

Module 6

Who Am I?

"You can see a lot just by observing" ~ Yogi Berra

Review Weekly Tasks

Review acceptance exercises from last week

Introduction to Who Am I?

Over the previous sessions, we looked at how we can learn to not be defined or ruled by our thoughts and emotions. The opposite of this is being open to our thoughts and emotions, and to see them for what they are: a flow of our inner experience that changes over time. In today's session we are going to explore this concept a bit more deeply. We are going to look at "the self" and what this means.

In Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT), there are 3 ways of experiencing the self:

1. Self as Content

The first one is self as a content. If you were to describe yourself as "I am smart", "I am funny", "I like to play board games", "I am clumsy", and "I am anxious" this would be content, this is how we describe and identify ourselves on an ongoing basis that creates a narrative about who you are.

Group Exercise - Self as Content:

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

These statements represent the content of your life, and they will likely have emotions and sensations and memories associated with them. If you'd like, you can also write in a feeling or memory that is evoked by those statements.

2. Self as Process

This self refers to the ongoing flow of experience, your thoughts, emotions and physical sensations are all on the move from moment-to-moment, whereby your experiences flow on a continual basis. This self is not about those statements, but about the process of experiencing the ongoing flow of your experiences.

Group Exercise - Self as Process:

Take one of those “I am _____” statements (Self as Content) and freely write about it for a few minutes. Also notice how you feel as you are doing this exercise and include that as well:

I am _____

3. Self As Context

The sense of self is one that can observe and notice the narratives of the mind (the “I am” statements) and the flow of our emotional experience. This is the sense of self that offers you a choice in how you want to respond to that content and live your life according to your values.

Group Exercise - Self as Context:

Take a different “I am _____” statement that you wrote in the Self as Content section and write it in the space below:

I am _____

Notice that this “I am” statement is your mind’s interpretation! Now, I invite you to rewrite that in the space below:

My Mind’s Interpretation: I am _____

For example:

My Mind’s Interpretation: I am polite _____

In addition to your mind’s interpretation, there is also your actual experience. Now, I invite you to write down in the space below what your actual experience tells you:

What my experience tells me: _____

For example:

What my experience tells me: Although there are times that I am a polite person, the other day I was being quite rude to my coworker.

What are the Costs? - Fusing with “I am” Statements:

There are so many more thoughts that we just simply “*buy into*” without ever really noticing what we're doing or questioning our thoughts to a degree that actually matches our experience. When we fuse with these statements and treat them as “*rules that we must live by*” our quality of life suffers.

For example, “I am too shy to go to the party”. This statement is full of constraint that shuts down opportunity. If you start looking, you'll start to see that there are all sorts of narratives showing up all over your life, defining who you are, and what you can, or should do. The unhooking exercises that we did in session 4 is one way of loosening the grip of these statements.

Group Exercise - Who Is In Charge?

Stage Metaphor

Imagine a stage in a theater with actors, set details, and props on it. The props and the set all change with the different scenes of the play and the actors move on and off the stage. If the props, the set, and the actors are your thoughts, feelings, and sensations (self as content) and the changes of set and the props and the movement of the actors are the flow (self as process) then the stage is the “*noticer*”. It is the place where all the events of the play occur. The stage

was in contact with the props, the actors, and the set details, and the stage is and it is not those things. The stage can hold all the experiences that are happening in the play. Now, let's do an exercise in order to get into contact with this “*noticer you*”.

Group Mindfulness Exercise

Video

“Internal Struggles” ~ Dr. Russ Harris (2.28)

This video outlines The Chessboard Metaphor

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz_nexLqY_8

Notes on Video (optional)

Weekly Tasks

Catching Self Awareness (Hayes, 2019)

Begin regularly to ask yourself the following question as you go about your daily life:

“And who is noticing that?”

You can set reminders on your phone or computer to do this. Or you could set a rule for times to ask it, such as whenever you touch your phone, or keys, or wallet. When the cues appear take a moment to notice your experience and touch awareness for a split second as you ask “and who is noticing that?”

Be careful not to let the question lead to an extended mental debate or analysis about who you are – that is your judgmental mind trying to tell a self-story. Shut that process down if it kicks in by using your defusion skills, such as observing the thoughts like clouds in the sky, or imagining that your mind is an overly helpful friend.

The goal is to touch the “I am here, in the now” of how you relate to your experiences, or your observing self, even if that’s just for a millisecond. Over time you will find that asking yourself this question becomes second nature and your connection to your authentic self keeps strengthening. You will quickly find that you are treating yourself with more compassion and feeling more genuinely connected with more and more people in your life.