

SHOWING UP TO WHAT MATTERS: MANAGING ANXIETY DURING COVID-19

JENNIFER PLUMB VILARDAGA, PHD

DUKE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, PEER-REVIEWED ACT TRAINER

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA CHAPEL HILL, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

CLINICAL LECTURE SERIES

OUR COMMON HUMANITY IN THIS TIME

- It is rare that the whole world struggles with the same experiences all at the same time; us, our clients, our families and friends. Yet here we are. The ultimate parallel process.
- For all of us who find ourselves feeling: anxious, uncertain, overwhelmed, confused, angry, impotent, frustrated, stuck, incompetent, bored, frayed, tired, on edge, resigned...
- ***I see you. You see me. We see each other.***
- Let's see if we can be together today in a way that allows us to show up to our common humanity, for ourselves, our loved ones, and those we serve.
- **Let's breathe. Let's choose kindness. Let's choose meaning.**



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND VALUES

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Viktor E Frankl

I HERE NOW, MATTERING

- BEING PRESENT to what MATTERS MOST in our hearts
- Two necessary ingredients for living well in these times
- We start with ourselves. Now more than ever, we model it and instigate it for our clients.

HOW TO WE DO THAT?

FOR
OURSELVES

TOGETHER

FOR
OUR CLIENTS

Start where you are.
Notice, Name, Cultivate
Empathy & Self-Compassion

Turn Energy From Struggle
to Purpose

Cultivate Flexibility for
Purposeful Action

Continue Practicing Self-
Compassion Along the Way

Start where they are.
Notice, Name, Cultivate
Empathy & Self-Compassion

Invite Turning Energy From
Struggle to Purpose

Help them Cultivate
Flexibility for Purposeful
Action

Modeling and Practicing
Self-Compassion Together

Repeat.
Share.
Connect.

START WITH WHERE WE ARE

I

HERE

NOW

1. What does it mean to BE PRESENT in this time?
2. A present moment practice

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PRESENT?

- Mindfulness is intentional attention to what is here, right now
- *Paying attention, on purpose, non-judgmentally* - Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Awareness + Openness to Experience

OPENING UP TO THE SUFFERING IN THE WORLD

1. Breath Creating Space Meditation

- *Slow down. Get centered. Feel your seat.*
- *Gently scan, soften. Even your eyes don't need you to hold them in your head.*
- *Turn attention to air flowing in and out. Allow the breath to flow. See if we can soften even here.*
- *As the breath is moving in.... And out.... Notice how each outbreath makes space for the next inbreath.*
- *No matter how tight, tense, or jagged our experience, there is always just this breath, which makes space for yet another breath. In an ongoing flow.*
- *Whatever we struggle with, whatever suffering we experience or notice in others, there is just always this breath. Soft. Ongoing. Making space.*
- *Connecting us to the shared experience of Breathe In, Breathe Out we all do, across the globe, behind a mask, or seemingly alone in our homes, each day.*

WHAT IF...

- When we think “Don’t be afraid”
 - we practice responding... “I hear your fear”
- When we think “I shouldn’t be so sad”
 - we practice responding... “I see your sadness”
- When we think “Others have it worse than I”
 - we practice responding... “I see each of our suffering”

WHAT IF...

- We start with NOTICING
- We respond with NAMING
- We practice cultivating EMPATHY and SELF-COMPASSION



EMPATHY & SELF-COMPASSION IN ACT TERMS

Empathy requires perspective-taking – for others and on our own experience (R. Vilaradaga, 2009)

My experiences are not my enemy, so I don't need to fight them (or myself for having them).

- **Acceptance** – I practice opening up to my experience.
- **Defusion** – I notice my thoughts. “I am having the thought that...”
- **Observer Self** – I am the observer of my experiences, not defined by them.

MATTERING

1. What are VALUES?
2. What matters to you, in your heart?
3. A mattering practice

1. WHAT ARE VALUES?

- As long as we are **alive**, we are behaving.
- As long as we are behaving, we are behaving based on something.
- As long as we are behaving based on something,
 - why not make it **MEANING AND PURPOSE** ?

