**Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for the Treatment of Compulsive Pornography Use**

**Treatment Manual**

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**Introduction**

The purpose of this treatment manual is to guide the implementation of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for the treatment of compulsive pornography use (CPU). It is assumed that users of this manual have a fundamental understanding of the basic theoretical and philosophical basis of ACT. It is also assumed that they have received some basic training and supervision on the implementation of the treatment.

The primary material of this manual is a session by session description of ACT for CPU. The treatment is designed to be delivered in 12 one hour sessions over the course of 12 weeks. The outline for each session will include a list of session objectives, the suggested content for achieving those objectives, and homework assignments for the participant.

The focus of ACT is on the movement of six core psychological processes. Therefore, any technique or exercise that targets these processes would be considered consistent with the treatment model. These processes can be targeted when the opportunities arise throughout treatment, so the middle sessions of the treatment protocol are designed to allow for flexible work with these processes while the initial and final sessions tend to be more structured.

Note: This manual is an adaptation of ACT for CPU based on the original ACT protocol in Hayes et al., 1999.

**Session Outline**

Session 1 Introduction & Assessment

Session 2 Setting the Stage for Acceptance with Creative Hopelessness

Session 3 Undermining the Control Agenda and Introducing Acceptance as an Alternative

Session 4 Fostering Cognitive Defusion: What are these urges anyway?

Session 5-8 Viewing the Self as Context and Contact with the Present Moment

Session 9 Values Clarification

Session 10 Committed Action

Session 11 Review

Session 12 Termination

**Session 1**

**Introduction and Assessment**

**Objectives**

The objectives of this session are to make introductions, review the limits to confidentiality, provide the ACT informed consent, obtain a history of the problem, set the treatment goals, introduce the idea of private events, and identify the difference between private events and behaviors.

**Content**

Introduce yourself to the client and let the client introduce him or herself. Answer any questions that the client has and provide a brief overview of the treatment.

*The treatment will last 10 sessions and we will try to meet every week except for the last two sessions that will be spaced two weeks apart. I will be doing a lot of the talking at first, but you will be expected to take more of a role in the treatment as we progress. In fact, the more that you engage this treatment by asking questions and trying to understand the material, the better this will go.*

Review the traditional limits to confidentiality (reporting requirements there is a reason to believe the client might harm self or others, you learn of the occurrence of abuse of a protected population, or through court-ordered subpoena). Also warn the client that if they report viewing child pornography, it will be reported.

Informed consent in ACT consists of general descriptions of operating principles and frank discussion of the areas of ambiguity. Before ACT begins, the participant must be prepared for it. It can be an intensive intervention and the participants should not be subjected to such interventions lightly. Because ACT can raise fairly fundamental issues, it is wise to get the participant to commit to a course of treatment, and agree not to measure progress impulsively. Ask the participant to commit to the entire 10 session treatment.

*You should expect ups and downs. As treatment is unfolding, it is not unusual for clients to question the progress of treatment. This commitment will help you to engage the entire treatment and evaluate the outcome after you have completed treatment. Are you willing to commit to the entire treatment?*

Interview the client about the history the problem and the current manifestation of the problem.

*How did their viewing start? How long has it been an issue? Has it been better or worse at certain times? Have they received therapy or medication for their problem? What things have made it worse or better? What negative outcomes have resulted from their CPU?How much do you view on average per day? Per week? Per month? Are there any other related sexual behaviors? What triggers your behavior? What is your behavior like at its worst? At its best? How do you view (internet, cable, magazines, etc.)? What kind of material are you viewing in general—I don’t need specifics, but it is helpful to know the severity of use (soft, hard, deviant, heterosexual, homosexual)? What times of the day or week do you usually view? What are your goals for treatment?*

Set the treatment goal (i.e., what is the target level for viewing). If necessary, explain that this is up to the participant to choose between a goal for no viewing behavior or just to better regulate and manage the behavior. Also explain that you will support that participant in achieving whatever goal is chosen.

Introduce the idea of private events as thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations that areseparate from public experience. Use the term *urge* to describe the private events (thoughts, emotions, sensations) that are typically associated with viewing.

*I wonder if I had a magic wand and we were able to get rid of the urges if you would have a problem anymore?*

Introduce the difference between private events and behaviors using the *$100,000 Question* exercise.

*If I gave you $100,000 for 1 month of no viewing, could you do it? How long could you go? What if I said that I would give you $200,000 for 1 month of no urges to view.*

Make sure the participant recognizes that they have control over behavior, but not over the urges to view.

**Homework**

Ask the participant to pay attention to the urges to view during the week and how he/she responded to them. It may be helpful keep a record of the urges to aid discussion during the next session.

**Session 2**

**Setting the Stage for Acceptance with Creative Hopelessness**

**Objectives**

The objectives of this session are to review the assigned homework, evaluate the workability of efforts to control urges, foster a sense of creative hopelessness, and suggest letting go of the control agenda.

**Content**

Ask the participant what was learned from the assignment to pay attention to the urges to view and the subsequent response to the urges. Draw his/her attention to any patterns and an overall agenda of control. Do this without communicating any judgment about the control agenda, just highlight the attempts to control urges.

Evaluate the workability of efforts to control urges by making a list of everything the participant has done to control urges. This is most effective when done on a dry erase or chalk board, but you can also use a notepad. If necessary, make it clear that these are things that have been done to control urges. After the list is on the whiteboard ask the participant, *What do you think of this list?* Usually there is some level of surprise at the amount of work that has been devoted to controlling these urges. Let the participant talk about his/her reaction to seeing the long list.

Ask the participant, *Which items on this list work really well in the short term? Which ones work well at controlling the urges for a couple minutes or maybe an hour?* In most cases about half of the items work well at controlling the inner experiences immediately. Then move to, *Which ones work well in the long term? For example, which ones work well for a month, or even a week?* Most likely there are no items on the list that work for a duration of a week or a month. A statement such as, *Hmmm….this is odd, wouldn’t you think that you would want a solution that works for an extended period of time. For example, if you had a leaky pipe in your basement you would want the plumber to fix it for 20 or 30 years not for a day or two. Are there any items up there that can fix this for a meaningful period of time?* Most likely nothing up there will work like that, otherwise the participate would not need to participate in the study. Allow the participant some time to discuss these findings.

Foster a sense of creative hopelessness by asking the participant, *Do any of these items have a negative effect on your life?* Usually some of the items on the list negatively affect the participant’s quality of life. Some of the items may not be inherently problematic, but the time and effort involved in an unsuccessful struggle is usually quite detrimental to quality of life. Allow a couple minutes for the participant to discuss these issues. This phase usually ends with a review of findings such as, *It looks like these attempts work pretty well in the short term, are generally ineffective in the long term, and at some level cause problems in your life.*  Discuss these findings with the participant in a nonjudgmental way by saying, *It isn’t for lack of effort on your part that this hasn’t worked, maybe the strategy is the problem*.

