanted internal experience without letting it get in the way.
- Accept, and be willing to live with, the internal stuff and focus on what you are doing.

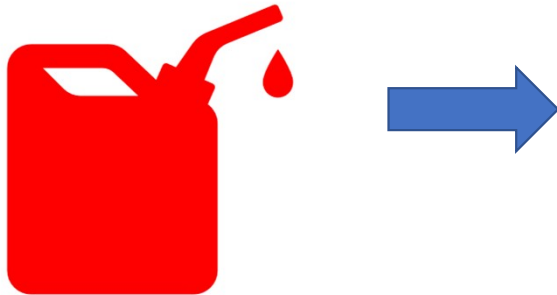


# White Bear Exercise





# Gasoline on a Fire



# Great Quote

“You don’t win medals by having great and confident thoughts and feelings. You win medals by doing the actions required in a competition. Confidence as a feeling doesn’t matter. At the end of the day, you must stick to things you want to do, not on how you feel.”

--**Kelly Dekker**, Dutch sport and performance psychologist and ACBS member.



# United States Navy SEALs Saying



- You are not always going to feel the way you want.
- If you can be okay being uncomfortable, you'll be prepared to handle whatever situation comes along in your life.

# Control the Controllable ...Let go of the rest



**What I don't Control:**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



**What I Do Control:**

My **A**ttitude and **A**ctions

What I choose to **C**oncentrate on (focus)

My **E**ffort

**ACE**

# A Definition of “Confidence”

“The absence of uncomfortable feelings and the thoughts and inside stuff that tag along with them.”

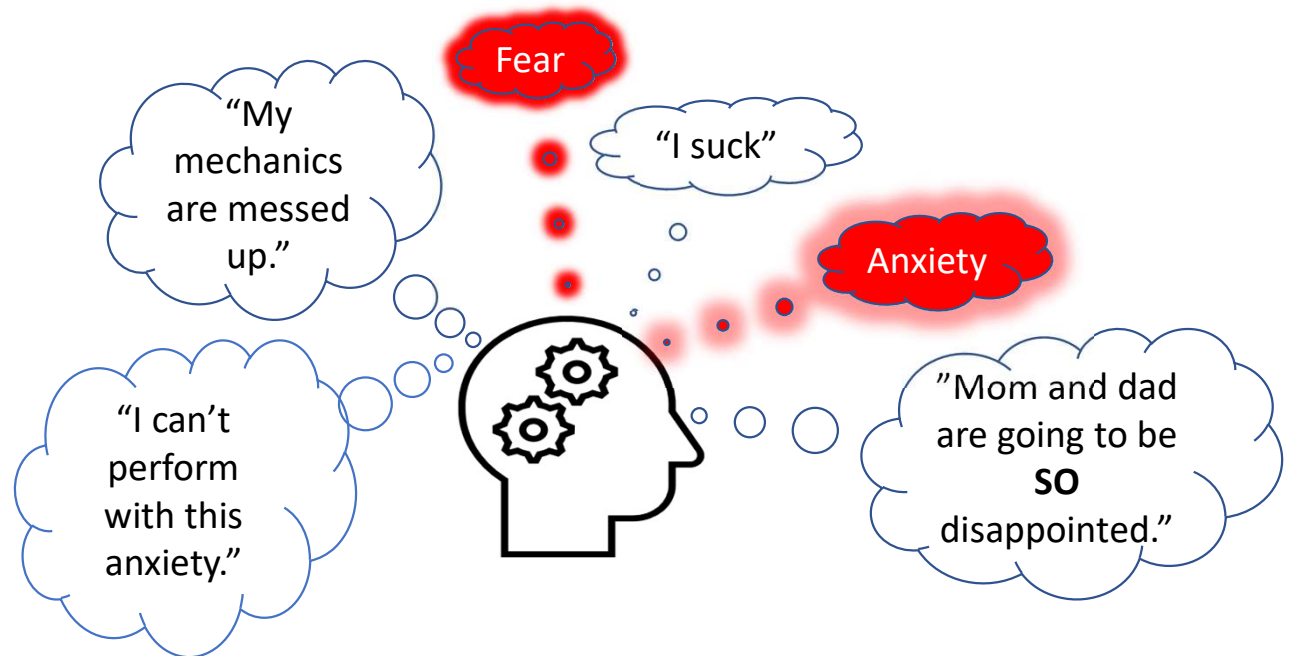
**--David Udelf**

Unfortunately, that doesn't happen as often as we would like when performing.



# The Mind-Chatter, Emotion Machine

- The mind produces non-stop, random, and unwanted chatter and emotion
- We do not control the inside stuff.
- It's like that annoying friend who won't stop talking, texting, snap-chatting, tweeting you.



# Slow is Smooth, Smooth is Fast



A United States Navy SEALs training philosophy highly applicable to performance.



Optimal Rhythm is critical for performance success.



Young performers often rush as they perform.