- D.J. Moran

1. WHAT ARE VALUES?

“freely chosen, verbally constructed consequences of ongoing, dynamic, evolving patterns of activity, which establish predominant reinforcers for that activity that are intrinsic in engagement in the valued behavioral pattern itself”

(Wilson & DuFrene, 2009)

1. WHAT ARE VALUES?

Values (or guiding principles) <u>ARE:</u>	Values (or guiding principles) <u>are NOT:</u>
A journey (ongoing actions)	The destination (goals or achievements)
What matters to us in our hearts	Just morals or “should’s”
A sense of meaning	People, places, activities, or feelings
How we want to act	How we want others to act toward us



VALUES AS PROCESS, REQUIRES BEING PRESENT

- A brief video – Russ Harris Youtube Channel, “Values Vs. Goals”
- Journey as FULLFILLING or Journey as FRUSTRATION



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-IRbuy4XtA>

2. WHAT MATTERS IN YOUR HEART?

Authoring & amplifying values

- **Tune in:**

- Choosing what I wish to stand for

3. Practice. Get a piece of paper and a pen.



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?

2. WHAT MATTERS IN YOUR HEART?

Authoring & Amplifying Values

- **Turn Up the Volume:**

- Not just the WHAT but the WHY
- Bring present moment attention to What I am Doing AND Why I am Doing it*
- Remembering to link behavior across contexts back to values

3. Practice. Ready to write again.

**Behavior analysis caveat: Why do we things is under multiple sources of control.*

We are simply focusing on the chosen, value-guided part of this equation.



TURNING ENERGY FROM STRUGGLE TO PURPOSE

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STRUGGLE SPACE

- We spend energy trying to NOT HAVE what we HAVE
- We FIGHT our experience
 - Deny, Dismiss, Discount
- We RUN AWAY
 - Disengage
- **Reduction of Emotion is the Guide**

Easy to spend a lot of energy here.

Much of the news is all about this.

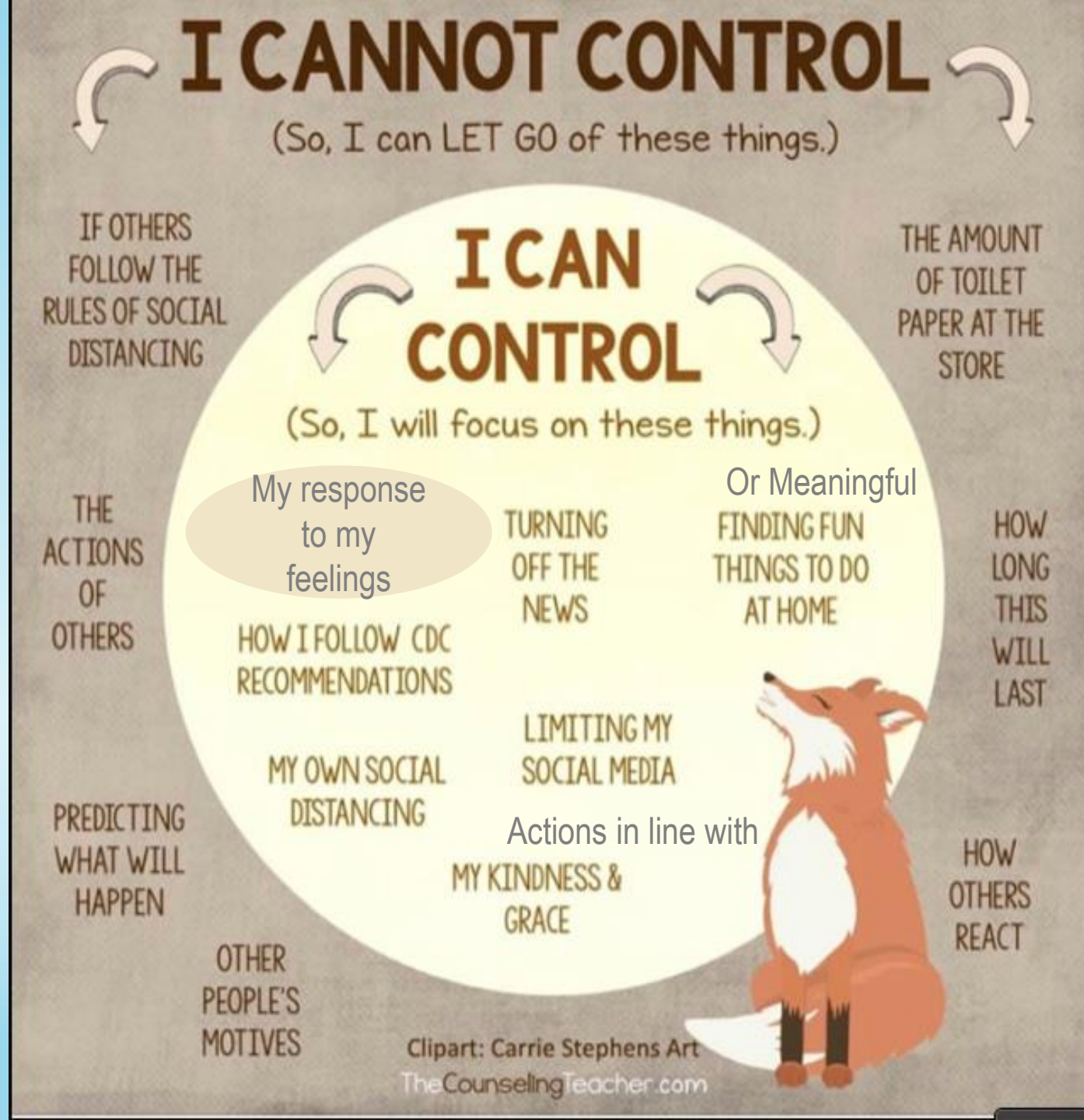
Anger, fear, and predictions abound.

