

# ACT on Your Recovery



**A Fifteen Session Group Work Manual**

Lee Woodward

# Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

‘An orientation toward Acceptance and Commitment Therapy as a Treatment for Addiction’

The options for substance Misuse treatment have evolved considerably in the past few decades. A set of approaches currently showing promise are those falling under the banner of ‘*Third Wave Cognitive Behaviour Therapies (CBT)*’. These ‘third-wave’ approaches are characterized by their tendency to target **Openness to experience** (changing one’s relationship to thoughts and emotions rather than their form or frequency), **Awareness of Experience** (flexible attention to experiences in the here-and-now), and **Active engagement in life** (motivation to change, values, behavioural activation)<sup>1</sup>. Hayes<sup>2</sup> has also commented that third wave approaches are:

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<sup>1</sup> Hayes, S. C., Villatte, M., Levin, M., & Hildebrandt, M. (2011). Open, aware, and active: Contextual approaches as an emerging trend in the behavioral and cognitive therapies. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 7, 141-168.

<sup>2</sup> Hayes, S. C. (2004). Acceptance and commitment therapy, relational frame theory, and the third wave of behavioral and cognitive therapies. *Behavior therapy*, 35(4), 639-665.

## At a Glance...

- ❖ Introduction to ACT
- ❖ Psychological Flexibility
- ❖ Acceptance
- ❖ Defusion
- ❖ Present Moment
- ❖ Self-as-Context
- ❖ Values
- ❖ Commitment

**“...particularly sensitive to the context and functions of psychological phenomena, not just their form, and thus tends to emphasize contextual and experiential change strategies in addition to more direct and didactic ones. These treatments tend to seek the construction of broad, flexible, and effective repertoires over an eliminative approach to narrowly defined problems, and to emphasize the relevance of the issues they examine for clinicians as well as clients. The third wave reformulates and synthesizes previous generations of behavioural and cognitive therapy and carries them forward into questions, issues, and domains previously addressed primarily by other traditions, in hopes of improving both understanding and outcomes.”**

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)<sup>3</sup> is one of the more established ‘third wave’ approaches. Based upon a philosophical foundation of *Functional Contextualism*<sup>4</sup>, and a behaviour analytic account of language and cognition called *Relational Frame Theory*<sup>5</sup>, ACT has amassed empirical support for a wide range of behavioural and psychological problems<sup>6</sup>. For substance abuse specifically, a recent meta-analysis found a small to medium effect size in favour of ACT over other active treatment approaches<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2011). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change*. Guilford Press.

<sup>4</sup> Biglan, A., & Hayes, S. C. (1996). Should the behavioral sciences become more pragmatic? The case for functional contextualism in research on human behavior. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 5(1), 47-57.

<sup>5</sup> Hayes, S. C., Barnes-Holmes, D., & Roche, B. (2001). *Relational frame theory: A post-Skinnerian account of human language and cognition*. Springer Science & Business Media.

<sup>6</sup> Ruiz, F. J. (2010). A review of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) empirical evidence: Correlational, experimental psychopathology, component and outcome studies. *Revista Internacional de Psicología y Terapia Psicológica*, 10(1), 125-162.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, E. B., An, W., Levin, M. E., & Twohig, M. P. (2015). An initial meta-analysis of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for treating substance use disorders. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 155, 1-7.

## Psychological Flexibility

From an ACT point of view, the uniquely human ability of language and cognition has a dark side. It is the same categorizing, evaluating, predicting, and problem solving abilities that underpin human success that also creates and exacerbates our suffering. In essence, our attempts to solve the problem of unwanted thoughts, emotions, urges, sensations, and memories create paradoxical outcomes, restricting our capacity to live a full and meaningful life. The processes that account for this are collectively termed *Psychological Inflexibility*. The aim of ACT, as one might imagine, is to increase the opposite: *Psychological Flexibility*. This concept is defined as:

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*“The ability to more fully contact the present moment and based on what the situation affords, persist or desist in behaviour when doing so serves valued ends”*

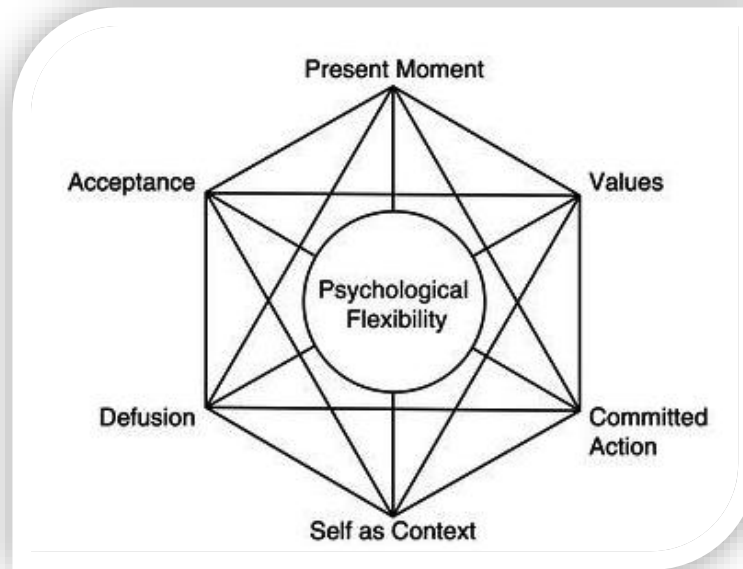
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*Psychological flexibility* consists of six interlinking processes (see below). The processes on the left, center, and right of the model target the areas of *open*, *aware*, and *active*, respectively. Interventions in ACT are pragmatically applied to target processes which contribute to a person’s presenting issues. Furthermore, processes in which a person is stronger are utilized to leverage weaker processes.

Measures of psychological flexibility (using the AAQ-SA) indicate that those with more severe and persistent histories of substance use have lower psychological flexibility scores<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Luoma, J., Drake, C. E., Kohlenberg, B. S., & Hayes, S. C. (2011). Substance abuse and psychological flexibility: The development of a new measure. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 19(1), 3-13.



## Targeting ‘Experiential Avoidance’ with ‘Acceptance’

Experiential avoidance is defined as, “...the phenomenon that occurs when a person is unwilling to remain in contact with particular private experiences (e.g., bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, memories, behavioural predispositions) and takes steps to alter the form or frequency of these events and the contexts that occasion them.”<sup>9</sup> ACT views many psychological and behavioural problems to be a product of experiential avoidance. It is well documented that one of the most common relapse precipitants is negative emotional states<sup>10</sup>. And, those who are more experientially avoidant are more likely to relapse when they encounter negative life

<sup>9</sup> Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. G., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential avoidance and behavioral disorders: A functional dimensional approach to diagnosis and treatment. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology, 64*(6), 1152.

<sup>10</sup> Marlatt, G. A., & Donovan, D. M. (Eds.). (2005). *Relapse prevention: Maintenance strategies in the treatment of addictive behaviors*. Guilford Press.

events<sup>11</sup>. Other research has shown that drinking motives aimed at coping with emotions, rather than social motives, significantly predict problem drinking<sup>12</sup>. This likely accounts for the fact that those with coexisting mental health problems are also more likely to have issues with drugs and alcohol<sup>13</sup>.

Where *Experiential Avoidance* is evident, it is targeted with *Acceptance*; the active embrace of unwanted thoughts, emotions, and urges. This is in contrast to many addiction treatments which instead focus on reducing exposure to situations and triggers for substance use. Although this approach is not inconsistent with ACT (avoiding people, places, or things can be done as a move toward one's values), unrelated situations have the potential to elicit thoughts and urges to use as a result of relational framing (e.g., staying at home in a relational frame with avoiding drug use). This strategy is, at best, likely to offer partial success. In contrast, cue exposure has attempted to extinguish eliciting functions. But, research to date suggests no consistent evidence for its efficacy; longer term outcomes are blighted by re-emergence of previously extinguished functions (particularly in different contexts)<sup>14</sup>. Acceptance seems a promising approach when psychological triggers to drink or use drugs are unavoidable and can't be erased. Greater mindful acceptance of the present moment has been shown to decouple automatic motivations to drink and the behaviour of drinking<sup>15</sup>. Mindfulness interventions have not only demonstrated significant reductions in alcohol use but these effects were partially mediated by reduction in thought suppression<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Westrup, D. A. (2001). Experiential avoidance and alcohol dependence relapse. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 62(1-B), 568

<sup>12</sup> Cooper, M. L. (1994). Motivations for Alcohol Use Among Adolescents: Development and Validation of a Four-Factor Model. *Psychological Assessment*, 6(2), 117-128.

<sup>13</sup> Kessler, R. C. (2004). The epidemiology of dual diagnosis. *Biological psychiatry*, 56(10), 730-737.

<sup>14</sup> Conklin, C. A., & Tiffany, S. T. (2002). Applying extinction research and theory to cue-exposure addiction treatments. *Addiction*, 97(2), 155-167.

<sup>15</sup> Ostafin, B. D., & Marlatt, G. A. (2008). Surfing the urge: Experiential acceptance moderates the relation between automatic alcohol motivation and hazardous drinking. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 27(4), 404-418.

<sup>16</sup> Bowen, S., Witkiewitz, K., Dillworth, T. M., & Marlatt, G. A. (2007). The role of thought suppression in the relationship between mindfulness meditation and alcohol use. *Addictive behaviors*, 32(10), 2324-2328.

### The ACT on Your Recovery Group aims to:

- ✓ *Help group members consider the function of substance use and assess its workability*
- ✓ *Identify avoided psychological content that triggers substance use*
- ✓ *Assess current strategies to control psychological triggers for substance use*
- ✓ *Experientially appreciate the paradox of control strategies*
- ✓ *Practice making room for psychological triggers to substance use, and barriers to valued living*

## Targeting 'Fusion' with 'Defusion'

Fusion refers to a dominance of verbal processes over the regulation of behaviour<sup>17</sup>. A person responds to the world structured by thought (events acquire functions through their participation in relational frames), while reducing sensitivity to natural contingencies. The consequence is that people act on verbal rules describing what should work (e.g., "If I'm craving to use, get rid of the craving to prevent drug use.") even when their experience suggests the rule is ineffective.

Cognitive processes have long been implicated in addiction. Strength of belief in the disease model of alcoholism predicts relapse (as opposed to recovering from a lapse)<sup>18</sup>. The subjective effectiveness of substance use to alter unpleasant psychological states predicts relapse<sup>19</sup> and level of dependence correlates with the strength of belief that alcohol will enhance pleasurable

<sup>17</sup> Blackledge, J. T. (2007). Disrupting verbal processes: Cognitive defusion in acceptance and commitment therapy and other mindfulness-based psychotherapies. *The Psychological Record*, 57(4), 555.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, W. R., Westerberg, V. S., Harris, R. J., & Tonigan, J. S. (1996). What predicts relapse? Prospective testing of antecedent models. *Addiction*, 91(12s1), 155-172.

<sup>19</sup> Litman, G. K., Stapleton, J., Oppenheim, A. N., Peleg, M., & Jackson, P. (1984). The relationship between coping behaviours, their effectiveness and alcoholism relapse and survival. *British Journal of Addiction*, 79(4), 283-291.

experience and reduce stress<sup>20</sup>. Cognitive Behavioural Therapies (CBT) have stressed the importance of ‘Outcome Expectancies’ (the expected effects if one were to drink), ‘Self Efficacy’ (confidence in one’s ability to not drink), and the Abstinence Violation Effect (attributing the cause of drinking to internal, stable factors such as being weak willed or having a disease, along with guilt and blame reactions)<sup>21</sup>. Whereas the restructuring the content of these thoughts is a focus within CBT, ACT is more concerned with the function of such thoughts. *Defusion* involves altering the context in which thoughts are experienced such that they are experienced as transient mental events, are not literal truths, and which do not control one’s behavioural choices.

**The ACT on Your Recovery Group aims to:**

- ✓ **Help group members look *at* thoughts and emotions rather than *from* them**
- ✓ **Help group members discriminate when they are *having a thought vs buying into a thought***
- ✓ **Approach thoughts based on their utility rather than their literal truth**
- ✓ **Help group members discriminate descriptions from evaluations and appreciate how evaluations generate struggle to change one’s experiences**
- ✓ **Notice reason-giving thoughts and practice making a free behavioural choice in the presence of reasons**

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<sup>20</sup> Connors, G. J., O’Farrell, T. J., Cutter, H. S., & Thompson, D. L. (1986). Alcohol expectancies among male alcoholics, problem drinkers, and nonproblem drinkers. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 10(6), 667-671.

<sup>21</sup> Marlatt, G. A., & Donovan, D. M. (Eds.). (2005). *Relapse prevention: Maintenance strategies in the treatment of addictive behaviors*. Guilford Press.

## Targeting 'Inflexible Attention' with 'Present Moment'

Language allows us to construct the remembered past and an imagined future. In and of itself, this is not problematic. However, inflexible attention can result in past and future thoughts dominating in awareness, effectively reducing contact with experiences in the present moment. Over time, an inability to flexibly attend to the present moment can facilitate weak self-knowledge, where individuals are less aware of what they are thinking and feeling. Lack of contact with the present moment can create a form of 'autopilot state'. As Goldman<sup>22</sup> describes it, "*Substance use becomes less influenced by a deliberate 'mental algebra' and more under the control of spontaneous, non-volitional responses to substance use cues.*"

Behaviour in the present can also become a function of a verbally constructed past/future. The functional impact of worry and rumination exemplify this. Craving, too, can be considered through the lenses of fusion and inflexible attention. The elaborated intrusion theory<sup>23</sup> of craving, for example, distinguished between automatic intrusive thoughts about their conscious elaboration. Craving is considered the consequence of elaborating intrusive thoughts; dwelling upon the future positive effects of substance use offers a short term strategy to feel momentarily better (experiential avoidance) but also amplifies one's sense of deprivation in the present, leading to further dwelling on future positive effects. Drink or drugs are consumed to relieve oneself of this '*exquisite torture*'.

ACT targets inflexible attention with the practice of bringing flexible awareness to the present moment. *Flexible attention to the Present Moment* supports *Acceptance* and *Defusion* by helping group members observe the flow of experience moment to moment.

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<sup>22</sup> Goldman, M. S., Brown, S. A., Christiansen, B. A., & Smith, G. T. (1991). Alcoholism and memory: broadening the scope of alcohol-expectancy research. *Psychological bulletin*, 110(1), 137.

<sup>23</sup> Kavanagh, D. J., Andrade, J., & May, J. (2005). Imaginary relish and exquisite torture: the elaborated intrusion theory of desire. *Psychological review*, 112(2), 446.

**The ACT on Your Recovery Group aims to:**

- ✓ **Help group members flexibly attend to present moment experiences**
- ✓ **Help group members experience thoughts of the past and future from the perspective of here and now.**
- ✓ **To discriminate being on ‘autopilot’ vs being ‘mindfully aware’**

## Targeting ‘Attachment to a Conceptualized Self’ with ‘Self-as-Context’

Language allows us to construct thoughts about ourselves. Fusion with a verbal construction of the self can be problematic because it can function as a touchstone for behaviours consistent with the self-concept (often resulting in a self-fulfilling prophesy). Over-identifying with negative labels can lead to avoidance of actions which evoke those labels. And, awareness of how others might perceive those qualities creates issues of self-stigma<sup>24</sup>. Self-stigma in substance using populations has been linked to delays in seeking treatment, lower self-esteem/self-efficacy, and lower quality of life. Avoiding situations that bring an individual into contact with painful thoughts and feelings about oneself is, in one sense, a logical thing to do. However, doing so tends to interfere with valued living. Paradoxically, parts of the conceptualised self may be disliked, yet defended; maintaining consistency (i.e., being right) about one’s ‘self’ can compete with doing what works.

ACT is predominantly interested in the function of the conceptualised self. Labelling oneself as an addict, for example, is not intrinsically problematic or beneficial. For one person, the label may function as a motivator to stay vigilant and prioritize self-care (e.g., “I’m an addict; I need to

<sup>24</sup> Luoma, J. B., Twohig, M. P., Waltz, T., Hayes, S. C., Roget, N., Padilla, M., & Fisher, G. (2007). An investigation of stigma in individuals receiving treatment for substance abuse. *Addictive behaviors*, 32(7), 1331-1346.

focus on my recovery”). For another, the label can function to elicit feelings of hopelessness (e.g., “I’m an addict, I can’t control my drinking so why even bother trying”). Positive self-concepts can function in equally problematic ways. A self-concept of being strong and self-sufficient might function to create reluctance to seek help, draw upon support, or take sufficient steps to avoid temptations. Rather than challenge the conceptualized self and try to replace it with a more accurate one, ACT aims to reduce attachment to the conceptualized self by increasing one’s flexibility to access an alternative sense of self, referred to as *self-as-context*. Self-as-context is not ‘thing like’; it is the unchanging perspective or ‘locus’ from which experiences are observed. It is useful therapeutically because it offers a stable place to experience discomfort, and affords a sense of perspective from which one is able to consider the workability of self-conceptualizations objectively.

**The ACT on Your Recovery Group aims to:**

- ✓ **Help group members contact self-as-context and recognise its permanence when experiencing difficult thoughts and emotions**
- ✓ **Be aware of the mind’s tendency to create stories about the self**
- ✓ **Develop a more compassionate relationship toward oneself.**

## Targeting ‘Lack of Values Clarity’ with ‘Values’

Values are defined in ACT as, *“freely chosen, verbally constructed consequences of ongoing, dynamic, evolving patterns of behaviour, which establish predominant reinforcers for that*

activity that are intrinsic in engagement in that valued behavioural pattern itself.”<sup>25</sup> Values are abstract qualities of behaviour which provide meaning, purpose, and vitality to people’s lives. The fact they function as reinforcers is of particular relevance to addiction. Substance use is readily changed by altering contingencies of reinforcement. Contingency Management, for example, has a substantial evidence base for modifying substance use behaviour<sup>26</sup>.

Unfortunately, these outcomes tend to deteriorate after the program is discontinued, which suggests the benefit of utilizing reinforcers that remain present following treatment. The Community Reinforcement Approach takes this approach, seeking to rearrange reinforcers in a person’s life to support abstinence, and has a strong evidence base for its effectiveness<sup>27</sup>.

The benefit of values are that they provide an inexhaustible source of reinforcement. They function to bring longer term reinforcers into the present moment to compete with the short term reinforcers for drink or drug use<sup>28</sup>. Developing discrepancy between current behaviour and values appears to motivate behaviour change<sup>29</sup>. Setting valued actions to live one’s life and create an environment supportive of abstinence has been shown to reduce alcohol consumption<sup>30</sup>. Other research indicates that values may moderate temptations to drink or use drugs; greater purpose in life reduces temptation to drink and subsequent consumption, while lower purpose in life predicts greater temptation to drink and increased consumption<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson, K. G. (2009). *Mindfulness for two: An acceptance and commitment therapy approach to mindfulness in psychotherapy*. New Harbinger Publications.

<sup>26</sup> Prendergast, M., Podus, D., Finney, J., Greenwell, L., & Roll, J. (2006). Contingency management for treatment of substance use disorders: A meta-analysis. *Addiction, 101*(11), 1546-1560.

<sup>27</sup> Roozen, H. G., Boulogne, J. J., van Tulder, M. W., van den Brink, W., De Jong, C. A., & Kerkhof, A. J. (2004). A systematic review of the effectiveness of the community reinforcement approach in alcohol, cocaine and opioid addiction. *Drug and alcohol dependence, 74*(1), 1-13.

<sup>28</sup> Plumb, J. C., Stewart, I., Dahl, J. A., & Lundgren, T. (2009). In Search of Meaning: Values in Modern Clinical Behavior Analysis. *The Behavior analyst, 32*(1), 85-103.

<sup>29</sup> Apodaca, T. R., & Longabaugh, R. (2009). Mechanisms of change in motivational interviewing: a review and preliminary evaluation of the evidence. *Addiction, 104*(5), 705-715.

<sup>30</sup> Heffner, M., Eifert, G. H., Parker, B. T., Hernandez, D. H., & Sperry, J. A. (2003). Valued directions: Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of alcohol dependence. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 10*(4), 378-383.

<sup>31</sup> Roos, C. R., Kirouac, M., Pearson, M. R., Fink, B. C., & Witkiewitz, K. (2015). Examining temptation to drink from an existential perspective: associations among temptation, purpose in life, and drinking outcomes. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 29*(3), 716-724.

From an ACT perspective, values are intimately linked to pain, and as such contact is often lost with values as a protective manoeuvre (referred to as traumatic deflection). Alternatively, values may be unclear because they are obscured by others expectations of what one should or shouldn't do (termed pliance). ACT seeks to make personally chosen values explicit, so behavioural change can be in the service of what is meaningful to that individual.

**The ACT on Your Recovery Group aims to:**

- ✓ **Help group members choose values as a free choice, recognising the distinction between making choices for reasons and making choices with reasons**
- ✓ **Help group members clarify valued directions and take a stand for these**
- ✓ **Use values as a criteria of workability to evaluate drinking/drug use and other strategies used to control unwanted thoughts and emotions.**

## Targeting 'Avoidance, Impulsivity, and Avoidant Persistence' with 'Commitment'

Behaviour driven by experiential avoidance leads to patterns of behaviour characterized by impulsivity, inaction, and avoidance. These behaviours are typically followed by negative reinforcement (the reduction of aversive experience), and therefore tend to both narrow behavioural flexibility and increase of frequency in those behaviours over time. As such, valued living is affected (displacing reinforcement from other areas of life) which increases the salience of these avoidant patterns of behaviour. ACT seeks to target these patterns of behaviour with commitment skills, in the service of pursuing valued directions. ACT shares similarities with

Relapse Prevention<sup>32</sup> in its emphasis on integrating slips into larger patterns of behaviour (and is consistent with other third-wave CBT approaches such as Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention<sup>33</sup>). Traditional behavioural strategies found in other evidence based addiction treatments are incorporated into the committed action component of ACT. For example, the skills training components in the Community Reinforcement Approach<sup>34</sup> (e.g., refusal skills, communication skills, problem solving skills) can be applied as committed action toward values, while making room for psychological triggers that function as barriers to valued actions.

**The ACT on Your Recovery Group aims to:**

- ✓ **Help group members set behavioural commitments to chosen values**
- ✓ **Identify barriers to valued actions and target these with mindfulness and acceptance strategies**
- ✓ **Help group members utilize stimulus control strategies as a means to valued actions, and coping skills training as a means to broadening behavioural repertoires.**
- ✓ **To help group members incorporate slips into larger patterns of committed action.**

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<sup>32</sup> Marlatt, G. A., & Donovan, D. M. (Eds.). (2005). *Relapse prevention: Maintenance strategies in the treatment of addictive behaviors*. Guilford Press.

<sup>33</sup> Bowen, S., Chawla, N., & Marlatt, G. A. (2011). *Mindfulness-based relapse prevention for addictive behaviors: A clinician's guide*. Guilford Press.

<sup>34</sup> Meyers, R. J., & Smith, J. E. (1995). *Clinical guide to alcohol treatment: The community reinforcement approach*. Guilford Press.

## At a Glance...

- ❖ OPEN, ACTIVE, and AWARE Modules
- ❖ Entry Points
- ❖ Group Style and Facilitation
- ❖ Monitoring Outcomes

# Group Structure, Style, and Facilitation

‘A birds-eye view on the ACT on Your Recovery Group’

This section describes the overall structure, style, and facilitation of the ACT on Your Recovery group.

## OPEN, ACTIVE, and AWARE Modules

The ACT on Your Recovery group is a modular, fifteen session group-work program. Each module is five sessions in length and has a primary focus on developing *open*

(acceptance, fusion), *active* (values, commitment), and *aware* (present moment, self-as-context) processes. Within each module, the remaining processes are utilized in a supportive role.

Thus, the primary objective of the *Open* Module is to *'foster acceptance and defusion of psychological triggers as a means to reduce substance use behaviour'*. *Active* and *Aware* processes are used in the *OPEN* module to motivate change by creating discrepancy with one's values, increase awareness of high risk situations and psychological triggers, and motivating enactment of coping responses by framing their enactment as instantiating values.

The primary aim of the *ACTIVE* module is to *'Activate behaviour toward valued directions such that the rewards of life compete with the rewards of substance use.'* *Open* and *Aware* processes supportive this objective by making room for psychological barriers to valued action, and to foster consciously chosen action

The primary aim of the *AWARE* module is to *'to build skills in stepping out of automatic pilot and fostering a kinder, more compassionate stance to oneself during the challenges of recovery'*. *Open* and *Active* processes support this objective by making room for discomfort as one attends to the present moment, treating oneself kindly in response to lapses and recommitment, and defusing from shame and stigma.



This structure offers three benefits: it allows session content to build upon itself, group dynamics have an opportunity to settle within each module, and waiting times for new members is kept to a reasonable length.

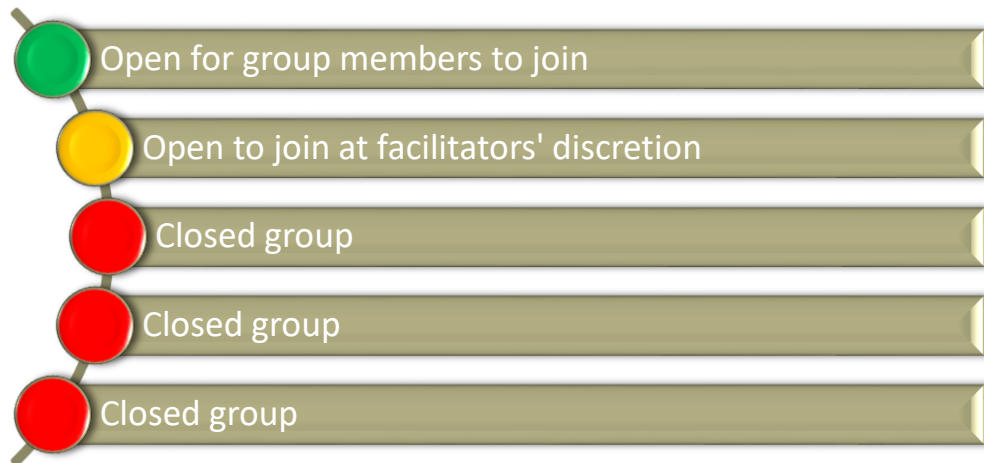
Facilitators may also find value in supporting group members enter on modules that target relevant processes. Research suggests ACT processes differentially impact outcomes<sup>35</sup>.

## Entry Points

The first session Group members can join at the start of each module. The remaining sessions of each module are closed sessions. This is for two reasons: to support group members develop a sense of cohesiveness and group identity over the course of the module, and to allow material introduced each session to build upon the previous session's material. It is possible for group members to join at session two if they miss session one. However, this is at the discretion of the facilitators based on their consideration of the group member's circumstances, and their assessment of group dynamics at session one. If a group member misses two sessions in a module, they should be asked to re-enter the group at the open session of the next module.

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<sup>35</sup> Villatte, J., Vilardaga, R., Villatte, M., Plumb Vilardaga, J. C., Atkins, D., & Hayes, S. C. (2016). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy modules. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 77, 52-61.



## Group Style and Facilitation

The style of the group should be one of guidance; allowing group members to explore and trust their experience of what works and what doesn't. Facilitators should strive to maintain the experiential focus of ACT, and care should be taken to avoid *talking about ACT* at the expense of *doing ACT*.

Facilitators should aim for flexible application of the material presented in this manual. The ACT on Your Recovery group specifies particular exercises and metaphors arranged in a logical and coherent structure. However, these exercises are *not* ACT; they are a means to an end to target ACT processes. This allows facilitators to alter, rearrange, substitute, and adapt any intervention if doing so a) offers a more effective means to target relevant ACT processes in that moment, and b) maintains fidelity to the ACT model. Facilitators should be mindful of what influences their decision when doing this, however. Many exercises can elicit discomfort for facilitators, and altering planned exercises to reduce discomfort likely reflects the facilitators' own experiential avoidance. This need not be a problem if identified, as it provides an opportunity for facilitators to practice acceptance of discomfort when later reintroducing such exercises. The value is one of modelling ACT processes within group. The facilitator, on the next session, may decide to say to the group:

*“Last session I’d planned to do an exercise that I think would be helpful. But, I also noticed that anxiety showed up for me about doing this exercise. I was reflecting this week on why I didn’t do the exercise and I think it was more about trying to avoid the anxiety rather than doing what would be of service to you. So, although I’m noticing the same anxiety here and now, I’d also like to offer this exercise today if you’re willing to participate.”*

It can be powerful for group members to see ACT processes being modelled by facilitators, and reduces the incongruence created when facilitators are inviting group members’ to accept difficult thoughts and emotions when also being unwilling to make room for their own. It also humanizes the work by emphasizing that *‘we are all in the same boat with this stuff!’*

Facilitators should appreciate that there are two components within each session:

- ✓ **Structured Exercises and Metaphors**
- ✓ **Processing of Experience**

The relevance of ACT processes is most obvious within structured exercises and metaphors. However, facilitators should appreciate that the time between these exercises – the processing of experience – should be guided by the ACT model too. Below, illustrates how the six psychological flexibility processes can guide facilitator responses to further the work.

**Group Member:** *I don't think this group will work for me!*

**Facilitator (acceptance response):** *That's a natural thought to have. Would you be willing to attend the group, even with that thought, to see how it works for you? [Encourages willingness to have the thought]*

**Facilitator (defusion response):** *Ouch, that sounds a painful thought to have. How familiar is that thought? [Encourages noticing the thought as a thought]*

**Facilitator (present moment response):** *That must have been hard to say, can we take a moment to notice what it's like to have that thought in the room with us? [Encourages attending flexibly to present moment experience]*

**Facilitator (self-as-context response):** *If I were you, that would have been hard to say. If you were me, and hearing that thought, what would you feel? What might you say in response? [Encourages deictic framing which underpins self-as-context]*

**Facilitator (values response):** *It may not. It depends, possibly, on what 'works for you' means. If you mean it will 'work for you' to get rid of your cravings, then I'm inclined to agree with you. If this group, however, helped you move toward something important in life, something truly meaningful, what would you want that to be? [Encourages contact with values]*

**Facilitator (commitment response):** *How many sessions would you be willing to commit to before you'd get a sense of whether the group is working for you? [Encourages committed action in the presence of barriers]*

## Monitoring Outcomes

The first fifteen minutes of each session is provided to complete outcome measures. Outcome measures allow facilitators to assess the impact of the ACT on Your Recovery group for those attending. Where lack of change is noted, it provides facilitators the opportunity to conduct case-conceptualisations, discuss adaptations, or focus the work to better target ACT processes for these individuals. Feedback of client outcomes has been shown to improve treatment effectiveness<sup>36</sup>

The following measures are recommended for ACT on Your Recovery:

- ✓ **Substance Use Time-Line Follow Back:** *Group members record the quantity and frequency of drugs and alcohol working back over the previous seven days*
- ✓ **Acceptance and Action Questionnaire – Substance Abuse:** *Assesses psychological flexibility adapted for substance use issues. It provides a total psychological flexibility score and sub-scale scores for ‘Defused Acceptance’ and ‘Values Commitment’*

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<sup>36</sup> Gondek, D., Edbrooke-Childs, J., Fink, E., Deighton, J., & Wolpert, M. (2016). Feedback from outcome measures and treatment effectiveness, treatment efficiency, and collaborative practice: A systematic review. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 43(3), 325-343.

# Session Guides: 'OPEN' Module



ACT on Your Recovery

### Primary Objective

**Open** – *To foster an accepting and defused relationship with psychological triggers for substance use in order to facilitate behavioural change.*

### Supportive Objectives

**Aware** – *To increase awareness of psychological triggers and the high-risk situations that elicit them.*

**Active** – *To motivate behaviour change by developing discrepancy between current behaviour and values. To frame coping responses to high risk situations as instances of valued action.*

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1. How's it Working?
  2. The Wisdom to Know the Difference
  3. Dealing with Your Inner Dictator
  4. Willingness vs Willpower in Recovery
  5. Finding a Free Choice

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Mindfulness of the Breath
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Group Orientation
- ❖ Values Based Group Agreement
- ❖ How's it Working:
  - What's Important?
  - Substance Use as a Tool
  - Life Costs?
  - Muddled Discomfort
- ❖ Digging Out of a Hole Metaphor
- ❖ Between Session Work: *'Noticing When I Pick Up the Shovel'* and *'Mindfulness of the Breath'*

# Session One

## 'How's It Working?'

From an ACT perspective, the function of problematic drink and drug use is experiential avoidance. People engage in such behaviours with the intention of regulating, controlling, or avoiding unwanted private experiences (thoughts, emotions, urges, sensations, and memories). Though substance use successfully achieves that goal in the short term, it has the potential to damage every part of a person's life. Over these longer time scales, avoiding unwanted thoughts and emotions tends to exacerbate these experiences. A person develops uncomfortably strong desires to use more substances; physical withdrawals trap the person in fear and discomfort if they don't use drugs; and, their very sense of who can even become aversive. This discomfort is often managed through further substance use in an ongoing cycle of avoidance. Contact one's history of substance use can be painful, but necessary; noticing the discrepancy between current actions and personal values is a powerful motivator of change.

This first session aims to form the group around shared values, and to foster a sense of shared experience of addiction. The unworkability of substance use as a means of avoiding thoughts and emotions is made clear which lays the groundwork for the remainder of this module.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Mindfully Noticing the Breath*

Facilitators can allocate the first fifteen minutes of the group as a space for group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group (e.g., Week Timeline Follow-back; AAQ-SA).

After 15 minutes, facilitators should bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. All sessions begin with a brief mindfulness exercise. The following rationale can be provided:

***“It is quite normal to come to group with things on our mind. Sometimes, that mental clutter can pull our attention to life outside this room, perhaps away from the reasons you have chosen to be here today. So, I’d like to suggest beginning our group today with a brief centring exercise. The aim of this exercise is not to get rid of the concerns or distractions we may have, but simply to give ourselves the opportunity to bring ourselves into the here and now so as to make the best use of the next two and a half hours together.”***

Facilitators should then invite group members to settle into a relaxed but alert posture and to allow their eyes to gently close. They should guide group members to bring their awareness to the sensations of breathing and to follow the flow of these sensations. Advise them that it is common for the mind to wander into thought or distraction during this exercise, and that this is entirely normal. In fact, the aim of this exercise is to notice when the mind wanders and gently return their attention to the breath. The exercise should last approximately five minutes.

Facilitators should then debrief group members’ experiences of the exercise by inquiring what

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction, and bring awareness to experiences in the here and now

was noticed in the exercise. Following this, facilitators should transition to a brief check-in.

