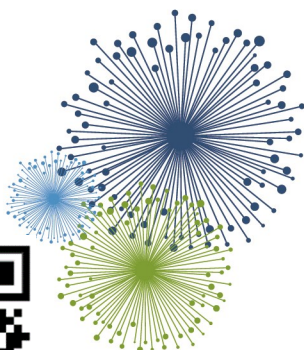




Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for PTSD

Veteran Manual

Regan Settles, Ph.D.
Beth Morris, Ph.D.
Kristi Bratkovich, Ph.D.



south central

mirecc

Mental Illness Research, Education
and Clinical Center

Acknowledgements

Portions of this manual were adapted from or influenced by the following sources:

- Follette, V.M., & Pistorello, J. (2007). *Finding Life Beyond Trauma: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Heal Post-Traumatic Stress and Trauma-Related Problems*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Harris, R. (2009). *ACT Made Simple: An easy-to-read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: an experiential approach to behavior change*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Hayes, S. C., & Strosahl, K. D. (Eds.). (2005). *A practical guide to acceptance and commitment therapy*. New York: Springer Science.
- Hayes, S.C., & Smith, S. (2005) *Get of Your Mind and Into your Life*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.
- Juariscio, A., Shaw, J., Forman, E., Timko, C.A., Herbert, J., Butryn, M., & Lowe, M. (2010) The WE-ACT Group: Weight and Eating Applications of Acceptance-Based Treatments. Unpublished Manual.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York: Hyperion.
- Stahl, B., & Goldstein, E. (2010). *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.
- Walser, R.D. & Westrup, D. (2007). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for the Treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Trauma-related Problems*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Portions of session 10 were also adapted from sources on Dr. Russ Harris' website:
www.thehappinesstrap.com

The authors would also like to thank Chase Bailey, Ph.D. for his assistance early versions of this manual.”

This work was supported by a clinical educator grant from the VA South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC)

Group Guidelines

- **Confidentiality**

Everything you discuss in group is confidential with two exceptions: (1) If you report any plans to hurt yourself or someone else and (2) If you report any abuse. In both of these cases, group leaders are legally required to break your confidentiality to protect you and/or others

While your group leaders are bound to confidentiality, group members are not. By participating in this group, we ask you to keep this a safe space by keeping everything that your fellow group members discuss private.

- **Respect**

We are all unique people and will have different points of view. Please respect others who think differently than you do. Please also respect that people process their trauma at different paces.

- **Be on time**

We have a lot to discuss in this group! If you are more than five minutes late, please enter quietly to avoid disruption. Please also be aware that we may not be able to catch you up on missed content.

- **Missing sessions**

If you miss more than two weeks of the group, we will ask you to discontinue and start again during another group. This is because missing more than two sessions will result in you not receiving adequate exposure to the group content.

- **Staying on Topic**

Most people have numerous problems going on in their lives. While we view all of this as important, our focus in this group is on posttraumatic stress symptoms. If we redirect you during group, it is not because what you are saying is wrong. Instead, it is because we have limited time and want to make sure that we focus on the purpose of the group. You may also bring something up that is on topic and important, but that we cannot fully address as a group. In these instances, you may be asked to address the topic with an individual therapist or group leader outside of the group session.

- **Homework**

If you only come to group and do nothing in between sessions, this group will have limited effectiveness. For this reason, we will be giving you weekly assignments to complete between sessions. This homework serves two purposes. First, it helps you apply the things you are learning in group to your specific struggles. Second, it gives you experience using the group material in the real world. If you are struggling with any of the assignments, please bring this up to group leaders as soon as possible so that we can help you identify and overcome barriers.

- **Open-mindedness**

During this group we will ask you to think in new ways and at times participate in activities that seem different to you. It is normal to feel confused at times or wonder if this will be helpful to you. Please keep an open mind throughout the group.

Session 1 Overview

What is ACT

The overall idea of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, or ACT, is that trying to avoid the pain of PTSD comes at a cost: that cost is the ability to really engage in a life that is meaningful to YOU. The core idea of this group is that we can learn new ways to live with pain, while making more room for the important things in our lives.

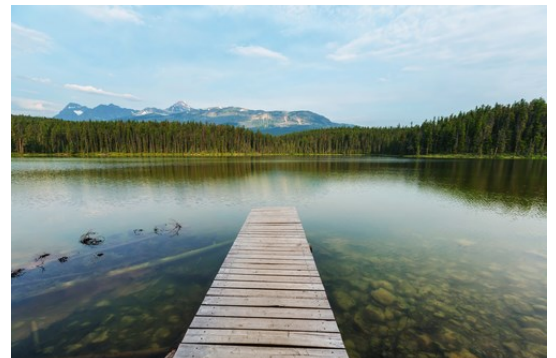


Goals of the Group

- Overcome the pull to avoid your painful memories and anxiety
- Learn skills to help you live a life that matters to you, despite the presence of PTSD
- Learn skills to relate to your trauma a new way, so it has less power over your actions

Pain of Presence and Absence

Pain is inevitable and unavoidable. We can think of the inevitable presence of pain in life as “clean pain.” When we put a lot of focus and effort into avoiding or getting rid of the pain of presence, we can miss out on important things in life. This is the pain of absence, which can be thought of as “dirty pain” or avoidable pain. By reducing the pain of absence, ACT helps us reconnect with what we find most meaningful and important.