THE SEDUCTION OF CONTROL

It often feels like anger or worry will make things change.

It gives us a sense of control.

But it is a failed promise.



TURN TOWARDS VALUES

Make space for what we feel when we realize we cannot control certain things.

Come back to what we can control: Values-guided actions...

If there is meaning
in life at all,
then there must be
meaning in suffering.

-Viktor Frankl-

2 SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

- Take out a piece of paper and fold it in half, or find some post-it notes.
- Write out your three greatest fears.
- Turn over, write what that fear tells you matters to you
 - As a process (showing up to caring or protecting others), not as an outcome (whether they feel cared for or are protected)
- Can you have one without the other? Would you throw away the mattering to get rid of the fear?

TURNING ENERGY FROM STRUGGLE TO PURPOSE

By slowing things down, we may be able to act with intention.

Acting with intention allows purposeful choices.

Purposeful choice allows meaning.

PURPOSEFUL SPACE

- We use present moment practices to soften, breathe, and CHOOSE the 'Next Right Thing'
- We notice what happens, we breathe, and choose again
- **Increase in Meaning is the Guide**

How do I live during COVID19?

STRUGGLE SWITCH «ON»

I worry about things I can't control

I'm completely focused on finding and sharing info on COVID

I try to control or avoid anxiety and fear

I acknowledge my suffering, as well as that of others

I act guided by anxiety, anger or frustration

I have complaints and claims on everything

I criticize and mistreat my self and others

How would the person I want to be act?

OPEN AWARENESS

I notice what shows up in my mind without getting hooked by unuseful thoughts

I observe what I feel in my body and I allow sensations and emotions to be there, as part of the experience that I'm living

I try to understand what is important in what I can't have/do and how I can take care of it despite suffering and limitations

I focus on things and people important to me in this moment

I try to act like the person I want to be

COMMITTED ACTION

I choose willingness towards thoughts and emotions instead of control or avoidance

I choose to spend my time and my energy on people and activities important to me

I choose how I want to live today, according to my values, e.g. *love, kindness, openness, compassion, courage, sharing*

curiosity, connection, generosity, cooperation, pleasure, humility, learning, growth, awareness, self-care, fun, and others...

