

Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT) for Family Caregivers of People with Developmental Disabilities

Training Manual

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PREFACE

Family caregivers of children with developmental disabilities are everyday unsung heroes whose needs are often neglected. This manual documents how our team has conducted Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT) workshops for caregivers and serves as a basic training manual for future prospective facilitators. The aim of the workshop is to promote the mental health and well-being of family caregivers by increasing their psychological flexibility through mindfulness, acceptance and values-based processes consistent with the ACT model. It is designed as a group intervention to be conducted by a team of two or more trained co-facilitators who, as a starting prerequisite, have themselves experienced the workshop as participants. We also recommend that the team consist of at least one family member with lived experience and one clinician with professional background or experience working with the developmental disability community. This pairing of peer and professional collaboration is at the heart of the workshop's success.

The original group intervention was designed to be delivered in-person, typically over one-and-a-half days, followed by another half-day session four weeks later. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have made adaptations to the intervention so that it can be delivered virtually through videoconferencing technology over five sessions. Each of the two modes of delivery offers a unique experience, and participants of one may still reap benefits from the other. Common to both is an emphasis on an experiential approach to learning ACT. Most important of all, a successful ACT workshop is guided by values of compassion and empowerment, which can never be adequately described by words alone. We hope that this manual will serve as a cornerstone to make these ACT workshops more accessible, that it will touch our lives as facilitators and participants in meaningful ways, and that it will move us toward building supportive communities for all caregivers and their families.

This manual is adapted from and based on:

Fung, K.P. & Wong, J.P. (2014). *ACT to Reduce Stigma of Mental Illness: A Group Intervention Training Manual on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Toronto, ON: Strength in Unity.

MAKING THE LEAP: FROM PARTICIPANT TO FACILITATOR

Lee Steel

In January 2014, I attended an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) workshop called “Caring for the Caregiver” facilitated by Dr. Kenneth Fung. The flyer for the workshop intrigued me because it proposed that, among other outcomes, I would have the opportunity to reflect and reconnect with my own core values, and come up with ways to parent my children and live in a way that was more consistent with my values. This appealed to me. I realized that I didn’t often take the time to reflect on my values in parenting; I was too busy reacting. I was feeling the deep tiredness of trying to be what I thought a “good” parent should be, but this involved a lot of doing, not leaving much time for reflecting.

I don’t think I’m alone. Parents of children diagnosed with a developmental disability often receive and give ourselves positive feedback for all our advocacy work, ever striving to meet the needs of our children, which doesn’t leave us much time to just be—to celebrate, to cherish, and to enjoy our children, just as they are. Fears of the future and demands of the day seem like constant robbers of the moment. This workshop was an opportunity for me to turn some attention back to myself, to “care for the caregiver,” so I could hopefully get to a healthier place, a place that would honour both my children and me.

I enjoyed the workshop and wanted to learn more about ACT, so I was delighted when Dr. Yona Lunsky asked if I would be interested in joining Dr. Fung and Kelly Bryce, a mom whom I partnered with at the initial workshop, to co-facilitate three ACT workshops for mothers of children with autism. This was such an exciting opportunity for me to learn more about ACT and support other moms in coping with the stressors of parenting a child with a developmental disability. We noted that there was an immediate trust in the workshops, as participants appreciated that the facilitators themselves had first-hand experience parenting a child with autism.

Since August 2015, Kelly and I have facilitated a monthly support group for parents who attended one of the ACT workshops and who expressed an interest in continuing their learning about ACT, as well as supporting one another. The focus of the group, in addition to providing mutual support, is to continue the learning and practice of ACT processes and mindfulness.

Benefits of being a facilitator

As a parent without previous mental health training, I appreciate that a key requisite of being an ACT facilitator is authenticity. As expressed by Lisa Coyne and Phoebe Moore (2014) in the *ACT for Parents Manual*, facilitators need to “actively model the ACT components you teach, in your language, in your presence, in your willingness to acknowledge your own mistakes and limitations, in your willingness to show and accept your own difficult emotions” (p. 4). Thus, what I lack in formal clinical training does not need to be a limitation as an ACT facilitator. It is more important for me to bring authenticity to the role and to recognize that my vulnerability is one of my greatest strengths. My own journey, as a person and a parent, with all my mistakes and limitations, is the foundation I need to draw upon to listen and respond to others with

compassion. Therefore, one of the benefits of being a facilitator is to practise compassion beyond the ACT workshops—in my parenting, my workplace, with my friends and family, and toward myself.

There is a sense of joy I find after each workshop ends, knowing that I have opened myself up more fully to my own experience and to other parents' experiences. The workshops remind me that I am not alone and that despite ethnic, cultural or age differences, as parents we are all striving to help our children live their best lives possible. The workshops remind me to move from fear to hope and to live and treasure this time we share together, not getting lost in past regrets or future anxieties. This provides a purpose for my life.

The learning curve

Kelly and I wanted to be better prepared to co-facilitate the workshops, so we enrolled in a one-semester ACT course at McMaster University, in Hamilton. We also attended two days of training from Steve Hayes, the co-founder of ACT, when he visited Toronto in 2016.

Although this additional training improved my understanding of ACT, I would say that mentorship with constructive feedback and the opportunity to practise the activities are key to building confidence as a facilitator. Dr. Fung has been teaching and mentoring a group of four parent facilitators. Together we build our confidence, develop our skills and prepare for the many variables that can arise in the workshops. Beyond this formal training, it is important that parent facilitators gather to practise and encourage one another. We can also practise with family and friends if they are willing.

Outside of practice and mentorship, I have found reading books on ACT and mindfulness to be helpful. The following books have been particularly useful:

- *The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living—A Guide to ACT*, by Russ Harris
- *ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*, by Russ Harris
- *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*, by Jon and Myla Kabat-Zinn
- *ACT for Parents of Anxious Children Manual*, by Lisa Coyne and Phoebe Moore

Considerations before committing

The workshops require one evening, one full day and, one month later, an evening refresher session. For group cohesion and to feel part of the team, I have found it useful to volunteer for any tasks required to help the workshops run as smoothly as possible. Tasks include promoting the workshop; ensuring all the items needed for the workshop are ready; picking up the key to the venue; being prepared for my responsibilities as a facilitator; arriving early to set up; staying after the workshop for clean-up and debriefing; and setting aside time for team meetings. In the past, we received a grant that covered our hours during the workshops. The other time was given voluntarily.

What to expect

As a facilitator, you may wear many hats. These include:

- ensuring that all participants have an opportunity to share (if they want to) while safeguarding that no one person monopolizes the discussion
- being sensitive to emotions that arise while keeping your eye on the time and ensuring that things don't veer too far off schedule
- finding the balance between drawing from your own experience and being mindful not to give advice or "lead" an activity because you desire a certain outcome
- preparing for the next activity while being available to socialize and support during the breaks.

Each workshop is unique and depends greatly upon the cohesion of group members. You can be organized, but you cannot prepare for all the variables that may arise. Unlike many workshops, you cannot stick to a script—you must be prepared for the unexpected. If things go well, that's exciting and rewarding. If things go less well, it can be challenging not to take it personally. That's where debriefing and honest feedback from other facilitators are invaluable. I want to be open to learning and growing, both personally and as a facilitator, and every experience is an opportunity to learn.

Conclusion

ACT is a process that seeks to help individuals to struggle less with difficult things in their lives and mindfully connect with things that are most important in a way that is loving and respectful. Parents need safe spaces to explore their feelings, and an ACT workshop creates such a space. I describe the ACT model as a "reservoir of hope," a place where I can learn to pause and refresh my thoughts, as well as learn skills that build renewed compassion and understanding for other caregivers, my children and myself.

WHY ACT FOR CAREGIVERS? WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Yona Lunsky

ACT has been adopted with many populations, including caregivers. We think it is important that caregivers be able to participate in something practical and applicable to their daily lives. In supporting a loved one with a developmental disability, it is important to have knowledge about developmental disabilities and information about services and supports, and to learn skills to help. But as parents have said in our workshops, “You tend to focus all your energy on them, and their well-being. And even members of the family when they come around. It is always about how is the child? How is he doing? And you forget to pay attention to things that are going on with you.” Family caregivers need information and skills that go beyond developmental disabilities and that focus on their own mental health. And they don’t just need this support once they are in crisis.

In 2006, Blackledge and Hayes published a paper on a brief ACT workshop for parents of children with autism. Their study found that parents who participated in the two-day workshop reported improvements in depressive symptoms.

As a researcher interested in discovering new ways to support families, recognizing that interventions need to be brief (because life is so hectic already!), I wanted to see if we could build off of the Blackledge and Hayes study here in Canada. I met Kenneth Fung at an ACT workshop in 2010 and learned that in addition to being an expert in ACT, Kenneth was also a parent in the autism community. Over the next three years, together with Kenneth’s colleague Mateusz Zurowski, we had the honour of facilitating ACT with four groups of parents. We learned from them what they needed in their role as caregivers and which activities resonated the most with them.

In contrast to other parent groups that tended to teach parenting skills or give education about disability or supports or services, this group provided families with something just for them. It became clear in observing the families that having Kenneth as their leader offered an added element. Given the emphasis on authenticity in ACT, his ability to relate to families as a parent himself was very powerful. It was at this point that we invited two more parents to join us on our journey to further develop a parent-focused workshop, by parents and for parents. Through the support of a small grant from Women’s Xchange, we further refined the workshop with three groups of mothers of children with autism, and the workshops were led by Kenneth, Lee and Kelly. Mothers who participated in these workshops reported improvements in depressive symptoms and overall stress, as well as in physical health, and these changes were maintained three months later (Lunsky et al., 2018). Mothers also showed changes in psychological process targeted by ACT, as well as in their values. And these changes held over time (Fung et al., 2018).

We continue to refine our intervention based on ongoing evaluation and feedback from facilitators and parents. We have learned that parents value the parent leadership and that with the right supports, there are parents who can learn to facilitate. We also learned from parent facilitators that they value being able to co-lead groups with clinicians. Having a clinician co-lead means there is added expertise in understanding the service system and being able to provide professional support to a parent in need of it. Having parents and clinicians work together also demonstrates that there are many types of expert knowledge and that we need all of them if we are truly to make an impact on families.

ACT AS AN EMPOWERMENT VEHICLE

Kenneth Po-Lun Fung

In searching for a form of psychotherapy that complements traditional western psychotherapy (such as cognitive behavioural therapy) and has an Asian perspective on acceptance and mindfulness, I came across Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a model of intervention brilliantly developed by Steven Hayes, Kirk Strosahl and Kelly Wilson. ACT is an incredibly flexible form of psychological intervention that can be used in a wide variety of contexts. Its perspective on universal human suffering naturally situates the therapist and the client “in the same boat,” and tends to promote more self-disclosures than other therapies. This non-pathologizing approach to mental health makes ACT a suitable and powerful intervention for the promotion of general well-being, especially for populations that experience distress. In this use of ACT, the T stands for “training” rather than “therapy.”

While always informed by the six underlying core processes of the ACT model, every practitioner may deliver ACT differently based on the target population and context, as well as their own personality, life-experiences and cultural background. Just as ACT has influenced my way of living, my own way of thinking is also embedded in how these ACT activities, including classic metaphors and exercises, have been adapted, modified or created. Along my journey as an ACT therapist, the foundation of most of the group exercises was initially shaped organically in my work with Mateusz Zurowski, my friend and psychiatrist colleague from my hospital. The exercises were further tuned toward collective empowerment through my community research work, with Josephine Wong and Alan Li, to champion against HIV stigma and mental health stigma in minority groups. A large part of this manual is based on the original research manual written for the Strength in Unity study, a multi-site national study championing against mental health stigma among Asian men in Canada.

I then had the fortune of connecting with Yona Lunsky, renowned researcher working with families with developmental disabilities, and along with Mateusz, we piloted our first ACT groups for parents with children with ASD. As the parent of a child with ASD myself, I still recall being deeply moved within the first minutes of our initial workshop, listening to each parent introduce themselves. I realized ACT’s tremendous fit and the value of what it has to offer; I felt a deep sense of honour and responsibility, and of solidarity with the other parent participants. The stories they shared resonated with me, and memories of my own journey are still revisited regularly in these workshops: from first receiving and processing my son’s diagnosis, to the first days of connecting with other parents, to learning the ropes, the lingo and the resources in the community, to the fleeting hopes of “curing” my son with regimens of diets, physiotherapy, behavioral interventions, alternative therapies and ADHD meds, to the frequent explanations, negotiations, problem solving and contingency management strategies invoked in response to my son’s regular transgressions with family members, peers, teachers and the public. In the midst of our pain, struggles and the chaos of life, ACT reminds us of our values. Just as I can empathize with the parent participants’ agony and suffering, from disappointment to frustration to anger to self-blame, I can also see the values of love, hope, generosity and compassion brightly shining through in every participant’s eyes.

With every group, it is touching and gratifying to clearly see many parents blossoming and being empowered through the ACT processes. It was in leading the Chair Sculpture exercise in one of these ACT groups that the obvious dawned on me: that the ACT intervention can be most powerfully delivered by parents, for parents. This particular activity explores the concept of acceptance and has people share their personal stories about their difficulties as a parent. By the end of that exercise, there was not a dry eye in the room as an unspoken yet palpable bond was forged by our common struggle. It was also in this group that Lee Steel and Kelly Bryce first attended as participants, and they have transformed to become my treasured colleagues as ACT co-facilitators, advocates and co-researchers. Together with Yona's expertise and successive waves of amazing parents joining our team, we have embarked on a journey to promote more access to ACT by training other parents and clinicians to become co-facilitators of ACT workshops. This manual is one of the tools that we trust will facilitate this process. We invite you, the reader, to practise, use and disseminate these exercises with care and compassion.

WORKING WITH YOUR CO-FACILITATOR

Sarah Waldman

The facilitation model for the ACT “Caring for the Caregiver” workshops is based on pairing caregivers and clinicians as co-facilitators. This clinician–caregiver partnership is meant to be both a meaningful and powerful dynamic that brings together a rich combination of clinical expertise and life experience, resulting in an authentic and safe learning space for all. This approach, however, can also come with inherent challenges and lessons. This section aims to support a positive co-facilitator journey by providing you with helpful practices for navigating around some of these potential pitfalls.

Exercise ongoing compassionate self-reflection.

- *Before beginning your co-facilitation partnership, spend some time reflecting on the type of co-facilitator you want to be.* This can be informed by your values (e.g., compassion, accountability) and by your personal experiences facilitating other types of groups and/or as a participant in groups. You can ask yourself questions such as: What do I like/dislike about the facilitation style of facilitators in groups in which I have participated? How do I want to be treated as a co-facilitator, and how can this help inform how I interact with my co-facilitator?
- Each of us brings our own unique intersection of social identities (e.g., sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, economic status, level of education, ability and professional role) to the facilitator role. It is this diversity that can make the co-facilitation dynamic so powerful and rich. Sometimes, however, the dynamic between co-facilitators can be affected by the ways in which our various social identities affect our lives and our interactions with others. Most of us have identities that are part of privileged groups (e.g., white, educated, upper class) as well as identities that are part of oppressed groups (e.g., LGBTQIA2S+, person of colour, lower socio-economic class) (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). *Ongoing reflection on your own position of both privilege and oppression can be a helpful practice in fostering a positive co-facilitation partnership.*

Consider the following scenario:

- Ann is a new caregiver facilitator who comes to the role with a strong background in mindfulness and extensive lived experience of caring for her loved one who has autism. Ann has had many challenging experiences with service providers over the years as she has had to advocate to get access to the appropriate services for her daughter. When she first begins to work with her clinician co-facilitator, Mary, Ann feels uncomfortable providing feedback, as she is worried about saying something “stupid” or offending Mary. She feels intimidated by Mary’s professional background and level of education. Mary senses Ann’s unease and makes an effort to ask Ann for feedback explicitly and demonstrate how much she values Ann’s contributions continuously. Over time, Ann begins to feel more comfortable and confident in providing feedback to Mary.

Communicate about communicating.

- *Consider having a conversation with your co-facilitator about communication styles very early on in the partnership.* You can ask your co-facilitator how they would prefer to receive feedback during practice sessions. Some people like to receive moment-to-moment feedback while they are practicing a particularly challenging exercise, while others might prefer consolidated feedback once they have completed their practice. (See more on feedback below.)
- *Discuss how you will support each other during the workshop.* For example, you can establish a subtle signal (e.g., a tap on the shoulder for an in-person workshop) and/or a phrase (e.g., “Do you have anything to add?”) that will let your co-facilitator know when you need some support.
- *In advance, establish when you will connect with your co-facilitator to conduct check-ins during the workshop.* For example, for an in-person workshop, you may decide that you will spend some time during each break and at lunch to briefly check in with each other and make any necessary tweaks to the agenda. For a virtual workshop, you may choose to send a private message using the chat function or share phone numbers to send text messages.

Grow through feedback.

- Sometimes receiving feedback can be challenging. It may bring up negative thoughts and feelings. If we can mindfully recognize the thoughts and feelings that are stirred in us, we can use this information to help us respond and grow in our facilitator role. For example, if our initial response to some feedback is “That’s not true!” a helpful response might be “Can you give me an example?” or “What did that mean to you?” or “How did this impact you?” (Douglas & Heen, 2014).

Support each other.

- When you facilitate an ACT workshop, whether as a caregiver or a clinician, you bring your vulnerability and authenticity to the role. In doing so, you help to create an environment where participants can feel safe to share very difficult feelings and thoughts. At times, the intensity of the sharing and the nature of the stories being shared may trigger your own difficult feelings and thoughts. This is why it is really important to *have dedicated time immediately after each session for you and your co-facilitator to check in with each other and thoroughly debrief.* Having this time, that doesn’t feel rushed, in an established place where you can share any feelings or concerns that might have arisen during the session can help you both to process these experiences and continue to be there for others.

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MAKING A SECOND LEAP: IN-PERSON TO VIRTUAL ACT WORKSHOPS

REFLECTIONS FROM A PARENT FACILITATOR

Becky Lerner

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, many people embraced staying at home and viewed it as an opportunity to try a different pace for the “three weeks” we were asked to stay in our homes. People made blanket forts, cleaned out cupboards and embraced connecting with colleagues and loved ones via Zoom for the first time. It was scary, but like all new things, it still had an element of curiosity. I, however, was in a state of total and complete terror about the idea of being shut inside my house with my nuclear family.

I have three children under the age of 13, and my middle son has complex needs that require full-time care, including feeding, toileting, safety protocols—the list is long. I was frozen with fear at the idea of losing our support system of people who help relieve the burden of caring for someone with disabilities. I wondered how I could possibly survive this extended break from school, and I thought to myself, “How horrible of a parent am I when all I feel is anxiety, sadness and distress about being with my children full time?”

Like many caregivers, isolation is not a new state of being. The very nature of caring for someone with unique challenges can be isolating. We long for a strong community to support us and we strive for meaningful connections. For me, the beginning of the pandemic brought my fears of isolation to life—so real, I could touch them. The ACT team at CAMH and UHN understood these fears and immediately began to develop strategies to connect online. This dedicated team of people are so committed to exploring any outreach necessary to dispel isolation, to connect caregivers to each other and to support solutions for the long-term well-being of caregivers.

As an ACT workshop family facilitator who had trained only in person prior to the pandemic, I was skeptical that my experience as a participant could be achieved online. The deep sharing and resulting connection with fellow participants are so critical in an ACT workshop; it's an organic experience that is hard to replicate. Given my original bias, I was absolutely blown away by the resulting product.

Virtual vs. in-person

I had the wonderful opportunity to join my first virtual workshop at the height of the pandemic. I attended with curiosity mixed with the same gentle skepticism that comes with having pre-existing knowledge and previous in-person experience. What could the virtual experience bring that an in-person workshop could not? As I soon found out, many things:

- It allows for a national (or international) reach.
- It enables an increased capacity for delivery.
- It provides the opportunity to engage diverse communities.
- It allows participants to connect, with little disruption in their lives.
- It makes participants feel safe to share deeply inside of their own comfortable homes.

Benefits of a virtual workshop

Contrary to my initial thinking, a virtual workshop not only met expectations, but delivered on that rare and difficult cohesion I assumed could only be achieved in person. How?

- In-person exercises were redesigned to foster appropriate sharing for online discussion.
- The workshop was shaped into five two-hour sessions.
- Technology was tested and then used for participant sharing.

These key elements created a warm online environment, dispelled fatigue (given the shorter sessions) and created new and different opportunities to share feelings using online tools.

The potential of online workshops

With the tremendous stress and negative consequences brought on by the pandemic, the ACT team felt that it was imperative to reach out to caregivers despite the public health restrictions. They worked tirelessly to create and deliver virtual sessions that would give caregivers the critical tools needed to support their mental well-being. In this way, the pandemic actually catapulted a concept the team has been discussing for some time: how can we use technology to reach out to more communities, especially underserved communities? The concept was attractive for many reasons:

- A virtual workshop can be attended anywhere an internet connection is available.
- Training is accessible to people with limited resources.
- Online workshops are cost-effective, requiring no brick-and-mortar spaces.
- Capacity for continued training of facilitators is increased.
- The online workshops are effective and impactful.

Conclusion

Connection is there even if it is virtual. This statement is truthful on its own; however, I'll elaborate.

Fear, loneliness, anxiety and deep sadness can be debilitating when one is overwhelmed with isolation. ACT and its practices bring brightness and hope to match many of the negative emotions that sometimes come with caregiving. Though these negative emotions will never dissipate, learning tools of acceptance can make the life-changing difference between feeling “frozen” and feeling hopeful.

Meeting virtually and getting to know like-minded people from around the country who are going through the same things as you are is powerful. Being connected to fellow caregivers and supportive clinicians *in any way* can lead to the rise of well-being for so many people who are suffering. Offering ACT workshops online has delivered the many benefits we worried would be lost, especially the connection that I have referenced repeatedly. I am so pleased to say that the virtual workshop solidified the fact that connection can occur in many different forms.

The pandemic was a catalyst for community, support and hope. Isn't that wonderful?

Introduction

The ACT model

People suffer not only from physical pain, but also from various forms of psychological pain: difficult emotions, unpleasant memories, unwanted sensations, fear, worries, etc. At the same time, people also demonstrate resilience, courage and compassion. As Steven Hayes observes, “Knowing they can be hurt, humans still love others. Knowing they will die, humans still care about the future. Facing the draw of meaninglessness, humans still embrace ideals. At times, humans are fully alive, present, and committed” (2005, p. 1).

The ACT model is about supporting people in moving beyond suffering to fully engage with meaningful and committed living.

What is ACT?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, or ACT (pronounced as a word), is a relatively new evidence-based third-wave behaviour therapy.¹ It differs from classic cognitive therapy in several ways (Hayes, 2005):

- ACT highlights the paradox of psychological problem solving. Our psychological challenges worsen when we try to get rid of these problems (e.g., anxiety often worsens when we keep telling ourselves, “I must not be anxious”).
- ACT differentiates between pain and suffering. All people experience different kinds of pain; it is part of living. However, avoiding pain and unwanted experiences can lead to additional pain and suffering.
- ACT promotes a counterintuitive and unconventional concept: Accepting pain is an important step toward reducing our suffering. We can begin living a life we value starting now. We do not need to wait until all our problems are solved or our pain has disappeared.

ACT promotes awareness of our constant critical and evaluative mind (or non-stop judgmental thoughts) and our internalized rules. It supports us in recognizing and accepting thoughts and feelings that emerge that are beyond our control. At the same time, ACT helps us to find new ways to relate to these thoughts and feelings so that we are free from being stuck in our struggles and suffering. ACT also enables us to develop compassion toward ourselves and others so that we can engage in full living.

ACT echoes the serenity creed: “Accept with serenity what you cannot change, have the courage to change what you can and develop the wisdom to know the difference” (Eifert & Forsyth, 2005, pp. 8–9).

¹ The first wave of behaviour therapy began in the 1950s and focused on classical conditioning and operant learning. The second wave emerged in the 1970s and focused on information processing; its classic form, cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), is currently the dominant psychotherapeutic modality worldwide (Kahl et al., 2012; Ost, 2008). The third wave came about in the 1990s and focuses on contextual and experiential change strategies (see further elaboration in the next section).

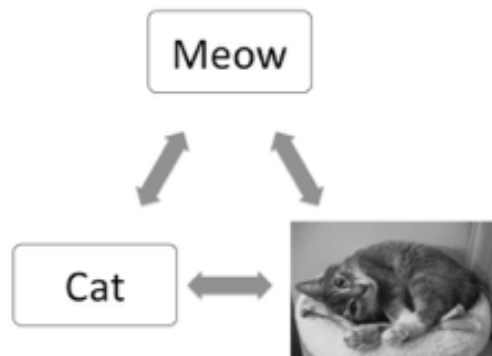
In a nutshell, ACT consists of three steps (Eifert & Forsyth, 2005):

- **Accept** our thoughts and feelings, including the unwanted ones (anxiety, guilt, pain, sense of inadequacy), by letting go of our struggle with them and recognizing them for what they are—our thoughts and feelings.
- **Choose** our directions in life by identifying and focusing on what really matters to us and what we truly value in life.
- **Take action** to realize our valued life goals by making a commitment to change what can be changed and to live a meaningful and engaging life.

The concepts and ideas behind ACT

ACT is one psychotherapeutic modality within the larger family of cognitive and behavioural therapies (CBT). However, unlike classic CBT, which presupposes that identifying, analyzing and correcting distorted thoughts is required for clinical improvement, ACT focuses on the entirety of psychological events; that is, contents and contexts, not only elements that are considered problematic. ACT builds on relational frame theory—a psychological account of human language and thinking.

FIGURE 1: An illustration of relational frame theory



Most English-speaking children in Canada are able to associate the word “meow” with the word “cat” and an image of a cat in their mind, without the actual presence of a cat in their immediate environment.

Relational frame theory captures our ability to make complex and “arbitrary” relationships between objects or aspects of the world. We can make these connections even in their absence from the actual environment through the use of symbols and language and the resulting psychological associations and relationships. This ability has enabled humans to advance in their potentials in many aspects (e.g., caring, trade, technology, arts, communication), but it has also increased our potential to experience suffering when we are not able to distinguish between our ongoing process of thinking and the products of thinking—that is, our thoughts. Consequently, we mistake our arbitrary language and thoughts as absolute reality and the essence of our being. For example, suffering occurs when we are not able to differentiate between “I am too skinny” as a thought and “I am too skinny” as a fused self-concept.

ACT is grounded in functional contextualism, in which psychological events are conceptualized as “a set of ongoing interactions between whole organisms and historically and situationally defined contexts” (Hayes, 2004, p. 646). Within this paradigm, a clinician or a researcher focuses on the entirety of each psychological event, paying attention to how and when psychological events are related, and the function or impact of these events on the psychological well-being and functioning of the person.

“Thoughts may be related to particular emotional and overt behavioural events, but only in historical and situational contexts that give rise both to these thoughts and to their relation to subsequent emotions and actions” (Hayes et al., 2013, p.182).

ACT is a mindfulness-based therapy

Relational frame theory enables ACT researchers and clinicians to understand how language and cognition are implicated in psychological suffering. However, the focus of ACT is not solely on research or identifying problems related to psychological inflexibility or suffering. ACT is also a science-based psychotherapeutic intervention that integrates mindfulness into change processes that promote psychological flexibility and well-being.

Mindfulness as a spiritual practice (not necessarily religious) has existed across different cultures, especially in Asia, for thousands of years. In western societies, mindfulness became popular in the 1970s, and is now used as a psychological intervention to address health challenges and promote health. However, within western science paradigms, there is still no definitive definition of mindfulness. The following definitions may help us to understand ACT mindfulness-based processes:

- Thich Nhat Hanh² (2008) defines mindfulness as “the practice of being fully present and alive, body and mind united. Mindfulness is the energy that helps us to know what is going on in the present moment. . . . Mindfulness brings concentration. When we drink water mindfully, we concentrate on drinking. If we are concentrated, life is deep, and we have more joy and stability. We can drive mindfully, we can cut carrots mindfully, we can shower mindfully. When we do things this way, concentration grows. When concentration grows, we gain insight into our lives.”
- Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 4).
- Sona Dimidjian and Marsha M. Linehan (2003) conceptualize mindfulness as a set of skills that are “the intentional process of observing, describing, and participating in reality nonjudgmentally, in the moment, and with effectiveness” (p. 230).
- Ellen Langer (2000) defines mindfulness as “a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context,” which she distinguishes from mindlessness, which is when we “act according to the sense our behavior made in the past, rather than the present . . . we are stuck in a single, rigid perspective and we are oblivious to alternative ways of knowing” (p. 220).

