

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY & THE SIX CORE PROCESSES OF ACT
(Mindfulness Skillful Means : Learning Psychologically Flexibility)

Skillful Awareness Allows Vital Life Adaptation

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance
How can we know the dancer from the dance?
~~ William Yates

A Conceptualization of Mindfulness as Psychological Flexibility:

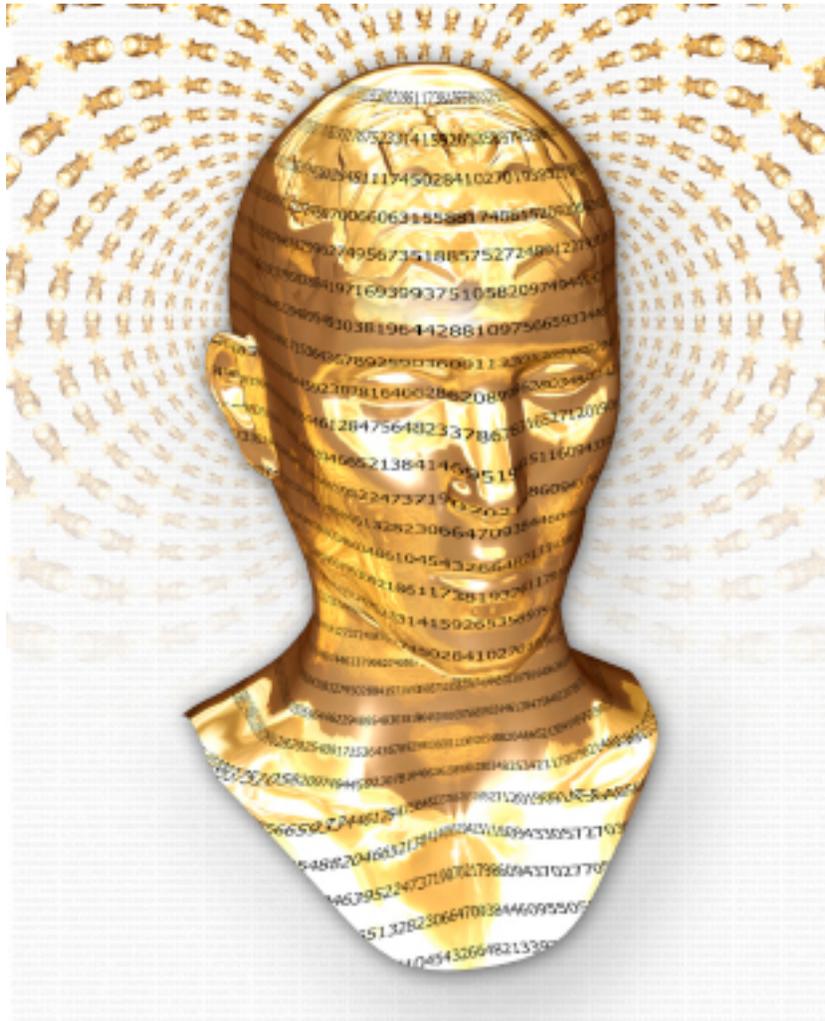
**Summary Features of Skillful Means: The Six Core
Processes of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy:**

**Connection & Attending
Defusion & Watching
Expansion & Opening
Observation & Response Able
Values & Clarification
Action & Exposure & Perseverance**

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**Skillful Means ~ Mindfulness ~ Psychological Flexibility
Sustaining Value Guided Actions**



Connection

Connection involves the ability hold in awareness the value of “turning toward life,” and actively skillfully-behave in a manner that “works for you.” The practice of ACT gives you as much room as necessary for you to decide just what behavioral direction you value. What functions best for you? *You get to pick, and you get what you pick!*

Through intentional focused awareness, we learn to earnestly engage in “value guided behavior.” Such value directed actions are, we presume, most likely to lead you, in a behavioral sense, toward the life direction that works best — for you. ACT helps us cultivate the skill to persevere and attend to experiential nuances, noticing attraction, noticing aversion, simply noticing . . . the richness of present experience. A personal *willingness* must be engaged . . . a certain experiential flow . . . expansion and contraction within our awareness . . . as we make “Psychological Contact” with what we value doing in . . . this present moment — just as it is. “Connecting intentionally” with whatever is happening right here, right now. In the practice of ACT, this is called “Contacting the Present Moment”.

