


Acceptance and Commitment Practice in the Schools

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Agenda/Objectives

- What is ACT?
- The Components of ACT
- How ACT can be used with students
- How ACT can be used in self-care, personal wellbeing to help against burnout
- Hands-on Practice of each Component
- Wrap up and Discussion

Agenda!

• Disclaimer: The presenter has several books published on the following materials and gets some compensation from sold publications.

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What is Acceptance and Commitment Practice?

- ☞ Based on 3 broad categories
 - ☞ Mindfulness
 - ☞ Acceptance
 - ☞ Commitment and Values-based Living

-Hayes (2005)

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Mindfulness in ACT

- To observe experience
- Thoughts are “lenses” through which we filter our world
- To become aware of experience, without avoidance or “fusion”
- Moment to moment awareness (in real time)

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Acceptance

- To acknowledge, as opposed to avoid, sink into, or try to “fix”
- What it is not: self-defeat or “putting up” with pain
- Active, vital awareness and acknowledgement of the moment and our experiences
- Open curiosity
- Defusion from thoughts

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Commitment and Values-Based Living

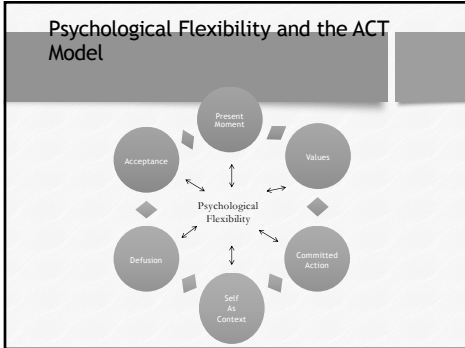
- Desired qualities of ongoing action
- How we want to behave on an ongoing basis
- Our compass for direction
- Committed action, guided by our values

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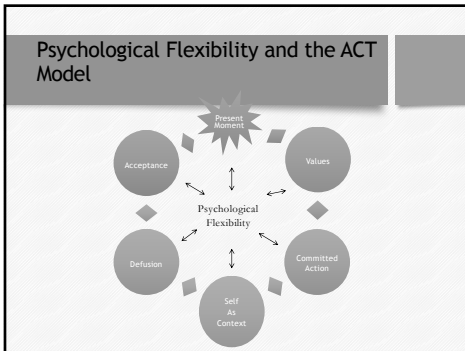
Psychological Flexibility

- The ability to be present, with full awareness and openness to experience, and to take action, guided by values - (Harris, 2009)
- The primary goal of ACT is to increase psychological flexibility

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Mindfulness


- Cultivating a nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment
- Things and events are not inherently good or bad: it is thinking them that make them so.
- Our minds race to label our experiences, both past and future, thereby taking us out of the present, which is the only reality.



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Mindfulness and The Thinking Mind

- If you delve into the past, it will become a bottomless pit. There is always more.




- More time to understand the past is not helpful in mindfulness theory
 - Contradictory to many therapies
- The idea that the future will eventually set you free of the past is a delusion.
- Only the present can set you free of the past.

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Present Moment

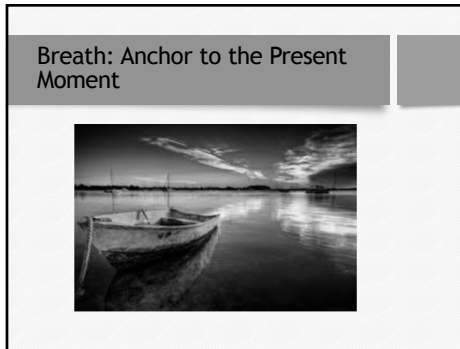
- We are often so trapped in our thoughts that we forget to experience, let alone enjoy, what is happening in the now.
- But if we are so absorbed in now, won't we miss information we need to strategize and plan??
 - Tolle suggests 80-90% of thinking is repetitive, useless, and negative, even harmful
- Our thinking minds are supposed to be tools; we use them for a task, then set them down



