



# Intro to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

WITH DR. CASSIDY FREITAS, LMFT

# Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

- ACT (“act” not A.C.T.)
- Founder: Steven Hayes, PhD
- mid 1980s- First implemented
- 1999- Fully systematized and first original publication of ACT
- 2011- Was listed by the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices



# Clinical Care Framework



# ACT Roots

- Third wave of behavioral therapy
- Relational Frame Theory
- Our mind's job:
  - To protect us from danger, to help us survive by constantly categorizing and evaluating
  - ACT regards the mind as a double-edged sword.



# LANGUAGE

## PROS

- HELP US MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD
- PLAN FOR THE FUTURE
- LEARN FROM THE PAST
- SHARE KNOWLEDGE
- COMMUNICATE WITH THOSE WE LOVE

## CONS

- CAN USE IT TO LIE, MANIPULATE
- CAN INCITE HATRED
- COMPARE, JUDGE, CRITICIZE OURSELVES AND OTHERS
- DWELL ON AND "RELIVE" PAST EVENTS
- SCARE OURSELVES BY IMAGINING UNPLEASANT FUTRE



Human  
Suffering is  
Universal

# Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

## **F.E.A.R**

- Fusion with your thoughts
- Excessive goals
- Avoidance of your thoughts
- Removed from your values

## **D.A.R.E**

- Defusion with your thoughts
- Acceptance of discomfort
- Realistic goals
- Embracing your values



# ACT Goals

A contextually focused therapy that uses mindfulness and behavioral activation to increase the following for our clients:

- Psychological Flexibility
- Ability to engage in values-based positive behaviors while experiencing difficult thoughts, emotions, or sensations