I choose to treat me and others with kindness and compassion

TURNING ENERGY FROM STRUGGLE TO PURPOSE

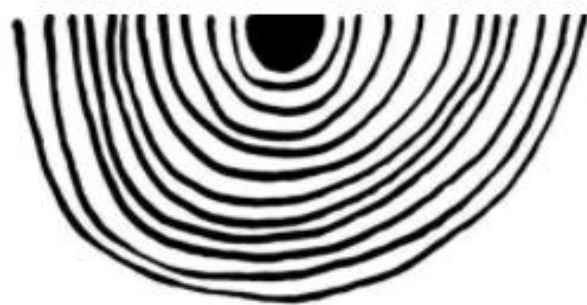
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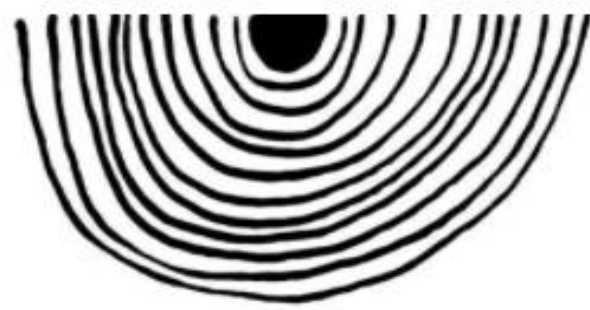
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AN OPPORTUNITY

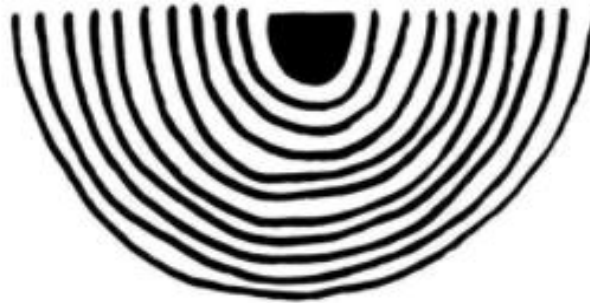


And the people stayed **HOME**.
And read books, and listened, and rested,
and exercised, and made art, and played games,
and learned new ways of being, and were still.
And listened more deeply.
Some meditated, some prayed, some
danced, some met their shadows.

AN OPPORTUNITY

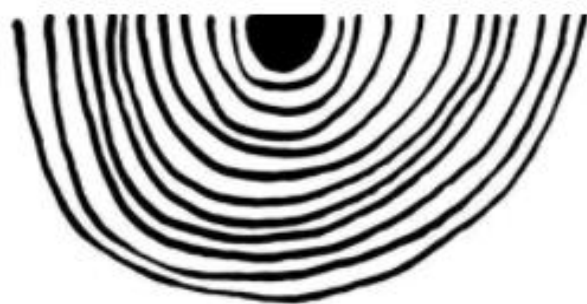


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And the people began to think differently.
And the people healed. And, in the absence of
people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless
and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

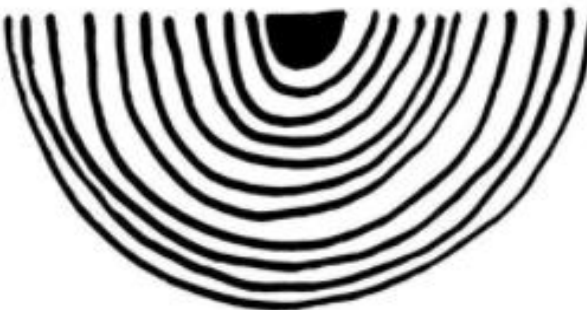
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And when the danger passed, and the people
joined together again, they grieved their losses,
and made new choices, and dreamed new
images, and created new ways to live and heal
the earth fully, as they had been **HEALED**.

WORDS Kitty O'Meara | ART & TYPE April Nemeth

@littlekorboose

CULTIVATE FLEXIBILITY FOR PURPOSEFUL ACTION

CULTIVATING FLEXIBILITY

- Moving beyond rigid rules.
 - Easy to fall into “A Good Therapist (Parent, Friend, Colleague) Would...”
 - Instead, focus on the process rather than the outcome.
 - Help clients see the possibility in showing up to the process, and responding with kindness to the fact that the mind may ask for perfection or good outcomes.

