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# ANXIETY

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THRIVE THERAPY

PHOENIX, AZ



# OVERVIEW

Section 1 - What is Anxiety?

Section 2 - Improving Our Relationship with Anxiety

Section 3 - Tools & Skills

Section 4 - Acceptance

Section 5 - Self as Context

SECTION

01

# WHAT IS ANXIETY?

## What is ACT?

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is an action-oriented approach to psychotherapy that stems from traditional behavior therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Clients learn to stop avoiding, denying, and struggling with their inner emotions and, instead, accept that these deeper feelings are appropriate responses to certain situations that should not prevent them from moving forward in their lives.

With this understanding, clients begin to accept their hardships and commit to making necessary changes in their behavior, regardless of what is going on in their lives and how they feel about it.

## What is Anxiety?

Webster-  
apprehensive uneasiness or nervousness usually over an impending or anticipated ill  
: a state of being anxious

Ours -  
Anxiety can be be boiled down to

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## GOALS FOR THIS COURSE

- Gain a more comprehensive understanding of what anxiety is and isn't.
- Work on improving our relationship with anxiety.
- See our anxiety as something that we relate to rather than seeing it as us.
- Gain tools from ACT to help us with our anxiety.

This course is for you, we have goals that we want to make sure you walk away with, but what do you want to have change after you complete this course

## YOUR GOALS FOR THE OUTCOME OF THE COURSE

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- 
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# WHAT IFS

*what are your's?*

# THE EMBRACE OF UNCERTAINTY

Anxiety exists in future oriented situations where there is what if.

Anxiety just wants to know the answer to what if, it doesn't care what the answer is, if it's good or bad, just wants an answer.

Our emotions have a job of giving us a gift, and anxiety is no different.

It may not be a gift we want, but there is a purpose.

We aren't trying to make our anxiety go away, we are simply trying to change our relationship with anxiety. Allow yourself to sit for a moment with that thought. How much time and energy have you spent trying to make your anxiety go away? Do you have awareness of the ways in which you make your anxiety try to go away?

The first step we are going to take in trying to improve our relationship with anxiety is that we are no longer going to try and make it go away. The reason that this is such a crucial step is because all anxiety is rooted in future oriented and uncertain circumstances. When we step back and take a look at this, we begin to see that there is simply nothing we can do to make the anxiety go away until that situation has come to the present moment.

This can be difficult when anxiety presents itself in so many things that are near and dear to our hearts. We often feel most anxious about our security, safety, relationships, etc. If your anxiety manifests around whether or not you are going to keep a stable income and provide money for your life and your family, the only way to completely make that anxiety go away is to wait until you have reached the day of your retirement and you can look backwards and see that you didn't lose your job and that you did have enough money.

We often try and fast forward ourselves to these moments by thinking about the ways to make this happen or to gather evidence that will tell us that everything is going to be okay. But until Doc Brown shows up at your doorstep with his time traveling Delorean, you will have to learn to enact some skills to gain more comfort with uncertainty.



## ANXIETY IS "WHAT IF"

# YOUR ANXIETY IS BRINGING YOU A GIFT

We give a rather graphic example of a dog bringing in a “gift for the family.” Depending on the breed, most canines have a job that is instinctual to them. My current dog at home believes there is nothing more important than fetching a ball and bringing it back.

Our anxiety sees its job as protecting us from risk.

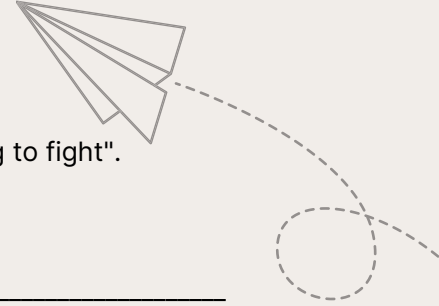
**PROTECTOR OF RISK**

Use the blow space to jot down a few areas or situations where your anxiety is working to protect you from risk.

Like we said, we are working on improving our relationship with anxiety rather than trying to make it go away. We would be remiss if not to look at the ways anxiety has served us in the past. It turns out it is a dangerous world out there and we are vulnerable to pain. Part of this improved relationship is knowing when we want to listen to anxiety, rather than listening to it every time it speaks up. Use the space to below to write down a few situations or areas where you are thankful for your anxiety protecting you.



# FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE



## Fight:

Flight tells us there is danger coming, and flight tells us "I can beat it, and I am going to fight".

What our body tells us:

Narrow Vision - \_\_\_\_\_

Tingle in hands - \_\_\_\_\_

Sweating - \_\_\_\_\_

## Flight:

Flight tells us there is going to be a fight, and "I don't think I can win, but I do think I can get away" so we run to evade danger.

What our body tells us:

Blood Plumping - \_\_\_\_\_

Nauseous (Dump & Run) - \_\_\_\_\_

## Freeze:

Freeze tells us that there is a fight coming, it tells us that we don't think we can't win, and that we don't think we can get away. "I am going to freeze out of protection".

What our body tells us:

Para-Sympathetic Shutdown - \_\_\_\_\_

*notes:*

# HOW DOES ANXIETY SHOW UP FOR ME?

*What is happening to you when you are experiencing anxiety?*

We need to gain a higher level of awareness of what is happening for us when we are feeling anxious. If we can understand that some of these familiar feelings or thoughts are coming up, we will have a better chance of enacting some of the skills we are going to learn throughout this course. You might notice your body warning you by a nausea in your stomach or your mind giving you the thought "I just need to get home." The following worksheet is to help you gain a higher level of awareness.

When I am feeling anxious, my body lets me know by:

When I am feeling anxious, my mind gives me the thoughts:

The situations that cause me the most anxiety are:

Some other emotions that show up for me when I am experiencing anxiety are:

Some of the memories that my mind brings up that I fear might happen again are:

This is for you, don't gloss over this section.

Make sure that you spend time learning about your anxiety and how it impacts your body specifically. Learning this, is a huge step in how you are able to improve your relationship with anxiety.

SECTION

02

# IMPROVING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ANXIETY

## GOALS FOR THIS SECTION

IDENTIFY  
OVERWHELM  
&  
AVOIDANT  
ANXIETY RESPONSES

IDENTIFY  
TIPS AND TRICKS  
THAT HELP  
YOUR PERSONAL  
ANXIETY



WE DON'T WANT TO GET RID OF ANXIETY, WE JUST WANT TO CHANGE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ANXIETY.

# THE REASSURANCE TRAP

We're going to say it again. Reassurance in and of itself is not a bad thing. We of course want to seek out some level of information when there is a fearful or uncertain event taking place. But when reassurance is going to work, it is going to work quickly. You might think of this like having a clogged toilet. You go grab your plunger and within five minutes you should be able to tell whether or not that solved the problem, or if you've got a bigger issue to deal with.

Reassurance is just a tool like the plunger. It's helpful and it solves a lot of uncertain situations. We get in to trouble when we continue to use it for situations where we are unable to get the reassurance or unable to bring our uncertain situation to some sort of conclusion.

Let's follow our reassurance down a trail for a bit and see what happens when it works.

SITUATION: Feel ache or pain in body

WHAT IF IT'S SOMETHING MORE THAN A COLD?

Go to Doctor

DOCTOR CONFIRMS IT IS A COLD.  
CERTAINTY REACHED.

As you can see in the first scenario, the reassurance worked. Getting a simple amount of information from a trusted resources was enough to satisfy this level of anxiety.

Let's now take a look at what happens when reassurance isn't working.

SITUATION: Feel ache or pain in body

WHAT IF IT'S SOMETHING MORE THAN A COLD?

Go to Doctor

WHAT IF THE DOCTOR MISSED SOMETHING?

DOCTOR CONFIRMS IT IS A COLD.

CERTAINTY REACHED.

Go to Second Doctor

WHAT IF IT'S SOMETHING NON-DETECTIBLE

DOCTOR CONFIRMS IT IS A COLD.

CERTAINTY REACHED.

Searches Web MD

WHAT IF IT'S EARLY ON SET MS?

In this scenario, the reassurance is not working because the person is not satisfied with the level of reassurance they are getting. Anxiety continues to pose new "What if" questions that need to be followed up on. As we are going to come to see, anxiety has an infinite amount of "What if" cards and the reassurance trap can go on for forever.

# overwhelm vs. avoidant

**Overwhelm** is like being \_\_\_\_\_

with our anxiety.

Believing everything

that it says is \_\_\_\_\_.