Tug of War Monster Activity: My Take Home Points

Session 1: The Pain of PTSD Worksheet

Column 1: What are the sources of my PTSD Pain? (“clean pain”)	Column 2: How have I have tried to get rid of PTSD pain?	Column 3: What am I missing out on when I do that? How does this interfere with the life I want? (“dirty pain”)

Common sources of PTSD Pain:

- Feelings (e.g., anxiety, anger)
- Sensations (e.g., shaky, tense)
- Urges (e.g., to leave a crowded place, to use substances)
- Thoughts (e.g., about the trauma)
- Memories (e.g., of what happened)
- Images/Sounds

Common ways we try to get rid of PTSD Pain:

- Distraction (e.g., videogames, working overtime)
- Withdrawing or giving up (e.g., isolating, stopping activities)
- Thinking (e.g., ruminating, dwelling on, fantasizing, blaming)
- Numbing (e.g., with substances, self-harm, recklessness)
- Controlling (e.g., only sitting in a particular place, always being the driver)
- Avoiding people, places, things
- Constantly checking for danger

Session 1 Home work

- Finish completing your Pain of PTSD worksheet. Consider bigger sources of pain that you struggle with as well as day to day things that come up for you. See if you can identify any patterns in how you tend to try to get rid of pain/anxiety, and assess the potential personal cost of those efforts.
- Complete the PTSD Beliefs and Behaviors worksheet. Use the completed example as a guide.

Session 1 Homework: PTSD Beliefs and Behaviors Worksheet

Directions: PTSD can impact how we think about things (our beliefs) and what we do (our behaviors). Consider how your PTSD has affected your beliefs about yourself, other people, and the world in the following areas. Answer the following questions by writing how PTSD has affected your beliefs in each area. Next, write how this belief has affected your behavior (i.e., led you to do something differently). Write about the impact of these behaviors on you living the life you want to live. Be as specific as possible. Use the completed example on the following page as a guide.

1. How has PTSD affected your sense of safety? _____

2. How has PTSD affected your ability to be intimate with others or comfortable with yourself?

3. How has PTSD affected your ability to trust yourself or others? _____

4. How has PTSD affected your confidence in yourself and in other people? _____

Questions to help you identify ways that your beliefs may have impacted your beliefs and behaviors:

Are there places you won't go or things you won't do? What are you afraid will happen in those places?
Are there any ways in which you tend to "check out," give up, or numb yourself?
Do you try to control scary situations? For example, do you scan dangerous environments?
Check your doors at night a lot? Ask family to call in frequently? Do you look for signs of being hurt by others? Do you isolate? Are there ways you try to punish yourself?

Session 1 Homework: PTSD Beliefs and Behaviors Worksheet

Completed example

1. How has PTSD affected your sense of safety?

I believe I must always be on guard. This leads to me checking my doors a lot at night and constantly scanning my environment. This leaves me feeling safer but I also can't always enjoy myself when I am out because I am on guard.

I am afraid that if I go out in a crowd, I will get anxious and lose control. This keeps me from going to important events with my family. It also decreases my confidence in myself.

I am scared that my daughter will get hurt. To manage my fear, I make her check in with me constantly. This annoys her and causes tension in our relationship. It also makes me constantly anxious when she is gone.

2. How has PTSD affected your ability to be intimate with others or comfortable with yourself?

I don't believe that civilians can understand me. I cope by not spending time with them. This has hurt my relationship with my family and left me with few friends.

I don't want to get close to people because I'm afraid they might get hurt. I cope by isolating. This has left me feeling lonely.

3. How has PTSD affected your ability to trust yourself or others?

I am afraid that if I express my emotions, I will lose control. This keeps me bottling a lot of things inside.

I don't think I can trust anyone. I keep everyone distant and I don't have many relationships.

4. How has PTSD affected your confidence in yourself and in other people?

I believe that I am damaged and unlovable because of my trauma. This leads me to push people away before they get too close. Again, I stay emotionally safe but I am lonely.

I believe that I don't deserve to be happy because other people have died. I cope with this by not letting myself enjoy any good things in life. I am miserable because of it.

I believe that other people are always working against me. I cope with this by keeping them at a distance. This has made me feel lonely and angry a lot.

Session 2 Overview

Reminder:

It is a natural part of being human to try and avoid pain. With PTSD, the pull to try and avoid painful or scary memories, thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations is strong. One of our goals in this group is to help you overcome the pull of avoidance.

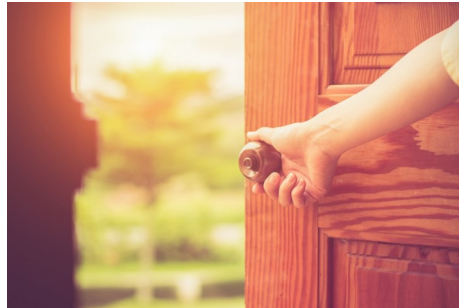


Joe the Annoying Uncle: My Take Home Points:

Session 2 Overview

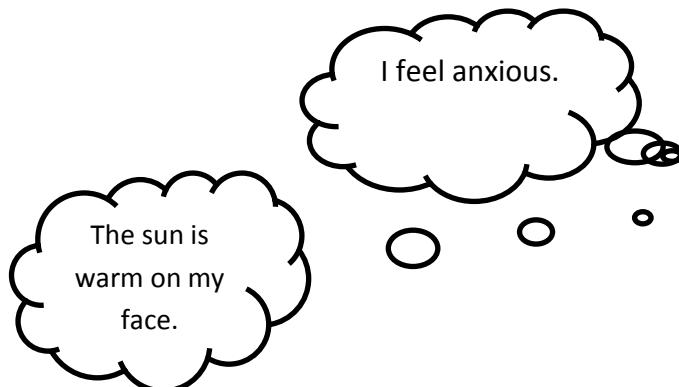
Willingness

- Willingness means “making room” for all the negative feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, memories, etc. associated with your trauma so that you can free up your energy to focus on what matters to you.
- Willingness is about living with the AND instead of the BUT. (e.g., “I want to go out with my family AND I’m anxious about it” instead of “I want to go out with my family BUT I’m anxious.”). This attitude allows you to carry the painful things AND still pursue the life you want.
- Willingness isn’t a one-time action. It is a constant choice.
- Willingness doesn’t get rid of your symptoms. Getting rid of your symptoms may be a nice side-effect, but you have to practice willingness regardless of whether you get symptom relief.