# The Two-Minute Warming

Experiencing the benefits of slow, rhythmic breathing





# Two-Minute Warming Follow-Up

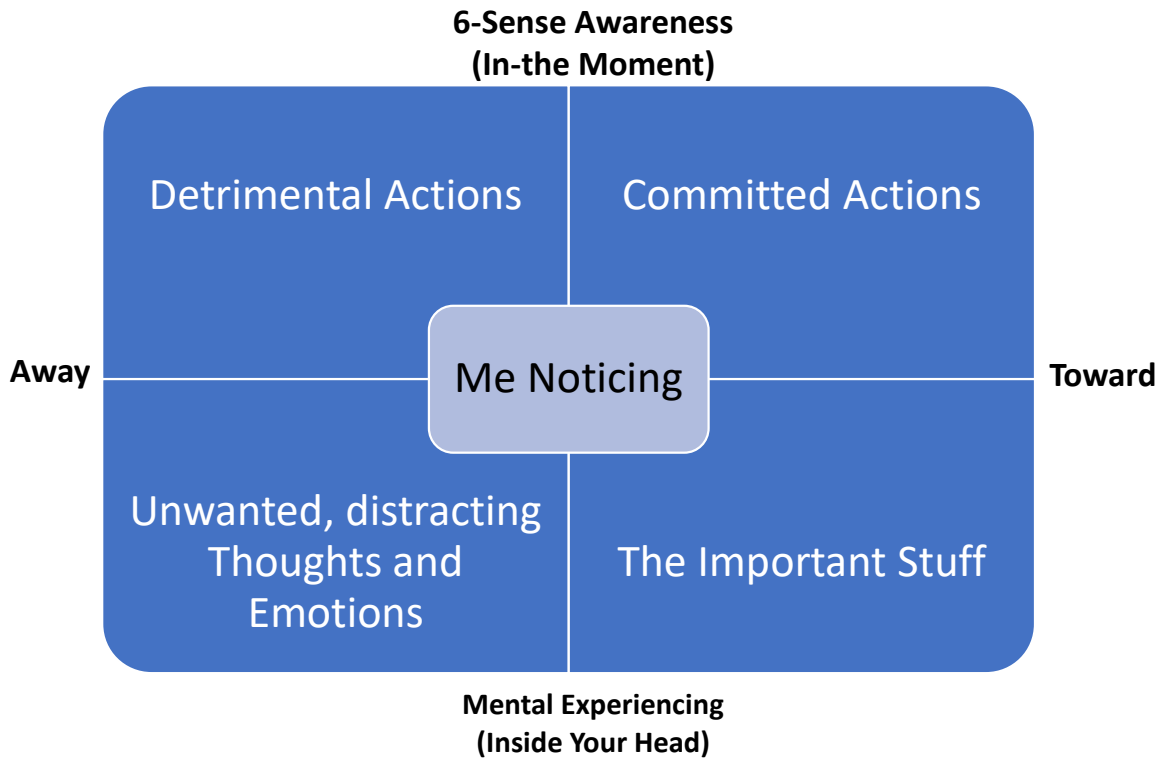
**What did you notice while doing the second minute?**

**Discuss the purpose of the exercise. Important points :**

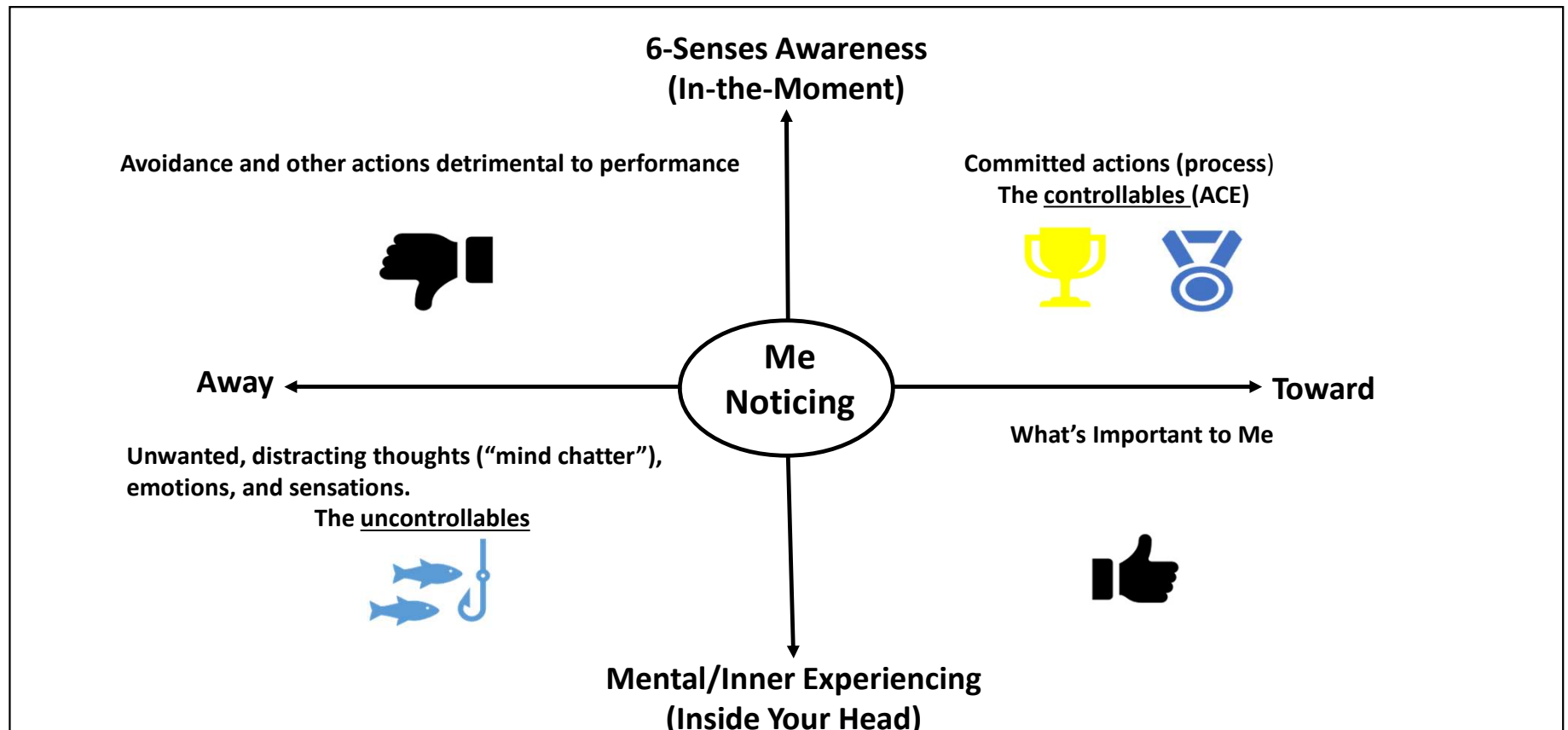
- Slow, rhythmic breathing a 24/7/365 pursuit with everything you do.
- Awareness and value of rhythm and slowing down.
- Awareness of breathing and its role in slowing down.
- The power of calm.
- To let thoughts, emotions, and body sensations be there—acceptance and willingness.
- Make it a habit by practicing.



