

Using Acceptance & Commitment Therapy in the Treatment of Eating Disorders

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Objectives

- Attendees will learn about the formation of body image, ways to improve body image at all ages, and practical approaches to improving body image for both clinicians and clients.
- Attendees will learn benefits of using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in treating individuals with eating disorders.
- Attendees will learn how to incorporate tenets of ACT into their professional practice to address desire to suppress or avoid emotions.

Who I am



Center for Change Boise



Alyee Willets, LPC, NCC, ACMHC

Body Image

What is body image?

- The mental representation an individual creates of themselves.
 - → Emotional response
- Influenced by:
 - Upbringing
 - Appearance
 - Trauma
 - Etc....



Body Image in the Lifespan

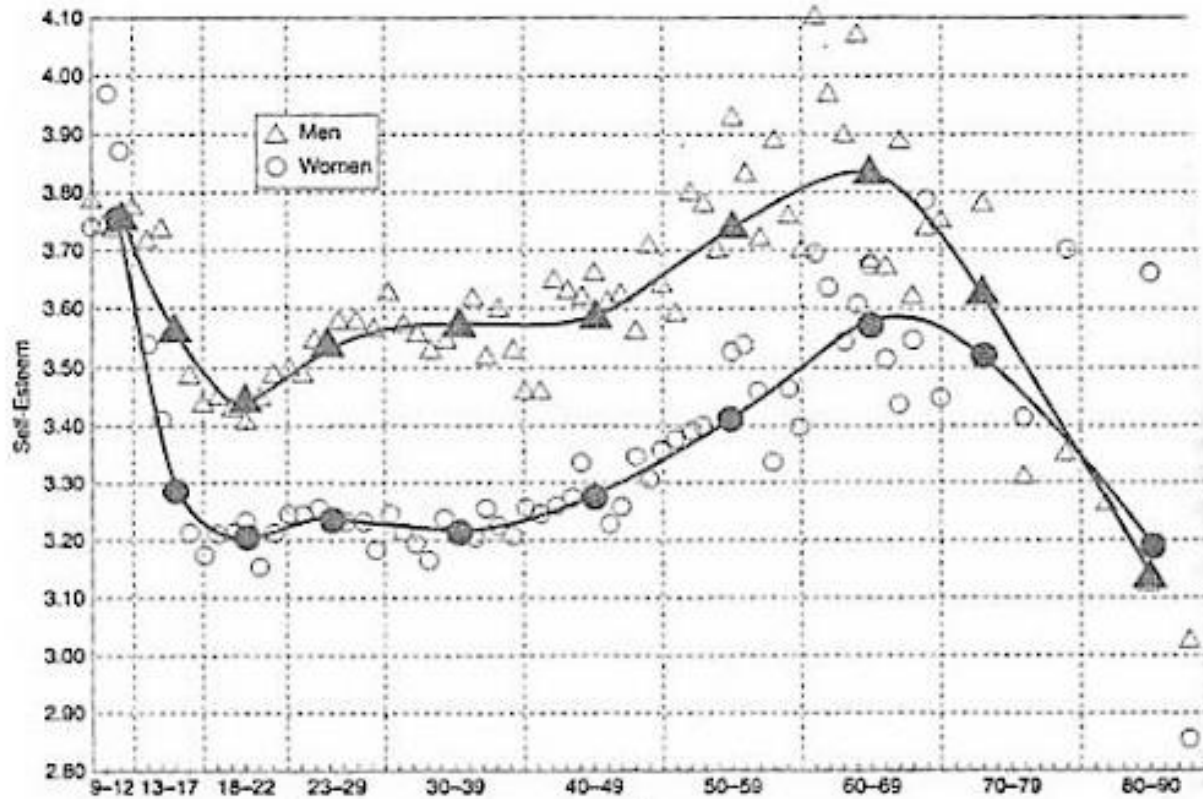
- Self-system- way of responding to others' actions towards us.
 - a. “Looking glass self”- Charles Horton Cooley
- Preschoolers- concrete, physical terms: “little, strong,” older children more abstract & evaluative, “good soccer player.”
- Girls report more dissatisfaction with their appearance than boys starting in early adolescence.



