ALL ABOUT VALUES: MEANING AND PURPOSE THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY

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ACT IN A NUTSHELL

• A psychotherapy based on a theory and model that helps us understand both human suffering and possible ways to empower meaningful living
  - Developed within the Cognitive Behavior Therapy tradition

• Flexible persistence: Open, Aware, Active
  - Moving forward in life with awareness of
    - Environment around us
    - Our insides (thoughts, feelings, sensations)
    - Helpful (freely chosen) rules that if followed are likely to move us toward things we care about

HISTORY: WHY WE DO SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT

• 1st Generation: Behavior Therapy
  - Target: Overt Avoidance
    - Reaction against unconscious (unmeasurable) processes
    - Strategies: Behavioral exposure, progressive relaxation, desensitization, activity scheduling

• 2nd Generation: Cognitive Therapy
  - Target: Cognitive Biases
    - Reaction to BT: Expand to a Thought->Feeling->Behavior causal model
    - Strategies: Cognitive restructuring, behavioral experiments, problem solving

• 3rd Generation: Mindfulness and Acceptance Therapies
  - Targets: Overt and Experiential Avoidance
    - Reaction to CT: Thinking doesn’t really cause action…
    - Strategies: Awareness, Openness, Action
DARK & LIGHT SIDES OF LANGUAGE: WHY WE DO SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT

Reasoning
Communicating
Problem-Solving
Past & Future: here now
• Plan
• Learn
Values
• Self directed rules
• Experienced as choice
• Remote & verbal consequences
• Guide action long term
Over-extension of:
• Problem-solving
• Evaluation, judgment
• Reason-giving
Past & Future: here now
• Rumination
• Worry
• Relive trauma (PTSD)
Context of literality (fusion)
• Thoughts = reality
• Thoughts → actions

CLINICAL IMPLICATION

• When people feel bad, they carry around verbal descriptions of the hurt
• These descriptions keep the person in contact with the hurt
• People don’t like hurting

They want to avoid the hurt
They try to control their thinking about the hurt

Problem:
• The language based relationship of "not thinking about X" means X is in the rule
Result:
• Even during "Avoid Anxiety" – Anxiety is in the room

4-26-2019
A PROBLEM…. RESEARCH SHOWS WE DON’T REALLY UNLEARN (NO TRUE BEHAVIORAL EXTINCTION)

CAN’T UNLEARN, CAN REDUCE IMPACT OF PREVIOUS LEARNING; BROADEN THE NETWORK

PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLEXIBILITY (Simplified)

Fusion
- thoughts as reality

Evaluation
- judgments of self, experiences, world

Avoidance
- unwillingness to experience

Reason-Giving
- the “whys” for behavior, who we are, our problems
**Values in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**

**J. Plumb-Vilardaga**

**4-26-2019**

**UNC CH School of Social Work Clinical Institute**

### ACT PROMOTES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACT PROMOTES</th>
<th>Be Here Now</th>
<th>Open Up</th>
<th>Thinking as something to observe</th>
<th>Observer</th>
<th>Choose What</th>
<th>Committed Action</th>
<th>Do What It Takes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Present Moment Awareness</td>
<td>(vs. defended, avoidant)</td>
<td>(vs. literal truth, thoughts guide action)</td>
<td>(vs. stuck on conceptualized self)</td>
<td>(vs. lack of awareness of what matters)</td>
<td>(vs. inaction or avoidant persistence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Contact with Values</td>
<td>(vs. distracted or stuck in feared future, regretted past)</td>
<td>(vs. stuck on conceptualized self)</td>
<td>(vs. stuck on conceptualized self)</td>
<td>(vs. lack of awareness of what matters)</td>
<td>(vs. inaction or avoidant persistence)</td>
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### MODEL OF INTERVENTION:

**OPEN (ACCEPTANCE, DEFUSION)**

**AWARE (PRESENT MOMENT, SELF)**

**ACTIVE (VALUES, COMMITMENT)**

### CLINICAL ASSESSMENT AND CASE FORMULATION

Early assessment from an ACT perspective

1) **Ask what the client wants to be about**
   - A start… may not be fully clarified (open, defused values) just yet…

2) **Ask what gets in the way of that**
   - The client’s presenting problem as they see it.
   - We then reframe that from an ACT perspective using the model.
WHAT ARE VALUES?

FOR THERAPISTS

ACTIVE (VALUES)

- Values are verbal statements (guiding principles) that organize behavior over the long term & orient us toward meaning and purpose.