Mindfulness

- Being aware of your present environment, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and physical sensations, rather than thinking about the past or worrying about the future.
- Goals of mindfulness:
 - To help you see what goes on inside yourself in order to counter the emotional disconnect/numbing and hypervigilance that pulls you from the present moment
 - To serve as a “systems check” so you can engage in healthy action
 - To create some space between what you experience and how you react
 - To increase your ability to accept painful internal experiences and increase your pleasant experiences



Session 2 Home work

- Practice mindfulness daily using the Be Where You Are exercise in your appendix as a guide. Aim for at least 5-10 minutes and record your experience in your mindfulness log. Remember, whatever comes up is ok! There is no right or wrong way to be mindful.
- Complete the PTSD Beliefs and Behaviors Worksheet if you did not do so last week.
- Complete the Willingness Assessment.

Session 2 Homework: Willingness Assessment

Look over your PTSD Belief and Behaviors worksheet from last week. Right now in this moment, how willing are you to experience the fears, images, and emotions you identified on your worksheet?

My Rating: _____. (0 = completely unwilling, 10 = completely willing)

Right now, how willing are you to change some of the behaviors you have been using to cope?

My Rating: _____. (0 = completely unwilling, 10 = completely willing)

How might your life look different if you were to choose a willing stance more frequently?

What will life look like if you consistently choose unwillingness?

Session 2 Homework: Mindfulness Log

Mindfulness Skill Practiced	Time spent practicing	Observations

Session 3 Overview

What is Fusion?

Fusion: Believing that a thought is true and important



Saliva Exercise: My Take Home Points

What is Defusion?

Defusion: recognizing a thought for what it is - sounds, words, stories, bits of language Not believing, following, or attending to unhelpful thoughts. Instead recognizing that thoughts may or may not be true. Whether they are true or not is not what matters. What matters is whether they are helpful.



Hands as Thoughts Exercise: My Take Home Points

Defusion Practice

My Practice Thought: _____

Defusion exercises practiced in group:

Session 3 Home work

- Practice Defusion. Take the list of each difficult thought you identified on your PTSD Beliefs and Behaviors Worksheet. Practice using any combination of defusion strategies on at least one thought per day. You can also continue to practice with the thought you used in group today. There is a list of extra defusion exercises you can try after the mindfulness log. Record your experience below.
- Practice the Mindful Check-in at least once per day. Aim for 5-10 minutes. Record your experience in your mindfulness log. You can find a script for the check-in in your appendix of mindfulness exercises.

Session 3 Homework: Mindfulness Log

Mindfulness Skill Practiced	Time spent practicing	Observations

SESSION 3: Defusion Strategies

A Beautiful Mind	See if you can picture your negative chatter as different people that follow you everywhere, you see and acknowledge they are there AND need to not talk to, be friends with, or fight against
Pop-Up Mind	Imagine that your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations are like Internet pop-up ads that just keep popping up when you least want them to, and which you can simply let pop.
Passengers on a Bus	Imagine that your difficult thoughts and experiences are passengers on your bus, folks that may be scary, but who need not leave the bus to move.
Gollum Mind	Imagine that your mind is like Gollum and tries to trick you sometimes just as Gollum did with Frodo by saying he could not trust his friends or who craves something that is not good for you.
Thoughts are not Causes	Ask yourself “could I still have this uncomfortable thought, feeling, or memory and still do (insert value based goal here)?
Waves in the Ocean	This is good for impulses and urges. When experiencing the urge (to avoid for example), picture it as a wave coming into the shore, building gradually, peaking, and then subsiding. Be the sand that receives it without having to do anything but just notice it coming and going
Think One Thing, Do Another	Try to say or think that you can’t do something while doing it. “I really can’t go to the gym today” while lacing up your shoes, opening the car door (“I really can’t”), getting in (“Maybe tomorrow”), and getting to the gym (“I’m way too busy to go to the gym”) and then exercising

SESSION 3: Defusion Strategies

The Television Screen	Bring an unpleasant image to mind. Now imagine there is a TV screen across the room from you, place your image on the screen. Play around with the image, flip it upside down, turn it on its side. If it's more like a movie, play it in slow motion or reverse it at double speed. Make the image black and white, or really vivid colors. Make the image seem like a harmless scary movie that you can watch and then walk away from.
Get of Your Buts	Replace the word "but" with "and." For example, rather than saying "I want to do that but I'm anxious" say, "I want to do that AND I'm anxious."
The Mind	Treat "the mind" as an external event, almost as a separate person. (e.g., "well there goes my mind again" or "my mind is worrying again.")
I'm having the thought that	Separate from your thoughts by changing your language a bit. First say, "I'm having the thought that X." Then say, "I'm noticing that I am having the thought that X."
"Buying thoughts"	Use language to acknowledge the difference between thoughts that just occur and thoughts that are believed. For example, "right now I'm buying the thought that I am bad."
Who is in charge here?	Treat thoughts as bullies; use colorful language. Who's life is this anyways? The mind's or yours?
How old is this?	When you are buying a thought, back up for moment and ask yourself, "how old is this thought?"
And what is this in the service of?	When you are buying a thought, back up for a moment and ask yourself, "what is buying this thought in the service of?" If it is not in the service of your interests, stop buying the thought.
Okay you are right, now what?	If you are fighting to be "right," even if it doesn't help move you forward, assume a judge has confirmed that you are indeed right. Now ask yourself, "so what?" What can I actually do to create a more valued life from here?

SESSION 3: Defusion Strategies Continued

Which would you rather be?	If you are fighting to be “right,” even if it doesn’t help move you forward, ask yourself, “Which would I rather be? Right or alive and vital?”
And how has that worked for me?	When you are buying a thought, back up for a moment and ask yourself, “How has that worked for me?” and if it hasn’t worked ask, “which should I be guided by, my mind or my experience?”
Say it slowly	Take the thought you are having and say it very slowly. Next, try speeding it up like you are rewinding a tape recording.
Find something that can’t be evaluated	If you find yourself entangled in negative evaluations, look around the room and notice that every single thing can be evaluated negatively if you choose to. So why would you be any different? This is just what the mind has evolved to do!
Carry Cards	Write difficult thoughts on notecards and carry them with you. Use this practice as a metaphor for the ability to carry your history without losing your ability to control your life.
Carry Keys	Assign difficult thoughts and experiences to each of your keys. Then think the thought each time you handle your keys. Keep on carrying the keys and your thoughts.
Silly Voices	Imagine a cartoon character (shrek, mickey mouse, Homer Simpson) and say the thought in their voice
Musical Thoughts	Put your thought to a musical tune (e.g. Jingle Bells or Happy Birthday.”)
Name your stories	If you tend to think a thought repeatedly, give it name. For example “Oh here’s that old I’m a failure story again. I love telling that story.”