² Thich Nhat Hanh is a renowned Vietnamese Zen master, poet and founder of the Engaged Buddhism movement. He was nominated by Martin Luther King Jr. for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967.

- Bishop et al. (2004) developed an operationalized definition of mindfulness that involves two parts: (1) “self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment”; and (2) “a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance” (p. 232).

The ACT model of psychological flexibility

The ACT model of psychological inflexibility and flexibility consists of six pairs of psychological processes of challenges and interventions (Hayes et al., 2012, Fletcher & Hayes, 2005) (See Figures 2 and 3 on pages 8 and 9). Table 1 highlights these processes.

TABLE 1
Six processes of psychological flexibility and inflexibility

REPertoire-NARROWING PROCESSES (PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLEXIBILITY)	REPertoire-EXPANDING PROCESSES (PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY)
Cognitive fusion	Cognitive defusion
Experiential avoidance	Acceptance
Dominance of the conceptualized past and feared future	Contact with the present moment
Attachment to the conceptualized self (or self-as-content)	Self-as-context
Lack of values clarity	Values
Inaction, impulsivity or avoidant persistence	Committed action

Cognitive fusion vs. cognitive defusion

Cognitive fusion occurs when we treat our thoughts as reality, as if thoughts and reality were fused into one. Cognitive fusion helps us function and make sense of the world. We usually don’t question what our thoughts tell us—“The sun is round,” “Fire is hotter than ice,” “Hell is hotter than earth” all sound so real and logical. As you think about these thoughts, they become transparent as just thoughts in your head. No matter how true or false they are, they are just thoughts. In some cases, cognitive fusion can be harmful. For example, a person may become fused with evaluative judgments (e.g., “Autism is a horrible defect”) and treat them as reality, in this case possibly creating a sense of shame or hopelessness and allowing these thoughts and feelings to guide the person’s behaviour.

Defusion occurs when we deliteralize from our thoughts; that is, we recognize thoughts as just thoughts—no more and no less. Many cognitive defusion techniques are effective; e.g., watching thoughts in the way we would watch a TV show; repeating words; labeling the ongoing process of thinking—e.g., “I am having the thought that I am useless.” These defusion techniques foster our capacity to experience thoughts as thoughts, rather than just “knowing” intellectually that thoughts are just thoughts, or getting caught up in trying to evaluate the “truthfulness” of thoughts.

Experiential avoidance vs. acceptance

Experiential avoidance is the attempt to avoid unwanted thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations or memories even though it may be costly to our well-being or be ineffective or unnecessary. Although it may be our natural reaction to turn away from unpleasant and difficult experiences, experiential avoidance can actually reinforce our psychological struggle and suffering. For example, when a person worries about being judged and tries to avoid the unpleasant feelings through social withdrawal, anxiety may worsen, functioning may become limited, and overall suffering may increase.

Acceptance is “a moment by moment process of actively embracing the private events evoked in the moment without unnecessary attempts to change their frequency or form” (Fletcher & Hayes, 2005, p. 319). Acceptance does not mean being passive or giving up, but increasing our willingness to experience and face our psychological experiences, including negative thoughts or emotions (e.g., anger, shame, sadness, disappointment), just as they are, rather than trying to control, suppress or avoid them.

Dominance of the conceptualized past and feared future vs. contact with the present moment

Dominance of the conceptualized past and feared future refers to a way of being, where we are stuck in our thoughts of the past or concerns about the future. Often, when we have been hurt (e.g., bullied, abused) or have done things we regret (e.g., “If only I hadn’t done this or that”), these thoughts continue to dominate and influence our life. Similarly, worries about things that might happen (e.g., “Children with autism have no future”; “I can’t cope”; “I can never enjoy a good life in the future”) may constrict our present lives.

Contact with the present moment means shifting our attention to what is happening here and now, including our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and external stimuli (sound, sight, smell, etc.). Training ourselves to attend to the present can decrease dominating thoughts about our past/future. It can also help us appreciate and enjoy what is before us in the present moment and respond more fully and effectively to the situation and its demands. It also means taking ourselves off autopilot. For example, while driving somewhere we may “wake up” from our thoughts only when we get to the destination, without having been present to the full experience of the journey.

Self-as-content vs. self-as-context

Attachment to the conceptualized self (or self-as-content) means getting stuck to a fused identity that is based on evaluations, concepts and stories we have about who we are. While concepts of ourselves can be helpful (e.g., knowing you are a mother helps you play that role), being stuck with it means you can feel like you have lost your sense of self when a fused role is lost (e.g., quitting a job to care for your child and feeling that you have lost a part of you). Being fused with ideas about ourselves (e.g., “I’m not an adventurous person, so I can never try new things”) can also constrict how we lead our lives and what we choose to pursue.

Self-as-context means freeing ourselves from a restrictive fused identity or conceptualized self, and connecting to our higher consciousness, or gaining a “transcendent sense of self” or pure awareness (Fletcher & Hayes, 2005, p. 321). Instead of being fused with our psychological “contents” (our thoughts, feelings, emotions, roles, stories), we are in touch with ourselves as the “context”—we see ourselves as the background or the container in which psychological experiences such as thoughts, feelings and memories occur. Being the container is more flexible and resilient than just being its contents. If you were a cup, yesterday you may have contained sour milk, today coffee, tomorrow juice. If we are like a container, we come to realize that difficult thoughts and feelings that we do not want or, conversely, treasured roles that we want to hang on to, will come and go while we are resilient and ready to experience the present moment and new possibilities. This is called the “observer self.” From your experience and perspective, you have always been you throughout your whole life, while all other things about you (that aren’t actually you) are constantly changing (e.g., thoughts, feelings, body, roles, stories, memories).

Lack of values clarity vs. values

Lack of values clarity means not being in touch with our chosen values or what really matters to us. Instead, our actions may be guided by our fusion and other unworkable rules and stories, and we feel stuck. We may also be busy avoiding things that provoke negative emotions like fear, anxiety and sadness (e.g., “If others know that my child has autism, people will look down on me and my child . . . better not tell my family and friends about this and avoid gatherings”).

Values are meaningful, chosen life directions that support us in disengaging from cognitive processes that drive us to act based on social compliance, avoidance or fusion, and in taking purposeful action based on what matters to us. Values are different from goals—they are not something we attain, but are ever-present directions that guide us. Thus, values do not depend on outcomes (e.g., you can still enact the value of being a loving parent in your own actions regardless of whether your child can reciprocate or achieve certain goals you have in mind).

Inaction, impulsivity or avoidance vs. committed action

Inaction, impulsivity or avoidant persistence are patterns of behaviour that reinforce our psychological struggles and prevent us from engaging in mindful, valued living. We may not take actions toward our values (e.g. “I should take better care of myself, but I’m too busy”); we may impulsively react to our emotions, thoughts and stories (e.g., “My child made me angry, so

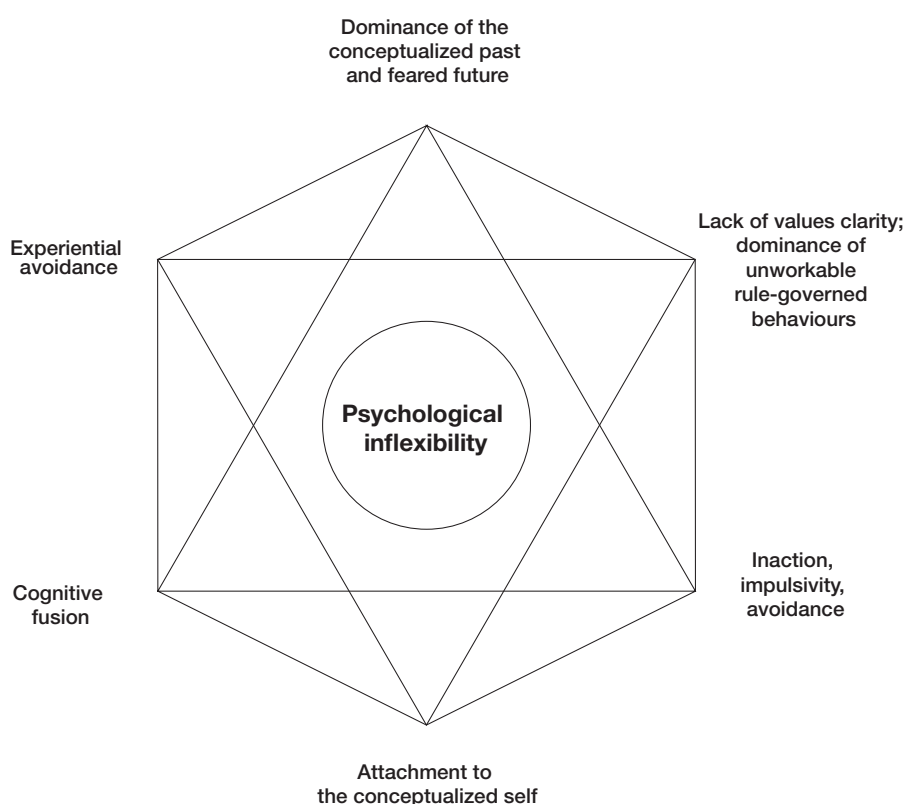
of course I scream and yell”); or we may avoid valued actions and situations that may arouse unpleasant internal experiences (e.g., “I avoid my friends in case they ask how my child is doing”).

Committed action refers to engaging in patterns of behaviour that are consistent with our chosen values. For example, if one of our chosen directions is to have self-compassion, then taking time each day for self-care and reflection is a committed action. Commitment requires acceptance and defusion of barriers that inevitably get in the way. Commitment is not about being perfect and never failing, but about being willing to commit 100% in the present moment. If we fail, we get back on track. Committed action can be built from small steps into larger ones. It is about the process, not the outcome (e.g., the values in loving a child are expressed through the meaningful committed actions of caring for the child, rather than through the outcome and whether the child will get better or be “cured”).

Mindfulness as integrated processes in ACT

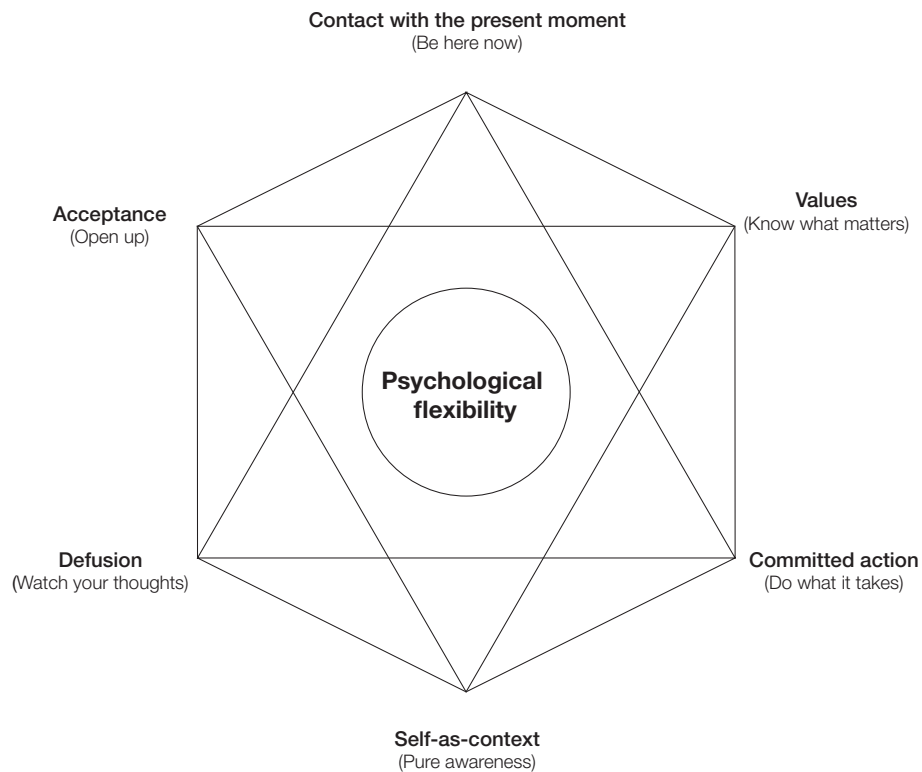
Mindfulness in the context of ACT refers to a set of related processes—acceptance, defusion, contact with the present moment and a transcendent sense of self—that work in tandem to support us in defining clear values and a chosen life direction, and in taking committed action that liberates us from suffering and allows us to move toward a meaningful life.

FIGURE 2: Processes that contribute to psychological inflexibility



Source: Fletcher & Hayes (2005); Harris (2009); Hayes (2005)

FIGURE 3: Processes that contribute to psychological flexibility



Source: Fletcher & Hayes (2005); Harris (2009); Hayes (2005)

Guidelines on implementing the program

General instructions

While adhering to the workshop protocol, uphold and model the following ACT principles:

- Be compassionate.
- Model acceptance and willingness.
- Be open to participants' experiences.
- Apply techniques in a flexible manner.

When you are leading ACT experiential activities, follow these tips:

- Provide a preamble and context to orient participants.
- Lead the activity while closely observing participants' reactions and level of participation.

- Facilitate reflection:
 - Draw from participants their actual experience during the activity and encourage them to share.
 - There are no “wrong” experiences, even when a participant draws an opposite conclusion to what the intent of the activity is. In this case, find out more about the person’s experience or thank them for sharing; sometimes asking gentle questions may help participants gain additional perspectives including the intent of the activity. Inviting others to share their experiences will often clarify things for the person.
 - Bring out important points of each activity, highlighting participants’ shared experiences.
 - Try to connect participants’ experiences with previous activities, concepts or participants’ shared stories where relevant.
- Summarize the discussion.

Group facilitation tasks and tips

HELP PARTICIPANTS FEEL SAFE TAKING PART AND SHARING

- Set group rules as guidelines at the beginning of the group to establish safety. If you can develop these guidelines together with participants, you will get better buy-in than if you dictate the guidelines from a list.
- Observe and use your feelings to gauge the cohesion of the group from time to time. This helps you troubleshoot if necessary.
- If possible, ensure that everyone gets at least one chance to share early on. This helps shy participants to open up and establishes the norm for the entire workshop.
- From time to time, gently invite quiet members to speak up. There is no need, though, for everyone to comment on each activity. Some people learn by listening, and this is a space where it is okay to be a listener.
- Remind participants about the group rules if necessary (e.g., if one participant starts telling another what she should do or how she should feel). This is not an advice-giving sort of workshop.

PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- When a participant becomes emotional, it is important to give them time and space to express that emotion (rather than trying to shut down this process and make the person feel better right away).
- Empathic statements are helpful; e.g., “It seems like talking about this is bringing up a lot of sadness.”
- Validate the emotions and experience first rather than rushing in to agree or disagree with what the participant is saying; e.g., “It seems like you are feeling angry at yourself and that you feel you’re failing in some way as a mom.” This helps to deepen the emotion and helps the person to verbalize the actual thoughts they are fused with.
- Consider inviting the person to observe these thoughts and allow the emotions to be there first. Then consider other ACT processes that may be helpful (e.g., defusion).

LEAD, SUPPORT AND DEBRIEF ACT ACTIVITIES

- Be familiar with the ACT activity and the take-home points.
- Encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and share openly. Ensure plenty of time for participants to share.
- If a participant gets the intended point, reinforce or emphasize it!
- If a participant gets something different than the intended point, and it is ACT consistent, you can also reinforce it!
- If a participant gets something completely opposite to the point of the activity (e.g., in a values activity, a participant says, “I see now that we should just give up because life has no values”), you can still validate the experience because it is how the person feels. Next, you can either help the person consider other possibilities yourself or invite other participants to help (“I wonder if others have also felt like giving up before and lost touch with what is valuable in life, and how did you deal with this?”).
- You can refer back to what participants previously have shared if it is relevant to the current activity. Here are two examples:
 - A participant may have said something earlier that illustrates a similar point. You can bring it in to reinforce the point.
 - A participant may have shared something previously that was the opposite of the intent of an earlier exercise (e.g., about how they are stuck and unable to see how mindfulness can be helpful). You can invite the participant to reflect on the connection between the previous problem and the current activity (e.g., “I wonder if what we just talked about in this exercise may actually help with the sticky situation you mentioned earlier”).
- You can make connections with previous ACT activities.

MODEL ACT

- Try to become conscious in modeling ACT, including mindfulness, allowing emotions to be present and not getting caught up or fused with issues yourself (e.g., having a long debate with a mom to prove you're right and she's wrong).
- Modeling ACT includes being grounded and being able to sit with silences, with people coming in late, with someone getting off course, with the schedule falling behind.

Of course, a balance is needed to keep things on track and ensure that people get their breaks and meals on time, which sometimes means that you may not be able to cover everything you wanted to in an activity. Be flexible in rescheduling activities or try incorporating learning points with an alternative activity.

DISCLOSE AND SHARE YOUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

- As a peer, your experiences are valuable. Disclosure and sharing are helpful if you use them judiciously for a particular purpose; that is, to facilitate the tasks described above.
- Use "I" statements, knowing that our experiences may or may not be applicable.
- Be careful about taking away the spotlight or time from participants. See whether others can be encouraged to share first, and pay attention to the balance in how much facilitators rather than the participants are leading and sharing.

WORK AS A TEAM

- Usually, one facilitator takes the lead in an ACT activity, and the other facilitator plays an important supportive role. That role may include the following:
 - Orient late attendees.
 - Help a participant who may need a break from the activity.
 - Control the environment (e.g., minimize distracting noise; guide participants back to their seats after a break).
 - Provide emotional support (e.g., hand out tissues or water) (see the section "Provide emotional support," on page 11).
 - Keep track of the time and update the lead facilitator without disrupting the flow of the activity.
 - Help the lead facilitator to clarify instructions; reinforce the lead facilitator's comments; and deepen the discussion (e.g., ask participants to elaborate further on comments they make).
 - On rare occasions, a participant may be triggered in the group. The supporting facilitator can work with the lead facilitator to provide support (e.g., the lead facilitator helps the participant outside the group while the supporting facilitator takes over the group, or vice versa).

- On rare occasions, a participant may react in anger to the lead facilitator. The supporting facilitator can help to defuse the situation.
- In some activities, supporting facilitators may be assigned a specific role (e.g., in the Bus driver activity, the lead facilitator focuses on the driver while the supporting facilitator tells passengers where to stand).
- Supporting facilitators may be able to observe participants' reactions that the lead facilitator may not be aware of. Debriefing, sharing and having discussions can help the team to better support all participants in upcoming activities.

The ACT intervention






Workshop recruitment

ACT workshops typically consist of one evening (5:30–9:00 p.m.), followed by one full day (9:00 a.m.—4:30 p.m.) and a refresher session one month later, usually in the evening (5:30–9:00 p.m.).

In our experience, 15 participants is the maximum number for the workshop to run smoothly. If the group is larger, there may not be sufficient time for sharing.

Once you have confirmed the dates and venue, create a poster or flyer. Figure 4 shows an example.

FIGURE 4: Example of a workshop flyer

Caring for the Caregiver

A research project evaluating Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) for parents of children with autism

ACT seeks to help individuals to struggle less with difficult things in their lives and mindfully connect with things that are most important in a way that is loving and respectful. With an introduction to the concept of ‘mindfulness,’ ACT does not attempt to directly change or stop unwanted thoughts or feelings, but to develop a new mindful relationship with those experiences that can free a person up to being open, and to take action consistent with what they care about. This is a research project evaluating the benefits of ACT for parents.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND? Any parent of school-aged child, youth, or adult with autism (fluency in English is required)

WORKSHOP 1: LOCATION: St. Leonard’s Church 25 Wanless Avenue Toronto	Friday May 25 5:00–9:30pm	Saturday May 26 9:00am – 4:00pm	Thursday June 21 5:00–9:30pm
WORKSHOP 2: LOCATION: University of Toronto 569 Spadina Avenue Toronto	Thursday June 14 5:00–9:30pm	Friday June 15 9:00am – 4:00pm	Wednesday July 18 5:00–9:30pm

Participants must attend all Workshop 1 OR Workshop 2 dates

WORKSHOP FACILITATORS:	Kenneth Fung Father of a child with ASD. Staff Psychiatrist and Clinical Director of the Asian Initiative in Mental Health Program at the Toronto Western Hospital.	Kelly Bryce Mother of a child with ASD. Registered nurse at Surrey Place in Toronto.	Johanna Lake Post-doctoral fellow at CAMH and York University	Lee Steel Mother of a child with ASD. Coordinator with Extend-A-Family.
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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact XXX at (email address) :a



Caring for the Caregiver

A research project evaluating Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) for parents of children with autism

INTEREST & INFORMATION

Name: _____

What city do you live in? _____

Telephone number: _____

Email Address: _____

Which workshop do you prefer to attend? Workshop 1 Workshop 2

How do you prefer to be contacted? Email Mail Telephone

If telephone, when are you most commonly available?

Monday-Friday:

Saturday-Sunday:

9:00am-12:00pm 1:00-5:00pm 6:00pm-9:00pm 9:00am-12:00pm 1:00-5:00pm 6:00pm-9:00

Does your child live at home?

How old is your child?

Yes No

Thank you for your interest!

Workshop facilitation

The workshop requires at least two facilitators so that they can support each other. It is helpful to have an additional support person to look after refreshments so the facilitators can concentrate on the workshop. The person meets the caterer and sets up lunch or dinner, refreshes hot water for tea and supports the facilitators.

Workshop resources

Participant folders

Each participant is given a folder that contains the following handouts³:

- 1.1: Hexaflex ACT model: Six core processes of psychological flexibility / Six core processes of psychological inflexibility
- 1.2: ACT PowerPoint slides (download the slide deck from <https://bit.ly/2VL7IRf>)
- 1.3: Homework reflection on mindfulness practice
- 2.1: Cognitive defusion techniques
- 2.2: Full living values
- 2.3: Bull's-eye: Valued living
- 2.4: Values, goals and life areas
- 2.5: Values and goals worksheet
- 2.6: Committed action plan
- 2.7: Session feedback form (these are optional)
- 3.1: Hexaflex with hand gestures
- 3.2: ACT matrix
- 3.3: Workshop feedback form

³ The handouts are included in this manual, in the sessions in which they are used, but may be more conveniently printed for participants by downloading them from <https://bit.ly/2OQ5RsG>

Other materials

STATIONERY AND HANDOUTS

- name tags
- black felt-tipped markers
- pens
- masking tape
- plain paper (at least one sheet per participant, inserted in their folder)

PRESENTATION EQUIPMENT

- easel
- flip chart paper
- coloured markers
- laptop loaded with PowerPoint slide deck and videos
- LCD projector and screen
- speakers

ACTIVITY MATERIALS

- Kleenex
- raisins or raspberries; chocolate
- paper plates—not styrofoam (one per person)
- Lego blocks
- mindfulness bell
- stones or leaves (as keepsakes, one per person; optional)

ENVIRONMENT AND COMFORT

- candle holders with tea light candles and matches
- candy bowls with candy
- milk, sugar, tea (black and herbal)
- snacks
- signage for the workshop
- soap bubble bottles

Delivering the activities

Instructions for each activity are provided in a template to help you deliver each activity consistently. Activities that are more complex include notes for facilitators that describe tips to conduct the activities, potential participant dynamics, and debriefing strategies.

Most handouts are included in the participants' folders and are also included in appendices at the end of each session.

Data collection

If you are evaluating the workshop, you may want to give participants a session feedback form (**Handout 2.7**) and ask them to complete it after the closure activity. The feedback may prompt you to address certain issues at the following session.

Session 1

Overview

SESSION ACTIVITIES	DURATION	ACT PROCESSES
Light meal and informal networking	30 min.	
1.1: Introduction	20 min.	
1.2: ACT and workshop overview (slides)	30 min.	
1.3: Group rules	20 min.	
Break	20 min.	
1.4: Video on mindfulness: Headspace	15 min.	Present moment
1.5: Mindfulness and Leaves on a stream activity	25 min.	Present moment (and defusion)
Homework and closure	20 min.	Present moment
1.6: Poetry reading: “Tell Me,” “The Guest House” or “Wild Geese”	3 min.	All

ROOM SET-UP

Arrange the chairs in a circle or horseshoe formation, with the facilitators sitting together at one end. Most activities will work with either formation, which can be changed from one activity to the next as necessary. A circle promotes cohesion and equitable sharing and works well for most activities, except the horseshoe works better when the facilitators need to use the flip chart or show slides or videos. Other considerations include number of participants and room shape and size. You can put a small table in the middle with tissues, candies and tea lights to make the room cozier. You can also play soft music in the background when participants arrive and during breaks.

FLIP CHART PREPARATION

- **For Activity 1.4, write:**

What Is Mindfulness?

“I define mindfulness as the practice of being fully present and alive, body and mind united. Mindfulness is the energy that helps us to know what is going on in the present moment. . . . Mindfulness brings concentration.”

—Thich Nhat Hanh

“Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, p. 4)

HANDOUTS

1.1: Hexaflex ACT model

1.2: ACT PowerPoint slides

1.3: Homework reflection on mindfulness practice

Activity 1.1: Introduction

TIME:	20 minutes
OBJECTIVE:	Facilitate trust, mutual respect and group cohesion.
ACT PROCESSES:	Defusion, acceptance
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants are invited by email or phone to bring an object that represents something about them to the session, or to share a bit about themselves and a “guilty pleasure” at the session.• Arrange the chairs in a large horseshoe formation, with the facilitators sitting at the open end of the horseshoe.• Participants take turns introducing themselves.
MATERIALS:	None
HANDOUTS:	None

INSTRUCTIONS

Use the following script to introduce participants to the session:

Facilitator 1:

“Hello everyone, welcome to the first session of Acceptance and Commitment Training. My name is X. I am one of the co-facilitators. Briefly, my background is X. I look forward to working with all of you.”

Facilitator 2:

“Hello. My name is X. I am a co-facilitator. My background is X. Right now, we invite you to introduce yourselves. Take a minute or so to tell us your name, whatever you wish to share about your child, and something about yourself, including the object you brought with you to symbolize something about you.” (Or ask participants to share a “guilty pleasure.”)

After each participant has taken their turn, say something more about yourselves (the facilitators), including the objects you brought to the group. Continue the activity, using the following script:

Facilitator 2:

“Thank you, everyone, for sharing. It is what makes a group like this so helpful and powerful. We will get to know one another more as we go through the sessions. Notice that even though we invited you to share information about your child, the object you brought is about you, not your child, because this group is about you and for you. We chose different objects and highlighted unique aspects of ourselves. We welcome and respect our common struggles and the diversity of who we are, and we can learn so much from one another.”

Facilitator 1:

*“Before we go on to our next activity, let’s take care of a few housekeeping items.”
(E.g., indicate where the washroom is, explain honoraria.)*

Activity 1.2: ACT and workshop overview

TIME:	30 minutes
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a short introduction to ACT.• Discuss how ACT can improve coping skills and well-being.• Explain the nature of the workshop, including how participants can get the most out of it.
ACT PROCESSES:	All
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Arrange chairs in a large horseshoe formation, with facilitators sitting at the open end of the horseshoe.
MATERIALS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laptop with PowerPoint slides• LCD projector and screen• Speakers
HANDOUTS:	1.1: Hexaflex ACT model 1.2: ACT PowerPoint slides (https://bit.ly/2VL7IRf) 3.1: Hexaflex with hand gestures

Source: Adapted from Fung, (2011); Fletcher & Hayes (2005); Hayes et al. (2012)

INSTRUCTIONS

You will use a PowerPoint presentation to explain ACT, the purpose of the workshop, and what participants can expect from it.

The presentation has three parts. Use the following script to guide you through it.

1. What is the purpose of the workshop?

Facilitator 1:

“It can be stressful being a parent of a child with a disability. This workshop has been designed to support this challenge.

Facilitator 2:

“What do you see in this graphic? It depicts a safety protocol that is reviewed on airplanes before take-off. Before you put the oxygen mask on your child, you must put yours on first because if you pass out, you can’t help your child. It’s a good metaphor for what this workshop is all about. We must learn to put the oxygen mask on ourselves first before we can help our children. You may have been to other workshops where the focus was on how to help your child learn or behave better, but this is not that kind of workshop. This workshop is all about helping you.

“It is important to look after our own health, both mental and physical, in order to be able to help others, including our children. Research tells us that parents who are highly stressed are less able to support their children, and that when we have better mental and physical health, we not only fare better, but we also support our children more effectively.”

Optional: The concepts of the hexaflex can be introduced by the video “The 3 Happiness Myths” (www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=93LFNtcR1Ok)

2. What is ACT and how can it help us?

Take turns talking about the six core ACT processes, drawing participants’ attention to **Handout 1.1: Hexaflex ACT model**. **Facilitator 1** begins by explaining how each inflexible process can contribute to psychological inflexibility. **Facilitator 2** follows by explaining how the corresponding ACT process can lead to greater flexibility. (See the section “The ACT model of psychological flexibility,” on page 5.)