Once the participant is in some level of agreement and experiences this sense of hopelessness, Suggest letting go of the control agenda using the *Man in the Hole* metaphor*.*

*Imagine that you’re placed in a field, wearing a blindfold, and you’re given a little bag of tools. You’re told that your job is to run around this field, blindfolded, and live your life. So you start running around and sooner or later you fall into this big hole. Your hole is that you have panic related inner experiences. Other people have other ones. Now one tendency you might have would be to try and figure out how you got in the hole--exactly what path you followed. You might tell yourself, “I went to the left, and over a little hill, and then I feel in,” etc. In one sense, that may be true; you are in the hole because you walked exactly that way. However, knowing that is not the solution to knowing how to get out of the hole. Furthermore, even if you had not done exactly that, and you’d gone somewhere else instead, in this metaphor, you might have fallen into another hole anyway, because unbeknownst to you, in this field there are countless widely-spaced, fairly deep holes. Anyway, so now you’re in this hole, blindfolded. Probably what you would do in such a predicament is take the bag of tools you were given and try to get out of the hole. Now just suppose that the tool you’ve been given is a shovel. So you dutifully start digging, but pretty soon you notice that you’re not out of the hole. So you try digging faster, or with bigger shovelfuls, or with a different style. More, different, and better. More, different, and better. You are trying all these difference things that we have listed on the board. But all of that makes no difference, because digging is not the way out of the hole; it only makes the hole bigger. Pretty soon this hole is huge. It has multiple rooms, halls, and caverns. It is more and more elaborated. So maybe you stop for a while and try to put up with it. But it doesn't work -- you are still in the hole. This is like what has happened with your urges. It is bigger and bigger. It has become a central focus of your life. You know all this hasn’t worked. But what I’m saying is that it can’t work. You absolutely can't dig your way out of the hole. It's hopeless. That’s not to say that there is no way out of the hole. But within the system in which you have been working--no matter how much motivation you have, or how hard you dig--there is no way out. This is not a trick. No fooling. You know that sense you have that you are stuck? And that you came here to get help to fix it? Well, you are stuck. And in the system in which you are working, there is no way out. The things you’ve been taught to do aren't working although they may work perfectly well somewhere else. The problem is not in the tools; It’s in the situation in which you find yourself using them. So you come in here wanting a gold-plated steam shovel from me. Well, I can’t give it to you and even if I could I wouldn’t because that’s not going to solve your problem. It'd only make it worse.*

If client asks for the way out of the hole, say, Y*our job right now is not to figure out how to get out of the hole. That is what you have been doing all along. Your job is to accept that you are in one. In the position you are in right now, even if you were given other things to do, it wouldn't work. The problem is not the tool -- it is the agenda. It is digging. If you were given a ladder right now it wouldn’t do any good. You’d only try to dig with it. And ladders make terrible shovels. If you need to dig, you've got a perfectly good tool already. You can’t do anything else until you let go of the shovel and let go of digging as the agenda. You need to make room for something else in your hands. And that is a very difficult and bold thing to do. The shovel appears to be the only tool you have. Letting go of it looks as though it will doom you to stay in the hole forever. And I can’t really reassure you on that. Nothing I can say right now would help ease the difficulty of what you have to do here. Your best ally is your own pain, and the knowledge that nothing has worked. Have you suffered enough? Are you ready to give up and do something else?*

The purpose here is to let the participant experience this feeling of creative hopelessness for the week. It is likely that she/he will be anxious for you to suggest an alternative, but gently ask her/him to just take time to examine their own experience and evaluate the workability of the control agenda.

**Homework**

Ask the participant to pay attention to their efforts to control urges to view during the week. It may be helpful keep a record to aid discussion during the next session.

**Session 3**

**Undermining the Control Agenda and Introducing Acceptance as an Alternative**

**Objectives**

The objectives of this session are to review the assigned homework, to continue undermining the control agenda, to introduce acceptance as an alternative, and to ask the participant to make the first behavioral commitment to change viewing behavior.

**Content**

Review the assignment to pay attention to the efforts to control urges to view during the week. Draw attention to the unworkability of the control agenda, and pay attention to any experiences that can be used later in the session.

Undermine the control agenda using the metaphors and exercises that target control as a problem. Explain that not only have the attempts to control urges been unsuccessful, perhaps they have made things worse

Remind the participant of the difference between public and private events, and suggest that perhaps the rules are different in these two arenas.

*What I want to do today is to try to get a clearer sense of this set of things--I want to have us get clearer about what digging* (from the *Man in the Hole* metaphor) *even is anyway. I believe that most of what you having been doing is quite logical, sensible, and reasonable, at least according to your mind and my mind. The outcome isn’t what you hoped it would be, but really it seems to me that you’ve done pretty much the normal thing. You’ve really tried hard and fought the good fight. All these digging moves you have listed. Aren’t they the kinds of things people do?*

*Consider this as a possibility. Everyone’s story is similar (and similar to yours) because what you are doing is what we are all trained to do. It’s just that it doesn’t work here. Human language has given us a tremendous advantage as a species because it allows us to break things down into parts, to formulate plans, to construct futures we have never experienced, and to plan action. And it works pretty well. If we look just at the part of our existence that involves what goes on outside the skin, it works great. Look at all the things the rest of creation is dealing with and you’ll see we do pretty well. Just look around this room. Almost everything we see in here wouldn’t be here without human language and human rationality. The plastic chair. The lights. The heating duct. Our clothes. That computer. And so on. So we are warm, it won’t rain on us, we have light--with regard to the stuff non humans are struggling with we pretty much have it made. You give a dog or a cat all this stuff--warmth, shelter, food, social simulation--and they are about as happy as they know to be. But without humans they are outside in the cold. So we’ve solved the problems nonverbal critters face. We are also the only species that commits suicide, and we can be miserable when they would be happy. Really, really important things--important to us as a species competing with other life forms on this planet--have been done with human language. There is an operating rule for things outside the skin that works great: if you don’t like something, figure out how to get rid of it and get rid of it. And that rule works great in most of our life. But consider the possibility--just consider it--that that rule does not work in the world between your ears. That last little bit of human existence is a pretty important part because it is where life satisfaction lies, but it is only a small proportion of our total lives. But suppose that same rule worked just terribly in that last few percentage points of life. In your experience, not in your logical mind, look and see if it’s not like this: In the world inside the skin, the rule actually is, if you aren’t willing to have it, you’ve got it.*

Demonstrate the paradox of control using the *Chocolate Cake* exercise.

*Suppose I tell you right now, I don’t want you to think about something. I’m going to tell you real soon. And when I do don’t think it even for a second. Here it comes. Remember, don’t think of it. Don’t think of ....Warm chocolate cake! You know how it smells when it first comes out of the oven...Don’t think of it! The taste of the chocolate icing when you bite into the first warm piece ...Don’t think of it! As the warm, moist piece crumbles and crumbs fall to the plate...Don’t think of it! It’s very important, don’t think about any of this!*

Most participants get the point immediately, and may laugh uncomfortably, nod, or smile. Others may respond by insisting that they did not think about anything. As is illustrated in the following dialogue between a therapist (T) and a participant (P), you can use this exercise to further highlight the futility of mental control or thought suppression strategies.

T: “So could you do it?”

P: “Sure.”

T: “And how did you do it?”

P: “I just thought about something else.”

T: “OK. And how did you know you did it?”

P: “What do you mean?”

T: “The task was not to think of chocolate cake. So what did you think of?”

P: “Driving a race car.”

T: “Great. And how did you know that thinking of a race car was doing what I asked? So that you could report success?

P: “Well I was saying ‘Great, I’m thinking of a race car ...[pauses]

T: “Yes. And continue on. I’m thinking of a race car and I’m not thinking of ...”

P: “Chocolate cake.”

T: “Right. So even when it works, it doesn’t.”

P: “It’s true. I did think of cake but I pushed it out so fast I almost didn’t think of it.

T: “And isn’t this similar to what you have done with your urges?”

P: “I try to push them out of my mind.”

T: “But see the problem. All you are doing is adding race cars to chocolate cake. You can’t 100% subtract chocolate cake deliberately, because to do it deliberately you have to formulate the rule and then there you are because the rule contains it. If you are not willing to have it ...”

P: “You do.”

The point can also be made with respect to physical reactions. We might say to the participant something like, *Don’t salivate when I ask you to imagine biting into a wedge of lemon. Don’t salivate as you imagine the taste of the juice on your lips and tongue and teeth.* These exercises help the participant to make direct contact with the ineffectiveness of conscious purposeful control in these domains.

If necessary, you can further undermine the control agenda using the *Mind Reading* metaphor.

*Suppose I had you hooked up to the best mind reading machine that’s ever been built. This is a perfect machine, the most sensitive ever made. When you are all wired up to it, there is no way you can think anything without the machine knowing it. So I tell you that you have a very simple task here: all you have to do not think about pornography. If you think about it even a little bit, however, I will know it. How are you doing so far? All you have to do is not think about pornography.*

Once you have undermined the control agenda, introduce acceptance as an alternative to control using the *Two Scales* metaphor. The term “acceptance” is usually not used in therapy because of the many connotations that are already associated with it. Instead, use terms such as *willingness or openness*.