Session 4 Overview

- ♦ Values reflect what is most important to you. They structure the way you choose to live your life.
- ♦ Values are personal and different for different people
- ♦ Values may change over time.
- ♦ Actions that line up with your values are called “valued actions.” At any given moment, you have the choice of which value to move toward with valued action.



Your top 5 Values

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Session 4 Home work

- Complete the Session 4 Values worksheet. Begin to also consider what value you would like to try to reconnect with more while you are in this group.
- Continue to practice mindfulness for 5-10 minutes daily. You may use any exercises you have learned. Record your experience in the mindfulness log.
- Continue to practice defusion from your thoughts.

Session 4 Homework: Values Worksheet

Directions: Look at each of your top five values. Answer the following questions for any values that you do not feel are currently well reflected in your life.

1. Why is this value important to you?

2. How has trauma affected this value?

3. Does it clash with any of your other values?

4. What gets in the way of living out this value?

5. What would I be doing if I was living out this value? (for example, taking family to a sporting event, taking risks in relationships, etc.).

6. What would I be willing to experience to pursue my values again?

Session 4 Homework: Mindfulness Log

Mindfulness Skill Practiced	Time spent practicing	Observations

Session 5 Overview

Exposure Based Goals My Take Home Points:

Value I would like to work on is:

Format for developing exposure goals:

S

- **Specific**
- Say exactly what you want to do

M

- **Measurable**
- Have a way to figure out if you'd achieved your goal

A

- **Achievable**
- Be realistic - don't aim too high or too low

R

- **Relevant**
- Your goal should really matter to you

T

- **Timely**
- Set a deadline for finishing your goal

Session 5 Home work

- Continue to practice mindfulness and record observations.
- Continue to practice defusion when you notice difficult trauma related thoughts. Be especially mindful of thoughts that may come up while you do your exposure and practice defusing from them.
- Complete first values-based exposure. My exposure this week: _____

Session 5 Ideas for Exposure Goals

If safety fears keep you from your values- practice being in objectively safe situations that you fear

- Ride in the elevator
- Walk around the VA and don't scan your environment
- Sleep with the lights off and your door open
- Drive during rush hour
- Practice reducing the number of times you check behind you.
- Practice reducing the number of times you check your door at night
- Go to crowded places (Wal-Mart, restaurants, rush hour traffic, sporting events) and stay there for 30-40 minutes. Let yourself feel whatever comes up.
- Walk around a relatively safe part of town and practice not scanning your environment
- Practice sitting with your back to the door at a restaurant or standing in the front of a crowded elevator.



If fear of loss of control prevents you from your values:

- Let someone else drive you
- Don't make your family members call to check in and don't call them. Practice experiencing any thoughts and emotions that come up when you do this
- Practice sitting with your back to the door at a restaurant or standing in the front of a crowded elevator. Practice reducing the number of times you check behind you.
- Practice reducing the number of times you check your door at night
- Go to the movies. Practice moving towards the front of the theater and not checking behind you



Session 5 Ideas for Exposure Goals

If fear of being hurt or misunderstood by others (or difficulties with intimacy) prevent you from your values:

- Practice engaging in casual conversation in the waiting room
- Share something personal with an acquaintance
- Tell someone they have upset you
- Ask someone to spend time with you
- Hold your partner's hand



If a specific memory or negative thought interferes with your values:

- Practice bringing that memory or thought into your mind and using your mindfulness skills to non-judgmentally observe it. Do this for increasing amounts of time (e.g., 1 minute, 5 minutes, 10 minutes)



Session 5: Values Based Exposures

Value I am working towards: _____

Values Based Exposure Ideas:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

11)

12)

You don't have to do these actions in any specific order, and you can always repeat a step on the ladder if needed. Remember that ALL OF THESE ARE VALUED ACTIONS because they are moving you toward one of your most important values! Any action that you take is getting you closer to your value.

Session 5 Homework: Mindfulness Log

Mindfulness Skill Practiced	Time spent practicing	Observations

Session 6 Overview

Physicalizing Exercise:

This exercise helps you look at a painful thought, emotion, or memory as simply an object, rather than something that needs to define or overwhelm you. You are also developing greater willingness to take a look at something you have likely historically avoided.