Defusion

“Cognitive Defusion” involves learning the skill to “step back” from your mind’s activity, or detach from unhelpful or distressing thoughts, worries, judgments and disturbing memories: instead of getting caught up in your own thinking, pushed around by your mind’s activity, or habitually struggling to get rid of what you are experiencing right now, you learn how to let thought-experience come and go . . . ‘You’ watching your mind . . . thinking, thinking . . . planning, planning . . . somewhat like watching your mind’s verbal “story-lines.”

The practice of cognitive defusion finds us “observing our own minds” as our internal commentary perpetually floats through awareness, like experiential story-bubbles flowing through and wandering within the mind. You learn how to step back and watch your own thinking, *so you can learn to respond effectively* — instead of getting “fused” . . . tangled up or lost-trapped . . . inside your judging and categorizing mind.

Expansion

This involves the means to open up and “make room” for distressing emotions or even unwanted bodily sensations. We learn how to drop the struggle with our own ideas, give our thoughts and emotions some breathing space, and let them be there — present in experience — just as these are — without getting all caught up in them, or overwhelmed by them; the more we can open up, and give our mind’s room to move, the easier it is for our emotions to come and go without draining us or holding us back. Essentially, this is what ACT means by “Acceptance.”

“Cognitive Defusion” involves opening up and “gently noticing” distressing emotions or unwanted bodily sensations. You learn how to drop the struggle with your own ideas, giving your thoughts and emotions some breathing space, and simply allowing them be there — present in you experience — just as they are — without getting all caught up in them, or overwhelmed by them; the more you can open up, and give your mind room to move, the easier it is for your emotions to come and go without draining you or holding you back. Technically in ACT, this is what is meant by “Psychological Acceptance.”

The Observing Self

Is the part of you that is responsible for awareness and attention. Author Russ Harris explained: “We don’t have a word for it in common everyday language – we normally just talk about the ‘mind’. But there are two parts to the mind: The Thinking Self – that is, the part that is always thinking; the part that is responsible for all your thoughts, beliefs, memories, judgments, fantasies etc. And then there’s The Observing Self

– the part of your mind that is able to be aware of whatever you are thinking or feeling or doing at any moment. Some traditions have called this “The Silent Witness” or “The Observing Self.” Without this human capacity, one couldn’t develop effective mindfulness skills. And the more you practice mindfulness skills, the more you’ll become aware of this aspect and ability of your mind. You learn to grow able – developing the “Skillful-Means” to access the observing-self when you most need to sustain adaptive awareness. This skill is ultimately necessary if you are to learn to persevere in ACTIONS that function to vitalize your life-experience.”

Values

Such “Vital Life Values” are what you want your life to be about, deep in your heart. What you want to stand for. What you want to do with your time on this planet. What ultimately matters to you in the big picture. What you would like to be remembered for by the people you love.

Committed Action Means taking action guided by your values – doing what matters to you – especially when it’s difficult or uncomfortable! Many aspects of coping with our most vital-lives will confront us with disquiet and distress. Our outcome is to persevere — intentionally — with momentary responses that work for us. If we learn to achieve our aim and become increasingly “Psychologically Flexible,” we live in line with what we value.

When you put all these notions and practices together, you can behold a sense just what Acceptance and Commitment Therapy calls “Psychological Flexibility.” This is otherwise known in various meditation traditions as “Mindfulness and Skillful Means“

Such enhanced awareness involves the ability to sustain contact with the “present moment.” Such momentary awareness skills can be cultivated in a number of ways. ACT is just one of them. Academic Clinical Psychology has posited that psychological “openness to experience” is the most vital ability an individual can master! From the ACT perspective it is clearly imperative that we learn to sustain an open, accepting, flexible awareness and — persevere skillful — especially in a behavioral sense.”

This is ultimately what some meditation traditions point toward in encouraging us to practice “skillful means.” Attentive and aware of our values, we behave in accordance with what works.

It must be clear to us, that we somehow value the ability to remain psychologically present, open up, and do what matters.

ACT helps us cultivate the ability to DO what really WORKS best for us! The greater our ability to do that, the more skillful we are . . . the better our quality of life is – the greater our sense of vitality, wellbeing and realistic fulfillment.

From an Acceptance vantage point, you must earnestly endeavor to cultivate the willingness to: *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life!*

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