Body Image in the Lifespan

- Social comparison
- Late childhood = self-esteem drop (13-22), more for girls
 - Growth spurt, avg. boy gains 42lbs, girls 38lbs, over 4 years
- Body image declines in later life
 - Can be linked to feeling purposeless and aging processes





Ways to Improve Body Image

- **Kids:** Identify things that are important to child and encourage process vs. content. Model positive relationship with body.
- **Teens:** Increase media literacy; identify messages and expectations in ads. Increase connection vs. screen time. Normalize weight gain and changing body shape/size due to puberty.
- **Adults:** Function vs. size. What can your body do for you? What are your values? Do your actions align with them?
- **Older adults:** Identify meaning beyond achievements. What does it mean to be human? Can I be all these things and no longer be in a youthful/able body?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Approaches to Body Image and Eating Disorders

HISTORICAL

- Early treatment
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy
- Group therapy
- Family therapy

EMERGING

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Health at Every Size, HAES®
- Body movement
- Mirror exposure vs. Avoidance
- Art

What is ACT?

- Founded by Steven Hayes in 1982
 - “...the primary source of human unhappiness is the way language and cognition interact with the circumstances of our lives to produce an inability to persist or make changes that are in the service of long-term valued ends.” -Luoma, Hayes, and Walser, 2007, p. 9
- Inflexibility happens when we use language and tools in ways that are ineffective or problematic.
- The point of ACT is not to feel **BETTER** but to better **FEEL**.

Use of Language in ACT

1. “And” instead of “but”

- a. “I want to go to the store and I am afraid.”

2. Verbally defuse

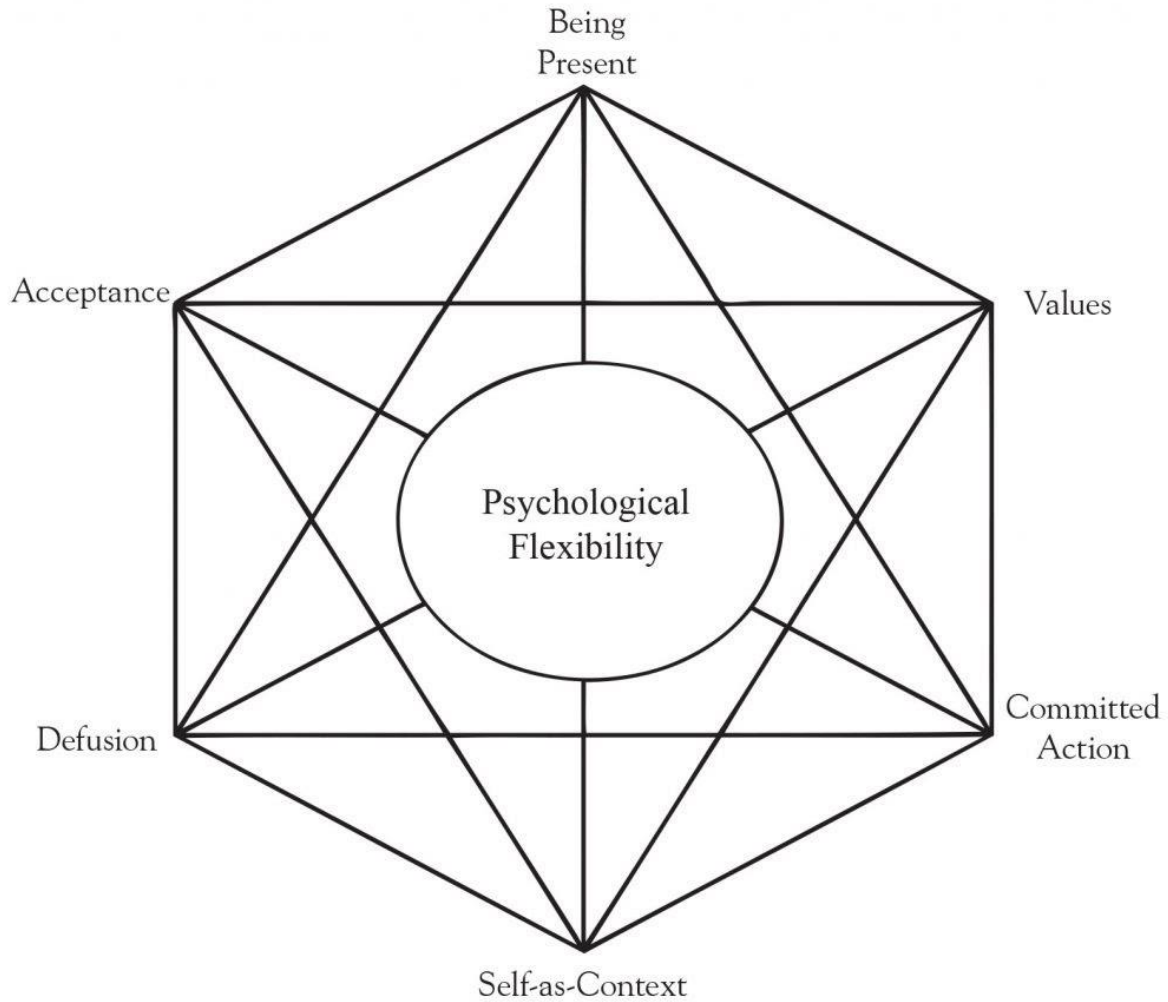
- a. “I notice that I am having the thought that I am stupid.”