## Brief Group Check-In

Throughout this group, check-ins should be kept brief and focussed. It is advisable to forgo asking open-ended questions about the past week. Such questions often evoke fused storytelling, which only serves to communicate that the week was *good* or *bad*. For this reason, facilitators should be clear about what they want to evoke in this discussion and refocus group members back to the here and now when needed. The check-in for this session should involve a round-robin inviting each group members to introduce themselves and describe what they hope to happen in their life as a result of attending the ACT on Your Recovery group.

Once this is completed, facilitators should introduce the following aims of the Group:

- ✓ **To provide an opportunity to explore the role of drugs and alcohol within your life.**
- ✓ **To explore barriers to changing substance use, should you choose to do so, and find workable ways we respond to these barriers.**
- ✓ **To provide a space in life where we can consider actions, both large and small, that will move us toward a life we value**

Where possible, facilitators should draw links between the aim of the group, as described above, and their relevance of the group members' goals.

Facilitators should also comment on the style of the group. Being clear about what group members can expect will allow them to make an informed decision about participation. This should increase willingness to engage in more unconventional and challenging exercises.

- ✓ **The group is a mix of structured exercises, group discussion, experiential and**

### Purpose:

To introduce group members to each other and explore their motivations for participating

exploration exercises, and skills practice.

- ✓ Our aim is not to *teach* you *what to do*. Instead we encourage you to trust your direct experience of what works or doesn't work to move you forward in your recovery.
- ✓ There is a strong focus on what is happening in the here and now. Although we inevitably talk about what has happened in the past, and what might happen in the future, facilitators may encourage you to slow down and notice what is to be noticed here and now.

## Values Based Group Agreement

Many group agreements comprise a list of rules to follow and unacceptable behaviours to avoid. In the ACT on Your Recovery, the group agreement is values based. Facilitators should support group members clarify ***what is important to them in the way they interact with each other***. Facilitators should elicit examples of behaviours which are consistent with what's important (e.g., if the value 'being respectful of others' offered, asking group members to consider how that might be recognized in the actions of ourselves and others). If specific behaviours are offered, list these, but also explore what makes them important (e.g., if 'maintaining confidentiality' is suggested, facilitators might ask the group to consider what maintaining confidentiality aims to achieve in our interactions. If this is in the service of trust, other behaviour might be explored which contribute to trustful interactions).

Prompts to Consider:

- ✓ **Participation in group activities**
- ✓ **How to approach different points of view**
- ✓ **Issues of confidentiality**
- ✓ **Attendance/punctuality/lateness**
- ✓ **Attending under the influence**

### Purpose:

To clarify what is important to group members in their interactions and generate a commitment to behaviours that serve these

- ✓ **How we respond to discomfort (e.g., not leaving the room, making room for discomfort)**
- ✓ **When others experience discomfort (e.g., no rescuing, be mindful of our urge to solve other's problems)**
- ✓ **Mobile phones/When calls need to be taken during group**
- ✓ **Attending after a Missed Session**

It can be useful to consider phrasing the group agreement in the positive; stating what group members will *do* as opposed to what they *won't do*. The group agreement should be written up on the flipchart and kept in a visible place during each session for the remainder of this module.

Facilitators should invite a commitment from group members; it should be noted to the group that, as facilitator, your aim is to advocate for the group's working agreement.

Group facilitators should consider themselves a part of the group, too. Not only should they model the group agreement in their actions (and call out their own actions when discrepant), but also play an active role in its formation. Facilitators can suggest items that are meaningful to them personally.

## How's It Working – Part One: What's Important to Us Outside this Room

After exploring what is important to group members in their interactions within the group, facilitators should transition to exploring what is important to group members in life more generally.

Prior to the session, facilitators should have prepared the 'life-space' diagram and place it in the

### Purpose:

To identify what is important to group members in a range of life areas. To increase awareness of the larger context in which substance use occurs

centre of the room on the floor. This is usually achieved by taping four pieces of flipchart together and drawing the life-space diagram on it. Various life areas can be specified in this diagram (e.g., partners, friendships, family, parenting, education, work, recreation etc.). Where group members are aware of particular issues being relevant, facilitators can select life areas to target discussion in areas of life which will be motivating and pertinent. For example, one area that has proved useful to explore is 'treatment and support'. This affords discussion about what is important to group members in the area of treatment and support and the challenges they have faced engaging with it.



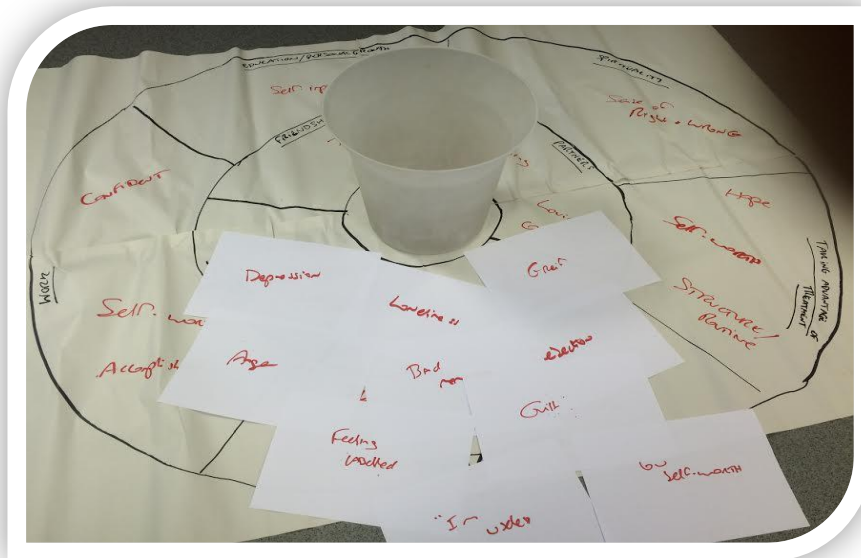
Facilitators should then place a bin in the centre of the life-space diagram. This bin represents each group member; the space outside the bin allows consideration of what is noticed happening in the world outside the skin, the space inside the bin represents the thoughts, emotions, urges, and sensations we contain and carry as we engage with the world.

Engage the group in an open discussion about what is important to them. Write words to describe these in a pen colour that is different from that used for the remainder of the exercise.



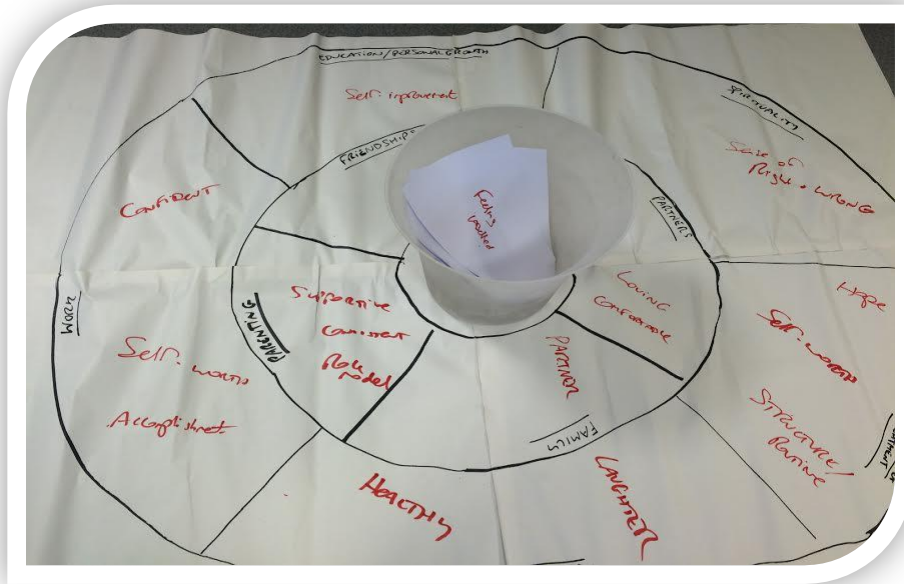
Group members typically identify themes of control, escape, self-medication, feeling better, and so on. These statements reflect the experiential avoidant function of substance use.

Sometimes group members may focus on the positive, euphoric feelings associated with substance use. This, too, may reflect experiential avoidance. This can be explored by asking, *“When are you most likely to seek out euphoric feelings?”* or *“How are you usually feeling just before you use drugs?”* Another line of questioning might be to ask, *“If you weren’t to use on these occasions, how would you feel then?”* Group members can be helped to notice whether they are avoiding discomfort as much as they are seeking out pleasurable experiences.



Once the purpose of substance use has been clarified (feeling free to use whichever term seems to capture the group consensus – escape, self-medicate, control etc.), facilitators should write it on the flipchart. They should then proceed to elicit examples of the psychological content that have noticed they have been avoiding with substance use. Each psychological experience should be written on individual pieces of paper and placed in the bin. This physical metaphor conveys that group members are the container of their experiences (the bin), and they hold these experiences (the paper). Facilitators should refrain from screwing up these pieces of paper to distinguish them from later additions. This helps help draw out the distinction between clean

and muddled discomfort.



During this part of the exercise, facilitators will need to work with group members to clarify the distinction between external events and internal reactions. Instances of fusion can be evident, where group members are responding to a world structured by thought rather than the world as directly experienced. For example, if a group member states they drink when their partner is being unreasonable, the facilitator might ask, *“Could you give me an example of what your partner is doing when you’re having the thought ‘she’s being unreasonable’?”* This response highlights the distinction between the partner’s actions, and the group member’s thoughts about those actions. For this group members, fusion leads to the perception that their partner’s behaviour and ‘unreasonableness’ are one and the same thing. The facilitator can use the bin and life-space diagram to support making these discriminations. Where a group member suggests they drink to ‘deal with arguments’, inquire about how that person feels when they have arguments, and to note it as such (e.g., *“so when you have an argument, you feel angry and frustrated, lets write anger and frustration down and place that in the bin. What happens to anger and frustration when you drink? What happens in that relationship over time?”*).

Facilitators should take a genuinely curious and compassionate approach to this discussion. Aiming to model acceptance of whatever content shows up, and validating how group members have been responding to it (e.g., *“It makes sense why you drink in this moments. Who wouldn’t want to not feel this stuff – to empty the bin? I’m curious, though, what your experience says about the way things work out when you try to not feel this stuff. What have you noticed?”*).

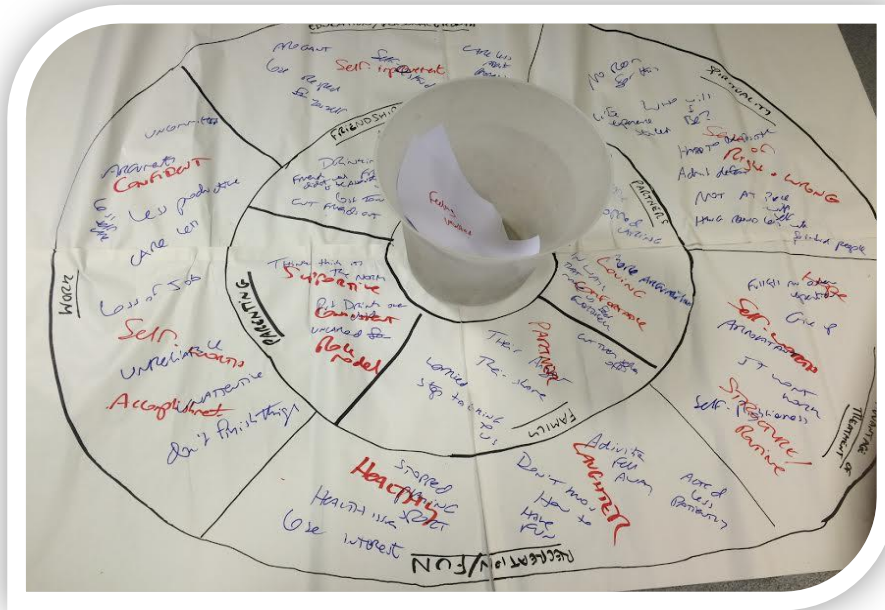
## How’s It Working? – Part Three: What Has Been the Cost?

Once group members have described a range of avoided psychological experiences, facilitators should invite the group to consider their experience of emptying the bin using drink and drugs. What impact has it had on the various domains on the life-space diagram? It can be helpful to ask for specific examples in this exercise. Specific examples tend to evoke greater experiential contact with the costs of drinking or using drugs. Facilitators should be careful to describe events in the world (e.g., relationship discord, loss of employment), rather than emotional discomfort. Psychological reactions to these life events will be explored later.

Progressing sequentially through each domain in the life-space diagram offers the benefit of sharing experiences that are then related in terms of one’s own experience. This can help bring the group together and create an accepting and supportive context. Use group member’s comments to open discussion about similar or different experiences. Facilitators should write the various consequences offered by group members in the life space diagram. (It is fine to write over the values written earlier as this will later illustrate the tendency for values to be obscured by problems).

### Purpose:

To bring group members into contact with the costs of drinking/drug use in various life domains.



## How's It Working? – Part Four: What Shows Up When We Find Life This Way?

Once the costs of substance use have been documented on the life-space diagram, facilitator should move to exploring the thoughts, emotions, urges, and sensations that have shown up as a result of this.

Reminding the group to that the bin represents the part of themselves that holds their experiences, facilitators can 'walk' the bin around the life-space diagram and ask, "When you find life being affected in [describe the consequences written in that life area] what emotions and thoughts do you find showing up?"

### Purpose:

To foster creative hopelessness by bringing group members into contact with the unworkability of substance use as a means of emotional control



*[Continued...]*

**Group Member:** *"Yeah, sadness...and guilty also."*

**Facilitator:** *"Sadness and Guilt. Let's add these, too. There is a lot of pain that you find yourself holding as result of these consequences [writes sadness and shame on pieces of paper, screws them up, and adds them to the bin]. What do you notice yourself wanting to do when you feel sadness and guilt?"*

**Group Member:** *"I just feel like I want to shrink away out of the situation. And, it's caused me to drink more"*

**Facilitator:** *"Mmm, so let's see if I'm with you here. Your experience suggests that by trying to empty the bin, it fills the bin, which gets your mind saying, let's try and empty the bin. But, your experience says emptying the bin fills the bin. Is that about right? What do you make of that?"*

**Group Member:** *"Yeah, drinking to get rid of guilt just gives me more things to feel guilty about. It's a crazy situation."*

**Facilitator:** *"The image that comes to mind is like a fire breaking out. The alarm goes off and suddenly you're focussed only on putting the fire out. You look around and see what looks like a bucket of water, and you quickly throw it on the fire. But suddenly the fire's bigger, it's spreading, and now we're panicking looking for another bucket of water. We find another and quickly chuck it on the fire, but strangely the fire just seems to grow again."*

**Group Member:** *"Throwing fuel on the fire, you mean?"*

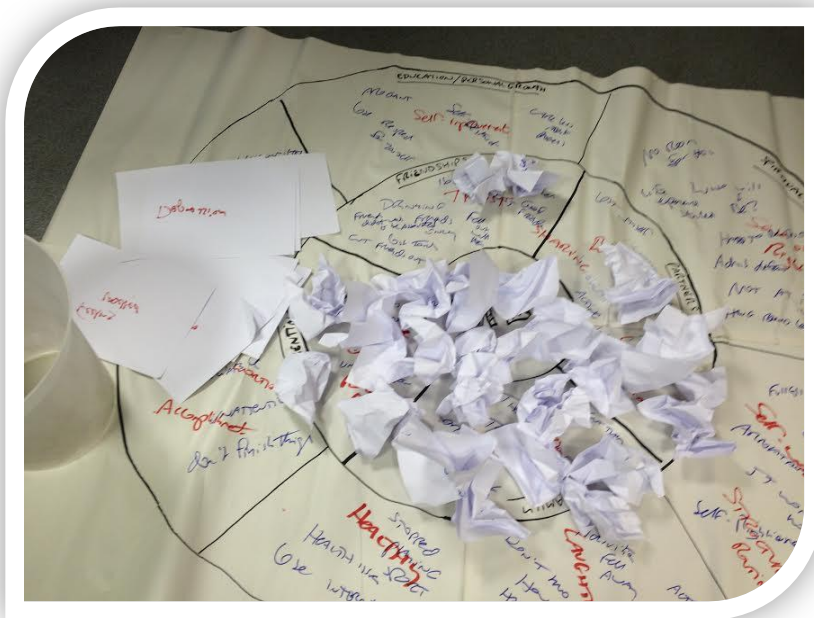
**Facilitator:** *"Well, is trying to empty the bin with drugs and alcohol been like that?"*

## How's it Working – Part 5: What's Happened to the Important Stuff?

By the time the exercise is complete, the bin is typically overflowing, and the costs of substance use cover the entire life-space diagram. As a result, the values written at the start of the exercise have usually been obscured.

### Purpose:

To explore the experience losing contact with important life directions as a result of one's addiction.



The group can be invited to notice what has happened to the things that were important to them? Useful questions include:

- ✓ ***“What have we noticed happening within our lives as we lose sight of what is truly important in life?”***
- ✓ ***“When all we can see are problems and the things we don’t want, what do find ourselves doing?”***
- ✓ ***“What’s your sense of being able to make your life about what you truly want***

*while we are focussing on the task of emptying the bin?"*

The contents of the bin can be spread out to notice the initial discomfort (clean discomfort) and amplified discomfort (muddied discomfort).

## Digging Out of a Hole Metaphor

Purpose:

To foster creative  
hopelessness

The 'Digging Out of a Hole' metaphor is a classic ACT metaphor which helps to foster creative hopelessness.

This metaphor can particularly resonate with those experiencing addiction issues because of the common parlance of *hitting rock bottom*. Of course, one doesn't need to hit rock bottom to appreciate that digging is an unworkable strategy for getting out of a hole.

*"Suppose the situation is something like this: Suppose navigating through life is like running around a field blindfolded with a big bag of tools. And, unbeknown to us, there are deep widely spaced holes in this field. So, given enough time, there's a good chance we'll fall into one of these holes; the hole of depression, the hole of anxiety, the hole of cravings. When we fall in to one of these holes we want to get out. So you look in your bag of tools for something that will help. So, you look in your bag of tools and pull out a shovel. That's all you have. Well, Shovels are great at moving mud, and feeling around we are seemingly trapped in walls of mud, so we start digging. Immediately, you have more space. But then you look up, and you find that you're deeper. So, you dig some more, more often, with bigger shovels, trying to get out of these mud walls. But, you're still in this hole, and it's getting deeper. Of course, digging will never get us out of this hole, it's hopeless."*

Facilitators should explore group members' reactions to the metaphor, and reflections on what this means for their substance use. Facilitators might ask, *"If the situation you are in is something like that, what does it suggest you need to do? What would be a small step toward doing that this week?"*

Where appropriate, facilitators should support group members who are willing to make commitments to behavioural changes that reflect dropping the shovel. Facilitators should not force a requirement to engage in a behavioural change goal. Research suggests that pressing for a behaviour change goal when a person is still ambivalent can lead to greater resistance to change.

Below are some examples of facilitator responses to some common group member reactions. These show how the facilitator can either work within the metaphor to further creative hopelessness, or sidestep the literal truth of the metaphor to avoid fusion and overanalysing.

***"I would just dig some stairs and climb out that way"*** answer this by saying, *"and have you tried something similar with your drinking/drug use, how has that worked? What does your experience say?"*

***"It was my own fault for getting in the hole!"*** answer by saying, *"If, by that, you're saying that some of your choices led to you falling into the hole, then I'd say of course you made choices. But, remember, in this metaphor you're blindfolded, so it isn't till you fell in the hole you're choices feel like they were the wrong ones. And, knowing the wrong choices you made, have they helped you get out of the hole?"*

***"Are you saying we need to hit rock bottom to stop using!"*** Answer by saying, *"Well, I'm not saying anything really, I'm just asking you to look at your experience and see if there's something hopeless in all this. If you were to hit rock bottom, what would you learn about digging as a way to yourself out of this hole? And, do we need to hit rock bottom to find that out?"*

**“So what do I do?”** Answer by saying, *“Well for now, I think our first step should be to see if we can become more aware of when we are digging. Digging can become really habitual, so we can have the shovel in our hands and not always be aware of it. Without noticing when we are digging, we can’t stop and let go of the shovel.”*

**“I don’t understand, I’m confused”** Answer as, *“That’s great! Perfect! If this made sense, you’d have solved it. We can’t trust our minds to give us the solution here – we need something else to guide us.*

Facilitators should utilize metaphors that have greatest impact on group members. Alternative metaphors to convey the unworkability of using drugs and alcohol are provided below.

- **STRUGGLING IN QUICKSAND** – the more you struggle to get out of emotional discomfort, the deeper you sink
  - *Useful to highlight the paradoxical unworkability of control*
- **HAMMER AND HEADACHE** – it’s like someone going to the doctors and asking for help to get rid of a headache, but behind their back is a hammer and they’re hitting their head with it. The first thing the Doctor might suggest, before prescribing pain medications, is to first stop doing what’s causing the pain. After all, getting rid of the pain this way allows the person to do themselves damage and not feel it.
  - *Useful response to inquiries about what to do to empty the bin*
- **GLASS WITH MUD IN IT** – this process can be like having a glass of water in it with mud at the bottom. When we start trying to scoop out the mud, it stirs things up. But it’s the only way to get the mud out.
  - *Useful to help group members stick with emotional discomfort if it is elicited by the exercise*
- **MONKEY TRAP METAPHOR** - In South America, Africa, and Asia, a monkey trap has been devised where a hole is drilled into a piece of wood, just big enough for the size of a

monkey's hand. They put fruit in the hole so that when the monkey grabs the fruit, it now cannot get its hand out. It loses its freedom when it tries to get the reward.

- *Useful for highlighting the loss of freedom associated with trying to empty the bin*

## Between Session Work – ‘Noticing When I am Picking Up a Shovel’

Hand out the between session handouts and discuss the exercises. The aim of these exercises is to encourage group members to spend time in the week noticing what situations elicit drinking or drug use, and the psychological experiences that show up at these times.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *“What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?”*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *“How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?”*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *“What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?”*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

### Purpose:

To foster greater awareness in the week to substance use behaviour and the contexts that occasion it

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them on today's group. Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between this session and the next, facilitators should send group members a text reminding them of session content and encouraging them to attend next session. Example text:

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Keep watching for when you feel the urge to start digging and take a moment to notice what’s happening around you and within you. All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

# Session Two

## ‘The Wisdom to Know the Difference’

The previous session focussed on bringing group members into contact with the unworkability of substance use as an emotional control strategy, and the consequences incurred as a result of their history of substance use. Session two elaborates these themes and introduces *willingness* as an alternative.

Group members vary in their awareness of triggers for substance use. Substance use can just ‘seem to happen’, or is attributed to personal characteristics. This session aims to build awareness of the *high-risk situations* that occasion substance use, and the psychological triggers that are elicited in these situations. From an ACT point of view, it is fusion with these psychological triggers, and the assumption that they must be controlled or avoided in order to forgo drugs or alcohol, that makes change difficult.

The ‘*Passengers on the Bus*’ metaphor is introduced in this session to reduce identification with psychological triggers, and the workability of control strategies examined. This furthers the creative hopelessness work in last session. It is important to have group members appreciate that it isn’t the strategy that’s at fault (e.g., substance use); it isn’t a case of finding other, better control strategies. Maintaining this assumption leads many into substitute addictions. It is the very agenda of control that is hopeless.

### At a Glance:

- ❖ Body-Scan
- ❖ Brief check-in and homework review
- ❖ High Risk Situation Card Sort
- ❖ Passengers on the Bus Metaphor
- ❖ What Have You Tried? How has It Worked?
- ❖ Feeding a Stray Dog Metaphor
- ❖ What Are The Numbers?
  
- ❖ Between Session Work: ‘*Advice From a Wiser, Future Me’* and ‘*Body Scan*’

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Body Scan*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group for members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, facilitators should bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. They should proceed into a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside distractions, and to bring awareness more fully into the here and now to make the most of the group.

The between session work from last session encouraged group members to practice noticing the experiences associated with the temptation to drink or use drugs. As group members' experiences with this exercise will be discussed in the check-in, the body-scan seems a relevant mindfulness practice to begin this session. The aim of the body scan is to bring one's attention systematically to each area of the body, practicing open awareness of the physical sensations noticed at each moment.

Facilitators should invite group members to take a relaxed but alert posture, close their eyes, and bring their awareness to the sensations of breathing. Then, gently guide group members to notice physical sensations in the feet, calves, upper legs, abdomen, back, chest, shoulders, upper arms, forearms, hands, and head. Finally, bring awareness back to the sensations of breathing before ending the exercise.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction, and bring awareness to experiences in the here and now

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Following the body-scan, and a brief reflection on the exercise, facilitators should proceed to conduct a group

### Purpose:

To reflect on the contextual factors which increase the likelihood of substance use.

round inquiring what group members noticed in the 'Noticing When I am Picking Up a Shovel' exercise. Inquire, in particular, about:

- ✓ **What situations influenced the decision or temptation to drink/use drugs**
- ✓ **The emotions, thoughts, sensations, and urges that showed up in these situations**
- ✓ **The effects of using drugs or alcohol in the short and longer terms**

Reviewing the 'Noticing When I am Picking Up a Shovel' exercise serves three tasks. First, it increases group members' awareness of the contexts that increase the likelihood of using drugs or alcohol. Second, it reflects on group members' experiences of using substances to regulate discomfort and the workability of that behaviour. Finally, if between-session work was not completed, it provides an opportunity to process barriers to commitments.

Below are two sample conversations illustrating the between-session work review. The first is an example where the group-member completed the between session work, the second example where it hasn't been completed.

#### **Example One (Completed Between-Session Work)**

**Facilitator:** *What did people notice in the between session work we discussed last session?*

**Group Member:** *Well, when I look back over when I use, it either occurs first thing in the morning or when I'm out with others.*

**Facilitators:** *Sounds like you noticed some important things there. So let's take the morning occasion. What did not you notice showing up for you in terms of thoughts and emotions first thing in the morning?*

*[Continued...]*

**Group Member:** *Withdrawals from not using.*

**Facilitator:** *Is there an emotion that comes along with withdrawals, what did you notice?*

**Group Member:** *Anxiety*

**Facilitator:** *So you noticed the physical sensations of withdrawal, and the emotion of anxiety. What was going through your mind when you felt that stuff? Did you notice any thoughts?*

**Group Member:** *Using, mostly. It's stuck in my head till I use*

**Facilitator:** *You were having the thought of using heroin. Was that like an image of using, or an expectation of what using will do?*

**Group Member:** *Like an expectation, I guess. Using will make me feel better.*

**Facilitator:** *Excellent. So let me check this. In the morning the heroin is wearing off and you start to notice sensations of withdrawals. Alongside that there is a feeling of anxiety showing up, and you're noticing your mind getting pretty loud with thoughts telling you that using will get rid of these experiences. Does that fit?*

**Group Member:** *Yeah*

**Facilitator:** *And what does your experience say, does it make you feel better?*

**[Continued...]**

**Group Member:** *Of course.*

**Facilitator:** *Which is probably why your mind suggests such a thing, right? It's picked up that using works to solve withdrawals and anxiety. Last session we were exploring that strange loop where working to empty the bin seems to end up fulling the bin with more discomfort. Did you notice any of that later in the week?*

**Group Member:** *Um, not really.*

**Facilitator:** *I'm hearing that you're pretty used to how things pan out after you use drugs. Ok. So, let me ask, the more you've used heroin to get rid of withdrawals, have your withdrawals become more or less of a problem in your life?*

**Group Member:** *More, I guess. It's like ground-hog day, every morning I do the same thing just to feel normal so I can get on with the day. And, if I can't get any then I'm just stuck feeling terrible.*

**Facilitator:** *So one of the ways this works is that working to get rid of withdrawals traps you into facing more withdrawals. Does it trap you in other ways? What emotions and thought showed up this week when the high of using has died down?*

**Group member:** *I feel guilty for using; that I've wasted my day doing nothing useful.*

*[Continued...]*

**Facilitator:** *What's it like to notice that? That you've not engaged in the things you would truly want to?*

**Group Member:** *It makes me feel depressed.*

**Facilitator:** *Sounds like you really noticed some important things about the way this works. The cost of solving withdrawals with more drug use is that life feeling stagnant, more depression, more guilt, and straight back into the withdrawals you tried to solve in the first place. Digging yourself out of that hole just makes the hole bigger. Thank-you so much for sharing your experience of this week as I expect others may relate to this. Does this resonate with others here?*

This example shows how the facilitator can help group member's more accurately track their experience. The emphasis is primarily on promoting awareness of experience and working to draw out and undermine the control agenda.

If some group members have not completed the between-session work, the review is conducted similarly. Facilitators should help group members to notice what influenced their decision and explore the workability of that choice. Care should be taken to avoid shaming the client for non-completion of between session work.

### Example Two (Non-Completion of Between-Session Work)

**Group Member:** *I'm sorry, I didn't do the diary.*

**Facilitator:** *OK. I appreciate you just coming out and saying that. Was it a case of choosing not to do it or did you intend to do the diary and then didn't?*  
*[Ascertaining the role of choice in not completing between session work]*

**Group Member:** *Well, I decided I would do it, but when it came to it I knew what it would say so I didn't bother.*

**Facilitator:** *So you had the thought, "I already know what this is going to show." I'm also catching, perhaps, a judgement, too? Like, "What it will show won't be good?"*

**Group Member:** *Yeah, kind of like that. I already know I'm drinking too much. I don't need reminding.*

**Facilitator:** *It's uncomfortable to see that written in front of you. Could you describe that discomfort?*

**Group Member:** *Embarrassment, probably. It's embarrassing to notice how much I'm drinking.*

**Facilitator:** *Ok, could we say it this way: putting the diary assignment to one side was in the service of avoiding the feeling of embarrassment. In what way might that move be like digging in a hole?*

This example captures some important points to consider when a group member doesn't complete between session-work. Rather than telling the group member, "It doesn't matter" (i.e., colluding with the client) or criticising their lack of effort (i.e., shaming them), it is more productive to identify the barriers to commitment and exploring what the group member did in response to them. For that reason, it can be productive to initially ascertain whether non-completion was chosen as a free choice or whether an initial commitment was later broken due to barriers. If it is the latter, facilitators should probe for relevant ACT processes (e.g., experiential avoidance, fusion, unclear values).

Group members can be offered the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of identifying high risk situations and psychological triggers regardless of whether they completed the between session work.

## High-Risk Situations Card Sort

Reviewing the between-session work works allows facilitators to introduce into the discussion that the likelihood of substance use is made more likely in some circumstances and less likely in others. Indeed, a core component of *Relapse Prevention*<sup>37</sup> is that of *high-Risk Situations; contexts* which increase the likelihood of drinking or using drugs. Increasing awareness of relevant High-risk situations affords group members the opportunity to consider the effectiveness of their coping responses in context.

Provide each group-member with a pack of 'high-risk situation' cards. These consist of 39 high-risk situations are adapted from the 'Situational Confidence Questionnaire'<sup>38</sup> (Annis, 1988). Ask group members to sort through the cards and place them in three piles

### Purpose:

To identify contexts in which there is an increased likelihood of using drugs or alcohol

<sup>37</sup> Marlatt, G. A., & Gordon, J. R. (1985). *Relapse prevention: Maintenance strategies in addictive behavior change*. New York: Guilford.

<sup>38</sup> Annis, H. M., & Graham, J. M. (1988). *Situational confidence questionnaire (SCQ): User's guide*. Addiction Research Foundation.

- ❖ Highly Likely to Drink/Use
- ❖ Moderately Likely to Drink/Use
- ❖ Unlikely to Drink/Use

Once group members they have completed this task, facilitators should invite group members to take the cards in the 'highly likely' pile and order them according to how frequently they encounter each situation. The top five situations on this list, then, reflect those that are both high-risk and frequently encountered. Before collecting up the packs of high-risk situation cards, group facilitators should have group members record their top five high risk situations on the 'My High Risk Situations' worksheet (in their between-session work packs).



Facilitators should first ask for group members' reflections on the exercise. Following this debrief, group members should be provided an opportunity to share their top five high risk situations. For their top one or two situations (depending on time and group size), invite group member to consider the last time they encountered that situation and to describe what emotions, sensations, urges, and thoughts show up in this situation. Contributions should be listed on the flipchart.

## 'Passengers on the Bus' Metaphor

The passengers on the bus metaphor is a classic ACT metaphor which re-contextualizes a person's relationship to their thoughts and emotions as one of a person driving a bus with bullying passengers telling them how to drive. Offering this metaphor at this point in the group aims to foster defusion for the psychological triggers identified in the high-risk situation card sort and discussion.

The 'Passengers on the Bus' metaphor can be presented as follows:

### Purpose:

To help group members defuse from the thoughts, emotions, urges, and sensations that invite them to use drugs or alcohol.

***"Suppose there's this bus and you're the driver. On this bus we've a number of passengers. These passengers are thoughts, feelings, bodily states, memories, and other aspects of experience. As you drive through life, different passengers come up front and you become aware of them. Some are helpful, but others are less so.***

***What seems to be happening is that you're driving along and you run into these situations (reference high risk situations listed on flip chart), these passengers (reference thoughts, emotions, urges, and sensations identified on flipchart) run up to front of the bus and start acting like bullies.***

**[Continued...]**

***They threaten you, telling you what you have to do in this situation. “You’ve got to turn left,” “You’ve got to turn right”, “Have a drink”, “Use drugs”, and so on. The threat they have over you is that if you don’t do what they say, they’re going to stay at the front of the bus and make you feel uncomfortable until you give in.***

***So maybe we decide to take control of the bus again and start driving in directions that are important to you as the driver. But these passengers keep coming up front, dictating to you where you should be driving.”***

At this stage, facilitators should utilize this metaphor to promote defusion (dis-identifying with the passengers), and drawing out the control agenda. To do this, the group can be asked the following question:

- ✓ ***“If I had a magic wand, and I could change something about these passengers, what would you want me to change?”***
- ✓ ***“And, what would you do then as the driver?”***

Responses to this question usually reflect a control agenda (i.e., get rid of the passengers so that I can drive the bus in the directions I want to go). It also provides a natural transition to engaging in further creative hopelessness work. The remainder of the session should focus on helping group members assess the workability of the strategies they have used to control the passengers on the bus.

## What Have You Tried? How Has It Worked?

Facilitators need to be clear within themselves that the aim of this exercise is not to identify the best strategy, nor to weed out poor strategies so that the best ones become clear. It is to utilize group members'

experiences of control strategies to undermine the very agenda of control. This is necessary to make room for acceptance as an alternative to control. If control/avoidance seems achievable, few would seriously entertain acceptance. After all, who would start to walk a 50 mile journey while they still have faith that they can get the engine to start in their luxury car. Acknowledging that the car will never start, it'll never get you to your destination, offers an opportunity to consider new options and to be open to less comfortable options.