What is a meaningful life made of?
A guiding principle requires reinforcement that is…

**Overarching**
(not dependent on specific action)

**Inexhaustible**
(not dependent on specific goal or outcome)

**Intrinsic**
(not dependent on external reinforcement)

**Positive**
(not dependent on avoidance or escape)

---

WHAT ARE VALUES?

**FOR CLIENTS**

---

Values are Guiding Principles

They help us choose actions that matter most.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Principles ARE</th>
<th>Guiding Principles are NOT:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The direction (ongoing actions)</td>
<td>The destination (goals or achievements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What matters to us in our hearts</td>
<td>Just morals or “shoulds”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of meaning</td>
<td>People, places, activities, or feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How we want to act</td>
<td>How we want others to act toward us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: We don’t achieve “being caring,” but we can be caring in many situations.
A QUESTION

• As long as we are alive, we are behaving

• As long as we are behaving, we behave based on something

• Why not make the thing we base our behavior on be MEANING AND PURPOSE?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR VALUES

• Places to start – an easy heuristic:
  • Connection
    • With another person! Something in nature! Some activity (eating, drinking, music)?
  • Caring
    • About something, someone, or some activity! Expressing concern or affection for self or others?
  • Contribution
    • To your health, happiness, other’s well-being! Looking after nature, your body, mind or spirit?
  • Across domains

My Guiding Principle:

ONE Small Thing
I can do in service of this principle between now and next week:
ABCs of ACT Case Conceptualization

A: Antecedent
   What did you notice (before B)?

B: Behavioral Response
   What did you do?

C: Consequence
   How did it work?

External Event
   Private Experience (memory, thought, feeling)

Approach
   Avoid
   Attempt to control

Private Public
   AWAY from internal experience!
   Or TOWARD meaningful living?

NOTE: Client’s presenting problem is often the B (sometimes the A)
Build Strengths & weaknesses formulated based on the client’s experience.
Questions: collaboratively build functional analysis (case conceptualization)

Practicing Case Conceptualization, from an ACT Framework
Look for Values

OVERARCHING METAPHOR

• Monsters on the bus
  (mostly the Whole Model)

• Where are you headed? (values)
• What Monsters are on board? (awareness, mindfulness)
• What do the Monsters tend to say? (fusion)
• What do they tell you to do? (avoidance, fusion)
• What happens if you listen? (consequence of avoidance in terms of valued living)
• Have they ever actually harmed you? (deliteralization)
• No matter what they say, who is in the driver seat? (self as context)
• What if it was possible to do “drive where you choose”, regardless of what they say? (committed action, willingness)

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ACTIVE (VALUES)

We continue values clarification later in therapy

1. To deepen what we are working for
2. Because some features of values are challenging to embrace, we need other processes to assist us.

CLARIFYING YOUR VALUES AS A THERAPIST

VALUE = Guiding Principle for Behavior

Specific Goal

Specific Goal

Action

Action

Action

ACTIVE (VALUES): SITUATING MEANING AND ACTION
GETTING IN TOUCH WITH A DEEPER SENSE OF MEANING

• Exercise: A Sweet Moment

ACTIVE (VALUES)

1. Deepen what we are working for: Establishing a Guiding Principle

- What would you want all the people you love to say about you in celebration of your life
- ‘Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come’
- What you stand for now
- (avoiding/struggling)
- vs. what you want to be about
- (like Scrooge) You get to go live that now!

EXAMPLE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being Kind</th>
<th>Understanding Myself</th>
<th>Living with Integrity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressing My Talents</td>
<td>Being Free/Independent</td>
<td>Being Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging Myself</td>
<td>Being Responsible or Reliable</td>
<td>Mentoring or Teaching Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Caring or Nurturing</td>
<td>Intimacy/sharing Inner experience</td>
<td>Helping or Supporting Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Useful or Industrious</td>
<td>Preserving the environment</td>
<td>Being Tolerant/Open to New Ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Practical</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Connecting with Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to the World</td>
<td>Exploring or Being Adventurous</td>
<td>Deepening my Spiritual Beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciating</td>
<td>Being Passionate</td>
<td>Being Honest/Genuine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Justice</td>
<td>Leaving a Legacy</td>
<td>Growing as a Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving my Skills</td>
<td>Expressing Humor</td>
<td>Caring for My Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Self-Disciplined</td>
<td>Being Adaptable</td>
<td>Being Hopeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Norms</td>
<td>Living Simply</td>
<td>Being Physically Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Risks</td>
<td>Following Tradition</td>
<td>Being Guided by Reason</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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ACTIVE (VALUES)

We continue values clarification later in therapy

1. Deepen what we are working for

2. Some features of values are challenging to embrace, need our other ACT processes (awareness and openness) to assist us.

