


UNC CHAPEL HILL SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK -
CLINICAL LECTURE INSTITUTE

Jennifer Plumb Vilardaga, PhD
Duke University Medical Center

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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

- 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


- 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*

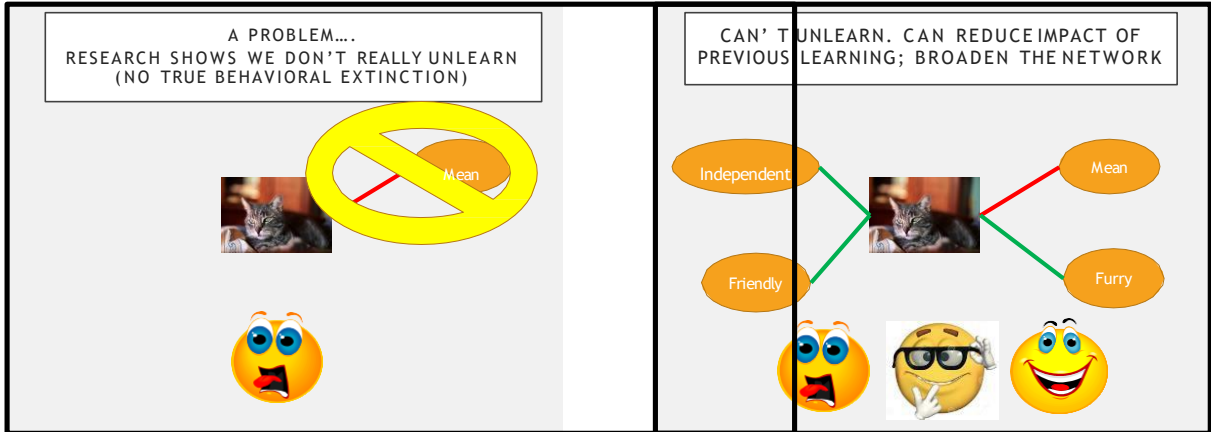
Problem:

- 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





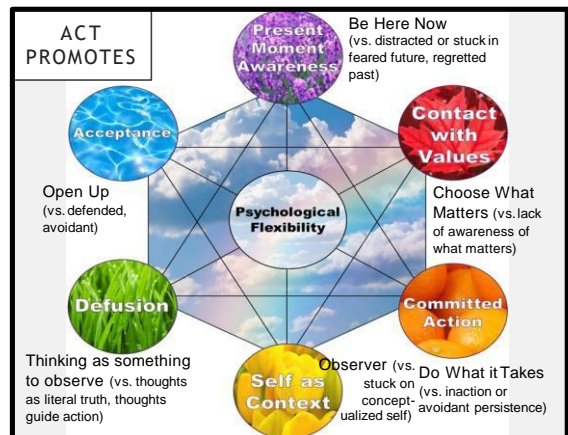
PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLEXIBILITY (SIMPLIFIED)

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

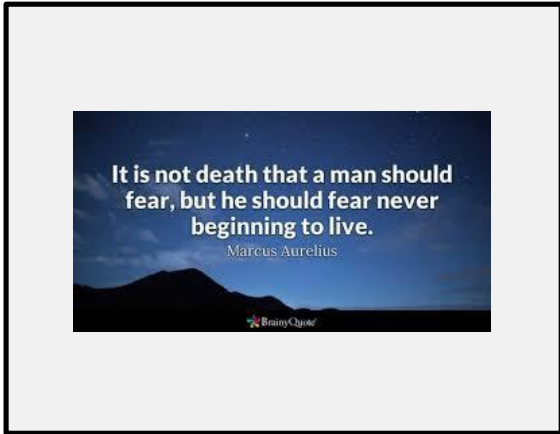


MODEL OF INTERVENTION:

OPEN (ACCEPTANCE, DEFUSION)
 AWARE (PRESENT MOMENT, SELF)
 ACTIVE (VALUES, COMMITMENT)


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)




e.g., Learning

WHAT ARE VALUES?
 FOR CLIENTS

Values are Guiding Principles
 They help us choose actions that matter most.