Prepare a table on the flipchart that includes the following headings:

- ❖ **What Have You Tried?**
- ❖ **How Has That Worked in the Short Term?**
- ❖ **How Has That Worked in the Longer Term?**
- ❖ **Costs/Downsides to that Solution?**

### Purpose:

To foster creative hopelessness around strategies used to control/avoid psychological triggers for substance use

**Facilitator:** *So we are noticing that in these situations, the thoughts and emotions that show up make it difficult to engage in actions that are meaningful to us. Is that about right?*

**Group member:** *Yeah, pretty much. I had the intention of going straight to the gym after work but when it came to it, it was such a stressful day I couldn't get the thought out drinking of my head.*

**[Continued]**

**Facilitator:** *So let me ask a question that seems relevant here. I'd like to open this up to the whole group if that's OK. Suppose we had a magic wand here, and we could do something with these unwanted thoughts, emotions, and cravings. What would you want me to change?*

**Group Member:** *Make them vanish! Get rid of them!*

**Facilitator:** *Sure, I get that. It sounds like if they weren't there, there'd be a greater sense of freedom around the directions you drive your bus. So, let me ask, what have we tried, so far, to get rid of these cravings and thoughts of using?*

**Group Member:** *I've tried distracting myself*

**Facilitator:** *OK. That makes sense. Think of something else so you don't think about using. What's been your experience of doing that? How's it worked?*

**Group member:** *It works for a while, but I can't keep the thought out for long.*

**Facilitator:** *So let's mark that up as working in the short term, but doesn't work in the longer term [writes this up on the flipchart]. The thought of using comes back. In the longer term, the more you've distracted yourself, have thoughts of using got less over time?*

**Group Member:** *Not really, more if anything. Definitely not less!*

This example illustrates the way facilitators can draw out the control agenda and start to bring group members into contact with their direct experience of the success of these strategies.

The form of the strategy is not as important as its function. Regardless of what the strategy looks like, explore what the hoped for effect was and the group members' direct experience of that strategy.

Facilitators should remain open to what group members say, always having them check with their experience about whether the strategy truly worked. Useful questions include:

- ✓ ***“And how about in the longer term? Has this given you complete control?”***
- ✓ ***“And you’re here today, so I’m wondering if it’s been the complete solution for you. Why not just keep distracting yourself?”***

It is vitally important to avoid trying to convince group members that control is bad and acceptance is good, or that a control strategy doesn't really work when the group member says it does. The table below illustrates how this list of strategies accumulates on the flipchart.

<b><u>What I Want:</u></b> <i>To get rid of thoughts of using and unpleasant emotions</i>			
<b><u>What I've tried?</u></b>	<b><u>How has it worked?</u></b>		<b><u>Costs/downsides of solution</u></b>
	<b><u>Short term</u></b>	<b><u>long term</u></b>	
<i>Not going out</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>felt lonely and isolated</i>
<i>Push thoughts out of my mind</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>They came back stronger</i>
<i>Telling myself not to use</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Get angry with myself</i>

It is important to keep going with this exercise till all (or most) strategies have been exhausted. If a group member, for example, says something like *"It seems like nothing works, perhaps I should just give up"* facilitators might consider the function of giving up for this client is experiential avoidance and so should be included in the exercise. The facilitators, in response to such a statement, might then ask, *"And have you given up trying before? How has that worked? What's the cost associated with giving up?"*

As you build up the list, typically a number of patterns will become evident:

- ✓ **That group members have tried numerous strategies to control their internal triggers, yet they are still here. It may be that it isn't just that the individual solution doesn't work, but the whole agenda is unworkable**
- ✓ **That short term success may be possible, but often at a longer term cost**
- ✓ **That in the longer term these strategies have been unsuccessful and contributing to a sense of loss of control**
- ✓ **You can gain control of your emotions, but lose control of your life!**

With numerous examples listed, facilitators can then introduce the idea that trying to control one's thoughts, emotions, urges, and sensations is perhaps like a rigged game. This reframe can be highly validating for group members who have likely sensed the way their strategies fall short, but have barely questioned the idea that there is no magical control strategy that works better than the ones they have tried.

Facilitators may introduce this as follows:

*“Well, doesn’t this feel like something odd is going on here? Almost like you’re playing a rigged game? What if it is like that? Just consider this for a moment. If it is a rigged game, we can draw two conclusions: First, we can safely say that this problem isn’t getting solved because you’re not trying hard enough. I can see the amount of effort you’ve put in! Second, we can say that this problem isn’t getting solved not because you’re not smart enough. You’ve been thinking through this time and again and coming from it in all sorts of angles. And, yet it isn’t working. What if the struggle to control cravings is something like this?”*

## Feeding a Stray Dog Metaphor

The feeding a stray dog metaphor offers a useful summary to the above exercise. Highlighting that by trying to gain control of the dog, we progressively lose control. And, the harder we try, the less possible the desired outcome becomes.

### Purpose:

To foster creative hopelessness and highlight the paradox of control when applied to internal experiences

*“So, I’d like to offer a thought about what might be happening here. What if it’s something like this? Imagine that you have this stray puppy turn up at your house one day. It’s quite sweet to begin with, but it does makes this annoying yapping noise every once and while. By chance we find that, when the dog makes this annoying noise, feeding the dog some food makes it goes quiet. We gain some control over the dog. But, by feeding the feeding the dog, we find the dog starts coming round a little more often, and having eaten, it’s gotten a little bigger, louder, and stronger.*

***[Continued...]***

***So when the dog comes round the next time, you feed it to keep the noise down. Once again you get control over the dogs annoying behaviour. But, the dog turns up more often, and as the dog gets bigger and bigger, it expects to be fed; it learns that bearing its teeth and looking big and mean makes us more likely to feed it.***

***The, it seems to find its own corner in the house and sets up home. So, more and more you find yourself in the kitchen preparing its food, trying to control this dog from barking and showing its teeth. Our efforts to control the dog end up with the dog controlling us. Might our attempts to control our unwanted thoughts, feelings, and urges be like this?"***

Debrief group members' reflections on the metaphor and what that might suggest about how to deal with cravings, thoughts of using, and unpleasant emotions. Useful questions are:

- ✓ ***"If feeding the dog hasn't worked to keep it quiet, what else could we do?" (be careful around responses that suggest getting rid of the dog, getting rid of the dog is trying to control it, which is just more feeding)***
- ✓ ***"How might you go about teaching the dog that barking doesn't result in getting you to feed it?"***
- ✓ ***"If you weren't just feeding the dog, how else might you interact with it?"***

## Psychoeducation: Why We've Been Coming at this from a Control Agenda

It can be useful at this point to provide some psychoeducation around why we naturally approach the problem of unwanted thoughts and emotions from a control agenda. It can help reduce the possibility of self-blame by highlighting that the control agenda is learned, and is come by honestly in life. Explore the following points with the group, looking to draw out personal examples from group members learning histories.

- ✓ **Control works well in most other areas of life** (*Why wouldn't we apply control to this problem?*)
- ✓ **Seems to work in the short term** (*Which is the golden rule of psychology, the immediate effect after a behaviour affects whether we do that behaviour again in the future*)
- ✓ **We're told by parents we can and should be able to control emotions** (*e.g., "Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about!" – explore examples with the group*)
- ✓ **As children we see adults appearing to control their emotions** (*But, do they really? Or, are better at hiding it? Think also of the exposure to gender stereotypes found in culture generally, or movies, or role-models*)

### Purpose:

To highlight the historical learning experiences that lead to trying to control thoughts and emotions from a control agenda

## What Are The Numbers?

After exploring the workability of control, and offering some ideas about where we learn to approach problems in this way, a brief defusion exercise called 'What are the Numbers?' can be offered. It shows how easy it is to learn new information, but how impossible it is to then erase that learning, and can still be elicited even if we later learn the information offers no benefit.

### Purpose:

To illustrate that we can easily pick up learning that may not be useful, but it is impossible to purposefully erase it

**Facilitator:** *No wonder we would approach cravings, thoughts, and emotions we don't want from an agenda of control. We've been taught to. It seems like it's the right way to approach it. But, check with your experience, how is it working out?*

**Group Member:** *Not particularly well, really.*

**Facilitator:** *And, I don't know of a way to get rid of that programming for you...or me for that matter. It's easy to absorb this programming but impossible to get rid of. Here's what I mean. Suppose I was to offer you three numbers. And if you remember these numbers, there is a million pounds in it for you. So, if I ask what "are the numbers" and you remember them, I'll give you a million pounds. Do you think you'll remember those numbers?*

**Group Member:** *For a million pounds, absolutely!*

**Facilitator:** *Let's make them nice and memorable. Let's say these numbers are 1, 2, 3. So if I ask you next week, "What are the numbers?" You'd say...*

**Group Member:** *1, 2, 3.*

**[Continued]**

**Facilitator:** *And, a million pounds is coming your way. What if I asked in a months' time? The answer would be?*

**Group Member:** *Still 1, 2, 3.*

**Facilitator:** *What if I asked in a months' time, the answer would be?*

**Group Member:** *still 1, 2, 3.*

**Facilitator:** *A years' time?*

**Group Member:** *1, 2, 3.*

**Facilitator:** *So that little piece of programming: 1, 2, 3 equals a million pounds would stick around a long time. So, let me own up about something: You'll never get a million pounds off me. Best to forget those numbers now! What are the numbers?*

**Group Member:** *1, 2, 3.*

**Facilitator:** *In a month's time?*

**Group Member:** *1, 2, 3.*

**Facilitator:** *A years' time?*

**Group Member:** *1, 2, 3.*

**Facilitator:** *So even when it doesn't pay off for knowing these silly numbers, we can't erase them. They can show and present themselves as being relevant to the current situation. Might the same be true of the programming, "I need to control my emotions, cravings, and thoughts to get control of my drink or drug use." Check with your experience of how that rule works; just because we can recall the rule, it doesn't mean it will pay-off for us.*

There may be opportunities in future group sessions to highlight the automaticity of thoughts by asking, 'What are the numbers?' Doing so when a group member is fused by a thought can help them relate to that thought as historical programming which may or may not work for them.

### Between Session Work – Writing Assignment – Advice From A Wiser, Future Me' and 'Body-Scan'

The content of this session aims to utilize ACT process to develop flexibility in the presence of psychological triggers, evoked within high-risk situations. Group members are invited to consider coping-responses relevant to their top 5 high risk situations. Rather than simply record coping responses, they are guided to take the perspective of a future, wiser self who is well into recovery. For each high risk situation, they are to consider and write about what that future self might advise them in how to respond to those situations now.

To develop skills which support mindful awareness of psychological triggers, group members are also invited to engage in daily practice of the body-scan exercise.

After presenting the two between session tasks, facilitators should explore what **benefits** group members hope to gain from investing time in these task (e.g., *"What would you hope to gain from taking some time completing this exercises?"*).

Facilitators might also explore **how group members might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *"How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?"*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore **likely barriers** that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *"What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?"*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

#### Purpose:

To utilize perspective taking to aid the development of workable responses to high-risk situations

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of. Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session is that we learn to approach unwanted thoughts, emotions, and urges from a control agenda. However, doing so can be like feeding a stray dog to keep it quiet. The more we try to control cravings the more they come around and the bigger they get. Example text:

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Notice what you do with cravings and urges this week. Are you feeding a stray dog to get it to go away? Or can you let that dog be around without feeding it. All the best and see you Next Friday at 10am.”***

# Session Three

## ‘Dealing With Your Inner Dictator’

With the previous two sessions developing awareness of psychological triggers, and creative hopelessness for their control, this session aims to develop willingness as an alternative.

The passengers on the bus metaphor is reintroduced, this time as an enacted version. Group members are invited to contrast different strategies of dealing with thoughts, emotions, and urges; specifically, giving into the passengers, arguing them away, or being willing to have them.

The values card sort exercise conducted in this session aims to give meaning to willingness and afford further opportunities to develop a greater perceived discrepancy between substance use behaviour and valued directions. The work here can be considered ‘Values Lite’ since valuing is addressed more fully in the next module

This session also introduces defusion to support willingness. The Lemon, Lemon, Lemon exercise and Finding a Place to Sit metaphor contrasts how thoughts present themselves vs what they are. The aim is have group members experientially appreciate the inherently non-toxicity of thoughts. To that end, an explicit distinction is made between buying into thoughts vs having thoughts.

### At a Glance:

- ❖ Cubby-holing
- ❖ Brief check-in and homework review
- ❖ Values Card Sort
- ❖ Enacted Passengers on the Bus Exercise
- ❖ Buying into Thoughts vs Having Thoughts
- ❖ Lemon, Lemon, Lemon...
- ❖ Finding a Place to Sit Metaphor
  
- ❖ Between Session Work:  
*‘Mindfulness Practice – Cubby-holing’ and ‘Values Writing Assignment’*

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Cubby-holing*

Facilitators should allow the first 15 minutes of the group to allow group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Facilitators should begin the session with a brief mindfulness exercise, offering the rationale of setting aside distractions and bringing awareness into the room in order to make the most of today's group.

Since last session focussed on noticing thoughts, emotions, and urges that show up in-high risk situations, it is recommended that this session opens begins with the cubby-holing exercise. The aim of this exercise is observe one's ongoing flow of experience from the perspective of the present moment, and to label each experience into the broad categories of thought, emotion, urge, and sensation. Facilitators should guide group members to centre into the present moment and then bring their awareness to the ongoing flow of experience. For each experience that comes into awareness, instruct group members to cubby-hole that experience into its broad category by saying to themselves, "there's thought", "there's emotion", "there's sensation", or "there's urge." After five minutes, lead group members out of the exercise and briefly reflect on what was noticed.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

To continue developing mindfulness skills

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Following the brief mindfulness exercise, facilitators should hand out the Values Bullseye form and have

### Purpose:

To explore identified responses to high-risk situations. To reflect on and explore barriers to completing between-session work

group member's complete it to reflect the previous week. Then, proceed to conduct a group round, asking each group member about their between session work and what they noticed. Last session's between-session work was to complete the 'Advice from a Wiser, Future Me'. If completed, group members will have considered new responses to their identified high risk situations. Reflect with the group on their experience of the exercise itself (e.g., "What was it like taking the perspective of an older you?"), and then ask for any particular strategies that were developed and/or applied.

In addition, group members will have practiced the body-scan exercise. Experiences of this exercise should also be explored and ACT processes reinforced.

## Values Card-Sort Exercise

Discussion of responding effectively to high-risk situations will often open up why it is important to do so. Sometimes, group members may be motivated to deal with high-risk situations because doing so moves them away from aversive experiences. The problem here is that if such behaviour is under aversive control, motivation to maintain change will wane as the aversive experience reduces. It is better in the longer term to bring recovery actions under appetitive control. The aim of the following exercise is clarify values and motivate coping responses to high-risk situations (and willingness to have unwanted thoughts, emotions, and urges) frame these actions as moves toward what's important.

### Purpose:

To increase contact with values so as to give meaning and purpose to willingness, and promote effective responding to high-risk situations

Facilitators should hand out the *values card sort packs*. These packs contain values statements taken from the 'Survey of Life Principles'<sup>39</sup>. Instruct group members to sort the values cards into three piles: **Very Important**, **Somewhat Important**, and **Not Important**.



When they have completed this step of the exercise, ask them to discard the **Somewhat Important** and **Not Important** piles, and focus on reducing their **Most Important** pile to reflect their top five values. Once identified, group members should record their top 5 values on the valued directions worksheet in their between-session work packs.

Facilitators should debrief the exercise:

1. **Experiences of the exercise** – e.g., *“What did you notice in the card sort exercise?”* / *“What stood out to you as you considered what’s important to you?”*

<sup>39</sup> Ciarrochi, J., & Bailey, A. (2008). *A CBT-Practitioner's Guide to ACT: How to Bridge the Gap Between Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

2. **The ways in which substance use affects their ability to live according to their valued direction** – e.g., *“In what ways does substance use affect where you placed your dart?”* / *“Which of your values has been most affected by your drug/alcohol use? In what ways?”*
3. **In what ways do your responses to your high risk situations move you toward what is important to you?** – e.g., *“If you were to take one of your high risk situations and respond to it in the way you have planned, which of your values would that move you towards?”*

Having group members frame their responses to high-risk situations as examples of acting consistently with their values is an important strategy which is further realised in the following exercise.

## Enacted Passengers on the Bus

Following the valued card sort, facilitators should recap the passengers on the bus metaphor introduced last session. After re-introducing the metaphor, ask for volunteers to engage in an experiential exercise based on this metaphor:

### Purpose:

To promote defusion and acceptance in the service of values. To contrast the workability of control vs willingness

*“Suppose there’s this bus and you’re the driver. On this bus we’ve a number of passengers. These passengers are thoughts, feelings, bodily states, memories, and other aspects of experience. As you drive through life, different passengers come up front and you become aware of them. Some are helpful, but others are less so. Some of these look scary; they’re dressed up in black leather jackets and have switchblade knives.*”

*[Continued...]*

*What happens is that you're driving along and you run into these situations (reference high risk situations listed on flip chart), and these passengers (reference thoughts, emotions, urges, and sensations identified on flipchart) run up front and start threatening you, telling you what you have to do in this situation. "You've got to turn left," "You've got to turn right", "have a drink", "Use drugs", and so on. The threat they have over you is that if you don't do what they say, they're going to come up front from the back of the bus and give you some discomfort.*

*Let's do an exercise to explore some different ways of dealing with these passengers, including the willingness approach we introduced last session."*

The enacted passenger on the bus exercise is conducted as follows. Initially, facilitators should work with the group to assign roles for those willing to participate in the exercise. Those who don't participate will take on an observing role and reflect on what they notice at during the final debrief period. Assign the following roles:

- **1 person to act as the driver**
  - Have this person describe a high risk situation in which lots of "passengers" came to the front of the bus and urge them to use or drink. The high risk situation is written on a piece of flipchart paper and placed on the floor somewhere in the room.
  
- **1 person to act as the driver's valued direction**
  - Ask the driver to identify the valued direction that the passengers are getting in the way of. Summarise this in one or two words on a large sheet of paper and ask for a volunteer to hold this or stand next to this if it is pinned to the wall.

- **3-4 volunteers to act as passengers**
  - Ask the volunteers to play the role of the driver's passengers. Provide them with a post-it note label with the label of their passenger. Have the driver brief what kind of things each passenger would say to the driver, and check that passengers are clear what their role is. Check with the driver that they are willing to hear the passengers for a maximum of 60 seconds.

The aim is for the driver to drive their bus (walking around the room twice and finally end up at their value with the passengers following).

## Scenario 1 – Giving In to the Passengers

Facilitators ask the driver to drive their bus. When the bus passes through the high-risk situation, the passengers should start talking loudly in an attempt to get the driver to deviate from their direction. The driver, in this scenario should be briefed to 'give in' to the passengers; to try to appease the passengers by doing what they say (a corner of the room can be selected to represent the decision to drink or use drugs):

Once completed, facilitators should debrief from all involved:

- ✓ **Ask for feedback from driver of bus:** *How was it to give in to the passengers? What was it like to let go of the steering wheel? Reinforce the qualities of this: that it may feel better in the short-term but at the cost of important life areas, that it is being 'stuck' in another way.*
- ✓ **Ask the passengers how it felt – did they feel in control of the driver?**
- ✓ **Ask the values how they felt – did they feel connected with or ignored?**

## Scenario 2 – Fight/Struggle With the Passengers

Facilitators ask the driver to drive their bus. The driver, in this scenario should be briefed to 'stop, turn around, and win the argument so that they can get back to driving the bus'. The passengers should hassle, cajole, plead, and distract consistent with the way they were briefed by the driver. Spend 60 seconds acting out this scenario.

Once completed, facilitators should debrief from all involved:

- ✓ **For the driver of the bus, how was it to struggle with the passengers** *(facilitator can suggest that no matter how much arguing and fighting with the passengers you have, nothing changes / quality of 'stuckness')*.
- ✓ **Ask the passengers how it felt – did they feel in control of the driver? What did they notice themselves doing when the driver argued back?**
- ✓ **Ask the person representing values how they felt – did they feel connected with the driver or ignored? Did they feel large or small in the situation?**

The struggle to drink/use or not is usually a familiar experience for group members. Inquire what group members tend to do when this sort of struggle gets too much. Oftentimes, people will give in to the passengers to end the discomfort of the struggle (experiential avoidance).

## Scenario 3 – Willingness

Finally, ask the driver to practice a "willingness" response. Steering the bus in the direction of their values, with the passengers following behind, saying/doing the things that they usually do when they pass the high-risk situation.

Facilitators should debrief from all involved:

- ✓ **Ask for feedback from driver of bus:** *How was it to focus on your values and keep them in mind whilst the passengers were saying/doing all those things?*
- ✓ **Ask the passengers how it felt** – *did they still feel in control of the driver? What might happen in the longer term in response to the drivers actions?*
- ✓ **Ask the values how they felt** – *did they feel connected with or ignored?*

Following this last part of the exercise, have all group members sit back down and open up the discussion to include reflections from those observing the exercise. Facilitators should aim to evoke conversations that compare and contrast the workability of: *Fighting/struggling with passengers, giving in/resignation, willingness* while doing what is important.

Facilitators might ask group members to consider high-risk situations they will encounter in the upcoming week and explore how willingness might be applied.

## Having a Thought vs Buying Into a Thought

A key point in the previous exercise is the different ways of relating to thoughts, emotion, and urges. In other words, what prompts us to give in or argue with passengers rather than willingly have them? Facilitators should write up on the flipchart:

### Purpose:

To help group members discriminate between fusion and defusion

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## Having a Thought

Vs

## Buying into a Thought

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Take the three strategies from the previous exercise and explore whether we are buying into thoughts when we are 1) giving into the passengers, 2) trying to argue them away, or 3) willingly making room for passengers. Notice that, if we argue against a thought (e.g., "I want a drink...No I don't!"), it is because we are taking the thought seriously, buying into the thought demands that we try to stand our ground and win the argument. Giving in, too, means we are buying into thoughts, because they tell us what to do and we follow what they say (e.g., "I want a drink...Ok better go satisfy that want!"). Willingness implies that we are not buying into a thought ("I'm having the thought that I want a drink...that's a familiar thought to show up. Thank-you mind for that thought).

### Lemon, Lemon, Lemon...

This exercise is also called 'Titchener's Repetition'. It demonstrates that language depends upon a range of contextual factors to operate and that by altering those contextual factors it reduces transformation of stimulus function. The typical outcome of this exercise is that

#### Purpose:

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To foster defusion from thoughts. To experientially demonstrate that thoughts are not what they say they are

group members' become more aware of their direct experience of language – its arbitrary sound.

Facilitators might ask group members to imagine a *'nice juicy lemon'*, then to imagine taking a *'big bite into that lemon'*. Inquire whether group members experienced any physical responses when they did this (e.g., salivation, muscles tensing in the face, etc.).

Facilitators can suggest that this is a quality of thoughts – they present themselves in a way that we treat them as if they were what they say they are. A thought of biting into a lemon affects us much the same way as actually biting into a lemon. Facilitators might explore with the group examples relevant to drink/drug use? (e.g., 'outcome expectancies').

Next invite the group to repeat the word *lemon* over and over for 30-45 seconds. Facilitators

***“Ok so let’s do something silly – I’ll do it with you all so we’ll all feel silly together. Let’s take the word lemon. I’m going to ask us to repeat the word lemon over and over for 30-45 seconds quite rapidly, and as we do, see if you can pay attention to your experience of lemon.”***

might suggest this as in the dialogue below:

Do this as a group – make sure to do the full 30-45 seconds as this is the optimum time. Then ask, *“OK where did all the lemon stuff go?”* The disruption of contextual cues means most group members will notice the direct experience of the word *lemon*; the arbitrary sound and the feel of the mouth moving rather than the derived functions (visual, taste, physical responses etc.).

Explore group members' reflections on the exercise and invite group members to consider what they are making room for when they are practicing willingness.

## Finding a Place to Sit Metaphor

The 'finding a place to sit' metaphor works well with to promote defusion from cravings and urges. The following dialogue illustrates the finding a place to sit metaphor in an example where the group member didn't get the Lemon, Lemon, Lemon... exercise.

### Purpose:

To help group members defuse from thoughts and see thoughts as not what they say they are

**Facilitator:** *So, if I'm thinking, "I really need a drink", then that thought presents itself as 'me really needing a drink'. It looks just like a fact. So, as a result, I'm more likely to go get one. However, that thought doesn't really mean I need a drink. It's a bunch of words that describes a 'me that needs a drink'.*

**Group Member:** *I'm confused; I don't get the point of that exercise*

**Facilitator:** *That's great.*

**Group Member:** *Is it? I don't understand.*

**Facilitator:** *Well, if what made sense had been helpful, wouldn't all this have been solved ages ago? If confusion is here, perhaps that means we are in new territory.*

**Group Member:** *I guess so.*

**Facilitator:** *Let me ask you, when you notice 'confusion', what does your mind tell you what you need to do?*

**Group Member:** *Understand it better. Figure it out.*

**[Continued]**

**Facilitator:** *OK, so your mind describes a scenario where you understand things better, and that seems attractive enough to work towards. So, see if your mind is doing something like this. Suppose I describe a chair here [points to the middle of the room]. It's got sturdy legs, really comfortable cushioning, and arm rests. I hope I'm describing this as one of the most comfortable chairs you've come across. Can you sit in this chair?*

**Group Member:** *Um, no, it's just a description, it's not there.*

**Facilitator:** *Maybe I should describe it better, with more detail. Let's say I describe this chair down to the atomic makeup of the materials this chair is made out of. Can you sit in this chair?*

**Group Member:** *No, it's just a description of a chair.*

**Facilitator:** *So no level of description can give this chair substance. The description is great but you can't sit in it. See if you can't catch your mind describing a seat here. The 'figuring this stuff out' seat. And, asking you to take a seat because when you do it will seemingly feel better than this 'confusion' feeling. Is that familiar, have you noticed your mind offering you this seat to sit in when you run into discomfort*

**Group Member:** *Well, yeah, I guess when I feel depressed and my mind says I should drink to block it out.*

**Facilitator:** *The mind describes that seat so well, and it looks like sitting in it will give you relief?*

**Group Member:** *Yeah, but it's not as comfortable as it looks. I'll try and sit in it and just have a hard fall*

As this dialogue illustrates, facilitators can work to help group members recognise 'positive outcome expectancies' or 'self-efficacy judgements' as the minds relentless describing of events in the now, the past, and the future (i.e., planning, evaluating, predicting, analysing). The product of these activities is not so much the problem as is our tendency to 'buy into' those descriptions as being the way things will be, are, or have been.

## Between Session Work – Mindfulness Practice (Cubby-holing), Values Writing Assignment

### Purpose:

To practice defused awareness of experience.  
To gain clarity on values

The between session work for this session invites group members to engage in daily mindfulness practice; the cubby-holing exercise that was introduced at the start of this session. Allow group members to set their own practice time. Suggest 15 minutes, but emphasise that 10 minutes or even 5 minutes offers a beneficial opportunity to practice mindfully noticing one's experiences.

The second exercise involves a writing assignment where, each day, group members take one of their five values and write for 15 minutes about how that value. Group members are advised to write as a stream of consciousness, and prompts are provided to stimulate their reflection.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *"What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?"*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *"How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?"*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *"What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?"*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of. Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session is the passengers on the bus metaphor; trying to control the passengers interferes with the job of driving the bus in chosen directions.

Example text:

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Keep noticing the passengers on your bus this week. Remember who the driver is here’s! You! Not the Passengers! All the best and see you Next Friday at 10am.”***

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Mindfulness of Sound, sensation, and Breathing
- ❖ Brief Check-in and homework review
- ❖ Choice Point – High-Risk Situations
- ❖ Tug of War With a Monster Metaphor
- ❖ The Impact of Evaluations
- ❖ Defusion Strategies
- ❖ Leaves on a stream
  
- ❖ Between Session Work: *'Practicing Unhooking from thoughts' and 'Leaves on a Stream Exercise'*

# Session Four

## 'Willingness vs Willpower in Recovery'

Session three introduced willingness as an alternative to control, using the enacted 'passengers on the bus' exercise as a means to experientially contrast the workability of these strategies. Group members were also supported to discriminate between 'buying-into thoughts' (fusion) and 'having thoughts' (defusion) was also outlined. This session extends the work on defusion as a means to promote acceptance. The choice-point is introduced to have group members consider the workability of common thoughts and emotions in relevant high risk situations. The impact of fusion with judgements about experiences is explored to illustrate how evaluations of 'good' and 'bad' draw us into a struggle to regulate emotions, urges, and thoughts.

The 'tug of war with a monster' metaphor is introduced to reinforce willingness as an alternative to control. And, several defusion strategies are taught to group members to help 'unhook' from thoughts when it is useful to do so.

The final experiential exercise (leaves on a stream) involves practicing noticing thoughts as an observer.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Sound, Sensation, Breath*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group to allow group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Engage the group members in a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside the distractions we tend to bring into session so we can make the most of the time in group.

Facilitators should lead the group into a mindfulness exercise which brings awareness to sound (e.g., noticed both outside and inside the room), physical sensations (e.g., sensations of sitting in the seat, body position, perception of gravity pulling them into the seat), and breathing.

Facilitators should spend a few minutes debriefing group members' experiences of the mindfulness exercise before moving to a review of between-session work.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Complete a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and describe how they are using a couple of words.

Following this group round, inquire about what group members noticed in their between session work. Last session's between-session work was to complete the

### Purpose:

To explore identified responses to high-risk situations. To show that between-session work is important enough to reflect on and explore barriers to completing between-session work

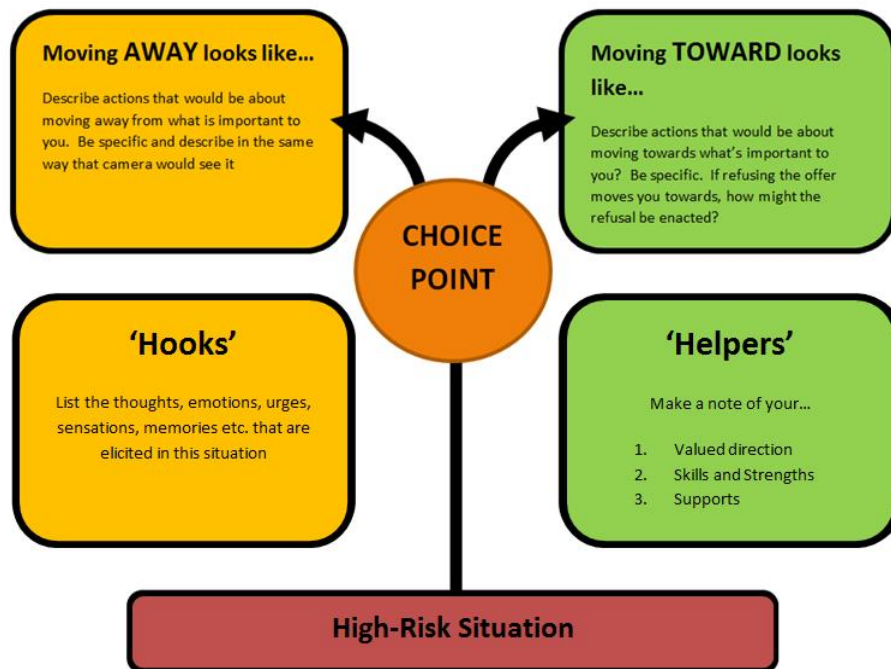
'Values Writing Assignment' and daily practice of the 'Cubby-holing' mindfulness exercise. Reflect with the group on their experience of the exercises (e.g., "would anyone be willing to share what stood out to them in the values writing assignment?"). Then explore how their between-session work influenced their responses to high risk situations ("In what ways did practicing the cubby-holing exercise affect your responses to high-risk situations this week?").

## Choice-Point – High-Risk Situations

### Purpose:

To explore workable responses to High-Risk Situations and barriers to committed action

After reviewing between-session work and orienting group members to last session's distinction between 'buying into a thought' and 'having a thought', facilitators should draw out the Choice-Point Diagram on the Flip-chart.



Facilitators should begin by making the distinction that some of our actions move us toward what is important to us, whilst other actions move us away. The thoughts, emotions, and urges that show up in certain situations can invite us to engage in either of these actions.

### ❖ **High-Risk Situations**

Facilitators should proceed to elicit recent examples where group members have been tempted to drink or use drugs, or where they acted upon that temptation and consumed drink or drugs.

### ❖ **Moving AWAY Looks Like...**

Next, facilitators can explore actions in that situation (including drinking or using drugs, but not limited to that behaviour) which would move them away from what's important to them. Facilitators should seek to clarify what those actions would move them away from. Typically, group members will report using drugs or alcohol is a move away from what is valued. However, this should not be assumed.

### ❖ **Moving TOWARD Looks Like...**

After facilitators have explored actions that move them away from what is important, they should explore actions that move them toward what is important. These constitute coping responses to specified high-risk situations; however, from an ACT perspective, these coping responses are aimed less at managing unwanted thoughts and emotions, and instead constitute values consistent responses to the demands to the situation. As such, avoiding the situation entirely may be such a response if it is in the service of one's valued direction. It is generally easier to have group members specify specific behaviours and then explore what those behaviours move them towards. This can be achieved by asking, *"By doing that, what of importance does that move you towards?"* or *"What makes it important to handle this situation*

well?" Alternatively, group members might be asked to consider what their top five values were in the previous session.

### ❖ Hooks

Facilitators can then start to explore the thoughts, emotions, urges, memories, and sensations evoked by the high-risk situation. This provides an opportunity to explore which actions (toward or away) are made more likely when we are 'hooked' by these experiences. It can be useful to utilize the language implied by the 'passengers on the bus' metaphor during this discussion as it supports a dis-identified, defused perspective on the psychological barriers to workable responses.

### ❖ Helpers

Finally, facilitators should explore what helps them to move toward what's important in the high-risk situations identified. This can be in the areas of 1) valued directions, 2) skills and strengths that group members can draw upon in this situation, and 3) support from others.

## Tug of War With a Monster Metaphor

Acting out this exercise requires a rope. From the previous exercise, group members will hopefully have gained awareness that their thoughts and emotions can invite them into actions that move them away from their values. The tug of war with a monster metaphor

### Purpose:

To orient group members toward behavioural control gained by accepting unwanted thoughts and emotions

is a useful way of experientially illustrating this. It also provides group members with repetition of key aspects of this group: Acceptance of thoughts and emotions paradoxically allows greater behavioural control.

