Values Work in Acceptance–based Behavioral Therapy: Helping Clients Reclaim their Lives

Lizabeth Roemer
University of Massachusetts Boston
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Clients
What is Meant by the Term ABBT?

- Overarching term for a class of related therapies that integrate acceptance and mindfulness with CBT
  - e.g., ACT, Hayes et al., 1999; DCBT, Linehan, 1993; MBCT, Segal et al., 2002

- Based on theory/research that suggest the relationship we have to internal content, not the content itself, plays a key role in psychopathology/problem behaviors

- Some (e.g., ACT) also explicitly focus on increasing engagement in valued activities
Conceptual Model of GAD and Associated Disorders

Problematic Relationship with Internal Experiences

Experiential Avoidance

Behavioral Avoidance/Constriction

Informed by a model of psychopathology described by Hayes et al., 1996
Cultivate an *expanded* awareness and a *compassionate decentered* stance toward internal experiences

- **Increase acceptance of/willingness to have internal experiences**
- **Encourage mindful engagement in personally meaningful behaviors**
1. Define values
2. Provide a rationale for the usefulness of helping clients to define/articulate values and incorporate them into daily life
3. Share methods of defining/articulating values
4. Share methods of incorporating values into daily life
5. Questions
Values in Psychology

Rogers\(^1\)

- Closing the gap between values and behavior would help clients live more fulfilling lives

Motivational Interviewing\(^2\)

- Helps clients become aware of how problematic behaviors (e.g., substance abuse) are barriers to living a values consistent life

Social Psychology\(^3\)

- Benefits of values affirmation include decreased stress, more willpower, closing of achievement gap due to stereotype threat

\(^1\)Rogers, 1964; \(^2\)Miller & Rollnick, 2002; \(^3\)Harris et al., 2009
Values in ABBTs

Personal, freely chosen principles that are intrinsically rewarding that define our “way of being in the world”\textsuperscript{1–2}

Differ from Goals

- Present—rather than future-focused
- Cannot be completed or fully achieved
- Are dependent on our actions; not external, uncontrollable factors

- Not narrowly/inflexibly defined by one particular behavior

\textsuperscript{1}Hayes et al., 2004; \textsuperscript{2}Wilson & Defrene, 2009
Sample Values¹

Relationships (partner, family, friends)

- Being affectionate and caring in my interactions with my children
- Respecting my parents, extended family, and elders
- Opening up, revealing my feelings, and sharing myself emotionally in my close personal relationships
- Being honest, sincere and truthful in my interactions with others

¹Adapted from Ciarrochi, 2008; Harris, 2010
Sample Values (cont.)

Work, education, training, household management

- Being industrious, dependable, and committed
- Gaining knowledge and learning new skills
- Engaging in creative pursuits

1Adapted from Ciarrochi, 2008; Harris, 2010
Sample Values (cont.)

Self–Nourishment and Community Activities

- Actively seeking, creating or exploring novel or stimulating experiences
- Being physically active
- Promoting justice and advocating for those who are marginalized and who face discrimination
- Connecting with things bigger than myself

\(^1\text{Adapted from Ciarrochi, 2008; Harris, 2010}\)
Rationale for the Importance of Values Work in ABBT
Emotions Are Linked to Behaviors

- Emotions are associated with *action tendencies* or “states of readiness to execute a specific action” \(^1\)
  - Anger \(\rightarrow\) Control, Dominate, Attack
  - Fear \(\rightarrow\) Protect (Fight or Flight)

- From a self-protective stance, we may instinctively try to *minimize or avoid* situations likely to elicit painful emotions

\(^1\) Frida (1987)
But….. There are Reasons We May Not Always Want to Respond Instinctively

1. The behavior “suggested” by our emotional state may be inconsistent with something that we personally value

2. The activities in our lives that are most likely to elicit positive (or approach) emotions such as love or interest typically require us to also be open to the possibility of experiencing painful emotions
A child misbehaves eliciting anger
  ◦ Rather than exerting our dominance or attacking, we may want to model understanding and teach appropriate behavior

We are offered the opportunity to take on a challenge at work
  ◦ Rather than avoiding because of our fear of failure, we may want to take on what we perceive to be a meaningful activity
In order to have a strong, loving connection with others, we open ourselves up to the possibility of loss, rejection, or betrayal.