# Teaching Kids the ACT Matrix



# Teaching the ACT Matrix

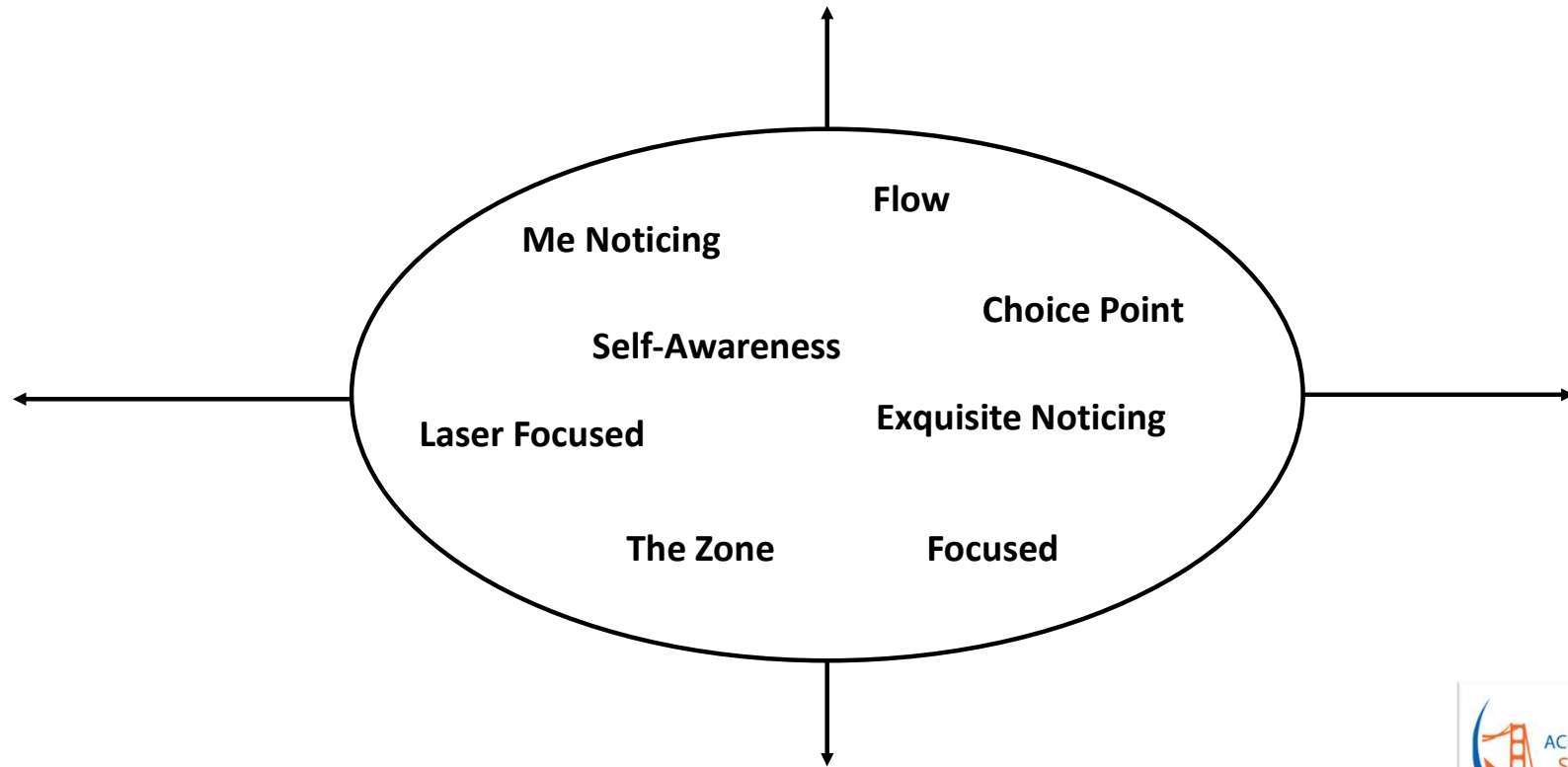


Acceptance

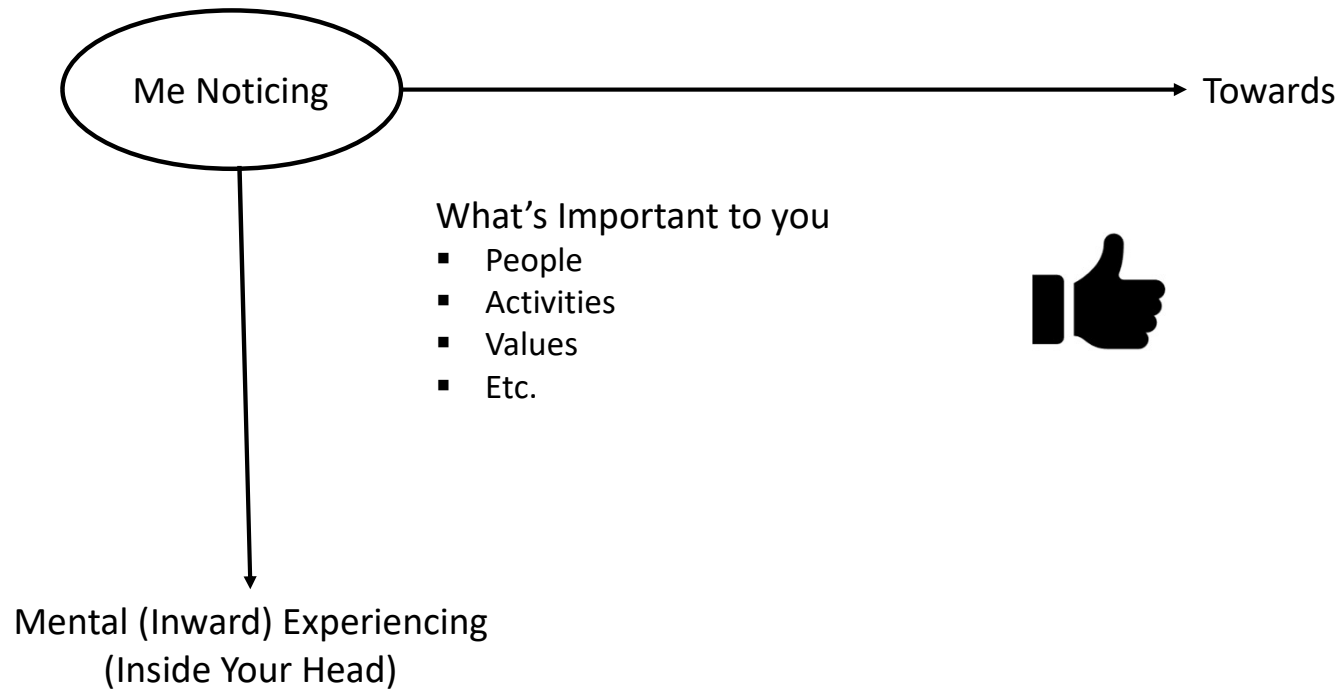
Willingness

Commitment

# Me Noticing (Self-Awareness)



# Lower-Right Quadrant



# Upper-Right Quadrant

Six-Sense Awareness  
(In-the-Moment)

**Committed Actions  
(Process)**  
(Where the **Important Stuff** happens)

**The Controllables**

**A**pproach/**A**ctions

**C**oncentration (Focus)

**E**ffort



Me Noticing