- Summarize the ACT processes using hand gestures (**Handout 3.1**).
 - *Defusion: Separating the hands—“Creating a distance between us and our thoughts”*
 - *Acceptance: Turning palms upwards—“Being open and accepting to our thoughts, feelings and inner experiences”*
 - *Contact with present moment: Centring the edge of one hand on the palm of the other—“Being in the present moment”*
 - *Self-as-context: Cupping the bottom palm to cradle the upper hand which is curled into a fist—“Being the flexible holding self, rather than fusing with the ‘contents’ of the self”*
 - *Values: Cupping both hands—“Being in touch with what we value”*
 - *Committed action: Hooking pinkies together—“Committing to act in the service of our values”*
- Invite participants to ask questions about the ACT model and how it may be helpful to them.

3. How can you get the most out of this workshop?

Introduce the participants to some of the principles that will allow them to maximize the benefit they get from the workshop, keying the photos of the objects listed below (found in the PowerPoint presentation) to your explanation:

“Now that you understand a bit more about ACT and how it can be helpful, we would like to share something more about the nature of this workshop and how you may benefit most from it, especially in light of the ACT principles we just described.”

- **Spotlight:** We often find ourselves focused on the world outside of us—our children, our work, the never-ending list of things we need to do and so on. Even when we attend workshops, they may focus only on our children and how we can help them. We may focus too much on trying to find or solve problems in our children or in those around us. In this workshop, see if you can allow yourself and your own experiences to be the centre of your focus. Begin by letting the spotlight to be on yourself.
- **Mirror:** In focusing on yourself, see if you can also allow yourself the space for self-reflection and an opportunity to take an honest look at yourself and your life.
- **Open window:** Self-reflection and ACT are most effective when we allow ourselves to open up. We invite you to be open at least with yourself, and, to the extent that you are willing, with the others in this group.
- **Heart and key:** For all of us to feel safe to open our hearts and share our feelings in this group, we must have the assurance that everything that is shared in this room stays in the room.
- **Heart made of pebbles in the sand:** As we become more open with ourselves and with one another, we need to do it with compassion.
- **Baby swimming:** Just like learning to swim, there are things we can only learn by experiencing them. ACT is all about learning through experience and participation—not simply intellectually understanding or reading what ACT is about. You have to get in the water and get wet. Approach this as a baby who is learning to swim would—with openness and curiosity. At the same time, don't force yourself to go too deep, too quickly: go at your own pace.
- **Emotional faces:** Part of “getting wet” is allowing yourself to be in touch with your emotions to the extent that you are willing. This may also mean allowing others in the group to feel the emotions they need to feel. You can provide support without controlling one another's emotions or telling one another how to feel. Try not to give advice. Simply allow each person the freedom to experience their emotions without trying to rescue one another. It's okay to feel exactly how you feel.
- **Sunset:** How do you look at a sunset? Is it by analyzing the angle of the sun and the wavelength of its colours? Rather than using your analytical mind, you can simply be mindful and appreciative of what you see. What if we learn to do that with ourselves, with one another in here, and with our loved ones at home? We can try to practise that here. Appreciate that our lives are not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived.
- **Footprints in the sand:** ACT is an experiential and reflective journey. Each activity we do will build on the previous one. Even if an activity does not make complete sense at the time, you may appreciate its meaning later. Approach each activity with patience, openness and reflection.

Activity 1.3: Group rules

TIME:	20 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish agreed-on ground rules to guide behaviour in the group.• Promote group safety, which is essential for meaningful participation.• Set parameters for privacy and confidentiality to guide behaviours outside the group.• Promote group interactions that value everyone's input.
ACT PROCESS:	Values
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a large horseshoe formation and take part in setting the ground rules and group goals.
MATERIALS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Ground rules” list (page 28)• Flip chart paper• Water-based markers• Masking tape
HANDOUTS:	None

INSTRUCTIONS

Facilitator 1 leads participants in identifying and agreeing on ground rules.

Facilitator 2 writes these ground rules on flip chart paper.

You can use this script to guide the activity:

Facilitator 1:

“In the next activity, we are going to come up with a list of ground rules and guiding principles that we as a group will follow. How many of us here have heard the term ‘ground rules’?”

Facilitator 1 acknowledges participants’ familiarity and unfamiliarity with ground rules.

Facilitator 1:

“In simple terms, ground rules are rules that we all agree on and that guide how we interact with one another throughout the training, and also how we relate to one another between sessions. Based on your previous group experience, please share ground rules that you feel are important and useful to support us in functioning as a group.”

Facilitator 2 writes down participants’ suggestions on the flip chart.

Facilitator 1 clarifies what participants mean if they used only one or two words to describe a ground rule. For example, if a participant says “confidentiality,” Facilitator 1 can follow up by saying: “Yes, confidentiality. Can you say more about what you mean by that?”

Facilitator 1 reviews the list of ground rules that participants suggested. More ground rules are added at the end of the list generated by the group. If participants have not mentioned the items in the "Ground rules guide" section below, Facilitator 1 may bring these up and establish them as group rules.

Facilitator 2 posts the agreed list of ground rules on the wall and says: *"I am posting these ground rules so we can refer to them throughout the sessions. During the workshop, if you think of another ground rule that would support positive interaction among us, please share it and we will add it to the list."*

GROUND RULES GUIDE

Ensure that the following items are included in the list of ground rules:

- Confidentiality: *"As we discussed, we ask that everything personal that is shared in this room remains in the room; that is, we all agree not to reveal any personal sharing to anyone outside of this group. Let's look at this issue a little bit more. . . ."*
 - Help the group distinguish the difference between *personal information* (e.g., names, detailed experiences) and *general teaching points* that can be shared (e.g., the ACT model, the effect of fusion, the benefits of mindfulness).
 - If it does not come up spontaneously, address the issue of interactions outside the group (e.g., is it okay to greet each other outside the group if you bump into another participant?).
- Mutual respect: *"Each of us agrees to respect each other as fellow human beings, and to respect each other's opinions and ideas, even when we may not agree with each other. This also means sharing time and giving each person the opportunity to share his or her ideas and opinions."*
- Use "I" statements: *"To demonstrate respect, we invite everyone to agree to use "I" statements when appropriate. This means we all agree to take accountability for what we say and share. It also means that we respect others who may think and feel differently. An example of an "I" statement is 'I feel that people should stop talking about curing autism.'"*
- Advice giving: *"Each of us has valuable experiences to share. At the same time, what works for you may not work for someone else. So, we can share our experiences rather than telling others 'You should have handled things this way. . . .'"*
- Punctuality: *"Since our goal is to learn together as a group within a limited amount of time, what are your thoughts on punctuality?"* (After participants define punctuality, summarize on the flip chart (e.g., "Punctuality: arrive on time; return from lunch and breaks on time").
- Other items:
 - Do not pass judgments.
 - Everyone gets a chance to share if they want to.
 - You can always "pass" if you do not want to share.
 - Do not interrupt when someone else is speaking.
 - Feel free to take a break when you need to.
 - Turn cell phones to silent or vibrate mode.

Activity 1.4: Video on mindfulness: Headspace

TIME:	15 minutes
OBJECTIVE:	Introduce the concept of mindfulness.
ACT PROCESS:	Present moment
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants watch a video and discuss it. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN6g2mr0p3Q)
MATERIALS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laptop with PowerPoint slides• LCD projector and screen• Speakers
HANDOUTS:	None

INSTRUCTIONS

Room set-up

Set up the projector, screen and speakers in a way that everyone will be able to see and hear. Show the participants the video.

Debriefing prompts and points

- *“Do you have any comments about the video? In the clip, notice that mindfulness is not about stopping thoughts, but about observing them. Is that surprising?”*
- *“Do you sometimes feel like the character in the clip, running after your thoughts? What kinds of thoughts tend to pull you in?”*
- *“The metaphor of watching busy traffic may be a little different from how we usually think about meditation—practicing it in some quiet, beautiful place in nature. If we can go to a wonderful place like that to meditate, it certainly can be helpful. But is it also possible to invite mindfulness into our busy lives?”*

Activity 1.5: Mindfulness and leaves on a stream

TIME:	25 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce the concept of mindfulness.• Facilitate the experience of observing rather than engaging in thoughts.• Help participants de-literalize their thoughts.• Help participants get in touch with the here and now.
ACT PROCESSES:	Present moment, defusion
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a circular formation. Facilitators sit at one end of the circle.
MATERIAL:	Meditation bell
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: Adapted from Hayes et al. (1999, p. 159); Chang (n.d.)

INSTRUCTIONS

Follow this script and steps for the activity:

“I invite you to take part in a mindfulness and defusion exercise together. See if it can help you connect with the present moment, the here and now.”

Give the following instructions:

“Take a deep breath in and breathe out slowly. Do this a couple of times.

“Now relax your body. Let your shoulders drop.

“Sit in a comfortable position. If there is anything in your hand, feel free to put it on the floor.

“I will sound the bell to mark the beginning and end of the exercise.”

(Ring the bell, allowing the tone to vibrate and fade naturally.)

“Close your eyes gently or lower your gaze to a fixed spot on the floor in front of you.

“If you are willing, see if you can imagine that you are walking along a forest path. Take in the colours of the forest. Feel the sun shining on your face through the branches overhead . . . a gentle breeze . . . the smell of the forest . . . crunching leaves beneath your feet. Up ahead, you hear the gentle sound of water. As you emerge through a clearing, you find yourself by the bank of a stream.

“Visualize yourself sitting by the bank of this gently flowing stream, with leaves floating along the surface of the water.”

(Pause 10 seconds.)

“For the next few minutes, notice whatever shows up in your mind. It may be a thought or an image. See if you can place it on a leaf, and allow your thought or image to float away on the stream.

“Do this with each thought or image that shows up next—pleasant, unpleasant, happy or painful—or neutral. Place them one by one on a leaf and watch them float away.”

(Pause 20 seconds.)

“If no thoughts enter your mind, just continue watching the stream. Sooner or later, your thoughts or images will start up again. Just put them on the leaves and watch them float away.”

(Pause 20 seconds.)

“Let your thoughts and the leaves go at their own pace; there is no need to hurry them.

“If you have the thought, “This is strange” or “This is boring” or “This is too hard” or “This is too easy” or “I’m not doing this right,” place these thoughts on the leaves, too, and watch them float away.”

(Pause 20 seconds.)

“If a difficult or painful feeling arises, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, ‘I notice that I am having a painful feeling.’ Place this thought too on a leaf and let it float off.”

(Pause 60 seconds.)

“From time to time, your thoughts may hook you and take you away from being fully present in this exercise. This is common. You may even forget that you are doing this exercise. As soon as you realize that you have become distracted by your thoughts, gently bring your attention back to the exercise. You don’t need to judge yourself. And if there is judgment, let the judgment sit on a leaf and float away.”

After 2 minutes, give these instructions:

“Now see if you can let your thoughts, the leaves, the stream go. Keeping your eyes closed for now, gently bring your attention back to your breath. Notice that it has been there all along. Gently guide your awareness to the fact that you are sitting here in this present moment, now. You can become aware that you are here with us in a group. In your mind’s eye, see if you can visualize the room and the pattern on the floor. It is time for us to reconnect. When you are ready, gently open your eyes, feeling alert and refreshed.”

Ring the bell, allowing the chime to fade naturally. Pause for a few seconds to allow participants to reconnect with the space and the group. Then invite them to share their experience of the exercise.

Debriefing points

- Having ongoing thoughts is common for human beings.
- If you find yourself struggling to remain fully present and mindful, be patient and compassionate with yourself. With practice, you may struggle less and less.
- If you experience painful and difficult thoughts during this exercise, recognize them for what they are—thoughts. With practice, you may be able to transform how these thoughts affect you.
- Mindfulness helps to free us from suffering related to thoughts that interfere with meaningful living.

If you have not already talked about them, highlight the following points to clarify the concept of mindfulness:

- **Being present in the moment (vs. focusing on the past or future)**

“Often we may find ourselves thinking about the past—bothered by something bad that happened to us that made us sad or angry, or bothered by something we did and feeling regretful and guilty about it. Or we may be worried about things that have not happened yet. It may even be so scary that we avoid doing certain things. When we did the exercise just now, or even on your way to this workshop today, you may have had thoughts about what you will do tonight when you get home. Notice how easy it is to miss being in the present moment and get caught up with the past or the future.”

- **Being present attentively (vs. being on autopilot)**

“Have you ever found yourself on autopilot? You may be in a car, and before you know it, you have arrived at your destination. Quite likely, on your way to this workshop, you didn’t notice the trees—what kind they were, the colour of their leaves. . . . Mindfulness is about helping us switch off the autopilot and attend to the present moment.”

- **Observing compassionately (vs. judging)**

“Mindfulness is also about being non-judgmental and cultivating compassion. This includes the judgment that we are not being mindful. Instead of judging, take on the role of observer. Observe thoughts, feelings, images or whatever comes up in the moment as thoughts, feelings, images, without the need to evaluate, judge or figure them out.”

Wrap up the activity by encouraging participants to integrate mindfulness as an everyday practice.

Activity 1.6: Closure of Session 1

TIME:	10–20 minutes
ACT PROCESS:	Present moment
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a large horseshoe formation. Facilitators sit at the open end of the horseshoe.
MATERIAL:	<p>A poem—“The Guest House,” by Rumi; “Tell Me,” by Sandra Belfiore; or “Wild Geese,” by Mary Oliver</p> <p>Note: For copyright reasons, you may not print and distribute copies of the poem to participants. Instead, you can direct them to the poems online:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “The Guest House”: https://gratefulness.org/resource/guest-house-rumi/• “Tell Me”: innerpeach.blogspot.com/2012/04/tell-me-tell-me-who-you-are-and-what.html• “Wild Geese”: famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/mary_oliver/poems/15809
HANDOUTS:	<p>1.3: Homework reflection on mindfulness practice</p> <p>2.7: Session feedback form</p>

INSTRUCTIONS

Facilitator 1:

“Session 1 is coming to an end. Before you return for Session 2, we would like you to do a mindfulness exercise at home. Do one ordinary thing mindfully—it can be brushing your teeth, taking a shower, eating breakfast or taking a walk. Doing it mindfully means you give 100 per cent of your attention to this task. If you are taking a shower, feel the temperature and the sensation of the water on your skin, smell the soap, notice the moisture of the air, listen to the water. . . .

“If your mind wanders off, see if you can catch it and bring your focus back to the task without judgment.

“You may want to capture your experience by filling in a homework form [Handout 1.6] from your folder. You will have the chance to share your experience at the next session.”

Facilitator 2:

“To further inspire us about mindfulness, we would like to share the following poem.”

Read one of the poems—“The Guest House,” “Tell Me” or “Wild Geese,” and write the web addresses for each poem on the flip chart.

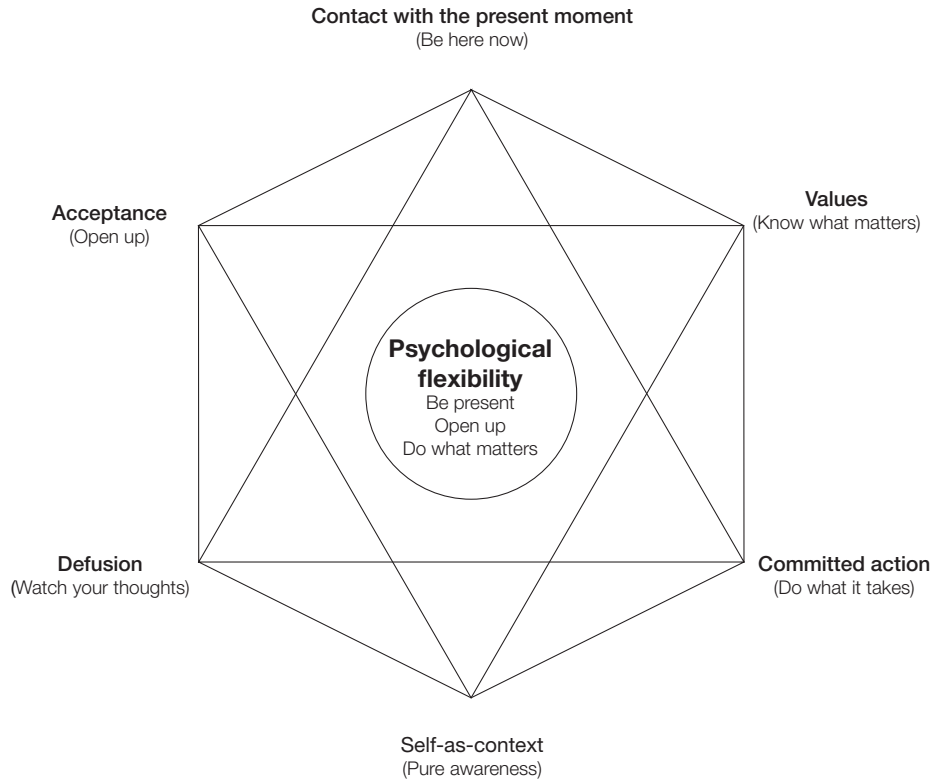
Facilitator 1:

“Before we close, we would like to go around the room and have each of you, if you could, say one or two words of appreciation about the group or about anything you took away from this session.”

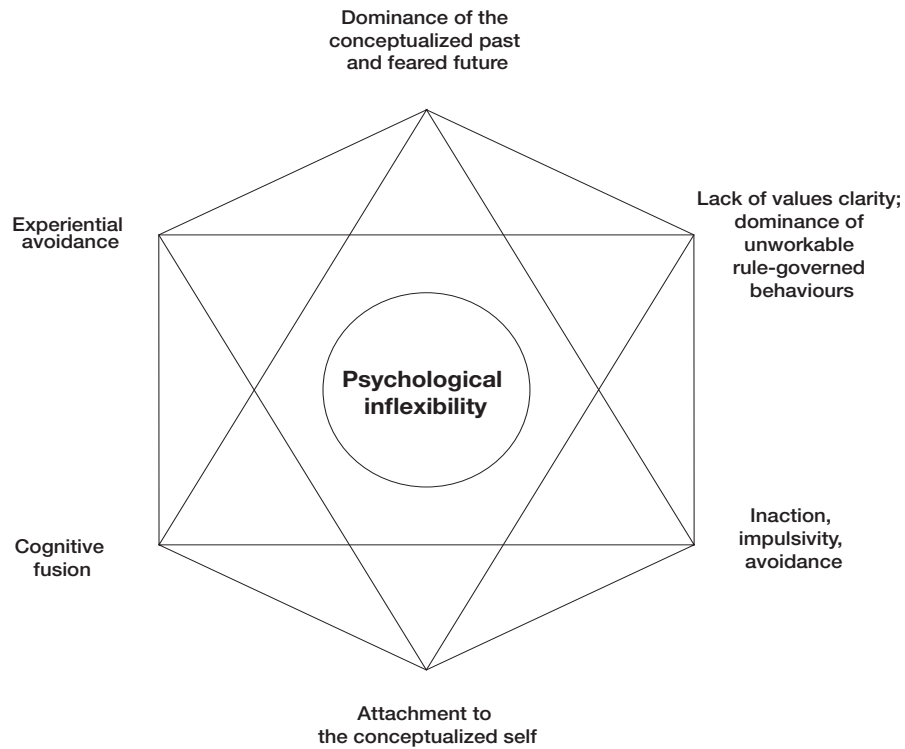
Invite participants to fill out and submit **Handout 2.7: Session feedback form** (in their folders). Thank participants for attending and remind them of the date and time of Session 2.

1.1: Hexaflex ACT model

Six core processes of psychological flexibility



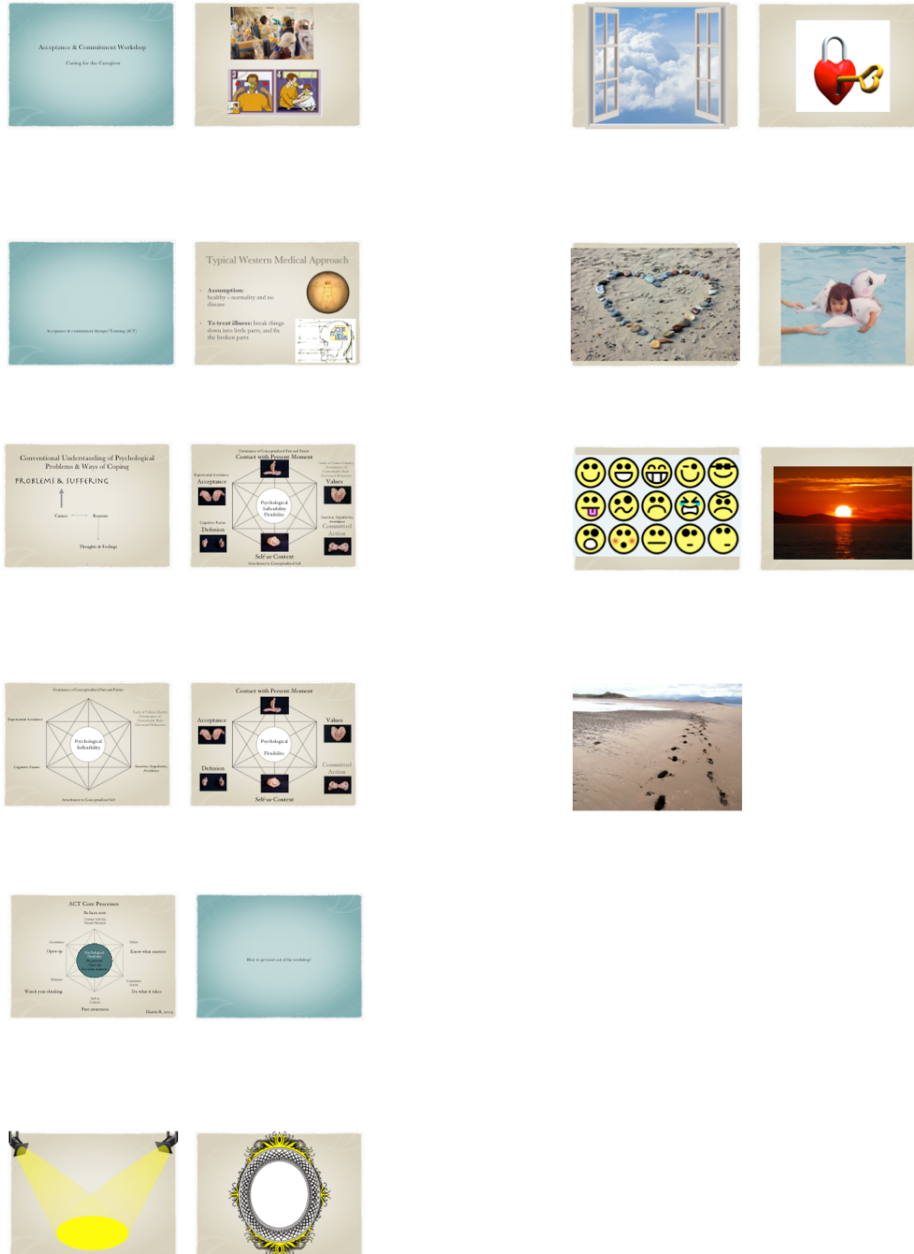
Six core processes of psychological inflexibility



Source: Adapted from Fletcher, L. & Hayes, S.C. (2005). Relational frame theory, acceptance and commitment therapy, and a functional analytic definition of mindfulness. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 23, 315–336; Harris, R. (2009). *ACT Made Simple: An Easy-to-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger; and Hayes, S.C., Luoma, J.B., Bond, F.W., Masuda, A. & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and commitment therapy: Model, processes and outcomes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44, 1–25.

1.2: ACT PowerPoint slides

A PowerPoint file will be available online for facilitators to download—the handout for participants in this manual consists of thumbnails of the slides. Facilitators may prefer to print the handouts directly from the PowerPoint file.



Adapted from Hayes, S.C., Strosahl, K. & Wilson, K.G. (2012). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

1.3: Homework reflection on mindfulness practice

INSTRUCTIONS TO FACILITATORS

This page contains two identical sheets. Print and cut and give each participant a copy to take home. Remind the participants to bring them to Session 2.

ACT SESSION 1: HOMEWORK ON MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Instructions:

- After you leave this session and before you return to Session 2, we invite you to do one ordinary thing mindfully—it can be brushing your teeth, taking a shower, eating breakfast, taking a walk, or anything you choose.
- Doing it mindfully means you give 100% of your attention to the task. We will ask everyone to share the experience when you return in the next session.

Date:	Time:
Place:	
Mindful activity:	
Reflection on the experience:	



ACT SESSION 1: HOMEWORK ON MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Instructions:

- After you leave this session and before you return to Session 2, we invite you to do one ordinary thing mindfully—it can be brushing your teeth, taking a shower, eating breakfast, taking a walk, or anything you choose.
- Doing it mindfully means you give 100% of your attention to the task. We will ask everyone to share the experience when you return in the next session.

Date:	Time:
Place:	
Mindful activity:	
Reflection on the experience:	

Session 2

Overview

SESSION ACTIVITIES	DURATION	ACT PROCESSES
2.1: Mindfulness five senses breakfast activity	20 min.	Present moment
2.2: Grounding activity	10 min.	Present moment
2.3: Homework review	20 min.	Present moment
Poetry reading: “Tell Me,” “The Guest House” or “Wild Geese”	3 min	All
2.4: Sweet spot activity	25 min.	Present moment and values
2.5: Video on acceptance: “The Fly”	25 min.	Acceptance and defusion
Break	15 min.	
2.6: Chair sculpture activity	60 min.	Acceptance and defusion
2.7: Three-minute breathing space activity	15 min.	Present moment
Lunch	45 min.	
2.8: Mindfulness bubbles activity	15 min.	Present moment
2.9: Paired sharing activity	45 min.	Defusion
2.10: Video on values: “Unsung Hero”	10 min.	Values
2.11: Values word list activity	10 min.	Values
2.12: 100th birthday activity	10 min.	Values
Break	15 min.	
2.13: Bull’s-eye activity	20 min.	Values
2.14: Bus driver activity	60 min.	All ACT processes
2.15: Summary and closure	35 min.	Committed action and values

ROOM SET-UP

Arrange the chairs in a circle or horseshoe formation, with the facilitators sitting together at one end. Most activities will work with either formation, which can be changed from one activity to the next as necessary. A circle promotes cohesion and equitable sharing and works well for most activities, except the horseshoe works better when the facilitators need to use the flip chart or show slides or videos. Other considerations include number of participants and room shape and size. You can put a small table in the middle with tissues, candies and tea lights to make the room cozier. You can also play soft music in the background when participants arrive and during breaks.

FLIP CHART PREPARATION

- **Write the following on the flip chart as a review:**

Six processes of psychological flexibility:

1. I am . . .
2. Here now . . .
3. Allowing my thoughts . . .
4. And accepting my thoughts and feelings . . .
5. While committing to . . .
6. Who and what is important to me

- **For Activity 2.4 and Activity 2.9, write:**

- Moment of silence to fully attend to partner
- First person shares story, listener listens (silently)
- Moment of silence attending to partner
- Second person shares story, listener listens (silently)
- Moment of silence attending to partner

- **For Activity 2.12, write:**

100th birthday

- Who might be making the speech?
- What would you want them to say about you?
 - > what you stood for, cared about
 - > how you acted out those values

- **Values debrief—write:**

- Values are “endless directions”
- Values vs. goals
- Values and barriers:
 - > going off course and re-orienting
 - > overcoming barriers: staying flexible and committed

- **For Activity 2.13:**

Draw and label the target (see **Handout 2.3: Bull’s-eye**).

- **For Activity 2.14:**

Draw another target.

HANDOUTS

2.1: Cognitive defusion techniques

2.2: Full living values

2.3: Bull’s-eye: Valued living

2.4: Values, goals and life areas

2.5: Values and goals worksheet

2.6 Committed action plan

2.7: Session feedback form

Activity 2.1: Mindfulness five senses breakfast

On Day 2, participants may show up at different times. Participants who arrive earlier can be encouraged to partake of the light breakfast using all of their senses mindfully. This gives them a chance to do the homework of mindful activity if they have not done it. Alternatively, they may choose to connect and socialize with the other participants there. The facilitators can use this time to address any individual questions from participants and to confer with each other on the plans for the day.

Activity 2.2: Grounding

The facilitators can choose from any of the brief guided mindfulness activities, including the Brief centring activity (page 93). This leads naturally to the homework review. Depending on time, this can be omitted.

