# ACT Guide Coaching Protocol

## Your role as a peer-support coach

The goal of coaching is to increase users’ engagement with the online ACT Guide program. There are several components to engagement, including adherence (completing the program in a timely manner), using the program to its greatest capacity (e.g., following through when the program prompts for written responses), and applying learned content in real-life contexts (e.g., completing “homework” assigned by the program). Out of these facets of engagement, adherence is the most critical for coaches to support.

As a coach, your job is to facilitate greater engagement with your assigned participants (the fellow college students that you coach), either through weekly phone calls or through briefer text messages, depending on the condition that the participant has been assigned to. Your job is *not* to provide therapy. While therapists may introduce new concepts and strategies and discuss personal problems in order to improve their clients’ mental health, an ACT Guide coach will only use concepts and strategies presented in this protocol in order to improve participants’ engagement with the ACT Guide program. Coaches may additionally provide motivational support, but focus should be maintained on participants’ use, understanding of, and experience with ACT Guide.

## Adherence: Reasons why users don’t engage

The most common reason why some users who start ACT Guide do not experience benefits is that they haven’t used it enough. Only 31% of USU students who sign-up for ACT Guide complete the welcome module, and only 29% of USU students who complete the welcome module get to module 3. Thus, only 9% of students who sign-up get through at least a quarter of the program, with even less completing subsequent modules and the program in full. This is why adherence is the most critical facet of engagement, and what coaching primarily seeks to impact. These are some of the most common reasons why students might not adhere to the program:

Table 1. Potential barriers to ACT Guide

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What might get in the way of using ACT Guide?** | **Prevalence** |
| Not having enough time | 72% |
| Not feeling motivated to use the program | 59% |
| Forgetting to use the program | 58% |
| Feeling stressed, sad, anxious, or other difficult emotions | 47% |
| Getting distracted while using the program | 46% |
| Putting off using the program | 44% |
| Being unsure of whether the program will help me | 37% |

While coaching may not prevent or solve all of these problems, research suggests that it may help. Coaching adds a human support element to self-help which can help keep users accountable, tailor the program experience to the user, and invigorate program content through social contact. The coaching you will provide will be further augmented by ACT principles and strategies embedded into the portions of the coaching protocol that follow. This will allow users to experience ACT “in action” in order to overcome barriers to engagement like the ones listed above, while simultaneously modeling how ACT skills can be useful for getting “unstuck”.

# Guidelines and Strategies for ACT Consistent Coaching

So that coaching does not contradict what participants are learning through ACT Guide, it is important to be conscientious of the messages and assumptions you are conveying through your speech as a coach. Some general guidelines as well as strategies specific to working with ACT are presented below.

*Open-oriented guidelines*

1. **Respond to a participant’s unhelpful thoughts with defusion.** Unhelpful thoughts can include ones like “I’m too stupid for this” or “This will never work out”. A knee jerk reaction to hearing unhelpful thoughts may be reassurance (“You’re not stupid!”) or rational logic (“What makes you think you’re stupid?”), however defusion is a more ACT consistent approach. Although it is a seemingly practical thought, one unhelpful thought you might hear the most as a coach is “I can’t do ACT Guide because I don’t have enough time.” Even if it is likely true that time is a precious limited resource for the participant, it is also likely true that this thought (rather than the time constraint itself) is stopping the participant from doing the valued action of using ACT Guide, making this thought a prime target for defusion.

Reflecting with defused language can help the participant step back from this thought, for example saying “So you’re having the thought that you don’t have enough time.” This principle can also be taught as a quick strategy, for example by saying “what if you just added the label ‘I’m having the thought that’ to each of these thoughts right now.”

Another option is helping set a defused goal with the program, for example saying “what if you just tried out doing the program for 10 minutes today, even while your mind says ‘I can’t do that. I have too much to do’, just to play around with this idea of doing things even when your mind says you can’t.” By defusing the participant from the unhelpful thought, it becomes more apparent that the thought is simply a thought rather than absolute truth. For unhelpful thoughts regarding time concerns specifically, it is recommended to integrate some practical problem solving as well; read more on this in the general principles for coaching section. *For more information, review “Module 5: Being flexible” and “Module 6: Stepping back”*

1. **Be careful not to reinforce the idea that negative thoughts/feelings need to be eliminated before one can engage in valued actions/life.** One way to detect this in participants is if they use the word “but”. For example, a participant may say something like “I want to do ACT Guide, *but* I feel so overwhelmed.” Rather than reinforcing the idea that the feeling of being overwhelmed would need to be gone before they could use ACT Guide, for example by talking about how they might reduce their stress, you could present the idea of rephrasing the statement using “and”. A statement like “I want to do ACT Guide *and* I’m so overwhelmed” can help a participant take control of their actions despite what they are thinking or feeling. *For more information, review “Module 8: Carrying emotions with you”*

*Engaged-oriented guidelines*

1. **Instead of telling participants what they “should” do, use their values as a source of motivation.** When encouraging participants to use ACT Guide, using words like “should” or “have to” might naturally come up, for example “Maybe working on ACT Guide this week didn’t work out, but you *should* give it another try next week.” However, thinking in “shoulds” can be inconsistent with ACT’s focus on valued choice and defused thoughts, and thus can lead to participant’s missing out on seeing why the actions they do or want to do matter to them. Seeing an action as a “should” can also lead to avoidance. Try your best to navigate encouragement without using “should” statements, and instead orient to the participant’s values as a source of motivation.

For example, saying “Maybe working on ACT Guide this week didn’t work out, but I know that you chose to sign up for ACT Guide for a good reason and that something about it matters to you” to spark a discussion on how using ACT Guide connects to the participant’s values. Some examples of values that can be connected to ACT Guide include valuing health (ACT Guide was designed to improve mental health/functioning) or valuing family (ACT Guide teaches skills that can help the participant get back to spending time with people who matter), but be creative in identifying other ways to connect ACT Guide with other values. *For more information, review “Module 4: Finding vales” and “Module 11: Making commitments”*

1. **Remember that values and actions are the participant’s choice; don’t try to correct the participant or use language/tone that imposes what you think is the right answer.** For example, you might be discussing with the participant how they have applied what they learned about valued actions, and they cite getting drunk with friends as a valued action towards a commitment to strengthen their friendships. Even if you might disagree with getting drunk as a valued action, you can still validate the participant’s experience with a focus on them having connected an action with a value, as opposed to a focus on the action of getting drunk on its own. Remember that actions and values are ultimately every individual’s choice. If you impose your own thoughts on the “correct” actions/values, the participant may begin to fuse with your expectations, leading to thinking with “should” or “have to” statements.

# General Guidelines for Coaching

There are some general guidelines that should be kept in mind as you coach participants.