My target item: _____

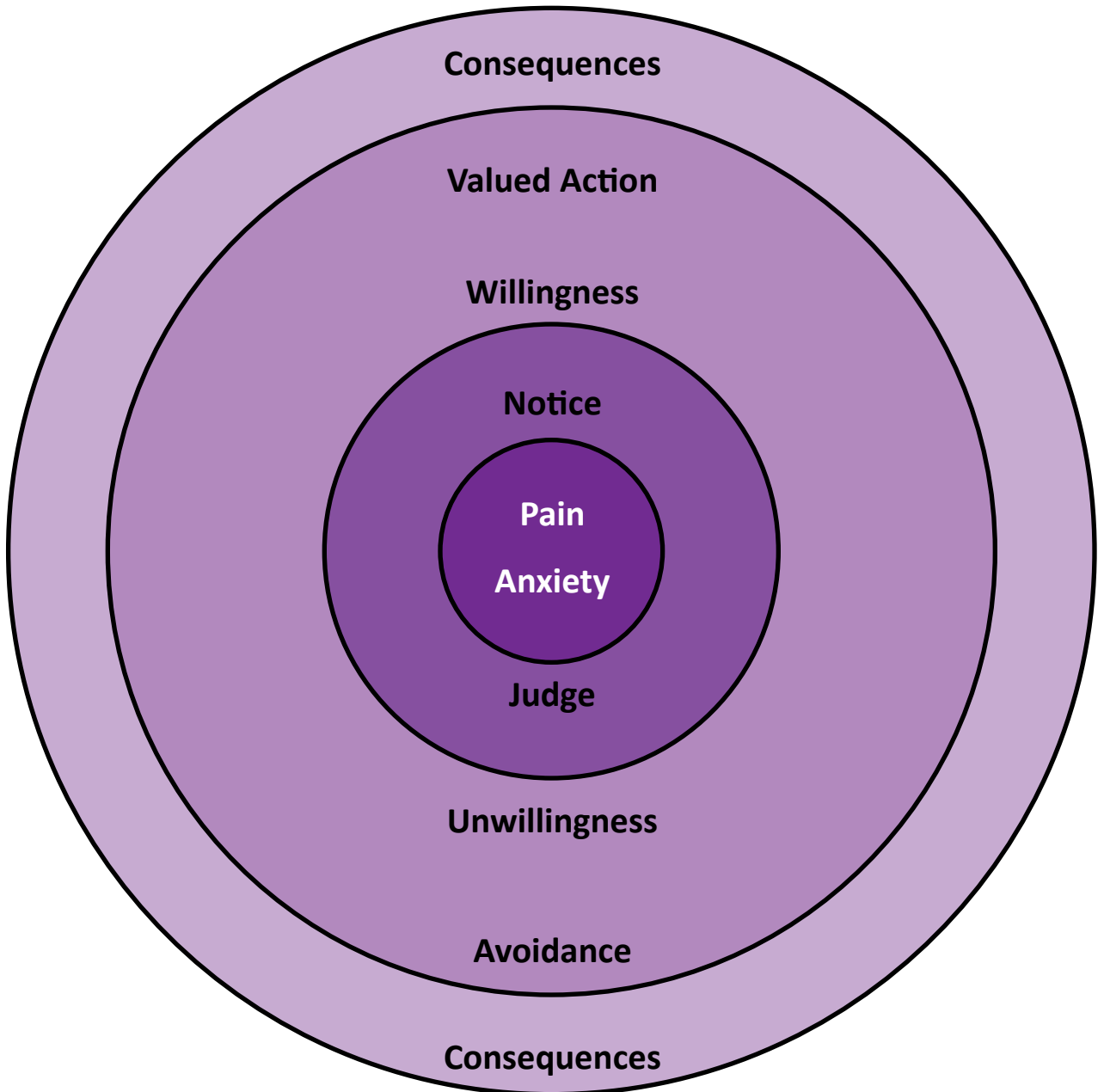
Decision Points

- Values based living is a constant process with many small choices along the way! The Decision Points rings show how each moment is an opportunity to step back and notice where we you are in reference to your values and change course if needed.
- By being mindful of your experience, you give yourself a chance to respond in a way that moves you closer to your values.

Imagining Next Exposure Goal: My Potential Decision Points

Decision Points

Valued Living



Continued Suffering

Session 6 Home work

- Complete your next values-based exposure. My next exposure : _____
- Practice the physicalizing exercise and/or any other mindfulness exercises daily. Record your experience in your mindfulness log.

Session 6 Homework: Mindfulness Log

Mindfulness Skill Practiced	Time spent practicing	Observations

Session 7 Overview

Physicalizing Exercise #2: My Target Item_____

Post Exposure Review:

This is an exercise in which we will review your process of trying to do your values-based exposure during the week. The goal is for you to:

- Increase mindfulness of what barriers you encountered and how to use ACT strategies to overcome them
- Learn to non-judgmentally observe your own process towards your goals. This is not about whether you “succeeded” or not, but about objectively looking at what was helpful and unhelpful to you.

Practice Review:

Imagining Next Exposure Goal: My potential Decision points:

Session 7 Home work

- Complete your next exposure. My next exposure:

- Complete the Post-exposure review.

Session 7 Homework Post Exposure Instructions

After your exposure exercise, complete the following Post Exposure Review. There is blank space for you to record your review on page 38.

Step One: Acknowledge that by completing this worksheet you are practicing willingness to look at your experience nonjudgmentally.

Step Two: Ask yourself whether the goal you selected this week reflects a top value.

Were you clear on your goal?

How is this exercise connected to your value? Did you have link between the exercise and your value in mind when you started?

Did you have a plan for enacting the exposure goal?

Step Three: Write down the steps you took during the exercise. Describe your experience in enough detail that an actor in a play or movie could re-enact it exactly. Continue until you reach the point where you stopped pursuing your goal either because you achieved it or changed directions.

Remember that steps can be thoughts, urges, feelings, or behaviors: What were you thinking? What were you feeling? What was happening around you? What urges were you feeling?

The following is an example of a veteran who values his marriage and planned an exposure of taking his wife out for dinner:

1. I decided I'd better get going on this goal thing
2. I thought about asking my wife which restaurant she wanted to go to
3. I started to have second thoughts. I thought to myself "I'm not sure I can do this right now." I started to feel anxious
4. I decided I might wait to ask her to go with me until I was sure I wanted to do this
5. I started feeling ridiculous. I thought "I can't even ask my wife about going out to eat because I can't handle what she will say if it turns out I can't do it." I felt like a "scared, weak child."

Session 7 Homework Post Exposure Instructions

Step Four: Use the post-exposure review questions below to identify ACT concepts and skills in the steps you wrote above. Each concept or skill that may be present in none or several of the steps. Write the concept/skills next to the step in which it was present.

WILLINGNESS:

At any step, were you willing to try the exposure regardless of the outcome? This also includes willingness to experience painful thoughts and emotions.

MINDFULNESS:

At any step, were you mindful of their experience in the moment?

EMOTIONS:

At any step, did you experience difficult emotions? Positive emotions?