Trying new activities that may be exciting or exhilarating are likely to elicit some anxiety and fear.
One Possible Alternative to Responding Instinctively to Emotions: Acting in Accordance with Values
Rationale for Defining Values

- Compass that can guide choices
  - Alternative to choices based on avoidance

- Opportunity to enhance quality of life
  - Increase awareness of potential opportunities to gain satisfaction

- Allows us to find meaning in moment even if goals aren’t met or the situation is less than ideal
Example

- Problems at work
  - Not challenged, conflict with boss, little room for advancement

- Looking for a new job, but need financial stability
  - What sort of worker do you want to be when faced with mundane tasks?
  - How do you want to interact with difficult people?
  - What interpersonal skills can you work on developing?
  - What initiatives can you introduce to co-workers?
Strategies for Defining/Articulating Values
ABBT Methods Used to Promote Values Articulation

- Values Assessment
- Emotional processing/writing exercises
- Psychoeducation/ In session clarification
Methods of Values Assessment

- VLQ – measures importance and consistency in 10 domains
  - Family (other than parenting and intimate relationships)
  - Intimate relationships
  - Parenting
  - Friendship
  - Work
  - Education
  - Recreation
  - Spirituality
  - Citizenship
  - Physical self-care

\(^1\text{Wilson et al, 2009}\)
Personal Strivings

- Prompted to describe top “strivings”
- Rate on several domains
  - Intrinsic Motivation
    - Makes my life more meaningful
    - Brings fun and enjoyment
    - It’s personally important
  - Extrinsic Motivation
    - I would feel ashamed, guilty, or anxious if I didn’t
    - Someone close to me wants me to do it
  - Behavioral Commitment
    - I am trying hard to pursue this striving
    - I behave in ways that are consistent with this striving

¹Emmons, 1986; Blackledge et al, 2007; Ciarrochi et al, 2006
Survey of Life Principles

- Draws from work of Emmons and Schwartz
- Rate 58 items on 4 domains
- ImPActS
  - Importance – how much it matters
  - Pressure – how pressured do you feel to hold value
  - Activity – have you wanted to put this principle in play?
  - Success – how successful have you been in doing so

1Blackledge et al, 2007; Ciarrochi et al, 2006
2Emmons, 1986; 3Schwartz, 1992
ACT Conversations

- Values cards for use with young adults
  - What makes a good life?
  - What makes a friend?
  - What do you hope people will remember about you?

- Spread subset (10) cards on table

- Prompt discussion
  - We have talked a lot about problems, let’s talk about something different today. Which of these would you like to talk about?
  - How might you behave if you were working in accordance with this value?

¹Hayes & Coyne
What makes a good life?

Have you ever wanted to create?

What do you hope people will remember about you?

What does it mean to you?

What does forgiveness mean to you?

What makes you strong?

What would you do if you were rich?

What is it like to learn?
ABBT Methods Used to Promote Values Articulation

- Values Assessment
- Emotional processing/writing exercises
- Psychoeducation/ In session clarification
Writing Assignment 1

1. How is your anxiety interfering with…
   - Relationships (partner, family, friends)
   - Work, education, training, household management
   - Self-nourishment and community activities

May be painfully aware of choices (e.g., not dating, passing up job opportunity)

May be more subtle – series of small choices that lead a person off track
What personally matters to the client? How do they want to “be” in the world?

- May be “going through the motions” with no sense of intention or purpose
- This can be painful to look at, because people may see what they haven’t been doing
Writing Assignment 2

- **Relationships**
  - How open or private would you like to be?
  - How do you want to communicate?

- **Work/Education**
  - What would you like to be doing and why?
  - What sort of worker/student do you want to be?

- **Self–Nurturance/Community Involvement**
  - How would you like to spend your free time?
  - Take better care of yourself?
  - Take part in your community?
ABBT Methods Used to Promote Values Articulation

- Values Assessment
- Emotional processing/writing exercises
- Psychoeducation/ Sorting out values in session
Initial Writing
Issues to discuss with Client
Examples of Initial Client Writing

- I want to lose 10 pounds
- I want to open up to others
- I want to be happy and self-confident
- I want to ensure my children have a safe and secure future
- I want to engage in creative pursuits
- I want to have more equal relationships – I want my partner and I to share our thoughts and feelings
- I want to excel at work
- I want to always be there for my partner and friends
- I want to read to my daughter every night
Any Clear Values on List?
Values

- I want to open up to others
- I want to engage in creative pursuits
Common Themes that Emerge in Early Values Writing
Goals

- I want to lose 10 pounds
- I value living a healthy lifestyle

Rigidly defining a value with one specific behavior

- I want to read to my daughter every night
- I value connecting to and being present with my daughter
Desire to Control the Uncontrollable

- Values that involve controlling one’s internal state, other people’s feelings or behaviors, situations, and/or the future

- Important to validate the desire

- Emphasis not on right vs. wrong/should vs. shouldn’t
  - Instead highlight consequences of defining life purpose with actions outside of control
    - Stuck in an endless cycle of anxiety – trying to figure out “how”
    - Feelings of hopelessness and despair when unsuccessful
Common Themes: Control the Uncontrollable

The desire to control one’s internal state
- I want to feel happy and self-confident
- What would do, how would you behave?

