

Acceptance & Change

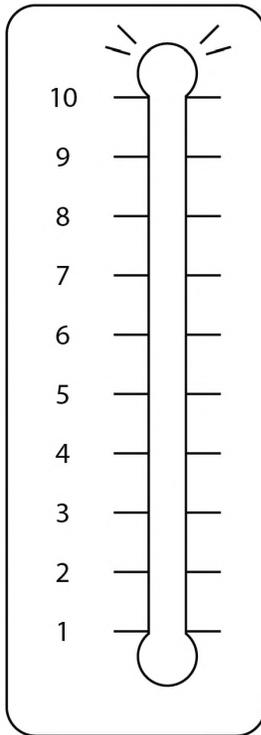
Welcome back to
CALM

Calming
Anxiety
Living
Mindfully

Chapter 3

My Anxiety Meter

Please think back on the past week, and rate your weekly average on this scale of 0-10.



- 10 - Highest anxiety/distress you have ever felt, unable to function
- 9 - Extremely anxious/distressed, highly affecting performance
- 8 - Very anxious/distressed, significantly impacting performance
- 7 - Quite anxious/distressed, moderately impacting performance
- 6 - Elevated anxiety/distress, some impact with performance
- 5 - Moderate anxiety/distress, uncomfortable, can still perform well
- 4 - Mild/moderate anxiety/distress, hard to ignore, fairly uncomfortable
- 3 - Mild anxiety/distress, no interference with performance
- 2 - Minimal anxiety/distress
- 1 - Alert and awake, concentrating well
- 0 - Totally relaxed

Check-in:

What was it like practicing your mindful daily activity?

How did practicing “I’m having the thought _____” or “I just had the thought” go this week?

Let's try the 3-Minute Breathing Space Meditation

The 3-minute breathing space is a helpful way to begin to integrate mindfulness into your daily life. There are 3 parts, and each lasts about one minute.

Minute 1: Awareness (becoming mindful of this moment)

Reflect on the question, “What is my experience right now... in thoughts... in feelings... in sensations?”

Notice and acknowledge whatever feelings, sensations, and thoughts arise.

Minute 2: Gathering (mindfully focusing in on your breathing)

“Now gently shift your full awareness to your breath. Notice each in-breath flow into each out-breath.”

Your breath can anchor you back to the present to find awareness and stillness.

Minute 3: Expanding (expanding focus to your whole body)

“Expand your awareness around your breathing... include your posture, facial expressions, your whole body.”

Source: Segal, et al., 2002

*“The curious paradox is that
when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change”*

- Carl Rogers

Discussion: What does acceptance mean to you?

Acceptance & Change

Acceptance and change almost seem like opposites. If we accept something, why would we change it? When we want to change something, isn't it because we don't accept it?

The field of psychology recognizes that acceptance and change are connected and not exclusive opposites. You can accept the way you are AND want to make changes in your life.

In CALM, we hope that you are willing to accept that you are a person of worth and value exactly as you are (anxiety and all!) AND that you have room for personal growth.

From our standpoint, acceptance is acknowledging the reality of the situation, no matter how much we might wish it were different.

Acceptance is acknowledging the reality of the situation,
AND the pain we are experiencing,
WITHOUT getting stuck in a cycle of "It shouldn't be this way!"

Dialectical World View



Image: The Noun Project, by Indra Anis, ID

The term dialectic refers to comparing, or balancing, 2 things that seem contradictory.

Acceptance & Change are commonly discussed dialectics. Another example is Love & Hate. We can hold feelings of love and hatred for the same person, as often occurs with difficult family members. We don't feel in the middle, or neutral, about the person. We feel both!

Instead of trying to see the world through a lens of "this OR that," it's important to be able to hold both at the same time. Try using the word "And" more often to describe your experience. For example, "I feel anxious And courageous."

A dialectical perspective also helps us avoid a pattern of all-or-nothing thinking

Discussion: What is a dialectic you are currently experiencing in your life?

Acceptance & Change Analogy: Getting Unstuck from Quicksand



Image: The Noun Project, by Markie Dossett, US

What is the best way to get out of quicksand? Is it struggling and fighting really hard?

No! Many of us have learned that if you fall into quicksand struggling and fighting only makes you sink deeper. This is much like refusing to accept anxiety. The more we fight acknowledging or accepting our anxiety, the worse it tends to get.