# ACT'S 6 Core Processes

01

ACCEPTANCE OF  
PRIVATE EXPERIENCES

02

COGNITIVE  
DEFUSION

03

BEING PRESENT  
MINDFULNESS

04

A PERSPECTIVE TAKING  
SENSE OF SELF

05

IDENTIFICATION OF  
PERSONAL VALUES

06

COMMITMENT TO  
VALUES-BASED ACTION



# Fusion and Avoidance

Road Trip Metaphor

# Fusion and Avoidance

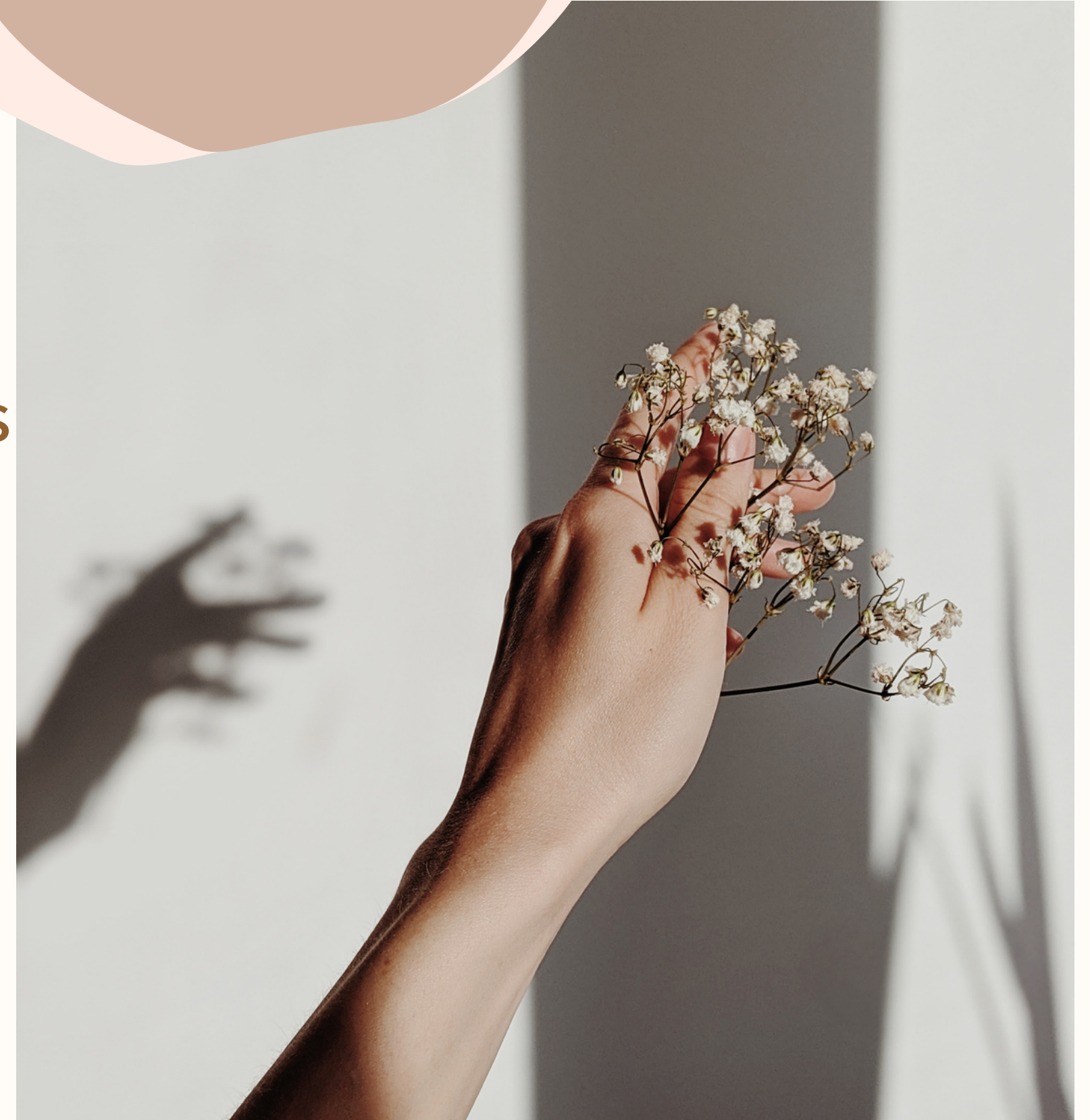
- **Experiential Avoidance**
  - The tendency to avoid making direct contact with distressing thoughts or images, unpleasant emotions, painful memories, distressing physical sensations, and the situations that trigger them
- **Cognitive Fusion**
  - Tendency of human beings to get caught up in the content of what they are thinking so that it dominates over other useful sources of behavioral regulation.



# Poll Time!

Which resonates most when it comes to your relationship with painful emotions, memories, or future worries

- 01 AVOID AND/OR WHITE-KNUCKLE
- 02 I GET HOOKED AND SPIRAL!
- 03 OOF, A COMBO OF BOTH





# Acceptance and Willingness

- **Acceptance**
  - Adopting a gentle, loving posture toward yourself, your history, and your programming, so that it becomes more likely for you simply to be aware of your own experience, much as you would hold a fragile object in your hand and contemplate it closely and without bias
- **Willingness**
  - Moving from: “I want to change, but I am anxious about it.”
  - “You want to change, AND you are anxious about it.”

# Acceptance and Willingness

- What acceptance is NOT
  - Not referring to accepting situations events or behaviors that are readily changeable.
- **Example: abusive situation**
  - If you are being abused by someone else, acceptance of abuse is not what is called for. What may be called for is acceptance that you are in pain, of difficult memories that have been produced, or the fear that will come from taking the necessary steps to stop the abuse.