*Imagine there are two scales, like the volume and balance knobs on a stereo. One is right out here in front of us and it is called "Urges"* [It may also help to move ones hand as if it is moving up and down a numerical scale.] *It can go from 0 to 10. In the posture you're in, what brought you in here, was this: The urges are too high. It's way up here and I want it down here and I want you, the therapist, to help me do that, please. In other words you have been trying to pull the pointer down on this scale* [the therapist can use the other hand to pull down unsuccessfully on the anxiety hand]*. But now there's also another scale. It's been hidden. It is hard to see. This other scale can also go from 0 to 10.* [move the other hand up and down behind your head so you can't see it] *What we have been doing is gradually preparing the way so that we can see this other scale. We've been bringing it around to look at it.* [move the other hand around in front] *It is really the more important of the two, because it is this one that makes the difference and it is the only one that you can control. This second scale is called "Willingness." It refers to how open you are to experiencing your own experience when you experience it--without trying to manipulate it, avoid it, escape it, change it, and so on. When urges are up here at 10, and you're trying hard to control them, make it go down, make it go away, then you're unwilling to feel the urges. In other words, the Willingness scale is down at 0. But that is a terrible combination. It's like a ratchet or something. You know how a ratchet wrench works? When you have a ratchet set one way no matter how you turn the handle on the wrench it can only tighten the bolt. It's like that. When urges are high and willingness is low, the ratchet is in and the urges can't go down. It's as if when urges are high, and willingness drops down, the urges kind of lock into place. You turn the ratchet and no matter what you do with that tool, it drives it in tighter. So, what we need to do in this therapy is shift our focus from the urges scale to the willingness scale. You've been trying to control the urges for a long time, and it just doesn't work. It's not that you weren't clever enough; it simply doesn't work. Instead of doing that, we will turn our focus to the willingness scale. Unlike the urges scale, which you can't move around at will, the willingness scale is something you can set anywhere. It is not a reaction--not a feeling or a thought--it is a choice. You've had it set low. You came in here with it set low--in fact coming in here at all may initially have been a reflection of its low setting. What we need to do is get it set high. If you do this, if you set willingness high, I can guarantee you what will happen to urges. I'll tell you exactly what will happen and you can hold me to this as a solemn promise. If you stop trying to control urges, your urges will be low ...[pause] or ... high. I promise you! Swear. Hold me to it. And when they low, they will be low, until they are not low and then they will be high. And when they are high they will be high until they aren’t high anymore. Then they will be low again. ... I'm not teasing you. There just aren't good words for what it is like to have the willingness scale set high--these strange words are as close as I can get. I can say one thing for sure, though, and your experience says the same thing--if you want to know for sure where the urges scale will be, then there is something you can do. Just set willingness very, very low and sooner or later when anxiety starts up the ratchet will lock in and you will have plenty of urges. It will be very predictable. All in the name of getting it low. If you move the willingness scale up, then the urges are to move. Sometimes it will be low, and sometimes it will be high, and in both cases you will keep out of a useless and traumatic struggle that can only lead in one direction.*

The participant will not be clear on what *willingness* is and he/she will likely ask the therapist to explain how to be willing. The therapist will be most successful if she says, *“Willingness is a skill like playing a sport or riding a bike. I can give you general suggestions—like a coach might, but you are really going to have to practice this at home.”*

**Homework**

Ask the participant to practice the acceptance of urges (willingness to experience urges) at home. Ask them to practice willingness to experience urges with the first three urges experienced during the week and make a commitment to control viewing behavior in those three instances. Practice after the first three urges is recommended but not required as this makes the goal achievable and specific.

**Session 4**

**Fostering Cognitive Defusion: What are these urges anyway?**

**Objectives**

The objectives of this session are to review the assigned homework, evaluate the effectiveness of acceptance, to start working on cognitive defusion, and to make another behavioral commitment for behavior change and skills practice.

**Content**

Review the practice of the acceptance of urges (willingness to experience urges) at home. Discuss the specific details about any situations in which it was successful and point out any evidence of the control agenda.

Evaluate the effectiveness of acceptance by discussing the specific details of any situation in which acceptance may have been difficult. You should expect the participant to have had some difficulties, as acceptance without defusion is difficult, especially in the long-term.

*So it was hard, and you did it, but it seems like willingness can be hard sometimes. Perhaps this is just a partial solution to the problem and we need to keep looking at it.*

You can introduce the idea of defusion and review the idea of acceptance using the *Monster Tug-of-War* metaphor

*The situation you have been in is like being in a tug-of-war with a monster. It is big, ugly, and very strong. In between you and the monster is a pit, and so far as you can tell it is bottomless. If you lose this tug-of-war, you will fall into this pit and will be destroyed. So you pull and pull, but the harder you pull, the harder the monster pulls, and you edge closer and closer to the pit. The hardest thing to see is that our job here is not to win the tug-of-war. ..... Our job is to drop the rope.*

This is a review of what has occurred, and can become an important reminder of the need to let go of the struggle as you move through treatment and the participant shows evidence of resorting to the control agenda. The metaphor can be continued to introduce start the defusion work.

*Now that you have dropped the rope, maybe you can finally take a look at what you have been fighting for so long. Every time an urge shows up, you do everything you can not to have it, including acting on it, so I wonder if you even know what this monster looks like? I wonder if you are more afraid of what you think about the monster, in your mind, or of the monster itself. Maybe this is a good place to start, to take a good look at what we have been fighting for so long.*

Now you start the work on cognitive defusion. It is unlikely that the participant will understand this idea from a brief explanation or one or two experiential exercises. This will require several attempts, with each one creating more and more distance between the literal function of language and the participants actual experience. Be prepared to feel like the participant does not “get it” because it will be a gradual process, and you need to keep “chipping away” at the cognitive fusion.

At this point, a description of the role of language in human suffering and problems can help to start the defusion work. The *Your Mind Is Not Friend* intervention helps highlight the problem of self referential language and thought.

*You’ve may have guessed by now that I’m not a big fan of minds. It’s not that I don’t think minds are useful, it’s just that you can’t really live your life effectively between your ears. I’m pretty sure minds evolved to give us a more elaborate way of detecting threats to our survival and they probably helped organize early humans in ways that led to less killing, stealing, incest and so forth. One thing minds didn’t evolve for was to help humans feel good about themselves. You know, it’s kind of hard to imagine them sitting around a fire, contemplating their belly buttons, hugging and bonding. And, if you look at recent studies of natural thought processes, what you consistently see is that a large percentage of all mental content is negative in some way. We have minds that are built to produce negative content in the name of warning us or keeping us in line with the pack. We will have to address this paradox: Your mind is not your friend, and you can’t do without it.*

Being verbally knowledgeable and verbally right is powerfully and frequently reinforced within human culture. The arbitrariness of human language means that, once it is learned, it becomes relatively independent of immediate environmental support. The combination of these two factors leads to the indiscriminate use of language, often without the participant even being aware of it. The *Finding A Place To Sit Metaphor* helps make this point experientially.

T: “It is as if you needed a place to sit, and so you began describing a chair. Let’s say you gave a really detailed description of a chair. It’s a grey chair, and it has a metal frame, and it’s covered in fabric, and it’s a very sturdy chair. OK now can you sit in that description?”

C: “Well, no.”

T: “Hmmm. Maybe the description wasn’t detailed enough. What if I was able to describe the chair all the way down to the atomic level. Then could you sit in the description?”

C: “No.”

T: “Here’s the thing, and check your own experience: Hasn’t your mind been telling you things like the world is this way and that way and your problem is this and that, etcetera. Describe, describe. Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate. And all the while you’re getting tired. You need a place to sit. And your mind keeps handing you ever more elaborate descriptions of chairs. Then it says to you, “have a seat.” Descriptions are fine, but what we are looking for here is an experience, not a description of an experience. Minds can’t deliver experience, they only blab to us about our experience elsewhere. So we’ll let your mind describe away, and in the mean time you and I will look for a place to sit.”