We are

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

based on our anxiety.

**Avoidant** is

\_\_\_\_\_ our ears,

seeking \_\_\_\_\_,

saying it's too \_\_\_\_\_

for me.

We are searching for ways to

\_\_\_\_\_ ourselves

from the anxious thoughts.

IF IT WAS GOING TO  
HELP OUR ANXIETY GO AWAY,

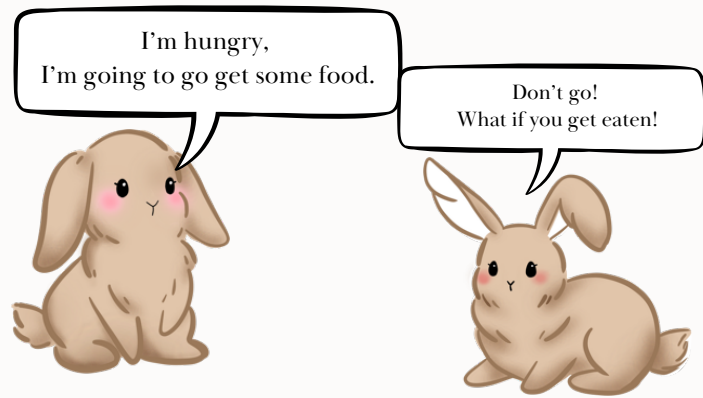
IT WOULD HAVE WORKED THE  
FIRST TIME.

and

A NATURAL FIRST RESPONSE  
IS TO SEEK REASSURANCE

.....  
BUT SHOULD WE?

# THE BUNNY IN THE FORREST



We give an illustration in the video about a bunny in the forest. If a bunny listens to it's anxiety all of the time it keeps itself safe from predators. But it also makes itself weak and vulnerable for when it may need to evade a predator in the future.

When the bunny never listens to it's anxiety, it feels much more free and enjoys it's food much more often. But it also makes itself too vulnerable to predators that may want the bunny as food.

Use the below space to bring in to focus how some of this has played out in your own life.

When I do not follow up on or listen to my anxiety,  
some of the benefits I have experienced are:

When I have listened to my anxiety in the past, some  
of the benefits I have experienced are:

When I do not follow up on or listen to my anxiety,  
some of the costs I have experienced are:

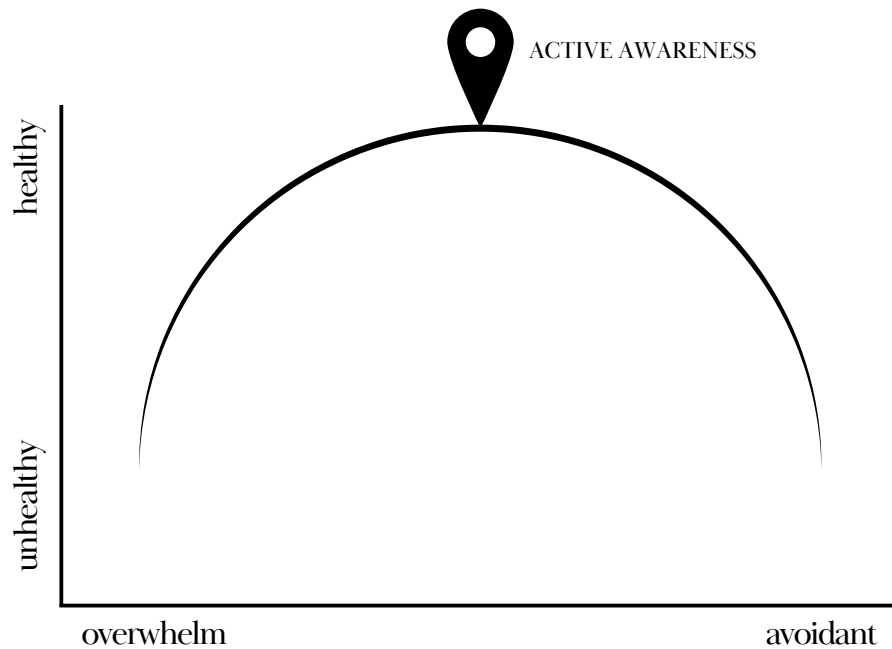
When I have listened to my anxiety in the past, some  
of the costs I have experienced are:



Active awareness means that we are not overwhelmed by our anxiety and we are not trying to avoid it. We are aware of it being there but have enough space to relate to it and act some tools to help us understand how to live in a way that is valuable to us.