CULTIVATING FLEXIBILITY

- What is One Small Thing I could do today, even right now, toward this value?
 - Make a list of “**The small ways I can live my values**, even if I would prefer the larger, more obvious ones.”
 - When converting to virtual note the prior in-person practice
 - Slow it down. Breathe. Focus on what is in front of you. Bring yourself back to the value-guided present again and again.
 - Track Value-Guided moments in real time, discuss it with loved ones. Ask your clients to do the same.

PRACTICE SELF COMPASSION ALONG THE WAY

VALUED ACTION IS HARD

- 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 _____”



- Yet...



VALUED ACTION AS AN IMPERFECT, ONGOING PROCESS

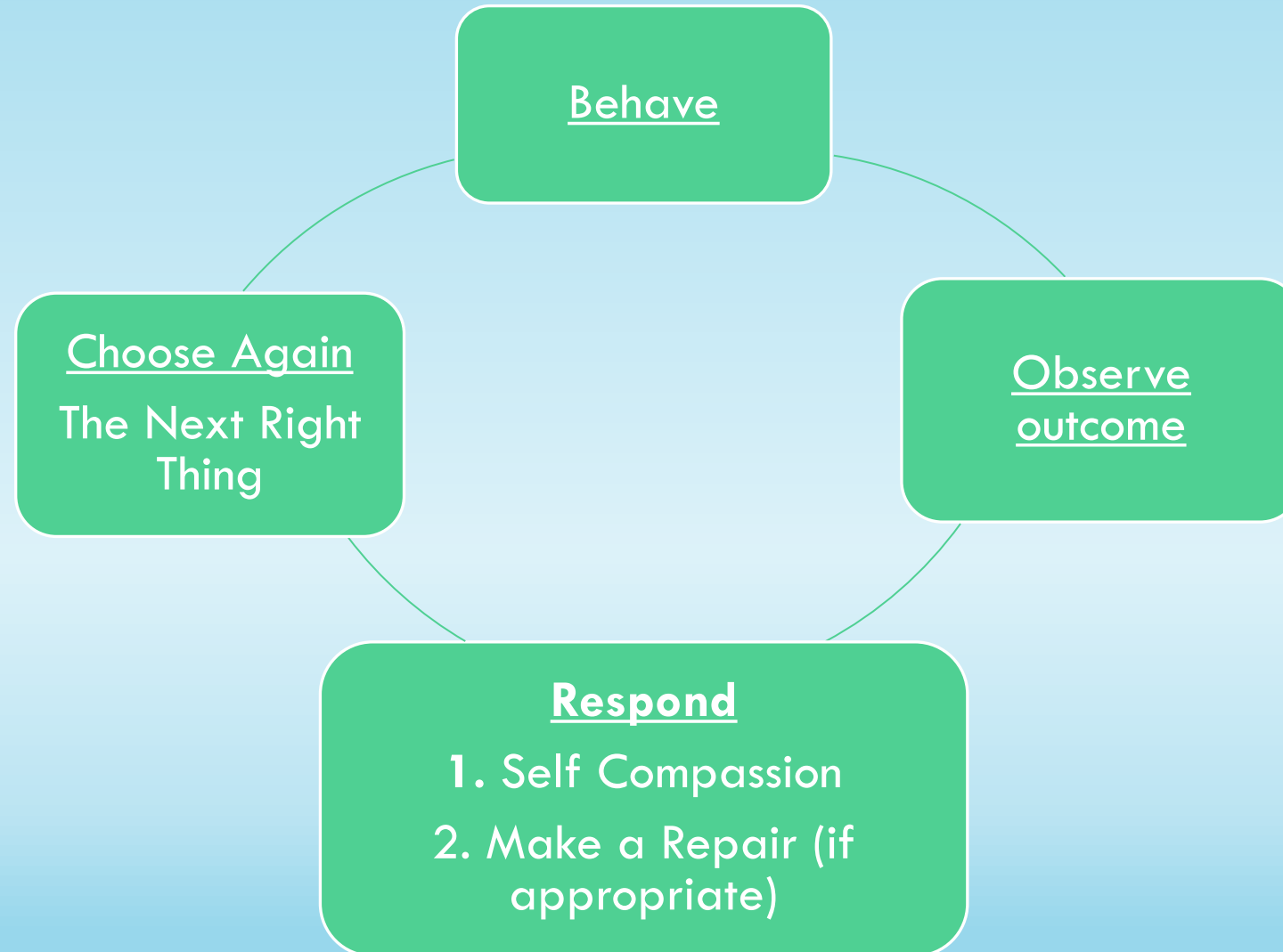
- With openness and awareness, increase willingness to track our behavior, and make space for what shows up when we do not live in line with our values
- Practice genuine apologies/repairs. Respond to repairs with “Thank You.”