Guiding Principles ARE:	Guiding Principles are NOT:
The direction (ongoing actions)	The destination (goals or achievements)
What matters to us in our hearts	Just morals or "shoulds"
A sense of meaning	People, places, activities, or feelings
How we want to act	How we want others to act toward us



Example: We don't achieve "being caring," but we can be caring in many situations.

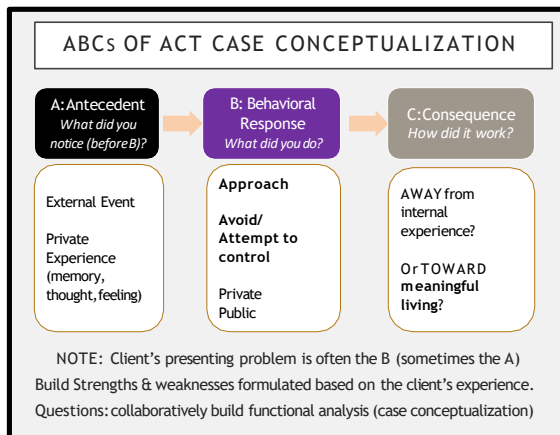
- As long as we are alive, we are behaving
- As long as we are behaving, we behave based on something
- Why not make the thing we base our behavior on be

MEANING AND PURPOSE?

- 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

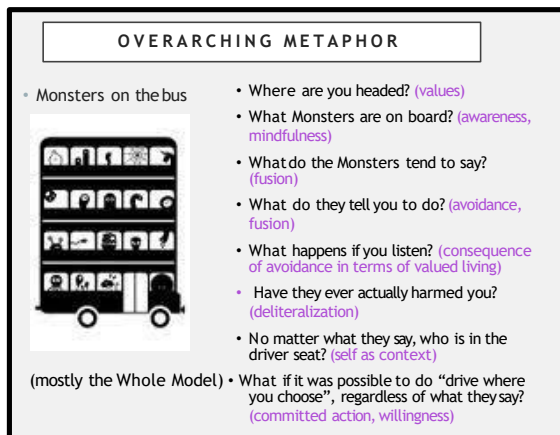
My Guiding Principle:

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



PRACTICING CASE
CONCEPTUALIZATION, FROM AN
ACT FRAMEWORK

LOOK FOR VALUES



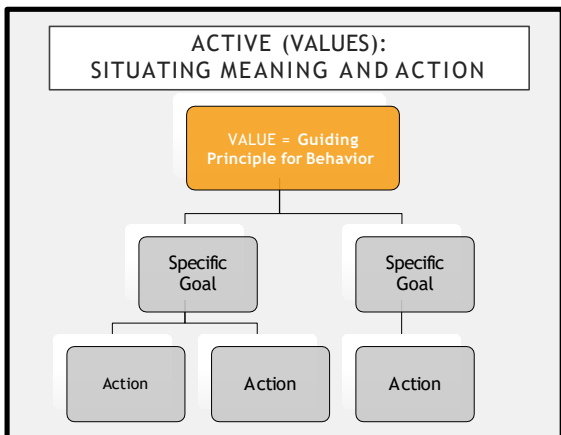
ACTIVE (VALUES)



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




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

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

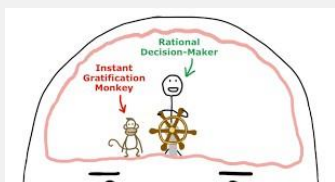
• Without values, goals can feel empty



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:



- 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)

- 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?

- 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.