Below you are going to see a graph illustrating some of what this looks like. Before anybody starts having a trauma response back to high school math class, I won't make you use any numbers.

For years I saw this graph as straight line where on one side we had overwhelm and the other side we had avoidant. The goal to plot ourself on the line and see how we were responding to anxiety, with the ultimate goal of moving into active awareness. Until one day I realized there is a second dimension to the graph. And rather than plotting ourselves on a straight line, we are plotting ourselves on a parabola. The further to one side of the other we go, the lower in health we also go. But as find the middle of the curve, we move out of overwhelm and avoidance and engage in a healthy level of active awareness.



How I know I am being avoidant of my anxiety :

How I know I am being overwhelmed by my anxiety:

(Keep in mind, these can sort of be two sides of the same coin and so there might be a bit overlap here.)



Whether or not you know it, you have certain areas in your life where you do a good job of enacting active awareness. Use the space below to list a few situations that are uncertain for you but you have come to a decent level of acceptance with.  
e.g. Not knowing who will in the next presidential election. Whether or not we will have any more children.

# REFLECTION

SECTION

03

# TOOLS & SKILLS

## Quick Reference Guide

"Defusion"

Opposite of Cognitive Fusion

ACT

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Recommended Books:

A Liberated Mind by Stephen Hayes

Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life by  
Stephen Hayes

Things Might Go Terribly Horribly Wrong  
by Kelly G. Wilson PhD.

Exposure Therapy for Anxiety  
by Jonathan S. Abramowitz, PhD, Brett J. Deacon,  
PhD, Stephen P. H. Whiteside, PhD