VALUED ACTION AS AN IMPERFECT, ONGOING PROCESS

Sometimes our minds say a choice is permanent, it will chart a course.

Yet each moment is an opportunity to restart our intention.



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



EMPATHY IS NOT A FINITE RESOURCE

- Our minds may tell us that denying, fighting, or numbing our experience is the way to stay safe, to heal, to live well. But check in with yourself – is it not that very struggle that steals our energy?
- Kindness begets kindness. When we practice living openheartedly (accepting, defused, observing), with kindness and compassion, it is where we find our deepest meaning and purpose.
- And in finding our deepest meaning and purpose, we connect with the wholeness of being alive.
- **There is no end to empathy when it is practiced with openheartedness (defused, accepting, with the observer stance). It is like our breath. It continues indefinitely.**

OPENING UP TO THE SUFFERING IN THE WORLD

2. Lovingkindness Meditation for Our Times

When I am: feeling scared, angry, overwhelmed; caring for others who are at risk; at risk myself; doing things not in line with my values...

- *May I be filled with lovingkindness.*
- *May I be safe from inner and outer dangers.*
- *May I be well in body and mind.*
- *May I be at ease and happy.*

When others do things I disagree with or go against my values...

- *May you be filled with lovingkindness.*
- *May you be safe from inner and outer dangers.*
- *May you be well in body and mind.*
- *May you be at ease and happy.*

When others in the world are: feeling scared, angry, overwhelmed; caring for others who are at risk; at risk themselves; doing things not in line with their values...

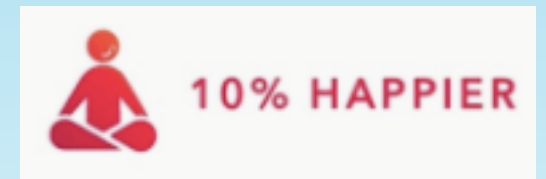
- *May all beings be filled with lovingkindness.*
- *May all beings be safe from inner and outer dangers.*
- *May all beings be well in body and mind.*
- *May all beings be at ease and happy.*

RESOURCES DURING COVID-19



Favorite mindfulness practices

- ACT Coach, Stop Breathe & Think
- Insight Timer app, Sarah Blondin



FOR THERAPISTS: <https://contextualscience.org/resources> for therapists

- New relevant book: July, 2020: *Moral Injury Workbook* (Evans, Walser, Drescher & Farnsworth)



FOR CLIENTS: <https://contextualscience.org/resources> for the public

- Free pamphlet – FACE COVID by Russ Harris

MAY WE CONTINUE TO HOLD IN OUR HEARTS OURSELVES,
EACH OTHER, IN OUR ROLES, DOING OUR BEST.



PROVIDERS: STAY CONNECTED

- Joining ACBS
 - **Values based dues** allows free download of many materials such as articles, worksheets, protocols, and presentations (like this one). These are great resources, and a great way to get more information on doing this work. Please consider joining, and stay up to date on new trainings, opportunities for networking in our community, and the annual conference.
 - www.contextualscience.org/join
- There is a lively community of ACT practitioners here in the region. Check out www.actatduke.org/events for more information.

SPECIAL THANKS TO MY COMMUNITY

- Association for Contextual Behavioral Science (ACBS) community all over the world, especially borrowed ideas and inspiration by my fellow ACT trainers
- Debbie Barrett at UNC
- My colleagues at Duke
- My family and friends
- All of you doing your best each day.

NAMASTE.