Activity 2.3: Homework review

TIME:	20 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage participants in reflecting on their experiences of doing the mindfulness homework.• Promote understanding of mindfulness practice.• Explore barriers and commitment to mindfulness practice.• Identify strategies for overcoming barriers to mindfulness practice.
ACT PROCESSES:	Present moment, committed action
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a circular formation. Facilitators sit at one end of the circle.
MATERIAL:	None
HANDOUTS:	None

INSTRUCTIONS

Tell participants:

“We would like to begin by inviting you to share your experience in doing the homework about a mindful activity. Who would like to share?”

Probe participants by asking:

“What was the experience like for you?”

“What did you notice?”

“What made it easy or difficult to be mindful?”

“What would support you in practising mindfulness?”

Conclude the discussion by reminding participants that mindful living is a practice. The wonderful thing is that we can connect with the present moment any time we focus our attention on the here and now.

Activity 2.4: Sweet spot

TIME:	25 minutes
OBJECTIVE:	Experience mindfulness processes in ACT in pairs and explore embedded values in our lives.
ACT PROCESSES:	Present moment, committed action
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants work in pairs, seated facing each other.
MATERIAL:	Meditation bell
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: Adapted from Wilson (2005)

INSTRUCTIONS

Ask participants to find a partner and position their chairs so they face each other (with enough room between pairs that they won't be overly distracted by others' conversations).

Explain that there will be a listener and a speaker, and that each person will have the chance to be in both roles. Ask participants to decide which partner will speak first.

Use this script to guide the activity:

"In a moment, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes so I can lead you through an exercise called the sweet spot. We will bring your attention to a moment in your life that was especially sweet for you."

"When you're ready, close your eyes or lower your gaze and take a moment to focus on your breath. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. You can put your hands on your tummy to feel how deep your breath flows into your body. Now take a moment to feel your bottom on your chair, your feet on the floor, or maybe feel your back against the back of the chair. Now just take a few more breaths to settle into this moment."

(Wait 10 seconds.)

"Now find a moment that was especially sweet for you. An experience where perhaps you let go of the struggles with your thoughts or feelings, even just for a moment. It doesn't have to be the most monumental thing that ever happened, or it could be. Just pick any moment, big or small, recent or long ago, when you really felt present, comfortable, engaged and alive."

"You might feel yourself engaging in a little mental ping-pong right now, trying to choose the 'right' or 'best' moment. See if you can notice this and let go of that struggle, just settling into whatever sweet spot shows up. It could be a walk outside on a beautiful fall day or a particular moment on a vacation with someone special, a conversation or laugh you shared with a dear friend, or even just a really engaging part of a good book. Whatever it was, it was your experience, and a sweet moment!"

"Without opening your eyes, gently raise your hand when you found the sweet spot that you would like to focus on."

(Wait until all hands are up and then tell participants they can lower them.)

“Now take a moment to really notice all the details that were present in that moment, using all your senses.”

(Say the prompting questions slowly in a calm gentle voice.)

“What did you see and how did you end up there?”

“Was anyone with you?”

“What kind of sounds, smells and tastes were there?”

“How were you feeling?”

“Once you have the whole image, I’d like you to stay there for a moment. Linger on the details and feel the sensations you may have right now.”

“Now, bring your attention back to your breath. The same sensation you felt at the very beginning of this meditation. Where you noticed the air going in your nose and out through your mouth. You can refocus on where your body makes contact with the floor and with the chair. You can even give your toes a little wiggle as we bring ourselves back to the room.”

“In a moment, you will be invited to turn to your partner and take turns sharing your sweet spot with each other. Remember, you decided at the beginning of the meditation who was going to speak first.”

“Before the first person begins to share, I’d like you to silently acknowledge each other when you hear the bell ring. This just means to sit with each other and, without words, sounds or gestures, to acknowledge through your presence that you will both be sharing a particularly sweet moment in your lives.”

“After a few seconds of silent acknowledgment, I will ring the bell again and the first person will have two minutes to share their sweet spot. If you are the listener, don’t say anything while your partner shares with you. Just listen silently, being present to their sharing.”

“After two minutes, I will ring the bell to indicate another moment of silent acknowledgment. Then the second person will have two minutes to share their sweet spot. We will again end with a few seconds of silent acknowledgment.”

“I will walk you through all of this as we go along and the instructions are also written on the flip chart.”

(Ring the bell.)

After every pair has shared, discuss the experience. Start by asking:

“Would anyone like to share or comment on how this exercise felt for them?”

Debriefing prompts and points

- “What was it like to share your story without the other person responding?”
- “What was it like to be the listener without responding?”
- “Do you notice that the sweet moments are often moments embedded with values—who and what is most important to you?”
- “We can become more mindful of these sweet moments in our lives.”
- “This exercise also taps into the present moment: you were really present in that sweet moment you were recalling, using all of your senses. When you were doing this exercise with your partner, you may also have been fully in the present moment, sharing, listening, and connecting with your partner.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

During the debriefing, you can ask, “Does anyone want to guess what ACT processes this activity targets?”

Activity 2.5: Video on acceptance: The fly

TIME:	15 minutes
OBJECTIVE:	Discuss acceptance.
ACT PROCESSES:	Acceptance
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants watch and discuss a video.
MATERIAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laptop set-up with link to video (https://youtu.be/wAtrogq9vMA?list=PLwbB3_dkDAglvLfrxsNITdS-nnJU6rwNk)• LCD projector and screen• Speakers
HANDOUTS:	None

INSTRUCTIONS

Set-up

Set up the projector, screen and speakers in a way that everyone will be able to see and hear.

Debriefing prompts and points

- “Any comments about the video?”
- “One of the main messages is that in certain paradoxical situations, the more we engage in an action, the worse the situation gets. This can happen when we try to eliminate unwanted thoughts (‘the fly’). The warrior in the video was highly skilled and exerted great effort, but neither is helpful in this situation. This may occur when we are stressed or when we try too hard to quiet our minds to meditate or fall asleep.”
- “By letting go of the struggle and calming the mind, we may discover the ‘flower’ inside the fly.”
- “The video is not saying that the fly needs to disappear or literally change into a flower. That was the original trap in the first place—trying to eliminate the fly. So the ending is important: we still have the original fly, unchanged. What has changed is the ‘opening up’—the acceptance—and the action of ‘letting go,’ allowing the fly to roam freely.”

Activity 2.6: Chair sculpture

TIME:	45–60 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify avoidance and control strategies to avoid unwanted thoughts and feelings, and the consequences of doing so.• Observe that despite our best efforts, thoughts and feelings that we try to avoid persist.
ACT PROCESSES:	Acceptance, defusion
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	At the start, the group sits in a circular formation. After orientation, one of the facilitators puts their chair in the centre. One by one, participants pile their chairs around the facilitator’s chair. After debriefing, participants retrieve their chairs, reform the circle, and sit for the final debriefing.
MATERIAL:	Chairs
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: Fung & Zurowski (2016)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Describe the purpose of the activity

Facilitator 2:

“Have you ever encountered difficulty or stress in parenting? It would be nearly impossible not to. It can include anything from dealing with a ‘meltdown,’ to trying to get a teacher or family member to understand your child’s needs, to feeling guilty after disciplining your child. In this exercise, we will explore these situations, the difficult thoughts and feelings they evoke, and how we try to deal with them.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Connect where possible to any specific parenting struggles that participants have mentioned in earlier activities as examples.

2. Recall the situation into the present

Facilitator 1 helps participants get in touch with the difficult situation.

“We will begin with a brief guided exercise. If you are willing, either close your eyes or let your eyes gaze unfocused at the centre of the floor. See if you can pay attention to your breath. Now see if you can allow your mind to revisit a difficult parenting situation you have encountered. You can recall who it involved, and allow yourself to be in touch with how you felt. It could be anger, sadness, disappointment, frustration, worry. . . . Recall how you dealt with it.”

(Allow a few seconds for participants to connect with the situation they are recalling.)

“Now allow yourself to reconnect with your breath and come back to the present. Whenever you are ready, open your eyes.”

3. Set up the space

Facilitator 1 moves their chair to the centre of the room.

4. Physicalize inner thoughts and feelings

Facilitator 1 asks a participant to share a bit about their situation and the associated thoughts and feelings.

“Who would like to share? Can you tell us a little bit about the situation you thought of? How did you feel at the time?”

“See if you can project your unwanted feelings onto this chair. These are the feelings you want to disappear or to avoid. This chair is now your ‘chair of [feeling X]’ —for example, a chair of anger, chair of sadness, chair of disappointment or chair of frustration.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Participants may spontaneously share backstories about an incident. Let brief stories emerge, as long as they don't dominate the entire exercise. Empathize with the story, while clarifying, focusing on and highlighting the unwanted thoughts that come up as a reaction to the event (e.g., “I'm not a good enough parent”) or feelings (e.g., “I feel guilty”). Don't let the group get caught up in the details, and discourage participants from interrupting, questioning or commenting on the narrative.

Ideally, you should remain standing throughout the exercise. When a participant volunteers an answer, you may walk closer to the participant to engage in a dialogue or show emotional support.

5. Identify coping and control strategies, and form the “chair sculpture of suffering”

Facilitator 1 asks participants to share a coping strategy. Ask the participant to get up and, using their chair to represent the coping strategy, place the chair in a representative relationship to the centre chair. Then ask the participant to return to and stand at their original spot.

Use this script to guide the activity:

“How did you cope with [feeling X]? How did you help yourself feel better?”

(Participant responds.)

“Thanks for sharing that. Now please stand up. Let your chair represent your coping strategy. This is now the ‘chair of [type of coping strategy]”—e.g., chair of calling a friend, chair of positive self-statements, chair of drinking alcohol, chair of pretending nothing is wrong.

“Please show us how your coping strategy relates to your feelings of [feeling X] by placing your ‘chair of [type of coping strategy]’ in a representative way in relationship to the centre chair—your ‘chair of [feeling X].’ Position your chair any way you want; for example, upside down or on the side, and anywhere you want in the room; for example, stacked on top of the centre chair or far away from it. However, you cannot move the centre chair.”

(Participant places their chair.)

“Thank you for sharing. Please return to where you were and keep standing.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

You may ask participants to clarify what they have shared, but don't comment on, judge, evaluate or discuss the coping strategies.

Note that the chair in the centre represents thoughts and feelings. It does not represent an actual person or situation. For example, a participant shares that she tries to “forget about the problem” and stacks “the chair of forgetting” upside down on top of the centre “chair of disappointment.”

If needed, offer to help participants move or stack their chairs.

6. Repeat steps 4 and 5

“Who would like to share next?”

As more and more participants describe their coping strategies, you will end up with a pile of chairs haphazardly stacked on top of the centre chair or placed in relation to it around the room, and the participants will either be standing or sitting in a circle around the pile of chairs.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Depending on group size, time and level of engagement, you may choose to involve most or ideally all group members, including the other group facilitator. If all participants share, then every participant will be standing in a circle around the centre pile of chairs. If not everyone gets a chance to share, those who do not share will remain seated in the circle.

7. Observe and reflect on the sculpture

Facilitator 2 asks the group to observe and reflect on their experience and the mass of chairs in front of them.

“Would anyone like to share what you observe here?”

“Have you heard of the saying ‘Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional’? Here, we have just witnessed emotional pain being transformed into a sculpture of suffering.”

“We can call this our collective chair sculpture of suffering.”

Discuss these points:

- Empathizing with our human efforts against suffering:
 - *“It seems that we all try quite hard to cope with our unwanted emotions and thoughts when we feel hurt. We do try our very best, and it’s not our lack of trying. . . .”*
 - *“We are quite creative too, and we use many different strategies.”*
 - *“Do you notice that you may use some of the strategies that others have mentioned? Observe our common struggle against negative feelings that arise in parenting.”*
- Persistence of hurtful thoughts and feelings:
 - *“What has happened to the centre chair? Has it disappeared?”*
 - *“Although the centre chair may be surrounded or even buried, it’s still there.”*
- Cost of our efforts: Explore the cost of our avoidance and control efforts, including the time, energy, and efforts expended and the activities and opportunities forgone:
 - *“What are the costs of our efforts?”*
 - *“Notice how much space our sculpture takes up. Does it take over the room and our collective energy and attention? In the same way, we may find that our lives revolve around trying to cope with our hurt and our pain, with our coping strategies adding to our suffering and taking up so much space in our lives.”*
 - *“Notice: are you able to sit? Instead of sitting comfortably as a group, we are left standing. We have sacrificed our chair and we are using up our own energy. If we put even more chairs in the middle, we will be pushed to the periphery and up against the wall.”*
- Recognizing the function of our actions rather than judging them categorically:
 - *“You may be drawn to judge the strategies that other participants have mentioned, and even to label some of them as good strategies and some of them as bad. Yet when we use any of these strategies to avoid and control, they only add to the sculpture of suffering.”*
 - *“Regarding the ‘good strategies’—it’s not that we shouldn’t use them, but when we use them to avoid and control our thoughts and feelings, you can see what happens. So, if you meditate or exercise, do them in the service of your values, rather than using them as strategies to control or avoid your thoughts and feelings.”*

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

You may want to highlight that we all encounter challenges and often struggle in a very similar way. Explaining this often builds group cohesion and empathy for one another among the participants.

Some participants may have self-blame, or may encounter messages from others that they shouldn't be feeling the way they do (e.g., they should think positively; they should be able to let go and accept things; they should try harder). You can use this exercise to empathize, and to emphasize that the person has indeed (for example) tried hard, and there is no need to blame herself or himself. It is just that in some contexts, like dealing with our thoughts and feelings, efforts to avoid, control and problem solve may ultimately be unworkable and counter-productive.

Participants may dislike the sculpture and be struck by its chaos and disorganization, just as our lives may be disrupted and chaotic when we are busy controlling and avoiding.

On the other hand, some participants may admire the sculpture, just as we can admire our patterns of behaviour. They are a work of art—our intellect, efforts and sophisticated defenses—though not without a cost.

Some participants may have mentioned “poor” coping strategies in a self-deprecating way (e.g., “I drink, I know I shouldn't”), whereas others may have mentioned “good” coping strategies (e.g., thinking positively, being accepting and mindful, meditating). Gently point out that in this context, these strategies serve the same function and result in the same consequence—adding to the sculpture.

Some participants may feel so struck by the activity that they want a memento of it. You can invite them to take a photo of the sculpture.

8. Dismantle the sculpture

Ask participants to take back their chairs and return to their original spot, leaving only the facilitator's chair in the centre. Ask them to reflect on the difference between the sculpture and the lone chair in the centre.

“Take a last look at our ‘chair sculpture of suffering,’ and then please retrieve your own chair and return to your spot.

“Observe again the lone chair in the centre. What is it like now?”

“What if we treat our unwanted feelings with acceptance—if we are willing to just have the feelings here with us?”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

You can use this opportunity to discuss more about acceptance—our willingness to experience our internal thoughts and feelings just as they currently are. It doesn't mean giving up. It doesn't mean that we need to love our negative emotions or thoughts in a masochistic way, or that we can't work to change our situation and environment through our actions. In fact, even if we choose not to accept our internal thoughts and feelings, they are here anyway (the centre chair).

Activity 2.7: Three-minute breathing space

TIME:	15 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	Teach participants a transition/grounding exercise.
ACT PROCESSES:	Present moment
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants and facilitators sit in a circular formation.
MATERIAL:	Meditation bell
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: Adapted from Williams & Penman (2012)

INSTRUCTIONS

Explain to participants:

“We will do a brief but powerful mindfulness exercise called the three-minute breathing space. In our reality as parents, sometimes a long sitting meditation session just seems out of reach. One of the advantages of this exercise is that it only takes three minutes to do!

“It is helpful to imagine that we will be tracing out the shape of an hourglass together. Trace out the shape of an hourglass with your hands as I briefly describe the activity.

“In the first minute, we will get ourselves out of the autopilot mode. By being an awakened observer, we can open up wide and become fully aware of our moment-to-moment experiences without getting hooked by any particular thought or judgment.

“In the second minute, we will practise narrowing our focus like a laser beam, and will direct our fullest attention to our breath. Whenever our mind wanders, we will patiently and persistently redirect our focus back to our breath.

“In the final minute, we will once again broaden our attention from our breath to encompass our entire being. We will also be grounding ourselves to our surroundings, building a solid foundation of awareness and attention. This helps us to face our world again with mindfulness and peace.”

Step 1: Opening up our awareness

“We will begin with the sound of the bell.

(Ring the bell.)

“Allow your eyes to close or, if you prefer, allow your gaze to become unfocused, gently settling on a spot in the centre of our circle.

“To begin, I would like to invite you to open up and become aware of your experience.

“From moment to moment, notice any thoughts (pause) . . . feelings (pause) . . . images (pause) . . . or bodily sensations emerging in your awareness.

“As they show up, see if you can observe them without altering them or getting lost in them.”

Step 2: Focusing in on our breath

“Now gather your awareness, sharpen your focus, and bring your fullest attention to your breath. See if you can trace the rise and fall of your breath, from its very beginning to its very end. Notice the breath coming in through your nose . . . the gentle pause . . . and the breath coming out through your nose. Allow your breath to become the centre and anchor of your calm awareness. Whenever your awareness wanders off, gently bring it back to the breath.”

Step 3: Broadening our attention

“We will broaden our attention once again. Beginning from the tip of your nose, gradually widen your attention with each breath to become fully aware of your entire body.

“It is as if your entire body is breathing. (Pause)

“Connect to the sensation of your body against the chair. (Pause)

“Ground yourself with the sensation of the floor beneath your feet. (Pause)

“Become aware of your entire being (pause) . . . your presence in this space and time (pause) . . . and your connection to the surrounding environment. (Pause)

“After the bell, whenever you are ready, open your eyes with renewed awareness and attention.”

(Ring the bell.)

Invite participants to share their experience with this breathing exercise.

Debriefing points

- The breathing space provides a way to step out of autopilot and reconnect with the present moment.
- The breathing space is a brief tool that many people use throughout their busy day.

Activity 2.8: Mindfulness bubbles

TIME:	15 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	Teach participants present-moment awareness/mindfulness.
ACT PROCESSES:	Present moment
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants and facilitators sit in a circular formation.
MATERIAL:	Bubbles—one bottle and wand for each participant
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: Adapted from Williams & Penman (2012)

INSTRUCTIONS

Explain to participants and guide their involvement:

“The practice of mindfulness can take many forms. It does not always have to be very austere. Have you ever played with soap bubbles before? As a child yourself, or with your child? What was it like?”

“You may already have certain associated thoughts and feelings about this activity. See if you can let them go and let’s engage in blowing bubbles together—as if you’re doing this for the very first time.

“As you blow the bubbles, see if you can be fully present in this moment and engage all your senses. What do you notice?”

(Wait a few minutes.)

“Now, let’s see if you can follow a few of the bubbles—from their birth to their disappearance. Notice their moment-to-moment change in colour, shape, size and movement; perhaps you may even be able to hear the sound they make when they collide into something else or pop.

“Focus on one bubble at a time, keeping your attention on that one bubble even in the presence of other bubbles or the urge to move on to the next one.”

(Wait a few minutes.)

“Let’s see if you can also become aware of your own thoughts and feelings as you engage in this activity. Maybe the feeling of anticipation before you blow . . . the intention you put into it as you are blowing . . . the joy of seeing the bubble . . . and your own feelings when the bubble finally bursts.”

(Wait a few minutes.)

“Paying attention to things we often don’t notice—that’s mindfulness!”

“Bubbles can be like thoughts and feelings—they float all over the place, but eventually they go away.”

Debriefing points

- One way to learn and practise mindfulness is to commit to a focus object and return to that focus whenever the mind wanders. In this activity, that means focusing on one bubble at a time and keeping your attention on it despite the distraction of other bubbles or the urge to move on.
- The often-exciting flurry of bubbles swirling everywhere can be an opportunity to observe how out of control the bubbles are. They ride air currents, flit around and pop when they bump into something.
- Thoughts and feelings flit around inside of us too. Many of our thoughts and feelings just ride the currents of what’s going on inside and outside of us. Sometimes they grab our attention. Eventually, they “pop” and go away. The idea is that, like bubbles, we don’t *have* to pay attention to every thought or feeling that is floating around. Maybe a few need our attention, but the others can simply float away.

Activity 2.9: Paired sharing

TIME:	45 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote understanding of the effects of words and language on our sense of being.• Help participants recognize that defusion—detachment from words and language—is possible.• Help participants realize that our personal fears and self-criticism may be similar to those experienced by others and we can all strive to become less judgmental and more accepting of each other.• Increase capacity to transcend restrictions that may be imposed by our stories and fears.
ACT PROCESSES:	Defusion
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants and facilitators begin the activity sitting in a large circle. After participants have written down words about themselves on a piece of paper, they will arrange their chairs so they can work in pairs. The debriefing will be done in a large circle again.
MATERIAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meditation bell• Watch or clock for timing
HANDOUTS:	2.1: Cognitive defusion techniques

Source: Inspired by Hayes & Smith (2005, p. 80)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Explain the purpose of the activity

“As we discussed in previous activities, words are very powerful in keeping us stuck in believing and behaving in certain ways that do not promote our well-being; for example, judging ourselves and others harshly or avoiding certain actions or interactions with others. But it is important to know that we can break free from the restrictions imposed on us by our thoughts, no matter how powerfully they may come across. In this exercise, you will challenge yourself to face some of these negative thoughts about yourself.”

2. Ask participants to list three negative words to describe themselves

“Think of three words or short phrases to describe what you don’t like about yourself and write them down. For the first word or phrase, choose something negative that you feel comfortable sharing with others. For example, you may share this easily as your weakness on a job interview and you feel quite okay to share it with everyone here . . . for example, your weakness may be too hard-working and perfectionistic. Next, write down a second word or phrase that is more difficult to share. Perhaps it is something that you would be willing to share only with someone you can trust in a safe environment, such as in this group. Finally, choose your third word or phrase something that is most difficult for you to share. You are probably never going to tell anyone about it. We won’t ask you to hand in

your list, and if you are worried that others may peek, write very small or scribble in a way only you will be able to read.”

3. Do the paired sharing exercise, Part I: Telling your story

Participants are guided to share with their paired partners about one of the negative words or phrases about themselves and the story behind it.

“Please put away your list, find yourself a partner, and get into pairs. You can move your chairs around so that each pair has some space to engage in sharing. Sit face to face as close to each other as you feel comfortable.”

Pause until each pair has settled in their space.

“In each pair, one of you will be the storyteller and the other will be the listener. The storyteller will speak for two minutes while the listener listens. Then you will hear a bell. We will take a one-minute break, and then you will switch roles, so that the listener will become the storyteller and speak for 2 minutes while the other listens. Decide now who will be the storyteller first. Raise your hand so we know that each pair is clear on who is going first.

“When you are the storyteller, we invite you to share with your partner one of the words or phrases you have written down—it can be your first, second or third. If there is something negative about you that is more fitting to share for this exercise, you may choose to share that instead, even if you didn’t write it down. Share your story about this negative word or phrase—maybe how you come to be this way, how it brings you suffering, how you struggle with it or try to change it, how it affects you or other people. . . . When you are the listener, your role is just to listen without making comments, gestures, or responses. You don’t need to provide counselling or advice. Your role is to be fully present, look at your partner gently, and bear witness to your partner’s suffering. Maintain eye contact and listen attentively and compassionately.”

Ensure that participants understand the instructions. Then continue:

“We will begin the activity with a minute of silence. During this minute, you will look at each other with compassion and in appreciation that you are about to share some personal stories with each other. Be present with this experience and honour this moment. While this may be different from your usual or cultural rules about manners, see if you are willing to allow yourself this moment to act differently in the service of being present, opening up, and making a compassionate connection with your partner.

“Think of this activity as a layered sandwich: We will begin with a minute of silence, followed by the first person sharing, then another minute of silence, followed by the second person sharing, and then a final minute of silence. I will sound the bell at the beginning of each step and give you reminders along the way.”

You can now sound the bell to start the activity. The bell signals each transition between silence and sharing: the first minute of silence; the first person shares for two minutes; the second minute of silence; the second person shares for two minutes; the final minute of silence; and the end of this part of the activity. Each time you ring the bell, give brief verbal prompts and encouragement, for example, “*Now a minute of silence,*” and remind participants to silently look at each other and be present with one another with compassion and appreciation.

4. Do the paired sharing exercise, Part II: Singing your story

Participants are guided to share with their paired partners the same story, but presented as a song.

“We are now ready for Part II. I would like to invite you to take turns sharing the exact same story again in the exact same sequence, maybe even using the exact same words, except this time you won’t speak your story but sing it, using any tune you like. Again, each of you has two minutes to do this.”

If participants say they don’t know any songs or can’t sing, tell them that they can pick a song everyone knows, whether it’s “Happy Birthday” or the national anthem or rap. Reassure participants that this activity is not a singing competition. Demonstrate this to the group by singing a few bars of a melody with spontaneous lyrics about yourself. If someone is really stuck, they can tell their story using a different voice (e.g., a cartoon character) or recite the story dramatically as an epic poem. Reassure participants that the intention of this exercise is not to ridicule the story, but to notice if there is a difference between telling and singing the story.

Start with one minute of silence. Then a participant from each pair sings their story for two minutes. Ring the bell. After one minute of silence, the other participant of each pair sings for two minutes. Ring the bell. Each time you ring it, give verbal prompts as you did in Part I.

After the final minute of silence, give participants the opportunity to thank each other, and bring everyone back to the large circle for debriefing.

Debriefing prompts and points

“I would like to invite you to come back to the large circle and share what this experience was like for you.”

Depending on participants’ responses, there are several areas you can explore:

- Three negative words:

“What was it like to find the three negative words to describe yourself? Was it easy or difficult?”

“Notice that everyone has things about themselves that they don’t like. You are not alone in this.

“Even though they are ‘just words,’ through fusion words seem to take on important meanings to us. We can even compare them and rank them into categories.”

- Minute of silence:

“What was it like to just simply look at each other without words?”

“It is quite common to feel discomfort. There are many social and cultural rules that we have internalized, including not to look at each other. So it may feel safer to avoid looking at each other. In this activity, we experience what it may be like to drop our usual ‘defences’ and counter our natural tendency to avoid, and instead to be fully present to each other. It doesn’t mean you have to look at people in the way you did in this activity all the time, but we hope to create a safe space here for you to experience this.”

- The story:

“What was it like to share your story with your partner? Did you feel any difference between telling your story and singing your story? How did singing your story change the experience for you?”

Invite participants to share their experiences. Often, people will feel that their stories are lighter and less serious when they sing, which is the effect of defusion, and the point of the exercise. Other participants may focus on how self-conscious and uncomfortable they felt when they were singing. You can explain that even if participants focused just on how well they sang, they already were no longer being hooked by the content of the story at that moment. They may have become “fused” with other kinds of thoughts, such as whether they like singing or whether they are good singers, which is not really required for the exercise. Finally, some participants may find that singing makes their stories even more real or upsetting. In this case, you can explain that just by changing how we relate to the same words and same stories may increase or decrease their apparent realness, which is the story’s power over us, and in this case, it becomes a good illustration of the process of fusion.

Summarize these general points after the discussion:

“Internalized words, stories, and rules about what is wrong with us or others can be powerful in influencing our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, especially when we are unaware of their influence and take them for granted as reality or as unbreakable rules that we must follow.”

“We can free ourselves by treating them as what they are—words, thoughts, and stories—and using different ways such as singing to loosen their grip on us. We call this “defusion,” which means getting unstuck from our thoughts. We do not have to take our thoughts so literally and seriously. Defusion is the opposite of fusion, which means getting stuck with our thoughts, even when it is not helpful to us or others.”

(Direct participants to **Handout 2.1: Cognitive defusion techniques.**)

“Today we explored singing our stories to each other. There are many other ways we can practise defusion—that is, relating to our thoughts as just thoughts, no matter how ‘true’ they seem. It would be great if you could try out some of these other methods at home.”

“We can learn to see and appreciate ourselves for who we are, as human beings, and not as our labels or stories, just as we can learn to look at others compassionately as fellow human beings, and not as their labels or their stories.”

Activity 2.10: Video on values: *Unsung hero*

TIME:	10 minutes
OBJECTIVE:	Introduce the concept of values.
ACT PROCESSES:	Values
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants watch a video and then discuss it.
MATERIAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laptop set-up with link to video (https://youtu.be/uaWA2GbcnJU)• LCD projector and screen• Speakers
HANDOUTS:	None

INSTRUCTIONS

Set-up

Set up the projector, screen and speakers in a way that everyone will be able to see and hear.