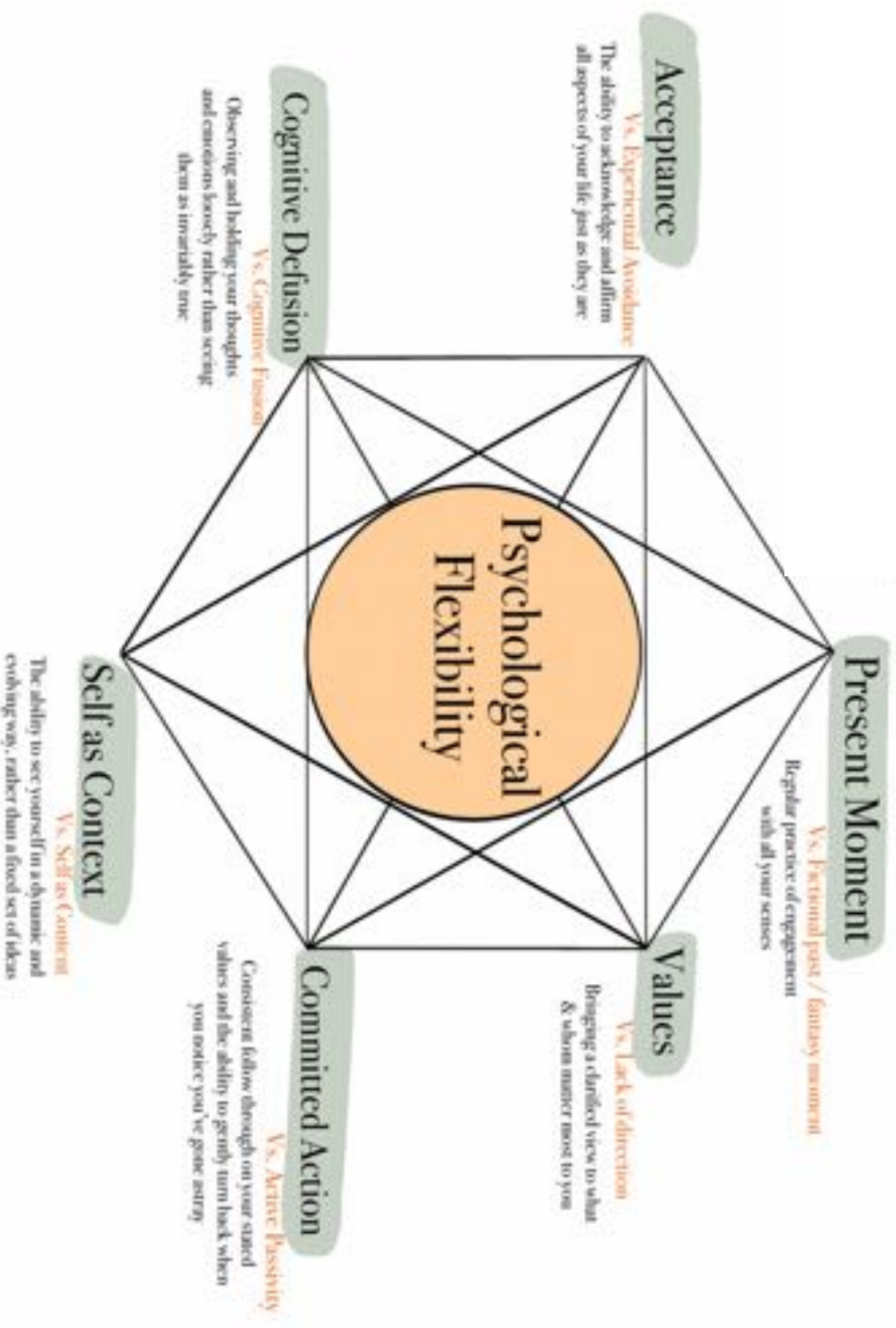
## GOALS FOR THIS SECTION

- Understand and know the application for the ACT skill of "defusion".
- Practice and Adapt skills for managing anxiety in our everyday life.

## WHAT DO YOU ALREADY DO FOR YOUR ANXIETY?

## DOES IT HELP? HOW DO YOU KNOW?

# HEXA FLEX



# YOU CAN'T *THINK* YOUR WAY OUT OF ANXIETY, YOU HAVE TO *BEHAVE* YOUR WAY OUT OF ANXIETY.

We so often get caught in trying to reason with our anxiety. Attempting to prove it wrong or arguing with it. We might even swing to the other side where we start agreeing with it. Getting stuck in these thought loops has seldom proved to be helpful for more people. You probably can't think of many times that you spent 5-10 minutes thinking about an anxious thought and were able to eventually reason it away. Most of the time if we did get it to go away it's because we accepted the possibility of it occurring, which in essence is actually different from "making it go away."

And thus we have to behave our way out of anxiety. This means that we have to move forward and live our life while our anxiety is there. But even more than living our life alongside the existence of anxiety, we must live our life in a way that directly confronts our anxiety. If our anxiety tells us how we are going to get into a car accident, we have to get in our car and drive! If it tells us that something is going to happen to one of our children, we need to loosen our grip on them and see what happens. We can't reason our way out, we have to behave our way out!



# DEFUSION

## De-Fusing from our thoughts

When we are engaging in cognitive fusion we have aligned with our thoughts and taken them as true. Our mind gives us a thought or emotion and there is little to no curiosity or patience.

The purpose of defusion is to gain space from our thoughts. This is a much easier stance than trying to completely avoid or prove our anxiety wrong. When we have a more wide angle view of our thoughts, we have the ability to take in the fullness of that situation and learn to process our emotional experience. When we don't choose to take this path, it leads to overwhelm or numbing out. We have to give up on the battle of trying to never or rarely have any anxious or uncertain thoughts. This would be like a basketball team that never wanted to practice if there were any defenders on the court. It's easy to shoot the ball when there is nobody trying to stop you from doing so. As we accept that the defenders are there, we can shift our mindset to trying to gain enough space from the defenders to move forward.



