



Creating Calm in the Chaos

WORKBOOK



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In creating calm in the chaos, the aim is to recognize that even in the midst of a chaotic life, you can still create moments of calm for yourself that help you be more resilient when you need to step back into the chaos and keep getting things done.

Explore the workability of your efforts to experience calm by assessing if what you are doing is helping you lead a meaningful life and that you are also taking action based on what works.

Examine the ways you've tried to get rid of or avoid thoughts, emotions, urges or other unwanted experiences. Write down below a few of the strategies you have been using recently.

Did this reduce your symptoms long-term? What did this strategy cost you in terms of:

- Time?
- Energy?
- Health?
- Relationships?

Did it bring you closer to the life you want?

At this point, assess the functional contextualism. This means that we decide if a behavior is a problem or not by looking at how it functions in the current context. Below write down some of your thoughts about the functional contextualism of the different ways you've been avoiding unwanted experiences lately.

Think of a recent negative event, an occasion that prompted you to use some of the unhelpful strategies listed above to avoid or get rid of unpleasant experiences. Holding this in your mind, we will go through a couple exercises to develop psychological flexibility, an openness to your present experience that allows you to adapt your response to any circumstance in service of your personal values



Contact with the present moment

Bringing ongoing, **nonjudgmental**, full awareness to you're here and now experience, with openness, curiosity, interest, and receptiveness – focusing on engaging fully in whatever you're doing.

Focusing on that recent negative event, record your responses below:

- Bring your awareness to your thoughts.
 - ▶ Notice what your mind is telling you right now.
- Notice what's happening in your body right now.
 - ▶ What are you feeling?

The observing self

Also called self-as-context, the observant self is a viewpoint from which we can observe thoughts and feelings, and a space in which those thoughts and feelings can move. To access this space, we notice that we are noticing our thoughts and feelings or becoming conscious of our consciousness. While this may sound difficult, you do not need to be a meditation master to access this self. Think of it like the sky – no matter the weather, it's always there. While we can't change the weather, we can watch the clouds float by with our observant self.

If we observe that our supervisor has stopped listening while we are talking, we often start wondering about what they're doing and why. Our thinking brain will kick in with stories about how we're boring, how they're working too hard, or another narrative trying to explain the situation. We may start planning how we should react. We may judge the situation as being bad. Instead of just observing what is going on, our mental chatter is pulling us away from the present moment.

Now, write down all the observations you have regarding the external world, internal thoughts, and emotions; no judgements, accepting all things with awareness, consciousness, and self-knowledge.

In the text box below, record what you're thinking mind communicated during the negative event you've been focused on. Write down all the stories you are telling yourself about this experience.



Defusion

Learning to perceive thoughts, images, memories, and other cognitions as what they are, language, as opposed to what they appear to be – threatening events, rules to be obeyed, objective truths. Defusion provides the space for us to step away from our thoughts and see the bigger picture. One way to understand defusion is to understand cognitive fusion.

Cognitive fusion is the coupling of thoughts and direct experiences. The experience that your thoughts are reality, and the story we are telling ourselves is genuinely happening. Our thoughts are totally truthful and must be believed. The thoughts are important and require our full attention. They are orders and must be obeyed immediately. Our thoughts are wise, so we need to follow their advice as they know best. And our thoughts are threats, that might frighten or disturb us.

Using the negative event, being the process of defusing from your thoughts.

Label your thoughts. Are they descriptive, your direct experience and something perceived with the 5 senses or are they evaluative, assigning a value on the experience?

Label the interpretation of the thought. Some examples of cognitive distortions are:

- Overgeneralizing, viewing everything from an always or never perspective.
- Jumping to conclusions, assuming you know what the other person is thinking, or you know how the scenario is going to play out.
- ‘Shoulding,’ telling yourself what should be done or not done.
- Labeling, making a judgment about yourself or someone else as a person, rather than seeing the behavior as something the person did that doesn’t define them as an individual.



Expansion

Making room in our body for unpleasant or painful feelings, sensations, urges, and other internal experiences. This process is also called acceptance in that we allow these experiences to come up and go without struggling, suppressing, fighting, running, or giving them attention.

In our final step, once again connect to the negative event.

1. Use your observing self to connect with the experience in your body. Take a few moments and notice the sensations. Focus on the least comfortable. Notice its dimensions: Is it large or small? Uniform or irregular? Identify the texture, smooth or rough? Does it have a color? If you can, visualize this sensation as a distinct object with its own material and properties.
2. Use deep breathing to explore the sensation. As you scan the uncomfortable sensation, focus on breathing deeply. Your breath can decrease the tension in your body. As your tension decreases, imagine your deep breath forming a space around the discomfort.
3. Make additional room in your body for the sensation. Imagine that space growing in size until your body can freely accommodate the discomfort. Rather than the feeling that the sensation is trapped, causing disruption and tension, you should feel that the sensation has room to move and grow, because you can accommodate it.
4. Tolerate the sensation and give it space to exist. Accept the emotion, rather than entertaining your thinking self, which might be saying that the emotion is a threat and needs to be eliminated.
** If your thinking self is still active, use it to reinforce the goal of expansion: acceptance. For instance, you could say out loud, "This is a difficult feeling, but I am able to accept it."*

In the box below, record what this experience was like for you. How did it feel to make room for all your sensations and experiences with your observant self?