1. **Talk about actions as concrete and achievable goals as opposed to talking about actions in the abstract.** A participant talking about an action in the abstract might sound something like “I know I didn’t do the module yet, but I plan on doing it this week.” You can help the participant make this plan more concrete by turning it into a SMART goal. Remember that SMART goals are (1) specific, (2) measurable, (3) adaptable, (4) realistic, and (5) towards values. Review module 10 for more information.
2. **Be flexible to the participant when structuring your coaching calls or texts.** While the recommended duration of coaching calls is 10 to 15 minutes, the optimal duration for coaching calls is whatever serves the participant best. If the participant seems disengaged during calls, and using strategies to further engage them are ineffective, the best move might just be to offer shorter calls in which you briefly check-in on if they completed the module, and reinforce this if they did or offer to help problem-solve barriers if they didn’t. Similarly, if a participant is seems disengaged from coaching texts with you, for example offering only brief texts like “OK” or “Yea”, you can offer to keep your texts to just brief check-ins.
3. **But also manage coaching time appropriately.** If the participant is assigned to phone coaching, calls should be no more than 15 minutes. While it is encouraged to cover all elements of the coaching call, you can use your best judgement to decide how many questions to ask, or whether there is enough time to do the brief practice assignment together if the participant had not complete it before the coaching session (this is especially relevant if the participant completed two modules that week, but did not complete the practice assignment for either of them). Try not to spend too much time discussing any one topic or question. If there are only three minutes remaining for the call, and there is still plenty of content to cover, you can warn the participant about the time remaining and ask what they would be most interested in covering before wrapping up.
4. **Validate the participant’s experience without digging deep.** Validation does not have to look like asking more about what the participant shared with you. For example, if a participant shares that they have been sad about a breakup, you can say something like “It sounds like you’re feeling really sad about losing your relationship.” with a sympathetic tone and move on. Another way to provide validation is framing the participant’s experience or feeling as making sense given their circumstances, for instance “Of course you’d feel sad, you are going through a breakup.” You can additionally ask if they were able to use what they learned in ACT Guide to help them during this tough time. You should not “dig deeper” to show interest and sympathy for the participant, for example asking, “What happened during the breakup?” This can put you outside of the scope of your coaching responsibilities and take time away from covering planned items from the coaching agenda.
5. **Treat non-adherence compassionately, while still maintaining accountability.** If the participant did not complete modules or practice assignments, model curiosity as to why rather than asking why with a judgmental tone.
6. **Offer affirmation for any progress made within the program, as well as for real life application of program content.** Affirming progress can be relatively straightforward, for example, saying “It’s good to hear that you were able to complete the module.”
7. **Talking about your own experience briefly can be helpful.** If the participant doesn’t know how to answer a question, or provides a vague answer, you can answer the question in reference to yourself to model what this might look like. This may help decrease stigma as well and increase rapport. Talking about your own experiences can also act as a form of validation, for example, “I know I’ve felt devastated when I’ve gone through breakups too.” Note that self-disclosure can be used to share your experiences with both ACT Guide and life in general, as well as with both successes and struggles. However, be sure to *not* treat this as an opportunity to vent about your own problems; keep any self-disclosure brief and shift the focus back to your participant immediately after.
8. **Be honest if you aren’t sure about the answer to a question.** If a participant has a question about the module’s content or about ACT, and you aren’t sure about the answer, tell the participant that you will consult with your supervisor and can get back to them about the answer in a few days through text messaging or a brief call. Of course, it is expected that you will be adequately familiar with the ACT Guide program content so that you can answer basic questions from the participant, but its also fine to just say if you don’t know an answer and to follow up later if it’s an important question once you check in with us.
9. **Use a collaborate approach.** People generally don’t like to be told what to do, and simply telling someone what to do without their input or own suggestions is often ineffective. Work together with your participant to figure out what would be most helpful for them. Listen to what your participant has to say; they have known themselves for much longer than you have known them and may offer valuable input on what works and what doesn’t work for them.

## Emergency procedures for high-risk disclosures

While it is highly unlikely that this will happen, if the participant discloses that they have been abusing, neglecting, or intending to harm another or themself, further steps are to be taken in order to ensure the participant’s safety. Note that the majority of suicidal ideation disclosures will be passive in nature, meaning that suicide or an expressed wish for death is mentioned without a specific plan (e.g., “I want to go to sleep and never wake up”). In order to determine whether a disclosure warrants the following emergency procedures, respond to any passive disclosures by asking about it with a compassionate tone. For example, “That sounds really hard. Have you had thoughts of committing suicide? I’m asking because I want to make sure you’re safe.”

If a potentially high-risk disclosure occurs, immediately contact Dr. Michael Levin at (541) 531-3892 and Korena Klimczak at (561) 673 9258. If neither answer, contact Dr. Michael Twohig at (435) 265 8933. Tell the participant that, as they were told during the initial first call, you are required to report this to your supervisor so that we can make sure they are getting the level of support that they need. If the disclosure was suicidal in nature, Korena will perform a suicidal risk assessment with the participant once she is contacted. Korena and Dr. Levin will then consult together regarding next steps. Depending on the severity of the disclosure, the participant may be referred to in-person services. If appropriate, you may continue the call after contacting Dr. Levin and Korena before the risk assessment is administered.

# Weekly Coaching Phone Calls

Table 2. ACT Guide Intervention Schedule for Phone Calls

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Week | Planned Module(s) | | Phone coaching time |
|  | Module 1 | Module 2 |  |
| 1 | Welcome orientation | | 15 |
| 2 | 1: Away moves | 2: Your mind is like… | 10-15 |
| 3 | 3: Your values | 4: Finding values | 10-15 |
| 4 | 5: Being flexible | 6: Stepping back | 10-15 |
| 5 | 7: Siting with emotions | 8: Carrying emotions with you | 10-15 |
| 6 | 9: How you want to act | 10: Setting goals | 10-15 |
| 7 | 11: Making commitments | 12: Returning to commitments | 10-15 |
| 8 | Moving forward | | 15 |
| 9 | [Week allotted for flexibility] | | - |
| 10 | [Week allotted for flexibility] | | - |

Over a span of 8-10 weeks, you’ll engage in weekly coaching calls with each of your assigned participants as you provide support throughout their use of the ACT Guide program. The outlines below provide a general script to be followed, in which each key point should be touched on. However, while these scripts model what your “lines” as a coach should look like, they do not have to be read word for word. In order to develop rapport with participants, your speech should sound fluent and natural as opposed to sounding as if it is being read out loud.