OUR GOAL IS

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

# TOOLS

## THOUGHT IN A POCKET

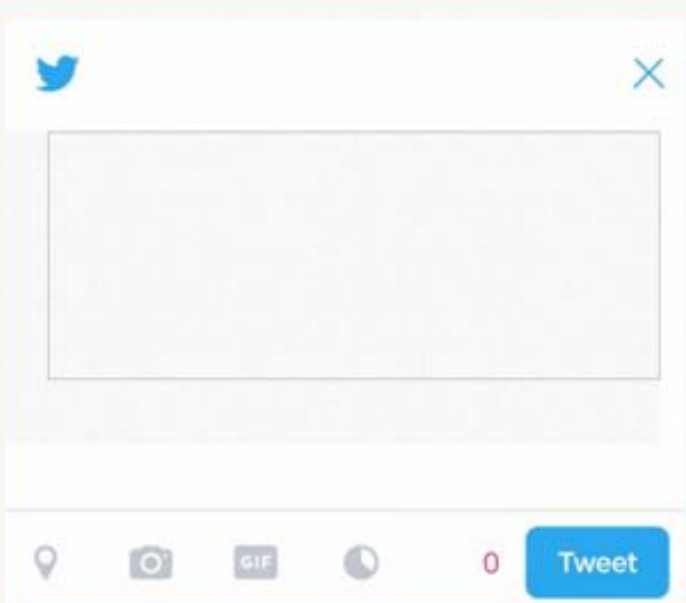
Use this space to start to identify the thoughts you may be ready to put in your pocket. When you are ready, add a thought to your pocket and come back here to track your progress. Write the date you add it to your pocket and track how many days until you are ready to mark it as done.

## CHANGE IT UP

A fun defusion technique is to take a phrase that has been bothering you and put it in the voice of somebody else.

You can use a cartoon character like Homer Simpson, or put it in the twitter voice of a political figure that you don't align with.

Pay attention to how this interrupts the typical pattern of thought and response.



# DEFUSION EXCERSIZE

Anxious Thought

I notice my mind is giving me the thought

Anxious Thought

I notice my mind is giving me the thought

Anxious Thought

I notice my mind is giving me the thought



# REFLECTION



SECTION

04

# ACCEPTANCE

## Quick Reference Guide

Steps we have taken so far  
Anxiety to Avoidance to DeFusion

ACT  
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Experiential Avoidance:  
The attempt to suppress or block unwanted internal experiences, such as thoughts, memories, feelings, and bodily sensations even when doing so has negative consequences to our lives.

Acceptance -  
the ability to acknowledge and affirm all aspects of your life exactly as they are.

## GOALS FOR THIS SECTION

- Understand what acceptance looks like with anxiety.
- Identify the difference between Reassurance and Acceptance.

What are the tools you have learned that have been beneficial for you in moving away from avoidance?

# GRIEVING VS GRIEVANCES

At risk of dating myself too much, there is a bit from the show *Seinfeld* about a made up holiday. One of the characters, Frank Costanza invents a holiday called Festivus, as he is tired of some of the traditions of other holidays in December. There is even a tag line. Festivus for the rest of us!

Out of the number of new traditions that Frank injects into Festivus, the most famous is "The Airing of Grievances." This is when each member of the family goes around the table to let others know the problems that they have with them. They might talk about the shortcomings of others or the ways they have felt disappointed by the people that surround them. It made for fantastic 90's situational comedy and an even worse idea.

We talk a lot in IOP about how to more effectively communicate with other people which might include airing a grievance. We want to claim a need that we had and how that need was not attended to. This is an important part of healing.

However, in order to be able to do grievance work we need to have a few factors set in place. This might include the situation that we are in, the context, or the setting. But more importantly it requires having two people who are properly resourced to be able to do the work. Both parties need to be able to self-reflect, effectively communicate, empathize, listen, stay out of judgment, and look at another's perspective. None of these are a walk in the park.

Now, I bet you can guess which person you have control over in terms of checking off those tasks. That's right, you. You are not going to be in control of whether or not the other person is able to successfully engage in this type of work.

*And when you cannot do grievance work, you  
have to do grief work.*

Grief work looks like letting go of the idea of the relationship that we want to have with somebody. Allowing the other person to be who they are, or not take ownership of what we are wanting them to take ownership of. We may not be able to achieve the level of intimacy or reconciliation that we want with that person. In essence, we have to grieve the idea of what that could have been like. When we grieve the relationship that we want to have with someone we care about, we open ourselves up to the relationship that is available to us with that individual.





# ACCEPTANCE IS THE ANSWER TO WHAT IF

In the video, we learn about how we want to use acceptance when it comes to our anxiety as well as how anxiety will try and use acceptance against us. We try and tell our anxiety that we are okay with a certain situation or outcome, but anxiety can use this against us by saying that we accept that consequence, we are accepting something that is outside of our values. Use the below space to gain a bit more clarity on how this happens for you.