Towards



# Control the Controllables (A.C.E.)

....and let go of the rest.

What we control:

**A**ctions

**C**oncentration (what we choose to focus on)

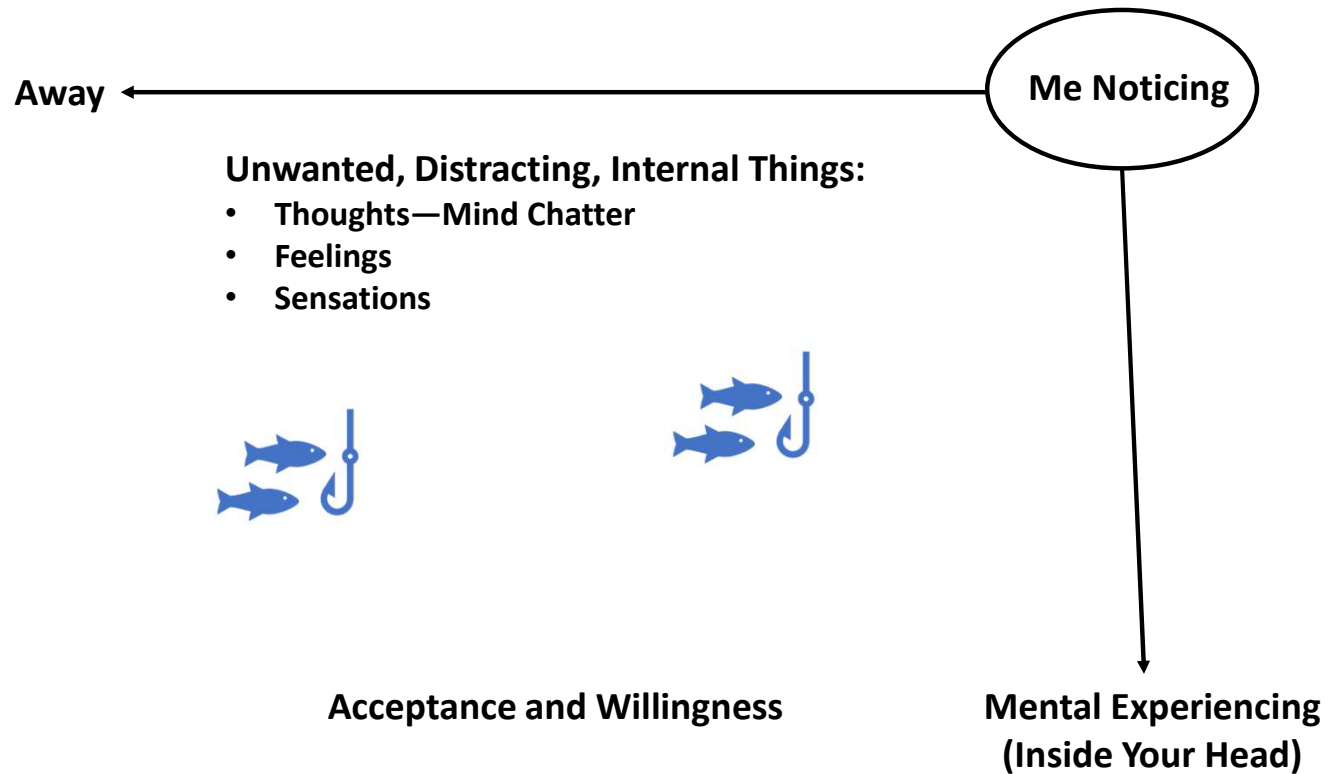
**E**ffort

The rest (what we do not control):

Just about everything else, including thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, the past, the future, other people, etc., etc.,etc.