## Welcome call

1. Check-in
   * “Hi, is this \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? Is now still a good time to talk about ACT Guide?”
2. Introduce yourself
   * “Good to hear! My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I’ll be your peer-support coach throughout the ACT Guide program. I’m an undergraduate at USU, and [*state any other information you’d like to introduce yourself with, such as major, any leadership positions, etc.*] Before we begin, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?”
3. Set the agenda for the call
   * “Great! I’m glad that you decided to sign up for ACT Guide. For our call today, I wanted to take some time to talk some more about ACT Guide. That way, you can know what to expect from the program, and I can be in a better position to support you as your coach.”
   * “I’m hoping that we can go over what you would like to get out of the program, what we can expect from each other, and any other questions you may have. Does that sound good to you?”
4. Explain your role as a coach and establish expectations
   * “As your coach, I’m here to help support you as you work through ACT Guide over the next 10 weeks. What do you currently know about my role as a coach?”
   * “My job as your peer-support coach is to help you get the most out of ACT Guide and stick to it. I do want to emphasize that I am absolutely not a therapist, and this is not therapy, so we won’t be discussing your problems in depth. If we ever feel like this is starting to go in that direction, I’ll catch it and shift gears, not because I don’t want to help but because I want to stick to what I’m trained for in helping you. If you do want therapy, just let me know and we can give you referrals and help you find resources. Most of the help you’ll be receiving will be coming directly from ACT Guide, while my job is to help keep you accountable, reinforce what you learn, and help you apply what you learn in ACT Guide to other areas of your life.”
   * “Each week I’ll ask if you completed your sessions, and if you didn’t, I’ll help you troubleshoot ways to get back into using the program. Each session will include a practice assignment so I’ll also check in on how that went. If you didn’t get a chance to do it, I’ll help you try out a simple version of the practice assignment over the phone with me. We’ll also talk about what you learned in the session and we might try out a few related skills to help you explore and understand ACT Guide more and how to apply it in your life. I’ve used ACT Guide too and got a lot out of it, so I’ll also be sharing about my experiences as they are helpful for you using it too. If you ever have any questions about how ACT Guide or any of the skills you’ll learn in it have applied to my own life, always feel free to ask and I would be happy to share.”
   * “We’ll be keeping in touch through scheduled phone calls once a week. You can expect each call to be around 10-15 minutes long.”
   * “That’s what you can expect from me. As for what I can expect from you, I’d like to ask you to complete one or two modules a week. We’ll start with the expectation of two modules a week and can tone this down to one module a week as we see how things go. Really, it’s up to you how you want to go through the program, and my goal is to help you stick to your goals and get the most out of it. Because I’ll only be your coach for 10 weeks though, I’d like to aim for you completing the program within that span of time. Does this pacing sound okay?”
   * “In addition to that, I’d like to ask you to keep with the phone calls that we schedule. I’ll be the one making the call, you don’t have to worry about calling me. If you realize that you won’t be able to make it to a meeting, please text me to let me know so we can reschedule. That wraps it up for what I expect from you, so that includes completing two modules per week, having one scheduled phone call with me a week, and letting me know if you’re going to cancel. Do you have any questions about any of that?”
5. Explain level of privacy/confidentiality
   * “Next, let’s go over the privacy and confidentiality of this and future calls. Calls are recorded and may be listened to by research staff in order to assess coaching fidelity. As a coach, I will also be attending weekly supervision meetings with research staff and other peer-support coaches. So it’s possible that specific issues that may come up during coaching calls will be discussed during these supervision meetings.”
   * “Other than that, our calls are private and what we talk about will be confidential, but if you disclose that you intend to harm yourself or someone else, this will have to be reported for safety reasons, and so that we can make sure you have the support you need. In that case, Korena Klimczak will follow up with you and/or Dr. Mike Levin to help figure out the best level of care for you to support you and make sure you are safe.”
6. Elicit the participant’s goals for using ACT Guide [Estimated time: 4-5 minutes]
   * “One thing I’m wondering is why you decided to sign-up for ACT Guide.”
   * “Is there anything specific you’re hoping to get out of using the program?”
   * “How might things be different for you after completing ACT Guide if it worked exactly how you hoped it would work?”
   * Try to elicit goals and/or values when you see the opportunity. For example, if the participant says, “I just want to be happy”, you may respond by asking “how would your life be different and what would you be doing differently if you felt happy?” You might also ask what else they would like to get out of the program. If this proves difficult, you can simply validate their goal without encouraging it, for example “I can see why you’d like that.”

Link the participants goals/values to what ACT Guide has to offer. For example, if the participant says that they are hoping to better their personal growth, you can tell them that ACT Guide was designed with this in mind and could help. You could also share how ACT Guide has helped you with your own personal growth to reflect, summarize, and extend what the participant shares.

1. Discuss barriers to participation [Estimated time: 4-5 minutes]
   * “Now that you have an idea of how things will go for the next 10 weeks, I’d like see if there is anything we can anticipate that might get in the way. Can think of anything that might keep you from using ACT Guide as planned? You may want to think back to what you selected when you were answering the initial questions in ACT Guide.”
     + If the participant can’t think of any barriers, try offering some of the ones listed below.
   * Address any concerns using *collaborative* problem-solving. Here are the most common concerns that may come up and how you might address them:
     + *Not having enough time/forgetting.* You can remind the participant that ACT Guide modules are only expected to take 20 to 40 minutes each and isn’t intended to be a time-consuming process. Scheduling out time and setting a reminder, such as putting it on their calendar, could help. If this is a significant concern, you can use the “Problem-solving barriers” steps listed in the “Addressing adherence” section below.
     + *Not feeling motivated to use the program.* You can tell the participation that motivational issues are normal, and that one solution might be to build motivation through promising themselves a reward for completing the module. If this sounds appealing to the participant, you can work with them to help them decide what they might use as a reward and ensure that this can be easily done (e.g., watching an episode of a show on Netflix might be a more realistic and immediate reward than going to the movie theatre).
     + *Feeling stressed, sad, anxious, or other difficult emotions.* You can remind the participant that these are the kind of feelings that ACT Guide is designed to help you work with. The skills you learn in ACT Guide can help you live your best life despite these difficult emotions. It might also be helpful to go over the strategy of turn “but” statements into “and” statements: “You may have a thought like ‘I want to use ACT Guide, *bu*t I feel stressed. What might happen if you modify this thought to “I want to use ACT Guide, *and* I feel stressed”?
2. Summarize and set a time for weekly calls
   * Give a comprehensive summary of what was discussed, including the participant’s goals for using ACT Guide, your role as a coach, and possible barriers as well as how to address them.
   * Set a time and day of the week for which the two of your can have a coaching call every week. It is recommended to set a consistent time for every week, but if this is not possible for the participant going week by week is okay too. Try to have this time paired with something they already do each week, for example right after a specific class.
   * Wrap-up the call by asking if they have any other questions that weren’t answered in the call and reminding them to complete Module 1 and 2 before the next coaching call.

Once the call is completed, email Korena Klimczak at [k.klimczak@aggiemail.usu.edu](mailto:k.klimczak@aggiemail.usu.edu) to let her know so that we can keep track of which participants have begun the coaching process and which ones haven’t.

## Weekly calls

Weekly coaching calls should discuss the module specific content relevant to the one or two modules completed by the participant that week. Follow the agenda listed below and refer to the questions and content listed in the “Module specific content” section. Keep in mind that the practice assignment review (or brief version of the practice assignment, if they did not complete the practice assignment) is intended to help strengthen the participants ability to use the learned skill in the future. The specific questions you will ask are then intended to reinforce the learned content and help the participant generalize the skill to their own life, increasing an awareness of when and how this skill would be pertinent to use.

*Weekly coaching call agenda:*

1. What progress did the participant make this week?
   * If the participant did not make progress, or struggled with making progress, refer to “Using ACT to Address Nonadherence”.
2. Has the participant completed the practice assignment from this week’s module(s)?
   * If the participant completed the practice assignment, discuss what they noticed while doing it.
   * If the participant did not complete the practice assignment, complete a brief version of the practice assignment together with them.
3. Ask specific coaching questions respective to the module(s) completed.
4. Address any of the participant’s questions or concerns.
5. Set expectations for next session (modules to be completed; date/time of next call).
6. After completion of the call, record the date, participant name, modules completed, and length of call in your log.
7. Upload the call recording to Box. Delete the call recording from your phone directly afterward.

Note: If multiple modules were completed this week by the participant, focus on only module one at a time. Rather than trying to cram in discussion of all completed modules, it is preferred to give adequate attention to one module, and then only discussing other modules if there is still time. Allow participants to pick which module they would like to talk about first. If no preference is given, discuss the most recent module completed.

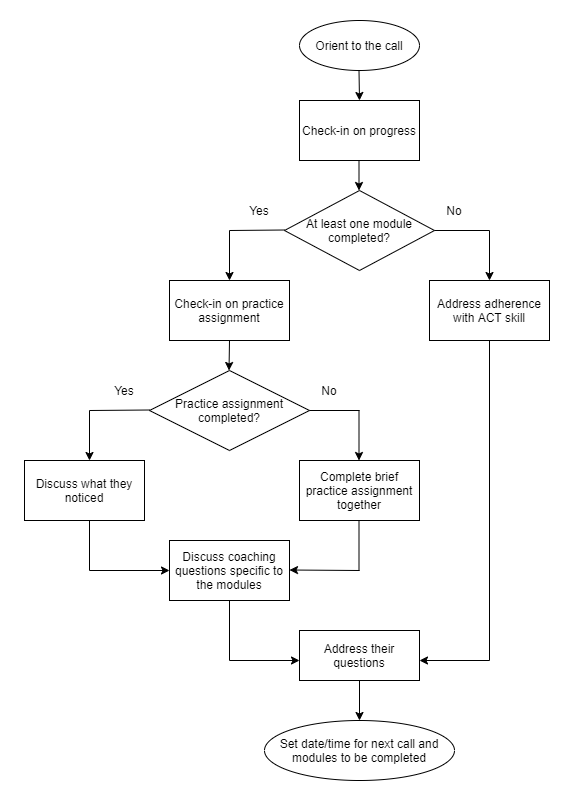


Figure 1. Coaching call flowchart

## Module specific content

### 1. Away Moves

*Practice assignment review*

You were asked in session 1 to practice noticing when you were doing an away move and considering how it worked. Was it easy or difficult to notice away moves? How did the away move work in the long run?