Debriefing prompts and points

- *“Any comments about the video?”*
- *“How is this clip relevant to the concept of values?”*
- *“If you were touched by the clip, what made it so moving?”*
- *“Notice that there are people who are naysayers—shaking their heads when the main character is helping others. Are there people like that in our lives? Do we have inner thoughts that also try to stop us from acting out our values?”*
- *“It seems like to the “unsung hero” the rewards are in the process of acting out what he believes in, day after day.”*
- *“It also shows that small actions can ultimately result in important changes, even if we may not see results right away.”*

Activity 2.11: Values word list

TIME:	0–15 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate reflection on one’s personal values.• Facilitate reflection on one’s socio-cultural and collective values from family, communities and society.• Promote awareness of the influence of socio-cultural context on our values and the potential for conscious choice in our values.
ACT PROCESSES:	Values
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants work independently for a few minutes and then share in a large circle.
MATERIAL:	Pens
HANDOUTS:	2.2: Full living values

INSTRUCTIONS

See Virtual activity 4 on page 139, which describes a virtual version of this session. Use those detailed instructions to run the in-person session.

1. Introduce the activity

“As we discussed, we each have our own set of values that guide us through our lives. In this exercise, we will explore our cultural values and our personal values, and their relationship to each other.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Ask participants whether they have questions about the concept of values as life directions that can guide our actions (vs. goals or outcomes).

2. Identify cultural and personal values

Direct participants to **Handout 2.2: Full living values** and read the instructions aloud. Ask participants whether they have any questions. Give participants five minutes to do the exercise.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Tell participants that they may add to the list any particular value that is important to them that does not appear in the handout.

3. Debrief the activity

In the large group, invite a couple of participants to share their values and their reflections on them:

- *“Would anyone like to share their cultural and personal values?”*
- *“Do you notice any relationship between the two sets of values?”*
- *“In what ways are your cultural values helpful? In what ways have you found them problematic?”*

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

The debriefing can be shortened or skipped if time is tight and you are doing this exercise in conjunction with the next activity (“100th birthday”), in which case you can combine debriefing for the two activities.

Depending on how diverse your group is, the impact of cultural and societal values may become an important area of discussion. Caregivers often have to deal with cultural and societal values and expectations, such as values about parenting (e.g., good parenting is to be able to fully control your child’s behaviours). Seeing that there is a choice in our personal values becomes important in this context.

4. Conclude the activity

Summarize the reflections shared about this activity, noting that everyone is free to choose their values. These values may be identical to those of their culture; adapted from their cultural values; have no apparent relationship to their cultural values; or in stark opposition to their cultural values.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Participants may say that they have more (or fewer than) than three values. Explain that this number is an arbitrary choice for the sake of the exercise. Point out that different kinds of values may become relevant in different contexts—which leads into the next activity.

Activity 2.12: 100th birthday

TIME:	10 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help participants gain a clear understanding of their values.• Help participants develop a sense of continuity of values throughout their adult lives.• Promote awareness and identification with self-defined valued directions.
ACT PROCESSES:	Values, committed action
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants work independently for a few minutes and then share in a large circle.
MATERIAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blank paper, pens• Flip chart paper, markers, masking tape
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: Inspired by Hayes & Smith (2005, p. 166)

INSTRUCTIONS

Facilitators distribute paper and pens.

Facilitator 2:

“This exercise helps you to examine your values—what is most important to you in your life, what you stand for or care about passionately. Imagine that it’s your 100th birthday. Imagine that your life has unfolded just as you had wished. Your friends and family have organized a birthday party for you, and some of your family members, friends, coworkers, or perhaps even other people in the community have prepared speeches about you. Now take a few minutes to write down who ideally might be making a speech, and what you would like them to say about the values you stood for or cared about throughout your adult life, and the path or actions you have taken in your life. Use the word list and the words you circled to guide you.”

Facilitator 1 posts the previously prepared questions on the flip chart. Participants take three to five minutes to write down their thoughts.

Facilitator 2 debriefs the activity by inviting participants to share:

“What have you learned about your values and your actions in doing this exercise?”

“How does the experience of doing the exercise provide you with new motivation to pay attention to certain aspects of your life?”

Facilitator 2 concludes the activity by reminding participants:

“This activity shows us that our values are freely chosen directions. However, they are often difficult to strive toward, because of the complex demands or distractions in different

areas of our lives. Living a full and meaningful life requires us to pay attention to what we truly value, and to follow our chosen directions through committed action.”

During debriefing, both facilitators can highlight the following four points about values, using participants’ examples to illustrate:

1. Values as endless “directions”:

“Values are our chosen directions in life; they are not something that can ever be achieved or completed. Like going east: you can always go further east—you can go to a street east of here . . . to the East Coast . . . across the ocean . . . to another continent, and still you can go further. Just like being a caring parent (or partner), this does not end with changing the 100th diaper (or giving the 100th hug). It’s not like you can just get a caring parent (partner) certificate and then stop being a caring parent (partner).”

Use specific values that participants mentioned. The *quality* is important here; for example, what *kind* of a parent?

2. Values versus goals:

“What helps us along the way as we strive to live our values is to set goals. Goals are achievable. Graduating from school is a goal. Working out in the gym three times a week is a goal. Having a night out with your partner can be a goal. Hosting a birthday party for your child is a goal. It’s kind of like mapping out waypoints along our paths, or stops along a bus route. We can carry out a committed action along our path as we travel in our valued direction in our journey of life.”

Use participants’ examples of goals and actions that are consistent with their values.

3. Barriers—going off course and re-orienting ourselves:

“Once we know our directions, like stars in the sky, our values guide our actions. We can commit to them. If we ever deviate off the path while encountering distractions and obstacles, which seems inevitable from our sharing here, we can pause and reflect; get our bearings; and resume our journey.”

Use obstacles that participants mentioned; for example, getting distracted or giving up certain goals after handling a crisis.

4. Barriers—being flexible and staying committed:

“Knowing our valued directions is important because it helps us remain flexible. Imagine that you are going east and there is road construction that you can’t bypass. When we know our direction, we can take an alternative route that is consistent with our true valued directions. For example, if I can no longer work, maybe I can still do volunteer work or remain engaged in my field of interest in some way.”

Ask participants to give other examples.

Activity 2.13: Bull's-eye

TIME:	20 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce a way to conceptualize values as being embedded and manifested in multiple life domains.• Facilitate participants' reflection on their current actions and their values in multiple domains.• Introduce a tool that participants can use to track their progress toward their values.
ACT PROCESSES:	Values, committed action
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants sit in a horseshoe formation. The facilitators stand in front with the flip chart, which depicts a large multi-ring target. Participants do the activity on their own. They use the flip chart to share their work.
MATERIAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blank paper, pens• Flip chart paper, markers, masking tape
HANDOUTS:	2.3: Bull's-eye: Valued living 2.4: Values, goals and life areas 2.5: Values and goals worksheet

Source: Adapted and modified from Dahl & Lundgren (2006, pp. 139–142)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Explain the purpose of the activity

“We each have our own set of values that are really important to us and give our lives a sense of direction and meaning. In this exercise, we will explore our values in our various life domains.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Connect the purpose of this exercise with the previous exercises about values (2.11 and 2.12).

2. Introduce participants to the target

One facilitator shows and explains the archery-style target on the flip chart, which comprises five concentric circles divided into quadrants (see **Handout 2.3: Bull's-eye**, on page 83). Label the quadrants Self-Care, Work, Family, Friends/Community.

3. Ask participants to reflect on their current behaviours

Ask participants to think about their current behaviours in the above four domains and whether they are consistent with their values. Participants can record the current status of their behaviours on the handout.

“We have many different areas of our lives. Let’s begin with these four major areas.

“On your handout, place an X in each quadrant to represent how well you think the things you’re doing or not doing match your values. How satisfied are you with your actions if you use your values as a yardstick?”

“For example, your value in the Self-Care domain might be promoting your well-being by taking care of your physical and mental health. If, however, you find yourself never exercising, not watching your diet, not getting enough sleep, smoking or never going for a medical check-up, you may find that your actions are not that consistent with what you value. In that case, put an X pretty far from the centre.

“We’re looking for consistency in your actions in terms of your values, not evaluating an idealized outcome. So going back to the previous example, if you take excellent care of yourself, even if you have a serious illness, you would put an X in the centre of that quadrant—right in the bull’s-eye—because your actions are ‘on target’—that is, they’re in line with your values. Your actions are constantly taking you slightly closer toward health in this case, even if you are quite unwell.

“At the bottom of the sheet, write down why you put each X where you did; and say what supports you, and what hinders you, as you strive to live your values.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

You can expand on each domain by giving relevant examples, using what participants have talked about earlier, including in the previous two activities (2.11 and 2.12).

4. Encourage participants to share

Invite participants who are willing to share the results of the activity to come up to the front and with a coloured marker put an X in each quadrant. Ask each participant to use a different colour (or symbols such as different shapes or initials).

“Would anyone like to share what this activity was like for you?”

“Were there any surprises?”

“Please come up, choose a coloured marker and put an X in each quadrant. Can you tell us why your marks are not in the centre?”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Participants may want to tell stories about why the values are important to them and why they have not been able to act on them. Empathize with participants' sharing. Help them to identify their values, desired actions and barriers.

Sometimes participants may put an X far from the centre because they focus on external factors, underestimating what they are already doing. For example, they may focus on the reactions of others (e.g., "My child will never appreciate what I am doing"; "My parents will never understand what I go through"); financial limitations (e.g., "I would want to hire more therapists for my son, but I can't afford it"); or illness, societal forces, and other factors. Ask participants to focus on their *own* efforts and actions given the circumstances (e.g., "Given that your parents can never understand what you go through, are you satisfied with your *own* actions in your relationship with them?")

While competing value priorities do occur, it is often the case that stories get in the way or are used as a rationale for avoiding more difficult areas in our lives. For example, a participant might say, "Because my children are important, and my son has autism, I can't address the problems in my marriage and I have no time to fight for any social causes." In this case, ask the participant to consider whether it may be possible to pursue more than one of these values, and whether in fact they may not be mutually exclusive.

5. Conclude the activity

Summarize participants' reflections about the activity, especially about the nature of values. Explain that the bull's-eye exercise is a tool we can use to track our progress. Also explain that there are many areas of our lives, and ask participants to turn to **Handout 2.4: Values, goals and life areas** and **Handout 2.5: Values and goals worksheet**. This activity used four domains as a starting point, but participants can follow up at home by applying the activity to other aspects of their lives to help them determine which areas they need to work on.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Review the nature of values. Explain that they are not something to attain like a goals, but a direction that guides the goals we set and the path of behaviours we want to pursue. When one route is blocked, we can be flexible and take detours around our barriers, as we try to move our Xs ever closer to the centre.

Activity 2.14: Bus driver

TIME:	60 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate exposure to thoughts and feelings (e.g., reasons, stories, stigmatizing thoughts, judgments, assumptions) that act as barriers to engaging in valued actions.• Weaken the power of unpleasant feelings and literal thoughts through defusion and acceptance.• Evoke and reinforce commitment to personal chosen values.
ACT PROCESSES:	All
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	In this role play, the group sits in a horseshoe formation, with the facilitators standing at the front beside the flip chart that depicts the large target from the previous activity. One participant volunteers to be the “bus driver” and joins the facilitators at the front. Other participants are invited to act as “passengers”; they come up and join the bus driver. The remaining participants can move their chairs closer to observe the role play. After the activity, a facilitator sits down with the bus driver to debrief the experience and formulate a committed action. The activity is debriefed with the passengers and the whole group.
MATERIAL:	Flip chart, water-based colour markers, masking tape
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: Adapted and modified from Hayes et al. (2012, pp. 250–252)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Explain the purpose of the activity

“As we try to pursue our values, we often encounter obstacles. The bus driver exercise will help us to explore what it is like to face challenges and barriers that get in the way of doing important and meaningful things in our lives; and to explore how we can commit to our values through our actions.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

This activity works best if participants have some understanding about values and feel engaged. Ask participants whether they have questions about the importance of values.

2. Ask for a volunteer to play the bus driver

“We will act out a little story with your help, so we need several volunteers. To start off, we need someone for the lead role—the bus driver.

“As the bus driver, we would ask that you be willing to open up and share in detail the personal difficulties that have stopped you from doing something that furthers your value. So you may be sharing an area of your life in which you feel stuck but want to change, and you’re getting ready to do so.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Because the bus driver plays a central role in this activity, select a participant who is willing and has the capacity to reflect, share and articulate his or her values and perceived barriers to the group.

3. Identify the bus driver’s values and desired actions

Invite the bus driver to come to the front of the group. Find out what kinds of *actions* the bus driver would like to engage in and the *value* behind them:

“Thanks so much for volunteering. Please share with us which life domain you would like to focus on and the kinds of values you have in that domain.

“Think about what kinds of actions you would like to engage in that you’re not currently engaged in but would now like to change.

“Why is this important to you? What does it mean for you to be able to do X?”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

After the bus driver shares the kinds of *actions* he or she wants to engage in (e.g., call friends more often to see how they are doing), explore the *values*, that is, the meaning of these actions to the bus driver (e.g., wanting to be the kind of person who engages friends actively and compassionately). Focus on the *quality* of the bus driver’s actions (e.g., compassionate, caring), not the outcome or others’ reactions (e.g., so that friends will appreciate and understand the person more). Ensure that the actions and values are personally important to the bus driver.

4. Assess the consistency of the bus driver's values and current actions

Ask the bus driver:

“If the bull’s-eye of the target means that your current actions are 100 per cent in line with your values, how far from the bull’s-eye are you?”

Ask the bus driver to mark an X on the target on the flip chart (see Bull’s-eye activity on page 68.).

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

As in the Bull’s-eye activity, we want to focus on the *consistency* between the bus driver’s actions and their values, and not on ideal outcomes (e.g., if the bus driver is already doing everything possible for their child, the X may be near the centre, even if the child does not show appreciation or “behave well”).

We also want to focus on an area in which the participant wants to improve *now*. If the bus driver puts an X close to the bull’s-eye, or if the actions being discussed are not something the bus driver wishes to change right now (e.g., they plan to start to look for work next year, when their older child moves back home and can help care for the person’s son), then go back to step 3.

5. Identify barriers to value-driven actions

Ask the bus driver to identify five or six barriers to their valued actions (e.g., “no time”; “not enough confidence”; “I’m too old”; “I’m too shy”; “my friends just don’t understand”; “people don’t care”; “I’m a failure”):

“Can you share with us some of the barriers that cause you to be here (point to the X) rather than in the centre of the target?”

Write down the barriers in point form on the flip chart.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Observe the bus driver’s emotional reactions as he or she articulates the barriers. Check to ensure that they include all the important barriers. You may need to probe several times (e.g., “If these barriers you mentioned were to magically disappear, would your values and actions be *perfectly* aligned and your ‘X’ will be moved to the bulls-eye?”; “What else stops you from taking action today?”) If there are more than six, ask the participant to rank the top six.

6. Ask for volunteers to play the role of bus passengers

Choose five or six volunteers to play the bus driver's passengers. These passengers will personify the bus driver's barriers. Ask each volunteer to come to the front of the group and identify with one of the barriers.

“Are there some volunteers willing to help us out by playing these [five/six] barriers?”

“Your job will be to role play the barriers that have been getting in [bus driver's name]'s way when [he or she] really wants to be doing X.

“Who is willing to play [barrier 1]?”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

If there are two facilitators, the second facilitator can help to orient volunteers to role-play the barriers (e.g., “Please come up to the front. You will role-play the first barrier the bus driver identified, which is ‘no time.’”)

7. Brief and position the bus driver and the passengers

Outline the basic story and characters in the role play. Position the bus driver to face the flip chart, and the passengers (barriers) to line up perpendicular (at 90 degrees) to the bus driver to get on the imaginary bus. Invite the remaining participants to gather around however they feel most comfortable to watch the action.

“Has everyone here ridden a bus? They are pretty great at transporting us to our destination.”

To the bus driver: *“You, as the bus driver, want to drive to the main station. So put on your cap and have your hands on the wheel and eyes on your target—the main station.”*

To the passengers: *“You are the barriers. You are the unruly passengers who are going to get on the bus and try to boss the bus driver around. To get started, line up here. As each of you gets on the bus, you're going to look the driver in the eye, scare them and tell them why they can never do [action X]. You are just like the negative thoughts inside the bus driver's head that we heard about.”*

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Describe the scenario (the bus system, etc.) relevant to the local context, to engage the whole group. If there are two facilitators, one can orientate the bus driver and the other can orientate the passengers. Encourage the bus driver to physically get into role, for example, by placing their hands on an imaginary steering wheel and maneuvering it.

8. Start the role play

Ask the bus driver to spend about 30 seconds connecting with and being present with the importance to them of their actions and values. Instruct the passengers to board the bus, one by one, and to stand in front of the driver, facing them, and tell them why they cannot do the valued actions.

Help the driver to avoid facing the barrier after hearing what the passenger has to say by pivoting them counterclockwise, and direct the passenger to “enter” the bus, standing behind the driver. Invite the next passenger to board, and so forth. When they are all aboard, the bus driver should be facing about 180 degrees away from the flip chart, with a single line of passengers behind the bus driver.

To the bus driver: *“Take a moment and connect with the target in front of you. How much do you wish you could be doing X to express your values of Y?”*

To passenger 1: *“Remember, you’re the bully (barrier 1). Do your best to scare the bus driver!”*

To the bus driver: *“Enough of this, let’s avoid this.” (Pivots the bus driver after the ‘barrier’ is articulated in an intimidating tone.)*

To passenger 2: *“Get on the bus behind the bus driver (or the previous passenger). Let’s have the next passenger come on the bus.”*

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

If there are two facilitators, one should stand beside the bus driver to give emotional support and to help pivot the bus driver and the other facilitator can help guide the movement of passengers.

Order the sequence of passengers approximately from the “easiest” barrier to the “hardest,” based on the bus driver’s assessment.

You may need to coach the passengers to act as “bullies”—for example, to say in an intimidating tone, “You are so old—no one will listen to you! Don’t ever think you can do X!”

The bus driver may spontaneously rationalize and “talk back” to the passengers—saying, for example, “I know that’s not really true—I was successful before.” You do not necessarily need to intervene. Interrupt only if it gets too long.

The bus driver may want to “kick off” a passenger from the bus. Tell the bus driver that the passenger has paid the fare and is here to stay.

The bus driver may get emotional facing certain barriers. Pace the exercise accordingly to give the bus driver the needed support.

9. Debrief the role play

Debrief with the bus driver, and help them to reflect on the experience and notice what direction they are driving toward.

- “What was it like to be facing your barriers?”
- “Which ones were especially hard for you?”
- “Were there any particular surprises in this experience?”
- “Take notice—where are you driving to? Are you getting closer to or farther away from your values (the bull’s-eye)?”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Depending on the situation, the bus driver may want to discuss more about the experience at this point, including some more stories and explanations about the barriers. Some barriers may be surprisingly “easy” or surprisingly “hard” for them to face. Support the bus driver and take time to empathize with their experience.

10. Re-do the role play with acceptance and defusion

Invite the bus driver and passengers to re-do the role play, this time coaching the bus driver to welcome the passenger to the bus and stay facing the target.

“Let’s do this role play one more time. This time, let’s try something a little different. Are you ready?”

“This time, when a passenger gets on, see if you can welcome them. You don’t have to talk back to them—just something very brief: ‘Welcome aboard’ or something like that of your choosing.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

The bus driver may lapse into arguing back with the passengers. If so, gently remind the bus driver to just welcome the passengers on board.

11. Debrief with the bus driver

Thank the passengers and invite them to return to their seats. Sit down and debrief with the bus driver, with the two facing chairs at a 45-degree angle in front of the group. Explore the bus driver's experience with the whole exercise, including sharing the barriers and doing the role play twice.

- *“Would you like to share with us what this experience was like for you?”*
- *“What was it like to share your values, desired actions and barriers?”*
- *“What was the role play like the first time around?”*
- *“How was it different the second time around?”*

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Help the bus driver to reflect on the differences between the two role plays; how they were able to welcome the passengers; their emotional reactions to the passengers; and the sense of being in control of their “bus.” Make the point that the passengers are still present at the end of the role play. They have not disappeared. Acknowledge that the passengers may still seem scary or intimidating.

12. Elicit committed action from the bus driver

Have the bus driver identify one committed action that they are willing to take, based on their experience in the activity. Ensure that they are committed to following through on the action.

“Now that you have this experience, what is one action you are willing to do this week to further your values?”

“It can be a small step or a big step—just as long as you are willing to take this step and it takes you a little further in your valued direction.”

“How sure are you that you will do this? Rank your certainty from 0% to 100%?”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Help the bus driver to choose a concrete action. Be as specific as possible (e.g., “I will jog twice this week for 20 minutes”; “I will call my sister tonight”).

If the bus driver endorses a low likelihood of following through (e.g., below 80%), see if there is a smaller action that they are willing to commit to (e.g., “I will take a walk for 15 minutes after dinner at least once this week”; “I will look up my sister's phone number tomorrow night”).

13. Debrief with the passengers and the rest of the group

Invite the passengers to share their experiences with the role play:

- *“What was it like to role play the barriers?”*
- *“What did you notice about yourself? About the bus driver?”*

Ask the whole group to share their reflections and experiences:

- *“Have you experienced similar kinds of thoughts in your mind that try to bully you around?”*

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Passengers may need chance to describe the emotional experience of acting as barriers. They may describe feeling bad in role playing a barrier. It might be helpful to remind them that they were role playing the internal struggle already existing in the bus driver, and the bus driver may be able to confirm this. Passengers may also notice that the bus driver became more resilient in the second round, and that as a result they had less impact on him or her.

Participants may want to offer support, suggestions or advice to the bus driver. Empathic comments and some open suggestions can be helpful. If there is any doubt, check with the bus driver whether it is helpful, and remind the group that all our struggles are different: what works for one person may or may not be suitable for someone else. However, while our struggles may be different, our experiences of being “bullied” by the barriers created by our internal thoughts and feelings may be the same.

Summarize the entire exercise and point out that the six core processes of ACT are embedded in this exercise: defusion (i.e., thoughts as passengers), acceptance (i.e., “welcome aboard”), present moment, self-as-context (i.e., you are not your thoughts just as the driver [self] is not the same person as the passengers [thoughts]), values and committed action.

Activity 2.15: Closure of Session 2

TIME:	35 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage participants in deeper reflection on their values.• Engage participants in formulating specific goals.• Help participants identify their willingness to engage in action and address anticipated barriers.• Encourage participants to take committed action.
ACT PROCESSES:	Values, committed action
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a circular formation.
MATERIAL:	None
HANDOUTS:	2.6: Committed action plan 2.7: Session feedback form

INSTRUCTIONS

After debriefing the previous activity, ask the participants to take **Handout 2.6: Committed action plan** from their folder. Ask them to record their chosen value, goal and action items.

Facilitator 1:

“At the top of the handout, please write down a value and a related goal that are important to you.

“Then, in the first column of the table, write down three concrete actions that you plan to do to actualize your value and reach your goal.

“Next, in the second column, rank the relative difficulty of the three actions: 1 for the easiest, 2 for the next easiest and 3 for the most difficult.

“Finally, in the third column, rank your readiness to complete each action, regardless of how difficult you identified it as being. Willingness is an ‘all-or-nothing’ commitment: you can’t be half-pregnant, climb half a step on a ladder or half-jump from a diving board. However, when you do feel ready and committed, you may be ready to go for a small leap off the diving board, or a big leap. Take a moment to rank your readiness for each of the action items, with 1 being a small step and 3 being a big leap.”

End the activity by reminding participants that challenges and barriers do not necessarily prevent us from actualizing our chosen values (refer to the Bus driver activity). Invite participants to carry out their actions as homework and, having done so, to complete the fourth and fifth columns of the table.

Facilitator 1:

“Later, when you have completed each action, record the date when you completed it, how you found the experience, and what the result was.”

Invite participants to give feedback on the day’s activities:

“Before we close, we would like to go around the room, and invite you to say one or two words of appreciation about something you took away from the today’s session.”

Invite the participants to fill out and submit **Handout 2.7: Session feedback form**. Thank the participants for attending and remind them of the date and time and date of Session 3.

2.1: Cognitive defusion techniques

These are some techniques to help us “defuse” from our thoughts—to see thoughts as just thoughts, nothing more and nothing less—rather than being trapped and dictated by our thoughts.

1. **The Mind:** Treat “the mind” as an external event, almost as a separate person (e.g., “Well, there goes my mind again” or “My mind is worrying again”).
2. **Thought labeling:** Label your thoughts as thoughts (e.g., “I am having a thought that I will not be able to change”) or label the type of thought (e.g., “I am having a judgment that my child’s illness is too terrible to have” or “I am having a prediction that people will not listen to me”).
3. **Get off your “but”:** Replace “but” with “and” (e.g., “I would like to take care of myself, *but* I am busy” becomes “I would like to take care of myself *and* I may busy”).
4. **Use a variety of vocalizations:** Say the thought very slowly, say it in a different voice, sing it, etc.
5. **Thank your mind:** Thank your mind when you notice it butting in with worries and judgments (e.g., “Thank you, mind. You’re doing a great job of scaring me today”). This is *not sarcasm*—after all, the mind is doing exactly what it was designed to do all those thousands of years ago: problem solve and avoid danger.
6. **Say it fast and loud:** Repeat a thought out loud quickly until it loses its meaning (e.g., “I’m useless, I’m useless, I’m useless, I’m useless, I’m useless, I’m useless, I’m useless, I’m useless, I’m useless, I’m useless . . .”).
7. **Imagine that thoughts are like:**
 - Internet pop-up ads
 - a ringing cell phone that you can’t turn off (e.g., “Hello. This is your mind speaking. Don’t do too much because you are going to regret it”)
 - clouds floating across the sky
 - leaves floating down a stream. You don’t have to dive in. You can watch from a bridge
 - a waterfall. You’re standing behind it, not under it.
 - guests entering a hotel. You can be like the doorman: you greet the guests but you don’t follow them to their rooms.
 - actors on a stage. You can watch the play; you don’t need to get on stage and perform.
 - a passing parade. You can watch the floats pass by; you don’t have to climb on board.
 - suitcases dropping onto a conveyor belt at the airport; you can watch them pass by, without having to pick them up.
8. **Buying thoughts:** Distinguish between thoughts that just occur and the thoughts that are believed (e.g., “I guess I’m ‘buying’ the thought that I’m hopeless”).
9. **And how has that worked for me?:** When you are buying a thought, back up for a moment and ask yourself, “How has that worked for me?”—and if it hasn’t worked, ask, “Which should I be guided by, my mind or my experience?”
10. **Create your own defusion strategy!**

2.2: Full living values

Circle the top three *cultural values* that most reflect your upbringing and the socio-cultural values inherited from your family, community and society. Write “CV” beside them.

Circle your top three *personal values*, which may or may not be the same as above, and write “PV” beside them. If there are important values that are not listed, please feel free to add them to the list.

- Acceptance
- Advocacy
- Altruism
- Assertiveness
- Authenticity
- Autonomy
- Awareness
- Balance
- Benevolence
- Calmness
- Caring
- Charity
- Choice
- Closeness
- Collectivism
- Compassion
- Competence
- Conformity
- Connectedness
- Conscientious
- Consideration
- Consistency
- Contribution
- Cooperation
- Courage
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Dedication
- Deference
- Dependability
- Determination
- Dignity
- Diligence
- Discipline
- Diversity
- Efficiency
- Empathy
- Enthusiasm
- Equality
- Equanimity
- Excellence
- Expressiveness
- Fairness
- Faithfulness
- Family
- Filial Piety
- Flexibility
- Forbearance
- Fortitude
- Freedom
- Friendliness
- Gallantry
- Generosity
- Gratitude
- Growth
- Harmony
- Helpfulness
- Honesty
- Honour
- Hopefulness
- Humaneness
- Humility
- Humour
- Inclusion
- Independence
- Industry
- Ingenuity
- Inspiration
- Integrity
- Interdependence
- Intimacy
- Joy
- Justice
- Kindness
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Learning
- Logic
- Loving
- Loyalty
- Mastery
- Meticulousness
- Mindfulness
- Moderation
- Motivation
- Mutuality
- Naturalness
- Nurturing
- Openness
- Order
- Participation
- Patience
- Peace
- Perceptiveness
- Practicality
- Preparedness
- Presence
- Productivity
- Prudence
- Purity
- Purpose
- Reasonableness
- Reflection
- Renunciation
- Resilience
- Respect
- Rite
- Sacrifice
- Security
- Self-control
- Sincerity
- Spirituality
- Stability
- Strength
- Temperance
- Tolerance
- Trust
- Truthfulness
- Understanding
- Virtue
- Vision
- Vitality
- Wisdom

2.3: Bull’s-eye: Valued living

Are you doing what is important to you? When our values and our actions are consistent and aligned, we will be in the centre of the target below—the bull’s-eye. Please rate how consistent your current *actions* are with your *values* in four areas of life by putting an “X” in each quadrant of the target. For example:

- Mary values an active lifestyle. Even though she is dying of cancer, she puts an “X” in the centre of the *Self-care* quadrant because she is quite satisfied with her actions, as she exercises daily.
- Johnny values an active lifestyle too. Although he is physically healthy, he marks an “X” in one of the outer circles for *Self-care* because he is not currently doing what he values—he does not exercise any more.
- Tom doesn’t value having an active lifestyle and so he never exercises. He takes care of himself in other ways by eating and sleeping well. He puts an “X” in the centre of *Self-care* because he is already doing what is important to him.
- Susan values a close relationship with her father, and visits him weekly at a nursing home. He has dementia and yells at her every time she visits. She puts an X in the centre of *Family* because she is satisfied with her own actions.