# Cognitive Defusion

HELP CLIENTS TO SEE THOUGHTS AS THEY ARE—  
THOUGHTS—SO THOSE THOUGHTS CAN BE  
RESPONDED TO IN TERMS OF THEIR WORKABILITY  
GIVEN THE CLIENT'S VALUES





# Cognitive Defusion

- Allows one to step back and look at their thoughts in a broader and more flexible way, so you can see thoughts for what they are
- The “milk” exercise
- Conditioned nature of thoughts and words
- We relate certain words to phrases, and also...to ourselves
- Blondes have more \_\_\_\_\_
- Deep down, I’m afraid that I’m \_\_\_\_\_



# Cognitive Defusion

- An attached identity to: “I am no good.” vs the thought: “I am no good.”
  - Externalize the part of you that is bringing the thought
  - Identify a thought, then loosen the trap of the words by seeing it as “data” not “direction”
  - Mental Appreciation – “Thanks for the input mind, you’re really letting me know I need to slow down, or that this thing is really important to me.”

Hold that thought  
like you might hold  
a butterfly that has  
landed on your  
finger, observe it...  
notice it...



# If I'm not my thoughts...then who am I?

## Thinking Self

- Your mind and interpretations. Verbal categorizations and evaluations.
- Acceptance: making room for painful feelings, allowing them to come and go without a struggle

## Physical Self

- Your body and your physical responses.
- Mindfulness: contact with the present moment, engaging fully with you're here and now experience, with an attitude of openness and curiosity

## Observing Self

- Capable of awareness and attention. Descriptive, non-evaluative, present, and flexible.
- Defusion: distancing from and letting go of, unhelpful thoughts, beliefs, and memories  
“Now I am feeling \_\_\_\_\_” “Now I am remembering\_\_\_\_\_” “Now I am experiencing\_\_\_\_\_”





# Being Present

- Mindfulness
  - Engaging fully with your here-and-now experience, with an attitude of openness and curiosity, not judgment
- Practice
  - Set aside the time
  - The point isn't to get to a "relaxed state," the point is to be aware of whatever is going on for you without avoidance or fusion



# Values

- Chosen life directions that bring purpose and a deeper meaning to one's life
- Defined in ACT as something you **do** or a quality of something you do, not something you **have**
- Put aside values based on what our culture deems as appropriate, your values are yours and yours alone





# Values

- Values are here and now; goals are in the future
- Values often need to be prioritized
- Values are best held lightly- they aren't commandments we have to obey, they should be flexible guides that you can pull out to use when you need help finding direction
- Values are freely chosen
- Sometimes your choice is not between “right” and “wrong” but between two cherished values



# Values

Identify values in the following realms:

01 HEALTH

02 RELATIONSHIPS

03 WORK

04 PLAY







# Clarifying Values

- The sweet spot
  - Vividly recall a rich “sweet” memory and get in touch with the emotions.  
What is meaningful about this memory?
- Speeches
  - Two or three people make a speech on an important birthday or anniversary, what do they say about what you stand for? What you mean to them? What you have modeled?
- Exploring your pain
  - Pain as your ally: what does this pain tell you about what really matters, what you truly care about? What do they remind you is very important?