- 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

- 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

SHOULD SHOULD SHOULD
 SHOULD SHOULD SHOULD
 SHOULD SHOULD
 SHOULD SHOULD SHOULD

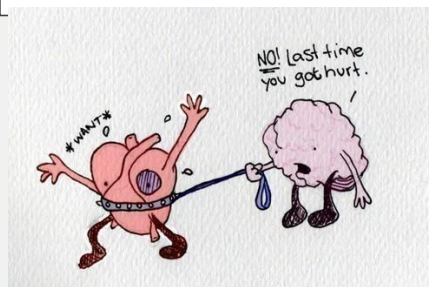
RULE-GOVERNANCE AND FUSION



- 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

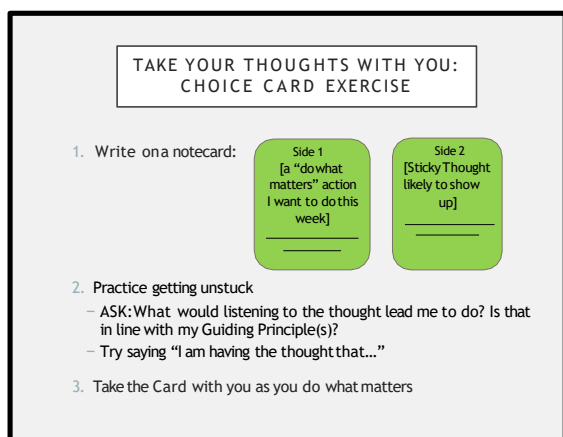
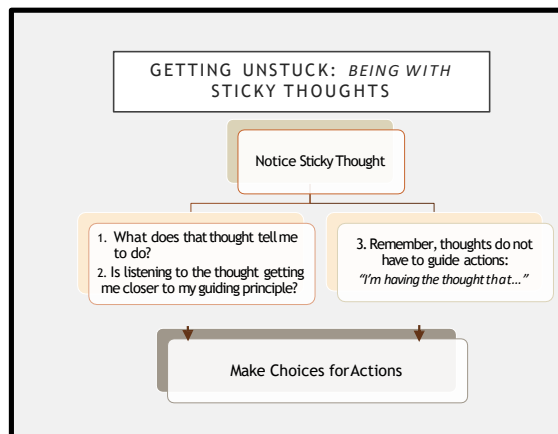
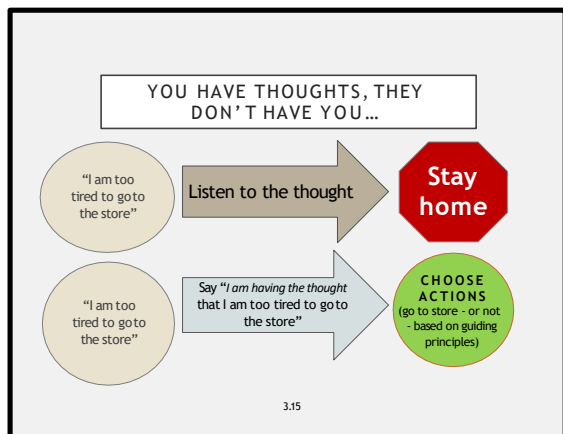
When this thought " _____ " _____
 Shows up, I end up doing _____
 My guiding principle action is _____

When this thought " _____ " _____
 Shows up, I end up doing _____
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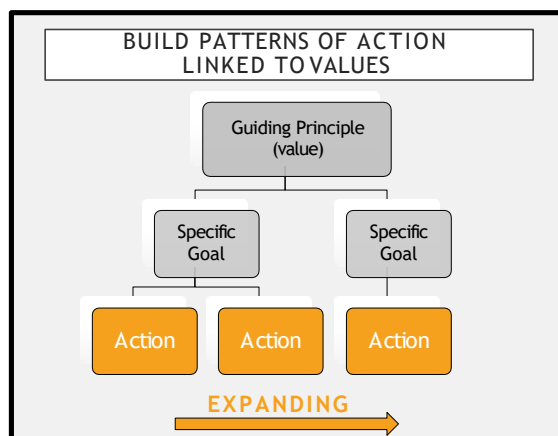
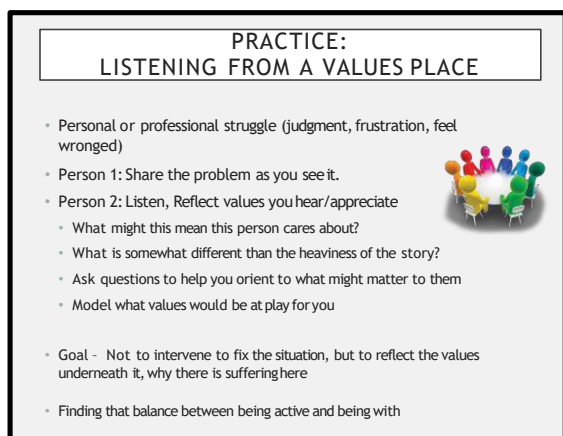
YOU HAVE THOUGHTS, THEY
 DON'T HAVE YOU