Facilitators might introduce the metaphor as follows:

***“Let’s imagine our struggle with these thoughts and emotions like being in a tug of war with a monster. In between you and the monster is this bottomless pit. So, when this monster makes itself known, it throws out the rope and we catch it. We get into a struggle with this monster. It seems like, though sheer efforts, if we could pull this monster into the bottomless pit, we will have won. We won’t get to see that thought again and we can get on and move in directions that are important to us. But this monster is pretty strong and the harder we pull the harder it pulls. And what’s worse, we can feel like we’re getting pulled closer to this bottomless pit, so we pull harder and the struggle goes on. If our experience says we can’t win the war here, what can do in this scenario?”***

If group members don’t offer the idea of dropping the rope, facilitators can gently guide them to consider this option. Reflection on the metaphor should highlight the idea that ‘dropping the rope’ with thoughts doesn’t get rid of the unwanted thought (the monster is still there), but reduces the discomfort associated with the struggle itself. Also, it can be highlighted that by letting go of the rope frees up one’s hands to do the actions specified in the ‘*toward looks like...*’ section of the choice point diagram.

Invite several group members to engage in an experiential version of this metaphor. The facilitator can take the role of the monster who throws the tug of war rope out to the group member. Facilitators should inquire about the direct experience of trying to win the tug of war

vs letting go of the rope, and then relate these experiences to 'dropping the rope' with thoughts and emotions.

## The Impact of Evaluations

Facilitators can suggest to group members to evaluate (either 'good' or 'bad') each of the *hooks* in the choice-point diagram.

Once that has been done, invite group members to consider what they are inclined to do with the experiences evaluated as 'bad' vs the experiences evaluated as 'good'. Likewise, they may be invited to consider how much effort they put into trying to avoid and control happiness or other 'positive' emotions. Generally, experiences labelled as 'bad', are considered problems that must be solved, and as such draw us into a struggle to change their form or frequency. Facilitators can further this point by using either the 'saliva exercise' or the 'bad cup' metaphor.

### ❖ Saliva Exercise

Facilitators should invite group members to simply notice the saliva in their mouth. To notice how dry and uncomfortable it would be to not have saliva there; maybe to roll their tongue around the mouth to get a sense of how beneficial saliva is. Next ask group members to imagine spitting saliva into a cup over and over again until the cup is full, and then to imagine drinking it.

Facilitators can ask group members to notice their *evaluation* of saliva, and any urges they noticed to 'do' or 'not do'

The point of this exercise to highlight that the evaluation 'disgusting' is not in the saliva at all, since we swallow great quantities of saliva every day. However, when we are buying into the

### Purpose:

To help group members defuse from evaluations of experience and bring awareness of how evaluations can draw us into a struggle to regulate psychological triggers

evaluation that saliva is disgusting, it appears as if disgusting is a quality of saliva and influences how we interact with it.

### ❖ 'Bad' Cup Metaphor

Another exercise that facilitators may choose to use is the 'bad' cup metaphor. This is described below and aims to illustrate that evaluations masquerade as descriptions of events.

*"Let's take this cup. It seems to me to be a white cup and in the shape of cylinder. Do people agree with my description? Ok, good. Supposing I describe it as a 'bad' cup; the most 'ugly' cup I have ever seen. Do people agree with that description? No? It seems we have different opinions on how to describe this cup. Notice that, although both statements sound like we are describing qualities of the cup, the cup being 'bad' and 'ugly' isn't a description, it's an 'evaluation'. But it seems that to turn this 'ugly cup' into a beautiful cup' we need to change how it looks, in the same way we would if we wanted this 'white cup' to be a 'brown cup'. So, I'd like you to consider, if everyone vanished off the face of the earth, would this still be a white cup? Yes. Would this be an ugly cup? No. Because the evaluation isn't in the cup, it's in our relationship with the cup."*

With both these exercise, facilitators should work to help group members apply this defused awareness of evaluations to the psychological triggers identified in the choice point exercise and how 'buying into' the evaluation draws them into a struggle where they are less willing to have their experience *as it is*.

## Defusion Techniques

Introduce the following list of defusion techniques as ways to take 'unhook' from thoughts. Facilitators should be clear that none of these strategies are designed to make thoughts go away, feel better, or change them into more desirable ones. Their purpose is to afford a greater degree of choice in a given situation; to notice the passengers on the bus for what they are, and recognise that we don't have to drive the bus they say we should.

Defusion strategies to explore can include (but need not be limited by...):

- ✓ **Calling a Spade a Spade/"I'm having the thought..."** *Label each experience noticed by saying to oneself, "I'm having the thought... [That I need a drink]", "I'm having the emotion... [Of anxiety]" etc. Explore with the group the difference between the thought, "I need a drink" in comparison to the thought, "I'm having the thought that I need a drink".*
- ✓ **Titchener's Repetition:** *Condense the thought down to one or two words and repeat it over and over out loud for 30-45 seconds.*
- ✓ **Funny Voices:** *Have group members hear thoughts in unusual voices, such as Joe Pasquale, Prince Phillip, or Donald Duck.*
- ✓ **Saying it Slowly:** *Say the thought out loud very slowly (about one syllable per breath).*
- ✓ **Singing a Thought:** *To the tune of Happy Birthday, for example.*
- ✓ **Thank Your Mind For That Thought:** *Treat your mind as a separate person, maybe give it a name. When it offers you unhelpful thoughts, thank your mind for what it offers.*

These strategies can be practiced with thoughts previously offered by group members, and their experiences of applying these strategies explored.

### Purpose:

To provide practical strategies that group members can use to defuse from challenging thoughts

## Leaves on a Stream Mindfulness Exercise

This exercise provides group members an opportunity to practice stepping back and looking at thoughts, rather than from them. It is also practice at noticing when they have been 'hooked' by a thought (experientially *in* the thought, rather than looking *at* the thoughts floating on a leaf in front of them).

Facilitators should help group members centre into the present moment and bring their awareness to the ongoing flow of experience. Inviting group members to imagine sitting on the bank of a river, with a slow moving stream in front of them, and leaves floating past. With this image in mind, instruct participants to simply watch for thoughts. When they notice a thought, instruct them to *catch* that thought and place it on a leaf out in front of them so that can look *at* it.

Group members should be advised to let the thought float by in its own time. And, meanwhile, look for the next thought to show up, catch, put on a leaf, and watch float past. They should continue this exercise for at least five minutes.

Facilitators should also invite group members to notice when they find themselves immersed *in* a thought rather than looking *at* it. If this happens, they should take a moment to see if they have been 'hooked' by that thought, and 'buying into' the literal truth of its content. If this should happen (highly likely) they should notice it, place that thought on a leaf, and continue with the exercise.

Following the exercise, facilitators should debrief group members' experience of the exercise.

### Purpose:

To practice defused acceptance of thoughts from the position of a detached observer in the present moment. To practice discriminating when 'hooked' by a thought

## Between Session Work – Mindfulness Practice (Leaves on a Stream), and Practicing Unhooking From Thoughts

The between session work for this session invites group members to engage in daily mindfulness practice; the leaves on a stream exercise that was introduced at the start of this session. Allow group members to set their own practice time. Suggest 15 minutes, but emphasise that 10 minutes or even 5 minutes offers a beneficial opportunity to practice mindfully noticing one's experiences.

The second exercise involves identifying thoughts that group members pre-emptively plan to apply a defusion strategy in challenging situations and reflect upon its impact.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *"What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?"*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *"How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?"*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *"What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?"*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

### Purpose:

To practice defused awareness of experience and find opportunities to apply these skills in the week.

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

in today's group session. Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection. Group members can be invited to take 'six mindful breaths on purpose' before closing the group.

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session is the tendency to become hooked by thoughts and defusion strategies as a way of unhooking from thoughts.

Example text:

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Keep noticing when you're being ‘hooked’ by thoughts. Try saying out loud, “I’m having the thought...” to get unhooked. Remember who the driver is here’s! You! Not the Passengers! All the best and see you Next Friday at 10am.”***

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Physicalizing exercise
- ❖ Brief check-in and homework review
- ❖ Reasons-Giving and substance use
- ❖ Making a Free Choice
- ❖ Refusal Skills and the Choice Point
- ❖ Skills Practice
  
- ❖ Between Session Work:  
*'mindfulness Practice' and 'Noticing Reasons I Give Myself'*

# Session Five

## 'Finding a Free Choice'

The past four sessions have been aimed at helping group members dis-identify with (defuse from) psychological triggers for substance use. Greater willingness to have psychological triggers has been fostered and linked to personally chosen values. In this final session of the *OPEN* module, emphasis is placed on defusing from reason-giving thoughts. It is common for those with substance misuse issues to find that they justify and rationalise their substance use. They may emphasise one's *loss of control* over their addictive behaviours; or, events outside the person's control - including thoughts, emotions, and urges – may be treated as *causes* of one's behaviour. Getting 'Hooked' by reasons and justifications tends to perpetuate substance use. The function of 'justifying' and 'reason-giving' is often experiential avoidance. Doing so helps to avoid feelings of guilt about one's substance use and reduce disapproval and stigmatisation from others in the short term.

This session aims to increase group members defused awareness of reason-giving and the possibility of making behavioural choices *with* reasons and not *for* reasons. Refusal skills are presented in this session as an opportunity to practice new responses to being offered drink/drugs. This skills training component is included because Witkiewitz, Donovan, & Hartzler (2012) found those who received the drink refusal skills module in the COMBINE study had significantly fewer drink days in the year following treatment.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Physicalizing*

Facilitators should allow the first 15 minutes of the group to allow group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, facilitators can bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. The session should begin with a brief mindfulness exercise.

Since group members spent time last session working on defusion and willingness, the *physicalizing exercise* is suggested. The physicalizing exercise offers an opportunity to further practice defusion and acceptance of discomfort. The exercise aims to create a space between the observer and the observed, and evokes functions related to the physical properties of the experience (as if it was an object).

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

To continue developing Willingness and Defusion skills

*“So, if you’re ready, let your eyes close, or if you feel a little uncomfortable with this, just find a spot on the floor to softly focus on. And just let your attention fall on the sensation of breathing...noticing the temperature difference between the in-breath and the out-breath...taking your attention within your body and noticing sensations of pressure where your body touches the seat...and perhaps colouring in those areas of pressure so you can explore the boundaries of those sensations...noticing where the pressure starts and where it ends...”*

*[Continued...]*

*“And I’d like you to get in contact with an experience that has a quality of discomfort to it: an urge, a difficult reaction, an uncomfortable emotion, a judgement about yourself... taking your time to get in contact with this reaction as best you can. Noticing where in the body you find this experience taking shape.*

*Now...see you can take this experience and mentally place it out in front of you a few feet...so that you are able to look at this object...*

*I’m going to ask a few odd questions but see if you can allow whatever answers show up to take shape in this experience....*

*If this object had a size, what size would it be? And seeing if you can see that  
...if this object had a shape, what shape would it be?  
...if this object had a weight, how heavy would it be?  
...if this object had a colour, what colour would it be?  
...if this object had a texture, what texture would that be?  
...and just looking at this object and noting any resistant you might have to having this object.*

*Taking a moment to check-in with yourself and see if you have any resistant to having this object, see if you can move that object a few feet to one side and place that resistance out in front of you.”*

**[Continued...]**

***“...so...I’d like you to look at this object for a few moments...***

***...and ask yourself, if this object had a size, what size would it be?***

***...If this object had a shape, what shape would it be?***

***...if this object had a weight, how heavy would it be?***

***...if this object had a colour, what colour would it be?***

***...if this object had a texture, what texture would that be?***

***...and looking back at your first object, and notice...has anything changed about its colour, shape, size, etc.***

***...and you might ask yourself, do these objects have to be your enemy. What, if anything, about these objects can’t you have right now? Or whether, within your experience of holding these objects, you are in fact perfectly made to contain them...after all, this object is kind of like an orphan with no-where to go***

**(Pause for 30 seconds of so)**

***...so you might just pick up these objects and bring them back within you, not having to want them, or like them, but simply being willing to find a place for them as an act of kindness to yourself.***

***And, perhaps now returning your awareness to the sensations of breathing...the sounds inside this room, and the sounds outside this room.***

***When you feel ready to open your eyes, feeling free to do so in your own time.”***

Facilitators can debrief this exercise with group members, or consider forgoing the debrief. This can be quite a powerful experiential exercise that has the potential to highlight group member’s

capacity to have experiences they don't want. As such, group member's can be left with the experience of this capacity without clouding that experience with unnecessary analysis and evaluation.

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Facilitators should proceed to complete a group round, inviting each group member about what they noticed in their between session work. Last session's between-session work was to complete the 'Practicing Unhooking From Thoughts' exercise and practice the 'Leaves on a Stream' mindfulness practice. If completed, facilitators can reflect on specific examples where thoughts were noticed as thoughts, which defusion strategies were utilized, and what the behavioural outcomes were. Facilitators should take time to deal with any misconceptions (e.g., defusion strategies should make me feel better).

### Purpose:

To explore identified responses to high-risk situations. To show that between-session work is important enough to reflect on and explore barriers to completing between-session work

## Reason-Giving and Substance Use

Facilitator's might introduce this exercise with reference to the passengers on the bus metaphor covered in the previous sessions.

### Purpose:

To undermine attachment to the idea that reasons are causes of behaviour

***“The last few sessions we have been noticing how the passengers on our bus invite us to drive in ways they want us to. This session, I’d like us to explore a particular type of passenger – passengers that provide reasons, justifications, and rationalisations for drinking or using drugs. These passengers can be trickier to spot because they don’t typically present themselves as dictators or bullies; they are more like good salespeople that convince us to buy something we don’t need.”***

Hand out a piece of paper to each group member and ask them to write a relevant high-risk situation on it. Complete a group round inviting group members to share these high-risk situations and place the piece of paper in a row in the centre of the room.

Next, ask group members to offer the reasons they have given themselves to drink or use drugs in this situation. Write these on pieces of paper and place them on the right hand side of the high risk situations.

Ask group members, then, to see how easy it is to come up with some made up reasons to explain drinking or using in those situations. Add these to the list.

Now, ask group members if they have ever been in the same high risk situations, and had those same reasons to drink or use drugs, and decided not to.

Move to exploring reasons why they didn’t and list these in the same way, written on a piece of paper each and placed to the left of the high risk situations.

As before, ask group members if they can make up additional reasons and see how easy it is to come up with those reasons.

Finally ask group members if they have ever been in those high risk situations, and had those reasons to not drink or use, and drank or used anyway.



Highlight the following points:

- ✓ **Reasons don't cause behaviour**
- ✓ **If this is the case, we don't need better reasons to not drink or use (we need to be able to make a free choice in the presence of reasons)**
- ✓ **Our minds are extremely good at coming up with plausible reasons (there is no way to stop the mind coming up with reasons to drink, but we can work at buying-into reasons less so we have a free choice)**

Group members might be asked the following question:

***"Suppose a miracle happened: From this moment on you never used drink or drugs again. Yet, nothing changed in your life as it is now, and all these reasons to drink or use were still there. Who would be made wrong by that?"***

## Making a Free Choice

After completing the previous exercise, write up on the flipchart the following distinction. Ask group members to reflect on the difference is between the two choices.

It can be helpful to eliciting personal examples from the group of times when group members have had many good reasons choose in one direction, but did the opposite. Facilitators can highlight that the presence of those reasons did not preclude a free choice, and making that choice does not get rid of those reasons – reasons come with the whichever choice we make

### Purpose:

To discriminate choices made *for* reasons and choices made *with* reasons

---

Making a Choice **For** Reasons

Vs

Making a Choice **With** Reasons

---

Invite group members to engage in an exercise where this distinction is explored.

Have group members stand up in the centre of the room and ask them to choose one side of the room and walk to it. They must vote with their feet, so to speak.

Once they have chosen, explore the reasons they made this choice.

**Facilitator:** *So, what were your reasons for choosing this side of the room?*

**Group Member:** *It was close, less distance to walk. And I noticed most people choosing the other side of the room.*

**Facilitator:** *So some of the reasons you noticed your mind hand you were related to what other people were doing, and which side of the room was closest. And, those reasons led to you to choose this side of the room?*

**Group Member:** *Yeah.*

**Facilitator:** *Cool, so let me ask. Couldn't you have had those reasons and chose the other side of the room anyway?*

**Group Member:** *Well, yes, I guess so. I could have stood over there.*

**Facilitator:** *The reasons to choose this side of the room or the other are still going to be there, but behind them is a free choice. Let's do the exercise again. This time, I'd like you all to take a moment before you choose. See if you become aware of the reasons you mind hands you. Maybe saying to yourself, "I'm having the thought..." as you catch each reason. And, see if you can make a free choice, with reasons but not for them*

This choice should be made three to five times. Each time, explore reasons for making the choice and highlight the free choice behind those reasons. Group members can be guided to use any of the defusion exercises last session, such as the calling a spade a spade strategy (i.e., "I'm having the thought...") to practice defusing from reasons-giving thoughts.

Once the exercise is completed, invite group members to reflect on the exercise and relate it to addiction and recovery (e.g., “How does what you noticed in this exercise relate to your recovery? In what situations might we benefit from backing up from reasons and making a free choice?)

## Refusal Skills

Facilitators should reintroduce the choice-point diagram to situate the following refusal skills practice within the context of moving toward values. It also helps to identify some of the barriers and reasons that lead one to accept offers of drink or drugs.

### Purpose:

To teach skills to support refusal of offers to drink or use drugs. To explore how refusal skills supports valued directions

### ❖ Being Offered Drink or Drugs

Explore with the group instances of being offered drink or drugs. Facilitators should inquire about *who* group members find declining offers of drink or drugs most difficult, and in what contexts.

### ❖ Hooks

Facilitators can then explore what thoughts, emotions, urges, memories, and sensations are evoked by the offer of drink or drugs.

### ❖ Moving AWAY Looks Like...

Next, facilitators can explore whether accepting the offer of using drink or drugs moves them towards or away from what’s important to them. Typically, group members will report using

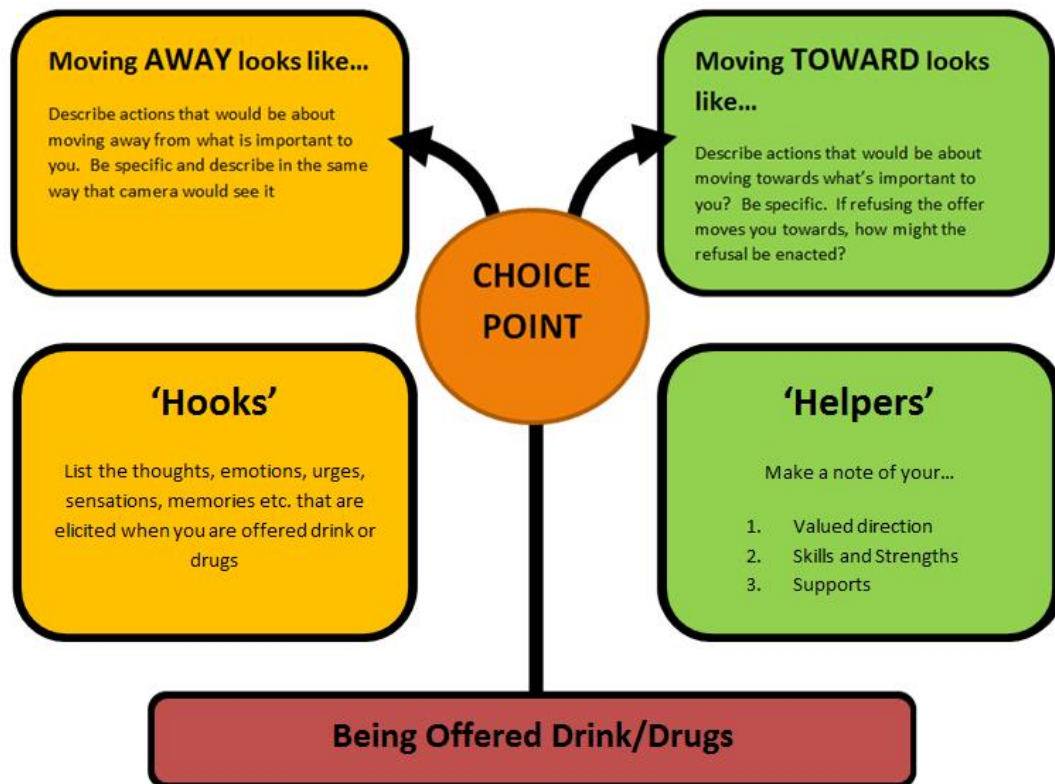
drugs or alcohol is a move away from what is valued. However, this is not a forgone conclusion. Some group members may consider accepting the offer to be a move toward what is valued. If this is the case, facilitators should refrain from arguing the case, and spend time exploring the ways in which it is a *'toward'* move. In the case that accepting the offer is an *'away'* move, have group members describe the specific behaviours they notice themselves engage in to accept the offer of drink or drugs. Facilitators should link the functional impact of those behaviours to the short term changes in barriers to effective action (e.g., "By accepting the offer, what happens to the passengers?"). It might also be explored if certain passengers on the bus were presenting reasons, justification, or rationalisations about drinking or using.

### ❖ Moving TOWARD Looks Like...

Facilitators can then explore what response would be consistent with what's important. Have the group be specific about what behaviours would constitute an effective refusal. Facilitators can explore varying scenarios, starting with an initial refusal, if the person has/doesn't have drugs on them, and if they continue to be persistent. Elicit the groups' ideas about the most effective ways to respond to this situation. Facilitators may gently draw attention back to values if responses appear discrepant (e.g., values being honest, but suggests making up excuses).

### ❖ Helpers

Finally, spend time exploring areas of life that are important to group members. Facilitators might simply ask "*Who or what is important to you?*" or "*Why is it important to handle this situation well? What would that move you towards in life?*" Alternatively, group members might be asked to consider what their top five values were in the previous session. The aim here is to have group members frame the behaviour of refusing offers of drugs or alcohol as a valued action.



After group members have explored ways of refusing that is linked to a move toward one's values, introduce the following skills training component as something to add to the *helper* part of the choice-point diagram. This skills training component should be presented as a *guide* or *orientation* to refusing offers of drink/drugs rather than a set of strict rules to follow. The behavioural impact of these pointers can be explored directly in the following skills practice exercise.

Facilitators should describe each component listed below and invite group members to consider the usefulness of each. The idea of a hierarchy of responses can be introduced to orient group members toward increasingly challenging offers of drink or drugs.

First offer:

**A clear 'No Thank-you'. Avoid vague answers or excuses.  
Be mindful of your eye-contact and body-language**

If the person does not have drugs/alcohol on them and not under the influence...

**Can consider purposefully changing the subject, or suggesting an alternative activity**

If the person does have drugs/alcohol on them, or is under the influence...

**Leave the situation as soon as you can**

If the person continues to offer drink or drugs...

**Ask the person to stop offering**

## Behavioural Skills practice: Refusal Skills

Learning new skills is best achieved through experiential means. ACT focusses on reducing rule-following in areas where rule-following creates insensitivity to natural consequences of actions. This (and other behavioural skills training exercises) should be approached as a behavioural commitment in the service of chosen values, while making room for the thoughts, emotions, and urges that are elicited in that situation. As such, behavioural

### Purpose:

To practice new refusal skills experientially

skills training may provide group members an opportunity to practice values based actions in a role play that evokes similar psychological triggers to those in similar contexts.

Facilitators may helpfully provide a rationale for engaging in behavioural skills practice using the swimming metaphor:

***“Supposing you it was important to you to learn to swim well. You go sit in a group and watch an in-depth power-point presentation instructing you how to swim at an Olympic standard. Would that achieve you’re goal? Of course not. Although it might orient you toward useful adjustments in your swimming stroke, you need to get in the water to feel what it’s like to move in the water. It is much the same with the skills we have been talking about. So I’d like to invite you to engage in an exercise where we kind of jump in the water with these skills.”***

Break the group into diads or triads (depending on group size). Have each diad decide upon who will take the role of *offerer* and who will take the role of *refuser* (if facilitators are working with triads, also assign an *observer* role).

Have *refusers* brief the *offerers* how their most likely offer would occur. Then to role-play that scenario between three to five times before swapping roles. Advise *offerers* to work with their partners and support their practice. With each iteration of practice, *offerers* can add a little more challenge to their response to give *refusers* an opportunity to practice refusing in more difficult scenarios.

After each iteration, have group members take a step outside the practice and discuss what they thought was effective and any areas that could be worked on. If *Observers* are used in the exercise, should contribute to this feedback process.

Facilitators should provide adequate time to practice, and then have group member's exchange roles.

After the skills practice, facilitators should bring the group back together and reflect on group member's experience of the exercise.

### Between Session Work – *Noticing Reasons I Give Myself and 'Mindfulness Practice'*

The between session work for this session invites group members to list the typical reasons, rationalisations, and justifications they give themselves to engage in substance use behaviours. Throughout the week, their between session task is to notice these thoughts and practice defusing from them. Group members are also encouraged to engage in daily mindfulness practice (any of the previous exercises introduced in this module). Whichever is chosen, the rationale is practicing 'unhooking' from thoughts and feelings, and practicing 'willingness' with those experiences.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *"What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?"*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *"How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?"*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *"What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?"*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

#### Purpose:

To practice the awareness of and defusion from reasons, rationalisations, and justifications.

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

They should also remind group members that next session is the start of the ACTIVE module. Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

## Mid-Week Contact



















Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session is the readiness of the mind to generate reasons, rationalisations, and justifications for action.
















Example text:

















***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Keep noticing the reasons we give ourselves for using drugs/alcohol, and practice making a free choice WITH those reasons, not FOR those reasons. All the best and see you Next Friday at 10am.”***




















### Purpose:























To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Mindfulness of the Breath						
Values Based Group Agreement						
How's it Working?						
Digging Out of a Hole						
Noticing Picking up the Shovel						
Body Scan						
High-Risk Situation Card Sort						

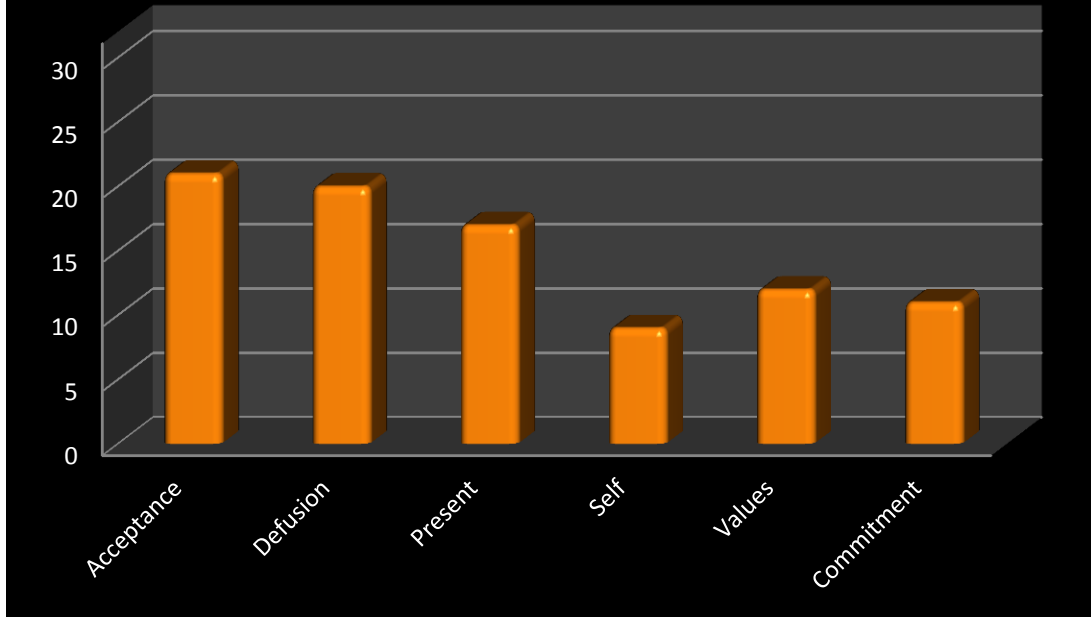
	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Passengers on the Bus						
What Have You Tried? How Has it Worked						
Feeding a Stray Dog						
What Are the Numbers?						
Advice From Older, Wiser Me						
Cubby-Holing						

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Values Card Sort						
Enacted Passengers on Bus						
Buying-into Thoughts vs Having Thoughts						
Lemon, Lemon, Lemon.						
Finding a Place to Sit						
Values Writing						

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Leaves on a Stream						
Choice-Point						
Tug of War With a Monster						
Defusion Strategies						
Impact of Evaluations						
Practicing Unhooking Thoughts						

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Physicalizing						
Reason-Giving and Substance Use						
Making a Free Choice						
Refusal Skills Choice Point						
Skills Practice						
Mindfulness Practice						
Noticing Reasons I Give Myself						

## Weighting of ACT Processes Targetted In OPEN Module



# Session Guides: 'ACTIVE' Module



ACT on Your Recovery

## Primary Objective

**Active** – *To activate behavioural commitments in line with valued directions such that life is restructured to compete with the reward of substance use. To train behavioural skills to facilitate valued actions*

## Supportive Objectives

**Open** – *To foster a more accepting and defused relationship with psychological barriers to valued living, including those that trigger substance use*

**Aware** – *To increase behavioural awareness of actions that move one toward or away from values*



# Session Six

## ‘Where Am I Heading?’

The ultimate aim of ACT is not to rid group members of distressing cravings, urges, emotions, and thoughts so that they might start to live a vital and meaningful life. It is to start living that life now. This shift can be challenging for those with a history of addiction. Substance use can damage valued life areas. Exploring valued directions can bring group members into contact with the pain of lost relationships, lost employment, lost contact with non-drug using friendships, and legal problems. It can be a challenge to allow oneself to explore what is truly wanted from life without also contacting those losses. Group members who have completed the OPEN module will have gained mindfulness and acceptance skills which will be valuable preparation for this work.

This first session aims to introduce values in an exploratory way. And, it seeks to situate valuing at the heart of recovery, rather than what happens after recovery.

### At a Glance:

- ❖ Mindfulness of the Breath
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Group Orientation
- ❖ Values Based Group Agreement
- ❖ Valued Life-Domains
- ❖ The Miracle Question
- ❖ Jigsaw Metaphor
- ❖ Attending Your 30 Year Recovery Celebration
- ❖ Valued Domains: rating importance and possibility
  
- ❖ Between Session Work: *‘Reflecting on Valued Life Areas’ and ‘Noticing Meaningful Actions’*

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Mindfully Noticing the Breath*

Facilitators should allow the first 15 minutes of the group to allow group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, facilitators can bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. The session should begin with a brief mindfulness exercise and the following rationale provided:

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment

***“I’d like to suggest beginning our group today with a brief centering exercise. It is quite normal to come to group with things on our mind, and those distractions can sometimes pull our attention to life outside this room. The aim of this exercise isn’t to get rid of the concerns or distractions we may have, but to give ourselves the opportunity to bring ourselves into the here and now so we can make the best use of the next two hours together.”***

Facilitators should proceed to group members to settle into a relaxed but alert posture, and allowing their eyes to close. Group members can be invited to bring their awareness to the sensations of breathing and to follow the flow of these sensation moment to moment. Facilitators should advise group members that it is common for the mind to wander into thought or distraction, and that this is normal. Part of the practice in this exercise is to notice when this has happened and gently return their attention back to the breath as many times as they need to.

Following the exercise, which should last approximately five minutes, facilitators may debrief group members’ experiences of the exercise or move directly into the check-in.

## Brief Group Check-In

Facilitators should proceed to conduct a group round, inviting each members to introduce themselves and offer a few words about why they have decided to attend the group.

Once this is completed, introduce the aims of the Group:

- ✓ **To bring into focus meaningful life directions**
- ✓ **To explore ways of overcoming barriers to living a valued life**
- ✓ **To provide a space in life where we can focus on actions, both large and small, that move us toward a valued life**

Where possible, draw links between the aim of the group, as described above, and the relevance of these aims to the goals that group members have described previously.

Facilitators should also discuss the style of the group. Being open about what group members will be invited to participate in is important because it allows the opportunity for informed consent regarding participation. The following points may be presented:

- **The group is a mix of structured exercises, group discussion, experiential and exploration exercises, and skills practice.**
- **Our aim is not to ‘teach’ you ‘what to do’. Instead we encourage you to trust your direct experience of what works or doesn’t work to move you forward in your recovery.**
- **There is a strong focus on what is happening in the here and now. Although we will inevitably talk about what has happened in the past and what might happen in the future, as facilitators, we may encourage you to slow down and notice whatever is showing up for you in the here and now.**

### Purpose:

To introduce group members to each other and explore their motivations for participating

## Values Based Group Agreement

As discussed previously in the OPEN module, many group agreements look like a list of rules to follow, or unacceptable behaviours to prohibit. In this group, facilitators should strive to construct a group agreement that reflects what is important to group members in the way they interact with each other. Facilitators should elicit examples of behaviours which are consistent with what's important (e.g., if 'being respectful of others' is suggested, asking the group to consider how that might be recognized in our own and others actions, or in what situations would that be most important). If specific behaviours are offered, list these, but also explore what makes that important (e.g., if 'maintaining confidentiality' is suggested, facilitators might ask the group to consider what maintaining confidentiality aims to achieve in our interactions).

Prompts to Consider:

- ✓ **Participation in group activities**
- ✓ **How to approach different points of view**
- ✓ **Issues of confidentiality**
- ✓ **Attendance/punctuality/lateness**
- ✓ **Attending under the influence**
- ✓ **When we are upset (e.g., not leaving the room, being prepared to make room for discomfort)**
- ✓ **When others are upset (e.g., no rescuing, be mindful of our urge to solve other's problems)**
- ✓ **Mobile phones/needing to take calls during the group**

### Purpose:

To clarify what is important to clients in their interactions on this group and consider behaviours which reflect those values

Facilitators might consider phrasing the group agreement in the positive (what group members will do as opposed to what they won't do) where possible.

Remember that group facilitators should consider themselves a part of the group too. This means that facilitators might also make suggestions that are meaningful to them personally. Write the group agreement on flipchart and keep in a visible place each session for the remainder of the module.

Ask group for a verbal commitment to the group agreement, and inform the group that, as facilitator, part of your role is to advocate for the group's working agreement.