* *Did not complete assignment:* An away move is something you do to get away from an inner experience like an emotion, thought, urge or memory. What’s one away move you’ve experienced in the past two weeks, even if you didn’t realize it was an away move in the moment? What happened as a result of the away move? What might have happened if you did the opposite of the away move instead?

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* Looking back, what are some areas or situations in your life in which you tend to respond with away moves?
* How might noticing away moves in these situations affect what happens?

*Note:* Sometimes coaches find it helpful to use the Choice Point to help explain or give context to away moves. Feel free to use the Choice Point model while discussing module 1 with your participant.

### 2. Your Mind is Like…

*Practice assignment review*

Your practice assignment from session 2 was to practice working with the perspective of either viewing your mind as an overeager assistant, a computer, or a sportscaster. Which one did you choose? What did you notice when you took on this perspective?

* *Did not complete assignment:* Remember that you can choose to view your mind as either an overeager assistant, a computer, or a sportscaster, leaving you in control in how you respond to your mind. Based on what you learned in the module, which perspective would be most helpful to you? What is one situation you can use this perspective in? How might you remind yourself to take this perspective on your mind?

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* Tell me about a time this week where you noticed that [*choose based on the perspective they practiced:* your overeager assistant was at work; you were really close to the screen; or all your attention was on the announcer]
* What are some thoughts that tend to come up for you which you might [*choose based on the perspective they practiced:* simply thank your mind for; lean back from; or simply notice before “returning back to the game”]?

### 3. Your Values

*Practice assignment review*

You were asked in session 3 to practice noticing how your actions might fit with your values. What did you notice about the connection between your values and actions?

* *Did not complete assignment:* Break down an average day in your life for me. With each activity you list, also tell me why it matters to you (if the participant says “because I have to” or “I should”, probe gently for a deeper meaning).

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* Why does what you’re doing right now, talking to me about how ACT Guide has been going, matter to you?
* What are some other areas of your life in which you’ve noticed values showing up?

### 4. Finding Values

*Practice assignment review*

Your practice assignment from session 4 was to try out a value and see if it was helpful. What value did you try out and how? How did it go?

* *Did not complete assignment:* Tell me a value that you’d like to try working with. What’s one, brief way you can work with this value immediately or shortly after this phone call? For example, if the value you’d like to try working with is connection, you can shoot a friend you haven’t talked with in a long time a text message. Based on what you do, how can you know if this value is important to you?

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* Are there any values that you would like to be living by, but haven’t?
* If there are, what can you do to try working with this value to see how it works for you?

### 5. Being Flexible

*Practice assignment review*

You were asked in session 5 to practice the a flexibility strategy from the module. Which strategy did you choose, and what did you notice when you did it?

* *Did not complete assignment:* Let’s practice one of the flexibility strategies from the module with a thought that you might have been struggling with lately. What’s one thought that you have been struggling with? It might seem a little silly, but let’s try singing the thought together to the tune of ‘Happy Birthday’. If you’re in a public area or around other people and wouldn’t feel comfortable doing this one, we can try a different exercise.

*If the participant doesn’t want to sing:* That’s okay, how about we try painting a picture of the thought together? First tell me what color the thought would be. What shape would you give it? What details would be on it? [try to elicit details, rather than moving on with one or two word answers]

Does this thought seem as true as before we did the exercise? Is it as distressing?

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* Are there any distressing thoughts that tend to come up when you’re working on ACT Guide? [If there aren’t any, ask about a situation that does elicit distressing thoughts]
* How might you use a flexibility exercise next time this thought comes up when you’re using ACT Guide (or another situation specified)?

### 6. Stepping Back

*Practice assignment review*

Your practice assignment from session 6 was to practice either the ‘leaves on a stream’ or the ‘labeling mindfulness’ exercise. What did you notice while completing the practice assignment?

* *Did not complete assignment:* Let’s take a moment to practice the ‘leaves on a stream’ exercise. In this exercise you’ll be to turning your attention to your thoughts, looking at your thoughts as opposed to from your thoughts. You’ll simply be noticing your thoughts, placing them on leaves and then letting them flow by. If possible, sit in an upright, but not rigid, position with your feet squarely on the ground. Close your eyes or find a place to fix your gaze on the floor. Notice the sounds in the room … Notice the sensations of sitting in the chair … of your feet contacting the ground … of breathing in and out.

Imagine a flowing stream with leaves floating down it. Focus on your thoughts, and as each thought comes to mind, imagine putting the thought onto a leaf flowing by . . . These might even be thoughts you’re having about the exercise itself, for example ‘I’m not doing it right’ or ‘This is stupid’. Just take those thoughts and place them on a leaf . . . when you notice yourself getting caught up in a thought, gently and compassionately return to imagining the stream and placing your thoughts on leaves . . . [allow 2 minutes to pass] Now you can let your awareness expand, and notice your breathing, the sensation of each inhale and exhale. Notice the contact your feet make with the floor. Notice the sounds around you. When you’re ready, you can open your eyes.

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* When do you think you’re most likely to get hooked on unhelpful thoughts?
* When this comes up for you, what might unhooking yourself and ‘stepping back’ look like?

### 7. Sitting with Emotions

*Practice assignment review*

You were asked in session 7 to practice sitting with a specific emotion. What emotion did you pick, and what was the experience like for you?

* *Did not complete assignment:* Let’s practice sitting with an emotion. What’s an uncomfortable emotion you feel right now, or maybe felt earlier today, that we can practice with? To start, close your eyes or find a place to fix your gaze on the floor. First acknowledge that emotion, notice it in a manner that accepts what is there. Now, carefully notice what it feels like to have this emotion right now. Attending to every detail with a sense of curiosity, as if you were experiencing it for the first time. Where do you feel the emotion? Stomach, head, shoulders, chest, etc…What sensations are associated with it? Tension, temperature, pit in stomach, nausea, etc… Take a breath and imagine you are breathing into this emotion and where you feel it in your body… Take a few breaths in this way… As you continue breathing, imagine opening up around the feeling… Making space for the feeling and just allowing it to be there… If you feel an urge to fight or push it away, just acknowledge the urge without acting on it. Returning to breathing into the emotion. Start noticing other sensations in your body... The rise and fall of your chest/stomach as you breath... The sensations of your body contacting the chair…. Notice the sounds you can hear…. And opening your eyes to finish.

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* In what future situations might you want to try sitting with an emotion?
* What might get in the way of sitting with an emotion when a difficult emotion comes up for you?

### 8. Carrying Emotions with You

*Practice assignment review*

Your practice assignment from session 8 was to complete a goal that would require you to carry your emotions with you. What goal did you choose? How did it go?

* *Did not complete assignment:* What is an action you’d like to do today, but would find it difficult to do because of an emotion? Let’s plan for you to do at least a ‘lite’ version of this action right after our call (e.g., working on a procrastinated assignment for 10 minutes, instead of the full assignment), or shortly after our call if you have something coming right up afterwards. How will you respond to your ‘passengers’ as you do this action?