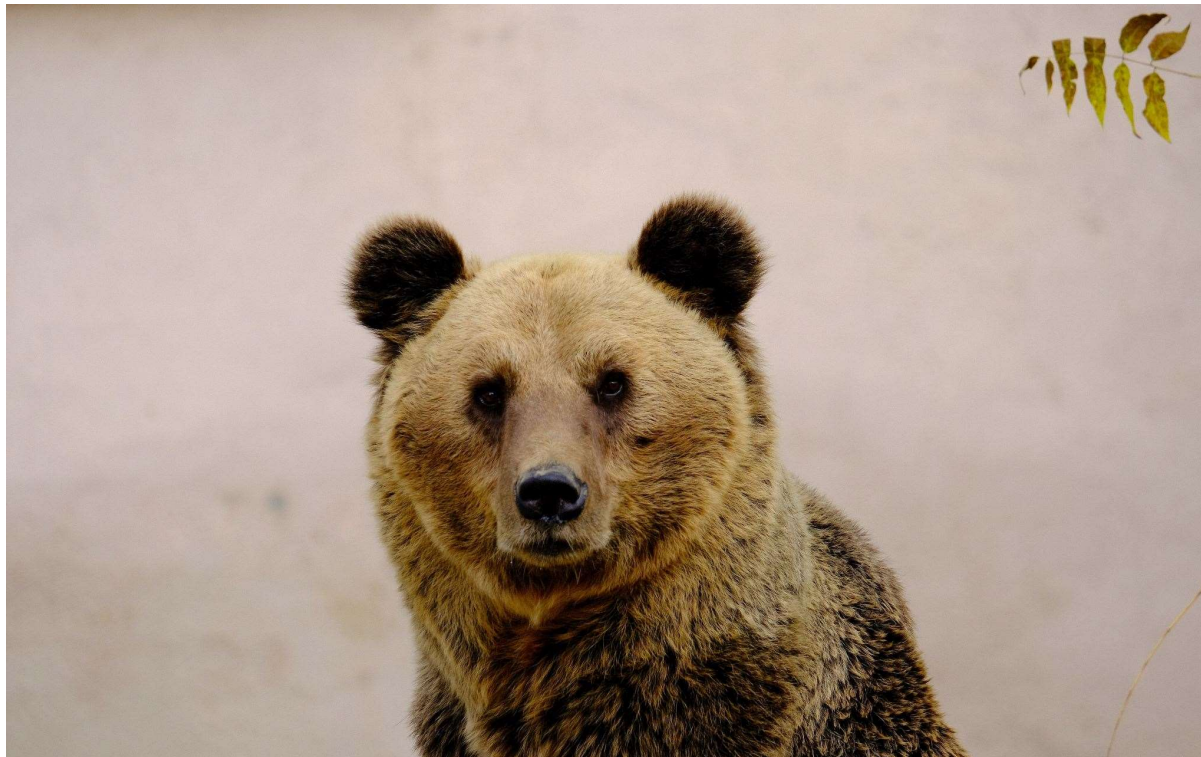


# Lower-Left Quadrant





# Don't Poke the Bear



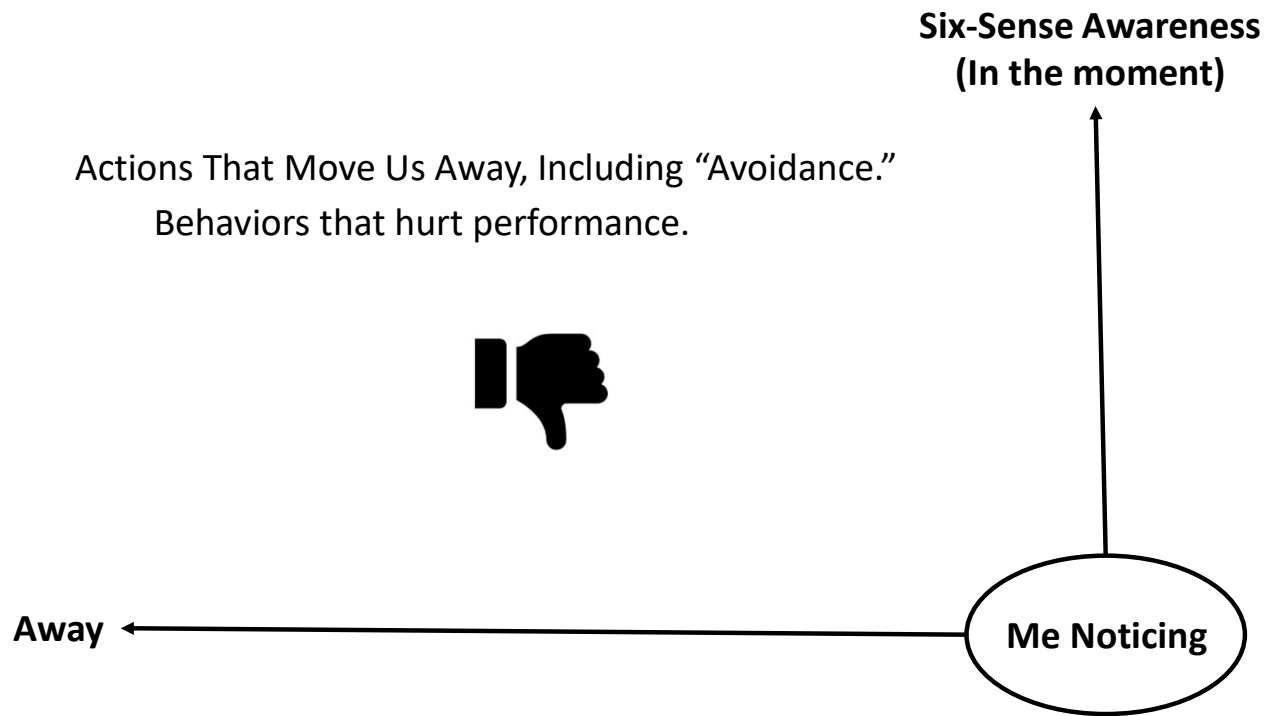
# Baby-Walking Story: The role of language