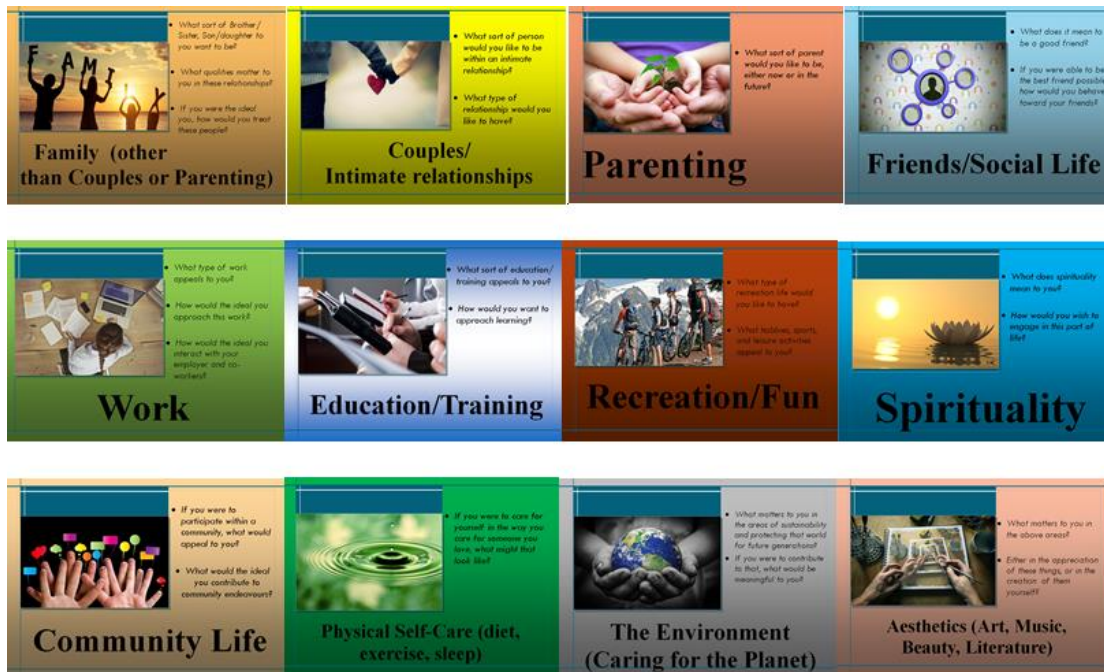
## Valued Domains: Exploring Effects of Substance Use?

After discussing what is important to group members in their group interactions, facilitators should lay out the life-domain cards on the floor. Facilitators can introduce the intended discussion in the following way.

### Purpose:

To evoke exploration of the impact substance use has had on valued life areas?

**“These cards describe a number of areas of life that are important to some people. I’d invite you to consider which areas of life are meaningful to you? And, which areas have been most affected by substance use? In a moment, I’ll invite you to choose two life areas that stand out to you. You may find some areas stand out to you because they have sweetness to them, others may stand out because they have a sourness to them. Let these guide you in the life areas you select. Who would be willing to go first and pick up two cards?”**



Facilitators should conduct a group round inviting each member in turn to select two life areas and share what drew them to that life area, and the ways that that life area has been affected by their substance use. Facilitators might ask:

- ✓ *“What consequences of your substance use led you to select those life areas?”*
- ✓ *“How has your engagement in that life area changed as a result of your substance use?”*
- ✓ *“On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is minimal impact, and 10 is about as much impact as you can imagine, what number reflects the effect your substance use has had on this life area?”*
- ✓ *“What do you think someone close to you would say about the way you have engaged in this life area? What changes might they have noticed as a result of your substance use?”*

## The Miracle Question

The previous exercise is intended to bring into the room the ways in which substance use has interfered with living a valued life. This sets a context for considering the miracle question. The miracle question originates from Solution Focussed Therapy<sup>40</sup>. This question is a great starting point to begin discussing values. As group members describe what their solution scenario is, their responses likely reflect their values (however facilitators should still be mindful of pliance and avoidant tracking in group members' responses).

Advise the group that you are going to ask a strange question, one that requires their imagination. Moreover, you'd like them to approach the question with curiosity. The miracle question is as follows:

**“Suppose our group today ends, you do whatever you planned to do for the rest of the day. And then, sometime in the evening, you get tired and go to sleep. And in the middle of the night, when you are sound asleep, a miracle happens and the problem that brought you here today is solved just like that. But since the miracle happened overnight you don't know that the miracle has happened. When you wake up the next morning, how are you going to start discovering that the miracle happened? What else are you going to notice? What else? And what else?”**

Explore with the group those changes, no matter how big or small, that characterize their solution scenario. Facilitators should pay particular attention to overt behaviours, and the possible values they serve. If group members report that their thoughts, emotions, urges, or

<sup>40</sup> De Shazer, S., & Dolan, Y. (2012). *More than miracles: The state of the art of solution-focused brief therapy*. Routledge.

### Purpose:

To evoke a conversation that is focussed on how group members will be engaging in life if their addiction problems disappeared

sensations would be different, facilitators should simply acknowledge that such a change would be a nice outcome, and proceed to ask, *“If that were the case, what might you notice yourself doing that you are not doing now?”* Some group members may respond better to perspective taking versions of this questions (e.g., what would your friend/partner/child/work colleagues/other members of this group see you doing that would let them know this miracle had happened?). Facilitators should write up contributions on the flip chart.

## The Jigsaw Metaphor

A common response to problems in life is to postpone life until one’s problems are resolved. The jigsaw metaphor helps reframe this such that that engagement in life is integral to one’s recovery. It also emphasizes the general approach of restructuring life to support abstinence from drugs/alcohol.

### Purpose:

To highlight the importance of restructuring life around changes to substance use

**“Think of your life like a table full of jigsaw pieces. Perhaps, jigsaw pieces from several boxes, all mixed up. In the beginning, building this jigsaw can be pretty exciting; imagining possible pictures you could create with these pieces, and finding interesting looking pieces to add to the picture you’re creating. Of course, the shape of the pieces we choose dictate the shape of the pieces that fit with it. You might reflect on how drugs and alcohol have limited the shape of other pieces of life you can fit into the picture. As the big picture builds, we may find pieces we wish we could fit into this picture, but it becomes less and less clear how they would fit. So, maybe we decide to take the drug and alcohol piece out of the picture...”**

The following discussion points may be written up on a flipchart:

❖ **What's the danger in only taking the drug or alcohol piece out?**

*Perhaps we remove the drug and alcohol piece out. We stop using. Notice that this then leaves a gap in our life space that is easy to fill with drugs and alcohol. It might leave us feeling as though our life is missing something that can only be fulfilled by drugs and alcohol. But, notice how the shape of this gap is dictated by the pieces around it. Some people use the term 'dry drunk' for this situation.*

❖ **What is the benefit of actively changing other pieces in the jigsaw?**

*If were to actively change some of the pieces around this gap, notice what happens: The shape changes. Restructuring life to support abstinence or moderated drinking leads to a situation where, if we're tempted to pick up the piece of drugs or alcohol, it's not as easy to fit it in.*

❖ **What are the barriers to breaking down the old picture to make room for new pieces?**

*Several barriers might be noticeable. Notice what it feels like to lose sight of the old picture? Notice what might be difficult about having two different half made pictures going on at the same time? Notice that there may be concerns that we could successfully build a new picture? In all likelihood, the process will feel worse before it feels better.*

❖ **How might your values be useful in choosing different shaped pieces to restructure life?**

*Although restructuring life invariably helps with your drug and alcohol goals, there is a bigger game to play: Creating a picture that works for you. That, it could be argued is the essence of recovery. Your values can help you select jigsaw pieces that build a different picture*

## Attending Your 30 Year Recovery Celebration

### Purpose:

To help group members experientially contact values

This exercise aims to bring group members into experiential contact with their values. The traditional version of this exercise is to have group members imagine attending their own funeral, and if they could choose what people remembered them for, what would they want them to say. This version has been adopted because, as a first session experiential exercise, the funeral scenario can be quite emotive. If particular group members respond strongly to this imagery, it can detract from their connection with values. The image of a recovery celebration conveys a sense of growth as a result of changing their substance use, and allows facilitators to utilize values as the *directions that define recovery*.

Facilitators might introduce the exercise as follows:

**“I’d like to invite you into an exercise. This will be an eyes-closed type of exercise aimed at bringing into focus what makes your recovery meaningful. Where we stand to take a look at things can make a big difference in what we see. So, in this exercise, I’d like us to take a position some thirty years in the future, where many people close to you have organised a celebration to acknowledge your recovery. In this exercise, I’d invite you to consider what you want your recovery to stand for?”**

Invite consent from group members to engage in the exercise and encourage them to approach the exercise with openness and curiosity.

**“Allowing yourself to gently close your eyes. And, on the very next breath just paying attention to the sensations of breathing. Noticing the temperature of that breath; how the in breath is a little cooler than the outbreath. Following the breath as it enters and leaves the body, perhaps catching that moment, that place at the top and bottom of the breath where it just breathing hangs, or rests. And, taking your awareness within your body, becoming aware of the places that your body touch the chair. Maybe exploring one of these areas of pressure and noticing the temperature of that pressure. The differences in temperature at the places around that area pressure. Allowing your breath to reach into these areas.**

**And as if your consciousness could travel forward in time and look out from the eyes of an older you. Seeing people are sat around you; people that you know in your life. Looking into the expressions on their faces, the look of acknowledgement of how far you have come. Their wish to celebrate thirty years in recovery. And allowing yourself to consider that letting go of drink or drugs has been like letting go of a stone held over a still lake; you felt the weight of that burden fall away from your life. And, is it did so, it rippled out, spreading, felt clearly in the lives of everyone here. Ripples that broke the clear reflection of that familiar face looking back. Ever so gradually calming into waters that reflect the face looking back at each person here, celebrating thirty years of recovery.**

**These people wish to acknowledge the changes they have seen you make. To let you know how you have touched their lives.**

**And, here’s the thing...since this is your celebration, you get to choose what they’d say. So if you could allow yourself to hear what you would want these people to say on this day, what would that be?”**

[Continued...]

“...So taking this moment to cast your gaze into the eyes of some of people here at this celebration. Seeing if you can noticing who you turn toward with a sense of connection. And, letting yourself hear what you’d want them to acknowledge about you, and the ways you have touched their life?

If there is a sense of difficulty hearing that, see if there isn’t something important to be noticed there.

(Pause for 20 seconds to allow space to connect with the experience)

And, maybe reaching out to touch this person on the shoulder. And letting your eyes move away to see the faces of others here today. Seeing if you can notice who’s eyes you find yourself connecting with yours. And, letting yourself hear what you’d want them to acknowledge about you, and the ways you have touched their life?

If there is some sadness in these moments, seeing if you can make room for that

(Pause for 20 seconds to allow space to connect with the experience)

And, maybe reaching out to touch this person on the shoulder. And letting your eyes move away to see the faces of others here. Casting your eyes from one side of the room to the other.

And just letting that image dissolve. Gently showing up in this room, noticing the positions of your arms and legs as you sit in your chair. Becoming aware of the temperature of the air on your skin. And, ever so gently, letting your eyes open.”

Facilitators should invite group members to explore what stood out to them in this exercise.

Useful questions include:

- ✓ ***“What was there to be noticed in this exercise?”***
- ✓ ***“Who stood out as having felt changes in their own life as a result of your recovery? What was that like for you to see that?”***
- ✓ ***“If the words people said were like the North Star, something to help navigate by, what do they guide you to do more of?”***

The aim is to help group members articulate the values they connected with. Often, this is directly expressed as in the words of others at the recovery celebration (e.g., she was kind and supportive). However, facilitators may pay attention to other aspects of the exercise that point toward group members' values. The following dialogue illustrates this:

**Facilitator:** *“What was there to be noticed in this exercise?”*

**Group Member:** *“Hardly anyone was there.”*

**Facilitator:** *“What did you notice yourself feeling as you saw there weren't many people there?”*

**Group Member:** *“I felt sad. Kind of angry at myself.”*

**Facilitator:** *“Sometimes our pain is like a teacher; it tells us something important. Let me ask a strange question, What would you have to not care about to not feel sad and angry at the lack of people showing up to your recovery celebration?”*

**Group Member:** *“I guess I'd have to not care about people standing by me.”*

**Facilitator:** *“What makes a meaningful friendship or relationship is they stand by you, their reliable, or loyal.”*

*[Continued...]*

**Group member:** *“Yes, loyalty is so important.”*

**Facilitator:** *“When others are loyal to you, stand by you, that’s has a sense of importance. I wonder if that works as a two-way street? Is there that same sense of importance when you have been loyal to your family and friends.”*

**Group Member:** *“But I haven’t been that loyal, really. I’m always letting people down.”*

**Facilitator:** *“What do you feel when you notice yourself letting people down?”*

**Group member:** *“Angry at myself, and sadness...wait! I just realised that’s how I feel about others not being loyal.”*

**Facilitator:** *“What if your anger and sadness are pointing you in a direction? If, at your recovery celebration in thirty years’ time, people acknowledged you as having been a loyal friend, what would that mean to you?”*

This dialogue illustrates what is often said in ACT: *“In our pain we find our values, and in our values we find our pain.”* The facilitator recognised that the group member’s pain and discomfort likely reflected their values. By approaching and exploring that discomfort, the group member became better able to articulate what was important to them in the area of relationships and friendships.

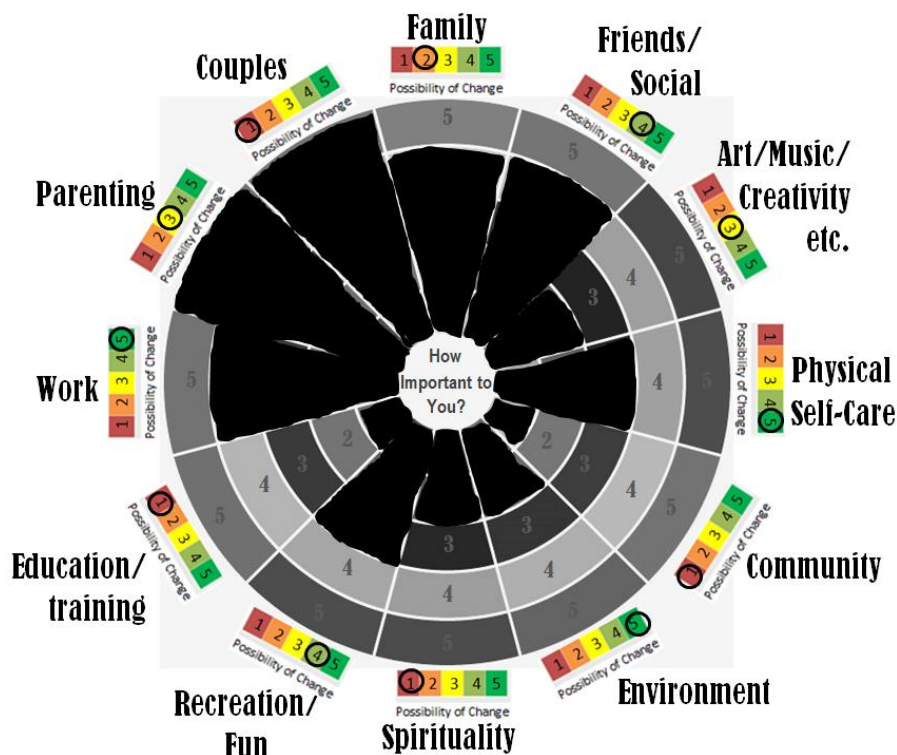
## Valued Domains: Rating Importance and Possibility

The final exercise in this session is to have group members rate the twelve life areas introduced in this session in terms of their importance and the perceived possibility of meaningful change occurring. These two factors are used to guide group members to select four life areas to focus on over the following sessions of this module.

Hand out the Life Wheel Worksheet and have group members complete each of the ratings. Importance is rated by filling in each segment; the more important the life area, the more fully it is shaded in. Possibility of meaningful change occurring is rated on a traffic light system; the red end of the scale indicates a perceived difficulty in moving forward in that area of life, the green end indicates a perceived ease in making changes in that life area.

### Purpose:

To consider which areas of life are important, and rate the possibility of change occurring in those areas.



Facilitators should advise group members to select four life areas they wish to work on over the course of this module. They might be encouraged to choose life areas that have been rated important and where there is a perceived possibility of meaningful change happening. Beginning with these life areas offers a good chance of developing reinforcing behaviour patterns which set the stage to address for approaching important life areas assessed as low possibility of change.

### Between Session Work – ‘Reflecting on Valued Life Areas’ and ‘Noticing Meaningful Actions’

Facilitators should hand out the between-session work and describe the suggested exercises. The aim in these exercises is for group members to increase the clarity of their values and begin to notice actions (and opportunities to act) in accordance with their values.

Facilitators should dedicate time to explore what **benefits** group members can see in investing time with the tasks (e.g., *“What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?”*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *“How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?”*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *“What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?”*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

#### Purpose:

To foster greater awareness of overlooked values consistent actions, and increase clarity of valued directions

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session was to begin clarifying values.

Example text:

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Keep noticing your actions in valued life areas this week. Which actions move you toward your recovery celebration in 30 years? Which move you away. All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

## At a Glance:

- ❖ The Sweet-Spot Exercise
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Review of Between Session Work
- ❖ Skiing Metaphor: Distinguishing Values from Goals and Feelings
- ❖ Life Compass
- ❖ Values Bullseye
- ❖ Values Commitment
  
- ❖ Between Session Work: *'Values, Goals, and Barriers' and 'What Breathing Can Teach You About Commitment'*

# Session Seven

## 'Setting a Course'

This second session of the ACTIVE module seeks to build upon last session's introduction to values. The session begins with a reorientation to valuing through the Sweet-Spot exercise. This aids the discussion of noticing valued actions in the previous week. The intention of this between-session work is to help group members begin to frame actions as examples of personal values. Many actions may be overlooked, and facilitators can support that process in the between session work review.

The skiing metaphor is introduced to help clarify the distinguishing features of values: Direction, distinct from goals, and distinct from feelings. Group members are supported to develop values narratives in chosen valued life areas. With a clearer view on valued directions, the values bullseye exercise is used to explore how consistently one's actions are in relation to values. This exercise helps 'develop discrepancy', an important driver of change within Motivational Interviewing. This motivational work sets the stage of for identifying a commitment this week which moves them in the directions on a chosen value. A secondary commitment is made to substance use depending on the way it functions as a barrier to this valued action.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Sweet-Spot Exercise*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group to allow group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Provide a rationale for engaging in a brief mindfulness exercise along the lines of that suggested below:

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment. To contact a moment connected to one's personal values

***“I’d like to suggest beginning our group today with a brief centering exercise. It is quite normal to come to group with things on our mind, and those distractions can sometimes pull our attention to life outside this room. The aim of this exercise isn’t to get rid of the concerns or distractions we may have, but to give ourselves the opportunity to bring ourselves into the here and now so we can make the best use of the next two hours together. Last session we spent time exploring areas of life that are meaningful to us. This exercise will help us find that place where we left off last week.”***

Before beginning the exercise, have group members arrange themselves into pairs, usually this will be the person sitting next to them. Let them know that the exercise will involve getting in touch with a sweet moment in life; a moment where they felt truly alive and connected. At the end of the exercise, you’ll invite them to turn to their partner and give voice to that sweet moment. There is no need to explain why the moment was sweet, just told in a way that the other person will ‘get it’. For those listening, there’s no need to try to interpret that sweet

moment or figure out why it was sweet, just to appreciate the sweetness of that moment.

“Let’s start by settling into the exercise. Allowing your eyes to gently close. I’d like you to begin by noticing the different sounds in this room. You might imagine that you have a checklist, and as you turn toward the most prominent sounds, just noticing them and check them off the list. Seeing if you can listen for smaller, more subtle sounds. Checking these off your list, and so on. And, breathe. Beginning to draw your attention to your own body. Noticing those places where your body makes contact with the floor and the chair. And, breathe. Noticing, especially, the little places where you can feel the edges that contact. Seeing if, in your mind’s eye, you can trace that edge between the places that contact the chair and the places that don’t. And, breathe.

And, I’d like you to imagine that in front of you there is a filing cabinet. In the filing cabinet there are photographs. Letting yourself reach over, open the drawer, reach in and take out a picture of you during that sweet moment. Letting yourself notice the sensations in your fingertips as you hold that photograph. Let yourself look into that face of yours in that picture and notice the details surrounding you. Noticing the look in your eyes; the way you are holding your body.

And now, I want you to imagine that your awareness is some sort of liquid that can be poured into that *you* in that picture. So, imagine that your awareness is beginning to pour into the skin of that *you in that very moment*. See if you can let yourself emerge in that place at that particular moment. Imagine opening your eyes in that place; seeing what you see there. Letting yourself notice the sensations that you feel on your skin; the smells and sounds that are in this sweet moment. Let it be as if you could just breathe that moment in and out; feeling the aliveness in that moment. As if each breath filled you with that sweetness. Just taking this a moment to soak in that moment.

And now, I’m going to ask you to gently let your eyes open. To look at the person sat next to you; a person who has known sweetness, too. And, when you’re ready, beginning to speak and give expression to that sweetness.”

Allow sufficient time for one group member to describe their sweet moment to the other. Then ask all group members to let their eyes close and reconnect with the sweet moment. Then, instruct group members to open their eyes and the other group member give voice to their sweet moment.

Explore group member's experiences of the exercise and sense of connection with their partner.

- ✓ ***“What did you notice come up in that exercise?”***
- ✓ ***“In addition to the sweetness, did you notice any sourness too? Where did you notice yourself doing with that”***
- ✓ ***“What did you notice in the experience of sharing your sweet moment? What was your sense of connection with the other person?”***

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Complete a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and describe how they are using a couple of words.

During this group round, proceed to explore what group members noticed in their between session work. Last sessions between session work was to complete the *‘Noticing Meaningful Actions’*, and *‘Looking Back at My Substance Use’* exercises.

In reviewing the *‘Noticing Meaningful Actions’* exercise, facilitators should aim to support group members to verbalize the value that their actions instantiate. The following dialogue illustrates how this might be accomplished.

### Purpose:

To reflect on Valued Actions in the previous week. To explore the effect of substance use on valuing

**Facilitator:** *“What did you make important this week?”*

**Group member:** *“I visited my family. I wrote that on the form.”*

**Facilitator:** *“Visiting family was meaningful activity for you. Fantastic. What did visiting family contribute to in terms of your family relationships?”*

**Group Member:** *“I guess I’ve been distant from my family over the past few years. It’s nice to spend time with them.”*

**Facilitator:** *“I’m hearing that you value being involved in your family, and visiting them this week was an action that moved you toward that value. Am I catching that right?”*

**Group member:** *“Exactly.”*

**Facilitator:** *“have you noticed any other actions you’ve taken that contributed to building close family relationships?”*

This short dialogue illustrates the facilitator drawing out from the group member the value that the action of visiting family instantiates. By inquiring about other actions that serve the same value, the facilitator is increasing awareness of meaning and purpose behind multiple actions. These discussions will set the stage for introducing the skiing metaphor. This is used to clarify values as distinct from goals and feelings.

## The Skiing metaphor

It is helpful to have the ski slope and lodge drawn up on the flipchart. The skiing metaphor illustrates the distinction between values (as a process of engagement) and goals (an outcome to achieve). The aim is to orient group members to prioritize flexible engagement in valued directions rather than rigid adherence to goals. In ACT, this is sometimes described with the phrase, *'Goals are the Process Whereby Process becomes the Goal'*. The skiing metaphor can also be used to emphasise that values are a quality of actions rather than a feeling about things in life.

### Purpose:

To distinguish values from goals and feelings

***"So, we've been talking about actions that have meaning to them. See if it isn't the case that some actions and goals move us in directions that are important to us, while other actions and goals move us away from what is important to us. In this group, we sometimes call these our 'values' or valued directions'. I'd like to spend a bit of time being clear about what values are and what they are distinct from, if that's OK.***

***Let's imagine there's this ski slope. And, at the top of this ski slope I bump into you and happen to ask, 'Where are you heading?' You point down to some way down the ski slope and say, 'I'm going to that lodge down there.'***

***Now, suppose I then say, 'Brilliant, I can help with that!' And, I put you in a helicopter and fly you down to the lodge. So you got to where you want to go, but is there anything missing?"***

Group members will typically see the point that they are not there to have helicopter rides, they are there to ski. Facilitators can help group members appreciate the idea that it is the action of skiing that is important, rather than getting to the lodge. In the same way, engagement

in valued actions is more important than achieving a particular outcome. The following questions can help group members explore this:

- ✓ What would you gain if you spent the day skiing but don't reach the lodge?
- ✓ What would you lose out if halfway down the slopes you saw an amazing place to ski but it didn't exactly take to the lodge you were planning to head to?
- ✓ What would the experience of skiing be like if you spent the whole time imagining how warm it is going to be in front of the fire at the lodge? And, what if, on the way you got lost, what would that be like? (This question can highlight a downside of goals: it can make us dissatisfied with the present).

*“So there will be many opportunities within this group to consider the ways you want to ski. We may consider what lodge we want to use as a landmark to aim toward, but the heart of what we are aiming at is doing is skiing in a direction. That’s the distinction between goals and values. Organising a celebration for a family member is a goal, you can tick that off and get it done. But what gives that action meaning is maybe the value ‘building close family relationships’. That’s more like a direction, it can’t be ticked off; it is instantiated in the many twists, turns, and pushes someone does as they ski.*

*So, let’s say you choose a direction to ski in and the first day, it feels great to ski. You feel really exhilarated and alive, but don’t get to the lodge. So you carry on skiing the next day, but that day, it feels frustrating, you don’t reach the lodge and you wonder if you should even ski again. The day after that, you ski well, you feel calm and relaxed and reach the lodge. Which of these days are you moving in a meaningful direction?”*

The metaphor can be elaborated to highlight that the distinction between values-as-actions and values-as-feelings.

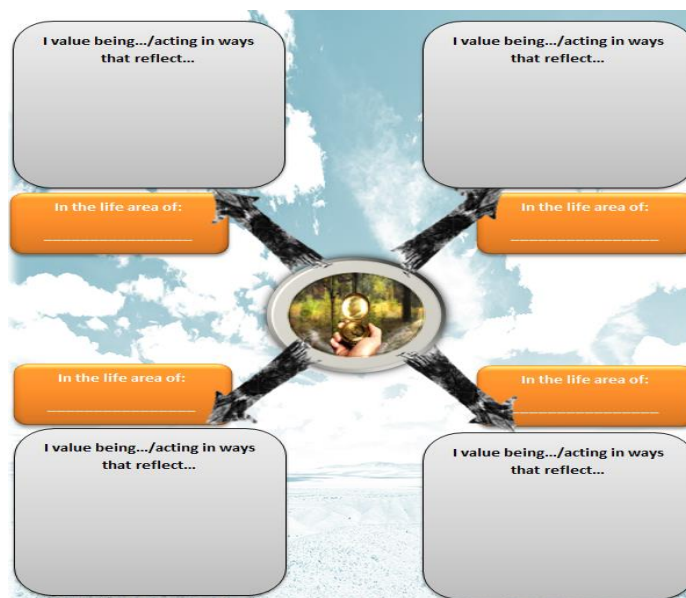
The answer, of course, is that one is moving toward what is important regardless of how one feels. It is important to emphasise this point because group members may feel passionate about what they value, or excited about doing something meaningful, but valuing is an action. One can engage in that action regardless of how one thinks or feels.

## Life Compass

Facilitators should reintroduce the life-domain cards introduced last session. These cards will remind group members of the life areas previously discussed, and of which each selected four they wished to work on in the course of the ACTIVE module. These cards have a number of questions on them which are useful prompts to help group members generate values narratives in their four life areas.

### Purpose:

To clarify valued directions in the four life areas selected last session



Once the life-domain cards have been laid out visible in the room, facilitators should distribute the life-compass worksheet and invite group members to spend time writing brief values narratives in each of the four areas.

Once this exercise has been completed, invite group members to share any reflections about their life compass. Once the group has shared about this exercise, proceed to introduce the Values Bullseye worksheet.

## Values Bullseye

The Values Bullseye worksheet aims to have group members self-assess how consistently their actions reflect their values. It uses the common-sense image of a dart-board; the bullseye indicates their actions are 'on-target' with what's important, further out on the board indicates most behaviours are values inconsistent. The task of each group members is to place four darts on the dart board, one for each life area. Facilitators should emphasise using their values narratives identified in the life-compass exercise.

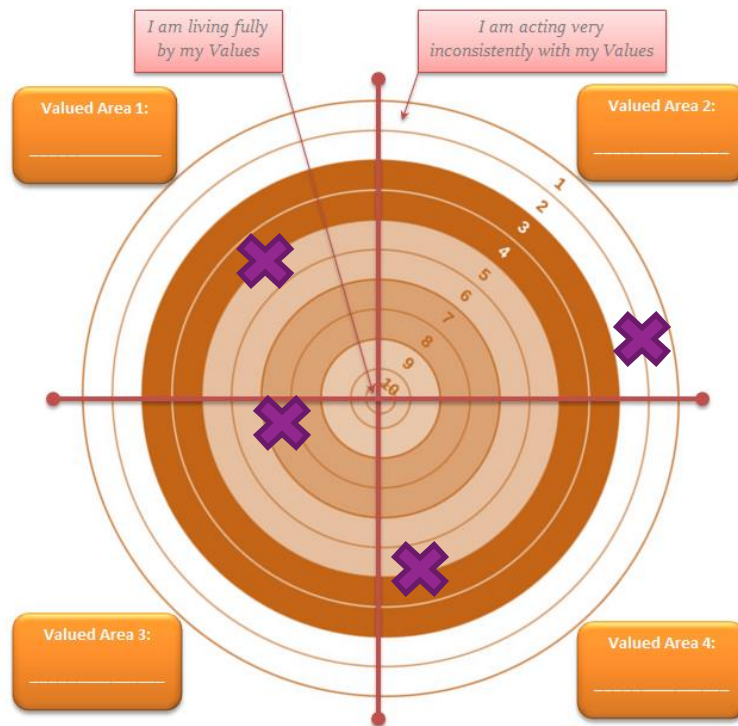
Have group members do this exercise in pairs. Instruct group members to help the other person appreciate why they are placing the dart where they are in each life area.

Once the exercise is complete, time should be provided to allow group members to reflect on the exercise. The following questions may be helpful:

- ✓ ***“What thoughts or emotions did you notice showing up as you were placing your darts?”***
- ✓ ***“What allowed you to place the dart where you did, and not further out on the dart board?”***

### Purpose:

To rate consistency in acting in accordance with chosen values. To set the stage for developing a values consistent behavioural commitment



Facilitators should collect back the values-bullseye worksheets to assess progress over the following weeks. Each week, group members will be asked to complete a new values bullseye. This information can be provided back to group members at the end of the module (or provided to their keyworker to support between session one-to-one support).

## Setting a Values Commitment

Invite group members to consider which of the four life areas they would be willing to 'ski' in this week. Provide the Valued Action form to complete (this is based on the skiing metaphor introduced this session. This allows group members to consider an outcome they would like

### Purpose:

To identify a behavioural commitment for the coming week which moves group members in a valued direction

to work towards (the lodge) and the actions they would need to engage in to move toward the lodge (skiing).

Group members are asked to consider whether drink or drug use would help or hinder their skiing, and to set a secondary commitment to their substance use.

Facilitators should conduct a group round, inviting group members to publicly share their valued action for the week. Group members should make a note of these actions (e.g., on the flipchart) so that they can be reviewed next session.

### Between Session Work – ‘Values, Goals, and Barriers’ and ‘What Breathing Can Teach You About Commitment’

Hand out the between session work and describe the exercises. Besides their values commitment, group members are invited to consider goals linked to their values in their four life areas, and identify barriers. A simple breathing exercise is provided with reflection on the defining features of commitment. This exercise helps group members see commitment as a present moment decision to turn toward one’s values, rather than a promise to achieve a future outcome.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *“What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?”*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *“How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?”*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

#### Purpose:

To identify goals and barriers linked to valued directions. To teach commitment as a process not an outcome

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., “*What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?*”) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members’ attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session was to begin clarifying values.

Example text:

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. All the best with your valued action this week, keep looking for opportunities to ski! All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Mindfulness of Sound, Breath, and Sensations
- ❖ Values Bullseye
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Review of Between Session Work
- ❖ Values Commitment
- ❖ Problem Solving Strategy
- ❖ Don't Think of a Chair
- ❖ Polygraph metaphor
- ❖ Unwanted Guest at a Party Metaphor (Video)
- ❖ Between Session Work: *'Using IDEAS CAN in the Week.'* and *'Taking a Mindful Walk'*

# Session Eight

## 'Dealing With Obstacles'

In the third session of this module, the topic of barriers becomes a focus. Group members have spent the last two sessions clarifying values, increasing awareness of valued actions, and setting values commitments. Barriers to values commitments are likely to be increasingly prominent; some of which may be discussed during the review of between-session work.

The aim of this session is to orient group members to two distinct approaches to dealing with barriers to valued actions. These approaches depend upon whether those barriers exist in the world around them (situational barriers/arrangements of the world around them) or in the world within them (unwanted thoughts, emotions, urges, and sensations/psychological barriers). For the former, a *problem solving strategy* is taught to help group members generate a broad range of values consistent behavioural responses that are selected based on their workability. For the latter, psychological barriers, group members are exposed to a 'creativity lite', emphasising the paradox of trying to control unwanted psychological experiences. These are both introduced within the context of values commitments for the upcoming week.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Sounds, Breath, and Sensations*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group for group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Engage the group members in a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside the distractions we tend to bring into session so we can make the most of the time in group.

Invite group members to close their eyes and bring their awareness to sounds outside the room. After a minute or so, guide them to notice sounds within the room, and eventually to the sounds associated with their own breathing. Finally, have them get in touch with physical sensations associated with sitting in their seat.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

## Values-Bullseye

Prior to the check-in and between-session work review, hand out the values bullseye forms and have group members place darts in the four life areas they identified last session. Facilitators may benefit from creating prepared values bullseye forms in preparation for this session with the chosen life domains, values narratives, and last week's dart positions already added. Having group members complete these prior to the between-session work review will allow them to reflect on whether their actions this week were more or less on target with their values.

### Purpose:

To rate consistency of actions in line with values for the previous week

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Conduct a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and to describe how they are using only a couple of words.

Proceed to explore what group members noticed in their between session work. Last sessions between session work was to complete the *'Values, Goals, and Barriers'* exercise, and the *'What Breathing Can Teach You about Commitment'* exercise. In addition, group members set themselves a valued action. Facilitators should start by reviewing each group member's valued action and group members' experiences of that action.