Another useful strategy is to appeal to the clients’ own experience in areas where words are not only insufficient, but even detrimental.

*Some tasks are very well regulated by rules, such as finding one’s way to the grocery store--go to the first stop light, turn left, and so forth. However, for some other activities it is not at all helpful. Suppose we had a perfect description of swimming. We could describe its mechanics, even the feel of the water moving over the skin, but we would not then know how to swim. The only way to learn to swim is to get in the water.*

This awareness can be built upon experientially by asking the client to explain motor actions during therapy. For example, if the client picks up a pen, the therapist can ask for an explanation of how this is done. When the explanation is given (e.g., “reach for it with your hand”) the therapist can see if this works by telling her or her own hand to reach. Of course, the hand will not hear and will not reach. The behavior was nonverbal first and only then became verbally governed.

*Language itself claims to know how to do virtually everything, from reaching for a pen to developing a relationship. Verbal knowing rests atop nonverbal knowing so completely that an illusion is created that all knowledge is verbal knowledge. If we suddenly had all nonverbal knowledge removed from our repertoires, we would fall to the floor quite helpless.*

If time allows, you can close the session with the *Milk Milk* exercise to help the participant experience defusion from the literal functioning of language. It is a playful way to demonstrate that a literal, sequential, analytical context is required for language stimuli to have any literal (that is, derived) meaning.

T: “Let’s do a little exercise. It’s an eyes-open one. I’m going to ask you to say a word. Then you tell me what comes to mind. I want you to say the word, “Milk.” Say it nice.”

P: “Milk.”

T. “Good. Now what came to mind when you said that?”

P: “I have milk at home in the refrigerator.”

T: “OK. What else. What shows up when we say ‘milk?’”

P: “I picture it--white, a glass.”

T: “Good. What else?”

P: “I can taste it, sort of.”

T: “Exactly. And can you feel what it might feel like to drink a glass? Cold. Creamy.” Coats your mouth. Goes “glug, glug” as you drink it. Right?”

P: “Sure.”

T: “OK, so let’s see if this fits. What shot through your mind was things about actual milk and your experience with it. All that happened is that we made a strange sound --milk-- and lots of these things showed up. Notice that there isn’t any milk in this room. None at all. But milk was in the room psychologically. You and I were seeing it, tasting it, feeling it--yet only the word was actually here. Now, here is the little exercise, if you’re willing to try it. The exercise is a little silly, and so you might feel a little embarrassed doing it, but I am going to do the exercise with you so we can be silly together. What I am going to ask you to do is to say the word “milk”, out loud, rapidly, over-and-over again and then notice what happens. Are you willing to try it?”

P: “I guess so.”

T: “OK. Let’s do it. Say “milk” over and over again. [T and P say the word for one-two minutes, with the T periodically encouraging the P to keep it going, keep saying it out loud or to go faster]”

T: “OK, now stop. Where is the milk?”

P: “Gone (laughs).”

T: “Did you notice what happened to the psychological aspects of milk that were here a few minutes ago?”

P: “After about 40 times it disappeared. All I could hear was the sound. It sounded very strange--in fact I had a funny feeling that I didn’t even know what word I was saying for a few moments. It sounded more like a bird sound than a word.”

T: “Right. The creamy, cold, gluggy stuff just goes away. The first time you said it, it was as if milk was actually here, in the room. But all that really happened was that you said a word. The first time you said it, it was really meaning-full, it was almost solid. But when you said it again and again and again, you began to lose that meaning and the words began to also be just a sound.”

P: “That’s what happened.”

T: “Well, when you say things to yourself, in addition to any meaning sustained by the relation between those words and other things, isn’t it also true that these words are just words. The words are just smoke. There isn’t anything solid in them.”

This exercise demonstrates quite quickly that while literal meaning dominates in language it is not that hard to establish contexts in which literal meaning quickly weakens and almost disappears. To many “milk” is a very odd sound, considered (as it almost never is) simply as a sound. It has a funny quality to it, reminding people of sounds made by birds or other animals. These direct properties are so glossed over by its functional symbolic properties, that it is often a revelation to hear--just to hear--”milk,” perhaps for the first time since early childhood. This does not mean that milk has lost its literal meaning. Participants still have milk and the mammary secretions of cows in an equivalence class, though it may have loosened somewhat. What has happened is that the transfer of stimulus functions through that equivalence class has been greatly weakened.

A participant who is struggling with the urges to view pornography can be asked to do this exercise with the thoughts. It is a bit harder to get the effect with a complete sentence, but it can be done especially if the thought can be put in a few words. For example, shorten an urge to “I want it.” This sentence can then be stated as rapidly as possible over and over for a couple of minutes until it’s meaning dissolves. Once this is experienced, the thought now has two functions: it is referential and evaluative, and it is also just a string of auditory events. Ask the participant in the natural environment to practice actually experiencing “I want it” as a string of sounds, in addition to whatever literal meaning it has.

**Homework**

Ask the participant to practice applying the acceptance and defusion skills learned to this point by making another behavior commitment to change behavior. Typically, you should have them commit to reducing behavior on certain days, but still make it achievable and specific.

**Session 5-8**

**Viewing the Self as Context and Contact with the Present Moment**

**Objectives**

The objectives of these sessions are to continue to review the homework from the previous session(s), foster both acceptance and defusion, to introduce the idea of self as context, to help the participant contact the present moment, and to make another behavioral commitment for behavior change and skills practice.

**Content**

In this portion of treatment it is important to target these processes based on the needs and responses of the participant. The content for these three sessions is presented here as a reference for how to target each process, but it is expected that this will be done flexibly as opportunities arise. As you review the homework at the start of each session, the content of the participant’s experience should provide an idea of what to target.

Continue targeting cognitive defusion by using the following exercises and metaphors:

The *Passengers On The Bus Metaphor* is a core ACT intervention aimed at deliteralizing or defusing provocative psychological content through objectification.

*It’s as if there is a bus and you’re the driver. On this bus we’ve got a bunch of passengers. The passengers are thoughts, feelings, bodily states, memories, and other aspects of experience. Some of them are scary, and they’re dressed up in black leather jackets and they’ve got switchblade knives. What happens is, you’re driving along and the passengers start threatening you, telling you what you have to do, where you have to go. “You’ve got to turn left,” “you’ve got to go right,” etc. The threat that they have over you is that, if you don’t do what they say, they’re going to come up from the back of the bus.*

*It’s as if you’ve made deals with these passengers, and the deal is, “You sit in the back of the bus and scrunch down so that I can’t see you very often, and I’ll do what you say, pretty much.” Now what if one day you get tired of that and say, “I don’t like this! I’m going to throw those people off the bus!”You stop the bus, and you go back to deal with the mean-looking passengers. Except you notice that the very first thing you had to do was stop. Notice now, you’re not driving anywhere, you’re just dealing with these passengers. And plus, they’re real strong. They don’t intend to leave and you wrestle with them, but it just doesn’t turn out very successfully.*

*Eventually you go back to placating the passengers, to try and get them to sit way in the back again where you can’t see them. The problem with that deal is that, in exchange, you do what they ask in exchange for getting them out of your life. Pretty soon, they don’t even have to tell you, “Turn left”--you know as soon as you get near a left-turn the passengers are going to crawl all over you. Eventually you may get good enough that you can almost pretend that they’re not on the bus at all. You just tell yourself that left is the only direction you want to turn. However, when they eventually do show up, it’s with the added power of the deals that you’ve made with them in the past.*

*Now the trick about the whole thing is this: The power that the passengers have over you is 100% based on this: “If you don’t do what we say, we’re coming up and we’re making you look at us.” That’s it. It’s true that when they come up they look like they could do a whole lot more. They’ve got knives, chains, etc. It looks like you could be destroyed. The deal you make is to do what they say so they won’t come up and stand next to you and make you look at them. The driver (you) has control of the bus, but you trade off the control in these secret deals with the passengers. In other words, by trying to get control, you’ve actually given up control! Now notice that, even though your passengers claim they can destroy you if you don’t turn left, it has never actually happened. These passengers can’t make you do something against your will.*

You can continue to allude to the bus metaphor throughout defusion work. Questions such as, “Which passenger is threatening you now?” can help re-orient the practicing who is practicing emotional avoidance in session.