Instead, if we accept that we are in quicksand, much like accepting a stressful or scary reality, we can respond in the most effective way.

With acceptance, we don't deny that getting stuck in quicksand is awful or scary. We fully validate and acknowledge this AND we choose the most effective way to get through the difficult experience.

Discussion: How are quicksand and panic attacks similar?

*“The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different.
Accepting experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on.”*

-Segal, et al. 2002

What is “Pain?”

Pain is the pure physical or emotional response directly related to being hurt

You fall and hurt your knee = you feel an immediate pain response

Someone you love dies = you feel intense sadness and loss

What is Suffering?

According to world-renowned psychologist Dr. Marsha Linehan,
suffering is **Pain without acceptance**

Suffering often comes from the stories we tell ourselves in response to pain

“This isn’t fair!”

“They betrayed me!”

“It shouldn’t have happened!”

Examples of adding suffering to your pain:

After falling and hurting your knee (pain), telling yourself, “I’m an idiot!”

After a break-up, deciding “It’s all my fault. No one will ever stay with me.”

After your bike is stolen, repeatedly thinking “Why do bad things always happen to me?”

“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.”

- Haruki Murakami

Discussion: Please share a time when suffering played a role in your anxiety

Skill: Radical Acceptance

“Radical” is a term that actually means extreme. So, radical acceptance is extreme or total acceptance; it is “all the way” acceptance.

Radical Acceptance also means NOT GIVING UP on making positive changes that are possible. It is the opposite of rolling over; it’s doing what is most effective!

Radical Acceptance means you acknowledge the facts and see what is happening despite wishing things were different. Then, it’s about deciding to do what is most effective in response. This can be very challenging and extremely powerful!

What is Accepted in Radical Acceptance?

Reality is as it is, even when it’s very painful

Your pain is real and deserves to be acknowledged

Life can be meaningful and beautiful, even with tremendous pain

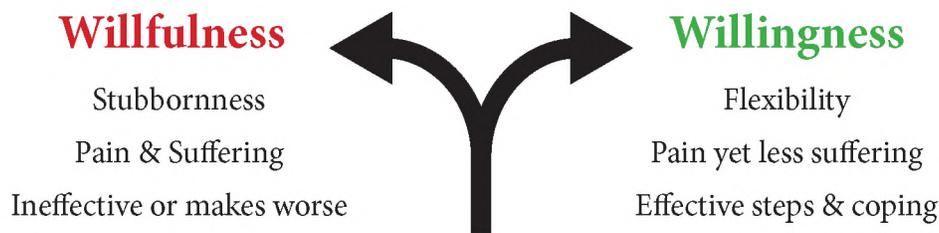
Acceptance allows us to see options we couldn’t before

Change is always possible in some way (at very least how we cope with the pain)

Discussion: Please share a time when suffering played a role in your anxiety

Turning the Mind:

Turning the Mind is when we realize we are at a fork in the road. We see that we can either go down the path of rejecting reality or make a difficult turn toward acceptance.



Willfulness is the desire to fight a difficult reality. This turns pain into suffering.

Willingness requires turning your mind toward acceptance over and over again.

Based on Linehan, 2015

Skill: Practicing Willingness

- 1) Observe and label your willfulness.
- 2) Validate your feelings & acknowledge the reality of the situation you're facing.
- 3) Ask, "What's most effective?" to manage this situation.

Skill: Willing Hands

The mind-body connection is powerful. By using a technique called "willing hands" we can use our body in a way that helps our mind with acceptance.

Willing hands is a simple yet effective technique to try when struggling to accept something. With this skill, we use body language to communicate willingness and acceptance to our mind.

Please take a moment to consider something you are having trouble accepting. It may be best to not pick the most difficult thing right at first. Perhaps you can consider one way your anxiety is affecting you that you don't always acknowledge.