3. “Willing” instead of “Want”

- a. “I’m afraid and I am willing to eat this meal for my recovery.”

4. Speak to your mind as if it were a separate entity

- a. “Thank you Mind, for doing your job and helping me be aware of that thought or feeling.”



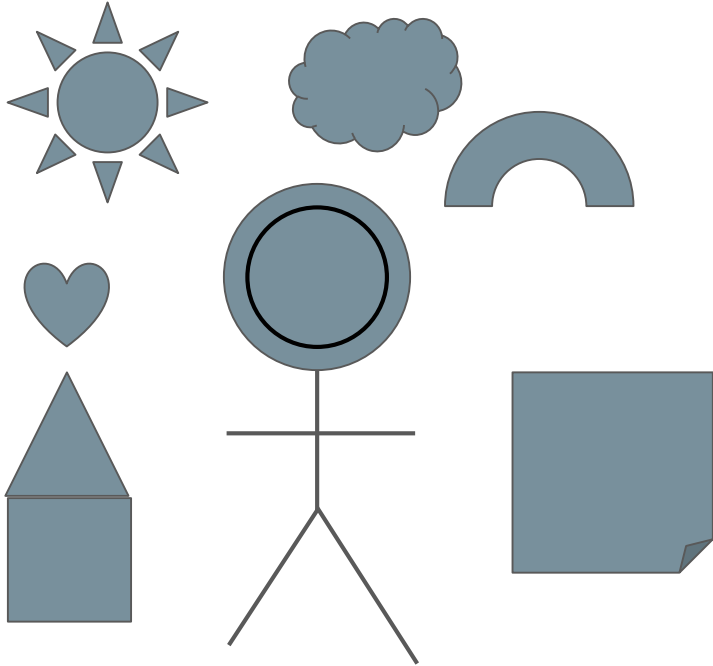
Self as Context

- The OBSERVER self.
- The YOU that is able to notice that you are noticing,
 - *“Now I’m feeling this.”*
- Best connected with through experience rather than intellectual understanding.
- Decreases attachment to a conceptualized self based on identities.
- Creates context where acceptance and de-fusion are not threatening
- Fosters greater flexibility.

