

ACT for PTSD: Clarifying and Acting on Values

The Importance of Values

Our values are the beliefs and principles that guide our actions and decisions. They are crucial in determining how we respond to challenging situations, and they influence our feelings. Identifying values is essential to overcoming obstacles, like trauma, that hinder our progress toward living lives aligned with our core beliefs.

Exploring Values

Freewriting: imagine a life without challenges, anxieties, or troubling thoughts. How would you spend your time? How would you wish to live? Answering such questions highlights what truly influences your choices.

Legacy visualization: imagine that someone is writing a book about your life in the far-off future. What would you want it to say? How would you want your life to be remembered? This visualization can map out the values you most wish your life to intertwine with and reflect.

Incorporating Values Into Daily Life

It's one thing to identify values, but acting on them is what truly makes a difference. Try to recognize and integrate valued actions into your routine throughout your journey. No matter how small, these actions should resonate with your core values. When confronted with distressing situations, ask yourself: "Am I acting in line with my values, or am I avoiding?"

Example: If honesty is a core value, you might practice being more transparent in your communications, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Using Emotions as a Guide

Emotions, even painful ones, can be signposts pointing to our values. Feelings like guilt or shame may highlight areas where we yearn to align with our values. Emotions can also help you to choose valued actions.

Example: Feeling guilt after being short-tempered with a friend might indicate a discrepancy between your behavior and your value of kindness, prompting an apology and a kind gesture.

Exposure and Values

Exposure exercises aren't just about confronting fears but are also about acting on values. Identifying valued actions that coincide with situations you fear can be an effective way to both engage in meaningful activities and face those fears.

Example: If you value social connections but fear crowded places due to trauma, you might start by attending small gatherings and gradually increasing the group size as you become more comfortable.

Key Points

- Values guide our decisions, and identifying them can help in overcoming trauma.
- Acting on identified values in daily life can lead to meaningful experiences and confront avoidance.
- Emotions can serve as indicators of our values, guiding us toward valued actions.