Based on Linehan, 2015

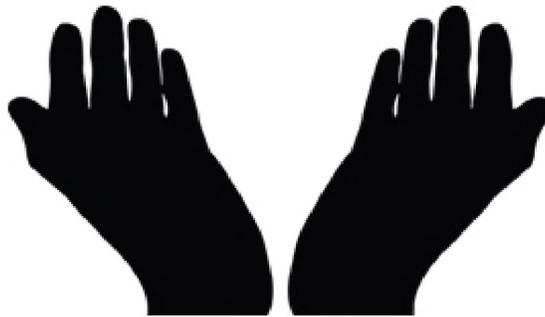


Image from Pixabay.com

Now, let's practice using Willing Hands

Steps for Willing Hands:

1. Rest your hands on your thighs, with palms turned upward, and fingers relaxed.
2. Now, remind yourself "I choose to accept _____."

Willing Hands: Instructions for standing or lying down:

If standing, simply keep arms by your side with palms facing in front of you. Keep hands open and relaxed.

If lying down, keep your arms by your side with open palms facing upward.

Acceptance and Change:

Please take a moment to consider accepting some area of your life that is affected by anxiety. Then, consider steps you could choose to take (if you're willing!) toward change.

My Steps for Change (example):

I accept that anxiety affects me by:

“Preventing me from answering questions in class, or introducing myself to other classmates.”

I could move toward change by:

“Answering at least one question, or talking to one classmate, each day I have class.”

My Steps for Change:

I accept that anxiety affects me by:

I could move toward change by:

Discussion: Please share any changes you are considering, if you are willing!

Anxiety & Me

Now let's consider what our anxiety actually reflects about us.

Have you ever asked yourself, “*What does my anxiety say about me that is good or amazing?*”

Wait, what?!?! Probably not...

Your worries and sources of anxiety have led to distress and suffering. So, it's pretty rare to look at the values and priorities anxiety reflects about you that are positive.

Imagine a person worrying they may have judged and treated someone differently because of their own bias.

What does that say about their character or values?

It may reflect values of equality and social justice, and strengths of responsibility & fairness.

Recognizing ways your anxiety is related to personal and cultural strengths & values is a powerful step toward **changing your relationship with anxiety.**

Also, reflecting on our values and moving in valued directions are powerful coping skills that have been shown to help effectively manage symptoms of anxiety (Hayes, 2014).

Consider these additional examples:

- A person with obsessive thoughts and compulsive cleaning behaviors may have many organizational strengths, exceptional attention to detail, and a value of discipline.
- A person with panic attacks and fear of dying may value and appreciate life and prioritize health more than others who take time and health for granted.

You are NOT your Anxiety, yet your struggles with anxiety reflect amazing and beautiful things about your strengths and values!

Now, let's put this into practice, and start identifying some of your values and strengths.

Anxiety & Me

Please circle the strengths and values that match how you (or others who know you well) might describe you.

Strengths: Compassion, humor, thoughtfulness, humility, honesty, fairness, passion for social justice, freedom, connection, empathy, perspective taking, analytical thinking, curiosity, spontaneity, planning, conscientiousness, reliability, trustworthiness...

Other Strengths: _____

Values: Family, the environment, relationships, community, religion, spirituality, education, empowerment, freedom, social justice, kindness, faith, mercy, preparation, independence, inter-dependence, integrity, courage, holistic wellness, equality for all, discipline, fairness...

Other Values: _____

My anxiety about _____

shows my strength/value of _____

My anxiety about _____

shows my strength/value of _____

My strength(s) of _____

will help me manage anxiety and change my relationship with it.

My value(s) of _____

will help me manage anxiety and change my relationship with it.

Additional realizations, strengths, or values that are important to me include:

Created by David Emmert, Psy.D. San José State University Counseling and Psychological Services, 2018

Discussion:

If you're willing, please share experiences from "Anxiety and Me."



Weekly Mindful Exercises

Thank you for joining us today!

To get the most out of this experience, please practice radical acceptance while taking steps toward change and growth.

Try to also catch yourself this week whenever you notice yourself turning pain into suffering.

Through mindfulness of your suffering, you'll start finding important patterns and themes. This week, when you notice your mind going down these similar paths, try saying to yourself "suffering."

This will help you realize you don't have to replay the same old thoughts, images, memories, and stories that lead back to suffering. Then, you can choose to reconnect with the present through mindfulness.

Much like the "I'm having the thought..." exercise last week:

Practice labeling "suffering" and then reconnecting with the present moment around you!

Bonus Technique:

You can practice jumping right back into the present by reminding yourself "I'm back" once you realize you were drifting into a place of suffering.