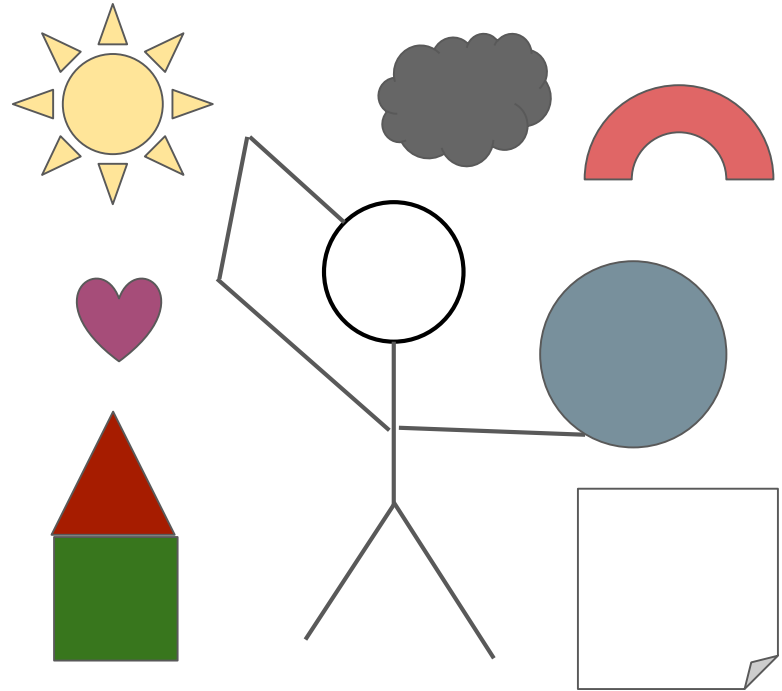
Defusion

- Getting some distance or unhooking from the literal meaning of words.
- **Fusion**: when thoughts, feelings, emotions, and body sensations run our lives.
- **Defusion**: when you are able to separate your thoughts, feelings, emotions, and body sensations as separate from you.
 - Does not deny or suppress the presence of pain but rather, notices it in a way that does not change your direction.
 - This increases *flexibility* and leads to **growth**.