In reviewing group members valued actions, facilitators should seek to first clarify whether group members engaged in their valued action. If they have, facilitators should proceed to evoke descriptions of experiences associated with engagement in that action, and reinforce ACT processes where noted (e.g., defusion from thoughts, acceptance of emotions, recommitting to one's values when off course etc.). If group members' did not complete the valued action, facilitators should non-judgementally explore and identify barriers to the valued action. Group members should be encouraged to notice their responses to these barriers and assess their workability (i.e., *"does that action move you toward or away from your valued direction?"*).

Once values commitments have been reviewed, inquire about what group members noticed in the between-session exercises. Both exercises have a focus on barriers to valued actions, and discussing these will set the stage for the remainder of this session.

### Purpose:

To reflect on Valued Actions in the previous week.

## Problem Solving Strategy

Over time, many people's behavioural repertoires can become excessively narrowed such that substance use is the primary, overgeneralized response to dealing with life problems. The consequences of impulsive and avoidant behaviour patterns can lead to deficits in skills associated with considering behavioural options when dealing with situational barriers to valued action. Furthermore, alcohol and drug use has the potential to impair executive functioning, with cognitive functioning exhibiting deficits for up to a year into recovery<sup>41</sup>. Teaching problem solving strategies is used in other evidenced based addiction treatments (e.g., Community Reinforcement Approach, Relapse Prevention, Behavioural Couples Therapy), and is used here to broaden behavioural responses to life problems and identify values consistent actions to address them.

Much of ACT is targeted at helping group members let go of unworkable attempts at problem solving, so it may seem odd to include a problem solving component. The type of problem solving addressed in ACT is typically that which is avoidance based, and focussed on eliminating unwanted psychological experiences. Here, problem solving is introduced as a strategy to broaden behavioural repertoires and actively approach barriers to valued living.

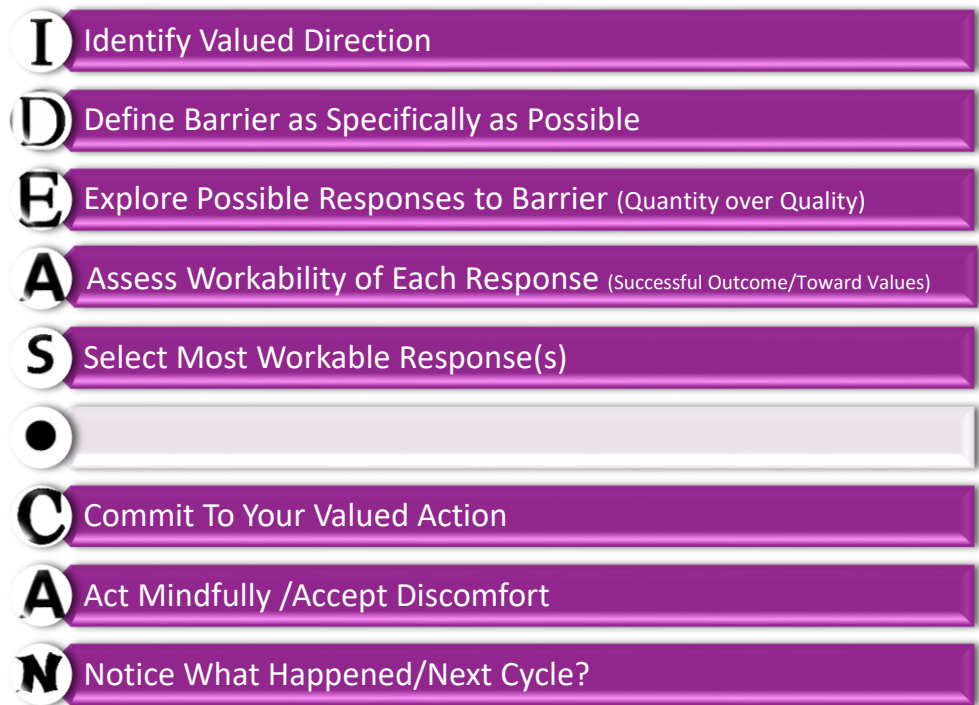
Facilitators should begin by introducing the 'IDEAS CAN' acronym and explore the rationale for each step. Following this, group members should ask group members to select a life area from their values bullseye they wish to work on this week. Facilitators should suggest they consider selecting a life area where they are currently experiencing a problem or barrier to moving forward in that area of life.

The group can be split into dyads so that there is an opportunity for group members to support each other as they work through the first half of the 'IDEAS CAN' problem solving strategy.

### Purpose:

To teach group members problem solving strategy as a way of broadening behavioural repertoire

<sup>41</sup> Stavro, K., Pelletier, J., & Potvin, S. (2013). Widespread and sustained cognitive deficits in alcoholism: a meta-analysis. *Addiction biology*, 18(2), 203-213.



The rationale for each step is as follows:

- ❖ **Identify Valued Direction:** This places the barrier in context and emphasises the direction by which the barrier is approached.
- ❖ **Define barrier as Specifically as Possible:** Defining the barrier clearly and in concrete terms (rather than in vague and general terms) makes it easier to identify solutions that are context specific.
- ❖ **Explore Possible Responses to Barrier:** Brainstorm as many solutions as possible that may impact the barrier as defined. Emphasise that the quantity of options is most important at this stage. Quite often, our tendency to approach problems habitually can lead us to overlook potentially useful alternative courses of action. We may discount options because they appear to be the 'wrong' thing to do, are something 'we can't see ourselves doing', or feel they will elicit levels of discomfort we are unwilling to make

room for. For these reasons, avoid evaluating or judging those options until a range of possibilities have been recorded.

- ❖ **Assess Workability of Each response:** Once a menu of behavioural options has been generated, each can be assessed in terms of a) the likely impact on the identified barrier, and b) the degree to which that response moves one in the direction of their values.
- ❖ **Select Most Workable Response(s):** From the above steps, select the behavioural response (or combination of responses) that has been assessed as most workable.
- ❖ **Commit to Your Valued Action:** Once selected, see if you can make a commitment to that action. Maybe make a public commitment and tell someone else of your intention. Consider when and where you will take action.
- ❖ **Act Mindfully/Accept Discomfort:** When taking action, be present. Watch your experience. New responses can bring up unwanted thoughts and emotions; this doesn't indicate that the wrong option has been selected, it shows you are doing something new and meaningful.
- ❖ **Notice What Happened/Next Cycle?:** After your valued action, reflect on what happened. Explore what impact your actions had. It is important to review the effectiveness of your actions and learn from those experiences. If the barrier still remains, you can cycle through these steps again. Let your experiences guide you to determine your next steps which move you in the direction of your valued direction.

When group members have generated a values commitment from this strategy, facilitators can conduct a group round to share identified behavioural commitments. As part of this, facilitators may explore level of commitment to this action (e.g., by scaling commitment on a scale of 1-10), and/or eliciting thoughts, emotions, and urges which may present as additional barriers to this action.

## Don't Think of a 'CHAIR'

It is probable that at least a few group members will have come across the *Serenity Prayer*. This prayer is common within fellowship groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. By presenting this prayer and discussing with the group the possibility that there are two important approaches to dealing with barriers or problems we encounter.

### Purpose:

To demonstrate the paradox of control when applied to psychological experiences

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*"...grant me the serenity to accept the things I can't change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."*

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Have one group member stand up at one end of the room, and inform them that their job is to walk from one end of the room to the other. Place a chair in the middle of the room and say to the group something like, *"We have been exploring the part of the serenity prayer that is about the courage to change the things we can. I'd like you to imagine this chair is a barrier to moving in your valued direction. The presence of this barrier is just the way the world is currently arranged. But, it stands in the way of your valued direction. What I'd like you to do, is to walk toward your valued direction, and see if you can figure some way of getting rid of this barrier so you can keep on moving towards what's important."*

Have the group member do this task. They will likely walk around the chair, pick-it up and move it to one side, ask someone else to move it for them etc. Once they have done this, briefly reflect on what they did to keep moving toward what they valued. This will typically be summarised as:

---

*The Rule of Problem Solving*  
*Figure Out How to Get Rid of It, and Get  
Rid of It!*

---

Facilitators may discuss how larger barriers may require us to figure out specific ways to approach that barrier (e.g., using the 'IDEAS CAN' strategy).

Next, invite all group members to line up against the wall and walk to the other side (valued direction). Place the chair back in the middle of the room and say that once again the chair represents a barrier to your valued direction. This time, however, the barrier is not in the world around them, it will be within them: The thought of a chair.

The task for group members is to walk from one side of the room to the other. But, consistent with the rule of problems solving (figure out how to get rid of it, and get rid of it), they must get rid of the thought of a chair before they take a step forward. If, when they check, they are thinking of a chair, they need to stay stood still and work really hard to get rid of that thought.

The typical response to this exercise is a difficulty getting moving. The paradox of thought suppression is that it tends to amplify the frequency of the target thought. This is, in part, because the verbal rule constructed to eliminate the thought ("don't think about chairs"), in fact references the unwanted thought. Furthermore, to check if one is succeeding, one needs to check to see if the thought is there (e.g., by following the verbal rule, "Check to see if I thinking of a Chair?"), which tends to evoke the unwanted thought.

After a minute or so, interrupt the exercise and ask the group to reflect on their experience of suppressing unwanted thoughts. You might ask the group to consider that the same effect is likely to be the same for any thought, such as thoughts of using, doubts about our self, thoughts about how terrible things are, and so on.

If a group member says they succeeded in the task by thinking of something else, ask, “And how did you know that thinking of X was what I asked you to do?” The answer is of course that ‘it is not a chair. So at some level you need to know you are thinking of X to avoid thinking of a chair. You might also note how long it would be possible to keep up that strategy, and pay attention to what their final tally showed (i.e., whether there was a rebound effect). Furthermore, the physical barrier itself, in this exercise was a chair. Facilitators may usefully explore how unwillingness to have thoughts and emotions associated with barriers to valued actions prevents them from approaching such barriers and resolving them.

## Polygraph Metaphor

The polygraph Metaphor can also be presented to group members to highlight the inherent paradox of control efforts when applied to emotions. The Polygraph Metaphor is as Follows:

### Purpose:

To demonstrate the paradox of control when applied to psychological experiences

**“Suppose I hooked you up to a polygraph machine – it can detect any amount of anxiety within you. Now, your job in this scenario is to not feel anxious, but I’ll definitely know if you are because of my extremely sensitive polygraph machine. Of course, I know you want to do well in this task, but to make you try as hard as you possibly can to not feel anxious, I’m going to give you a motivational incentive: I’m going to hold a gun to your head and if you start feeling anxious I’ll pull the trigger! Could you succeed at feeling anxious in this scenario?”**

This metaphor illustrates how the problem solving rule (‘figure out how to get rid of it, and get rid of it’) amplifies the problem. Group members can be guided to consider that they already have the most sensitive polygraph already – their nervous system. They know exactly how they feel. Moreover, there are many times we hold a gun to our own heads, telling ourselves, ‘I must not feel this’. The following rule can be offered to describe internal barriers.

---

*The Other Rule of Problem Solving*  
*What You Resist, Persists*

---

Facilitators should spend some time generalizing the learning from the ‘Don’t think of a Chair’ and Polygraph Metaphor into group members’ experiences with barriers to valued actions (e.g., depression, stress, craving, fear of failure, shame etc.).

## Unwanted Guest at a Party Video

To illustrate *willingness* as an alternative to *control* when dealing with psychological barriers to valued action, the video of the unwanted guest at a party can be shown. Group member's reflections on the video should be elicited following its presentation and facilitators should aim to help group members draw connections between the metaphor and the psychological barriers associated with their valued action.



### Purpose:

To illustrate the cost of unwillingness on valuing in life

## Between Session Work – ‘Using IDEAS CAN in the Week’ and ‘Taking a Mindful Walk’

Hand out the between session work and describe the exercises. Besides their values commitment, group members are invited to apply the IDEAS CAN strategy on another problem encountered in the week. Because the strategy begins with identifying valued directions, it offers the benefit of connecting a problem solving effort to one's values. The ‘Taking a Mindful Walk’ exercise aims to have group members practice mindfulness skills while engaged in an activity (rather than sitting with their eyes closed).

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., “What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?”).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., “How might you go about doing this

### Purpose:

To practice using the values based problem solving strategy in the week, and practice applying mindful awareness during an activity based exercise

*exercise so that you get the most out of it”). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)*

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., “*What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?*”) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these).

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection. Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members’ attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. Example text:

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Pay attention to where your barriers are. If they are outside you, use the IDEAS CAN. If they are within you, see if you can make room for them. All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Mindfulness  
Exercise: Dropping  
Anchor 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.
- ❖ Values Bullseye
- ❖ Brief Check-in and  
Review of Between-  
Session Work
- ❖ Setting a Values  
Commitment
- ❖ Identifying Social  
Network
- ❖ Communication  
Skills
  
- ❖ Between Session  
Work: *'What can  
I Do Today to  
Look After My  
Social Network'  
and 'Practicing  
Dropping Anchor'*

# Session Nine

## 'Enlisting Support'

Research on Treatment Outcomes for substance misuse issues has highlighted the importance of social support, particularly for those with a number of individuals in their social network who influence one to drink or use drugs.

Communication skills have long been an integral part of several substance misuse treatments and those skills are introduced here to support bringing partners, family and friends alongside valued actions. Most people's values are social, in some sense. The skills training component in this session is conducted in an ACT style: connected to values, emphasising mindful engagement in behavioural practice, and defused acceptance of the thoughts and emotions elicited as one communicates a request.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Dropping Anchor 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group for group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Engage the group members in a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside the distractions we tend to bring into session so we can make the most of the time in group.

Invite group members to imagine they have a check-list they and to look around and see if they can see five things they can see; to notice things they don't normally notice.

Next, allowing their eyes to gently close and to bring their awareness to physical sensations; noticing four things they can feel.

Then, to bring their attention to sounds, and to identify three things they can hear.

Then, to become aware of smells, and see if they can notice two things they can sense with their nose.

Finally, to bring awareness to one taste that's present (e.g., the aftertaste of something eaten, coffee or tea etc.)

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

## Values-Bullseye

Prior to the check-in and between-session work review, hand out the values bullseye forms and have group members place darts in the four life areas they identified

### Purpose:

To rate consistency of actions in line with values for the previous week

last session. Facilitators may benefit from creating prepared values bullseye forms in preparation for this session with the chosen life domains, values narratives, and last week's dart positions already added. Having group members complete these prior to the between-session work review will allow them to reflect on whether their actions this week were more or less on target with their values.

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Conduct a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and to describe how they are using only a couple of words.

Proceed to explore what group members noticed in their between session work. Last sessions between session work was to complete the 'IDEAS CAN' values based problem solving strategy in the week, and to take a mindful walk. Facilitators should start by reviewing each group member's valued action and group members' experiences of that action. Following this, review group member's experiences of engaging in the between session work.

In reviewing group members valued actions, facilitators should seek to first clarify whether group members engaged in their valued action. If they have, facilitators should proceed to evoke descriptions of experiences associated with engagement in that action, and reinforce ACT processes where noted (e.g., defusion from thoughts, acceptance of emotions, recommitting to one's values when off course etc.). If group members' did not complete the valued action, facilitators should non-judgementally explore and identify barriers to the valued action. Group members should be encouraged to notice their responses to these barriers and assess their workability (i.e., *"does that action move you toward or away from your valued direction?"*).

### Purpose:

To reflect on Valued Actions and between session work in the previous week.

## Setting a Values Commitment

Invite group members to consider in which of the four life areas they would like to develop a valued commitment. Provide the Valued Action form to complete and to record their valued direction, a desired outcome in line with that value, and the actions they would need to engage in to move in their chosen direction.

Group members are also asked to consider whether drink or drug use would move them toward or away from their values.

Facilitators should conduct a group round, inviting group members to publicly share their valued action for the week. Group members should make a note of these actions (e.g., on the flipchart) so that they can be reviewed next session.

### Purpose:

To identify a behavioural commitment for the coming week which moves group members in a valued direction

## Identifying Social Network

Ask group members to consider that the important people in our lives can be valuable resources in recovery. It is common for valued actions to involve other people, and often helpful when others come alongside us in these actions.

Give each group member a piece of flipchart, and invite group members to consider the important people in their life. Group members should put themselves in the centre and then proceed to identify people who have a place in their lives. People that they spend a lot of time with should be placed closer to them, whilst those they spend less time with should be placed

### Purpose:

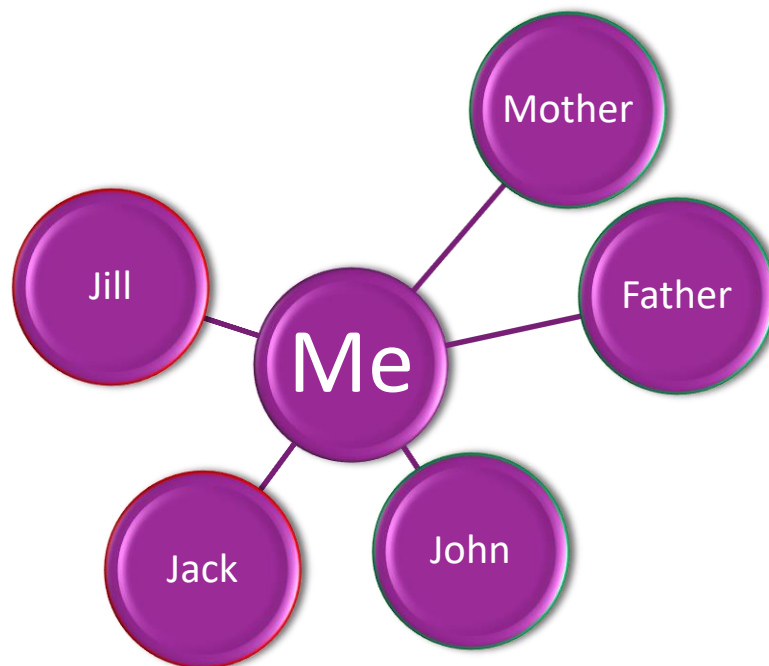
To identify important people within group members' social network

further away. The rationale for doing this is to highlight not only significant people, but also their prominence in group members lives.

Once this is completed, have group members make a note next to each identified person as to whether they are supportive of substance use (e.g., by marking with an S, or circling that person in a red coloured pen), and those who are supportive of recovery (e.g., by marking with an R, or circling that person with a green coloured pen).

Reflect with the group what they notice about their social networks:

- ✓ **“When you look at your social network, what stands out to you?”**
- ✓ **“How supportive of drinking and drug use are those you spend most time with? What effect does that have on committing to your valued actions?”**
- ✓ **“What about those you spend less time with? What benefits might there be in reconnecting with these people in terms of the life you want to build”**
- ✓ **“Who, in your social network would be of benefit to you in your valued action set today?”**



The final part of this exercise is to have group members identify a person to 'bring alongside' or 'support' their valued action.

## Communication Skills

The aim of the rest of the session is to teach communication skills and provide an opportunity for behavioural rehearsal of these skills. This skills training should be conducted with the explicit intention of supporting group members' enactment of their chosen values. Opportunities for mindful moments should be sought out and interwoven into the exercise.

A history of substance use often results in discorded relationships; increasing the likelihood of conflict during interactions. How group members communicate with others affects the likelihood of having supportive others come alongside them. As a result, they are more likely to have their needs met.

List the following communication skills up on the flip chart and describe them. These should be presented as a menu of pointers to consider. Take some time with the group to ensure they understand each of the components of the communication skills. Then break group members into pairs and give them the following instructions.

### Purpose:

To teach communication skills and provide an opportunity to rehearse



**Be Brief**



**Be Positive**



**Refer to a Specific Behaviour**



**Offer an Understanding Statement**



**Accept Partial Responsibility**



**Offer to Help**

“Take this opportunity to consider your valued action for the week and bringing your identified person alongside you. This might be a request for support of help, or a request for them to alter their behaviour in some way to make room for you to engage in your valued action, or it might even be to have your commitment heard. Whatever your request, see if you can connect this practice with the value you want to make important this week.

The aim of the exercise is to practice your request to bring this person alongside your valued action. However, I’d like you to run through this request several times, taking a playful attitude to trying out different ways of doing this. So make your request, then break away from the practice for a second to sit by each other and see which of the skills listed on the flipchart were included. Tick off the ones you included and note ones to include. Then rehearse again. Do this for maybe 4-5 runs before swapping over and allowing the other person to request. See if you can make room for any thoughts and feelings that show up during the exercise, we’ll reflect on these afterwards.”

Facilitators may consider asking group members to fall silent in the middle of the exercise and to close their eyes. Group members may be invited to:

- ❖ bring their awareness to the sensations of breathing
- ❖ Notice emotions and thoughts being experienced as they engage in the practice
- ❖ To take perspective of the other persons feelings about the request (and to convey that to the other person)
- ❖ To notice how their own actions have contributed to the current situation and practice taking a kind, compassionate stance toward themselves as they acknowledge this
- ❖ To get in touch with the value inherent in the request itself (e.g., imagine a future self- looking back on today, what might they say they are doing differently in life then as a result of making this request now?).

Facilitators may choose whichever they feel is most appropriate for the needs of the group members. The aim of these pauses is to mindfully notice barriers to enacting components of the skills practice and to practice engaging in these behaviours in the presence of those barriers. After the exercise, encourage the group members to reflect on their experience of the request:

- ✓ **“What showed up for as you made the requests? What thoughts, emotions, urges etc. acted as barriers or incentives to engage in the practice?”**
- ✓ **“When you heard the request of the other person, what was that like? What reflections do you have about some of the skills we listed up on the board here? (Refer to communication skills criteria)”**

### *Between Session Work – ‘Can I Do Today to Look After My Social Network?’ and ‘Practicing Dropping Anchor’*

Hand out the between session work and describe the

#### **Purpose:**

To practice using the values based problem solving strategy in the week, and practice applying mindful awareness during an activity based exercise

exercises. Besides their values commitment involving their identified social network member, group members are invited to consider one action each day that contributes to their social network. This may involve reaching out and making contact with someone they haven't had contact for a while, spending time with a close friend, doing a kind act, acknowledging support received, and so on. In addition, group members are invited to practice the Dropping Anchor 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 exercise. This exercise should be recommended as a way of slowing down, dropping into the present moment, and giving ourselves time to choose a behaviour that moves toward what is important

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *"What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?"*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *"How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?"*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *"What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?"*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these).

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session was to begin clarifying values. Example text:

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. All the best requesting someone to come alongside your valued action. Remember, it’s the skiing that’s important, whether or not you get to the lodge. All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Soldiers on Parade
- ❖ Values Bullseye
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Review of Between Session Work
- ❖ Setting Values Commitments: Long, Medium, and Short Term Goals
- ❖ Path Up a Mountain Metaphor
- ❖ Taking Your Mind For a Walk
- ❖ Between Session Work: *'Monitoring Progress over the Next Month'*

# Session Ten

## 'Keep on Keeping on'

The final session of the ACTIVE module is dedicated to looking further ahead. Group members have clarified valued directions and practiced behavioural commitments. They have practiced applying skills to address situational barriers and bring supportive others alongside their valued actions. Group members are invited to consider long term and medium term goals in addition to their weekly values commitment. These goals are reference points to consider what patterns group members aim to grow in their lives.

The path up a mountain metaphor is used to help group members consider progress toward values as an imperfect progression; stressing the role of committing and recommitting over and over to one's valued directions.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Soldiers on Parade*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group for group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Engage the group members in a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside the distractions we tend to bring into session so we can make the most of the time in group.

The aim of the *passengers on parade* exercise is the same as the *leaves on a stream* exercise conducted in the OPEN module: to practice observing the process of thinking from a defused, observing perspective.

Have group members engage in an eyes-closed exercise. Lead them to notice present moment experiences (e.g., breathing, sound, sensations) for a minute or two before asking them to watch the activity of their mind. Have group members imagine that a parade of soldiers march out of one ear, around in front of their eyes, and back into the other ear. As group members notice a thought, have them see that thought written on a sign held by a passenger in the parade. And to do this for each thought they notice.

Advise group members that, if the exercise disappears or they find themselves in a thought rather than looking at it, to notice that has occurred and return to the exercise.

Ensure the exercise continues for at least five minutes. Towards the end of the exercise, the poem *‘the guest house’* by Rumi can be read out while group members have their eyes closed.

Spend time with the group after the exercise debriefing their experience of stepping back and watching thoughts, along with any instances of being hooked by a thought.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

The Guest House (Rumi)

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes

As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still treat each guest honourably.

He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

## Values-Bullseye

Prior to the check-in and between-session work review, hand out the values bullseye forms and have group members place darts in the four life areas they identified last session. Facilitators may benefit from creating prepared values bullseye forms in preparation for this session with the chosen life domains, values narratives, and last week's dart positions already added. Having group members complete these prior to the between-session work review will allow them to reflect on whether their actions this week were more or less on target with their values.

### Purpose:

To rate consistency of actions in line with values for the previous week

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Conduct a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and to describe how they are using only a couple of words.

Proceed to explore what group members noticed in their between session work. Last sessions between session work was to engage in a valued action which involved bringing a supportive other alongside them, a daily action aimed at contributing to one's social network, and practicing dropping anchor with the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 exercise. Facilitators should start by reviewing each group member's valued action and group members' experiences of that action. Following this, review group member's experiences of engaging in the between session work.

In reviewing group members valued actions, facilitators should seek to first clarify whether group members engaged in their valued action. If they have, facilitators should proceed to evoke descriptions of experiences associated with engagement in that action, and reinforce ACT processes where noted (e.g., defusion from thoughts, acceptance of emotions, recommitting to

### Purpose:

To reflect on Valued Actions and between session work in the previous week.

one's values when off course etc.). If group members' did not complete the valued action, facilitators should non-judgementally explore and identify barriers to the valued action. Group members should be encouraged to notice their responses to these barriers and assess their workability (i.e., *"does that action move you toward or away from your valued direction?"*).

## Setting Values Commitments: Long, Medium, and Short Term Goals

Facilitators should acknowledge that this session is the final of this module. For that reason, group members will be invited to look a little further ahead and consider longer term goals which are in the direction of their values.

Facilitators should hand around the 'looking further ahead...' worksheet and have group members consider a longer term goal (e.g., between 6 months and 1 year), medium term goal (between 1 and 3 months) and a short term goal (completed in the next week) for each of their four life areas on their values bullseye.

After sufficient time to complete, have group members turn to the person next to them and let that person know what they are taking a stand for in terms of their values commitments.

Facilitators should then bring the group back together and initially focus on the direct experience of setting values goals. After this has been discussed, invite group members to share their life area, valued direction, and goals. Facilitators can use the metaphor of climbing a mountain (drawing a mountain on the flipchart) and listing short medium and long term goals at greater heights up the mountain, and valued directions recorded above the mountain. This sets up the path up a mountain metaphor described below.

### Purpose:

To explore extended patterns of committed action to motivate continued valuing following this module

## Path Up a Mountain Metaphor

This metaphor is useful to foster a ‘big-picture’ perspective of lapses. It emphasises the process of commitment and recommitment to valued actions while expecting their actions will be more or less on target at any given moment. Valuing can be likened to riding a bike where one is always off balance and acting to maintain balance. Indeed, it is being off balance that sets the stage for creates the forward motion.

Facilitators can utilize the mountain diagram to introduce the path up a mountain metaphor.

### Purpose:

To emphasise the role of ongoing commitment to valued actions, and to reframe lapses in commitment as opportunities to recommit

**“Goals are useful for something to aim for, but only so far as they help us act in ways that serve our valued directions. I’d like to offer a way of thinking about engaging in these directions. Who has ever seen a mountain path go straight up a mountain? They don’t, do they? No, they tend to wind around depending on the terrain. Sometimes, these mountain paths actually lose height. It is in those moments, we notice we are facing the wrong way. What thoughts and feelings might we notice in these moments? Maybe thoughts like, ‘I’m failing’, ‘I’ll never succeed’, ‘Maybe I’m not cut out for achieving this!’ We might notice emotions such as regret, anxiety, sadness, or frustration. What might we notice ourselves doing when we get hooked by all this mental chatter? Maybe give up on the goal itself. Maybe give up on our valued direction? But from a distance, we can see that losing height is the only way to get to the top. By sticking with the mountain path, rather than giving up on it, we’re more likely to get to the top of the mountain.”**

Facilitators should take time to explore with group members the likely barriers their minds will create when progress is not going as smoothly as one would hope. Spending time collecting these examples, and reinforcing group members' potential to recommit to their valued direction in the presence of these psychological barriers will give relevance to the following exercise.

## Taking Your Mind For a Walk

The purpose of this exercise is to have group members experientially relate to their mental chatter from a dis-identified perspective, and to make behavioural choices that are not dependent on the content of those thoughts. Facilitators will need to pair up group members for this exercise. They should clearly outline the roles of the *person* and the *mind*, and have group members decide who will play each role first.

The *person* plays the person who notices their mind. Their job is to walk around the room wherever they want to go, and to look at the things they want to.

The *Mind* plays the person's mind. The job of the mind is to walk behind the person and tell them where they can and can't go, instruct the person the directions they need to take, what to look at, to judge and evaluate the things the person does, and to provide reasons for actions.

The exercise is completed in three phases:

- ❖ PHASE ONE: Have pairs walk around for a minute or two engaging in their roles
- ❖ PHASE TWO: Have group members reverse roles and continue for another minute or two

### Purpose:

To promote a defused, accepting stance toward psychological barriers and practice desynchronizing behaviour from the content of thoughts

- ❖ **THIRD PHASE:** Have group members walk around the room individually, taking their own mind for a walk, listening to the chatter of their minds but acting in ways that they choose to. After a minute or two, end the exercise.

Following the exercise, encourage group members to reflect on what they noticed in the exercise:

- ✓ **“What was your experience of being the person with a mind chattering behind you?”**
- ✓ **“What influence, if any, did the mind have over your actions?”**
- ✓ **“What was your experience of being the mind?”**
- ✓ **“What seemed important to notice in the experience of taking your own mind for a walk at the end of the exercise?”**

## Between Session Work – *‘Monitoring Progress Over the Next Month’*

Hand out the between session work and describe the exercises. Besides their values commitment (short term goal), group members are invited to rate the consistency of their actions in terms of their valued directions each day for the next four weeks. By monitoring valued actions in their four life areas, group members are in a better position to notice being off-target and seize the opportunity to recommit to their valued directions.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *“What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?”*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *“How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?”*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

### Purpose:

To monitor consistency of actions toward values over the next four months in 4 valued life areas

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., “What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?”) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these).