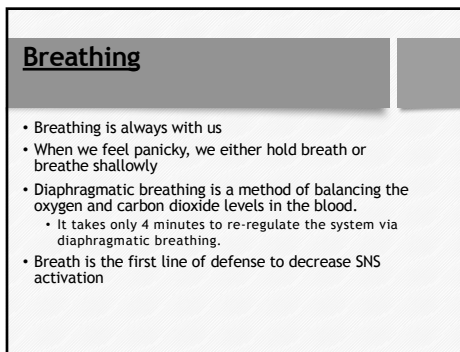
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Savoring the Present Moment

- Savoring the moment often involves our senses
 - Hearing
 - Vision
 - Taste
 - Touch
 - Smell

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Breathing and Meditation Exercise

- Coming into breath
- Being aware of our bodies
- Opening up to our other senses
- Labeling thinking as "thinking"
- Opening up our "mental hands" to thought



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Mindful Moment



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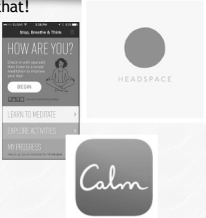
Discussion

- What did you notice externally?
- What did you notice internally?

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Technology


- Yep, there's an app for that!
- Stop, Think, Breath
- Calm
- Smiling Minds
- Insight Timer
- Pacifica
- Headspace
- Simple Habit
- Virtual Hope Box
- GoNoodle



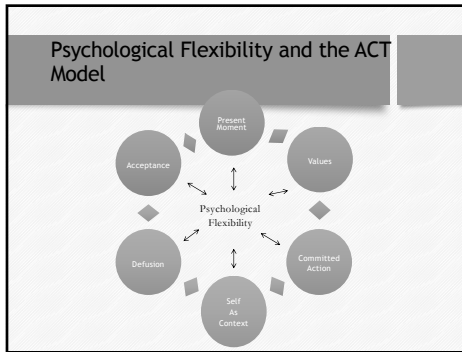
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Incorporate Mindfulness Every Day

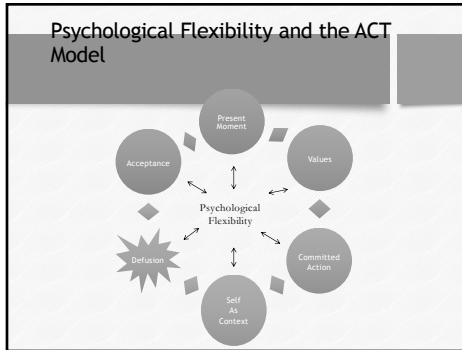
- Whenever we are in the present moment, as opposed to our scripts of the past and future and thinking mind, we ARE practicing mindfulness



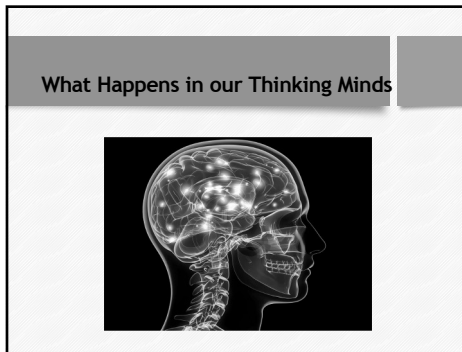
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The Past and Future



- Movie directors: constantly playing scripts and clips in our minds. Often this leads to an emotional experience, such as anxiety, depression, or excitement.
- We react and respond to the illusions we create in our minds. Not to what is actually occurring in the present.
- Negative scripts/thinking patterns create anxiety, depression, stress, sense of failure, etc.
- "Monkey Mind"

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Defusion of Thought

- Fusion with thoughts: they are the lens by which the world is viewed
- Defusion: Recognizing that thoughts are thoughts and that these can structure our inner worlds
 - Sunglasses metaphor
- Defusion allows us to be more flexible psychologically
- No delete button on thoughts

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Techniques for Defusion

- Numbers game
- Silly, sing songy voices
- "I am having the thought that..."
- Externalize the thought (e.g., form, speed, color)
- Thank the Mind
- Leaves on the Stream