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* When might it be helpful to remember that you always have the choice to carry your emotions, instead of leaving them behind?
* What might choosing to carry your emotions look like?

### 9. How You Want to Act

*Practice assignment review*

You were asked to pick a value and bring it into an action. What value and action did you pick? How did it go?

* *Did not complete assignment:* What is a value you would like to bring into your actions today? So you would like to act [name adverb form of value; e.g., “compassionately” if value was compassion]. What might acting in line with that value look like as you go through the rest of your day?

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* How could you bring intention regarding your values to the action of using ACT Guide?
* How could you continue to bring intention regarding your values to your actions, even after you complete ACT Guide?

### 10. Setting Goals

*Practice assignment review*

Your practice assignment from session 10 was to work towards a SMART goal. What was your goal? How did it go?

* *Did not complete assignment:* What was the SMART goal you wrote for yourself in ACT Guide? What is one brief step toward that goal you can take immediately or shortly after this phone call? What will you measure to determine if you’ve made progress toward that goal? How will you measure this? For example, you could record your progress in a note on your phone.

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* What is a goal you often try to work towards where “should” statements often come up? For example, “I should be working out five times a week.”
* How could you modify this goal so that it is more oriented towards your values and what you *want* to be doing, rather than what you *should* be doing?

### 11. Making Commitments

*Practice assignment review*

You were asked in session 11 to make a commitment and work towards it. What did you do to work towards your commitment? How did it go?

* *Did not complete assignment:* What was the commitment you made while completing the ACT Guide module? Even if you didn’t actively do the practice assignment of working toward this commitment, can you think of how any of your actions throughout the work still served that commitment? What is something you can do immediately or shortly after this phone call that is in service of that commitment?

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* How might you remind yourself that your commitment is a whole-hearted choice, so that it doesn’t slip back into a “should”?
* Has the way you’ve thought about or chosen your actions changed since you made your commitment?

### 12. Returning to Commitments

*Practice assignment review*

Your practice assignment from session 12 was to continue working towards your commitment, noticing when you drifted from it, and recommitting even when the urge to fall into a ‘fail-give up’ pattern came up. Were you able to notice when you drifted from your commitment? How did recommitting go?

* *Did not complete assignment:* What was the commitment you chose to work on? What can you do to keep an eye out for when you start to drift from it, and resist the urge to fall into a ‘fail-give up’ pattern?

*Questions to enhance engagement*

* What might get in the way of maintaining your commitment over time?
* Why is recommitting, even when you have the urge to give-up, important to you?

## Exit call

This will be the last call you have with your participant, with the purpose of debriefing the participant, discussing how the participant plans to keep using what they learned, and as a reminder to complete the post-test survey they have received or will receive by email. If the participant hasn’t completed ACT Guide by now, you can additionally help them develop a plan for finishing the remaining modules without your support.

* What are some of the main takeaways the participant learned from ACT Guide?
* What parts of ACT Guide were less helpful, or didn’t work out? For example, maybe the practice assignments were difficult to remember to do, or maybe they were disappointed that ACT Guide addressed mental health from a general perspective instead of tackling their specific problem (e.g., anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD, etc.).
  + Address any concerns that came up. If the participant was disappointed with any aspects of ACT Guide, you can refer the participant to other resources. You might direct them towards the USU Student Wellness webpage, where they can see what mental health services are available to them as a USU student (e.g., face-to-face therapy) or suggest trying a different self-help program (<https://onemindpsyberguide.org/apps/>).
* How does the participant plan to continue using the skills they learned in ACT Guide? Which skills might be most helpful, and for what scenarios? Are there any skills that the participant wishes to practice more?
* Thank the participant for their time in participating in the study, and remind them that if they complete the emailed post-test assessment survey they will receive a $10 gift-card.
* Ask the participant if they have any other questions, and wrap-up on a positive note with a hope instilling message such “It was great getting to know you over the past couple of months. I hope ACT Guide has helped give you the tools to live your best life!”

# Weekly Coaching Text Messages

Table 3. ACT Guide Intervention Schedule for Text Messages

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Week | Planned Module(s) | | Text coaching time |
|  | Module 1 | Module 2 |  |
| 1 | Welcome orientation | | 5 |
| 2 | 1: Away moves | 2: Your mind is like… | 5 |
| 3 | 3: Your values | 4: Finding values | 5 |
| 4 | 5: Being flexible | 6: Stepping back | 5 |
| 5 | 7: Siting with emotions | 8: Carrying emotions with you | 5 |
| 6 | 9: How you want to act | 10: Setting goals | 5 |
| 7 | 11: Making commitments | 12: Returning to commitments | 5 |
| 8 | Moving forward | | 10 |
| 9 | [Week allotted for flexibility] | | - |
| 10 | [Week allotted for flexibility] | | - |

Coaching over text messages will be similar to coaching through phone calls, in that you’ll be communicating with a participant over a course of 8-10 weeks as they go through the ACT Guide program. However, the content of communication will be briefer. You will also have pre-written messages to use in order to decrease the time required to coach through text messages, given that coaching through text messages is intended to be a less resource-intensive modality for coaching as opposed to coaching over the phone.

The specific messages that you can simply copy and paste will be available in a separate pdf as well, so that you can easily pull up the pdf on your phone or computer, copy the message, and paste it to send it to the participant (https://bit.ly/2QkBxpK). The messages are additionally highlighted grey in this document.

If you have an Android, the app Google Messages can be used to send text messages from your computer, which may be easier for copying and pasting. If you have an iPhone and a Mac, iMessage can be used to send texts from your computer. If you will be sending text messages directly from your phone, it is recommended that the previous pdf link is saved to your home screen for easy access.

## Welcome text message sequence

1. Introduce yourself
   * Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I’ll be your peer-support coach throughout the ACT Guide program. I’m an undergraduate at USU, and [*state any other information you’d like to introduce yourself with, such as major, any leadership positions, etc.*] Before we continue, take a moment to read through the following document that will explain a little more about coaching: <https://bit.ly/3aPTTIz>
   * Once you finish reading, can you let me know if you have any questions about anything you read? It would also be great if you could tell me a little bit about yourself!

[Wait for reply]

* + Thanks [*participant’s name*], I’m so glad you decided to sign up for ACT Guide! I’ve used ACT Guide too and got a lot out of it, I’m so excited to help you get the most out of it too!
  + Now that you have an idea of how things will go for the next 10 weeks, I’d like see if there is anything we can anticipate that might get in the way. Can think of anything that might keep you from using ACT Guide as planned?
    - Address any concerns using problem-solving. Here are the most common concerns that may come up and how you might address them:
    - *Not having enough time/forgetting.* You can remind the participant that ACT Guide modules are only expected to take 20 to 40 minutes each and isn’t intended to be a time-consuming process. Scheduling out time and setting a reminder, such as putting it on their calendar, could help. If this is a significant concern, you can use the “Problem-solving barriers” steps listed in the “Addressing adherence” section below.
    - *Not feeling motivated to use the program.* You can tell the participation that motivational issues are normal, and that one solution might be to build motivation through promising themselves a reward for completing the module. If this sounds appealing to the participant, you can work with them to help them decide what they might use as a reward and ensure that this can be easily done (e.g., watching an episode of a show on Netflix might be a more realistic and immediate reward than going to the movie theatre).
    - *Feeling stressed, sad, anxious, or other difficult emotions.* You can remind the participant that these are the kind of feelings that ACT Guide is designed to help you work with. The skills you learn in ACT Guide can help you live your best life despite these difficult emotions. It might also be helpful to go over the strategy of turn “but” statements into “and” statements: “You may have a thought like ‘I want to use ACT Guide, *bu*t I feel stressed. What might happen if you modify this thought to “I want to use ACT Guide, *and* I feel stressed”?