# Committed Action

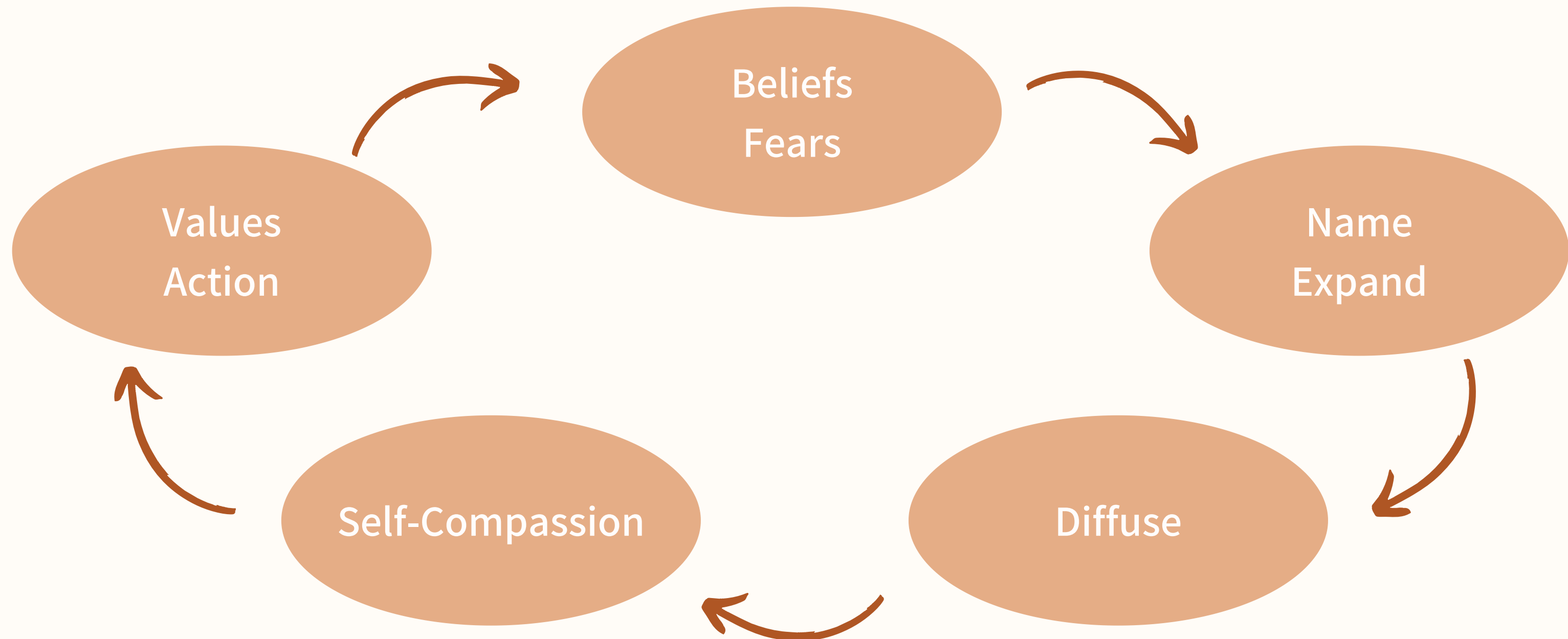
- Start out big or small, moving in the direction of becoming the person you want to be
- What can you do today?
- S.M.A.R.T. Goals
  - Specific, Measureable AND Meaningful, Adaptive AND Achievable, Realistic, Time-Framed







# Socio/Cultural/Family Systems Attunement





# How is ACT different from CBT?

	CBT	ACT
Treatment of thoughts	Cognitive restructuring	Cognitive defusion/Acceptance
Physical Symptoms	Prediction and Control	Acceptance/Observing Self
Therapy Outcomes	Symptom Reduction	Valued Living

# ACT with Couples and Families

Identify the DRAIN in the relationships:

**Disconnection-** how do you disconnect from your partner (get bored, irritable, stop listening, close off, distracted and not present)

**Reactivity-** How do I react impulsively or automatically (do you yell, snap, swear, storm off, say hurtful things?)

**Avoidance-** How do you try to avoid or get rid of painful feelings that are related to the relationship? (substance, social media, shopping, triangulating)

**Inside Your Mind-** How do you get trapped in your mind? (getting caught up in worrying about the future, rehash old arguments, get caught up in judgment, blame, rejection..)

**Neglecting Values-** What core values do you neglect, forget about, or act inconsistently with when issues arise in the relationship?

# ACT with Couples and Families

- **Mindfulness:** Partners and family members becoming more aware, present, and engaged with themselves and their partner/family member
- **Acceptance:** Accepting that relational discomfort will be experienced, and that past hurts will arise, holding them lightly rather than being hooked by them
- **Values:** What are the shared and personal values?
- **Committed Action:** Using values to create relational SMART goals





# Now What?

Take your own ACT action:

01 TRAININGS/MANUAL

02 BOOKS

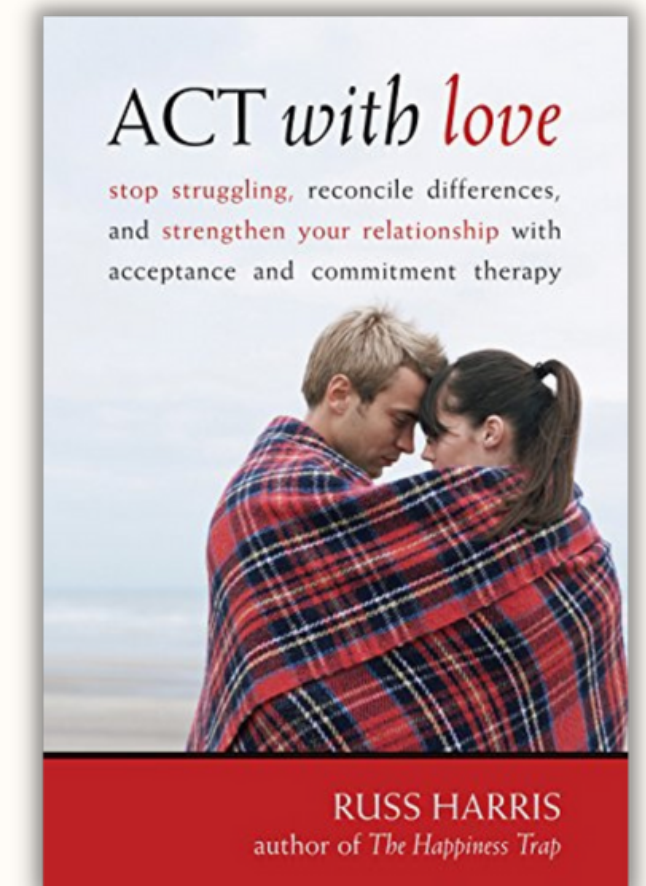
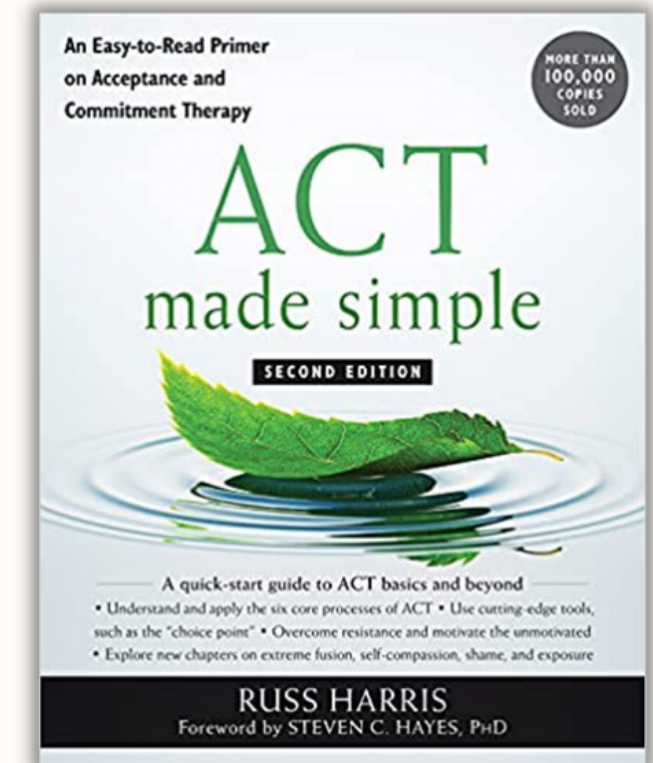
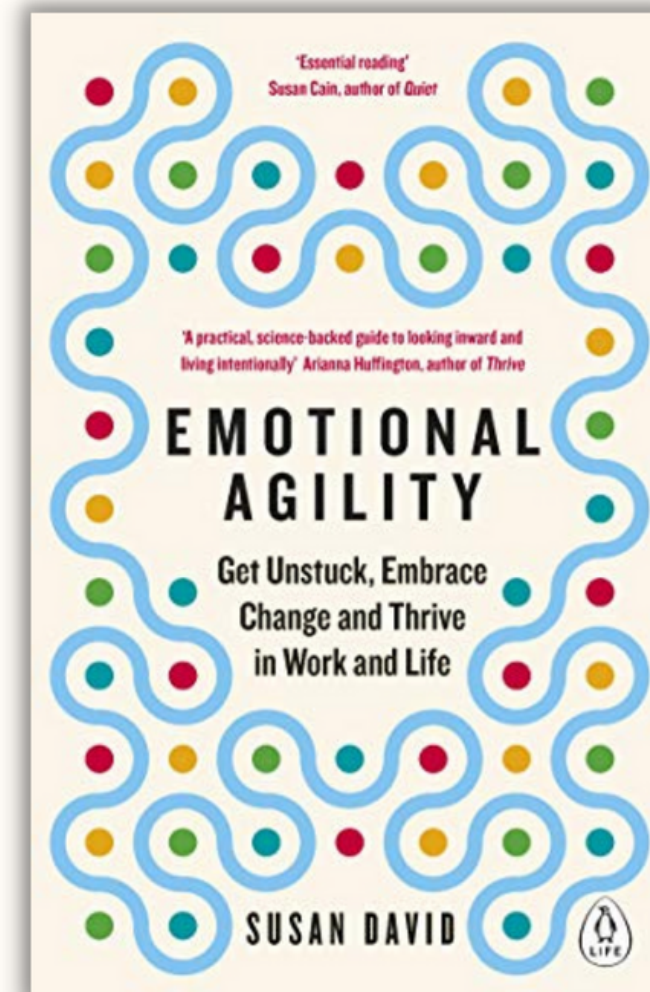
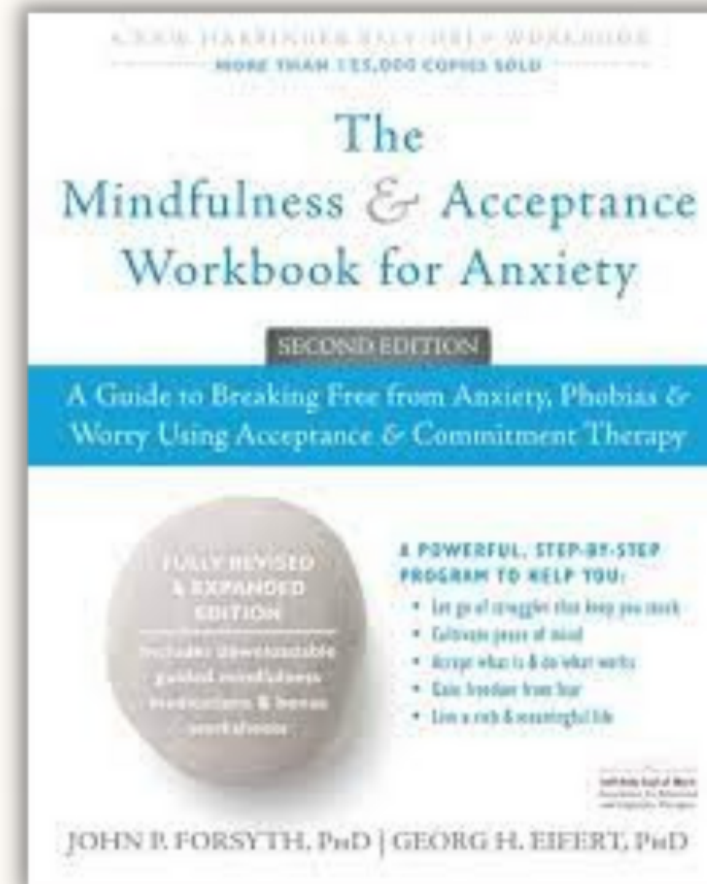
03 PODCASTS



# Now What?

overcast.fm

Episode 136 | Susan David on Emotional Agility — The RobCast — Overcast



Listen to Holding Space Podcast: Episode 42  
Cultivating a New Relationship with Emotion through  
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy  
with Dr. Sophie Mort



# Questions?

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