

Setting Homework Using the ACT Perspective

During therapy sessions, we focus on choosing and modeling language that encourages more helpful thinking and behaviors. We employ metaphors and experiential exercises to help clients become present, to notice their thoughts and feelings and avoid being driven and tyrannized by them. However, practice outside of therapy sessions is equally important.

This handout provides practical strategies and exercises for setting therapeutic homework assignments. Grounded in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) principles, these exercises focus on promoting mindfulness, encouraging self-reflection, and fostering meaningful action in line with client values. The intention is to extend therapeutic benefits beyond therapy sessions into their day-to-day lives.

1 Mindful Awareness

One practical homework assignment is to practice mindful awareness daily. Start with one minute a day and gradually increase it to two minutes over time. Clients can download a meditation app and practice mindful walking. Those who connect with animals can also practice mindfulness by focusing on their pets' eyes and engaging in gentle touches. While many mindfulness exercises are available online, clients often find more resonance when they establish a personal connection within a practice.

2 Journaling

For clients who value writing, keeping a journal can be an effective way to connect with their thoughts and emotions. Writing out their thoughts creates a distancing effect and helps them gain a different perspective. Encourage clients to make regular time for a journaling practice, even if it's challenging for them to get started.

3 Writing to a “Friend”

Another valuable writing exercise is asking clients to write a letter to an imaginary friend who is experiencing the same difficulties. The client can provide advice, support, and compassion to this friend, gaining insights about themselves in the process. This exercise is an elaborate version of the “What would you tell a friend?” question and can be a powerful tool for self-reflection.

4 Other Work

Assign various activities outside therapy sessions that align with the client's values and goals. These might include:

- Requesting support from friends
- Connecting with friends
- Engaging in gentle physical activities
- Trying activities like dancing
- Tidying up their living space
- Overcoming fears, such as traveling to see loved ones

Remember that from an ACT point of view, setting homework assignments is an integral part of the therapeutic process. By engaging in these practical activities, clients can actively work toward their treatment goals and experience meaningful life changes.

Key Points

- Mindful awareness, journaling, and seeking support and connection are practical activities for reinforcing treatment outside therapy sessions.
- Encouraging clients to take action and make small changes in their daily lives is crucial for treatment progress.
- Writing exercises like journaling help clients connect with their values and gain a different perspective on their thoughts and emotions.