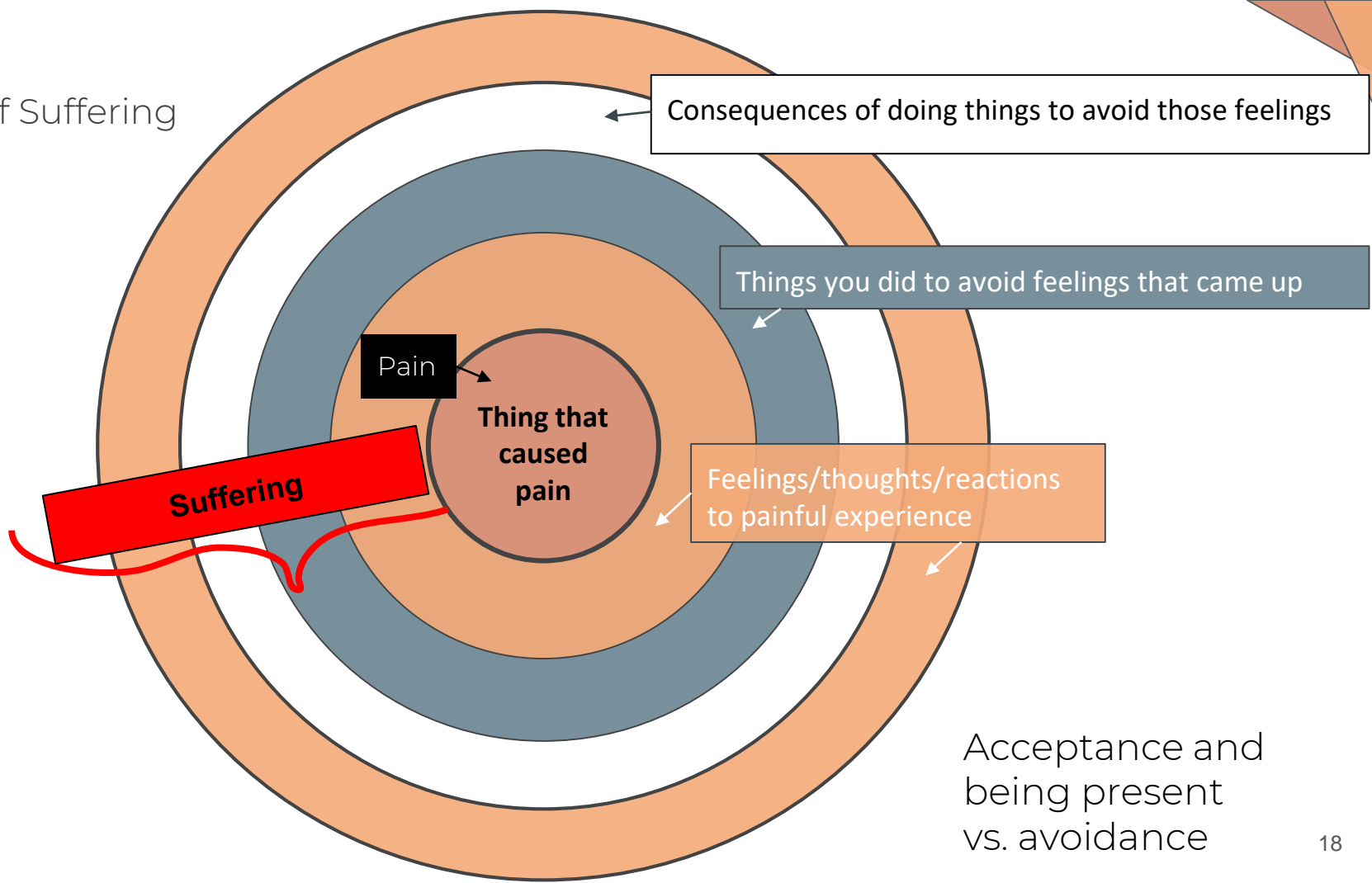
Fusion



Defusion



Wheel of Suffering



Consequences of doing things to avoid those feelings

Things you did to avoid feelings that came up

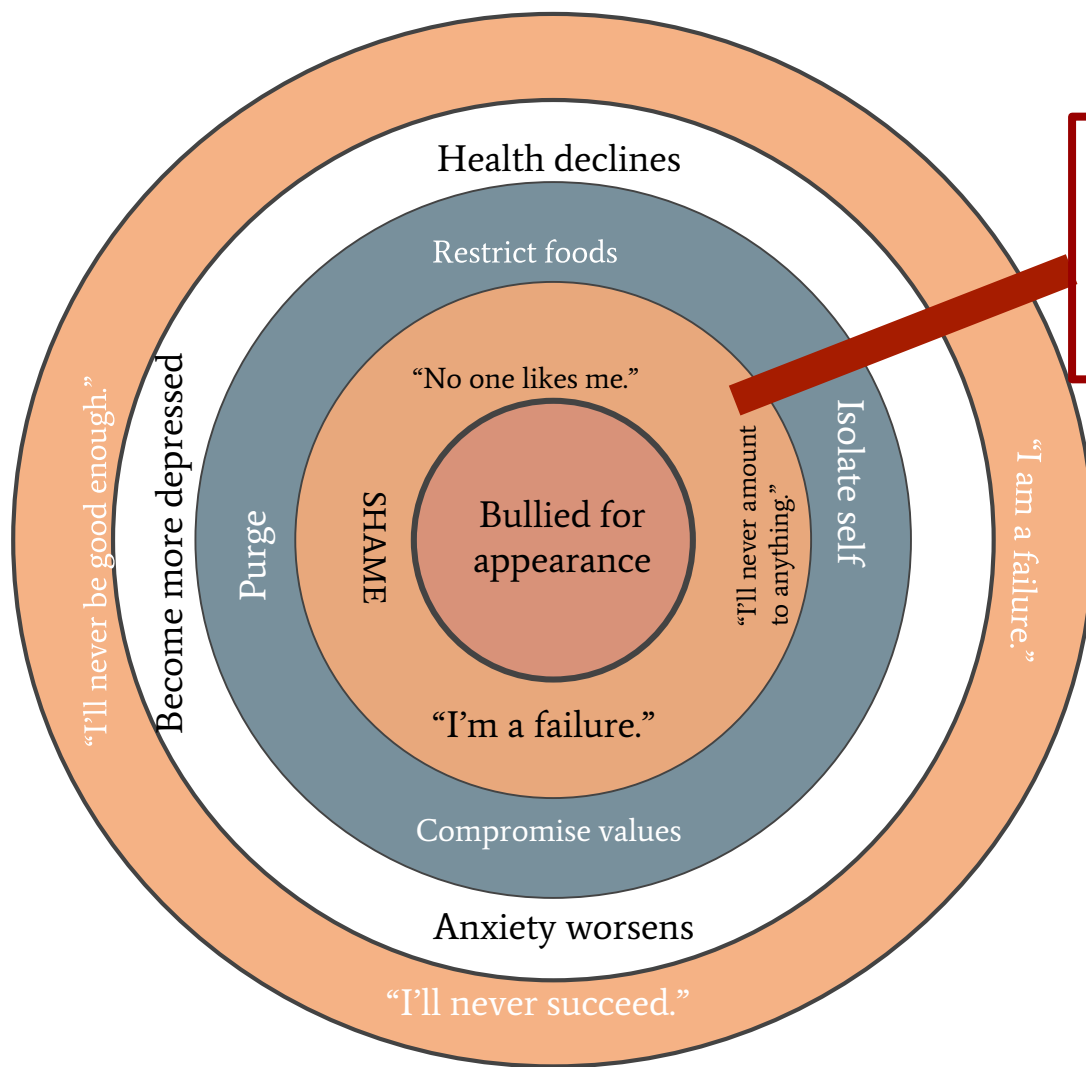