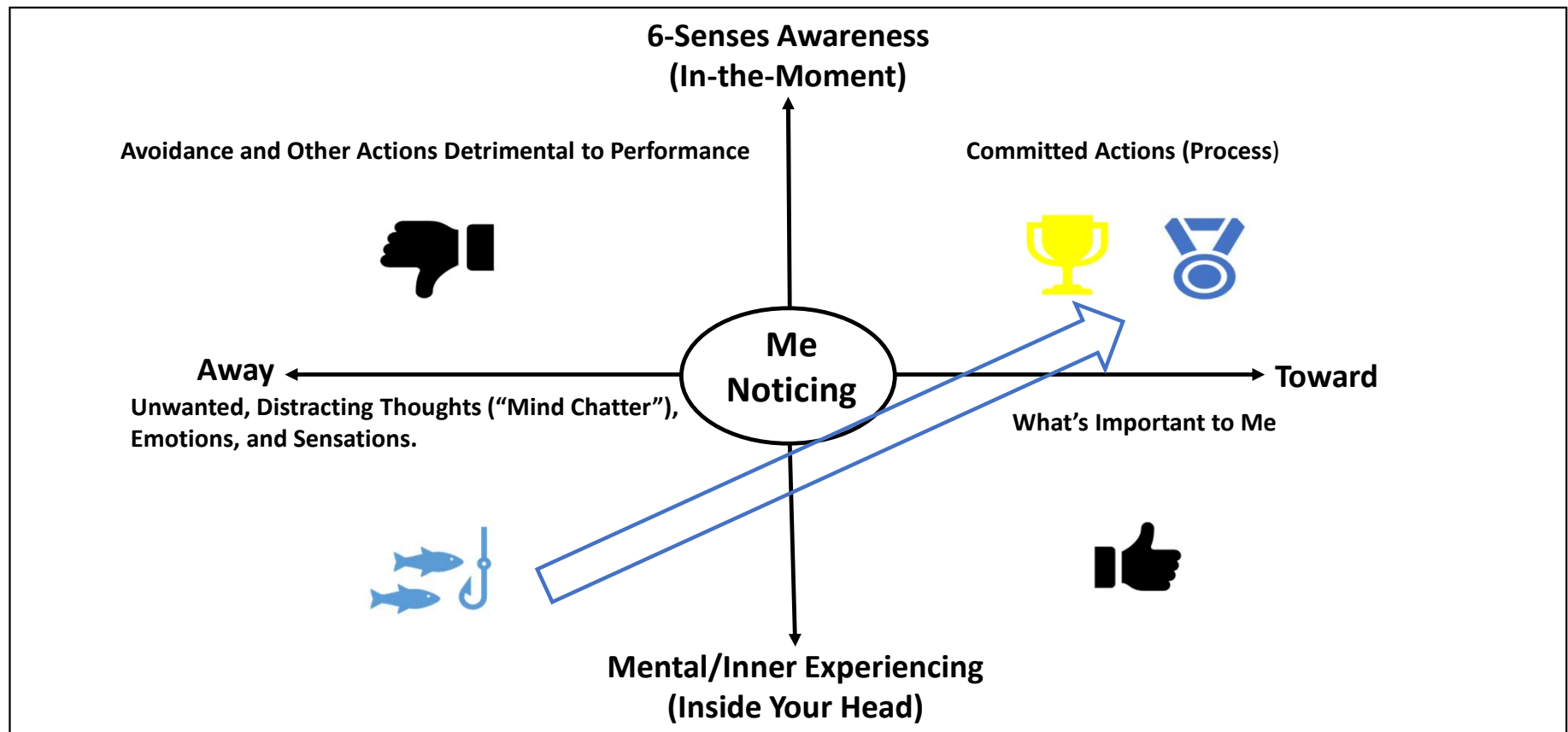
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# Upper-Left Quadrant