The bus metaphor casts the relationship between a person and thoughts or feelings the way one might cast a social relationship between a person and bullies. This reframe is useful as a motivative augmental for seeking freedom from literal language. Some of our past efforts to gain social independence can be used to stimulate a similar independence from the hegemony of our own verbal systems: our own minds. However limited our social independence is, independence from our minds is usually much less. This makes sense in another way since the source of verbal relations, after all, is dominantly social and external in any case. The bus metaphor also nicely structures how the illusion of language works and what the cost is in terms of loss of life direction.

Continue to target defusion using the *Having a Thought vs. Buying a Thought* exercise. The exercise helps distinguish between thoughts observed as thoughts and thoughts bought as beliefs or concepts.

T: “I’d like us to do an exercise to show how quickly thoughts pull us away from experience when we buy them. All I’m going to ask you to do is to think whatever thoughts you think and to allow them to flow, one thought after another. The purpose of the exercise is to notice when there’s a shift from looking at your thoughts, to looking from your thoughts. You will know that has happened when the parade stops or you are down in the parade or the exercise has disappeared. I’m going to ask you to imagine that there are little people, soldiers, marching out of your left ear marching down in front of you in a parade. You are up on the reviewing stand, watching the parade go by. Each soldier is carrying a sign, and each thought you have is a sentence written on one of these signs. Some people have a hard time putting thoughts into words, and they see thoughts as images. If that applies to you, put each image on a sign being carried by the soldiers. Certain people don’t like the image of soldiers, and there is an alternative image I have used in that case: leaves floating by in a stream. You can pick the one that seems best.”

P: “The soldiers seem fine.”

T: “OK. In a minute I am going to ask you to get centered, and begin to let your thoughts go by written on placards carried by the soldiers. Now here is the task. The task is simply to watch the parade go by without having it stop and without you jumping down into the parade. You are just supposed to let it flow. It is very unlikely, however, that you will be able to do this without interruption. And this is the key part of this exercise. At some point you will have the sense that the parade has stopped, or that you have lost the point of the exercise, or that you are down in the parade instead of being on the reviewing stand. When that happens, I would like you to back up a few seconds and see if you can catch what you were doing right before the parade stopped. Then go ahead and put your thoughts on the placards again, until the parade stops a second time, and so on. The main thing is to notice when it stops for any reason and see if you can catch what happened right before it stopped. OK?”

P: “OK.”

T: “One more thing. If the parade never gets going at all and you start thinking “it’s not working.” or “I’m not doing it right” then let that thought be written on a placard and send it down into the parade. OK. Now let’s get comfortable, close your eyes, and get centered. [Help the P relax for 1 or 2 minutes]. Now allow the parade to begin. You stay up on the reviewing stand and let the parade flow. If it stops or you find yourself in it, note that, see if you can notice what you were doing right before that happened, get back up on the reviewing stand, and let the parade begin to flow again. OK, let’s begin. ... Whatever you think, just put it on the cards. .... [for about two to three minutes, allow the P to work. Don’t under do it time-wise, and use very few words. Try to read the P reaction and other cues and add a very few comments as needed, like “just let it flow and notice when it stops.”. Don’t dialogue with the P, however. If the P opens his or her eyes calmly ask that they be closed and the exercise be continued. If a P starts to talk, gently suggest that even that thought be put on a placard, saying something like, “we will talk more about this when the exercise is finished, but for now there is no need to talk with me. Whatever you think you want to say, let that thought be written down and let it march by too.”]. Ok, now we will let the last few soldiers go by, and we will begin to think about coming back to this room [Help the P reorient for 1 or 2 minutes]. Welcome back.”

P: “Interesting.”

T: “What did you observe?”

P: “Well, at first it was easy. I was watching them go by. Then I suddenly noticed that I was lost and had been for about 15 seconds.”

T: “As if you were off the reviewing stand entirely.”

P: “Right. The whole exercise had stopped.”

T: “Did you notice what had been happening right before everything stopped.”

P: “Well, I was thinking thoughts about how my body was feeling and these were being written on the cards. And then I started thinking about my work situation and the meeting with the boss I have Friday. I was thinking about how I might be anxious telling him some of the negative things that have been going on, and next thing you know it’s a while later and I’m still thinking about it.”

T: “So, when the thought first showed up “I’m going to be meeting with the boss next Friday” was that thought written on a placard.”

P: “At first it was, for a split second. Then it wasn’t.”

T: “Where was it instead?”

P: “No where in particular. I was just thinking it.”

T: “Or it was just thinking you. Can we say it that way? At some point you had a thought that hooked you. You bought it and started looking *at* the world *from* that thought. You let it structure the world. So you started actually working out what might happen, what you will do, and so on, and at that point the parade has absolutely stopped. There is now no perspective on it--you can’t even see the thought clearly. Instead you are dealing with the meeting with the boss.”

P: “It was like that. It was.”

T: “Did you get that thought back on the placard?”

P: “Well, at some point I remembered I was supposed to let the thoughts flow so I wrote the thought out and let a soldier carry it by. Then things went OK for a while until I started thinking that this whole exercise is kind of silly.”

T: “And did you just notice that thought, or did it think you.”

P: “I bought it I guess.”

T: “What happened to the parade?”

P: “It stopped.”

T: “Right. And check and see if this isn’t so. Every time the parade stopped, it was because you bought a thought.”

P: “It fits.”

T: “I haven’t met anyone who can let the parade go by 100% of the time. That is not realistic. The point is just to get a feel for what it is like to be hooked by your thoughts and what it is like to step back once you’re hooked.”

It is useful to encourage participants to engage in awareness exercises that can help the client to practice observing the contents of consciousness. Several exercises that emphasize the noticing of conscious content, rather than struggle with the contents, involve writing the contents on cards and having the client do various things with the cards.

One more defusion exercise to demonstrate to role of language in evaluation is the *Bad Cup* metaphor.

*There are things in our language that draw us into needless psychological battles and it is good to get a sense of how that happens so that we can learn to avoid them. One of the worst tricks language plays on us is in the area of evaluations. For language to work at all, things have to be what we say they are, when we’re engaging in the kind of talk that is naming and describing. Otherwise, we couldn’t talk to each other. If we describe something accurately, the labels can’t change until the form of that event changes. If I say “here is a cup” I can’t then turn around and claim it isn’t a cup but instead is a race car, unless I somehow change the cup. For example, I could mash it into raw materials and use it as part of a sports car. But without a change in form, this is a cup (or whatever else we agree to call it)--the label shouldn’t change willy nilly.*

*Now consider what happens with evaluative talk. Suppose I say “This is a good cup” or “this is a beautiful cup.” It sounds the same as if we are saying “This is a ceramic cup” or “this is an 8 ounce cup.” But are they really the same? Suppose all the living creatures on the planet die tomorrow. This cup is still sitting on the table. If it was “a ceramic cup” before everyone died, it is still a ceramic cup. But is it still a good cup or a beautiful cup? Without anyone to have such opinions, the opinions are gone, because good or beautiful was never in the cup but instead was in the interaction between the person and the cup. But notice how the structure of language hides this difference. It looks the same, as if “good” is the same kind of description as “ceramic”. Both seem to add information about the cup. The problem is that if you let good be that kind of descriptor, it means that good has to be what the cup is, in the same way that ceramic is. That kind of description can’t change until the form of the cup changes. And what if someone else says “No, that is a terrible cup!” If I say it is good, and you say it is bad, there is a disagreement that seemingly has to be resolved. One piece has to win, and one piece has to lose: both can’t be right. On the other hand, if good is just an evaluation or a judgment, something you’re doing with the cup rather than something that is in the cup, it makes a big difference. Two opposing evaluations can easily coexist. They do not reflect some impossible state of affairs in the world--the cup is both ceramic and metallic. Rather they reflect the simple fact that events can be evaluated as good or bad depending on the perspective taken. And, of course, it is not unimaginable that one person could take more than one perspective. Neither evaluation needs to win out as the one concrete fact.*

Continue fostering acceptance by identifying moments in session where it appears that the participant is avoiding some negative emotion. This can be immediately identified and compared to how they have responded to urges to view.