VALUES: PROCESS VS. OUTCOME

• Goals are necessary but not sufficient for meaningful living

• Without values, goals can feel empty

VALUES: PROCESS VS. OUTCOME

• A focus on process is even more challenging in a world of instant gratification
VALUES: CLIENT STUCK PLACES

- May never experience the outcome (increased uncertainty)
- Example:

ADDITIONAL COMMON VALUES PITFALLS: AVOIDANCE AND FUSION REAR THEIR HEADS

- Positive Reinforcement ≠ Feeling Good
  - Most things that matter also bring some discomfort!
- World doesn’t cooperate – doing something of worth regardless of outcome
- May require building something
  - Life is meaningless
  - Don’t know what matters
  - Fear of failure (requires defusion and self work)
  - Feel damaged/incapable (requires defusion and self work)

MEANINGLESSNESS VS. ACTING WITH MEANING

- On Choice: Chocolate or Vanilla Ice Cream?
- There is a difference between meaninglessness as an existential reality and acting with meaning
- What if we can simply choose, like chocolate or vanilla, even if we don’t completely have access to WHY we choose/prefer that?
- Could we act in line with what we chose anyway?
I DON'T KNOW: TRYING ON A VALUE

- Ten Steps to trying on a value exercise
- Perspective Taking: Someone you admire! What do you think they care about?

VALUES AND ACCEPTANCE/PRESENT MOMENT

THE CAVE YOU FEAR TO ENTER HOLDS THE TREASURE YOU SEEK

[JOSEPH CAMPBELL]
VALUES: CLIENT STUCK PLACES

Sometimes values are experienced as extremely painful.

1. Vulnerability
   - PRACTICE:
     - 3 Cards
     - Side 1: Greatest fear
     - Side 2: What that indicates matters to you

2. May be legitimate grief or regret at not having lived in line with values previously.

VALUES AND VULNERABILITY

- Would you throw away the value in order to avoid the possible pain?
- Sometimes clients say YES, and their behavior is about trying to keep others (or risk) at bay
- Ask: How do you get rid of the caring, for good?
- Ask: Would you want to WANT something different?
- Start with whatever level of caring is present, work way up, make it a collaborative effort

OPENNESS/ACCEPTANCE EXERCISES

- Mindfulness:
  - Making Space (on inbreath), Letting Go (on outbreath)
  - Be Still Exercise
  - Welcome Anxiety, my old Friend

- Contents on cards
  - Push away vs. let sit where they land
  - Which takes more effort?
VALUES: CLIENT STUCK PLACES

- Rule-Governance:

- For example, over-reliance on SHOULDs vs. self-generated values

RULE-GOVERNANCE AND FUSION

- High fusion leads to problems with valuing:
  - Highly fused with good/bad evaluations
    - "I must be a good parent"
  - Narrowly focused
    - On the expression of particular roles (motherhood, etc.)
    - On outcomes
    - Expressed rigidly
    - Caring means I need to be perfect, or successful in this domain

VALUES AND DEFUSION
Avoidance and Excess Verbal Rule Following are Linked: The Mind Puts Our Hearts on a Leash

Listening to the Monsters

When this thought: _______________________
Shows up, I end up doing _______________________
My guiding principle action is _______________________

When this thought: _______________________
Shows up, I end up doing _______________________
My guiding principle action is _______________________

You Have Thoughts, They Don’t Have You

- There are times when we think one thing, and do another
- This means that our thoughts do not have to cause our actions
- Even when we have sticky thoughts, we still get to choose what we do

- Next time you have a sticky thought try saying “I am having the thought that…” as you do what you choose to do
YOU HAVE THOUGHTS, THEY DON’T HAVE YOU…

“I am too tired to go to the store”

Listen to the thought

Stay home

Choose Actions

“I am having the thought that I am too tired to go to the store”

“I am too tired to go to the store”

GETTING UNSTUCK: BEING WITH STICKY THOUGHTS

Notice Sticky Thought

1. What does that thought tell me to do?
2. Is listening to the thought getting me closer to my guiding principle?
3. Remember, thoughts do not have to guide actions:
   “I’m having the thought that…”

Make Choices for Actions

TAKE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH YOU: CHOICE CARD EXERCISE

1. Write on a notecard:
   - Side 1: [a “do what matters” action I want to do this week]
   - Side 2: [Sticky Thought likely to show up]

2. Practice getting unstuck
   - Ask: What would listening to the thought lead me to do? Is that in line with my Guiding Principle(s)?
   - Try saying “I am having the thought that…”
3. Take the Card with you as you do what matters
VALUES AND ANGER