- 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





- 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



- 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



GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 1

<p>Relationships ★ Guiding Principle: <i>Sharing & being present</i></p> <p>Action: <i>Go to dinner with friends</i> When, Where, Who with: <i>Thurs night</i></p>	<p>Hobby/Free Time ★ Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: _____ When, Where, Who with: _____</p>
<p>Work/Community ★ Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: _____ When, Where, Who with: _____</p>	<p>Health/Well-Being ★ Guiding Principle: <i>Connecting with Nature</i></p> <p>Action: <i>Walk 10 mins</i> When, Where, Who with: <i>In mornings in the woods</i></p>

GUIDING PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE 2

<p>Relationships ★ Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: _____ When, Where, Who with: _____</p>	<p>Hobby/Free Time ★ Guiding Principle: <i>Being Playful</i></p> <p>Action: <i>Watch a funny movie</i> When, Where, Who with: <i>by myself, tomorrow night</i></p>
<p>Work/Community ★ Guiding Principle: <i>Giving Back</i></p> <p>Action: <i>Bringing food to a pantry</i> When, Where, Who with: <i>Tuesday mornings</i></p>	<p>Health/Well-Being ★ Guiding Principle:</p> <p>Action: _____ When, Where, Who with: _____</p>

EXERCISE: EXPANDING ACTIONS


- What would you do with \$100 million?
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8olRelul6c>


VALUED ACTION IS HARD

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?





- 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

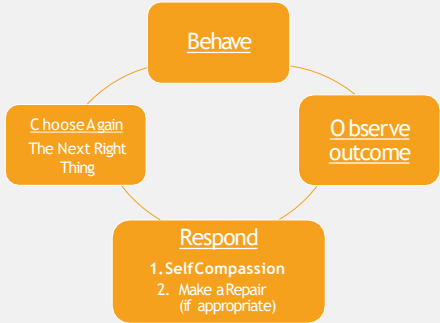
**VALUED ACTION AS AN IMPERFECT,
ONGOING PROCESS**

- 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






**VALUED ACTION AS AN IMPERFECT,
ONGOING PROCESS**




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**

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?

- SAMHSA placed ACT on the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) in 2011
- **Substance abuse**
 - Opioid dependence (Stotts 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 (Twohig et al., 2010), anxiety disorders (Arch et al., 2012; Craske et al., 2014)
 - PTSD, PTSD / SUD Case studies (Batten & Hayes, 2005; Twohig, 2009)
 - Experiential Avoidance as a predictor (Kashdan et al., 2012; Plumb et al., 2004)
 - Depression & anxiety (Forman et al., 2007)
 - Veteran distress (Lang et al., 2012), VA roll-out for depression (Walser et al., 2013)
- **Behavioral Medicine**
 - Chronic Pain/Migraine/Fibromyalgia (Vowles et al., 2011; Wetherell et al., 2011)
 - Diabetes (Gregg et al., 2007)
 - Weight management (Lillis et al., 2011; Forman et al., 2013)
 - Smoking Cessation (Bricker et al., 2010; Vilardaga et al., 2016)
 - Cancer/palliative care (Rost 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



- 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_vilardagas_training_page
 - Goodies you cannot get unless you are a paid member
 - My email: jennifer.plumb.vilardaga@duke.edu