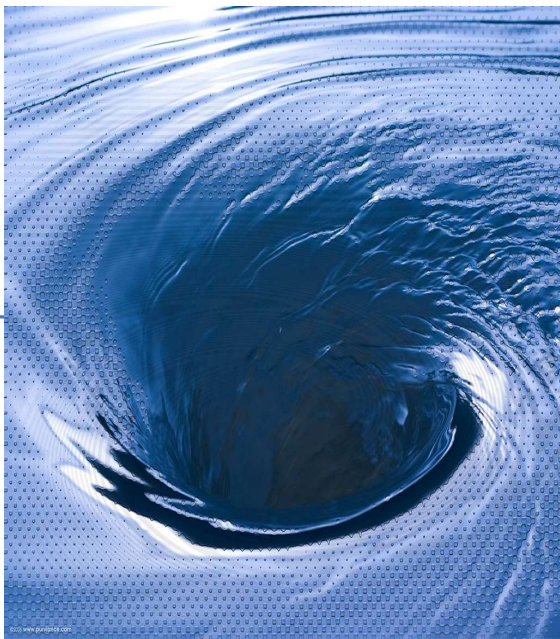
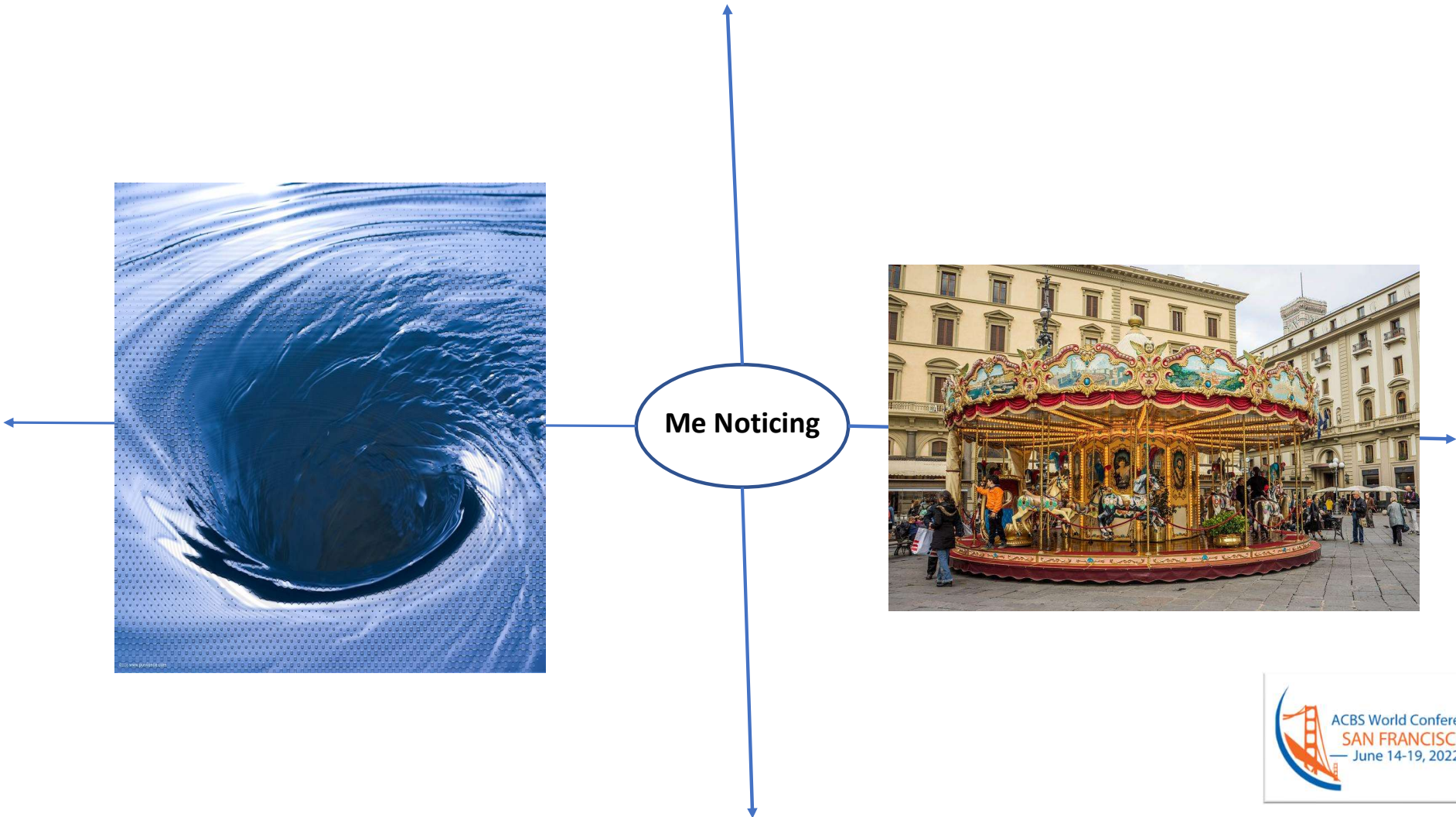
# Teaching the ACT Matrix