SELF-CARE

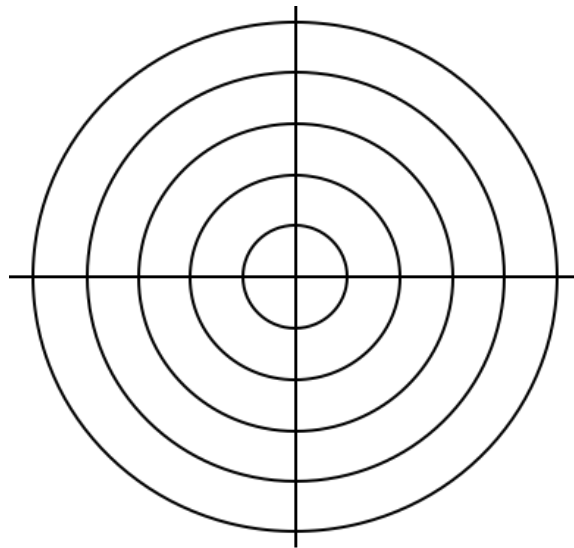
(e.g., sleep, diet, exercise, relaxation, entertainment, hobbies)

WORK/PURSUIITS

(e.g., job, volunteerism, study, housework)

FAMILY

(e.g., partner/spouse, children, parents, siblings, close relatives, chosen family)



FRIENDS/COMMUNITY

(e.g., friends, co-workers, neighbours, religious community, ethnic community, Canadian society)

HANDOUT

For each area of life, explain why you put the Xs where you did (e.g., what supports you or gets in your way?):

SELF-CARE:	WORK/PURSUIITS:
FAMILY:	FRIENDS/COMMUNITY:

2.4: Values, goals and life areas

1. **Friendships and social life.** What sort of qualities would you like to bring to your friendships? If you could be the best friend possible, how would you behave toward your friends? What sort of friendships would you like to build?
2. **Career and employment.** What do you value in your work? What would make it more meaningful? What kind of worker would you like to be? If you were living up to your own ideal standards, what personal qualities would you like to bring to your work? What sort of work relationships would you like to build?
3. **Marriage, couples and intimate relations.** What sort of partner would you like to be in an intimate relationship (whether or not you are in a relationship now)? What personal qualities would you like to develop? What sort of relationship would you like to build? How would you interact with your partner if you were the “ideal you” in this relationship?
4. **Education, personal growth and development.** What do you value about learning, education, training or personal growth? What new skills would you like to learn? What knowledge would you like to gain? What further education appeals to you? What sort of student would you like to be? What personal qualities would you like to apply to learning?
5. **Recreation, fun and leisure.** What sorts of hobbies, sports or leisure activities do you enjoy? How do you relax and unwind? How do you have fun? What sorts of activities would you like to do?
6. **Family relations.** What sort of brother or sister, son or daughter, uncle or aunt do you want to be? What personal qualities would you like to bring to those relationships? What sort of relationships would you like to build? How would you interact with others if you were the ideal you in these relationships?
7. **Citizenship, environment and community life.** What type of neighbour would you like to be? How would you like to contribute to your community or environment (e.g., through volunteering, recycling, or supporting a group, charity or political party)?
8. **Spirituality.** Whatever spirituality means to you is fine. It may be as simple as communing with nature, or as formal as participating in an organized religious group. What is important to you in this area of life?
9. **Parenting.** What sort of parent would you like to be? What sort of qualities would you like to have? What sort of relationships would you like to build with your children? How would you behave if you were the ideal you?
10. **Health and physical well-being.** What are your values related to maintaining your physical well-being? How do you want to look after your health, with regard to sleep, diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol, etc.? Why is this important to you?

2.5: Values and goals worksheet

Choose one or more life areas from Handout 2.4 to work on below. Only choose life areas where pain has held you back from achieving your goals. For each life area identify *values*, *goals* and *short-term committed action*, using the example below for guidance. Be sure to write about what *you* value, not what you think your friends', family's or society's expectations are.

Examples:

Life area: Develop friendships, social life and family relations.

Values: Be a supportive and reliable friend and sister; be an open listener and share about myself.

Goals: Spend more time talking with my friends and with my sister and brother.

Short-term committed action: Talk to or see at least one friend or sibling this week.

1. Life area:

Values:

Goals:

Short-term committed action (i.e., in the next week):

2. Life area:

Values:

Goals:

Short-term committed action (i.e., in the next week):

3. Life area:

Values:
Goals:
Short-term committed action (i.e., in the next week):

4. Life area:

Values:
Goals:
Short-term committed action (i.e., in the next week):

5. Life area:

Values:
Goals:
Short-term committed action (i.e., in the next week):

6. Life area:

Values:
Goals:
Short-term committed action (i.e., in the next week):

2.6: Committed action plan

Value:
Goal:

In the table below, list three concrete actions that will help you accomplish your goal in the service of your values.

1. Rank the three actions in order of the potential level of difficulty of the barriers and challenges they present, from 1 (least difficult) to 3 (most difficult).
2. Rank each item in terms of your readiness to take action, from 1 (low readiness) to 2 (medium readiness) to 3 (high readiness).
3. Record the actual date(s) when the actions are undertaken, and your experience and results.

Action	Perceived difficulty	Willingness to take action	Date(s)	Experience/ results
1.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3		
2.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3		
3.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3		

Adapted from Hayes, S.C., Strosahl, K. & Wilson, K.G. (2012). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press (pp. 311–315).

2.7: Session feedback form

Name:

Day: 1 2 3

1. List the main point of today's session.

2. List one thing you can do or one way you can think differently during the next week as a result of today's session.

3. Was there anything said during today's session that confused or troubled you?

4. Do you have questions about today's session?

5. Any other comments:

Session 3

Overview

SESSION ACTIVITIES	DURATION	ACT PROCESSES
3.1: Brief centring activity	5 min.	Present moment
3.2: Homework review	20 min.	Committed action
3.3: Review of ACT hexaflex	20 min.	All processes
3.4: ACT matrix activity	30 min.	All processes
Break	15 min.	
3.5: Raisin activity	15 min.	Present moment
3.6: Le' go activity	45 min.	Self-as-context
3.7: Goodbye	30 min.	Committed action

ROOM SET-UP

Arrange the chairs in a circle or horseshoe formation, with the facilitators sitting together at one end. Most activities will work with either formation, which can be changed from one activity to the next as necessary. A circle promotes cohesion and equitable sharing and works well for most activities, except the horseshoe works better when the facilitators need to use the flip chart or show slides or videos. Other considerations include number of participants and room shape and size. You can put a small table in the middle with tissues, candies and tea lights to make the room cozier. You can also play soft music in the background when participants arrive and during breaks.

FLIP CHART PREPARATION

- **For Activity 3.3, write:**

ACT in a nutshell:

- **Accept** our thoughts and feelings, including the unwanted ones (anxiety, guilt, pain, sense of inadequacy), by letting go of our struggle with them and recognizing them for what they are—just our thoughts and feelings.
- **Choose** our directions in life by identifying and focusing on what really matters to us and what we truly value in life.
- **Take action** to realize our valued life goals by making a commitment to change what can be changed and to live a meaningful and engaging life.

- **For Activity 3.3, write:**

Six processes of psychological flexibility:

1. I am
2. Here now
3. Allowing my thoughts
4. And accepting my thoughts and feelings
5. While committing to
6. Who and what is important to me

- **For Activity 3.3, write:**

What is mindfulness?

“I define mindfulness as the practice of being fully present and alive, body and mind united. Mindfulness is the energy that helps us to know what is going on in the present moment. . . . Mindfulness brings concentration.”

—Thich Nhat Hanh

“Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, p. 4)

- **For Activity 3.4:**

Copy the matrix diagram from Handout 3.2.

- **For Activity 3.7, write:**

ACT goodbye

- Connect—presently
- Share—openly
- Act—committedly

Instructions

1. Connect with each person in the group in the present moment.
2. Share openly about your experience of the group to say thank you.
3. Share one single action you will commit to in the service of your values to promote your health and well-being.

SESSION HANDOUTS

3.1: Hexaflex with hand gestures

3.2: Matrix diagram

3.3: Workshop feedback form

Activity 3.1 Brief centring

TIME:	5 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote connection and group cohesion through the use of a mindfulness exercise.• Help participants to focus on the present moment.• Help participants to get in touch with their values.
ACT PROCESSES:	Present moment, values
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants and facilitators sit in a circle.
MATERIAL:	Meditation bell
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (n.d.); Fung (2015)

INSTRUCTIONS

Invite participants to take part in a grounding/centring exercise. Provide the instructions below in a gentle, calming voice:

“Welcome back, everyone. We will begin today’s session with a mindfulness exercise to bring us to the present and to become centred.”

Sit on your chair; find a comfortable position; keep your body upright and sit slightly away from the back of the chair.

“Close your eyes gently. Rest your hands on your lap; keep your feet slightly apart and rest them firmly on the floor.

“Notice the sensation of your body where it touches the chair.”

(Pause 15 seconds.)

“Now focus on your breathing. Breathing in, notice the sensation at your nostrils and in the small area above your upper lips, breathing out, notice the sensation in the same area.”

(Pause 30 seconds.)

“Breathing in and breathing out, effortlessly, notice the sensation of your belly as you breathe in and out.”

(Pause 30 seconds.)

“You may notice other things that pull your attention away from your breath; it might be sounds or another sensation. So for a moment, notice the sounds, inside or outside this room; just notice these sounds without being caught up in a story about what these sounds are about.”

(Pause 30 seconds.)

“It could also be a sound of silence.”

(Pause 1 minute.)

“Now, let go of the listening and return to your bodily sensations. Notice which sensation calls out to you; just notice these sensations in your body, pleasant or unpleasant, just notice them without judgment or rejection. Just notice them.”

(Pause 1–2 minutes.)

“You may notice thoughts coming in and out of your mind. Acknowledge them as thoughts—without judgment, just notice that ‘Ah, I have a thought,’ and go back to noticing your breath—in and out—effortlessly.”

(Pause 1–2 minutes.)

“Now, see if you can allow yourself to get in touch with your values. What is important to you about being here for this workshop?”

(Pause 1 minute.)

“Breathing in—you are aware of the present; breathing out—you feel grounded.”

(Pause 10 seconds.)

“Now bring your focus back to this room [pause 10 seconds]; to the sounds [pause 10 seconds]; to the awareness of sitting in a circle with others in this room [pause 10 seconds] and that each of us are bringing with us our values, while sharing some collective values and goals.”

(Pause 10 seconds.)

“As in every sphere of your life, you are not on your own, in isolation; see if you can get in contact with the part of yourself that is also inherently connected with others—your interdependent self.”

(Pause 10 seconds.)

“When you feel ready, slowly open your eyes.”

Spend 5–10 minutes exploring with participants their experience of the exercise:

“What was it like for you to do this exercise?”

Activity 3.2: Review of homework

TIME:	20 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage participants in reflecting on their experiences in doing the “Committed action plan” homework (Handout 2.6)• Promote meaningful living through committed action.
ACT PROCESSES:	Acceptance, values, commitment
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants and facilitators sit in a large circle.
MATERIAL:	None
HANDOUTS:	None

INSTRUCTIONS

Engage the participants in a reflective conversation, using the following script:

“Our next activity is to share our experience in doing our homework on mindful and committed action.

“Was anybody able to complete their committed action plan?”

“What actions did you take, and what was it like? Did you have some successes? Challenges?”

“Was there anything you learned from the workshop that helped with your actions?”

“What would support you in continuing to do this work?”

End the discussion by highlighting the power in our willingness to act, and the strategies that we can draw on to take committed action.

Activity 3.3: Review of ACT hexaflex

TIME:	20 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help participants to clearly connect all the ACT activities to the ACT model.• Increase participants' understanding of the ACT processes and how they can continue to apply them after the training.
ACT PROCESSES:	Not applicable
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a horseshoe formation, with the facilitators at the open end.
MATERIAL:	Flip chart, water-based colour markers, masking tape
HANDOUTS:	1.1: Hexaflex ACT model 3.1: Hexaflex with hand gestures

Source: Hayes et al. (2013, p. 184)

INSTRUCTIONS

Discuss and review the prepared flip chart sheets “ACT in a nutshell,” “Six core processes of psychological flexibility” and “What is mindfulness?”

Ask participants to turn to **Handout 1.1: Hexaflex ACT model**, and review the six core processes of psychological inflexibility and flexibility, previously outlined in Session 1.

Ask participants to turn to **Handout 3.1: Hexaflex with hand gestures**, and review the hand gestures that summarize the model (first presented in Activity 1.2):

- **Defusion:** Separating the hands—“*Creating a distance between us and our thoughts*”
- **Acceptance:** Turning palms upwards—“*Being open and accepting to our thoughts, feelings and inner experiences*”
- **Contact with present moment:** Centring the edge of one hand on the palm of the other—“*Being in the present moment*”
- **Self-as-context:** Cupping the bottom palm to cradle the upper hand which is curled into a fist—“*Being the flexible holding self, rather than fusing with the ‘contents’ of the self*”
- **Values:** Cupping both hands—“*Being in touch with what we value*”
- **Committed action:** Hooking pinkies together—“*Committing to act in the service of our values*”

You can remind the participants of previous group exercises and review how the ACT processes are embedded in them.

Activity 3.4: ACT matrix

TIME:	30 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help participants to clearly connect all the ACT activities to the ACT model.• Increase understanding of the ACT processes, and how participants can continue to apply them after the training.
ACT PROCESSES:	All
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a horseshoe formation, with the facilitators at the open end.
MATERIAL:	Flip chart, masking tape, water-based colour markers
HANDOUTS:	3.2: Matrix diagram

Source: Adapted from Polk & Schoendorff (2014)

INSTRUCTIONS

Ask participants to turn to **Handout 3.2: Matrix diagram**, and use the following script to guide participants through the activity:

“In this activity, we will focus again on the perspective of psychological flexibility—doing more of the things that are important to you, your child and your family. As you saw in the previous activity, the term psychological flexibility is in the centre of the hexaflex. Psychological flexibility involves all six core processes of the ACT model.”

“To introduce you to the matrix illustrated in the handout and on the flip chart, we’ll begin by exploring how we engage with our world, starting with our senses. What are our five senses?”

(Have group participants name sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing.)

“Now I invite you to pick up your pen. Notice what it looks like.”

(Pause and model this whole exercise for them. Do this with some humour).

“Notice if it makes a sound.”

(Pause, tap the pen on table, or click the top of the pen, etc.)

“Notice how it feels.”

(Pause, feel the pen.)

“Notice if it has a smell.”

(Pause, sniff the pen.)

“Finally, you can imagine tasting it if you want.”

(Pause.)

“I would like for you all to put the pen down in front of you now, so that you are no longer touching it, and close your eyes.”

(Pause.)

“Now, call to mind the pen—how it looked, felt, sounded, smelled, and you can even imagine how it might have tasted.”

(Pause.)

“Now you can open your eyes. Notice the difference between when you are experiencing the world from your five senses and when you are experiencing it in your mind.

“On the flip chart I’ve described these two ways of experiencing as ‘Inner world’ (mental experiencing) . . .”

(Point to the centre top of the diagram.)

“. . . and ‘Outer world’ (experiencing with your five senses).”

(Point to the centre bottom of the diagram.)

“That’s the first tool involved in psychological flexibility—noticing the difference between these two ways of experiencing.

*“You’ll notice that on right-hand side of the matrix, I have written the word **Toward**, and on the left side is the word **Away**.*

*“Now, let’s discuss the upper right quadrant, **Values**—this is who and what matters most to us. So, think about this question: who and what matters most to you?”*

Gather five or six responses. These could include:

- family/parenting
- health/self-care
- spirituality / purpose in life
- work/education
- marital bond / intimate relationships
- friends / social life
- self-expression
- leisure.

“When you consider who and what matters most to you, what are some of the actions I and others would see you doing in the service of your values? I will write these actions in the lower right-hand quadrant under ‘Committed actions.’ These actions are experienced in the “outer world”; in other words, they are not just inner thoughts, but are actions that you and others would see and experience.”

(You can ask the person who responds to speak about the action that would be needed to move toward what’s important for them.)

Examples include (corresponding to the values listed above):

- spending time with my child
- exercising, watching what I eat
- praying or meditating
- developing relationships with co-workers or fellow students
- watching TV that is fun, laughing together
- having a night out with friends
- creating something, visiting an art gallery
- reading a book for pleasure.

“When we are moving toward who and what matters (the upper right quadrant—Values), thoughts and feelings sometimes show up inside us that we’d rather get away from.”

(You can point to “Away” on the left-hand side of the matrix.)

“These are internal barriers—negative thoughts, feelings, memories. For example, when I am moving toward something I want, for example a better relationship with my child, sometimes a barrier shows up, such as anxiety, anger, fear or thoughts like, ‘I don’t have the time’.”

Ask participants to name thoughts or feelings that come up for them. They might include, for example:

- anxiety
- fear
- depression
- lack of time
- fatigue
- guilt
- frustration.

“We write these internal barriers in the upper left quadrant because they are negative thoughts, feelings or memories in our inner world: thoughts that get in the way of moving toward who and what matters most to us.

*“Now, when these internal barriers (negative thoughts or feelings) show up, what are some avoidant behaviours that you may do to make these feelings go away or lessen them? For example, when I feel, say, fearful or fatigued, I may do something like yell, avoid, watch TV or ignore the kids. These are things that you do, behaviours that others can see, so I’ll write them below (in the **Outer world**) under ‘**Avoidant behaviours**’—my actions to avoid negative experiences.*

“So, what are some things you do to move away?”

Examples include:

- shopping
- emotional eating
- over-sleeping
- yelling
- drinking excessive alcohol.

Under “Avoidant behaviours,” list what participants say and then talk them through how each of these strategies works. Draw an arrow from the thoughts and feelings (internal barriers in the upper left quadrant) to the matching strategy (avoidant behaviours in the lower left quadrant). If the participant says that the strategy works in the short term but not in the long term, or if they say it doesn’t work at all (or makes things worse), then continue the arrow back to the thoughts and feelings. You should end up with a mass of circles that looks a bit like a hurricane.

Ask participants what they notice about how these strategies work. You may ask what the drawing looks like—they might say a whirlpool or a storm. Ask if the strategies are useful in moving toward things that really matter, their values—the answer should be an obvious no.

Highlight for participants that the purpose of using the matrix is to increase psychological flexibility. You can write Psychological flexibility in the centre of the diagram near the head. On or near the head, you can write the words “Me noticing,” and explain that the matrix helps us recognize whether we are experiencing with thoughts (inner world) or with our five senses (outer world) in the present moment.

Flexibility results from realizing that we have the choice either to move toward who and what is important to us (value-based committed action), or to more consciously continue attempts to manage our internal experiences such as our thoughts and feelings (even though we see this strategy doesn’t work well). If we choose this second strategy, we at least can do so without judgment and with more consciousness.

Activity 3.5: Raisin activity

TIME:	10–20 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate the experience of mindfulness.• Help participants get in touch with their moment-to-moment experiences.• Engage participants in becoming more mindful of their sensations, thoughts and feelings.
ACT PROCESSES:	Mindfulness, present moment, defusion
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants and facilitators sit in a large circle.
MATERIAL:	Raisins or raspberries
HANDOUTS:	None

Source: Kabat-Zinn (2005)

INSTRUCTIONS

Give each participant a raisin (or alternatively a raspberry). Use the following script to talk participants through the activity:

“There is one essential general instruction: whenever you find your mind wandering from the task at hand, just gently return your attention to the raisin and what you are doing with it.

“Begin by placing the raisin in the palm of your hand. Spend a few moments just looking at it. Really look at it with a sense of curiosity and awe, as if this were the first time you had looked at a raisin. (In fact, it is likely that this is the first time you are truly looking at a raisin.)

“Look at it from different angles. Notice the shape, size, wrinkles, the reflection of light, and the different shades of colour and shadow.

“Gently pick up the raisin with your thumb and index finger and roll it between them. What does it feel like? What are its textures?

“Now close your eyes because you will no longer be attending to visual sensations.

“Listen to any changes in sound as you bring it closer to your ear.

“Bring it close to your nose and smell the aroma.

“Rub the raisin across your lips and notice what that feels like.

“Place the raisin on your tongue. Let it sit on your tongue for a few moments. Don’t chew it. Just leave it on your tongue and notice how it feels.

Roll it around your mouth and notice how it feels.

“When you are ready, begin chewing it slowly. Bite the raisin very slowly and gently, extending the time it takes to bite through it for as long as possible. What is that like? What does the raisin feel like between your teeth? What sensations, textures, tastes and smells do you notice? If you feel the urge to swallow the raisin right away, just notice that urge, and slowly chew the raisin for a minute or so, without swallowing.

(Pause for a minute or two.)

“Finally, when you are ready, go ahead and give in to the urge to swallow the raisin.”

“Mindfully eating the raisin is an exercise that you can use to learn the skill of mindfulness.

“Mindfulness can be applied to any activity you are engaging in, from the mundane, boring tasks you do every day to those that are important or monumental. Being mindful of daily activities allows us to fully experience them and be truly alive in the moment.

“When you return home, I invite you to experience your child as you did this raisin, as if for the first time. Take in your child with all your senses—beholding them, seeing them for the beauty and joy and uniqueness of their being; if age appropriate, smelling them or touching them—perhaps stroking their cheek, or running your hand through their hair.

“Perhaps, even just once a day, I invite you to mindfully experience your child with fresh eyes and an open heart.”

After a few minutes, check to see if participants have finished eating their raisin, and invite them to share their experience.

Debriefing points

Conclude by highlighting the following points:

- Mindfulness can be practised at all moments in our everyday life (e.g., eating, bathing, answering the phone); when we stop multi-tasking and turn off the “autopilot,” we can be present to observe our experiences.
- As we develop new awareness and embody mindfulness through practice, we will be able to experience in a new way many things that we currently do in a taken-for-granted manner.
- Mindful practice enables us to defuse from rigid ideas and inflexible practices.

Activity 3.6: Le’ go activity

TIME:	45 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase participants’ awareness of the continuity and stability of the self, while allowing a more flexible relationship with the “contents” and identities of the self.• Increase awareness that despite numerous life changes, challenges and adversity, the sense of self-as-context (the “observer-self”) persists.• Expand participants’ repertoire of behaviour that is less constricted by concepts of oneself.
ACT PROCESSES:	Self-as-context
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a large circle.
MATERIAL:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bucket of small Lego building blocks—10 to 15 pieces per participant• Paper plates (one per participant)• Water-based markers
HANDOUTS:	3.2: Matrix diagram

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the activity

Facilitator 1 describes the overall purpose of the exercise:

“As we have explored, our thoughts often are not what they seem. This may even apply to thoughts about ourselves.”

“This activity is called the Le’ go (or Let-go) exercise. It will help us explore our sense of self—that is, our sense of who we are.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

If this exercise is done after defusion exercises, make reference to them.

2. Distribute the materials

Pass out a paper plate to each participant and invite each participant to write their name on the inside surface with a marker. Pass around a bucket of Lego pieces, and ask participants to take 10–15 pieces and put them on their plate.

Facilitator 1:

“Please write down your name on the plate so you can identify which plate is yours.

“Have you played with these before? They are small construction blocks. Please grab a handful of them and put them on your plate.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Some participants may take longer to pick up pieces, or may look for specific shapes. Some may want to trade pieces with other participants. Some will focus on whether they have enough pieces. Reassure them that whatever they have is fine for the purposes of the exercise.

3. Ask participants to identify a memory from last summer

Have participants become quiet and mindful to the present. Facilitator 1 directs them to deeply recall a memory of an event last summer. Ask them to note that there was a “self” that observed everything that was happening at the time—the same “self” that is here now recalling the memory.

“Please put down your plate. If you are willing, close your eyes, or alternatively fix your gaze on a point in front of you. We will just spend a few moments to become aware of the present and our breath.

“Now let’s think back to something that happened to you last summer. It may be a positive event or a negative event—whatever comes to your mind. Recall the event as clearly as you can. Notice what you were seeing, hearing, doing, feeling or thinking at the time. Notice where you were and whom you were with. Notice that you were there experiencing all these things, and notice that this is the same ‘you’ that is here right now, recalling all of this. Note that ‘you’ have been ‘you’ all this time.

“Let us return for a few moments to our breath and to just being here. Whenever you are ready, you may open your eyes.”

4. Ask participants to recreate the memory with Lego pieces

Facilitator 1:

“Now, being fully present, see if you can use the construction blocks to recreate the event you just recalled from last summer or represent the event in some way.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Observe participants’ actions. Some may take longer than others. If they start talking to each other or exchanging pieces, encourage them to focus quietly on their own work. Ideally, allow enough time for most people to finish.

5. Ask participants to “let go” and recreate a memory from their younger years

Have the participants reflect on this experience and their creation. Ask them to take the pieces apart. Then, ask them to recall another memory from younger years. Have them recreate the scene again with the Lego pieces.

Facilitator 1:

“Please stop building if you have not already finished. Whatever stage you are at, take a moment just to observe the memory of that event from last year, and notice that you are here now observing it.”

“Perhaps take one last look at your creation. . . . Now, let’s pull the pieces apart. . . . Notice anything that comes up for you as you do this.”

“Looking at the pieces in front of you, now recall another event, this time from your teenage years. Notice everything that you were seeing, hearing, doing, thinking and feeling back then. . . . Notice that your role then may have been quite different from your role now. . . . Notice that your body may have been quite different then, too Maybe every single cell in your body was different back then. . . . Yet notice too that the ‘you’ that was there back then is the same ‘you’ that is here now recalling all this, looking at these Lego pieces.”

“Now, being fully here, see if you can recreate what happened in your teen years with your Lego pieces.”

6. Ask participants to “let go” and recreate a memory from childhood

As before, have the participants reflect on this experience and their second creation. Ask them to take the pieces apart. Then ask them to recall a memory from childhood, and again re-create the scene with the Lego pieces.

“Please stop building if you have not already finished. As you did before, whatever stage you are at, take a moment just to observe the memory of that event from your teenage years, and notice that you are here now observing it.”

“Take a last look at your creation and then, once more, let it go and pull the pieces apart, noticing anything that comes up for you as you do so.”

“Looking at the pieces in front of you, now recall another event from even farther back, from your childhood. Notice everything that you were seeing, hearing, doing, thinking and feeling then. . . . Notice that your role then was quite different from your role now. . . . Notice that your little body was very different from your body now. . . . There were a lot of things that you did not know and had not experienced. . . . Still, notice again that the ‘you’ that was there back then is the same ‘you’ that is here right now, recalling all this, looking at these Lego pieces. You have never been me or anyone else. . . . You have been you your whole life.”

“Now, being fully here, see if you can recreate what happened in your childhood with your Lego pieces.”

7. Debrief and share the experience of the exercise

Have the participants reflect back on the exercise and share their experience.

“Please stop building if you have not already finished. Whatever stage you are at, take a moment just to observe the memory of that event from your childhood, and notice that the same “childhood you” is here now, observing all this as an adult.

“Now let’s let all these memories go . . . and return together to this room in the present moment.

“Would anyone like to share their experience of this exercise?”

Important points of discussion to draw out include:

- Self as perspective and observer—the sense of self as a perspective (“I”; “not-you”) and the “observer-self” (the experience of the same “I” who is aware and observing) is continuously present throughout our lives, amidst all the changes:

“Notice that ‘you’ have always been ‘you’ throughout your whole life. . . . ‘You’ (pointing around) have not been ‘me’ (pointing to self) . . . although everything else that is not our ‘selves’ is ever changing, including our thoughts, feelings, memories, body, social roles, etc.—just like our Lego pieces.”

- Resilience and the persistence of “self” through the challenges of life:

“Notice that ‘you’ remain ‘you’ throughout your life, through good times and bad times, from distant events to recent events.”