- What is under the hood of anger?
  - Anger can cover up more vulnerable emotions
  - Fear, sadness, hurt, disappointment
- Look for places values are (perceived to be) transgressed
  - e.g., Injustice
- Align with the client in their values
  - You do not (necessarily) have to agree with the CONTENT of the anger to build rapport or do the work

PRACTICE: LISTENING FROM A VALUES PLACE

- Personal or professional struggle (judgment, frustration, feel wronged)
- Person 1: Share the problem as you see it.
- Person 2: Listen, reflect values you hear/appreciate
  - What might this mean this person cares about?
  - What is somewhat different than the heaviness of the story?
  - Ask questions to help you orient to what might matter to them
  - Model what values would be at play for you
- Goal – Not to intervene to fix the situation, but to reflect the values underneath it, why there is suffering here
  - Finding that balance between being active and being with

BUILD PATTERNS OF ACTION LINKED TO VALUES

Guiding Principle (value)
- Specific Goal
- Action
- Specific Goal
- Action
- Specific Goal
- Action

EXPANDING
VALUES AND COMMITTED ACTION

- Most like traditional behavior therapy
- Build patterns of action that are likely to bring meaning and purpose
- Activity scheduling, intentional action
- Many behavior change techniques can be used here
- Behavioral Activation strategies
- Exposure
- Importance of Goals
- Goals are necessary but not sufficient for meaningful living
- Link goals to values

BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENTS

GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 1

- Relationships
  - Guiding Principle: Sharing & being present
  - Action: Go to dinner with friends
    - When, Where, Who with: Thurs night

- Hobby/Free Time
  - Guiding Principle: __________

- Work/Community
  - Guiding Principle: __________
  - Action: __________
    - When, Where, Who with: __________

- Health/Well-Being
  - Guiding Principle: Connecting with Nature
  - Action: Walk 10 mins
    - When, Where, Who with: In morning in the woods
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guiding Principle:</strong> Being Playful **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When, Where, Who with:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guiding Principle:</strong> Giving Back **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action: <strong>bringing food to a pantry</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When, Where, Who with: <strong>Tuesday morning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobby/Free Time</td>
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<td><strong>Guiding Principle:</strong> Being Playful **</td>
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<tr>
<td>When, Where, Who with: by myself, tomorrow night</td>
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<td>When, Where, Who with:</td>
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**GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 2**

| Action: **Watch a funny movie** |
| When, Where, Who with: **by myself, tomorrow night** |

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 2**

| Action: **bringing food to a pantry** |
| When, Where, Who with: **Tuesday morning** |

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 2**

| Action:  |
| When, Where, Who with:  |

**EXERCISE: EXPANDING ACTIONS**

- What would you do with $100 million?

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8olReluj6c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8olReluj6c)

**EXERCISE: EXPANDING ACTIONS**

- What would you do with $100 million?

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**EXERCISE: EXPANDING ACTIONS**

- What would you do with $100 million?

**VALUED ACTION IS HARD**

- If you’re not making mistakes, then you’re not doing anything.

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VALUES AND SELF

VALUED ACTION: CLIENT STUCK PLACES

- Values as a metric for “failure,” a reason for increased self-judgment and suffering

  - “If I care about that, and I didn’t live in line with that, I am ______.”

SUGGESTED OBSERVER SELF EXERCISES

- The Mind as a Great Documentarian
  - Ever watched a documentary? Editing lots of footage happens to tell a story.
  - What if that is what our minds do? Every year of life = 5,400 hours of footage. Editing happens.
  - If we added up all of the experiences, put it on a timeline or in a story, is that you? If we came up with 5, or even 10 different stories using the same footage, would they define you?

- Label Parade (in therapy room or in group)
  - Personal experiences (thoughts, memories, feelings, etc.) on Sticky Notes
  - Are they you?
NOTICING SELF-JUDGMENTS, STAYING CONNECTED

- Enact in pairs
- Labels - self-judgment
- Hold Eye Contact for a time
- Now share a meaningful moment with one another
- Notice what each feels like

VALUED ACTION AS AN IMPERFECT, ONGOING PROCESS

- With openness and awareness, increase willingness to track our behavior, and make space for what shows up when we do not live in line with our values

I'M SORRY OKAY
MY BAD
GOSH

VALUED ACTION AS AN IMPERFECT, ONGOING PROCESS

Behave

Choose Again
The Next Right Thing

Observe outcome

Respond
1. Self Compassion
2. Make a Repair (if appropriate)
SELF COMPASSION

Opening up to our (shared) humanness

Can we practice re-committing – moving our feet?