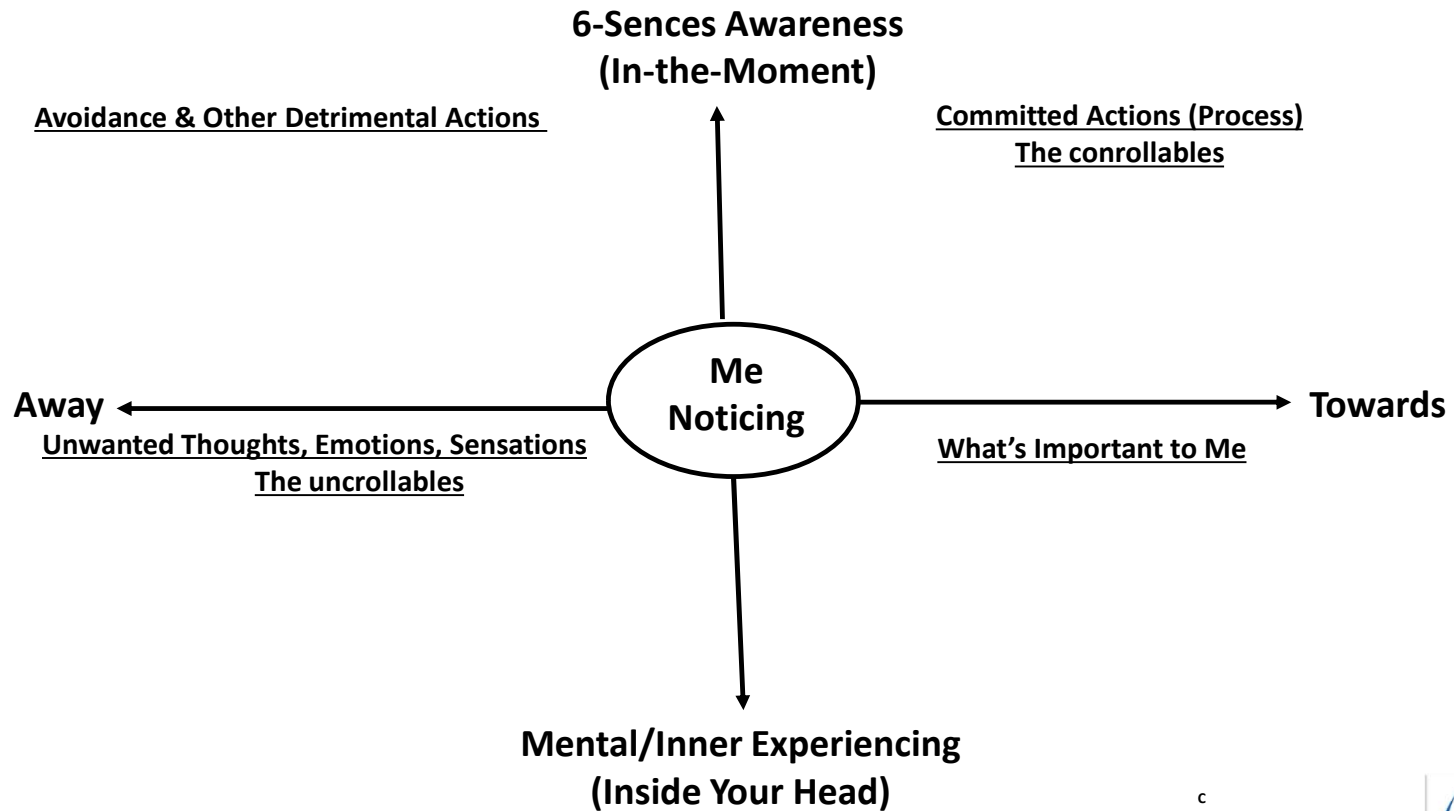
Acceptance

Willingness

Commitment



# ACT Matrix Worksheet



c



# ACT Exercises



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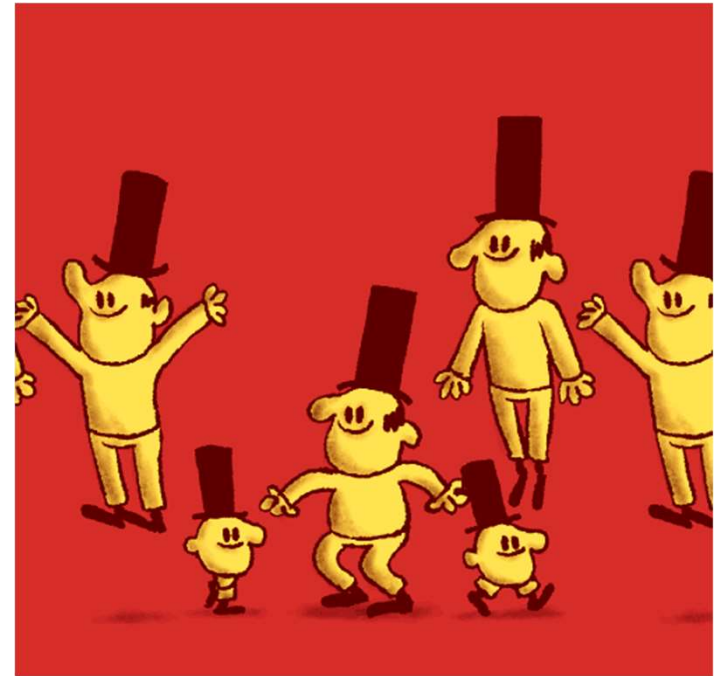
# Laser Focus (Exquisite Noticing) and Breathing





# Hop Exercise

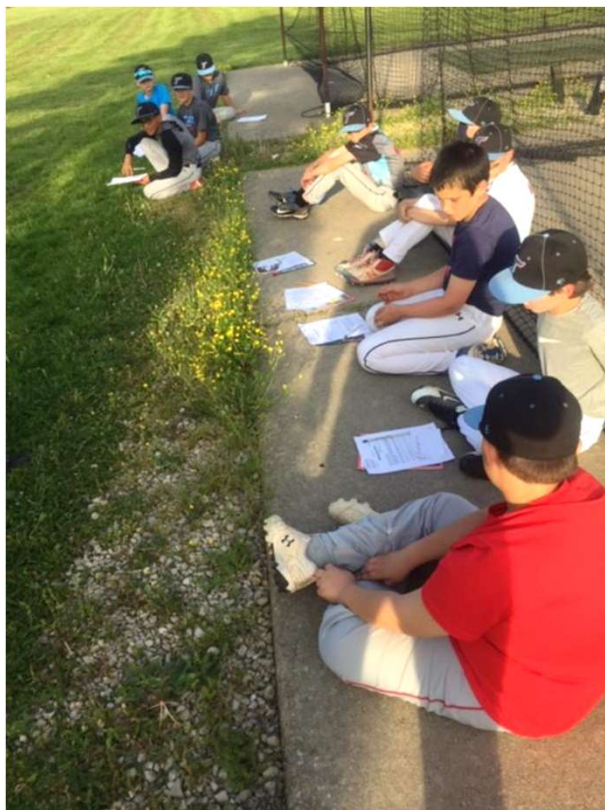
- Jump in place for one minutes to elevate heart rate and breathing.
- Slow down with one minute of slow, rhythmic breathing.
- Keep eyes focused on a small spot.
- Let your thoughts, emotions, and body sensations drive by.
- How did you experience all that?



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# Razzle Batting Practice



# Razzle Practice Instructions

- **Routine:** Have participants create and write down action steps to maintain calm and focus on their necessary committed actions.
- **Reboot:** Have participants create and write down steps to take to re-establish focus when it's been lost.
- Have participants record their most distracting thoughts and emotions on 3x5 cards.
- Assign razzlers to be annoying parents, cowbell moms, yelling coaches, ballistic dads, girlfriends/boyfriends and the performer's minds (read the 3x5 card out-loud).
- Have the performer do their thing while razzlers razzle.





# Razzle Batting Practice



# Q & A