THOUGHTS:

At any step, did you experience painful thoughts such as labels or judgments? What about helpful thoughts?

URGES:

At any step, did you experience urges to do or not do something?

FUSION:

At any step, did you get fused with any thoughts about yourself or what might happen? (i.e., I had the thought “I won’t be able to do this” and I fused with that thought so I believed I couldn’t)

DEFUSION:

At any step, did you use defusion to step back from unhelpful thoughts?

VALUES:

At any step, did you have your value in mind? Where there steps where the value was not in mind?

OTHER:

Was there anything else you noticed that was helpful or unhelpful to goal progress?

Step five: Identify decision points that became barriers. Write down any ACT skills that might be tried in the future to address those barriers.

Session 7 Homework Post Exposure

Step One

Step Two

Step Three

Step Four

Mindfulness:

Emotions:

Thoughts:

Urges:

Fusion:

Defusion:

Values:

Other:

Step five

Session 8 Overview

Observing Yourself Across Time Exercise: My Take Home Points

The Observing Self Concept:

“You in the moment.” The “you” that is experiencing whatever is happening for you in the moment (thinking thoughts, labeling yourself, feeling emotions, etc.)

“The observing self”: The “you” that is always there and has always been there. It transcends your current experience. It acknowledges that thoughts, sensations, emotions, and images constantly come and go, but the essence of who you are is always there.



Mountain Exercise:

Session 8 Home work

- Practice the mountain exercise and/or observing yourself across various points in time exercise to increase your awareness of your observing self. Throughout the week, try to occasionally check in and “notice yourself noticing.”
- Complete your next exposure goal. My exposure:

- Complete the post-exposure review.

Session 8 Homework Post Exposure Review

Step Two

Step Three

Step Four

Mindfulness:

Emotions:

Thoughts:

Urges:

Fusion:

Defusion:

Values:

Other:

Step five

Session 9 Overview

Homework Review: My take home points:

Tin Can Monster Exercise: Facing your trauma is like facing a thirty foot monster composed of tin cans, wire, and string. In this huge form, the monster may feel like too much to face. However, if we disassemble the monster into all the separate wires, cans, and strings that he is made of, we can deal with these pieces one by one which is much easier than all at the same time.



My target item: _____

My take home points:

Session 9 Home work

- Continue to practice mindfulness
- Practice Tin Can Monster, See if you can increase your willingness to non-judgmentally be with your experience
- Complete your next exposure goal. My goal:

- Complete post-exposure review as needed.

Session 9 Homework Post Exposure Review

Step One

Step Two

Step Three

Step Four

Mindfulness:

Emotions:

Thoughts:

Urges:

Fusion:

Defusion:

Values:

Other:

Step five

Session 10 Overview

Six core Principles of ACT

Mindfulness

-Bringing your awareness to the here-and-now with openness

Willingness

-Making room for feelings, sensations, and urges

Defusion

-Recognizing thoughts, images, and memories for what they are – just words and pictures. Allowing them to come and go as they please, without struggling with them

Values

-Clarifying what is most important to you

Committed Action

-Taking action and making goals that are in line with your values, no matter how many times you might get off track or struggle to succeed.

The Observing Self

-Remembering that there is a you across time

(adapted from Russ Harris, www.thehappinesstrap.com)

The Common Barriers to Values-Based Living

F = Fusion

E = Exiting the present moment

A = Avoidance of discomfort

R = remoteness from values

The Antidote to Barriers:

D = Defusion

A = Acceptance of discomfort

R = reunite with the present through mindfulness

E = embracing values

Additional ACT Self-Help Resources

- (1) The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living- Russ Harris
- (2) The Reality Slap- Finding Peace and Fulfillment When Life Hurts- Russ Harris
- (3) Get out of Your Mind and Into Your Life- Steven Hayes
- (4) The Confidence Gap- A Guide to Overcoming Fear and Self Doubt- Russ Harris
- (5) Finding Life Beyond Trauma- Victoria Folette

SESSION 10: 10 Valued Domains worksheet

This exercise will help you decide how you can apply the techniques and skills we have learned in class to certain realms of your life. The following 10 domains are examples of areas of life that people value. Some of these domains may not be important to you. If not, do not feel pressured to write something, skip it and move on the next one.

1. **Marriage/Couple/Intimate Relationship**

This is the relationship you have with a “significant other.” If you are not in such a relationship right now, you can still answer these questions in terms of what you aspire to find in such a relationship.

What kind of person would you most like to be in the context of an intimate relationship? It might help to think about specific actions you would like to take, and then use those to dig down to the underlying motives for such actions. What are those underlying motives? How do they reflect what you value in your relationship? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm.



Session 10: 10 Valued Domains worksheet

2. Parenting

Think about what it means to you to be a mother or father. What would you like to be about in this role? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm. For example, maybe a defusion technique if you know you will be anxious when taking your child to the mall or out to eat.



3. Family Relations (other than intimate relations and parenting)

This domain is about family, not about your spouse or children, but about other areas of family life. Think about what it means to be a son, daughter, aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent, or in-law. What would you like to be about in your family relationships? What values would you like to see in this area of your life? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm. For example, maybe a mindfulness technique to allow you to be more engaged with conversing with a family member.



Session 10: 10 Valued Domains worksheet

4. Friendship/Social Relations

What kind of friend would you like to be? Think about your closest friends and see if you can connect with what you would like to experience in your life regarding your friends. List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm.



5. Career/Employment

What kind of employee do you most want to be? What do you want to stand for in your work? What kind of a difference do you want to make through your job? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm.



Session 10: 10 Valued Domains worksheet

6. Education/Training/Personal Growth and Development

This area includes all the things you do to learn, though it is not necessarily school-based. What type of learner do you want to be? How would you like to engage with that area of your life? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm.



7. Recreation/Leisure

Activities in this area help us recharge and often allow us to connect with family and friends. Think about what is Important to you about your hobbies, sports, and other forms of recreation. In these areas, what would you like to have developed in your life? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm.