[Wait for reply]

* + So that’s pretty much all I have for you today! Do you have any questions about anything we talked about?

[Wait for reply]

* + Great! I won’t text you again until [*day of the week you plan to text*] next week to see if you’ve completed modules 1 and 2, but feel free to text me with any questions any time.

Once the welcome text sequence is completed, email Korena Klimczak at [k.klimczak@aggiemail.usu.edu](mailto:k.klimczak@aggiemail.usu.edu) to let her know so that we can keep track of which participants have begun the coaching process and which ones haven’t.

## Weekly text messages

Weekly texts provide accountability and can help participants apply what they learn in ACT Guide to other areas of their life. Follow the agenda listed below, copying and pasting messages in the “Module specific text messages” section to send to participants. Once initial conversations are started with the copy and pasted message, and the participant then answers, you can then answer back with your own written message.

However, keep conversations brief and do not extend the conversation more than necessary. Tailor the length of the conversation to the participants’ texting patterns. For example, if a participant usually takes over a day to respond, it may be more workable to keep the conversation as brief as possible even if there are opportunities for extending the conversation.

You should aside a time in the week to send your coaching text messages for that week, for example Monday mornings. This will allow your participants some consistency in when they can expect their check-in text, increasing accountability.

*Weekly coaching text agenda:*

1. Ask about the module(s) the participant had planned to complete that week. Use the pre-written messages from the “Module specific text messages” section below.
   * If the target for that week was two modules, copy and paste the message for the first module as directed above, but also adding in the second module. Do not add an additional question about the second module.
     + EXAMPLE: This week you planned on completing “Module 1: Away Moves” and “Module 2: Your Mind is Like…”, how did that go? Were you able to notice any ‘away moves’ in your own life?
2. Address the participant’s response.
   * Use affirmation to encourage continued use of the program, and validation to respond to the participant’s answer to the module specific questions.
     + If the answer to the module specific question was vague or unengaged, try offering your own response to the question to model what application of the idea looks like.
   * If the participant did not make progress, or struggled with making progress, refer to “Using ACT to Address Nonadherence”. Due to the brevity afforded by text messaging, use only problem solving and do not use choice point.
3. Set expectations for next session (modules to be completed; day of the week you’ll be checking in next).
4. Record the text exchange in your log, including how many modules were completed.
5. Upload the recorded text exchange as a PDF to Box. As soon as possible, delete the file from the text recording app as well the screenshots saved to your phone.

## Module specific text messages

The following messages can be copy and pasted to coach participants through text messages. Responses to this initial message should be typed out manually, individualized to how the participant responds. See the separate “Example Text Coaching Transcripts” file for examples of how to execute coaching through text message.

**1. Away Moves**

This week you planned on completing “Module 1: Away Moves”, how did that go? Were you able to notice any ‘away moves’ in your own life?

**2. Your Mind is Like…**

Last time we talked about you completing “Module 2: Your Mind is Like…”, were you able to do it? How might viewing your mind like an assistant, computer, or sportscaster help you in the future?

**3. Your Values**

How did working on “Module 3: Your Values” go? How might using ACT Guide be an action that fits in with your values?

**4. Finding Values**

Did you get a chance to do “Module 4: Finding Values”? Are there any values that you would like to be living by, but haven’t been?

**5. Being Flexible**

Were you able to do “Module 5: Being Flexible”? What happens when you react to your thoughts flexibly instead of rigidly?

**6. Stepping Back**

Just checking in if you did “Module 6: Stepping Back”. If you did, how did it go? What thoughts did you notice yourself getting hooked on throughout the week?

**7. Sitting with Emotions**

This week you planned on completing “Module 7: Sitting with Emotions”, how did that go? In what future situations might you want to try sitting with an emotion?

**8. Carrying Emotions with You**

Last time we talked about you completing “Module 8: Carrying Emotions with You”, were you able to do it? Is there an upcoming situation where you could carry your emotions with you instead of leaving them behind?

**9. How You Want to Act**

How did working on “Module 9: How You Want to Act” go? How have you acted in line with one of your values this week?

**10. Setting Goals**

Did you get a chance to do “Module 10: Setting Goals”? What’s one thing you can do today to work towards your smart goal?

**11. Making Commitments**

Were you able to do “Module 11: Making Commitments”? What’s one thing you can do today in service of your commitment?

**12. Returning to Commitments**

Just checking in if you did “Module 12: Returning to Commitments”. If you did, how did it go? What do you think might get in the way of maintaining your commitment over time?

## Exit text message sequence

This will be the last conversation you will have with your participant, with the purpose of debriefing the participant, discussing how the participant plans to keep using what they learned, and as a reminder to complete the post-test survey they have received or will receive by email. If the participant hasn’t completed ACT Guide by now, you can additionally help them develop a plan for finishing the remaining modules without your support. Below is an outline for the conversation, including messages you can copy and paste throughout the conversation. Supplement these pre-written messages with your own messages that are individualized to the participant’s responses.

* It’s been a whole 10 weeks since you first started ACT Guide! This means that your time in the study is coming to a close, and that this will be our last conversation together. The purpose of this last conversation is just to wrap up any loose ends and talk through your overall experience. One questions I have for you is what parts of ACT Guide were less helpful? If I know what didn’t work for you, I can better understand if other resources might be a better fit for you.
  + Concerns that may come up include practice assignments being too difficult to remember to do, or maybe being disappointed that ACT Guide addressed mental health from a general perspective instead of tackling their specific problem (e.g., anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD, etc.).
  + Address any concerns that came up. If the participant was disappointed with any aspects of ACT Guide, you can refer the participant to other resources. You might direct them towards the USU Student Wellness webpage, where they can see what mental health services are available to them as a USU student (e.g., face-to-face therapy) or suggest trying a different self-help program (<https://onemindpsyberguide.org/apps/>).
* I’m also wondering about your plans going forward. How do you plan to continue using the skills you learned in ACT Guide? Which skills do you think will be most helpful for you, and in what scenarios? Are there any skills you’d like to work on?
* Thanks for taking this time to talk all this over with me, and for participating in this study in general! I do want to remind you that there is one more part to this study. You should have either already received or be receiving soon an email with a link to a post-assessment survey. If you do the survey, you’ll receive a $10 gift-card! Before we say our goodbyes, do you have any questions for me?
* It was great getting to know you over the past couple of months. I hope ACT Guide has helped give you the tools to live your best life!

# Addressing Non-adherence

When participants fail to complete any modules of ACT Guide in a given week, it is important to address this in coaching. By using strategies informed by ACT principles to address nonadherence, you can use the content a participant is learning in ACT Guide to help get them back on track with program completion. Strategies discussed in the previous “Guidelines and Strategies for ACT Consistent Coaching” can be implemented when relevant to the participant’s non-adherence, but additional strategies will be described below. In addition to using ACT principles to discuss adherence, simple problem-solving can be helpful as well to address practicalities.

## The Choice Point as a strategy for nonadherence

If a participant isn’t adhering to ACT Guide and you’re not sure what to do about it, briefly assess why**.** This can especially apply when the participant isn’t sure why they didn’t adhere or says that they simply forgot about it. Going through the Choice Point with your participant is one way to do this, which can give some insight as to whether it is internal mental experiences/being open (e.g., avoidance and/or cognitive fusion) or external behaviors/being engaged (e.g., values and/or committed action) that is keeping them from doing ACT Guide. With a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their psychological flexibility, you can then decide what strategies might be most relevant to employ, or if there is a specific module to recommend to the participant to complete next that speaks more to their current struggle. A different module should be recommended for completion if the participant hasn’t completed a module of ACT Guide in two weeks.