You can also encourage the practice of acceptance as you have the participant describe their practice during the week. Reviewing the details of viewing experiences and the context in which they occurred can be somewhat awkward and embarrassing. You can identify this and ask the client to make a place for these private events and continue discussing the content of their practice. You can model acceptance as you acknowledge the awkwardness with a willingness to engage the treatment.

Introduce the idea of the self as context using the *Chessboard Metaphor* to identify the distinction between content and the observing self.

*It’s as if there is a chess board that goes out infinitely in all directions. It’s covered with different colored pieces, black pieces and white pieces. They work together in teams, like in chess--the white pieces fight against the black pieces. You can think of your thoughts and feelings and beliefs as these pieces; they sort of hang out together in teams too. For example, “bad” feelings (like anxiety, depression, resentment) hang out with “bad” thoughts and “bad” memories. Same thing with the “good” ones. So it seems that the way the game is played is that we select which side we want to win. We put the “good” pieces (like thoughts that are self-confident, feelings of being in control, etc.) on one side, and the “bad” pieces on the other. Then we get up on the back of the white queen and ride to battle, fighting to win the war against anxiety, depression, thoughts about using drugs, whatever. It’s a war game. But there’s a logical problem here, and that is that from this posture, huge portions of yourself are your own enemy. In other words, if you need to be in this war, there is something wrong with you. And since it appears that you’re on the same level as these pieces, they can be as big or even bigger than you are‑even though these pieces are in you. So somehow, even though it is not logical, the more you fight the bigger they get. If it is true that “if you are not willing to have it, you’ve got it” then as you fight them they get more central to your life, more habitual, more dominating, and more linked to every area of living. The logical idea is that you will knock enough of them off the board that you eventually dominate them--except you experience tells you that the exact opposite happens. Apparently, the black pieces can’t be deliberately knocked off the board. So the battle goes on. You feel hopeless, you have a sense that you can’t win, and yet you can’t stop fighting. If you’re on the back of that white horse, fighting is the only choice you have because the black pieces seem life threatening. Yet living in a war zone is no way to live.*

As the particpant connects to this metaphor, it can be turned to the issue of the self.

T: “Now, let me ask you to think about this carefully. In this metaphor, suppose you aren’t the chess pieces. Who are you?”

C: “Am I the player?”

T: “That may be what you have been trying to be. Notice, though, that a player has a big investment in how this war turns out. Besides, who are you playing against? Some other player? So suppose you’re not that either.”

C: “…. Am I the board?”

T: “It’s useful to look at it that way. Without a board, these pieces have no place to be. The board holds them. Like what would happen to your thoughts if you weren’t there to be aware that you thought them? The pieces need you. They cannot exist without you, but you contain them, they don’t contain you. Notice that if you’re the pieces, the game is very important; you’ve got to win, your life depends on it. But if you’re the board, it doesn’t matter if the war stops or not. The game may go on, but it doesn’t make any difference to the board. As the board, you can see all the pieces, you can hold them, you are in intimate contact with them and you can watch the war being played out in your consciousness, but it doesn’t matter. It takes no effort.”

Once the participant has been introduced to the metaphor, it is useful to reinvigorate it periodically by simply asking the participant, “are you at the piece level or at the board level right now”? All the arguments, reasons, and so on that the participant brings in are all examples of pieces and thus this metaphor can help defuse the participant from such reactions. The notion of board level can be used frequently to connote a stance in which the participant is looking *at* psychological content, rather than looking *from* psychological content. The point is that thoughts, feelings, sensations, emotions, memories and so on are pieces: they are not you. This is immediately experientially available, but the fusion with psychological content can overwhelm this awareness. Metaphors such as the chessboard metaphor help make the issue concrete.

Continue to help the participant understand the idea of self as context using the *Observer Exercise*.

*We are going to do an exercise now that is a way to begin to try to experience that place where you are not your programming. There is no way anyone can fail at the exercise; we’re just going to be looking at whatever you are feeling or thinking so whatever comes up if just right. Close your eyes, get settled into your chair and follow my voice. If you find yourself wandering, just gentling come back to the sound of my voice. For a moment now, turn your attention to yourself in this room. Picture the room. Picture yourself in this room and exactly where you are. Now begin to go inside your skin, and get in touch with your body. Notice how you are sitting in the chair. See if you can notice exactly the shape that is made but the parts of your skin that touch the chair. Notice any bodily sensations that are there. As you see each one, just sort of acknowledge that feeling and allow your conscious to move on.* [pause] *Now notice any emotions you are having and if you have any just acknowledge them* [pause]*. Now get in touch with your thoughts and just quietly watch them for a few moments* [pause]*. Now I want you to notice that as you noticed these things a part of you noticed them. You noticed those sensations ... those emotions ... those thoughts. At that part of you we will call the “observer you.” There is a person in here, behind those eyes, that is are of what I am saying right now. And it is the same person you’ve been your whole life. In some deep sense this observer you is the you that you call you.*

*I want you to remember something that happened last summer. Raise your finger when you have an image in mind. Good. Now just look around. Remember all the things that were happening then. Remember the sights ... The sounds ... Your feelings ... and as you do that see if you can notice that you were there then noticing what you were noticing. See if you can catch the person behind your eyes who saw, and heard, and felt. You were there then, and you are here now. I’m not asking you to believe this. I’m not making a logic point. I am just asking you to note the experience of being aware and check and see if it isn’t so that in some deep sense the you that is here now was there then. The person aware of what you are aware of is here now and was there then. See if you can notice the essential continuity--in some deep sense, at the level of experience, not of belief, you have been you your whole life.*

*I want you to remember something that happened when you were a teenager. Raise your finger when you have an image in mind. Good. Now just look around. Remember all the things that were happening then. Remember the sights ... The sounds ... Your feelings ... Take your time. And when you are clear about what was there see if you just for a second catch that there was a person behind your eyes then who saw, and heard, and felt all of this. You were there then too, and see if it isn’t true--as an experienced fact, not a belief‑that there is an essential continuity between the person aware of what you are aware of now and the person who was aware of what you were aware of as a teenager in that specific situation. You have been you your whole life.*

*Finally, remember something that happened when you were a fairly young child, say around age six or seven. Raise your finger when you have an image in mind. Good. Now just look around again. See what was happening. See the sights ... hear the sounds ... feel your feelings ... and then catch the fact that you were there seeing, hearing, and feeling. Notice that you were there behind your eyes. You were there then, and you are here now. Check and see if in some deep sense the “you” that is here now was there then. The person aware of what you are aware of is here now and was there then.*

*You have been you your whole life. Everywhere you’ve been, you’ve been there noticing. This is what I mean by the “observer you.” And from that perspective or point of view I want you to look at some areas of living. Let’s start with your body. Notice how your body is constantly changing. Sometimes it is sick and sometimes it is well. It may be rested or tired. It may be strong or weak. You were once a tiny baby, but your body grew. You may have even have had parts of your body removed, like in an operation. Your cells have died and literally almost every cell in your body was not there as a teenager, or even last summer. Your bodily sensations come and go. Even as we have spoken they have changed. So if all this is changing and yet the you that you call you has been there your whole life that must mean that while you have a body, as a matter of experience and not of belief, you do not experience yourself to be just your body. So just notice your body now for a few moments, and as you do this, every so often notice you are the one noticing.* [give the client time to do this]