WILLINGNESS AS SELF-COMPASSION

• Willingness is All or Nothing: Jumping
  • Jumping = both feet off the ground at same time

• Do. Or Do Not. There is no Try.

• Self-Compassion Move:
  • We do get to decide from how high we jump!

• Work up to bolder actions starting with smaller success experiences

SELF-COMPASSION: THE LITTLE KID EXERCISE
THE ACT QUESTION
Given a distinction between you and the things you are struggling with and trying to change,
are you willing to have that stuff, fully and without defense,
as it is and not as it says it is,
and do what takes you in the direction of your chosen values?

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE
- SAMHSA placed ACT on the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) in 2011
- Substance abuse
  - Opioid dependence (Scouts et al., 2012; Hayes et al., 2004), Methamphetamine dependence (Smout et al., 2010), self-stigma in SUD (Luoma et al., 2012)
- Anxiety, PTSD, and Depression
  - OCD (Tushig et al., 2010), anxiety disorders (Arch et al., 2012; Crake et al., 2014)
  - PTSD/PTSD/STUD Case studies (Barran & Hayes, 2005; Tushig, 2009)
  - Experiential Avoidance as a predictor (Kahrsen et al., 2012; Plumb et al., 2004)
  - Depression & anxiety (Forman et al., 2007)
  - Veteran distress (Long et al., 2013); VA roll-out for depression (Wolse et al., 2013)
- Behavioral Medicine
  - Chronic Pain/Migraine/Fibromyalgia (Kowles et al., 2011; Wetherell et al., 2011)
  - Diabetes (Gregg et al., 2007)
  - Weight management (Lees et al., 2011; Forman et al., 2013)
  - Smoking Cessation (Brisker et al., 2010; Vilardaga et al., 2016)
  - Cancer/Palliative care (Koz et al., 2012; Mosher et al., 2018; Plumb-Vilardaga et al., 2019)

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING ACT
- Learn with your feet
  - Start incorporating the ideas into your work (as long as message is consistent with your overall goals for therapy)
- Try a protocol if appropriate
  - Try out different metaphors and exercises for a given idea
  - Making mistakes = opportunity for modeling awareness, openness, and action in yourself
  - Build your tool kit
- Become flexible
  - Many different places to start
  - Consider harnessing strengths first, then go for weaker areas
ADDITIONAL VALUES EXERCISES

- Portland Psychotherapy clinic (Luoma and Lejeune)
- There are several values exercises in an PDF – “Seven Values Greatest Hits” – you can google this and get it off of the Portland Psychotherapy website

WHAT TO DO NEXT...

- Get and stay connected
  www.contextualscience.org
  - Values based dues!!
- My trainer page
  https://contextualscience.org/jen_plumb_vilardaga_training_page
  - Goodies you cannot get unless you are a paid member
- My email: jennifer.plumb.vilardaga@duke.edu

THERAPIST READING
Values in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) w/J. Plumb-Vilandarga

SELF-HELP RESOURCES/ADJUNCT TO THERAPY

TOOLS: THE MATRIX (POLL ET AL., REVISED BY SCHENDRUFF)

Behaviors (that others can see)

What do you do to move away from (trying to get rid of) the stuff going on inside you?

Away

What shows up inside of you that gets in the way of moving towards what's important to you?

Who and What are important to you? (Values)

Towards

What could you do to move towards what's important to you?

What we do on the inside (that others can't see)

TOOLS: THE MATRIX (EXAMPLE)

What we do on the outside

- Don't answer the phone
- Don't return calls or emails
- Refuse to leave the house
- Don't get up before 9 a.m.
- Say mean things to myself
- Pay my bills late, procrastinate
- Refuse my ethnic groups like this
- Eat lots of junk food and few vegetables

Away

- Tell myself that nobody understands how hard this is
- Tell myself that nothing is worthwhile
- Constantly criticise myself and others in my head
- Become emotionally “stuck” and rigid
- Refuse to consider other perspectives
- Constantly think about how lonely I am, which makes me feel even worse

Towards

- Invite a friend to do something with me once a week
- Cut my hair once a month
- Attend this group
- Work on something that I love
- Give a donation (even a small one) to my favorite charity this month
- Eat a fresh green salad daily
- Walk outside for 10 minutes everyday
- Find a meaningful book to begin reading
- Wear my favorite clothing this week

What we do on the inside

- Close relationships! Sharing with others, helping others through meaningful work, or volunteering, or giving in some way
- Continuous learning and growing
- Connect with nature
- Connect with God (a higher power, life force, etc.)