Pain

Thing that caused pain

Feelings/thoughts/reactions to painful experience

Suffering

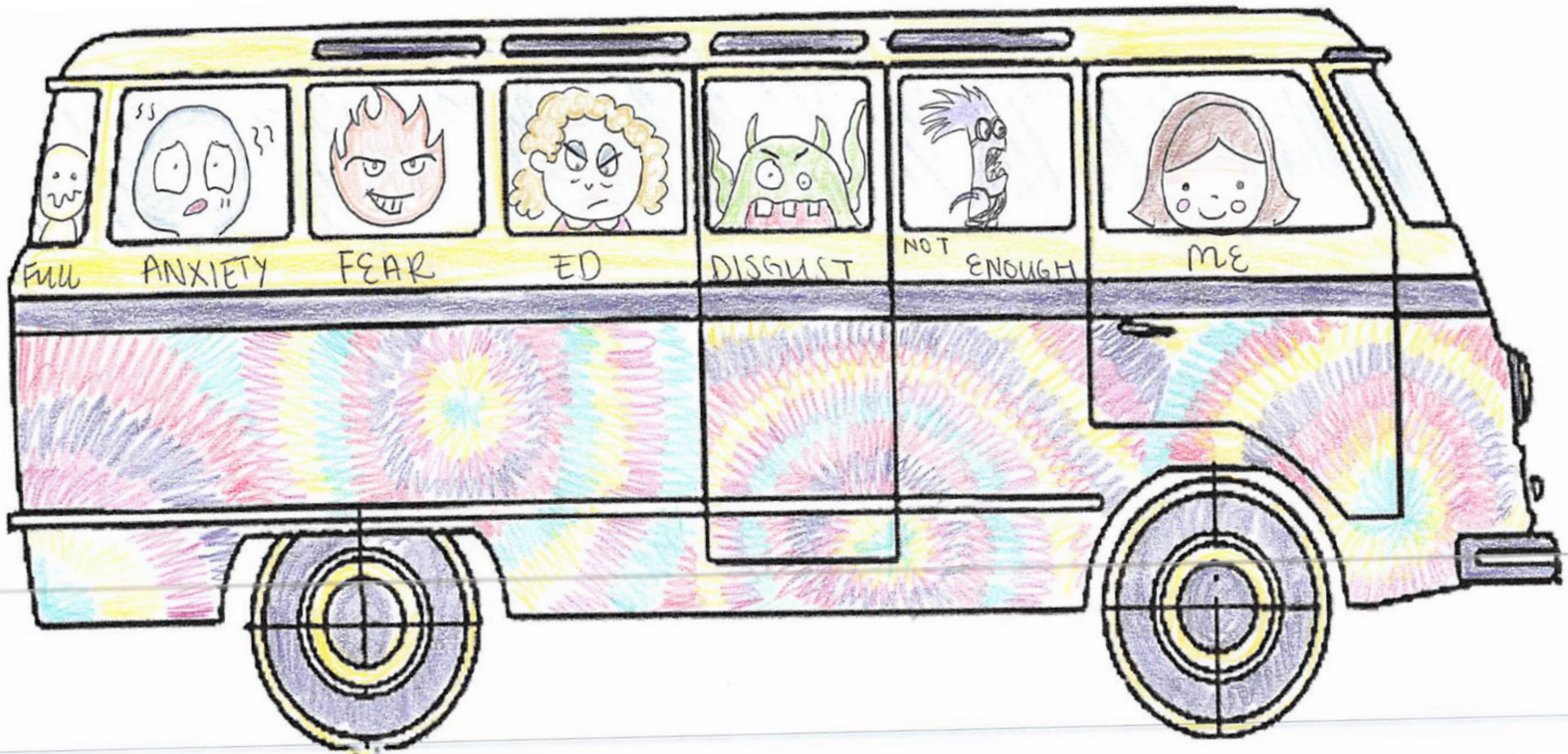
Acceptance and being present vs. avoidance



We can interrupt this process!