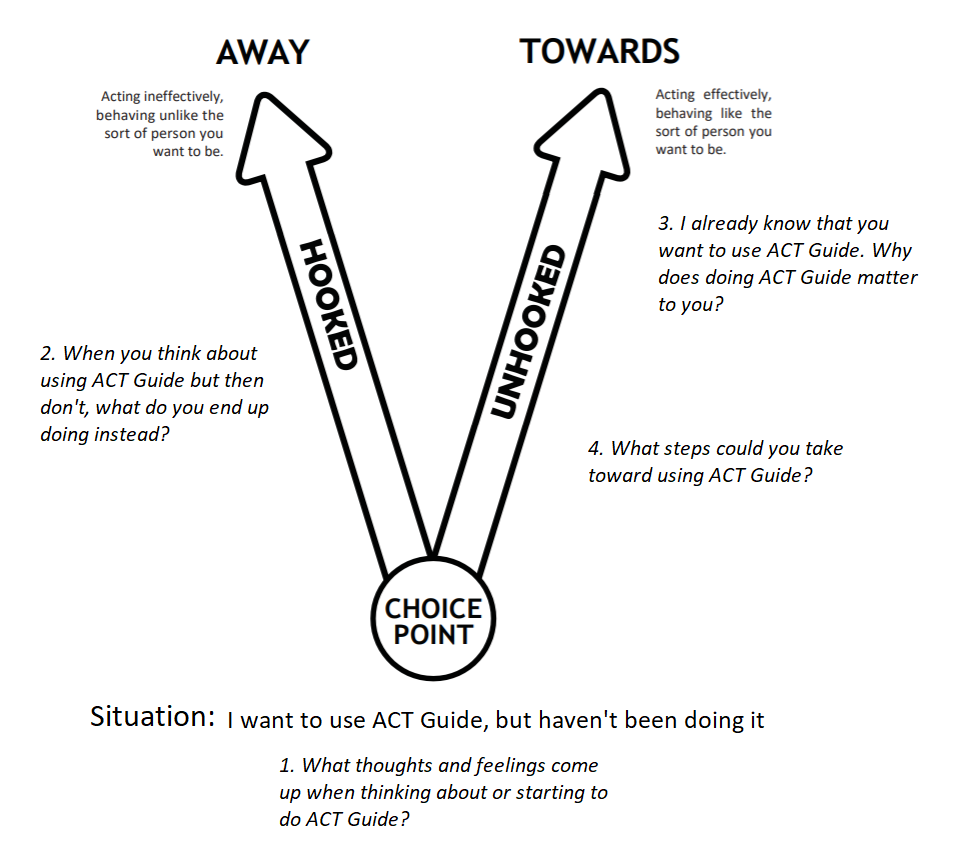


Figure 2. Choice Point diagram

The Choice Point (https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/Choice\_Point\_2.0\_A\_Brief\_Overview\_-\_Russ\_Harris\_April\_2017.pdf) can be used for a variety of scenarios with varying focus, which makes it a useful tool for assessing ACT Guide use specifically. It is typically executed through a simple drawn diagram, but since coaching is conducted either through phone calls or texts, you can substitute this by instead walking through the Choice Point verbally. It might be helpful to you though to fill out the Choice Point diagram based on the participant’s responses as they go along. Listed along with steps 6, 7, 8, and 9 are recommendations on actions to take if this happens to be a weakness. You do not have to do all of the recommendations, but rather treat these as possible moves you can make based on how the exercise goes. You may also want to keep an eye out for strengths, and capitalize on these if relevant (e.g., emphasizing the connection between ACT Guide and strongly held values). These recommendations should be executed after completion of the exercise. Note that while specific steps are listed in a relatively procedural manner, the Choice Point may alternatively be delivered in a more organic, conversational pattern. Use the approach that suits your own style of coaching.

1. **Discuss whether the participant wants to do ACT Guide or not. Choice Point is not appropriate if the participant no longer wants to do ACT Guide.** “So you haven’t been working on ACT Guide lately, and that’s totally okay! As your peer-support coach, my job isn’t to *make* you do ACT Guide, but to support you if you *choose* to do ACT Guide. How have you been feeling about ACT Guide, is this still something you’d like to do?”
2. **Invite the participant into the exercise.** “Sounds great! In that case, would you be okay with running through an exercise together that might help?”
3. **Introduce the concept of towards moves.** “All day long, humans do things. Cooking dinner, playing with the kids, watching movies… We’re always doing something, even if it’s just sleeping in bed. Now some thing we do move us towards the life we want to live, acting effectively, behaving like the sort of person we want to be, and we call these ‘towards moves.’ Can you think of any towards moves in your own life?”
4. **Introduce the concept of away moves.** “Now some things we do move us away from the life we want to live, like acting ineffectively, behaving unlike the sort of person we want to be, and we call these ‘away moves.’ What are some away moves you notice coming up in your own life?”
5. **Explain the Choice Point.** “When life is easy, it’s usually fairly easy for us to choose towards moves and do the things that make life better in the long term. But unfortunately, life isn’t that easy most of the time, and unhelpful thoughts and feelings arise. It’s when these unhelpful thoughts and feelings hook us, control us, that we start doing all those ‘away moves.’ However, we always have the choice to respond differently instead, to unhook and do towards moves. In any given situation, you have a choice in what action you take, whether that action is an away move or a toward move. These are called choice points.”
6. **Explain the Choice Point in relation to ACT Guide.** “One choice point you may have been facing lately is using ACT Guide. It sounds like you’re in this situation of wanting to use ACT Guide but haven’t been doing it regardless. Is that right?”
7. **Ask about thoughts and feelings to gauge fusion/defusion.** “So when you think about using ACT Guide, or start using ACT Guide, what thoughts and feelings come up for you?”

a.) If the participant seems too fused with their feelings to engage with ACT Guide, you can respond to their unhelpful thoughts with defused language (see ACT guideline 1 above).

b.) Recommend *Module 6: Stepping back* and explain why you think it might be helpful.

1. **Ask about away moves to gauge avoidance/acceptance.** “What away moves do you do when faced with the choice of using ACT Guide? In other words, when you think about using ACT Guide but then don’t, what do you end up doing instead?”

a.) Ask the participant how this away move(s) has worked in the short-term and in the long-term.

b.) Ask the participant if they would be willing to feel these uncomfortable emotions and use ACT Guide at the same time, in order to elicit acceptance. You can try something like “It can feel like this uncomfortable or difficult feeling is just going to keep getting worse. Usually they are more like waves that come and go. And people often find once they’ve approached this hard feeling, it’s easier to stick with it. Would you be up for trying to do ACT Guide AND feel bad as an experiment to see what happens?”

c.) Recommend *Module 7: Sitting with emotions* and explain why you think it might be helpful.

1. **Ask about values.** “Let’s shift gears a little. I already know you want to use ACT Guide; why does doing ACT Guide matter to you? What values are motivating you?

a.) If the participant struggles with answering this, for example being unable to list more than one or two thing, you can help them clarify their values through the tombstone exercise. Have the participant imagine that their tombstone is being prepared and ask what they would want to have it say, reminding them that this is how they’re going to be remembered. The tombstone should start with “Here lies [participant’s name], they…” You can then connect what they say to possible values (e.g., “Here lies John, he was a loving father.” could be connected to valuing family).

b.) Recommend *Module 3: Your values* and explain why you think it might be helpful.