Session 10: 10 Valued Domains worksheet

8. Spirituality

Spirituality includes everything that helps you feel connected to something larger than yourself, but does not necessarily have to be connected to organized religion. It includes your faith and spiritual practices. What do you most want to be about in this area of your life? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm.



9. Citizenship

How would you like to contribute to society and be a member of the community? What do you really want to be about in social/political/charitable and community areas? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm.



Session 10: 10 Valued Domains worksheet

10. Health/Physical Well-Being

We are physical beings, and taking care of our bodies and our health through diet, exercise, and sound health practices is another important domain. What do you want to have revealed in your life in these areas? List one or two techniques you have learned in class that might be particularly helpful in this realm.



Appendix A: Mindfulness Exercises

Be Where You Are: (Adapted from Hayes & Smith, 2005)

Assume a comfortable position with your back straight, letting your shoulders drop and relax. Close your eyes or find a spot on the floor to focus on. We are going to start by focusing on your breath. Bring attention to your stomach, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in breath and fall or recede on the outbreath. Keep focusing on your breath, “being with” each breath for its full duration. Every time that you notice your mind wandering from your breath, notice what it was that took you away, and then gently and without judgment, bring your attention back to your breath. You may have to bring your attention back multiple times and that’s ok.

Now, become aware of the chair you are sitting in. See if you feel exactly where the chair touches you and you touch it. Mentally try and see if you can color in the shape of where your body touches the chair. Take a minute to feel the chair- grasp the arm handles and notice the connection your hands have to them. Notice the cushiness of firmness of the seat below you.

Next, take a moment to notice any sounds that you can hear in this room right now. Spend a moment just observing them. Remember, if you get distracted, just observe that and gently redirect yourself.

Next, gently open your eyes and spend a moment noticing the light in the room. How bright is it? Where is the light hitting the room?

Next, look around and notice the colors, furniture, and people in the room. You may have been in this room or with these people before, but look at it all as if you were an alien entering a new environment. Spend a few minutes being aware.

Be Where You Are – Extended Version (Hayes and Smith, 2005)

“Find a comfortable position and get relax. Now slowly bring awareness to the tips of your fingers. Feel your fingers. Rub your fingers together. How do they feel? Can you feel the small indentations on your fingertips that are your fingerprints? Take your time and try to feel them. What are they like? Are your fingertips rough from lots of work or are they smooth and silky? How does it feel to rub them together? Notice the feelings and then move on.

Now rest your fingers where before. What are they touching? Are they resting on the blanket of your bed, or are they resting on the arm of your chair? What does that feel like? Is it soft or hard? Does it have any other distinguishing features? What does the material it is made of feel like? Take the time to completely absorb the way these objects feel to your fingertips.

Now bring attention to your hands and arms. What do they feel like? Perhaps they are relaxed and heavy. Perhaps they are tense from a long day’s work yesterday. Either way is okay. There is no need to judge, simply observe the feelings in your arms and hands. Are there any aches and pains? Take note of these, but do not fixate on them. Simply notice the pain and move on.

Move your attention down to your toes. Wiggle them around a little. Are they in shoes or socks? Are they free to move about? Squish your toes back and forth feeling whatever is beneath them. How does it feel? Can you tell what is just by feeling? Would you be able to tell only by touch? Just notice the sensations as you bring awareness to your feet.

How is your head positioned? If you are sitting, is your head aligned with your spine or is it drooping, resting on your chest. Without trying to change the position of your head, simply note where it is positioned. There is no right way for your head to be. Just let it be where it is. Now think about the sensations in your head. Do you have a headache? Is your head relaxed?

What about your face? How does your face feel? There are all kinds of sensations to explore in your face. Think about your brow. Is it smooth and flat or is it crinkled up with stress? Again, don’t try to change it, just notice it. Now bring our awareness to your nose? How does that feel? Can you feel cool air flowing into your lungs or is the air warm? Pay attention to the feeling for a moment. Then think about your mouth. How is your mouth positioned? Is it pursed? Open? Closed? What about the inside of your mouth? Is it wet or dry? Can you feel your saliva coat the inside of your mouth and throat? Explore all of the sensations throughout your face. Perhaps you can feel oil on your skin or your skin is dry. Perhaps there is no feeling at all. Just notice it and move on.

Now bring your attention to your chest and belly. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly. Can you feel yourself breathing? What is that like? Are you breathing fast or slow? Are your breaths going into your abdomen or into your chest? Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. How does that feel? Now invert the pattern. Spend some time with your breath, then place your hands wherever they were before.

Be Where You Are – Extended Version (Hayes and Smith, 2005)

Now think of your whole body. Where are you sitting or lying? Can you feel the back side of your body touch the chair in various places? Be mindful of the way your body is positioned. There is no need to move, just observe.

Now think about the room you are in. Where are you positioned in the room? Do you have a sense of where the door is? What about the ceiling? Can you feel your body in the context of this larger space?

When you are ready, open your eyes and take a look around the room. You can move if you wish. Notice where the various pieces of furniture are. What do they look like? You can spend as much time investigating them as you like. Remember to just notice and not to judge.

Mindful Check in or “Systems Check” (adapted from Stahl & Goldstein 2010)

This exercise is called the mindful check in and the purpose is to do a kind of “systems check” on ourselves to see how we are doing. Often we get caught up in our busy lives, or we get caught up in what is going on in our heads and we neglect to “check in” with ourselves and to become aware of how we are feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically.

To begin, let’s close our eyes, or find a spot on the floor to stare at, and I will step us through a mindful check-in script, which is also on your Mindful Check-In handout for your reference.