Passengers on a bus

- Thoughts, feelings, emotions, and body sensations are like passengers on a bus we are driving.
- Passengers can try to make the bus turn certain ways, but they are never in the driver's seat.
- We can be “hooked” by these passengers and allow them to steer our lives, instead of our values.
- Another example: “Emotions are are like weather and you are the sky. The weather can never hurt the sky.”



Values and Committed Action

- According to ACT:
 - Values cannot be right or wrong.
 - Values are not goals. Values are never finally completed accomplished.
 - Values are about *PROCESS*, not outcome.
- **Take action:**
 - Monitor current behaviors, create goals aligned with values, examine:
“Does this align with my values or am I being fused with thoughts, feelings, or emotions?”

3 Barriers to using ACT & recommendations

1. Lack of self-compassion

- Rate how much compassion you feel for others struggling vs. yourself.
- Identify what it would take to overcome those barriers. How many have to do with becoming fused with evaluations? Could you find a way of defusing from these evaluations?

3 Barriers to using ACT & recommendations....

2. Focusing on right and wrong instead of workability

- Take time to think about where you feel most invested about being right.
- Write down the situation, the cost of attachment, and the cost of letting go.

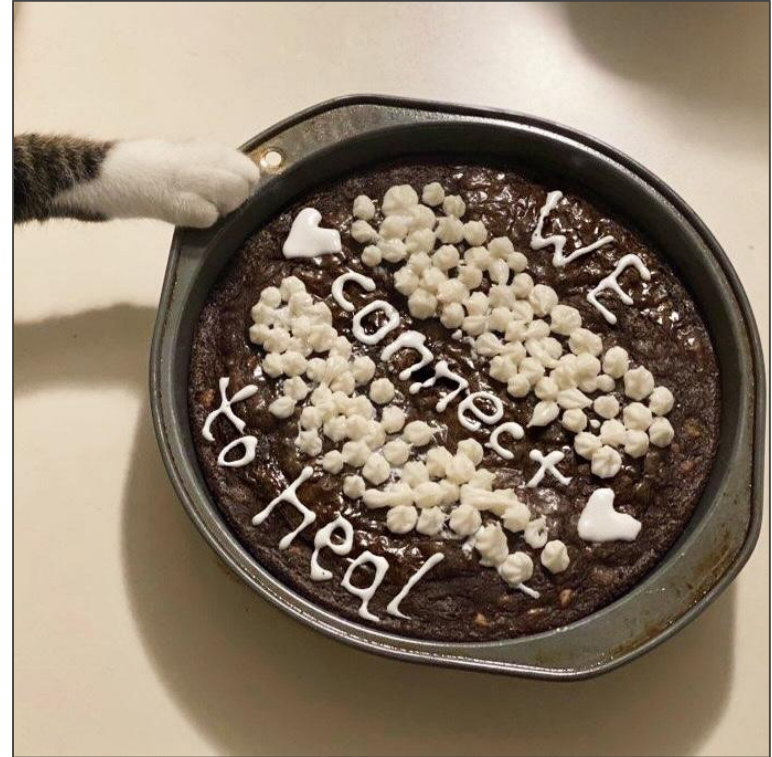
Barriers to using ACT and recommendations cont...

3. Being stuck on blame vs. response-ability

- Think about painful events that have affected you.
 - Write down the painful event, your ability to respond to the impact, and barriers to responding.
- Think about who you could be right now if you let go of the struggle with judgement, blame, being right or wrong, or the passengers. What if you could begin to have acceptance for yourself?

Walk the Walk and How to Avoid Burnout

- ACT can be used to address underlying anxiety and emotions fused into formation of body image.
- It's important to do our own work so that our emotions, thoughts, and feelings are not running our sessions and to ensure that we are valuing every individual's experience with dignity and respect.



In conclusion....

ACT is all about PROCESS vs. OUTCOME

Acceptance vs. evaluation

And committed action in alignment with your values.

- **Remember:** We are passengers on the busses of our clients, friends, and family members, and have an important role in their lives.
- We can say “all the things” and “do all the things,” AND ultimately they are in charge of the direction they choose to take.

Resources

Books:

- *Finding Life Beyond Trauma: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Heal from Post-Traumatic Stress and Trauma Related Problems*, by Follette and Pistorello
- *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Eating Disorders* by Sandoz, Wilson, and Dufrene

Videos:

- ACT Auntie (Youtube!)

Trainings:

- Association for Contextual Behavioral Science (ACBS): www.contextualpsychology.org

Questions?

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