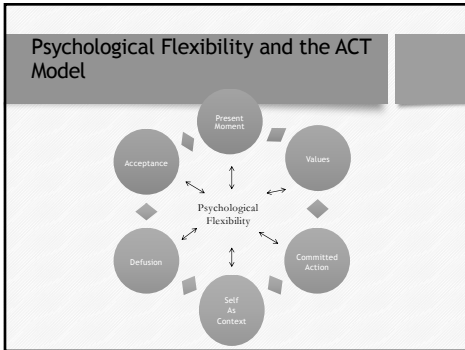
(Hayes, 2005)

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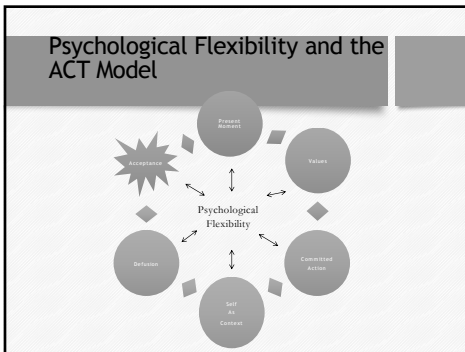
More Cognitive Techniques

- Say it slowly
 - Negative thoughts tend to be less painful as it highlights our thoughts are just thoughts
- Type it out
 - Change the font, formatting and color
- Name the story
 - The "I'm a failure" story
 - The "no one likes me" story

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Acceptance

↳ Active, vital awareness and acknowledgement of the moment and our experiences




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Attachment vs. Acceptance

- Suffering occurs because people miss the basic tenant of life: Life is Change.
- We suffer when we become attached to an outcome of events or relationships in our lives.
- Acceptance can help us loosen our attachments and shift our energy around things.

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Clip Board Technique



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Acceptance Techniques

- Chinese finger trap analogy
- Physicalize the thought (like the clipboard)
- Lean “into” the fear
- Moving through the swamp
- Tug of war (drop the rope!)



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Holding What Hurts Activity

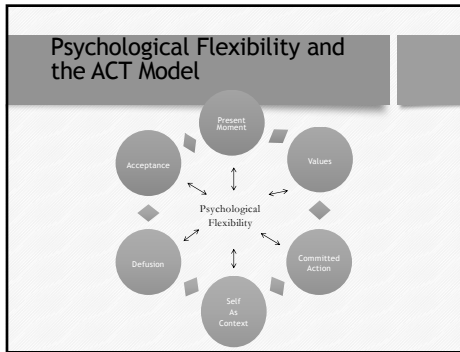
- Use a small, pointy/prickly object
- Demonstrate in your hand with the student
 - Closing hand around it as opposed to flat hand
- Discuss this as a metaphor for the thing that is hurting the youth

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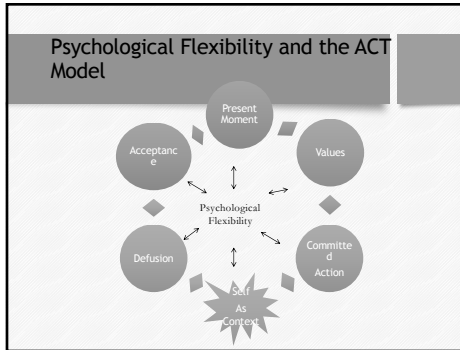
Unwanted Guest

- Unwanted guest activity (read script)
- Debrief:
 - Painful, private experiences (thoughts, feelings, physical sensations) are like the uninvited guest
 - We try to hide from them, or are very occupied with them
 - What would it be like to let the guest in and still connect with the world around us?
- Adapted from Gordon & Borushok (2019)

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Self as Context

- Children begin at a young age categorizing themselves
 - Naming, categorizing, evaluating self (I AM)
- These evaluations become stories, fused with thought
- The goal: Perspective taking and Observing self
 - Cultivating self compassion
 - Observing thoughts and reactions, feelings and behaviors as opposed to "being them"

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• *“Self as context is important in part because from this standpoint, one can be aware of ones own flow of experiences without attachment to them or an investment in what experiences occur: thus defusion and acceptance is fostered. Self as context is fostered in ACT by mindfulness exercises, metaphors, and experiential processes.”*