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members’ attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session was about building patterns of valued action. Example text:















### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

























***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Keep noticing actions which move you toward your valued directions. If you find yourself off course, ask yourself, what RIGHT NOW can I do in the service of my values? All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

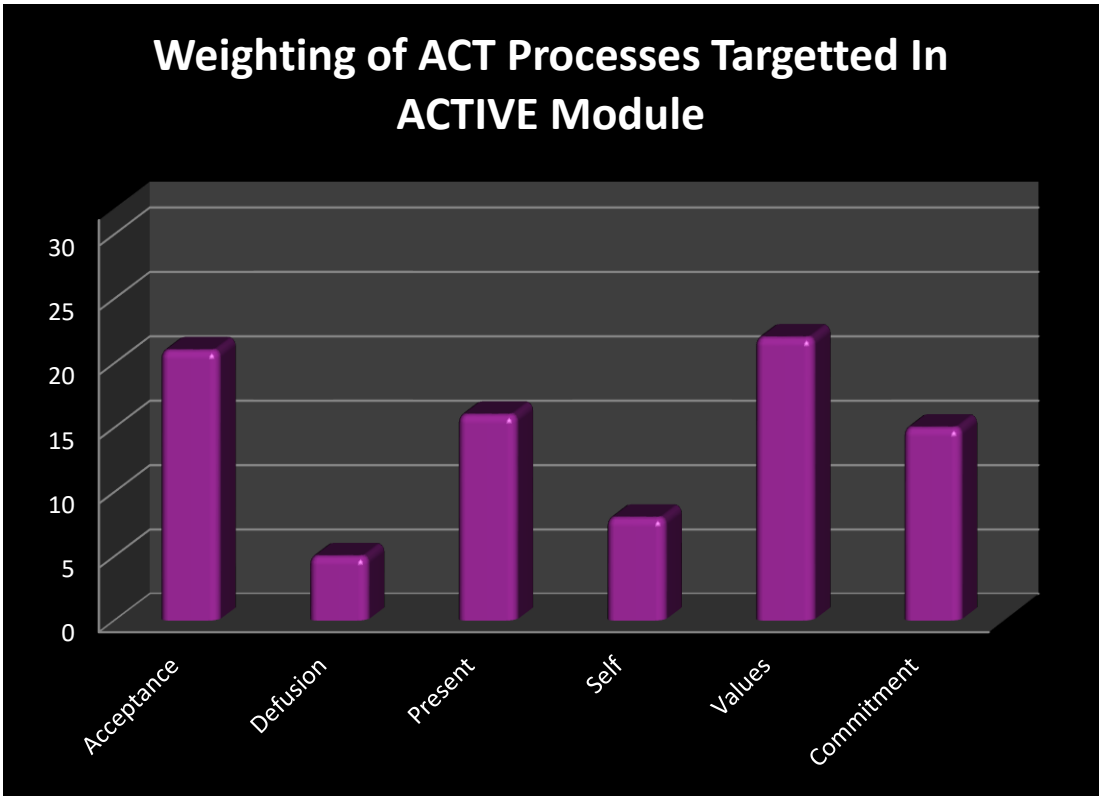
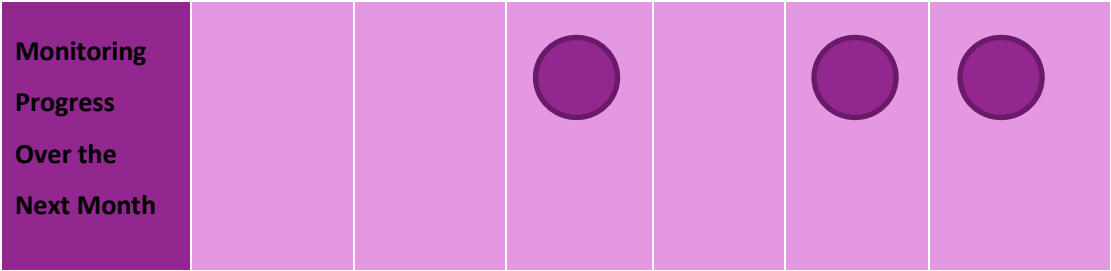
	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Mindfulness of the Breath			●			
Values Based Group Agreement					●	●
Valued Life	●				●	
Miracle Question				●	●	
Jigsaw Metaphor					●	
Attending Your 30 Year Recovery Celebration	●		●	●	●	

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Looking Back at My Substance Use	●				●	
Noticing Meaningful Actions			●		●	●
The Sweet Spot Exercise	●		●	●	●	
Skiing Metaphor	●				●	●
Life Compass					●	
Values Bullseye					●	
Values Commitment	●				●	●

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Values, Goals, Barriers						
What Breathing Can Teach You About Commitment						
Mindfulness of Sound, Breath, and Sensation						
Problem Solving Strategy						
Don't Think of a 'Chair'						
Polygraph Metaphor						

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Unwanted Guest at a Party Metaphor	●	●		●	●	
Using IDEAS CAN in the Week	●				●	●
Taking a Mindful Walk	●	●	●	●		
Dropping Anchor: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.			●			
Identifying Social Network					●	
Communication Skills	●		●	●	●	●

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
What Can I Do Today to Look After My Social Network						
Practicing Dropping Anchor						
Soldiers on Parade						
Values Commitment: Long, Medium and Short Term						
Path Up a Mountai						
Taking Your Mind For a Walk						



# Session Guides: 'AWARE' Module



ACT on Your Recovery

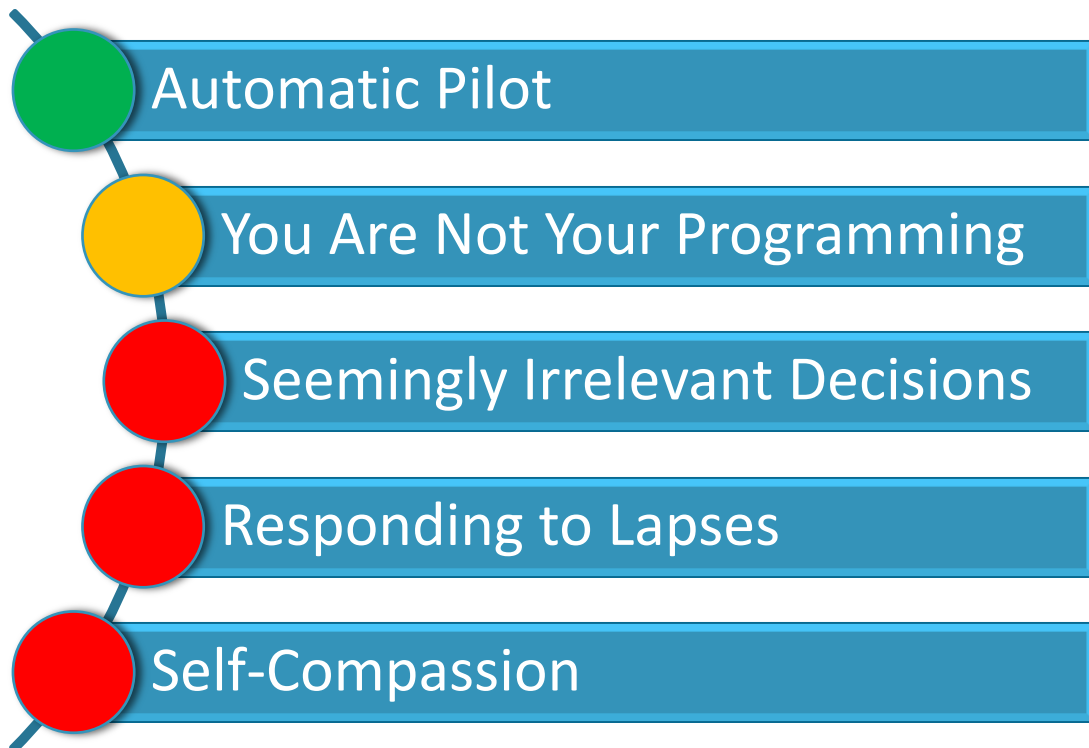
## Primary Objective

**Aware** – *‘To build skills in stepping out of automatic pilot, and foster a kinder, more compassionate stance to oneself during the challenges of recovery.’*

## Supportive Objectives

**Active** – *To make behavioural choices toward values as a conscious human being.*

**Open** – *To develop an accepting and self-compassionate relationship with present moment experiences*



# Session Eleven

## ‘Automatic Pilot’

Behaviours which are well-rehearsed over time tend to become habit. The same is true of drug and alcohol use, which may have been rehearsed many thousands of times. As a result, the contextual cues that occasion drink or drug use become less attended to, and the behaviour is initiated or enacted without full conscious awareness. This is sometimes reflected in statements that, “I just started drinking,” or, “I don’t know why I started to use.” This effect is colloquially referred to as *automatic pilot*; a mode of being that is opposite to mindful awareness. From an ACT perspective, impaired self-awareness is exacerbated by the ability to construct an imagined future and remembered past. This is typical during craving when one is recollecting the positive effects of past drug use, or the imagined relief if one were to drink. Becoming entangled with these thoughts reduces present moment awareness, limiting one’s ability to skilfully respond to the current situation.

The first session of the AWARE module aims to develop group members’ skills at discriminating when they are on automatic pilot and bring mindful awareness to the present moment. Doing so affords the benefit of greater awareness of triggers to drink or use, and a greater ability to consciously choose one’s responses.

### At a Glance:

- ❖ Mindfulness of the Breath
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Group Orientation
- ❖ Values Based Group Agreement
- ❖ Raison Exercise
- ❖ Autopilot Metaphor
- ❖ Craving Time-course
- ❖ Body-Scan
  
- ❖ Between Session Work: ‘Body-Scan’ and ‘Informal Mindfulness Activity’

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Mindfully Noticing the Breath*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group to allow group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Provide a rationale for engaging in a brief mindfulness exercise along the lines of that suggested below:

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment

***“I’d like to suggest beginning our group today with a brief centering exercise. It is quite normal to come to group with things on our mind, and those distractions can sometimes pull our attention to life outside this room. The aim of this exercise isn’t to get rid of the concerns or distractions we may have, but to give ourselves the opportunity to bring ourselves into the here and now so we can make the best use of the next two hours together.”***

Guide group members to settle into a relaxed but alert posture and to allow their eyes to close. Invite them to bring their awareness to the sensations of breathing and to follow the flow of sensation. Advise them that it is common for the mind to wander into thought or distraction that this is normal. Part of the exercise is to notice when this happens and gently return their attention to the breath when they notice this occur.

Briefly debrief group members’ experiences of the exercise or move directly into the check-in.

## Brief Group Check-In

Conduct a group round inviting group members to introduce themselves and offer a few words about why they have decided to attend the group.

Once this is completed, introduce the aims of the Group:

- ✓ **To build skills that increase our awareness of, and sense of choice in, the present moment**
- ✓ **To explore and develop the ways we relate to ourselves**
- ✓ **To provide a space in life where we can focus on actions, both large and small, that move us toward a valued life and away from behaviours that interfere with this**

Where possible, draw links between the aim of the group, as described above, and the relevance of these aims to the goals that group members have described previously

Introduce the style of the group. Being open about what facilitators will be asking of group members is important because it allows them to make an informed consent regarding their participation and, as such, increases willingness to engage in more unconventional exercises.

- **The group is a mix of structured exercises, group discussion, experiential and exploration exercises, and skills practice.**
- **Our aim is not to ‘teach’ you ‘what to do’. Instead we encourage you to trust your direct experience of what works or doesn’t work to move you forward in your recovery.**
- **There is a strong focus on what is happening in the here and now. Although we will inevitably talk about what has happened in the past and what might happen in the future, as facilitators, we may encourage you to slow down and notice whatever is showing up for you in the here and now.**

### Purpose:

To introduce group members to each other and explore their motivations for participating

## Values Based Group Agreement

Many group agreements look like a list of rules to follow or unacceptable behaviours to avoid. In this group facilitators should strive to help group members clarify what is important to them in the way they interact with each other. Facilitators should elicit examples of behaviours which are consistent with what's important (e.g., if 'being respectful of others' is suggested, asking the group to consider how that might be recognized in our own and others actions, or in what situations would that be most important). If specific behaviours are offered, list these, but also explore what makes that important (e.g., if 'maintaining confidentiality' is suggested, facilitators might ask the group to consider what maintaining confidentiality aims to achieve in our interactions).

Prompts to Consider:

- **Participation in group activities**
- **How to approach different points of view**
- **Issues of confidentiality**
- **Attendance/punctuality/lateness**
- **Attending under the influence**
- **When we are upset (e.g., not leaving the room, being prepared to make room for discomfort)**
- **When others are upset (e.g., no rescuing, be mindful of our urge to solve other's problems)**
- **Mobile phones/needing to take calls during the group**

Facilitators might consider phrasing the group agreement in the positive (what group members will do as opposed to what they won't do) where possible.

Remember that group facilitators should consider themselves a part of the group too. This

### Purpose:

To clarify what is important to clients in their interactions on this group and consider behaviours which reflect those values

means that facilitators might also make suggestions that are meaningful to them personally. Write the group agreement on flipchart and keep in a visible place each session for the remainder of the module.

Ask group for commitment to the group agreement, and inform the group that, as facilitator, part of your role is to advocate for the group's working agreement.

## Raison Exercise

The raison exercise aims to help group members contrast the difference between bringing mindful awareness to an activity that is typically engaged in without being fully present. Facilitators will need to have raisons in a bowl, and a spoon for distributing them to group members. Facilitators should introduce the exercise by saying something like:

### Purpose:

To help group members discriminate between mindful awareness and automatic pilot

**“I’m going to pass around some objects in a moment, and I am going to ask you to adopt a rather odd mind-set in this exercise. I’d like you to imagine you are an alien come down to earth and have never seen one of these objects before; almost as if you are here to investigate these objects in detail.”**

Facilitators should then precede to hand three or four raisons to each group members, asking them to place the objects in the palm of their hand. Facilitators may lead the exercise as follows:

**“First of all, take few moments to just examine what you have in your hand. Noticing the differences in colour and shape of these objects. And, then choosing one of these objects; noticing, possibly, what pulls you to choose this particular object.**

**Rolling this object around your fingers; noticing how that object feels on the fingertips. And, if thoughts or memories come up as you look at and feel this object, just noting what thoughts you have and returning your attention to the object in your hand.**

**Then putting the object under your nose, noting what this object’s aroma. Noting, as best you can, whether there are different layers of smells to be noticed.**

**And, then, placing the object on your tongue. Noticing how your arm moves and knows just how to do this. Being aware of the ways body responds to the presence of this object sitting on your tongue. Maybe you notice salivation, or the urge to start chewing. Or, maybe you catch expectations of what this object will taste like if you were to bite into it. Just taking this moment to pause and notice what you notice in this moment.**

**And, then, very slowly, taking a bite into this object. Noticing as you do, the tastes and textures of this object. Noticing, perhaps, how your body responds to this.**

**Then, slowly chewing. Bringing a curious attitude toward your experience of textures and tastes changing moment to moment. How the mouth moves and teeth make contact.**

**And, you might notice the urge to swallow this object. If you do, see if you can slow down even further. Pause a moment and see if you can notice where this urge begins and ends without acting upon it. Watching if this urge changes moment to moment...**

**And, in a moment of your choosing, swallowing that object and seeing if you can sense being one object heavier.”**

Following the exercise, facilitators should inquire about group members' experiences. A primary aim of this debrief is to help group members contrast the distinction between the experience of eating raisins with mindful awareness versus the more usual way of eating raisins (e.g., eating, chewing, and swallowing without full awareness of the activity). This distinction can be described as the distinction between being on *automatic pilot* and *mindfully aware*.

Once this distinction is appreciated, facilitators should seek to elicit everyday examples of being on automatic pilot. These may include:

- ✓ Walking somewhere, lost in thought, and though barely remembering the journey arriving at one's destination
- ✓ Eating while watching TV
- ✓ Driving the same journey to work each day
- ✓ Morning routines such as showering, brushing teeth, getting dressed
- ✓ The way in which we greet somebody

As group members become more aware of automatic pilot behaviours, facilitators can inquire about its relevance to drinking, drug use, and relapse. Group members typically discuss examples of reacting to high-risk situations in habitual ways, finding themselves taking steps to acquire drugs or alcohol, or accepting an alcoholic drink in a pub when offered.

## Autopilot Metaphor

The relevance of the distinction between *automatic pilot* and *mindful awareness* can be illustrated using the autopilot metaphor. This metaphor shows that being on autopilot is neither good nor bad, in and of itself, only when being on one's actions on autopilot are not consistent with valued directions.

### Purpose:

To highlight the importance of stepping out of autopilot in situations that elicit values inconsistent behaviours

“Imagine that what you do is like a ship which has an *automatic pilot* option on it. If you tend to sail the same waters, from one port to another, it makes more sense to switch the autopilot on. This means we can focus less on navigating and steering and attend to other things. If we’ve been sailing these seas regularly, the *automatic pilot* being switched *on* can become its default setting.

Automatic pilot is great so long as our ship is going in the right direction. Our Minds are like this Autopilot. Minds allow us to do all sorts of complicated actions without having to think. In fact, if we didn’t have this ability, life would be really hard. For instance, think of all the things you had to do to get here today, and then think about how long it would take if you had to think about each and every one of those things... Minds are really useful.

However, if the ship is heading for the rocks, then having the Automatic pilot switched on could be a bit of a problem. Sometimes you need to disengage it and take the wheel yourself so that you can change course. Over the next few sessions, we’ll be practicing skills to disengage the Automatic pilot, to bring our awareness to where the ships heading, and then change course so that your life goes in a direction that matters to you.”

This metaphor helps set the stage for discussing cravings and urges to use substances. Running into these experiences while on automatic pilot can lead one ‘straight into the rocks’.

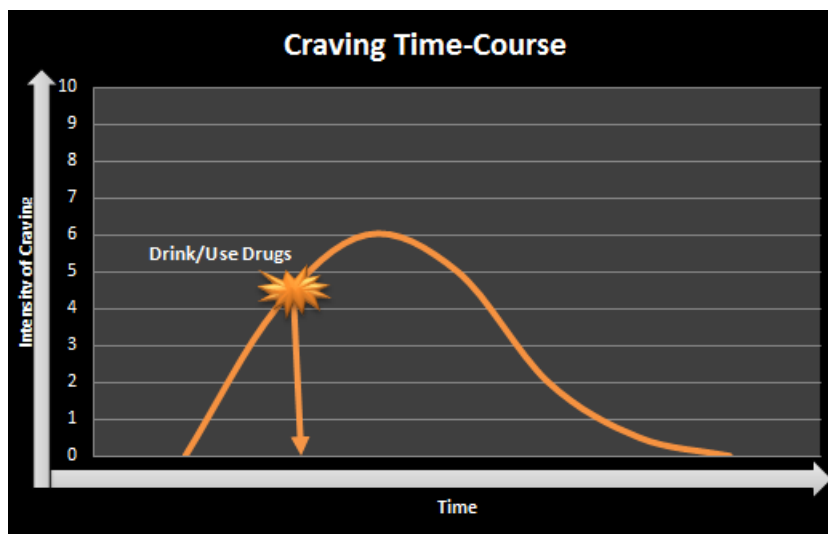
## Craving Time-course

Discussing the time-course of craving can be helpful in the context of acting on automatic pilot. Craving is the anticipation or desire for the effect of drugs or alcohol. Though thinking about these effects is often experienced as positive, the delay till gratification is experienced as aversive. As a result, cravings are often accompanied by behavioural urges to seek out and use drugs or alcohol. Cravings and urges, however, are experiences which are time-bound; they come and go if not acted upon. Being in a state of automatic pilot increases the likelihood of acting upon cravings and urges in two ways: First, the initial signs of craving may be missed, denying the person of valuable warning signs for an impending lapse. Second, cravings and urges are more likely to evoke habitual responses in the form of drug or alcohol use.

Facilitators can present the following psychoeducational material to illustrate the above points.

### Purpose:

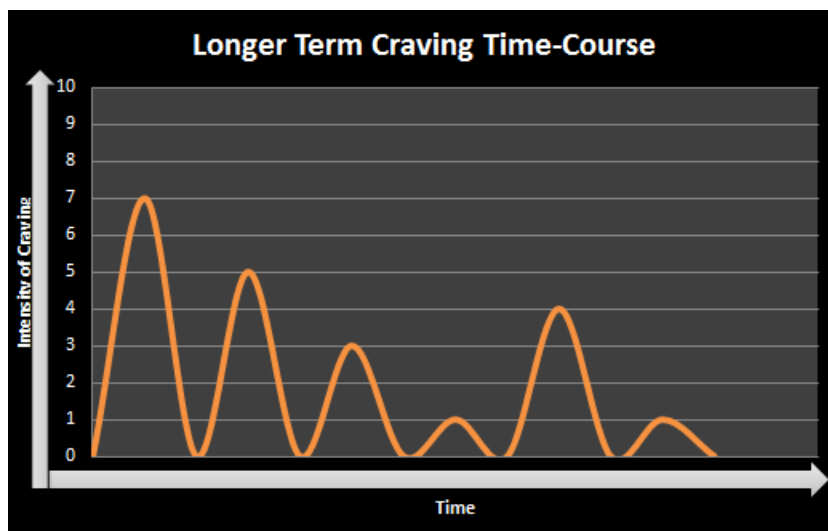
To emphasise that craving is a time-limited experience that one has the choice to act on, or *'be with'* till it goes



The graph above can be presented to group members to illustrate that cravings are time-limited experiences. Facilitators can explore with group members examples of what events trigger cravings, and the intensity of a craving over time if not acted upon. Facilitators can explore what the impact of being on automatic pilot is when meeting a craving or urge. Useful questions can focus around noticing the early signs of craving, and reacting to the craving (rather than responding consciously to it). For example:

- ✓ *“If we are on automatic pilot, where on this timeline might we first notice we are craving drugs or alcohol?”*
- ✓ *“What does our mind tell us will happen to the craving if we don’t act upon it? What does our experience tell us happens to cravings if we don’t act upon them?”*
- ✓ *“When we are on automatic pilot, acting without being consciously present, what is our default response to craving? What happens to the craving in the short term? Longer term?”*

Facilitators may also present the graph below to discuss the longer term effects on not acting upon cravings and urges. Over time, cravings and urges become less intense and less frequent when not acted upon.



## Body-Scan

Following the above discussion, facilitators can introduce the *body-scan* mindfulness exercise as an opportunity to practicing noticing skills that facilitate stepping out of automatic pilot. The body-scan practices bring mindful awareness to physical sensations. Facilitators can discuss that the early signs of craving and urges occur in the body, and offer cues that alert us to the need to slow down, pause, step out of automatic pilot, and consciously choose our response to the situation in front of us.

### Purpose:

To practice mindfulness skills with physical sensations of different parts of the body

**“If you are ready to begin the exercise, see if you can take a relaxed but alert posture, and allow your eyes to gently close. Bring your attention, as best you can, to the sensations of breathing. Noticing where you notice breathing most readily. Seeing if you can observe how the body moves to accommodate the breath as it moves into the body, and out of the body.**

**And, on the next in-breath, allowing your attention to follow the breath down through your body, down through your left leg and settle on your left big toe. Noticing the sensations in your left big toe. Then becoming aware of sensations in the other toes of your left foot. The sole of the foot. The top of the foot. Noticing where your foot touches the floor, or your shoe. And, almost as if your attention was like a spot-light, just gently moving to your calf and ankle; observing sensations there. Then, when you are ready, noticing the sensations in your upper leg. Particularly, those areas of the leg that touch the chair. Seeing if you can explore, with a sense of curiosity, the places where those sensations of pressure start and end. And, on the next in breath, allowing your attention to rise up through your body, and settle on the sensations of breathing.**

***[Repeat this sequence for the right leg]***

“And, when you are ready, letting your attention settle on the sensations in your lower abdomen. Observing how low in the body, breathing can be noticed.

Letting yourself become aware of the sensations in the abdomen. And, the rise and fall of the rib cage. Just, noticing sensations in these areas of the body in the way you might greet an old friend.

Taking your spotlight of awareness and noticing sensations in the lower back. Very gently, moving your awareness from the lower back, to the middle back, to the upper back. If you notice any sensations of discomfort, such as tension, aches, or pain, seeing if you can turn toward these sensations in the same way you’d turn toward sensations of relaxation or warmth. Allowing yourself to do nothing different with these sensations except noticing their presence. And, breathe. Taking this moment to settle into this moment; letting the breath be like a metronome for the pace of your experience as it unfolds moment to moment.

And, now becoming aware of sensations in the shoulders. Noticing any tension in the muscles of the shoulders. Experimenting, maybe, with tensing the shoulders a little more, and then releasing that tension, just watching what that is like. If there is any residual tension, that is OK, just notice that too.

Noticing sensations in the left upper arm. The forearm, and the hand. Taking a moment, perhaps, to see notice where on the hand is the warmest area, and where is the coolest area.

*[Transition to the other hand and repeat this sequence back up the right arm]*

Becoming aware of sensations on the back of the head. Seeing if you can notice sensations created by the hair on your head. And, noticing sensations on the top of the head; the sides of the head; and, the forehead. Noticing sensations around the eyes. The nose. And, the cheeks. Noticing the jaw.

And, breathe. Taking these last few minutes of this exercise to renew your commitment to notice your experience in the here and now. Maybe taking your spotlight of attention and widening it to include as many sensations at the same time. Noticing what that is like. And, very gently, allowing your eyes to open. Perhaps moving slightly, stretching, bringing yourself back into the room in whatever way feels appropriate.

Following the body-scan, facilitators should support group members to explore their experiences of the exercise. During this inquiry, facilitators should strive to maintain a mindful observation of experience. It can be helpful to back-channel experiences such that thoughts, emotions, and sensations are labelled as such. For example, if a group member states, *"I couldn't sit still!"* the facilitator may reflect back, *"You noticed the urge to move. Where in your body did you notice that?"* Asking group members to elaborate on the experiences is also helpful. If an uncomfortable emotion is reported, facilitators can ask questions that evoke descriptions of thoughts, urges, and sensations that may also have been noticed.

Themes that emerge from this discussion can be related back to the experience of craving alcohol or drugs, and relapses.

### Between Session Work – 'Mindfulness Practice: Body-Scan' and 'Daily Activity on Purpose'

Hand out the between session work and describe the exercises. The aim is for group members to practice mindfulness skills introduced in this session and to find opportunities for stepping out of automatic pilot. This is accomplished via the body-scan exercise, and choosing a routine activity (e.g., brushing teeth, washing up, drinking a coffee etc.) and stepping out of autopilot to practice mindful noticing. They are also encouraged to record mindfulness practice.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *"What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?"*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *"How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?"*). (Having group members describe implementation

#### Purpose:

To foster greater awareness of overlooked values consistent actions, and explore the impact of substance us valued life areas

intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *“What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?”*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection. Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session was to begin clarifying values.

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Notice this week when you are on automatic pilot and create opportunities to mindfully notice your experiences in the moment. All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

# Session Twelve

## ‘You Are Not Your Programming’

This second session of the AWARE module builds upon present moment awareness by introducing self-as-context. Those with addiction issues can develop quite rigid self-concepts that support self-defeating behaviours. In essence, perceived qualities of the person can become the enemy, and actions are taken to reduce contact with those qualities. This may include more substance abuse, avoiding engaging in valued areas of life, or criticising/blaming oneself for having those qualities.

Self-as-context supports flexible perspective taking on one’s own and other’s experience; it aids group members to reduce attachment to unhelpful self-concepts; and, it supports acceptance because self-as-context is not ‘thing-like’, it is a safe space from which to experience thoughts, emotions, urges, and sensations.

The focus of this group is to utilize exercises and metaphor to point toward self-as-context, and explore its relevance to making conscious, committed actions. This work sets the stage for developing self-compassion.

### At a Glance:

- ❖ Body-scan
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Homework Review
- ❖ Me at my Best/Me at my Worst
- ❖ Chessboard Metaphor
- ❖ Observer Exercise
- ❖ Taking Perspective on Your ‘Self’
  
- ❖ Between Session Work: ‘My Autobiography’ and ‘Daily Opportunity for Mindfulness’

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Body-Scan*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group for group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Engage the group members in a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside the distractions we tend to bring into session so we can make the most of the time in group.

Invite group members to close their eyes and conduct a shorter version of the body-scan introduced last session.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Conduct a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and to describe how they are using only a couple of words.

Proceed to explore what group members noticed in their between session work. Last sessions between session work was to practice the '*Body-Scan*' exercise, and a '*Daily Activity on Purpose*'

In reviewing group members valued actions, facilitators should seek to first clarify whether group members engaged in between session work. If they have, facilitators should proceed to evoke descriptions of experiences associated with engagement in that action, and reinforce ACT processes where noted (e.g., defusion from thoughts, acceptance of emotions, recommitting to

### Purpose:

To reflect on Between Session Work during the previous week.

one's values when off course etc.). If group members' did not complete the between session work, facilitators should non-judgementally explore and identify barriers noticed to engaging in that work. Group members should be encouraged to notice their responses to these barriers and assess their workability (i.e., "does that action move you toward or away from what is important to you?").

## Me at My Best.../Me at My Worst...

### Purpose:

To identify evaluative descriptions of the 'self'

Following the review of Between-Session Work, facilitators should proceed to hand out a piece of paper to each group members. Facilitators should begin by discussing with the group that we all label ourselves. We may think of ourselves in positive ways ("honest," "strong," "good parent") and in negative ways ("untrustworthy," "temperamental," "weak-willed"). Ask group members to take a few minutes to write down some of the labels they have used to describe themselves. On the flipchart, the following prompt can be presented:

The image shows two flipchart prompts side-by-side. The left prompt is titled 'Me At My Best...' and the right prompt is titled 'Me At My Worst...'. Both prompts have a light blue header and a larger light blue body. Each body contains five black bullet points for taking notes.

Once group members have generated a list, ask if anyone is willing to share what they wrote. Each contribution should be written on a piece of paper (or using a balled up piece of paper to represent that description) and placed on the floor. The negatively evaluated descriptions

positioned on one side of the floor, the positively evaluated descriptions positioned on the other side (the positioning should be similar to that of pieces on a chessboard, as this content will be used as grist for the mill for this metaphor).

Once a number of descriptions have been offered, facilitators might also explore:

- ✓ *“Which of these labels have you noticed becoming more prominent as a result of your substance use?”*
- ✓ *“Has thinking about yourself this way helped or hindered your efforts to change your substance use?”*

## Chessboard Metaphor

Once a range of self-referential labels have been identified, the chessboard metaphor can be introduced. The aim of this metaphor is to point to, what in ACT, is called *Self-as-Context*, or the *'observer self'*. The observer self is unchanging and is always bigger than the thoughts and emotions experienced (i.e., contains experience in the way the sky holds the weather). The metaphor also supports group members to begin to discriminate when they are experiencing thoughts, emotions, cravings, and urges 'at piece level' or at 'board level'.

### Purpose:

To point towards a 'self' that is not psychological content or verbal descriptions of the 'self'

**“Imagine a chessboard that goes out infinitely in all directions. It’s covered in black pieces and white pieces. They work together in teams, as in chess – the white pieces fight against the black pieces. You can think of your thoughts and feelings and beliefs as these pieces; they sort of hang out together in teams also.**

*[Continued]*

“For example ‘bad’ feelings (like craving, anxiety, depression, resentment) hang out with ‘bad’ thoughts and ‘bad’ memories; same thing with the ‘good’ ones. So it seems that the way the game is played is that we select a side we want to win, and we pit the ‘good’ side (self-confidence, willpower, feelings of being in control) against the ‘bad side’. Then we get up on the white horse and ride to battle,

But there is a logical problem here, and that is that from this posture huge portions of yourself are your own enemy. In other words, if you are in this war, there is something wrong with you. The logical idea is that you can knock enough of them off the board that you will eventually dominate the game and life will be OK. You won’t need to drink or use drugs and you can get on with living life. Except that your experience tells you that none of these pieces ever get knocked off the board. So the battle goes on.

Now, here’s an odd question. Suppose all these descriptions of who you are, all these pieces on the board, they’re not you. What could you be in this metaphor?

*[Let group members explore this question.]*

Suppose that you are the board. It can be useful to think of it like this. As the board, you are in complete contact with all the pieces. But as the board, the outcome of the game is less important. The outcome of the game can’t affect the board in any meaningful sense. At piece level the game is about picking a side and battling to win, but at board level, the game is different; it’s about holding all the pieces and taking them in a direction; in whatever direction is important to you.”

Facilitators can explore reflections on this metaphor with the group, getting their reactions and comments. Useful questions might include:

- ✓ *“Can you share an example where you were able to hold your thoughts and emotions, in the same way the board holds the pieces, and carry them into doing something that mattered?”*

- ✓ ***“Where are we usually when we experience thoughts and emotions? At piece level, picking a side and battling the enemy, or at board level, carrying all the pieces and choosing a direction?”***
- ✓ ***“Do the pieces need to be in a particular configuration for us to move the board in a direction of our choosing?”***

A useful way of interacting with this discussion is for facilitators to continue with the metaphor where it is useful to do so. For example, if a group member says, “I don’t get what we are talking about!” the facilitator might reach over and place a piece on the board, saying, “so you notice the thought ‘I don’t get this’, that’s a piece on the board. Who’s noticing that thought?”

(An optional exercise during this discussion is the ‘polarity exercise’, which highlights the unworkability of picking evaluative sides. Ask group members to believe the following statements as true of themselves and to notice what their minds do in response. The facilitator can start neutral (“I’m an alright person”) and progressively increase the positive or negative judgement (“I’ve got some flaws”, “I’m a terrible person”, “There is nothing good about be at all”, “I’ve got some good qualities”, “I’m fantastic”, “I’m perfect in every way”). Group members are likely to notice the opposite being pulled as the evaluative strength increased (e.g., “I’m not that bad”). This exercise shows that trying to think positively (or negatively) about oneself draws one into an unwinnable game.

## Observer Exercise

The observer exercise is designed to help group members make experiential contact with a ‘self’ separate from the content of experience. It is an eyes closed exercise which invites a variety of different psychological content so that the consistent place where that content has always been experienced (i.e., self-as-context).

### Purpose:

To experientially contact a ‘self’ that is separate from psychological content and verbal descriptions of the ‘self’

Facilitators should engage the group in an eyes closed mindfulness exercise aimed at noticing present moment experiences for a few minutes.

Then, invite the group pick a memory from last summer (have them raise a finger when they have a memory so you know when to proceed). Once they have a memory in mind, the facilitator should invite them to 'step into that memory' and 'get behind the eyes of the *you* that was there'. Group members can be guided to see what they were seeing then, hear what they were hearing then, and feel what they were feeling then.

Then, facilitators can ask: *"Notice who is noticing this?"* or *"Notice the part of yourself that is noticing this?"* After a pause, facilitators might invite group to consider that, *"in some deep sense, the you that was there then, is here now. See if you can notice the continuity in that that part of you doesn't change."*

Facilitators should then repeat the above procedure for two more memories: one from group member's teenage years, and one from childhood; each time, have group members notice who is noticing, and to notice that part of themselves has always been there.

Facilitators should proceed to label this part of themselves 'the observer self', and that it is like the chessboard. The distinction between the observer self and psychological content can then be explored within this eyes closed exercise in several domains. For example:

- ✓ **Physical self** – notice how your body has changed and grown and that sometimes you are ill and sometimes you are healthy....but notice who notices that physical self...and although you have a body, you are also not that body
- ✓ **Emotions** – notice how over the years emotions come and go, sometimes happy, sometimes, anxious, sometimes not feeling anything much....but notice who notices these emotions...and that although you have emotions, you are not your emotions.
- ✓ **Roles** – notice roles in your life...even being in the role of client or group member right now...but who notices this role...although you have roles, you are not those roles.
- ✓ **Thoughts** – notice how at one time you had few thoughts, thoughts and beliefs have changed and grown. But notice who notices this...although you have thoughts, you are not those thoughts.

Group members should end the exercise with a return to mindful awareness of the present moment for a few minutes.

Following the exercise, invite group members to reflect on their experiences of the exercise, reinforcing where appropriate the distinction between the *'noticer'* and the *'noticed'*.

As a summary from this exercise, facilitators can note that:

**“There is a part of you that is bigger than the cravings, thoughts, emotions, and urges you struggle with. Furthermore, it is not damaged by those experiences. This means, that when we experience a difficult thought, emotion, or urge, there is a part of you that is notice who’s noticing that experience, to step back into board level – the observer self – and make room for that experience. Then ask, what is the most workable action I can take, right here and right now? And, then, take those experiences along for the ride.”**

## Taking Perspective on Your 'Self'

Facilitators can pass around the 'Taking Perspective on Your 'Self'' worksheet and ask group members to either complete them, or separate group members into pairs and invite group members to interview each other about themselves in the third person. This exercise aims to help group members take an observing perspective on themselves and supports the development of a behavioural commitment for the week ahead.

Once the exercise is completed, invite reflection from the group members about their experience of the exercise. Facilitators can also ask group members to describe what action they would have their 'self' engage in this week, and ask whether the group member would be willing to make a commitment to that action (with the pieces on the chessboard along for the ride).

### Purpose:

To foster a defused perspective on the 'self'

I HAVE KNOWN ..... FOR ABOUT ..... YEARS.

I FIND HIM/HER TO BE.....  
.....  
.....

I THINK HE/SHE STRUGGLES WITH .....

I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE TIMES THAT HE/SHE.....

HIS/HER STRENGTHS ARE.....

IT COULD HELP HIM/HER IF HE/SHE COULD.....

THIS WEEK, I WOULD CHOOSE THE FOLLOWING ACTION FOR HIM/HER TO FOCUS ON.....

*Between Session Work – ‘My Autobiography’ and ‘Daily Opportunity for Mindfulness*

Hand out the between session work and describe the exercises. Group members this week are invited to write

**Purpose:** \_\_\_\_\_

To begin reducing attachment to one’s ‘story’, and to practice mindfulness skills

a brief autobiography of why they have an addiction problem. This will set the stage for the autobiographical re-write exercise over the following sessions. Group members are also encouraged to find opportunities for formal or informal mindfulness practice each day.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *“What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?”*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *“How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?”*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *“What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?”*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next. A key focus of this session was to develop self-as-context.