As you close your eyes, just take a moment to get comfortable, and then be still... Begin the mindful check-in by first attending to your breath... Not changing it, just noticing its qualities, what it feels like. Breathe in, and breathe out, noticing how your abdomen rises with each inhale and falls with each exhale... Engage in focused breathing for a moment...(pause)

Now extend this awareness of the breath to your entire body, just being present with your whole body and noticing any sensations that arise. Do not judge these sensations, just notice anything happening in your body... Maybe you feel some relaxation in some area, or some tension. Maybe there is some discomfort, or another particular sensation. Just be with these experiences for a moment...(pause)

Now let’s shift our attention to your emotions, and any feelings you may be having, no matter how subtle or strong. Again, we do not want to judge these emotions, simply notice and accept their presence... Stay with your emotions for a moment...(pause)

Finally, let’s shift our awareness to our thoughts, just noticing the thoughts that are entering, flowing through, and exiting your consciousness. Without becoming attached to any of your thoughts, or getting wrapped up in them, simply notice them. Notice them as they arrive, observe them as they play out, and allow them to leave when they are ready, without trying to push them away or cling to them. Stay with your thoughts for a moment... (pause)

Now congratulate yourself on taking these moments to practice an exercise that enhances your well-being... When you are ready, slowly and gently open your eyes and re-enter the room.

Mountain Meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

Settle into a comfortable position, with your spine straight but relaxed, with your head balanced easily on your neck and shoulders, sitting with a sense of dignity and ease. Letting your body support the intention to remain wakeful and present. When you are ready, allow your eyes to close or find a spot of the floor to focus on. And now, allowing your attention to rest on the sensation of the breath as it naturally flows in and out of the body. Just observing your body as it breathes. Coming into stillness, sitting with a sense of completeness, with your posture reflecting this.

Now, when you are ready, bring to mind the image of a mountain. Picture the most beautiful mountain you have ever seen or can imagine. Focus on the image or just the feeling of this mountain in your mind's eye, allowing it to come more clearly into view. Notice its overall shape: the lofty peak in the sky; the large base rooted on the earth, steep or gently sloping sides. Notice how massive it is, how unmoving it is, how beautiful both from afar and up close. Its unique shape and form. Perhaps your mountain has snow at the top and trees on the lower slopes. Perhaps it has one prominent peak, perhaps a series of peaks and a high plateau. However it appears, just sit and breathe with the image of this mountain, observing its qualities.

And when you're ready, see if you can bring the mountain into your body so that your body sitting here and the mountain in your mind's eye become one. So that as you sit here, you become the mountain. Your head becomes the lofty peak, your shoulders and arms the sides of the mountain, your buttocks and legs the solid base rooted to your cushion or your chair. Experience in your body a sense of uplift from the base of the mountain up through your spine. With each breath, become more and more of a breathing mountain, unwavering in your stillness, completely what you are, beyond words and thought, a centered, rooted, unmoving presence.

As the sun travels each day across the sky, and light, shadows, and colors are changing virtually moment to moment, the mountain just sits. In the mountain's stillness, night follows day and day follows night, seasons flow into each other, and the weather changes moment by moment, day by day. Calmness abiding all change. In summer there is no snow on the mountain except maybe on the peaks. In the fall, the mountain may wear a coat of brilliant colors. In winter, a blanket of snow or ice. In any season, it may change; it may find itself enshrouded in fog or clouds or pelted by sleeting rain. People may come to see the mountain and be disappointed if they can't see it clearly or they may comment on how beautiful it is. And through all this, seen or unseen, sun or clouds, in sweltering heat or in freezing cold, the mountain just sits. Solid and unwavering. At times visited by violent storms, snow, rain, and winds of unthinkable magnitude; through it all the mountain just sits, unmoved by what happens on the surface.

As we sit holding this image in our mind, we can embody the same unwavering stillness and rootedness in the face of everything that changes in our lives, over seconds, hours, and years. In our meditation practice and in our lives, we experience the constantly changing nature of mind and body, and all the changes in the outer world.

We experience our own periods of light and dark. We experience storms of varying intensity and violence in the outer world and in our minds. We endure periods of darkness and pain as well as moments of joy. Even our appearance changes constantly, like the mountain's, experiencing a weathering of its own.

Mountain Meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

By becoming the mountain in our meditation, we can touch these qualities of strength and stability, adopting them as our own. We can use its energies to support our efforts to encounter each moment with mindfulness. It may help us to see that our thoughts and feelings, our preoccupations, our emotional storms and crises, all the things that happen to us are much like the weather on the mountain. We tend to take it personally, but like the weather, it is impersonal. In holding it in this way, we come to know a deeper silence and wisdom than we may have thought possible, right here within the storms. Mountains have this to teach us, if we can come to listen.

In the last moments of this mediation, continue to sit with this image of the mountain, embodying its rootedness, stillness, and majesty.

Leaves on a Stream (adapted from Harris 2009)

Sit in a comfortable position and either close your eyes or find a spot to focus on. Now, imagine you are sitting or standing in the middle of a stream. The water is flowing away in front of you. Notice if there is any sound from the running water. Notice if there are any trees, etc. on the banks of the stream.

Now, look around and notice that there are leaves gently floating along the surface of the water. Notice that each leaf comes into your awareness and then gently floats down the stream until you can no longer see it.

For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf and let it float by. Do this with each thought- pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Just notice it, place it on a leaf, and let it float by. Just observe it floating by without becoming attached.

If your thoughts momentarily stop, continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later your thoughts will start up again.

Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. Don't try to speed it up or rush your thoughts along. You are not trying to get rid of your thoughts. You are allowing them to come and go at their own pace. Some may move by quickly, others may linger. Some may come by multiple times. Just let whatever thoughts come by be there for as long as they are.

If your mind says, "This is dumb," "I'm bored" or "I'm not doing it right" place those thoughts on leaves too and let them pass.

If a difficult or painful feeling arises, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, "I notice myself having a feeling of boredom/impatience/frustration/anxiety." Place those thoughts on leaves and allow them to float along at their own pace.

As you do this, you may find that a thought hooks you and distracts you. This is normal. As soon as you realize you have been side-tracked, gently bring your attention back to the exercise. You may also notice that you find yourself trying to push away a certain leaf. Again, once you notice it, gently bring your attention back to the exercise.

Continue observing your thoughts and placing them on leaves for the next few minutes.