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Accepting Emotions with Willingness

In this activity you will be practicing experiencing your emotions even the difficult ones. Many painful emotions we react with avoidance which prevents us from fully giving ourselves time to process them. That is where the concept of willingness comes from.

Avoidance says:	Willingness says:
Try not to think about it. Distract yourself!	I will remain open to what I feel like and make "space" for it.
Judges: Things that are painful or uncomfortable are just bad.	Acts like a curious scientist: How can I describe and not judge what's going on.
Catastrophizes: I can't handle this. What if this lasts forever?	Ground self in present: I can be here and now. Emotions come and go.
I shouldn't feel this way. Something must be wrong with me.	I do feel this way. But I will choose my actions.
I have to escape, avoid, shut down.	I can describe, explore, and be curious.

You can try this by doing this with the experience of holding your breath and being open to the discomfort you feel as you begin feeling the discomforting out of breath feeling. Or you can try this with a moderately painful feeling or thought.

1. Start by adopting a posture of ease. Close your eyes, if it is comfortable, or slowly lower your gaze down toward the floor in front of you.
2. Bring your awareness to your breathing. Notice as you inhale through the nostrils, as your chest and abdomen expand with each inhalation and contract with each exhalation. Follow this slow rhythm as the breath flows in and out of your body.
3. Bring to mind something you are struggling with (or begin holding your breath) if you are working with a feeling, continue breathing slowly and see if you can figure out what feeling(s) it is. Approach this by saying **"I am noticing the sensation, thought or feeling _____ right now."**
4. As you remain present with this, be curious about any physical sensations, thoughts or emotions begin to pop up. See if you can feel these with willingness and openness. Turn towards them, not away from them.
5. Gently thank your mind for this feeling.

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6. Out of curiosity imagine what it might feel like to want to learn and experience this difficult emotion.
7. What does _____ feel like? Notice if there is an urge to turn away or resist. Know that you can always return to your breathing, grounding yourself in the breath, but do your best to stay with your present-moment experience
8. Open up to, allow and accept them as they are.

Adding acceptance, willingness and self compassion to your experience

This task challenges you to get in touch with your feelings and make space for it even when it is really difficult. It's very natural to not want to experience painful things and sometimes it is necessary. However, when it has us feeling trapped or stuck that is where self-compassion is important.

Imagine that one of your friends confided in you they are experiencing intense feelings of loneliness, anxiety, distressing memories, or intrusive thoughts. Many people would offer kindness, compassion or support, maybe even a hug. You wouldn't tell them to just "try not to think about it," "get over it," "suck it up," "have a drink," or that they are stupid for feeling that way.

Do you offer yourself kindness, compassion, or support? If not, let's work on changing that. Imagine what would be most helpful to you when you experience distress? An example might be "I'm so sorry. I know this is hard. I am here for you?" Write below your own examples:

Try to do the activity above again this time integrating self compassion, kindness, and support. Even just for a few moments. As you practice over time you will begin to hold on to difficult emotions and hold it with a sense of kind awareness.

Gustafson, C. (2019). *Reclaim your life: Acceptance & commitment therapy in 7 weeks: Strategies to manage depression, anxiety, Ptsd, Ocd, and more*. Rockridge Press.

Additionally Inspired by Youtuber: Therapy in a Nutshell