Example text:

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Notice when you are at piece level or board level this week. Find opportunities to step back and carry your experiences like the chessboard. All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Expanding Bubble Meditation
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Homework Review
- ❖ Choice Point Exercise
- ❖ SOBER Breathing Space
- ❖ SOBER Breathing Space in a conversation
- ❖ Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions
- ❖ Climbing a Ladder Metaphor
- ❖ Between Session Work: *'Rewriting My Autobiography' and 'Practice SOBER Breathing Space'*

# Session Thirteen

## 'Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions'

The first two sessions of this module have focussed on increasing group members' capacity to bring flexible awareness to the present moment, stepping out of automatic pilot when it is helpful to do so, and develop an observer perspective on one's experiences. The aim of this session is to further this work, whilst also introducing the concept of Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions (AKA Apparently Irrelevant Decisions). Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions refer to the covert planning that is sometimes engaged in which sets up a relapse. This is typically motivated by an attempt to reduce a sense of responsibility for the relapse and as such avoids anticipated negative judgements from others and one's self. Typically this is achieved by a series of mini-decisions which are justified as inconsequential, but set up a situation which can be used to justify a relapse.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Expanding Bubble Meditation*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group for group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Engage the group members in a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside the distractions we tend to bring into session so we can make the most of the time in group.

Facilitators should lead group members into a mindfulness exercise focussed on becoming aware of physical sensations. Group members can then be invited to imagine a bubble around their body containing their thoughts, emotions, sensations, memories, and urges; group members can be asked to become aware of everything, right now, going on inside this bubble. In the final part of the exercise, invite group members to imagine expanding their bubble to the size of the room. In addition to one's own thoughts and emotions, not the bubble contains the thoughts and emotions of the other group members. Group members can be invited to notice the tendency to mask or hide our private experiences, yet we are all connected by the shared experience of having thoughts, emotions, urges, memories, and sensations that are sometimes painful, and sometimes joyful.

Following the exercise, facilitators should reflect with the group their reflections and observations on the exercise.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Conduct a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and to describe how they are using only a couple of words.

Proceed to explore what group members noticed in their between session work. Last sessions between session work was to practice the *'Writing My Autobiography'* exercise, and *'Daily Opportunity for Mindfulness'*

In reviewing these exercises, facilitators should seek to first clarify whether group members engaged in between session work. If they have, facilitators should proceed to evoke descriptions of experiences associated with completing these exercises, and reinforce ACT processes where appropriate (e.g., defusion from thoughts, acceptance of emotions, recommitting to one's values when off course etc.). If group members' did not complete the between session work, facilitators should non-judgementally explore and identify barriers noticed to engaging in that work. Group members should be encouraged to notice their responses to these barriers and assess their workability (i.e., *"does that action move you toward or away from what is important to you?"*).

### Purpose:

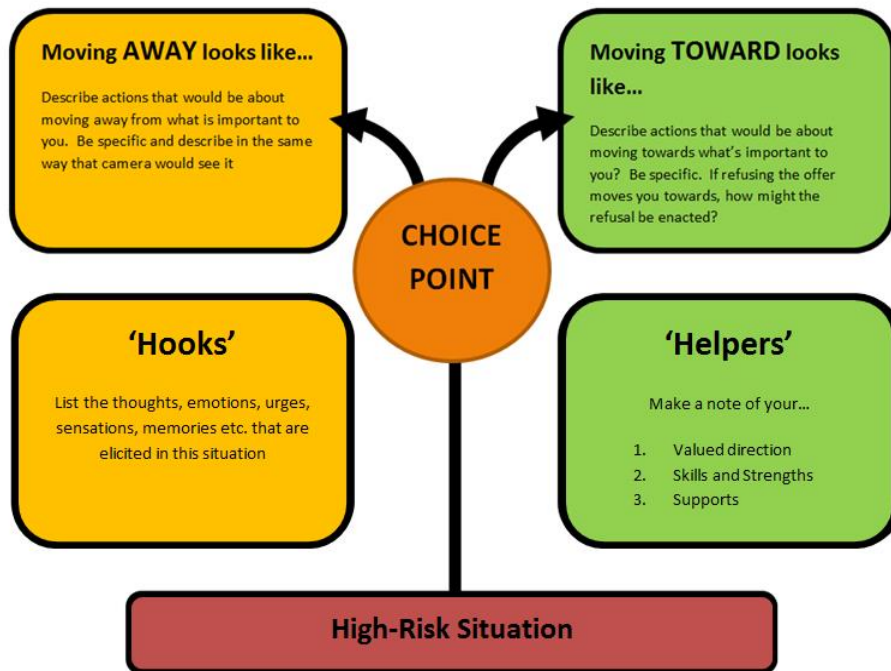
To reflect on Between Session Work during the previous week.

## CHOICE POINT Exercise

The choice point diagram is presented below:

### Purpose:

To develop a behavioural commitment for the upcoming week



### ❖ High-Risk Situations

Facilitators should invite group members to describe a situation which poses a higher risk for engaging in drinking, drug use, or some other relevant unworkable behaviour.

### ❖ Hooks (Pieces on the Chessboard)

Facilitators can then start to explore the thoughts, emotions, urges, memories, and sensations evoked within this situation. This provides an opportunity to explore which actions (toward or away) are made more likely when we are 'hooked' by these experiences

### ❖ **Moving AWAY Looks Like...**

Next, facilitators can explore actions in that situation (including drinking or using drugs, but not limited to that behaviour) which would move them away from what's important to them.

### ❖ **Moving TOWARD Looks Like...**

After facilitators have explored actions that move them away from what is important, they should explore actions that move them toward what is important. Facilitators might invite group members to consider slowing down at the choice point, stepping back into 'board level', what direction would they carry the pieces?

### ❖ **Helpers (Being at Board Level, Valued Directions)**

Finally, facilitators can explore what direction group members wish to take the board in their identified situation.

Facilitators should have each group members select a situation they wish to respond differently to and identify an action that moves them toward their values while making room for psychological barriers.

## SOBER Breathing Space

The CHOICE POINT model indicates a moment where one can slow down, notice one's experiences, and commit to a valued action whilst carrying those experiences. The SOBER Breathing Space is a mini-meditation adapted from Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention. This can be presented as below.

### Purpose:

To teach a mini-meditation to support slowing down and noticing at the choice-point

**S – STOP.** The first step when you are in a stressful or risky situation is to slow down. To stop. Give yourself a moment to step out of automatic pilot and start noticing what is going on for you

**O – OBSERVE.** Observe what is showing up in terms of sensations, emotions, thoughts, and urges. Describe each one, saying to yourself, “I’m having the thought that...”, “I’m noticing the emotion of...” Just notice as much as you can about your experience.

**B – BREATH.** Gather your attention and bring it to the breath for a few moments.

**E – EAGLE EYE VIEW.** Expand your awareness to take an observer perspective, noticing you, in this particular situation, experiencing what you are experiencing.

**R – RESPOND (versus react).** Respond mindfully, with awareness of what is needed in the situation and allowing your values to guide you. Whatever is happening in your mind and body, you still have a choice in how you respond.



After discussing the steps, have the group practice the SOBER Breathing Space and elicit their reflections and reactions of the mini-meditation. Facilitators can ask group members to consider other situations where the SOBER breathing space would help them to slow down, notice their experiences, and consciously take action toward what is important.

## SOBER Breathing Space in a Conversation

After teaching the SOBER Breathing Space, facilitators should organise the group into pairs. Facilitators should instruct group members that they will ask them to talk between themselves about a recent event that affected them. Perhaps, something that annoyed them, frustrated them, or felt unfair. Group members should be advised that the facilitators will, at some point, interrupt their discussion and invite them to engage in a SOBER Breathing Space.

Facilitators should let group members talk amongst themselves for a few minutes. When they are in full swing, facilitators should interrupt their discussion by ringing a bell, or simply asking group members to fall silent and close their eyes.

Facilitators should guide group members through the SOBER Breathing Space. Group members' values should be prompted (e.g., "Maybe taking a moment to get on contact with what is important to you in the interaction you are having. Perhaps it is mutual respect, connection, or supportiveness. Whatever is important to you in this interaction, letting that guide you in choosing a response.") as part of the guided SOBER Breathing Space to help group members select a behavioural response.

Facilitators can then invite group members to open their eyes and enact their response if they choose to.

Following the exercise, facilitators should elicit what was noticed in the exercise.

### Purpose:

To practice the SOBER Breathing Space in a situation that elicits psychological hooks

## SEEMINGLY IRRELEVANT DECISIONS

### Purpose:

To increase awareness of covert set-ups to relapse

The final topic of this session is Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions. This topic can be introduced as follows:

**“We have been spending a good deal of time practicing skills at stepping out of automatic pilot. One of the reasons for this is that each of us makes thousands of decisions each day. Many of these decisions are seemingly so small, they appear to have little to no effect on our recovery. However, there can be circumstances where small, seemingly irrelevant decisions, accumulate into a path which leads us closer and closer to a relapse. To illustrate what we mean, consider the following story...”**

The following story can be prepared on the flipchart and facilitators describe the story<sup>42</sup> to the group.

- ❖ **EVENT 1:** Sid sits at home, lonely and feeling deprived of social contact. He thinks, “I’ll go to the pub, see my friends, play pool, and drink soft drinks”
- ❖ **EVENT 2:** Sid arrives at the pub thinking about how good it will be to see friends, having no intention to drink, and not questioning his or her ability to refuse alcohol.
- ❖ **EVENT 3:** He pulls into the parking lot, stands in front of the bar, trying to avoid being aware of sweaty palms and increasing anxiety
- ❖ **EVENT 4:** Sid walks in, looks around, and is engulfed in the atmosphere – the smell of alcohol, the loud conversation, people drinking, and laughter

<sup>42</sup> Marlatt, G. A., & Gordon, J. R. (1985). *Relapse prevention: Maintenance strategies in addictive behavior change*. New York: Guilford.

- ❖ **EVENT 5:** Sid starts to entertain thoughts such as “one beer won’t hurt. After all, I used to drink a bottle of Jack Daniels. I’ve been sober for 3 months; I can control my drinking.”
- ❖ **EVENT 6:** The bartender recognises SID and asks if he wants his usual drink.
- ❖ **EVENT 7:** Sid sits in front of the drink
- ❖ **EVENT 8:** Sid picks up the drink and puts it to his lips
- ❖ **EVENT 9:** Sid pours the alcohol into his mouth
- ❖ **EVENT 10:** He swallows the alcohol

After presenting the above story, the facilitators should inquire about the following points:

- ✓ *“At which event do you think SID recognised the impending lapse?”*
- ✓ *“Which event marks the start of the lapse?”*
- ✓ *“At which event would it have been easiest for SID to have acted to avoid the lapse? What could he have done differently at that choice point?”*
- ✓ *“What thoughts and emotions were SID ‘Hooked’ by which led him to lapse?”*

Group members can be invited to share personal examples where they have made seemingly irrelevant decisions that set them up to lapse. The usefulness of pausing and noticing (using the SOBER Breathing space) can also be explored.

## CLIMBING A LADDER METAPHOR

The following metaphor can be provided to convey the importance of interrupting lapses as early in the lapse process as possible.

### Purpose:

To convey that lapses can be averted more easily the earlier they are noticed

“The seemingly irrelevant decisions that move one closer to a lapse can be a bit like climbing a ladder. The choice to step on the first rung doesn’t seem to be a problem in and of itself. And, from there, the next rung doesn’t seem like a big step, no the next, but suddenly, we’re high up and it can be daunting to jump off that climb. Perhaps when we are that high, we might notice ourselves thinking, who could blame us for not jumping from this height? I can’t give myself a hard time for not jumping from this height and we take another step up the ladder.

Of course, no matter how high up the ladder we get, we can always put two feet in the air and stop climbing. But it takes greater willingness to step into the discomfort. Of course, if we recognise where the climb leads on the first rung, it is much easier to jump off.”

## Between Session Work – ‘*Rewriting My Autobiography*’ and ‘*Practicing the SOBER Breathing Space*’

Hand out the between session work and describe the exercises. Group members this week are invited to review their brief autobiography and list a number of ‘facts’ (not causal statements). Then, to rewrite a new story including all those facts (plus any additional life events) into a different story. The story doesn’t have to be better – only different and equally valid as the previous story. Group members are also encouraged to find opportunities for practice the SOBER Breathing Space.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., “*What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?*”).

### Purpose:

To begin reducing attachment to one’s ‘story’, and to practice mindfulness skills

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *“How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?”*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *“What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?”*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

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To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next.

### Purpose:

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To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

Example text:

*“Great to see you on the ACT group. Keep practicing the SOBER Breathing Space. In fact, why not take this moment to do one. All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”*

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Compassionate Colour
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Homework Review
- ❖ Self-Compassion Scale and Discussion
- ❖ Inner Critic Job Description
- ❖ Rubbing the Dog's Nose in It Metaphor
- ❖ Younger Self, Older Self Meditation
  
- ❖ Between Session Work: *'Rewriting My Autobiography 2' and 'Monitoring Self-Compassion''*

# Session Fourteen

## 'Responding to lapses'

Lapses and Relapses are a common occurrence in recovery. Lapses invariably elicit a host of challenging thoughts, emotions, and sensations. In addition to the pharmacological effects associated with withdrawal or come-down, judgements about the self for succumbing to temptation can amplify ones suffering and drive further substance use to avoid physiological and psychological discomfort. Often, when the initial lapse is attributed to attributes of the self (conceptualised self), the self can be a target of blame.

In this session, group members are given opportunities to take perspective on the behaviour of self-criticism, and to practice self-compassion as a response to lapses.

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Compassionate Colour*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group for group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Engage the group members in a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside the distractions we tend to bring into session so we can make the most of the time in group.

The compassionate colour meditation used to begin this session is an experiential introduction to self-compassion practice. Facilitators should aim is to settle group members into the exercise by initially focus awareness on the breath.

Facilitators should then ask group members to choose a colour that, for them, represent kindness. With each breath, they should visualize that colour entering and leaving their body. The exercise can progress to moving attention around the body as one would in a body scan, though with the compassionate colour breathed into these areas.

Group members might also be instructed, in this exercise, to be aware of their reactions to the exercise; allowing themselves permission to make contact with kindness. Any thoughts that show up can be noticed, not pushed away. For example, if a group member experiences the thought “I don’t deserve kindness” during the exercise, having them step back from that thought and to breathe their compassionate colour into and around that thought would be encouraged. The same is appropriate with emotions, or uncomfortable sensations.

Following the exercise, facilitators should debrief group members’ reactions to the exercise.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Conduct a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and to describe how they are using only a couple of words.

Proceed to explore what group members noticed in their between session work. Last sessions between session work was to complete the 'Rewriting *Writing My Autobiography*' exercise, and 'Practice *SOBER Breathing Space*'

In reviewing the autobiographical rewrite exercise, facilitators should explore what was noticed in the exercise, and inquiring whether both stories are as valid as each other. Whether the story is better or worse is not important; the aim of the exercise is to highlight how the same facts can be woven together in multiple coherent ways. Instances of the SOBER Breathing Space practice should be elicited and the impact on behavioural choices explored. ACT processes should be reinforced where appropriate (e.g., defusion from thoughts, acceptance of emotions, reduced attachment to conceptualized self, values etc.). Group members should be encouraged to notice their responses to these barriers and assess their workability (i.e., "*does that action move you toward or away from what is important to you?*").

### Purpose:

To reflect on Between Session Work during the previous week.

## Self-Compassion Scale and Discussion

Following the review of between-session tasks, facilitators should initiate a discussion about the impact of a lapse on one's thoughts and emotion. Facilitators can discuss with the group how they treat themselves

### Purpose:

To have group members self-assess the tendency to be critical or kind with themselves.

after a lapse. The Self Compassion Scale<sup>43</sup> can then be handed to group members to complete and then reflect on what they notice about their relationship with themselves.

## Inner Critic Job Description

The inner critic job description aims to develop some distance between group members and the mind's behaviour of being critical toward the self. It provides an opportunity to defuse from critical, shameful thoughts following a lapse and take a more mindful, accepting, and compassionate stance toward these reactions.

Facilitators can begin this exercise by suggesting that, within self-criticism, there is a 'promised outcome'. To explore what self-criticism is aimed at achieving, we can consider the mind to have job description.

Write up on the flip-chart the following headings:

- ❖ **Job Responsibilities?** (What is the inner critic in place to oversee? What is the primary purpose of the critic when I relapse—e.g., to punish bad behaviour, to try to motivate change, to try to prevent a lapse happening again.)
- ❖ **Tasks:** How Does the inner critic go about achieving this outcome? (What specifically does the critic do in terms of thoughts, emotions, urges etc. Can explore what the critic says is the cause of the lapse i.e., internal quality vs external situation).
- ❖ **Skills, Qualifications, Past Experiences:** (What makes the critic a good candidate for completing these tasks?)

### Purpose:

To take perspective on the purpose of self-criticism and assess its workability to achieve those ends.

<sup>43</sup> Raes, F., Pommier, E., Neff, K. D., & Van Gucht, D. (2011). Construction and factorial validation of a short form of the self-compassion scale. *Clinical psychology & psychotherapy*, 18(3), 250-255.

- ❖ **Appraisal:** Explore group members' experience of whether being critical with oneself does indeed motivate better behaviour, reduce occurrence of lapses, prevent lapses becoming relapses etc.

Facilitators should List group member's contributions and encourage an open, curious attitude toward exploring the functions of self- criticism

Useful questions might include:

- ✓ *“Do the inner critic's responsibilities align with your values; does it move you toward what is important to you?”*
- ✓ *“What are the costs or downsides of your mind taking on this responsibility?”*
- ✓ *“How successful has this critic been in preventing you lapsing?”*
- ✓ *“How much energy does the mind use up doing this task?”*
- ✓ *“If you were this critic's manager, and were helping them find areas to improve on, what skills would the critic benefit from?”*

## Rubbing a Dog's Nose in It Metaphor

The rubbing a dog's nose in it metaphor can usefully convey the 'false promise' that punishment will lead to healthy and productive behaviour change and a reduction in bad behaviour. Because many group members have compassion for animals, it also creates a context to exploring kinder, caring responses to mistakes.

The metaphor can be presented as follows:

### Purpose:

To convey the unworkability of punishment through self-criticism to motivate behaviour change

***“Being hard on ourselves is often used to prevent future bad behaviour. As such, it’s like when a puppy goes to the toilet in the corner of the living room. Some may suggest punishing the dog by rubbing its nose in its mistake. Supposedly, this punishment will stop the puppy going to the toilet there. Instead, what it tends to do is cause the puppy to be scared of the person who rubs their nose in it, and may hide from that person when they need to go.***

***In the same way we can rub our own nose in the mistakes we make, hoping it will stop us from using drink or drugs again. But, the bi-product is that we can start to fear our own mind, and try to hide from the punishment by blocking it out with more drink or drug use.”***

The group can be invited to consider alternative responses to this scenario. Typically, group members will suggest responses that involve a more gentle, persistent, and encouraging approach. Facilitators can explore with group members what that might look like if we were to respond to our own lapses in that manner.

## Experiential Exercise: Younger and Older Selves

The final exercise for this session is an experiential one. The exercise aims to foster perspective taking on the functional impact of one’s addiction related beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and urges. It also creates a context in which group members may bring self-compassion to themselves for having those experiences. Group members should be informed that the exercise

### Purpose:

To promote perspective on thoughts related to addiction and recovery and foster self-compassion for having these experiences.

involves taking perspective on the difficult passengers on the bus, as such, it may be experienced as discomforting. However, this provides an opportunity to practice willingness with whatever shows up. Following a few minutes of mindful awareness of the present moment, group members are invited to imagine a younger self, around the earliest they can recall their problems with drugs or alcohol starting; this may or may not be when the person first used substances as they may find the problems predate problematic drug or alcohol use. Group members are invited to imagine this younger self having the same thoughts, emotions, and cravings as they do and to offer this younger self acknowledgement of how painful they can be. Perspective taking is shifted to accommodate both points of view. Group members are invited to connect with an older self who has overcome their present issues and who offers acknowledgement of the person's painful thoughts, emotions, cravings etc. A sample script is provided below:

***“Allowing your eyes to gently close, letting yourself connect with the breath. Noticing the inflow and outflow of breath, like an old friend that’s always there and inviting you to sit with them here and now.***

***And imagining that you can stretch your awareness back in time, through your life, to the earliest you can remember your drug or alcohol issues beginning. Maybe this is around a time you started using or drinking, to a particular life event, or maybe from there you find there’s a thread that stretches back further to a more innocent time where you couldn’t see the ways your life would take shape. Becoming aware of how old this younger you. And, almost as if the you that is here, now, could stand alongside the you there, then. Taking a moment to notice the expression on their face, their clothes, and their posture. Noticing the pain and challenge and discomfort that this younger you will have to go through to get to where you are today. There is nothing you can do to save that younger you from having to go through that. Standing by that younger you as you would a good friend and saying, I know...”***

*[Continued...]*

*“And connecting with the fact that this younger you has within them these same thoughts, emotions, urges, and cravings that led to the patterns of drug or alcohol use that you are working to change here and now. Perhaps seeing that younger self, almost as if you were a camera watching from the outside, in a situation you would typically find yourself craving drugs or alcohol.*

*Allowing yourself to hear the voice of that younger saying the thoughts you may have told yourself so many times before using or drinking. Knowing that younger you is doing the best they could. Seeing if you lean in close to that younger self and whisper into their ear, I know what that is to have that. And almost as if your consciousness was like water that you could pour into your younger self, and experience what it is to hear the acknowledgement that someone knows what you experience, how hard that can be.*

*And, allowing that image to dissolve. Imagining you could stretch your awareness forward in time to see an older, wiser you. A you that is living the life you deeply want to be living. Where recovery is more than just a possibility, it is like a home that you inhabit. Noticing the expression on the face of this older self, their posture. And looking into the eyes of this older self, maybe you let yourself tell them your fears and worries about moving forward in your recovery. And, in return, hearing that older, wiser you look back with kindness and say, I know what it is to have that.*

*Letting that image dissolve and returning your awareness to the breath. That old friend that is always there inviting you to sit with them. The same breath your younger self felt, and the same breath your older, wiser self will feel. Noticing your position amongst the other people here. Perhaps taking a moment to see we are all on this journey. Perhaps offering a kindness to each other in this moment, knowing each of us has looked at the fear that comes with change and the pain of difficult histories. Perhaps offering out a sense of, I know what it is to have that. And, allowing your eyes to gently open, settling back into the room.”*

Facilitators should proceed to debrief group members' experience of the exercise, paying particular attention to the experience of noticing thoughts and emotions from the different perspectives.

## Between Session Work – 'Rewriting My Autobiography 2' and 'Monitoring Self-Compassion'

Hand out the between session work and describe the exercises. Group members this week are invited to rewrite their autobiography for a second time, once again including all facts taken from the original story (plus any additional life events) woven into a different story. The story doesn't have to be better – only different and equally valid as the previous story. Group members are also encouraged complete a daily monitoring exercises tracking self-compassion. The purpose of this exercise is to increase group members awareness of how they relate to themselves day-to-day: with self-compassion, or with self-criticism.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *"What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?"*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *"How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?"*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *"What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?"*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

### Purpose:

To begin reducing attachment to one's 'story', and to practice mindfulness skills

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection. Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact

Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next.

Example text:

### Purpose:

To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Notice moments when you give yourself a hard time, and see if you can stand by yourself the way you would a good friend All the best and see you next Friday at 10am.”***

## At a Glance:

- ❖ Common Humanity Meditation
- ❖ Brief Check-in and Homework Review
- ❖ Self-Compassion: What It Is and Isn't
- ❖ Little Kid Exercise
- ❖ Making a Commitment
- ❖ Writing a Letter To Yourself
  
- ❖ Between Session Work: *'Practicing Self-Acceptance' and 'Monitoring Self-Compassion'*

# Session Fifteen

## 'Self-Compassion'

The Final session of the AWARE module is focussed on developing self-compassion. In many ways, this last session ties together the skills developed in the previous four sessions: bringing flexible attention to the present moment, developing self-as-context and taking perspective on the self, defused acceptance of thoughts and emotions, and committing to actions consistent with one's values.

Self-compassion is vital to recovery. Recovery unfolds imperfectly, with numerous instances of lapses and failed change efforts. One's ability to continually recommit to recovery and pursue life goals despite feelings of shame and stigma requires compassion toward the discomfort experienced as a result of these challenges

This session ends with writing a letter to one's self as though group members were their own good friend. This letter is typically posted out to group members fifteen weeks later (at the end of the next group).

## Brief Mindfulness Exercise – *Common Humanity Meditation*

Allow the first 15 minutes of the group for group members to settle in, socialize with their peers, and complete the outcome measures for this group.

After 15 minutes, bring the group together and welcome all who have attended. Engage the group members in a brief mindfulness exercise with the rationale of setting aside the distractions we tend to bring into session so we can make the most of the time in group.

Facilitators should lead group members in a short mindfulness meditation. This exercise should invite group members to visualise taking the perspective of themselves sitting in the chair from the height of the ceiling, then the roof, then cloud level, then the very edge of the earth's atmosphere. Group members can be guided to notice how their perspective of their thoughts, emotions, cravings, and urges changes as they take this observation point. Facilitators can also invite group members to notice the other people on the planet and the many people experiencing similar struggles in life.

The exercise should end with a gentle return of perspective, down to cloud level, the roof of the building, the ceiling, and finally behind the eyes of the person that is sat in the chair. As their perspective drops in height, facilitators should continue to invite group members to notice the shared experiences of others within their frame of reference until it includes just the other people in the room.

Following the exercise, facilitators should debrief group members' reactions to the exercise.

### Purpose:

To help group members set aside mental clutter and distraction and begin the group by settling into the present moment.

## Brief Check-In and Review of Between Session Work

Conduct a group round asking each group member to reintroduce themselves and to describe how they are using only a couple of words.

Proceed to explore what group members noticed in their between session work. Last sessions between session work was to complete the 'Rewriting *Writing My Autobiography 2*' exercise, and '*Monitoring Self-Compassion*'

In reviewing the autobiographical rewrite 2 exercise, facilitators should explore what was noticed in the exercise, and inquiring whether both stories are as valid as each other. Whether the story is better or worse is not important; the aim of the exercise is to highlight how the same facts can be woven together in multiple coherent ways. Reflections on the 'monitoring self-compassion' should also be elicited and its impact explored. ACT processes should be reinforced where appropriate (e.g., defusion from thoughts, acceptance of emotions, reduced attachment to conceptualized self, values etc.). Group members should be encouraged to notice their responses to these barriers and assess their workability (i.e., "*does that action move you toward or away from what is important to you?*").

### Purpose:

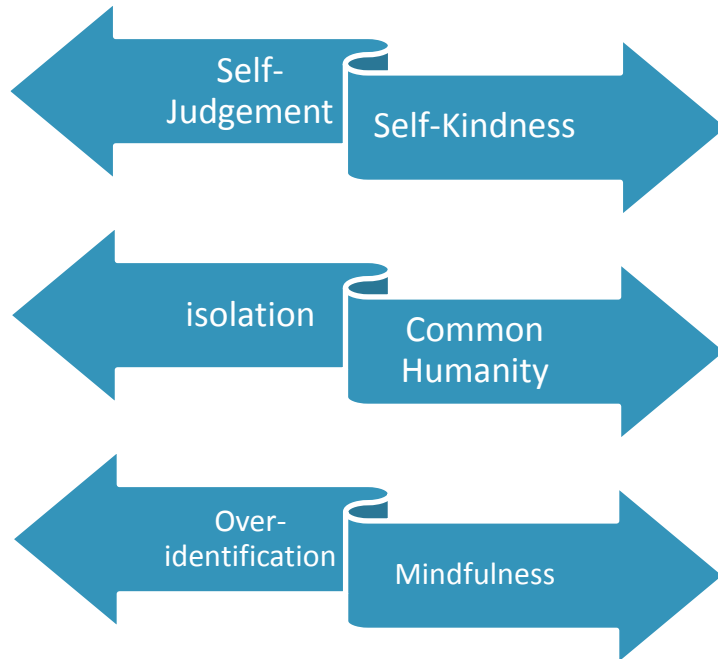
To reflect on Between Session Work during the previous week.

## Self-Compassion: What It Is and Isn't

Facilitators may benefit from presenting some information about what self-compassion is and distinguish it from some related concepts. The following dimensions of self-compassion can be discussed:

### Purpose:

To outline the qualities of self-compassion and distinguish it from other concepts.



These components of self-compassion allow facilitators to discuss related but distinct concepts. Self-esteem, for example, is one’s judgements of worth rather than one’s relationship to oneself; self-pity implies isolation with one’s suffering rather than a sense of common humanity; wallowing in one’s pain implies over-identification with one’s suffering rather than mindful awareness.

## Little Kid Exercise

This exercise can be emotive, but powerful. As such, facilitators should consider the timing of this exercise for group members and ensure they are fully willing to engage in the exercise.

### Purpose:

To foster self-compassion to one’s own addiction history, and the thoughts, emotions, and urges experienced as a consequence of this. To elicit a values action

Facilitators should settle the group member's into an eyes closed mindfulness exercise where, initially, they focus on present moment experiences.

Have group members imagine that there is filing cabinet in front of them containing all the memories of their life. Invite them to open the draw and flick back through memories to a time when they were about 7 or 8. Have them pull out a photograph of themselves at this age at the home they grew up in and look at the little kid, their younger self, in this memory; inviting them to notice any felt sensations, emotions, or thoughts that show up.

Then, have group members imagine they can pour their consciousness into this little kid and experience the world as it is through their eyes. Invite them to look at the place in or outside the house they grew up in and notice any thoughts, emotions, or felt sensations in the moment.

Ask group members to take themselves to the room they would have felt most comfortable, and to go there as the adult 'you'. Then, so see the little kid walk in.

Ask group members to look at that little kid and notice details, such as what they are wearing, the expression on their face etc.

Then, provide an opportunity to take a self-compassionate stance toward their own history, thoughts, emotions, and sensations. For example, by saying:

***“Taking a look at this little kid, and acknowledging all the pain, suffering, difficulties, wrong choices, and struggles this kid will have to go through to be where you are today, here and now. Knowing that you can't save that little kid from those experiences.***

***And, taking a moment to offer some words of wisdom to this little kid, about how to walk through this history of yours. Not saying this out loud, but kind of speaking to this little kid knowing they can hear you.”***

Leave some time for group members to engage in this self-compassionate act before moving toward eliciting values and commitment:

**“And if you could see inside this little kid and acknowledge what this kid really wants from life: be it safety, love, friendship, acceptance, whatever, see if you can just acknowledge that. And, seeing if this is important to you too, here and now. Exploring whether you could give this to yourself as a gift in your actions over the coming days and weeks. And seeing if you can work through to a place where the answer to this is a ‘yes’, a commitment to take a stand for something that was important then, that is important now, and guides you into shaping a future that is meaningful to you.**

**And, if it feels right to do so, embracing that little kid, letting that kid be a part of you, the programming you carry, and returning your attention to the sensations of**

Facilitators should gently lead group members into a few minutes of present moment awareness before ending the exercise.

Following the exercise, inquire into group members’ experience of the exercise:

- ✓ **“What stood out to you in this exercise?”**
- ✓ **“What was your experience of looking at your history from this perspective? Was there harshness in how you treated your younger self, or a kinder stance?”**
- ✓ **“What about the gift to yourself, and this little kid, what stood out there? What might that look like if you were to take a stand for that?”**

## Little Kid Exercise

Following the 'Little Kid' exercise, facilitators should proceed to provide paper, pens, and an envelope to all group members.

Group members should be invited to write a letter to themselves in the third-person - from the perspective of being a kind, compassionate friend. They can be encouraged to include what they have learned, or felt was useful, from participating in the ACT on Your Recovery group.

These letters should be completed *without* sharing their content with the group. This point should be made explicit from the start of the exercise.

Once completed, letters should be placed in the envelope, sealed, and group members write their address on the front. Group facilitators should keep these letters and post them 15 weeks later.

Whilst the content of the letters should remain private, facilitators should inquire about the experience of writing the letter itself.

### Purpose:

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To encourage a kinder, supportive, encouraging stance toward oneself in group members' recovery

## Making a Commitment

The final exercise of this session is to have group members take a few moments to gather their thoughts, and one at a time stand up and make a public commitment to a valued direction/values based goal following the group.

### Purpose:

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To make a public commitment to a valued direction

## Between Session Work – ‘Writing Assignment about My Commitment’

Hand out the between session work and describe the exercises. Group members this week are invited to engage in a writing assignment about their publically made commitment.

Explore how what **benefits** group members can see in investing some time with the task (e.g., *“What would you hope to gain from taking some time in this exercise?”*).

Explore **how they might engage** with the exercise (e.g., *“How might you go about doing this exercise so that you get the most out of it?”*). (Having group members describe implementation intentions can increase commitment to a goal)

Explore likely barriers that might get in the way of engaging with the task (e.g., *“What might stand in your way from doing this exercise?”*) (Pre-empting barriers can increase commitment and prompt group members to consider skilful ways of handling these)

### Purpose:

To support engagement in, and commitment to, valued actions

## Finishing Up

Complete a group round inviting each member to describe one or two things that have stood out to them as important to stay mindful of.

Facilitators should include themselves in this reflection.

Group members can be invited to take six mindful breaths on purpose before closing the group.

### Purpose:

To encourage reflection on what has been important or personally relevant in this group session

## Mid-Week Contact











Mid-week, between sessions, send a text acknowledging group members' attendance on the previous session, and inviting them to the next.






















Example text:































***“Great to see you on the ACT group. Find opportunities to move toward the commitment you made, and be kind with yourself as you do so. All the best and see you next Friday at 10 am.”***
























### Purpose:

















To remind group members on session related content, encourage engagement in between session work, and support ongoing attendance

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Mindfulness of the Breath						
Values Based Group Agreement						
Raison Exercise						
Automatic Pilot Metaphor						
Craving Time-Course						
Body-Scan						

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
<b>Informal Mindfulness Activity</b>						
<b>Me at My Best/Me at My Worst</b>						
<b>Chessboard Metaphor</b>						
<b>Observer Exercise</b>						
<b>Taking Perspective on the 'Self'</b>						
<b>Autobiographical Rewrite</b>						
<b>Daily Opportunity for Mindfulness</b>						

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Expanding Bubble						
Choice Point Exercise						
SOBER Breathing Space						
SOBER Breathing Space in Conversation						
Seemingly Irrelevant Decisions						
Practicing SOBER Breathing Space						

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
<b>Climbing a Ladder Metaphor</b>						
<b>Compassionate Colour Meditation</b>						
<b>Self - Compassion Self-Assessment</b>						
<b>Inner Critic job Description</b>						
<b>Younger and Older Selves</b>						
<b>Monitoring Self-Compassion</b>						

	Acceptance	Defusion	Present	Self	Values	Commitment
Common Humanity Meditation						
Self-Compassion What it is and Isn't						
Little Kid Exercise						
Writing a Letter to Yourself						
Public Commitment						
Commitment Writing Assignment	