**Anxious situation I want to accept:** Not knowing if I will get in a car accident on my next drive.

**How anxiety uses acceptance against me:** If you accept this possibility, you are saying it is acceptable for your kids to grow up without their parent and your loved ones to never see you again.

**Values that anxiety attacks:** Relationships and parenting

**Acceptance statement:** I am not saying that this outcome is okay, I simply saying that I accept the uncertainty associated with it.

**Anxious situation I want to accept:**

**How anxiety uses acceptance against me:**

**Values that anxiety attacks:**

**Acceptance statement:**

**Anxious situation I want to accept:**

**How anxiety uses acceptance against me:**

**Values that anxiety attacks:**

**Acceptance statement:**

## How To Use The Acceptance Card



- The only card that beats a what if card is an acceptance card.
- We want to play our acceptance card early.
- If we are needing to play more than two or three reassurance cards it is time to play an acceptance card.
- The acceptance card simply means that we are accepting the uncertainty
- When we play the acceptance card it allows us to get further involved with our lives and relationships

# EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE

The antithesis of acceptance is experiential avoidance. Stephen Hayes defines experiential avoidance as:

the process of trying to avoid your own experiences (thoughts, feelings, memories, bodily sensations, behavioral predispositions) even when doing so causes long-term behavioral difficulties.

Now, it's important to note that there is a difference between trying to zone out when we're sitting in the dentist chair and not processing the emotional experience that life has given us.

Take a few moments for this exercise to become more aware of how you have avoided and what the cost of that avoidance has been.

The *emotions* that I most often avoid:

\

The *physical sensations* I most often avoid:



The *thoughts* I most often avoid:

The *memories* that I most often avoid:

The *situations* that I most often avoid:

The *cost of avoidance* for me has been:

SECTION

05

# SELF AS CONTEXT



## Quick Reference Guide

Steps we have taken so far  
Anxiety to Avoidance to DeFusion

### ACT

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

#### Experiential Avoidance:

the attempt to suppress or block unwanted internal experiences, thoughts, memories, bodily sensations, and disengage even when it has negative consequences to our lives.

## GOALS FOR THIS SECTION

- Understand what self as context looks like with anxiety.
- Learning to hold thoughts loosely and identify the purpose of doing so.

## NOTES



# Self as Context

Use this space to write down a few “I am” statements. What are the consequences of holding those thoughts tightly? What about holding them loosely? Make sure to write both the positive and the negative.

*The ability to see yourself in an evolving and dynamic way rather than a fixed set of ideas.*

*While defusion is our main core process centered around holding our thoughts loosely, self as context teaches us to do this with both our “positive” and “negative” thoughts and identities. The reason that we do this is because when we grip very tightly on to our “positive” thoughts and identities we begin to grip tightly on to the inverse as well. When we loosen our grip we have the ability to see a fuller context of the situation that we are in.*

# WRITE ME A STORY

Use the below space to write the story of your life. It doesn't have to be massively long, but write about a paragraph or two. It's imperative that you do not skip ahead and read more directions but simply do this part first. Once you are done, move on to part 2.



## **Part 2 - Analyze**

Great work! Before this next part we want you to go back and read your story. Reflect on if it is true or not. Go ahead and read it and then move on to part 3.

## **Part 3 - Rewrite**

Now we want you to write the story of your life. You didn't read it wrong, you're going to do it again. Except this time there's a catch. You can't mention anything that you mentioned in the first version. That's right, you've got to write an entirely different story. Once you are done, move on to part 4.

## **Part 4 - Analyze**

Great work! Before this next part we want you to go back and read your second story. Reflect on if it is true or not. Go ahead and read it and then move on to part 5.

### **Part 5-**

*If you're suspecting you are going to have to write another story, you are right. You're so smary! At least in this context. Write an entirely different story of your life without mentioning anything you mentioned in your first two versions. This one will be quite difficult. Don't be surprised if you can't get as much.*

**Part 6** – Read through all three stories. Ask yourself which one is true? Unless you made up anything, they are all true! A lot of people find this exercise to be quite difficult as we often get very attached to one version of ourselves. We do the same thing with anxiety. We get attached to one version of a story. Engaging in this exercise and reflecting on holding different versions of ourselves aids in our goal of creating psychological flexibility.