1. **Ask about planned behaviors to gauge committed action.** “And so what steps could you take towards using ACT Guide? This is where towards moves come in.”

a). If or once values have been identified, you can connect using ACT Guide to the participant’s values (see ACT guideline 3 above).

b.) Recommend *Module 9: How you want to act* and explain why you think it might be helpful.

1. **Summarize the exercise.** EXAMPLE: “It sounds like this choice point of whether or not to use ACT Guide sometimes presents itself. While doing ACT Guide would be a towards move for you, you tend to get hooked by thoughts like “I don’t have enough time” or feelings like guilt over being slightly behind schedule. These thoughts are small and happen more in the background for you, but as a result, it feels too overwhelming to do ACT Guide and you choose to an away move like scrolling through Facebook instead. You still really want to do ACT Guide though, because it can help you get back to spending time with friends and family again. You recognize that setting aside time on your calendar might help. Does that sound right?”
2. **Exercise the closing recommendations.** EXAMPLE: “Okay, so based on all that it’s sounding like these unhelpful thoughts and feelings that come up when you think about ACT Guide are small, but have been having a big impact on your behavior, since they lead you to do an away move instead of ACT Guide. That totally makes sense though, I mean you already have a lot on your plate so adding ACT Guide on top of that sounds really difficult. It might even seem like doing ACT Guide isn’t even an option. How do you feel about doing a little exercise with me that might help open up your options next time you’re faced with that choice point? [*conduct sitting with emotions exercise*] Next time you’re at the choice point of whether or not to use ACT Guide, such as when you see a reminder to use it, try this out and see if it helps.

Any of the questions in steps 7, 8, 9, or 10 can be probed further if it is helpful to assessing the participants functioning in the corresponding facet of psychological flexibility. If the participant struggles with coming up with an answer, or answers seem “canned” or to lack vitality (e.g., “I guess studying…” in response to asking about things that are important to them), this area may be a weakness, and so it might be helpful to execute one of the corresponding recommendations. The area might also be a weakness if answers seem distressing or excessively avoidant/fused. If none of the areas seem to be a weakness, don’t push hard on “finding” a weakness. You can tell the participant that it sounds like things are going well and move on to briefly problem-solving barriers.

## Problem-solving barriers

Addressing practical barriers to using ACT Guide can be helpful, especially if the participant isn’t adhering because they haven’t made it a priority if they’re doing well without it. Use the following steps to help participants address practical barriers to using ACT Guide, such as not having enough time.

1. **Ask what barriers have gotten in the way of using ACT Guide.** The most common one that will come up is “I was too busy” or “I forgot”. If the barrier is more psychological than practical, such as “I felt too anxious to use it”, using the Choice Point and guidelines for ACT consistent coaching might make more sense than problem-solving. However, problem-solving could still be relevant, for example helping them schedule a time when anxiety is least likely to get in the way.
2. **Schedule a time for the participant to use ACT Guide that works around this barrier.** For example, if a barrier is that they don’t feel comfortable using ACT Guide around their family, you can help them schedule a time when they anticipate being alone. If the main concern was that they didn’t have enough time, you can ask if it would be more helpful to do the session in small parts, so that they only have to put in 10 minutes a day, as opposed to doing a whole module all at once. While it is recommended that participants complete modules in one sitting to get the most out of the program, it is more important that the participant is given the opportunity to use ACT Guide in a way that works best for them. It is also likely that once participants actually sit down and start using ACT Guide, they become less fused with the thought “I don’t have enough time” and end up completing the module in one sitting.

One useful strategy for scheduling is to pair using ACT Guide with an activity that is already integrated into their daily routines. For example, you might suggest using ACT Guide right after breakfast, during a lunch break, or right when they get home from work. Having the participant describe an average day for them could be helpful for identifying an “opening” in their schedule to make time for ACT Guide.

1. **Help the participant set up a reminder for using ACT Guide at the determined time.** Asking the participant how they usually remember to do things they’ve planned, like attend class or plans with friends, can be helpful. This can take the form of putting it in their calendar or setting an alarm on their phone for example.

## When a participant misses a call/text message

If a participant misses a phone coaching appointment or hasn’t replied to a text message within the past four days, you should follow-up to check-in and remind the participant about the missed call or text.

* If the participant is assigned to phone coaching, send a text message to reschedule the appointment.
* If the participant is assigned to coaching through text messaging, send a text message such as “Hi! I just wanted to remind you about this” after four days of not having heard back.

Regardless of whether the participant is receiving coaching through phone calls or text messaging, do not do two coaching sessions/conversations within a single week to “catch up”. The two flexibility weeks integrated into the schedule are meant to accommodate for this. If a participant completes more than two modules in a week in order to catch up, just cover content in your session from the two modules they are most interested in discussing or have most recently completed if they have no preference.

## When a participant ceases communication

It is possible that a participant will stop answering calls or text messages all together. As a coach, the only thing that can be done is to ask how you can better support them, and let them know that they are free to continue receiving coaching at any time as long as it is within 10 weeks of them having begun the study. Regardless of whether the participant is assigned to the phone call coaching or text messaging coaching condition, this should be communicated through text message as opposed to voicemail, as text messaging is generally more accessible to college students and gives the participant to text back their thoughts (e.g., if they are no longer interested in study) without the pressure of calling back to communicate this. However, if the participant is assigned to the phone call condition, do not engage in/switch to coaching through text messaging.

The following message should be used to follow-up with a participant who has ceased communication (has not contacted you back within the past two weeks):

“Hi [participant’s name], I hope you’ve been doing well! I wanted to check-in and see how things are going since I haven’t heard from you in a while. If you’re no longer interested in coaching, that is completely up to you, but it would be helpful to hear back if that’s the case or if anything’s changed. If there is anything I can do to better support you as you work through ACT Guide, just let me know. I am flexible and we can keep our coaching conversations to just brief check-ins that are only a few minutes long if that would be more helpful to you. Your participation in the study ends on [date of study completion, 10 weeks after beginning participation], so feel free to get back in touch with me any time before then.”

If the participant does express interest in receiving briefer coaching, coaching should then be limited to you simply asking if they had completed any modules. If they did, reinforce this. If not, briefly problem-solve barriers to completion. You can then end with asking if they have any questions.

## When a participant loses interest or wants to drop out

It is important to keep in mind that *all* aspects of being a participant are voluntary, including being a participant all together. The process to stop any part of participation should be made as easy as possible for the participant, and participants should never feel pressured to continue. Following are some brief steps to take in situations where participants lose interest in an aspect of the study.

*The participant no longer wants coaching or ACT Guide*

If a participant no longer wants to receive coaching in either form (phone call or text messages), assure the participant that this is completely fine, and that they will no longer receive communication from you. Let them know that they are still more than welcome to continue using ACT Guide. Ask if they would still be interested in filling out the final assessment survey once they reach their 10 week mark, and let them know that they are still eligible to receive the $10 reward for completing this survey even if they have ceased using ACT Guide or coaching services. If they are not interested in filling out the final assessment survey, see procedures below for dropping out.

These same steps apply if they say they are no longer interested in doing ACT Guide, just let them know that they will no longer receive communication from you, that they are free to continue using ACT Guide if they change their mind at any point, and ask if they would still like to the do the final assessment survey. After the call or text message exchange, note their decision regarding coaching/ACT Guide in your participant tracking log.

*The participant wants to drop out of the study*

To drop out of the study means that the participant would like to no longer receive any assessment surveys. If the participant expresses this to you, let them know that you will notify your supervisor and they will not receive any more communications regarding the study. Let them know that they are more than welcome to continue using ACT Guide even if they drop out of the study. Notify Korena Klimczak at [k.klimczak@aggiemail.usu.edu](mailto:k.klimczak@aggiemail.usu.edu) about the drop out after the conversation with the participant has ended.