- Being constricted by our own self-stories—we can easily confuse our “selves” with ideas and concepts about ourselves, like our self-descriptions, stories or social roles, and feel “bounded” by these things:

“You may say to yourself, for example, ‘I’m an introvert and I’m not a dancer—it’s not me’—so you may never try dancing at parties and never get to experience what it is like to dance. What if you can transcend these self-stories? Maybe you can start by dancing at home tonight!”

- Feeling loss of self when things changes:

“When we are rigidly defined by our self-descriptions, stories and roles, we become vulnerable. We may guard against changes, which comes at a cost to us. When changes do occur, we may feel completely lost.

“You may say to yourself, for example, “I’m a teacher.” . . . What happens if you are made redundant, or when you retire? If you identify yourself by “I’m a mother,” what happens when that role changes and your children are no longer living with you? Even though knowing our roles and the values behind our roles help us function, our sense of self need not be tied to them in a static or suffocating way.”

- “Take-home” metaphor: self-as-context (the container):

Ask the participants to look at their plate of Lego pieces and find themselves in it. The idea of self-as-context—that we are the context of our experiences but not the content of our experiences—is captured in the metaphor that we are the plate (the container of the Lego pieces) rather than the pieces or the creations themselves. At the end of the exercise, the facilitators can retrieve the Lego pieces for reuse, and let the participants keep their paper plates as the “take-home” message.

“Looking at this (lift up your plate of Lego blocks)—where are you in all of this? The blue piece or the red piece? If there are some pieces in your plate that are you, please lift them up for all to see.

“You are actually the plate that contains the Lego pieces—not the pieces themselves, which are always changing. The plate even has your name written on it!

“So, whatever difficult experiences and memories we may have experienced and depicted with the Lego blocks, we are still here, as the plate; and we can be open and flexible to the ever-changing experiences of life, and not hang on to past stories or other rigid beliefs.

“We are the container of our experiences. . . . We have our thoughts, but we are not our thoughts. . . . We have our memories but we are not our memories. . . . We can realize this when we are in touch with our observer self.”

“Please return the Lego pieces. They are the transient stories of your life anyways. Feel free to take the plates with you – since the plate is you.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

See if the participants can spontaneously come up with the discussion points themselves.

Participants may comment on how much they like the building process itself, or may share their particular memories. The sharing may be felt as quite helpful both to the individual and to the group. While demonstrating empathy, be careful not to get caught up with the content. If participants come to certain rigid conclusions about themselves, this can lead naturally to the discussion points.

Give relevant examples, depending on the group's composition, of how identities and stories may be constricting (e.g., "I'm a parent; I'm a failure because my son has issues").

Some participants may feel reluctant to take apart their Lego creations—just as it is hard for us to “let go” of our identities and stories, even when it comes time to change.

Some may feel that they lack the pieces to perfect their Lego creations or may want to trade with others—just as we get caught up with our stories about what we don't have, and how others may have what we want and don't have.

Some may feel that there is not adequate time or that they do not have the skills to perfect a Lego creation that is truly representative of their experience—just as sometimes, we may spend a lot of time trying to analyze and gain insights and understanding about ourselves, even when this “perfect” understanding may not be possible or helpful.

Activity 3.7: Goodbye

TIME:	30 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide an opportunity to reflect on and share personal experiences of the group and to thank the other group members.• Provide a chance for each participant to commit to a single action in the service of their values.• Give a sense of closure for the ACT group in anticipation of the follow-up phase of the study.
ACT PROCESSES:	All
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Participants sit in a circular formation.
MATERIAL:	Flip chart
HANDOUTS:	3.3: Workshop feedback form

Source: Adapted from Hayes (2005)

INSTRUCTIONS

Ask the participants to take turns to share what they want to say to the group and commit to a single value-driven action.

Draw participants' attention to the text on the flip chart: "1. Connect—presently; 2. Share—openly; 3. Act—committedly."

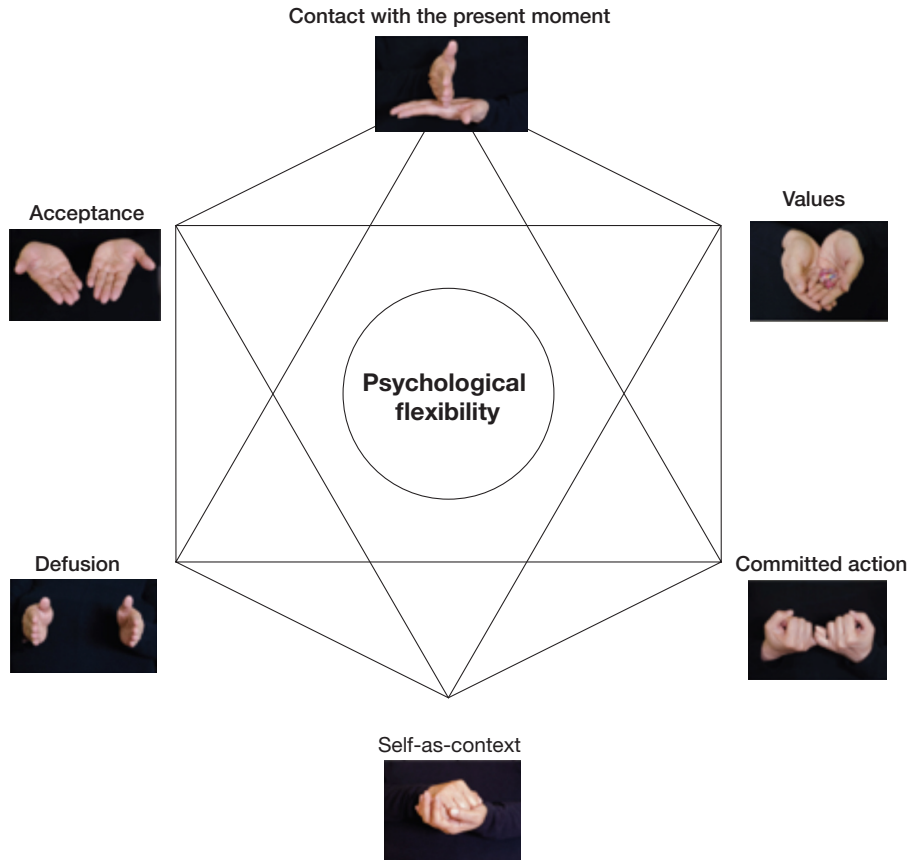
"As we approach the final minutes of our group, we would like to close things out with an ACT goodbye. We will go around the circle and take turns to do this. When it is your turn, we ask you to do three things in an ACT manner—being present, being open and being committed:

"Take a second to look at and connect with each person in the group, in the present moment.

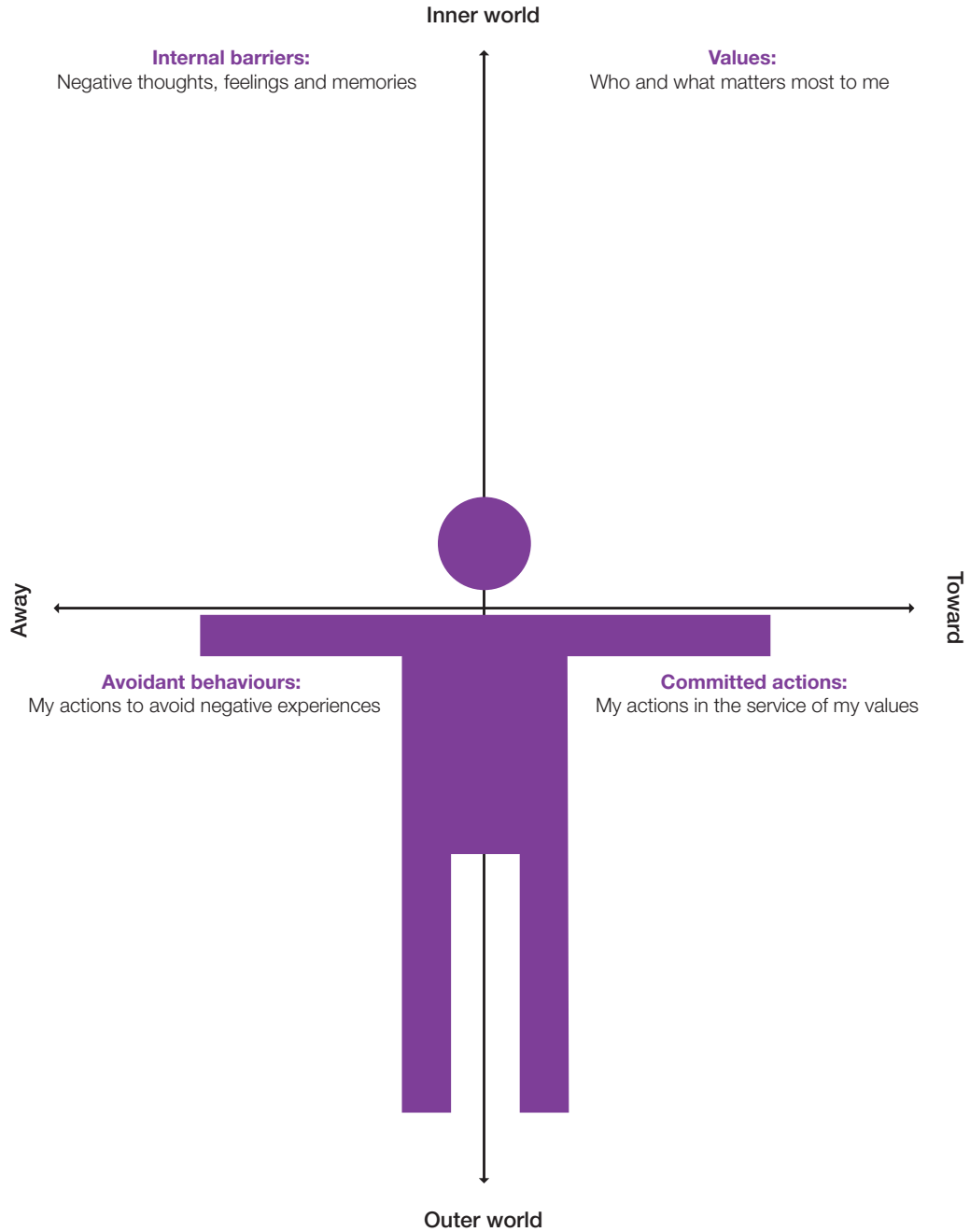
"Share openly about your experience of the group and, if you like, you can also thank the group.

"Let us know one single action that you will commit to that aligns with your health and well-being."

3.1: Hexaflex with hand gestures



3.2: Matrix diagram



3.3: Workshop feedback form

We are eager to get feedback about your opinions of our workshop. Please rate the following statements about your experience in the group using the scale provided.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
When I heard about this workshop, I was excited to participate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It was easy to understand the content presented in the workshop.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The workshop content was relevant for me and/or my family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I thought the workshop content was interesting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was provided with new information throughout the workshop.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The workshop addressed goals that were important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The workshop gave me skills that I can use in my everyday life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I plan to continue using the skills I learned in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt supported and valued throughout the workshop.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt that there was a benefit in having other parents of individuals with disabilities as co-facilitators of the workshop.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt that there was a benefit in having clinicians as co-facilitators of the workshop.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe I would have had the same experience in the workshop if the facilitators were all clinicians (i.e., if none of the group leaders were caregivers of individuals with disabilities).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would have participated in this same workshop if facilitators were all clinicians (i.e., if none of the group leaders were caregivers of individuals with disabilities).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

HANDOUT

1. Tell us about three things that you took away from this workshop.
2. What are you going to do differently because of this workshop?
3. What did you like best about the workshop?
4. Anything else you would like to hear?
5. If we repeat the workshop, is there anything you would like us to change?
6. This group includes parents of children with varying severity of IDD and age. How was this mix for you?
7. Would you prefer an intense workshop like this one (1.5 days) or spread out (e.g., one to two hours over several weeks)?
8. Would you recommend this to other parents? Why or why not?
9. How would you describe the benefits of this group to them?
10. Can you please share more about what you **liked and/or did not like** about having the workshop **co-led by family caregivers of individuals with developmental disabilities**?
11. Can you please share more about what **you liked and/or did not like** about having the workshop **co-led by a clinician**?

Holding Virtual Sessions

Supplemental section

To supplement the original text of the manual (see pages iv–xi) centred around in-person group exercises, the following section includes virtual session outlines and exercise instructions to help you organize and host a virtual ACT group online. The exercises are specifically designed to maximize virtual experiential engagement.

Facilitators and participants should be aware of the following in advance of holding a virtual group session:

- The application (e.g., Zoom, Webex) used for virtual group sessions needs to be able to have a “gallery view” so that all participants can be shown on screen with equal screen space at the same time, and it must have the capacity to allow for breakout rooms.
- It is recommended to have virtual group sessions of about 12–15 people. This gives adequate time for sharing and allows for most, if not all, participants to be on screen on the same page simultaneously. It is highly recommended that all participants are able to be viewed at the same time.
- Participants need to have access to a good internet connection, preferably wired ethernet. Use of a computer or laptop is preferred, as it can usually display more people at once on screen than smaller devices. For example, a smartphone or tablet may only be able to show four to nine people at once, which will have an impact on some of the exercises and the sense of virtual engagement.
- Participants need to find a quiet and private environment where they can engage in the group freely and uphold the group’s confidentiality.
- Participants may need help with technology to learn how the videoconferencing application works, including how to enable video and audio, how to switch to gallery mode, and how to use the mute and chat functions. It is helpful to offer a time before the workshop to support participants with the technology so that everyone is ready when the actual workshop begins.
- Facilitators need to be familiar with the core functions of the videoconferencing app and be able to:
 - enable their own video and audio
 - switch to gallery mode
 - create and manage breakout rooms
 - share their screen
 - use the chat function
 - mute and unmute facilitators or participants
 - remove participants if necessary
 - secure a meeting with available security features (e.g., using waiting rooms, locking the meeting, setting up passwords).

- Facilitators should find a way of communicating with each other via messaging during the online session, either using the private chat function of the videoconferencing app or alternative means, such as exchanging phone numbers so you can text one another.
- It is recommended to have group sessions of no more than two hours online. Discuss with participants whether they would like five-minute stretch breaks.
- It is recommended to get the phone number or emergency contacts of the participants.

Recommended Outline for Virtual Group through Videoconference

ACT for Caregivers of Children/Adults with ASD

Length: Five two-hour sessions

SESSION	AGENDA/CORE EXERCISES	ACT PROCESS	HOMEWORK
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and welcome (5 min.) • Who are you? (55 min.) • Hexaflex ACT model (20 min.) • Getting the most out of the workshop (10 min.) • Group rules (10 min.) • VA#1: Present moment with “self-object” (15 min.) • Homework and checkout (5 min.) 	Present moment	Mindful activity <i>(Do one thing mindfully.)</i>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in (20 min.) • Homework review (20 min.) • Discussion on mindfulness (20 min.) • VA#2: Keeping the count activity (55 min.) • Homework and checkout (5 min.) 	Acceptance	Leaves on a stream activity <i>(Listen to an audio file.)</i>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in (20 min.) • Homework review (20 min.) • VA#3-I: Elephant in the room activity (30 min.) • VA#3-II: Our song (group singing) activity (30 min.) • Review of cognitive defusion techniques handout (15 min.) (See handouts folder.) • Homework and checkout (5 min.) 	Defusion	Defusion activity <i>(Pick 1 or 2 techniques from the defusion techniques handout to try out.)</i>

SESSION	AGENDA/CORE EXERCISES	ACT PROCESS	HOMEWORK
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in (15 min.) • Homework review (20 min.) • VA#4: Values word list (20 min.) • VA#5: Bull's-eye & Fireside chat activity (60 min.) • Homework and checkout (5 min.) 	Values, committed action	Committed action <i>(Choose and carry out one committed action despite barriers.)</i>
<p>It is recommended that Session 5 be conducted four weeks after Session 4. This gives a chance for participants to apply ACT skills on their own and return for the final session to review the model, ask questions, consolidate their learning, and participate in the last few ACT exercises.</p>			
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in (5 min.) • Homework review (20 min.) • VA#6: Who I am activity (45 min.) • ACT Matrix (20 min.) • ACT goodbye (30 min.) 	Self-as-context	

Sample Agenda

SESSION 1: WELCOME AND THE PRESENT MOMENT

- Introduction and welcome (5 min.) (page 23)
- Who are you? (45 min.)
 - Go around the group and ask everyone to share something about:
 - > (i) them and their family
 - > (ii) an object* that represents them (“self-object”) (*in advance of the workshop, email instructions for the participants to bring an object to represent themselves.)
 - > (iii) a “guilty pleasure” (If you want to shorten the intros so you have more time for a mindfulness exercise, you do not need to ask participants to share a guilty pleasure.)
 - > We found that modelling an intro ourselves as facilitators can help set the tone and demonstrate how brief the sharing should be.
- Debriefing the sharing and introduction (10 min.)
- Introduction to the ACT model (20 min.)
 - Hexaflex “The ACT model of psychological flexibility” (pages 5–9; Handout 1.1)
 - Hexaflex with hand gestures (page 25; Handout 3.1)
- Getting the most out of this workshop (10 min.) (pages 25–26)
 - See PowerPoint slides (<https://bit.ly/2VL7IRf>)
- Group rules (10 min.) (page 27)
- Present moment with “self-object” (15 min.)
 - See virtual activity #1
- Homework and checkout (5 min.)
 - Do one activity mindfully (pages 33–34)

SESSION 2: ACCEPTANCE

- Check-in (20 min.)
- Review group rules (2 min.)
- Homework review (18 min.)
- Discussion: Mindfulness (20 min.)
 - What it is and what it isn't
 - Challenges with practising mindfulness
 - See page 32 for reference—the Leaves on a stream debriefing points may be helpful
- In-session exercise: Acceptance (55 min.)
 - Keeping the count (See virtual activity #2)
- Homework and checkout (5 min.)
 - If you are short on time and unable to include the Leaves on a stream activity (pages 30–32) during Session 2, assign listening to the audiofile of leaves on a stream as the homework for this week (<https://bit.ly/leaves-on-a-stream>)

SESSION 3: DEFUSION

- Check-in (20 min.)
- Homework review (20 min.)
 - Leaves on a stream
 - Discussion: review the concept of acceptance, connecting last week's activity, Keeping the count, with the Leaves on a stream activity
- Elephant in the room (30 min.)
 - See virtual activity #3
- Our song (group singing) (30 min.)
 - See virtual activity #3
- Review of cognitive defusion techniques (Handout 2.1) (15 min.)
- Homework and checkout (5 min.)
 - Choose one or two defusion strategies and try them out

SESSION 4: VALUES AND COMMITMENT

- Check-in (15 min.)
- Homework review (20 min.)
- Defusion activity
 - Discussion: Relationship between defusion and acceptance:
 - > Defusion is *not* about being more logical
 - > Defusion is *not* about more avoidance
 - > Defusion can strengthen acceptance—the willingness to experience thoughts and feelings as they are
- Values (20 min.)
 - Values word list (individual vs. cultural values) (Handout 2.2)
 - See virtual activity #4
- Optional: include 100th birthday activity (pages 66–67) only if time permits and the group size is small; you would want to ensure that there is adequate time for the next activity and every member has a chance to share; if time does not allow for the 100th birthday activity, include the debriefing points on page 67 when explaining values
- Bull’s-eye & Fireside chat of values and barriers (60 min.)
 - See virtual activity #5 and Handout 2.3
- Homework and checkout (5 min.)
 - Reflect on three other participants’ stories that most touched you
 - Committed action: carry out a value driven action while holding space for internal barriers without “solving” them

SESSION 5: SELF-AS-CONTEXT

- Check-in (5 min.)
 - One word check-in
 - Let participants know that the check-in is abbreviated to make room for an extended checkout for this final session
- Homework review (20 min.)
 - Committed action
 - Review of ACT model: hand gestures (See page 96)
- Who I am activity (45 min.)
 - See virtual activity #6
- ACT matrix (20 min.)
 - See pages 97–100 and Handout 3.2
- ACT goodbye—extended checkout (30 min.)
 - Go around the group and ask each participant to share the following for the final checkout:
 - > (i) what you are taking away from the group
 - > (ii) what you want to say to your fellow group members
 - > (iii) what your committed action is
 - > See page 109; the instructions are adapted for the virtual sessions

HANDOUT

HANDOUTS FOR VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS

(TO BE SENT TO PARTICIPANTS AHEAD OF WORKSHOP)

- ACT PowerPoint slides (optional) (Handout 1.2; <https://bit.ly/2VL7IRf>)
- Hexaflex ACT model (Handout 1.1)
- Hexaflex with hand gestures (Handout 3.1)
- Cognitive defusion techniques (Handout 2.1)
- Values word list (Handout 2.2)
- Values and goals worksheet (Handout 2.5) (optional)
- Bull's-eye (Handout 2.3)
- Matrix diagram (Handout 3.2)

Virtual activity 1: Present moment with “self-object”

TIME:	10–20 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate the experience of mindfulness.• Help participants get in touch with their moment-to-moment experiences.• Engage participants in becoming more mindful of their sensations, thoughts and feelings.
ACT PROCESSES:	Mindfulness, present moment, defusion
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Virtual
MATERIAL:	Object brought by participants for introduction activity
HANDOUTS:	None

Reference: Activity 3.5: Raisin activity

INSTRUCTIONS

Use the following script to guide the activity.

“Now I’m going to walk us through an exercise that involves the object you were asked to bring representing you. So, if you can get that out, that would be great.

“There is one essential general instruction throughout this exercise: whenever you find your mind wandering from the exercise, just gently return your attention to the object and what you are doing with it.

“Begin by placing the object in your hand or close to you. Spend a few moments just looking at it. Really look at it with a sense of curiosity and awe, as if this were the first time you have ever looked at this object. Take in as much details as you can . . . notice its contours . . . its shape . . . its colours . . . its various surfaces . . . whether they’re vibrant or muted . . . shinny or dull. Do you see any patterns or lines or even cracks? Notice its size . . . the way it looks in your hand or in the light.

“Now close your eyes, because you will no longer be attending to visual sensations. Gently pick up the object or feel it with your hands. What does it feel like? What are its textures? Is it smooth or rough? Soft or hard? Move it around and notice the weight of the object. Notice its temperature. Really feel all of its different surfaces.

“Now open your eyes slowly.”

Debriefing points

“Mindfully attending to an object is one exercise we use to practise the skill of mindfulness. Mindfulness can be practised at any moment or during any activity in our everyday life.

For example:

- *when we are eating (using all of our senses to take in and notice the appearance, taste, smell, and texture of our food)*
- *when we are showering (noticing the feeling of the water, the temperature of it, the smell of the soap, the sound of the water running)*
- *when we are outside walking (noticing sounds around us such as birds singing, cars passing by us, people talking, our feet on the pavement or leaves crunching beneath our shoes; noticing sights around us such as the clouds, the trees, the flowers that may be starting to bloom, the cracks in the road; and noticing things like the feeling of the warm sun on our skin or the wind blowing by)*
- *when we’re engaging in any other daily activities like drinking our coffee or driving our car.”*

“Being mindful is really about turning off the ‘autopilot’ and allowing ourselves to be present in any moment to observe our experiences. This is the hand gesture (centering the edge of one hand on the palm of the other)—being in the present moment.

“While it is lovely to be able to practise mindfulness in a quiet meditative space, having such requirements may make practicing mindfulness feel daunting or even impossible. You might think to yourself, ‘What if I don’t have the time to do a 10-minute meditation?’ or ‘What if I don’t have a quiet meditative space in my home?’ Through this activity, we invite you to find ways to embed mindfulness into your daily life without being constrained by space or time. We ask that you find mindful moments in the activities you are already doing as part of your everyday life, and that you attend to them and experience them in a new way.

“Mindfulness is a helpful skill to develop to help ground you in the present moment. Mindfulness is about becoming aware and paying gentle attention to the present moment without getting caught up by your thoughts, including any judgments and evaluations.

“Later today, I invite you to experience your loved ones as you did this object. As if you are seeing them for the first time, take in your loved ones with all of your senses—really notice them, appreciating the beauty, joy, and uniqueness of their being. Experience your child with fresh eyes and an open heart.”

Virtual activity 2: Keeping the count

TIME:	45–60 minutes depending upon the size of the group, allowing time for each participant (and facilitators) to share
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify coping strategies used to avoid unwanted thoughts and feelings, and the consequences of doing so.• Observe that, despite our best efforts, thoughts and feelings we try to avoid will persist.• Cultivate acceptance of our thoughts, feelings and past actions.
ACT PROCESS:	Acceptance
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Virtual
MATERIALS:	None
HANDOUTS:	None

Reference: Activity 2.6: Chair sculpture

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the activity

“As we discussed, mindfulness is not only about being aware of pleasant thoughts. In fact, for this exercise, let us revisit a challenging or stressful time in your life mindfully.”

2. Ask participants to recall a stressful event

“We will begin with a brief guided exercise. If you are ready, please allow your eyes to close or cast your eyes downwards. Become aware of your breath coming in . . . and going out . . . (repeat several times) . . . and feel grounded and anchored to this present moment.

“See if you can allow yourself to recall a particularly stressful or challenging time for you. It may be a challenge you face with parenting . . . directly or indirectly . . . and it may be a major event or a minor one . . . an event that you are willing to revisit or share at this present moment . . . any such difficult event that comes to mind will be just fine for this exercise.

“See if you can allow this story to replay in your mind once again . . . experience it as if it is happening now. What happened? Who is with you? And what you are saying or doing?

“As you bring this story into the present moment, see if you can notice how you are feeling . . . what emotions or thoughts are coming up for you? It may be sadness . . . or anger . . . or disappointment . . . or guilt . . . or anxiety.

“Finally, notice what coping strategies you used for this stressful event.

“Now see if you can guide your attention back to your breath. Become grounded once again . . . follow your breath coming in . . . and going out . . . (repeat several times) . . . and when you are ready, open your eyes and rejoin the group.”

3. Give directions on sharing and listening

“Now, I invite each of you to share with the group. When it is your turn, please share three things:

- *a brief sentence or two about the stressful event*
- *the negative feelings that you experienced, such as anger, sadness, or anxiety*
- *one of the coping strategies that you used, such as talking with a friend or eating a snack.”*

“When you are done sharing, please invite another person to share next. While one person is sharing, the rest of us will be giving our full mindful attention listening. We will also raise our two hands up so that we can display our fingers.

(Raise your own hands up to demonstrate and invite participants to follow you in this demo.)

“When you are listening to each person’s story and the feelings that it has evoked in them, please raise one finger on your left hand if you have experienced similar feelings and can identify with the experience.

“As you listen to the coping strategy used, if you have used the same strategy and can identify with it, please raise one finger on your right hand.

“When you run out of fingers on either hand, you can restart the count from the beginning.”

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Include these brief instructions in the chat function if possible:

1) the stressful event, 2) the negative feelings that you experienced, 3) the coping strategies you used.

Left hand – raise finger when you hear a negative feeling you identify with.

Right hand – raise finger when you hear a coping strategy you identify with.

4. Facilitate sharing

“Any questions? Who can start us off?”

5. Debriefing points

Invite participants to share their experiences. Discussion points to highlight:

- *Empathizing with our human efforts against suffering*
 - *“While each of our experiences and stories are personal and unique, we have much in common in the emotional pain we experience.”*
 - *“We also share in using all kinds of coping strategies.”*
- *Persistence of hurtful thoughts and feelings*
 - *“In sharing and listening to all the coping strategies each of us use, it becomes clear that we all try in our own way to do our best to cope with each situation given the circumstances.”*
 - *“Even so, as a group, in spite of our wealth of coping strategies, have we successfully eliminated negative thoughts or feelings?”*
 - *“Have any fingers on your right hand really removed any of your fingers on your left hand? You can see that it does not work this way. Nor would you want to lose your fingers, any more than you would want to lose your ability to feel emotions.”*
 - *“While we may get a reprieve, and sometimes we do need it, the negative feelings and thoughts do tend to come back again and again. In fact, as you recount your experiences just now, you have been in touch with the negative feelings and thoughts that show up once again.”*
- *Exploring the cost of our avoidance and control efforts, including time, energy expended and lost activities and opportunities*
 - *“Let us reflect on the cost associated with the coping strategies used. What are they?”*
 - *“In the context of this exercise, as you keep counting coping strategies, notice the effort and energy it takes to keep your hands up and fingers moving. Imagine if we had a much larger group and each of us share a ton of coping strategies. How long could you keep it up? Notice that if your hands are fully occupied, you are not free to do other things with them.”*
 - *“Although coping strategies may be helpful temporarily, they can drain our energy if we get caught up using them in an endless loop against negative thoughts and feelings.”*

- *Recognizing the function of our actions rather than judging them categorically*
 - *“Some of the coping strategies shared, like exercising, eating or getting help from others, are indeed helpful if we are carrying out that activity in the service of our values, like getting in shape, getting good nutrition and making authentic and mutually supportive connections with others. They just may not work if we expect them to eliminate negative feelings and thoughts for good. This is also the main reason that people might think that ‘mindfulness doesn’t work’ when mindfulness is used to try to eliminate negative thoughts and feelings.”*
 - *Adopting an acceptance stance*
 - *“Often we may be pulled to judge ourselves and others’ coping strategies as ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ In most workshops, we try to learn better and better coping strategies and yet, paradoxically, we may end up feeling more and more inadequate about our poor, inferior or ineffective coping strategies.”*
 - *“In this exercise, what is it like to simply just listen, recognize coping strategies and raise your finger? What is it like for you to be sharing and seeing others’ fingers going up in recognition?”*
 - *“Rather than judging or critiquing our thoughts, emotions or past coping strategies, we can take a mindful stance towards them. We can compassionately accept them and make room for our thoughts, feelings and the coping strategies we have used in the past. We can cultivate this acceptance in ourselves and others.”*

6. Summarize

“Inevitably, we will experience negative thoughts and feelings in our lives, and we will be pulled to use coping strategies as well. We can never eliminate our left and right hands, nor do we want to. We can learn not to get stuck in an endless loop of suffering caused by our efforts to eliminate negative thoughts and feelings. If we become mindful, we can recognize this, let go, and free our hands and feet for value-driven actions.”