Hayes, et. al, 2006

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The Chess Game Metaphor


- Imagine a chess board
 - Each of the pieces represent different thoughts, feelings, memories (both loving and pleasurable, and painful and fearful)
 - Imagine the battle between the pieces
 - When stuck in all or nothing/black and white thinking, there is great investment in continuing the battle
 - You are not the pieces - you are the chess board
 - Hold all the pieces & take them for a ride depending on where you are going

• Adapted from Hayes (2005)

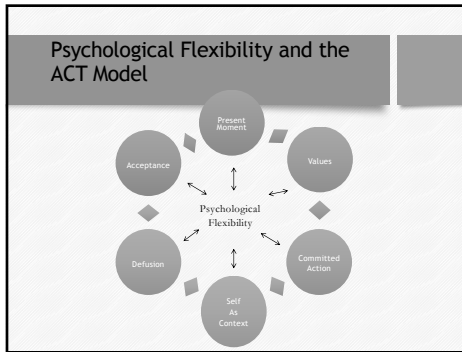
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Techniques to Increase Observer Self

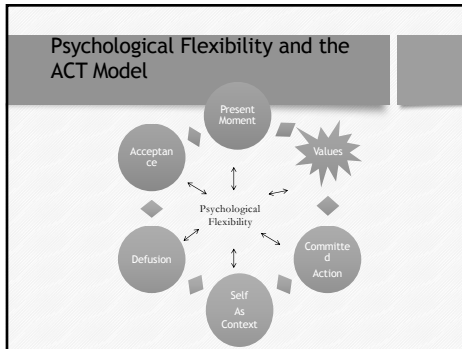
- Letter from wiser, older self
- Narrative work: Rewrite your story



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Clarifying Values

- Values are chosen life directions
- Defining what matters and actively choosing to pursue that direction
- We can have values, even in the face of much adversity

A small, square image showing a lone, leafless tree standing on a grassy hill under a hazy, overcast sky.

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Values

- ☞ Here and Now
- ☞ Never need to be justified
- ☞ Often need to be prioritized
- ☞ Best held lightly
- ☞ Freely chosen

Harris, 2009

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Common Values Domains

☞ Intimate relationship	☞ Education, training, personal growth
☞ Parenting	☞ Recreation/leisure
☞ Family Relationships	☞ Spirituality
☞ Friendships	☞ Citizenship
☞ Career/employment	☞ Health/physical well being

Hayes, 2005

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Values Techniques

- 80th birthday party
- List values in each of the relevant domains
- What if no one could know your achievements...
- Flip side of the paper

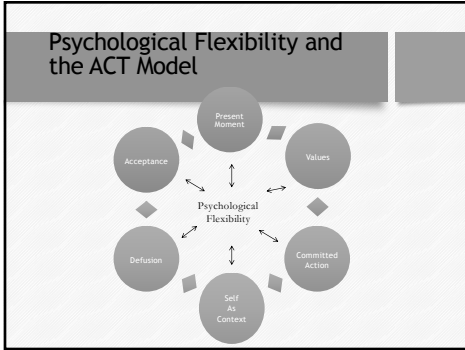
Hayes, 2005

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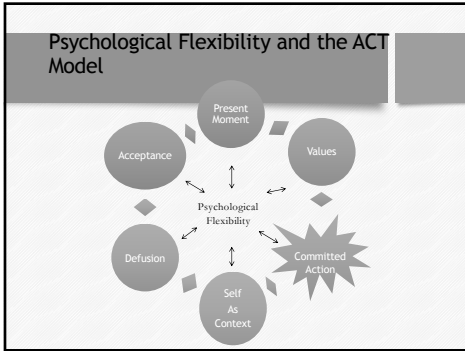
Values Techniques

- Intentions vs Goals
 - Intentions: Master plan or mission statement (our underlying values)
 - Goals: How you will accomplish this

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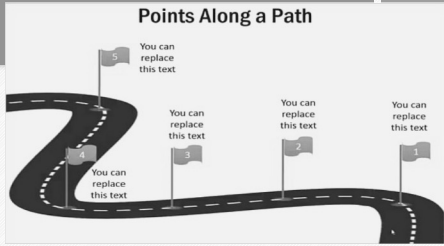
Committed Action