The desire to control the future
- I want to ensure my children have a safe and secure future
- I value caring for my children and being attuned to their needs

The desire to control another
- I want to have more equal relationships – I want my partner and I to share our thoughts and feelings
- I value sharing my thoughts, feelings and vulnerabilities in close relationships
Common Themes: The Desire to be Perfect

The wish to be perfect/ more than human

- I want to excel at work
- I value giving attention and effort to the work
- I intend to seek help when I need it and being open to learning/receiving feedback

- I want to always be there for my partner and friends
- I value caring for and helping others
Clients often worry whether or not they are choosing the “right” value.

Emphasize the nature of choice:
- 100 judges can all agree that $2+2 = 4$
- 100 judges will not all agree on whether pursuing creative interests or engaging in spiritual practices bring meaning and fulfillment in one’s life.
Indecision/ Fear of Articulating Value

- **Concept** is more important than getting the value “right”
  - Emphasize importance of *using values to act with awareness and intention* rather than reflexively responding with little awareness to painful emotions

- Encourage client to trust in his or her own wisdom
  - Over time, if client practices awareness and openness to the full range of emotional responses, he or she will become more informed about personal values
Balancing Personal Values with Others’ Values

- **Pliance**
  - Value influenced by what one believes they *should* do
  - Actions can elicit:
    - Happiness when receive approval
    - Anxiety when unable to do what others want
    - Emptiness/ feelings of dissatisfaction and regret

- **Collectivist Cultural Perspective**
  - Personally *value* acting in accordance with what is best for one’s family or community
    - Sense of fulfillment and satisfaction even when actions elicit some painful emotions
Values Clarification

- Name one or two *values* in each domain
  - Relationships
  - Work/Education
  - Self-nurturance and Community Involvement
Strategies for Promoting Engagement in Valued Actions
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- Self-Monitoring Opportunities
- Commitment
- Incorporating into Daily Life
First step is to become more aware of opportunities (including small/subtle) to act in ways that are consistent with values.

Self-monitoring can help bring awareness to habitual responding and provide opportunities to make changes.
Self-Monitoring

- When do opportunities to engage in valued actions arise?
- What are obstacles that interfere with taking valued actions?
- How mindful are you when passing up opportunities?
- How mindful are you when engaged in valued actions?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Taken (T) or Missed (M)</th>
<th>Mindfulness (0–100)</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/4</td>
<td>Co-worker invited me to lunch</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>I was afraid I wouldn’t be interesting and fun enough. Going to lunch would make me feel too anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/7</td>
<td>Talked to my partner about how I was feeling</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies for Promoting Engagement in Valued Actions

- Self-Monitoring Opportunities
- Commitment
- Incorporating into Daily Life
Making a Commitment to a Values Consistent Life

- Commitment is to the intention to engage in valued actions even when uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and sensations arise.

- This work begins once the client has:
  - Developed a different relationship with internal experiences
    - Increased awareness
    - Developed a curious and compassionate stance toward internal experiences
    - Developed ability to differentiate clear and muddy emotions
  - Articulated personal values
Writing Assignment: Encouraging Commitment

- What is the importance of the values you have chosen? What do they mean to you?
- What are the biggest obstacles that stand between you and the changes you want to make?
- What positive and negative reactions come up when you think about making a commitment to change?
Apply to Daily Life
Application of skills

- Identify clear and muddy emotions
- Consider the “message” sent by the clear emotion
  - Is some action required?
  - Is acceptance and compassion required?
- Identify the factors that are muddying response
  - Critical/ judgmental response to response?
  - Desire to control the uncontrollable?
- Apply mindfulness skills
  - Curious, compassionate observation of experience
- Identify behavioral choices consistent with values
  - Bring mindfulness to valued actions
Being aware of valued directions brings with it being aware of missed opportunities to take valued actions

- Remember it takes time to learn new habits
- Practice self-compassion in response to missed opportunities
- Examine barriers to action and address them
- Recommit to intention to take action
- Recognize that valued action, like mindfulness, is a process and requires continuing practice
Common Obstacle: External barriers

- Real-life external barriers can interfere with valued actions (e.g., financial strain, discrimination and marginalization experiences)
  - Extremely important to validate the reality of constraints and empathize with pain of these barriers
  - Then can help client to think about what choices could be made even within this context
    - Valued action may be empowering and increase self-efficacy
    - Values clarification found to reduce distress in response to racist stressor (West et al., 2014)
  - This process may also involve grieving for lost opportunities
In any one moment, acting in accordance with one value may mean you are attending less to another

- Accept the limits of being human
- Make choices with awareness and intention
- Check in over time to see if you are achieving balance at a more general level
Maintaining Valued Living

- Continued awareness/mindfulness practice helps with noticing opportunities for valued action or when valued living becomes imbalanced.

- Writing exercises can help to reclarify what matters and set a course and direction, particularly in new contexts.

- Reminders that this is a lifelong practice of stating intentions again and again.
www.mindfulwaythroughanxietybook.com