Virtual activity 3: The elephant in the room & Our song

TIME:	60 minutes
OBJECTIVE:	Practise cognitive defusion—treating our thoughts as thoughts
ACT PROCESS:	Defusion
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Virtual
MATERIALS:	Slides of the pink elephant ¹ (see handout page 138).
HANDOUTS:	Cognitive defusion techniques

¹ The pink elephant slides can also be downloaded from https://bit.ly/defusion_slides

Reference: Activity 2.9: Paired sharing

INSTRUCTIONS

PART I: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM (30 MIN.)

1. Introduce the activity

“Recall our practice of mindfulness (e.g., leaves on a stream, present moment with ‘self-object’): paying attention, being aware of what is here, being in the present moment—all in a nonjudgmental way. It is about observing thoughts rather than thinking the thoughts. Cognitive defusion is a skill to help with this—treating thoughts as just thoughts.”

2. Tell a story and invite an action

(Share screen: show slide 1 from pink elephant activity slides.)

“To explore this concept of defusion, I am going to tell you a little story. See if you can mindfully attend to it. It is a short story about the exciting adventures of this pink elephant.”

(Share screen: show slide 2 from pink elephant activity slides.)

“One day, this pink elephant comes across a river. She is hesitant to cross it because, as we all know, elephants cannot swim. After exploring up and down along the riverbank, the pink elephant finally comes across a bridge. Given her heft and weight, she is hesitant. She has always been cautioned by her family that elephants are not agile. Indeed, she knows that she is not nimble. What if she falls off the bridge? After mindfully meditating for seven days and seven nights, she finally gathers up her courage. One step at a time, slowly but surely, the pink elephant makes her way across the bridge. This marks the very first time she has ever ventured on to the other side of the river.”

(Share screen: show slide 3 from pink elephant activity slides.)

“The end. I hope you have enjoyed this story. Now it’s your turn to take action. Please reach out and pet the pink elephant on your screen!”

3. Facilitate sharing

“As you were listening to this story, what thoughts and feelings did you become aware of in your mind? Did anything come up for you about the elephant? Or the story itself?”

4. Debriefing points

(i) Lessons of the story

A story about courage

“This can be a story about courage, how sometimes we need to face our fears and worries to move forward. Our worries may not be completely unfounded. There may be risks. Yet, our paths can become quite restricted if we let our worries stop our action. We will then never be able to venture outside our ‘comfort zone.’”

A story about transcending stories

“Do you identify with the elephant? What stories or messages may be limiting you in your life? Where do these negative stories or messages in your mind come from? They may come from your family, friends or society, or from your own lived experiences. In fact, elephants (and pigs) can swim, just as we are often more capable of doing things than we think we are. If we start to believe in stories or messages about us, it can limit our lives or even result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. We need to reflect on how we and the society may make judgements about ourselves and others and not get fused with limiting labels, stories, or beliefs.”

A story about the blind men and the elephant

“This is also a story about making too many assumptions and having perceptions that are incomplete. A famous ancient parable, found in various Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain texts, applies here at various levels. The parable is about blind men who can only touch a small part of the elephant, and each person is convinced that his own description is the correct one. As attributed to the Buddha commenting on this story:

Some recluses and brahmins, so called,

Are deeply attached to their own views;

People who see only one side of things

Engage in quarrels and disputes.”

(ii) Elephant vs. pigs

“So where is the elephant? To some of you, you may have noticed the unsaid ‘elephant in the room’; that is, we usually call the depicted animal a pig. Notice how our minds may have become preoccupied as to whether this is a ‘pig’ or ‘elephant’ or trying to make some kind of sense out of this. For example, you may be thinking how wrong it is to call it an ‘elephant’ or even telling yourself ‘Maybe it is a particularly rare type of elephant’ or some other alternative rationale.”

Having no judgment vs. noticing judgments

“Although we try not to judge, in fact our minds are always evaluating and judging, telling us this is true and that is false. Based on our learning history, we are pretty much fused with what we call ‘elephants’ and ‘pigs.’ When we call this an elephant, no matter how we try to suspend our judgments or thoughts, our minds will tell us that it is not an elephant. Although we cannot eliminate our thoughts, we can start to notice them and not get trapped by them.”

Being right vs. workability

“If your mind gets stuck on ‘being right’ or ‘making sense,’ you may miss the entire point of the story! You will be just like the elephant at the beginning of the story, being busy and bogged down by your own thoughts. Similarly, sometimes when we try too hard to cheer ourselves up with positive thoughts, we actually may get caught up in a struggle between negative and positive thoughts. We can strive to shift from a focus on ‘being right,’ ‘making sense’ or ‘being positive’ toward a focus on ‘workability,’ ‘making things work’ or ‘being effective.’”

Thoughts don’t have to matter

“If we take a step back, we realize it does not really matter what we call the animal. It is an arbitrary label that some linguistic guru determined at one point in time, and we follow it by convention. Calling it one way or the other doesn’t harm it or change it. Calling it ‘wrongly’ as an elephant doesn’t rearrange its molecules. Calling it ‘correctly’ as being pink doesn’t make it pinker either. Just like if we call ourselves ‘stupid’ or ‘smart,’ our IQs do not change. Saying ‘things are hopeless’ and ‘the future is doomed’ has no impact on the present or future. Thoughts are only suggestions in our minds that are to be used as tools. If they are useful in a situation, great—use them! If they are not, there is no need to buy into the thoughts and believe in them. Realizing thoughts are just thoughts, no matter how ‘true’ or ‘untrue’ they are, is the process of defusion.”

Touching the elephant in the room

“Notice that some of you may have been reluctant to touch the elephant virtually. Your mind may have been saying, ‘But it’s not an elephant.’ You might also not have touched it because of other thoughts in your mind like ‘This is silly’ or ‘I don’t want to touch my computer screen’ or ‘I’ll just let someone else do it.’ Rather than fusing with what your mind tells you to do or not do, you can always choose to take a deliberate action regardless of what your mind is saying. Try it now. Touch the ‘elephant’ while observing your mind for any possible thoughts, which may include thoughts telling you to touch it and thoughts telling you not to touch it.”

PART II: OUR SONG (30 MIN)

1. Ask participants to recall a stressful event

“How does this discussion of fusion and defusion apply to you in your own life? What kind of powerful thoughts may be limiting you or bullying you around? These thoughts may take many different forms, including words, labels, judgments, stories we keep telling ourselves, reasons we have for our actions or inactions, or rules of what we should or should not do. It is easy to get trapped by our own thoughts. We will practise a defusion technique together to see how it can help us defuse from our thinking.

“If you are ready, please allow your eyes to close or cast your eyes downwards. Become aware of your breath coming in . . . and going out . . . (repeat several times) . . . and feel grounded and anchored in this present moment.

“See if you can allow yourself to recall a recent stressful event . . . one that you are willing to revisit at this present moment. Any difficult event that comes to mind will be just fine for this exercise. Allow this event to replay in your mind once again . . . experience it as if it is happening now. What happened? Who is with you? And what are you saying or doing?

“As you bring this story into the present moment, see if you can notice how you are feeling. What emotions or thoughts are coming up for you? It may be sadness . . . or anger . . . or disappointment . . . or guilt . . . or anxiety.

“Now see if you can guide your attention back to your breath . . . feel grounded once again by following your breath coming in . . . and going out . . . (repeat several times) . . . and when you are ready, open your eyes, and rejoin the group.”

2. Invite participants to share their emotions

“Just now, you have recalled to your mind a stressful event. You may be feeling a variety of challenging emotions such as feeling sad, anxious, angry, or guilty. Please share the emotions you are experiencing right now in the group chat.”

3. Lead the group in singing

“As you can see from the group chat, our thinking can evoke a variety of challenging emotions. For the next part, I will need all of your participation and cooperation in this group activity. On my cue, please unmute yourself and we will sing the song ‘Happy Birthday’ together. Except that when you sing, you will be using your own story as the lyrics to the song! Because the song is so short, we will be singing it together twice.”

(You can demonstrate a few bars.)

“Do you have any questions? Are you ready? 1, 2, 3—go!”

4. Debrief the activity

Invite participants to share their experiences.

“What was your experience in this exercise? What did you notice when you were singing your story?”

Discussion points to highlight (please also review the debriefing prompts and points in Activity 2.9: Paired sharing):

- *“The point of the singing is not to trivialize or make fun of your difficult experiences. It is a technique to help you develop a new relationship with your own thoughts about your experiences so that your thoughts are not weighing so heavily on you.”*
- *“Defusion means creating a distance from your own thoughts, letting them come and go instead of being caught up in them. Simply noticing our thoughts for what they are, as images, labels, or a collection of words, rather than getting ‘hooked’ by them.”*
- *“Defusion is not about being more logical.”*
- *“Defusion is not about avoidance or trying to ‘forget’ about what you have experienced.”*
- *“Defusion can strengthen acceptance and our willingness to experience our thoughts and feelings just as they are.”*
- *“There are many defusion techniques that can help free us from our thoughts so that they do not control our actions or prevent us from living a meaningful life. See the handout on cognitive defusion techniques and try them out. Some may work better for you in different situations.”*







Activity 4: Values word list

TIME:	20 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate reflection on one’s personal values.• Facilitate reflection on one’s socio-cultural and collective values from family, communities and society.• Promote awareness of the influence of socio-cultural context on our values and the potential for conscious choice in our values.
ACT PROCESS:	Values
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Virtual
MATERIALS:	None
HANDOUTS:	Values word list

Reference: Activity 2.11: Values word list

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the activity

“As we discussed, we each have our own set of values that guide us through our lives. In this exercise, we will explore our cultural values and our personal values, and their relationship to each other.”

“Whether we realize it or not, we are surrounded by cultural values. When thinking about your cultural values, remember that cultural values may reflect the particular ethnocultural group you identify with or your gender, your sexual orientation, your occupation, your religion, the place where you grew up or live in (such as a city versus rural area, etc.). Cultural values can include mainstream cultural values and norms as well as traditional values that we may get from our families, friends, cultural groups and communities. The latter may be embedded in the unspoken rules, expectations and trends that may influence how we function, including mainstream media, arts, education, programs, services, organizations, institutions and government. Cultural values are important to be aware of, as they may be guiding and shaping our own personal values, sometimes in an unconscious way.

“As caregivers, we often encounter cultural and societal values and expectations about parenting (e.g., being a good parent is to be able to fully control your child’s behaviours). It is helpful for us to reflect on this and identify these expectations.

“Some of the popularly promoted ‘values,’ however, may not be values at all. For example, money may be equated with success and promoted as a value to pursue. Yet, money is only a means to an end; it is about what the money may be used for in the pursuit of true values. Similarly, happiness is often promoted as a value to pursue, when it is a natural emotion that comes and goes. In fact, happiness may occur in pursuing one’s true values, even when it is challenging and painful. Without mindful awareness and reflection, it may be easy to become fused with popular dominating narratives that obscure your true values.

“You may or may not agree with your cultural values. Therefore, your personal values may be the same, may partially overlap with or may be completely different from your cultural values.”

2. Identify cultural and personal values

Direct participants to **Handout 2.2: Full living values** and read the instructions aloud. Ask participants whether they have any questions. Give participants five minutes to do the exercise.

3. Debriefing points

In the large group, invite a couple of participants to share their values and their reflections on them:

- *“Would anyone like to share their cultural and personal values?”*
- *“Do you notice any relationship between the two sets of values?”*
- *“In what ways are your cultural values helpful? In what ways have you found them problematic?”*

Summarize the reflections shared about this activity, noting that everyone is free to choose their values. These values may be identical to those of their culture; adapted from their cultural values; have no apparent relationship to their cultural values; or in stark opposition to their cultural values.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

Depending on how diverse your group is, the impact of cultural and societal values may become an important area of discussion. Caregivers often have to deal with cultural and societal values and expectations, such as values about parenting (e.g., good parenting is to be able to fully control your child’s behaviours). Seeing that there is a choice in our personal values becomes important in this context.

The debriefing can be shortened or skipped if time is tight and you are doing this exercise in conjunction with the 100th birthday activity, in which case you can combine debriefing for the two activities. The debriefing points below are from Activity 2.12: “100th birthday.”

“Values are our chosen directions in life; they are not something that can ever be achieved or completed. Like going east: you can always go further east—you can go to a street east of here . . . to the East Coast . . . across the ocean . . . to another continent, and still you can go further. Just like being a caring parent (or partner), this does not end with changing the 100th diaper (or giving the 100th hug). It’s not like you can just get a caring parent (partner) certificate and then stop being a caring parent (partner).”

Use specific values that participants mentioned. The quality is important here; for example, what kind of a parent?

4. Values versus goals:

“What helps us along the way as we strive to live our values is to set goals. Goals are achievable. Graduating from school is a goal. Working out in the gym three times a week is a goal. Having a night out with your partner can be a goal. Hosting a birthday party for your child is a goal. It’s kind of like mapping out waypoints along our paths, or stops along a bus route. We can carry out a committed action along our path as we travel in our valued direction in our journey of life.”

Use participants’ examples of goals and actions that are consistent with their values.

5. Barriers—going off course and re-orienting ourselves:

“Once we know our directions, like stars in the sky, our values guide our actions. We can commit to them. If we ever deviate off the path while encountering distractions and obstacles, which seems inevitable from our sharing here, we can pause and reflect; get our bearings; and resume our journey.”

Use obstacles that participants mentioned; for example, getting distracted or giving up certain goals after handling a crisis.

6. Barriers—being flexible and staying committed:

“Knowing our valued directions is important because it helps us remain flexible. Imagine that you are going east and there is road construction that you can’t bypass. When we know our direction, we can take an alternative route that is consistent with our true valued directions. For example, if I can no longer work, maybe I can still do volunteer work or remain engaged in my field of interest in some way.”

Virtual activity 5: Fireside chat of values and barriers

TIME:	60 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflect on our values and internal barriers.• Take committed action.
ACT PROCESSES:	Values, committed action
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Virtual
MATERIALS:	None
HANDOUTS:	Bull's-eye

Reference: Activity 2.13: Bull's-eye

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask participants to fill in the bull's-eye

“We have many different areas of our lives. In this bull's-eye handout, the four quadrants represent four major areas of our lives: self-care, work/pursuits, family, and friends/community. For each quadrant, please place an ‘X’ to represent how well your actions match your values. How satisfied are you with the things you are doing in each of these areas of your life if you use your values as a yardstick?”

“For example, your value in the self-care domain might be promoting your well-being by taking good care of your physical and mental health. If, however, you find yourself never exercising, not watching your diet, not getting enough sleep and never going for a medical checkup, you may find that your actions are not that consistent with what you value. In this case, you would put an ‘X’ far from the centre of the quadrant.

“We are looking at the consistency of your actions in terms of your values, not evaluating an idealized outcome. Going back to the previous example: if you are taking excellent care of yourself, you would still put an ‘X’ in the centre of that quadrant right near the bull's-eye, even if you have a serious illness, because your actions are ‘on target’—that is, they are in line with your values. Your actions are constantly taking you slightly closer toward health in this case, even if you are still unwell.”

2. Ask participants to choose one area and a committed action

“Looking at your bull's-eye quadrant, please choose one of the areas that you would like to work on—an area that you feel stuck in AND you would really like to make a change in now. It will be an area where your ‘X’ is far from the centre. Identify one specific action that you can take this week that will be consistent with your values and move your ‘X’ closer toward the centre.”

3. Ask participants to identify their three reasons as barriers

“When you think about doing this action, what kinds of barriers come up for you in your mind? There must be reasons why you have been avoiding this task to date. Think about your top three reasons that have prevented you from doing this action so far and are still barriers for you.”

(Give 5 minutes.)

4. Ask participants to identify their main reason for avoidance

“Now reflect on your three reasons and identify the main underlying internal reason that may be the real barrier, the biggest thing that has caused you to avoid taking action. Maybe only one of the listed reasons really matter. Maybe there is a common reason linking all three reasons. Maybe the actual reason is not even listed but is now becoming clear to you. See if you can be open and honest with yourself. Allow yourself to reflect deeper and find out what you really have been avoiding.”

(Give 3 minutes.)

5. Ask participants to share with the group

“For the next part of the exercise, we will create a virtual campfire and have a heart-to-heart fireside chat.

“Let us begin with a brief visualization exercise. I would like to invite you to close your eyes or lower your gaze.

“Let us first get grounded with our breath. Follow our breath coming in . . . and going out . . .

(pause)

“In your mind’s eye, see if you can visualize that we are all seated around a campfire . . .

(pause)

“. . . in front of you, you can see the glow of the fire, illuminating all around you . . .

(pause)

“. . . you can feel the warmth emanating from it, giving you a sense of safety and comfort . . .

(pause)

“ . . . you can smell the logs burning, bringing back any memories you are willing to welcome . . .

(pause)

“ . . . you can hear the crackling of the fire, guiding your attention to the present moment . . .

(pause)

“ . . . and you can see the flickering of light, dancing around the faces of the group members around you . . .

(pause)

“ . . . notice then we are creating a sacred space together . . . one that is compassionate, safe, and supportive . . .

(pause)

“ . . . allow yourself to take this experience in . . . and carry it in your heart . . . as you gently guide your attention back to your body . . . and back to your breath . . . noticing your breath coming in . . . and going out . . . and whenever you feel ready, you may open your eyes.

“We will now take turns sharing in this fireside chat exercise, where each of you are invited to share your reflections. When it is your turn, please share with the group one value-driven action you would like to take and the main internal barrier that is coming up for you as the reason for avoidance. Finally, toss out a word or short phrase as a closure to your sharing, like virtually tossing a log into the campfire.”

(Mime out this action.)

“The word or phrase you choose to toss into the campfire may pertain to any thoughts or feelings. It may be a word or phrase that describes your values, your barriers, an aspiration, an avoided feeling, a cheer, a regret, or an inspirational saying. There is no wrong choice. When you are done, please invite the next person to share. When you are listening to the sharing from everyone, see if you can identify three people whose sharing most resonate with you or touch you in some deep way.”

6. Reflections

Reflection-prompting questions to ask participants:

- *“What was it like to share your action and your barriers?”*
- *“Whose sharing most resonated with you? Why?”*
- *“What do you notice in our collective sharing?”*

“Our thoughts and feelings do not have to act as our barriers. What happens when we toss our thoughts or feelings into the fire? It is not about getting rid of them. We will always have plenty of challenging thoughts and feelings. Yet, we can practise defusing from them, much like putting them on leaves flowing down a stream . . . clouds floating across the sky . . . and now, logs burning in a campfire. This is also about recognizing the function of our thoughts and feelings in our lives. Bundled inside our thoughts and feelings are our values. When we toss them into the campfire, they can transform to become our endless supply of fuel that sustains our fire and drives us forward.”

7. Values, barriers and committed action

“Making a commitment means that we persist in taking action even when we encounter a barrier. That is, we continue to head toward the direction guided by our values regardless of obstacles along the way, even if we have to go above them, under them, or around them.

“For example, if self-care is important to us, we would carve out a few minutes to take care of ourselves even when we are unbelievably busy or when unexpected stressors occur.

“When there are external barriers and problems, we can:

- *use our problem-solving skills*
- *seek support from family and friends*
- *access community resources*
- *take actions with others collectively.*

“At the same time, we need to get in touch with our challenging internal thoughts and feelings blocking our path and use our ACT skills to move forward.”

8. Homework: Reflections and action

“You have all generously shared something very valuable and dear to you—your values and your struggle with your thoughts and feelings. Throughout this week, please continue to reflect on three stories from others that have particularly touched or inspired you.

“You have also shared a committed action that you can do this week. Go forth and do your committed action this week in the presence of your internal barriers! This means not getting rid of your challenging thoughts or feelings such as fear, anger, or sadness (or give specific examples based on participants’ negative thoughts and feelings) and, at the same time, not avoiding your committed action because of them. Make space for these thoughts and feelings, like carrying them in your backpack, while you take action. Or let them ignite your fire while you take action. You will get to share your experiences the next time we meet.”

Virtual activity 6: Who I am

TIME:	45 minutes
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defuse from our self-labels and stories.• Discover our values in our stories.• Foster acceptance of ourselves and others as self-as-context.
ACT PROCESS:	Self-as-context
PARTICIPATION FORMAT:	Virtual
MATERIALS:	Paper and pen/pencil
HANDOUTS:	None

Reference: Activity 3.6: Le' go activity

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduction

“Who are you? When you get asked this question, you likely reply, ‘I am _____.’ To fill in this blank, you probably already have a lot of ideas and descriptions about who you are in your mind. This may include your roles in your family, such as being a mother, sister, daughter, father, brother, etc. Another set of self-descriptors may involve work, such as being a homemaker, a factory worker, an accountant, a teacher, etc. Some self-descriptors may be more personal, including adjectives about your personality such as being hard-working, shy, confident, impatient, etc. We will further explore this question of ‘who you are.’”

2. Three self-descriptors

“To begin this exercise, over the next five minutes, reflect deeply on this question of who you are and write down on a piece of paper three words or short phrases that describe who you are in these ways:

- *The first word or phrase to write down about who you are is something that you feel bad about. Something you wish to change. Maybe you feel ashamed of it or embarrassed about it.*
- *The second word or phrase to write down about who you are is something that you feel good about. It may be your biggest strength. Maybe you feel most proud of this quality about you.*
- *The third word or phrase to write down about who you are is something that you aspire to become, even though you’re not quite there yet. You may be working toward being this particular way someday soon.”*

3. Paired-sharing of self

“We are now going to put you into pairs in breakout rooms for the next part of the exercise. This will take about 15 minutes. When you are in your own room, one of you will speak first and the other person will listen.

“In the speaker role, you will choose and share any one of the three words or phrases you wrote down about yourself and the background story around it. The only caveat is to share the idea or story without using the actual word or phrase you have written down on your piece of paper. When you finish the story, sum it up with a gesture using any part of your body. I will give you an example. For instance, you may want to share about your shyness. You begin by describing how anxious you get in front of others, how this problem got started, what kind of problems this has caused you in life and what you have done about it. You tell this whole story without actually using the word ‘shy.’ At the end of storytelling, you summarize your shyness by saying, ‘I am like this,’ and you close both of your eyes to symbolize your avoidance of others.

“In the listener role, you will be there to listen mindfully. This means being fully present and suspending any judgment. You are bearing witness to your partner’s sharing. Your other job is to time the speaker to keep the sharing to within five minutes. You can give a one-minute reminder when the sharing is at four minutes. At the end of the sharing, you will respond with precisely these three words only: ‘I accept you.’ No more, no less. You will not give any rebuttal, such as ‘Actually, you are not that shy compared to me.’ You will not give any advice, such as ‘Have you tried this technique?’ Just simply, ‘I accept you.’

“Then the two of you will switch roles. When both of you are done, please feel free to thank your partner, share what this exercise has been like for you and reflect on what you have learned from this experience.”

4. Large group debriefing

Debrief after bringing everyone back into the group. Depending on time allotment, ask as many pairs as possible to share their experience of the exercise. For the three categories of self-descriptors (negative, positive or aspirational), see if there is at least one participant who can share their experience of discussing this aspect of themselves.

Begin by asking:

“What was this experience like for you?”

Supplemental prompts:

“What was it like to choose and write down your set of three words/phrases?”

“Why did you choose your particular word/phrase to share from among the three options?”

“What was your experience like when sharing your word/phrase? And when listening to your partner?”

“What was it like to share the story while avoiding the use of the words you had written down? And while turning the story into a gesture?”

“What was it like to hear the words ‘I accept you’ or to say the words ‘I accept you’?”

“What did you learn about yourself? And about how we see the other?”

Debriefing points

You are not your story: Getting in touch with self-as-context

“In this exercise, we are looking at the power that we give to words and stories about ourselves. We may even carry around some of these stories with us for a long time. They may seem powerful and may evoke strong emotions in us, including shame or sadness. They may even seem to define us as who and what we are. However, you do not have to give these words or stories power. You are like a container of stories, or the ‘context’ in which the stories unfold. The stories are just ideas about you, they are not ‘you.’ This sense of self is the ‘self-as-context.’ You are a person with a story, but you are not your story.”

Stories without labels: Defusion

“One of the ways these words and stories become powerful is that we get fused with them. They become our labels, and we start to mistakenly see ourselves as these labels. Although they are just words, notice that they may seem emotionally laden when you first put them down on paper. When you are telling a familiar story around them without using your usual ‘go-to’ labelling words or expressing them through bodily gestures only, it is a chance to explore this story in a different way. This may help you notice fusion (the tendency to want to use familiar words and labels) and it may promote the process of defusion. In both the sharing and the listening during the paired sharing, you are practicing defusion when you are separating these stories and any judgments around them from the actual person.”

Connecting with your values and others

“As we free our usual way of relating to our labels and stories, this opens up new possibilities of experiencing them. Some of you may have chosen to share negative words. While these words may initially be associated with the emotions of shame or fear of rejection by others, you may notice a number of paradoxical things happening in this experience:

- *In deliberately choosing and sharing the negative words, note that there is much courage and boldness in this very action, which is the opposite of hiding in shame. Instead of keeping the story in the dark, you are shining light on it.*

- *When you are willing to be open and step into your vulnerability, you are more able to genuinely connect with the person in front of you. Instead of being judged or rejected, you have the opportunity to connect deeply with the person in front of you in this safe space we have co-created.*
- *Embedded within the negative words that you may want to shy away from, therein lie your values. The stories are there because you care. Instead of being your vulnerability, these negative words and stories are really coming from your source of strength.*

“Some of you may have chosen to share words and stories that you are most proud of, or qualities that you aspire toward. These words and stories capture and embody your values. While the three descriptions may seem very different and evoke different emotions, they are all linked in some way—through your values.”

Acceptance of self and others

“When you are choosing to allow challenging stories to be present here and to share with another, you are practising acceptance in not avoiding them. You are facing these stories with willingness and acceptance in the presence of the other ACT processes, including self-as-context, defusion, present moment and values. Acceptance is in your willingness to open up to experience what is here for what it is: stories as just stories, judgments as just judgments, and the person as the person. You are accepting the essence of yourself as your ‘self-as-context,’ just as you are accepting the essence of the person in front of you as their ‘self-as-context.’ We are also creating a powerful ‘we’ at our moment of connection and acceptance of each other.”

Freedom to act

“As we detach ourselves from our labels and stories and get in touch with our values, we are free to act. You may be the shiest and most introverted person in the universe by label, and yet you have been able to talk and share with someone just now in this particular moment in time. The opportunity to ‘re-invent’ yourself occurs in every moment, and you have the ultimate choice.”

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

CHOCOLATE MEDITATION

In this activity, participants are invited to mindfully eat a piece of chocolate, bringing full awareness to an everyday action that is usually done without much thought (source: Williams & Penman, 2012).

EASY MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

These three mindfulness exercises are all pretty quick and can be done anywhere. You may even suggest that parents try them with their child or other family members.

Starfish or five-finger breathing (<https://heartmindkids.com/5-mindfulness-exercises-just-hands/>)

Hand on heart (<https://heartmindkids.com/5-mindfulness-exercises-just-hands/>)

Five senses exercise (<https://medcenterblog.uvmhealth.org/wellness/physical/mindfulness-mindful-monday-exercise/>)

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