- Choose a life domain for change
- Choose your values to pursue in this domain
- Develop specific, realistic, achievable goals
- Create a road map to success
- Passengers on the Bus Technique

Harris, 2009

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Points Along a Path



You can replace this text

You can replace this text

You can replace this text

You can replace this text

You can replace this text


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Passengers on the Bus

Passengers on the Bus

You can be in the driving seat, whilst all the passengers (thoughts) are being critical, abusive, intrusive, distracting, and shouting directions, or sometimes just plain nonsense. You can allow those passengers to shout and chatter noisily, whilst keeping your attention focused on the road ahead, heading towards your goal or value.

(Heyes et al 1999)



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=729ptSuoWRc>

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Passengers on the bus script

- Set up chairs to role play a bus, with a driver out front and 3 or 4 passengers at the back
- Have one of the co-facilitators be the bus driver at first.
- Ask for 3 students to nominate as passengers. Give the passengers a sticky note with thoughts to say out loud.
 - You won't make it!
 - Don't even try!
 - Why bother!
- Write a goal of the bus driver on a piece of paper and tape to the wall (e.g., pass math class)
- The facilitator then explains that the passenger's job is to distract the bus driver from calling out the thoughts.
- Have the students take their places on the bus.
- The bus driver's job is to try and drive the bus without turning around to look at the passengers, without stopping the bus, etc. The bus driver should role play this in a way wherein at first the driver gives attention to the passengers, makes the driver turn around, makes the driver get out of the seat, makes the driver stop to try throw off a passenger. Then model for the group members the driver using the ACT techniques to stay seated, with clear direction and healthy self-talk around direction.
- Take turns being the passengers and bus drivers, if developmentally appropriate

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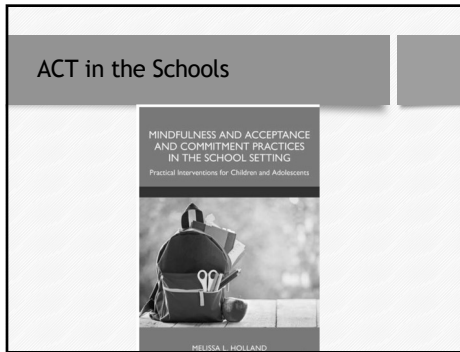
- Be careful of “Dead Person’s Goals”
- Magic wand question
- Unconditionally accept the client’s experience (Rogerian!)

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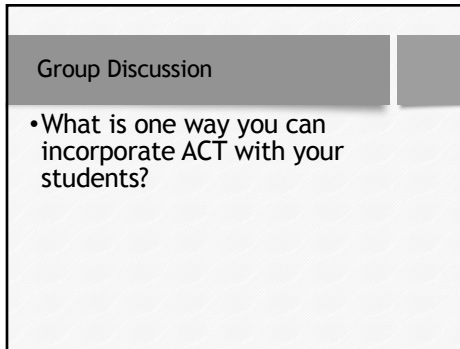
ACT and Various Populations

- <https://brainproof.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Pahoke-et-al-act-for-autistic-adults.pdf>
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1744629509346173>
- <https://www.neurodiversecounseling.com/blog/2020/2/10/affirming-neurodiversity-in-the-work-and-education/>
- https://med.emory.edu/departments/psychiatry/_documents/_documents1/act-against-racism.pdf
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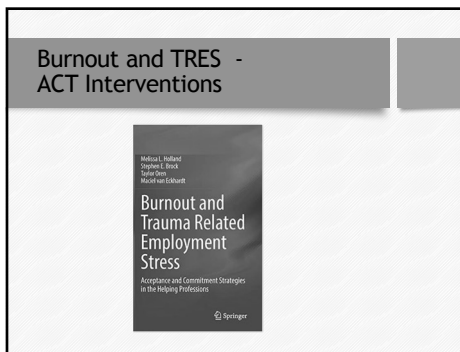
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•What is one way you can incorporate ACT with yourself in your own life/work or with your staff?

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**Resources and Books/
Self-Help**

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WRAP UP

- Discussion
- Questions
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