*Now let’s go to another area: your roles. Notice how many roles you have or have had. Sometimes I’m in the role of a* (fit these to client, e.g., “mother... or a friend... or a daughter... or a wife... sometimes I’m a respected worker... other times I’m a leader... or a follower”... etc.)*. In the world of form I’m in some role all the time. If I were to try not to, then I’d be playing the role of not playing a role. Even now part of me is playing a role... the client role. Yet all the while notice that you are also present. The part of me you call “you”... is watching and aware of what you are aware of. And in some deep sense that “you” does not change. So if your roles are constantly changing, and yet the you that you call you has been there your whole life, it must be that while you have roles, you do not experience yourself to be your roles. Do not believe this. This is not a matter of belief. Just look and notice the distinction between what you are looking at, and the you that is looking.*

*Now let’s go to another area: emotions. Notice how your emotions are constantly changing. Sometimes you feel love and sometimes hatred, calm and then tense, joy-sorrowful, happy-sad. Even now you may be experiencing emotions. . .interest, boredom, relaxation. Think of things you have liked, and don’t like any longer; of fears that you once had that now are resolved. The only thing you can count on with emotions is that they will change. Though a wave of emotion comes, it will pass in time. And yet while these emotions come and go, notice that in some deep sense that “you” does not change. That must be that while you have emotions, you do not experience yourself to be just your emotions. Allow yourself to realize this as an experienced event, not as a belief. In some very important and deep way you experience yourself as a constant. You are you through it all. So just notice your emotions for a moment and as you do notice also that you are notice them* [Leave a brief period of silence]

*Now let’s turn to a most difficult area. Your own thoughts. Thoughts are difficult because they tend to hook us and pull us up to piece level. If that happens, just come back to the sound of my voice. Notice how your thoughts are constantly changing. You used to be ignorant--then you went to school and learned new thought. You have gained new ideas, and new knowledge. Sometimes you think about things one way and sometimes another. Sometimes your thoughts may make little sense. Sometimes they seemingly come up automatically, from out of nowhere. They are constantly changing. Look at your thoughts even since you came in today and notice how many different thoughts you have had. And yet in some deep way the you that knows what you think is not changing. So that must mean that while you have thought, you do not experience yourself to be just your thoughts. Do not believe this. Just notice it. And notice even as you realize this, that your stream of thoughts will continue. And you may get caught up with them. And yet in the instant that you realize that, you also realize that a part of you is standing back, watching it all. So now watch your thoughts for a few moments--and as you do notice also that you are notice them* [Leave a brief period of silence]

*So as a matter of experience and not of belief you are not just your body... your roles ... your emotions ... your thoughts. These things are the content of your life, while you are the arena...the context...the space in which they unfold. As you see that, notice that the things you’ve been struggling with, and trying to change are not you anyway. No matter how this war goes you will be there, unchanged. See if you can take advantage of this connection to let go just a little bit, secure in the knowledge that you have been you through it all, and that you need not have such an investment in all this psychological content as a measure of your life. Just notice the experiences in all the domains that show up and as you do notice that you are still here, being aware of what you are aware of* [Leave a brief period of silence]

*Now again picture yourself in this room. And now picture the room. Picture* (describe the room)*. And when you are ready to come back into the room, open your eyes.*

Encourage contact with the present moment by identifying the ACT processes in the moment that they are occurring. You can also identity thoughts about the future or the past as they occur in the context of treatment and help the client defuse the literal function of these thoughts. Mindfulness exercises like the *Observing Self* exercise can also help the participant make contact with the present moment.

**Homework**

At the end of each session, ask the participant to practice applying all of the skills learned to this point by making more behavioral commitments to change behavior. The goals should be achievable and specific, and eventually they should approach their initial treatment goal.

**Session 9**

**Values Clarification**

**Objectives**

The objectives of this session are to review the homework from the previous session, target any of the ACT processes as deemed appropriate, and to present the idea of values.

**Content**

As you review the homework from the previous session, you will get a good idea of any processes that may need further work. Use any exercises or metaphors that may have not been used or could be reviewed.

Values work is based on the assumption that the significance of values can influence behavior by providing a way to connect immediate acts with long-term consequences. In other words, personal values provide a purpose for the behavior. The identification and clarification of values can provide a stronger purpose for immediate behavior change because it links a difficult behavior with a desired long-term outcome.

Values work can be broken down into a series of steps for easier implementation. When familiarity with these procedures increases, one will find it easy to increase motivation by linking therapy procedures to valued ends without working through all of the following steps. Nonetheless, the following steps are useful for conducting a full session on values clarification. The first four steps will be present in this session, and the three remaining steps will be reviewed in the next session.

1. Creating Distance from Social Rules

Behavior is under many sources of control. The type of employment chosen may be for financial compensation, benefits, prestige, ease of the job, hours worked, enjoyment, or the meaning and importance of the work. In most cases it is the combination of many of these areas that helps us select our occupations. The exact reasons that different areas are important to each of us are hard to determine, but there is a distinction between choices that are made based on rules of how we should behave and choices made freely based on the process of natural learning. Values chosen based on social rules will likely be less effective at maintaining behavior than values that are naturally important to the participant. Naturally important values are more reinforcing.

The first step in values clarification is to help the participant distinguish between choices based on rules of the way things “should be” and choices that are freely made. For example, how many people would attend college or graduate school if nobody ever knew you had done so? A question such as this illuminates the social approval that partially supports the decision to attend college or graduate school. The amount that income affects college attendance could similarly be illuminated by asking, “Would you attend college if it did not increase your income?” No particular type of motivation is more appropriate than any other, but awareness of the source of the motivation can help foster choices that are more in line with the participant’s values rather than social pressures. For example, if the participant finds that she is only attending college to please her parents or that she has chosen a career only to make more money, she may decide not to pursue this value or might benefit from finding the true value behind schooling. Participants should be able to freely choose between options even when there are external factors influencing the decision. Clarification of the sources of influence allows for choices that are more guided by values.

2. Defining Values as a Concept

The term *values* has many different meanings in psychology. In this context it refers to areas of life that are important to the participant. Values can never be achieved; one can always more fully pursue a value, and at any point it has been well pursued, there are additional opportunities to work on that value. For example, the value of being a good parent can never be achieved; one can always be a better parent and there will always be additional opportunities to do so. Values are different than goals; goals are steps that are consistent with values. Even though society may put greater emphasis on some values over others, in therapy, the importance of particular values is chosen by the participant and not judged by the therapist (unless the therapist believes the value was not chosen freely). The participant is welcome to value or not value any area that she chooses. Values can be described to the participant in the following fashion:

*Values are areas of life that you really care about. A value can never be achieved like a goal; it can only be worked towards. For example, someone who values being a good parent will never achieve the status of “good parent.” Once the parent has done well, such as helping the child do well in school, there will be additional opportunities to be a good parent. Helping the child do well in school is a good example of a goal. Goals are useful as steps in the service of values. Values are often compared to a lighthouse in a storm. The light tells the sailor which way to steer the ship, just as values are useful for telling you which direction to go in life. You get to pick your values. There are no right or wrong choices here—these are not my* [the therapist’s]*, your parent’s, or your friend’s values—and you are welcome to change them at any time.*

3. Defining Personal Values

There are an infinite number of areas of life that people can value, and each value means something different to each person. In many cases, people pursue values without thinking about what the value means to them or how they would really like to behave. In some cases the same value may have different functions for different people, (e.g., someone may be a doctor because it pays well and someone else may be a doctor to help the sick, or someone can value both at the same time). This phase of values training aims to help clarify what the person cares about in a number of areas in life.

Table 1 helps participants identify and clarify their values in nine major areas of life. This list is not exhaustive, but includes areas that many people find important. In this phase of values clarification, participants are asked to think about, discuss, and write about what they care about in the areas listed in the table. Participants are taught to select what they really care about in each area—as though nobody would see what is written. The participant is also welcome to write that she has no value in a particular area. This list is then discussed with the therapist.

Table 1. Values Clarification Exercise

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Area | Description |
| Intimate Relationships  | What kind of person would you like to be in the relationship? What would the relationship be like? What is your role in the relationship? |
| Family Relationships | Describe the type of brother/sister, son/daughter, father/mother you would like to be. What would the relationship be like? How would you want to treat others? |
| Social Relationships  | What does it mean to be a good friend? What kind of friends do you want? How would you treat your friends? What is an ideal friendship like for you? |
| Career and Employment | What type of work would you like to do? Why does it appeal to you? What kind or worker would you like to be? What kind of relationships would you like to have with your coworkers or your employer? |
| Personal Growth and Development  | What do you want to be able to do? What do you want to be like? Would you like to pursue a formal education? Specialized training? An informal education? Why does this appeal to you? |
| Recreation and Leisure | What type of hobbies, sports, or leisure activities would you like to be involved in? Why do these things appeal to you? |
| Spirituality | What does spirituality mean to you? (It doesn’t have to be any kind of organized religion.) Is this an important part of life for you? What would it be like? |
| Citizenship | What is your role in the community? What groups would you like to be a part of? What volunteer work would you do? What appeals to you in these areas? |
| Health | What do you value in your physical health? What issues are important to you (e.g., sleep, diet, exercise)? |

4. Choosing Values

The issue of choice is purposefully included in the discussion of values. Choice is defined as a selection amongst alternatives that is not necessarily done for reasons. Reasons are avoided because there are always reasons for or against any selection and the participant can get bogged down in whether or not pursuing a value is the “correct” decision. Whereas, a choice can be made while the participant is uncertain if the choice is “correct,” or choices can be made that are inconsistent with reasons. The impact of rules, social pressures, and pressures from the therapist (as well as many other pressures) needs to be decreased because they get in the way of value selection and the pursuit of values. For example, a participant might value romantic relationships, but could reason himself out of pursuing one because he could “get hurt.” The participant is taught to simply *choose* to pursue that value regardless of the reasons for or against it.

Choosing values is conducted after they are defined so there is clarity to the choice being made. In this phase of values clarification the participant declares that the values listed are indeed his and ranks the level of importance that is associated with each value. As described by Hayes et al. (1999), each one of these areas is ranked on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 = not at all important, and 10 = very important). Again, participants are reminded that they are welcome to rate the areas however they choose. Therapists should try to create a therapeutic context where participants feel welcome to be honest about their values.

**Homework**

Ask the client to complete the personal inventory of values. Print table 1 as a guide for the inventory and suggest that they write down the inventory. Also ask the participant to continue practicing all of the skills learned to this point by making more behavioral commitments to change behavior. The goals should be achievable and specific, and should now be fairly consistent with the initial treatment goal.

**Session 10**

**Committed Action**

**Objectives**

The objectives of this session are to review the homework from the previous session, continue the presentation of the values work, and link the behavior change commitments to values.

**Content**

Review the assigned homework and behavioral success. The behavioral report will give you a good idea of any process work that may need to occur throughout the session. Review the content of the values inventory and clarify any cases where the participant’s values may need to be more focused or if they are too much like goals. Continue the values work using the following steps.

1. Determining Consistency of Values and Current Actions

After participants have defined their values and rated the importance of each area, they assess the consistency between their current actions and their corresponding values. Participants are asked to look at how they defined each of the values and then rate how consistent their current actions are with their values on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 = not at all consistent and 10 = completely consistent). The function of this phase of therapy is not to make participants feel like failures, but to motivate and clarify areas that would likely benefit from additional attention. If the participant rates a value as very high, but rates his behavioral consistency with that value as very low, then a treatment target is clarified. Areas where the participant is behaving consistently with her values are less of a treatment target.

2. Choosing Immediate Goals that Are Consistent with Values

Based on the results from the previous step, participants are assisted in defining goals that are consistent with their values. Immediate goals are usually set in areas where participants are behaving inconsistently with values. There are an infinite number of ways that behavior can be altered to be more consistent with the stated value, and the link from each value to the specific goal should be clarified for the participant.

In this phase of values clarification just about any method of behavior therapy or behavior change procedures are acceptable, as long as they are done in the service of the participant’s values. A very commonly used procedure is to break down values into manageable steps of increasing difficulty. For example, if a parent values being a good mother—defined as being there for her son and supporting his growth—this might involve the following steps: (1) signing her son up for an activity he has wanted to participate in, (2) helping him with homework for 20 minutes each night, and (3) taking him out to do something enjoyable. These are all actions that would be considered consistent with the participant’s value of being a good parent.

3. Behaving in Accordance with One’s Values

The final step involves behaving in accordance with these values. This is done in the form of specific exercises that are agreed upon in session and also as opportunities present themselves outside of session. The participant should state an action that would be consistent with a value and engage in it between sessions. The idea is that a commitment to engage in the behavior is made prior to engaging in it and that the participant is responsible for achieving it between sessions. After the participant begins completing tasks with little difficulty, the need to commit to the tasks can be removed and the value itself can provide the motivation to engage in the tasks.

As you finish the values work, use any remaining time in the session to address any ACT processes that may need further work.

**Homework**

Ask the participant to continue practicing all of the skills learned to this point by making more behavioral commitments to change behavior. This practice should now be linked to the values work of the previous two sessions. The goals should be achievable and specific, and should now be fairly consistent with the initial treatment goal.

**Session 11**

**Review**

**Objectives**

The objectives of this session are to review the homework from the previous session and review any content from the six ACT processes that still need to be addressed.

**Content**

Review the assigned homework and behavioral success. The behavioral report will give you a good idea of any process work that may need to occur throughout the session.

**Homework**

Ask the participant to continue practicing all of the skills learned to this point by making more behavioral commitments to change behavior. This practice should now be linked to the values work of the previous two sessions. The goals should be achievable and specific, and should now be consistent with the initial treatment goal.

**Session 12**

**Termination**

**Objectives**

The objectives of this session are review the homework from the previous session, to review any materials/processes that may need further attention, to summarize the treatment, to discuss relapse management, to discuss the role of termination in the change process, and to recommend resources for continued ACT work.

**Content**

As you review the homework from the previous session, you will be able to identify any materials/processes that you could target in this last session.

Summarize the treatment using the *Joe The Bum Metaphor.*

*Imagine that you got a new house and you invited all the neighbors over to a housewarming party. Everyone is invited in the whole neighborhood--you even put up a sign at the supermarket. So all the neighbors show up, the party’s going great, and here comes Joe-the-bum, who lives behind the supermarket in the trash dumpster. He’s stinky and smelly and you think, “God, why did he show up?” But you did say on the sign, Everyone’s welcome. Can you see that it’s possible for you to welcome him, and really, fully, do that without liking that he’s there? You can welcome him even though you don’t think well of him. You don’t have to like him. You don’t have to like the way he smells, or his life style, or his clothing. You may be embarrassed about the way he’s dipping into the punch or the finger sandwiches. Your opinion of him, your evaluation of him is absolutely distinct from your willingness to have him as a guest in your home.*

*Now you could also decide that even though you said everyone was welcome, in reality he’s not welcome. But as soon as you do that, the party changes. Now you have to be at the front of the house, guarding the door so he can’t come back in. Or if you say, OK, you’re welcome, but you don’t really mean it, you only mean that he’s welcome as long as he stays in the kitchen and doesn’t mingle with the other guests, then you’re going to have to be constantly making him do that, and your whole party will be about that. Meanwhile, life’s going on, the party’s going on, and you’re off guarding the bum. It’s just not life-enhancing. It’s not much like a party. It’s a lot of work. What the metaphor is about, of course, is all the feelings and memories and thoughts that show up that you don’t like; they’re just more bums at the door. The issue is the posture you take with regards to your own stuff. Are they welcome? Can you choose to welcome them in, even though you don’t like the fact they came? If not, what’s the party going to be like?*

Discuss the use of the ACT processes in relapse management.

Discuss the role of termination in the change process as just another step as the participant continues their journey.

*Imagine that we both have been climbing separate mountains and I just came over and climbed with you for a while. We have climbed together and learned a lot, but now it is time for me to go back and climb my mountain. You now have some important skills that will help you as you continue to climb on your own.*

Recommend the self-help workbook, *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life* (by Steven C. Hayes & Spencer Smith), as a resource for the participant to review the treatment and continue the work on their own.