

Be Willing to Feel Difficult Emotions



Explanation

This is the ACT process of acceptance vs. avoidance. It is rooted in our yearning to feel and experience life. When we tell ourselves we need to avoid painful feelings, we begin to avoid more and more situations that could potentially lead to a painful outcome.

Rather than merely avoiding pain, one may begin to avoid positive situations as well, out of the fear that they can potentially result in pain.

For example, a person may avoid feelings of love and intimacy out of a deeper avoidance of the potential pain if the relationship does not work out.

Acceptance opens a person up to a sense of willingness to experience emotions. This means one can flexibly open up to painful emotions and learn from them.

Rather than viewing emotions as good vs. bad, a flexible approach views emotions as information.

Opening up to emotions does not imply being consumed by them. Rather, it means opening up to the lessons they are sharing with us.

Being willing to experience painful emotions also allows one to begin opening up to experiencing more pleasurable feelings as well. This leads to being able to savor life and fulfill our deep human yearning for feeling.

Exercise

Name the particular emotion you are feeling, curiously observing it like a scientist.

What shape is this emotion? Allowing it to be there, breathe it in. What feelings come up in your body?

Continue observing it curiously.

What color is it? Are there any designs on it? If you had to rate it on a scale of 1 to 10, what would you give it?

Why it Works

These techniques are designed to facilitate a process whereby a person stays in contact with difficult thoughts or emotions.

The willingness to observe it in this way facilitates a degree of openness that changes one's relationship to these emotions or thoughts.

Rather than being something one must fight, suppress, or avoid, flexibly making space for the pain also allows one to open up to pleasurable experiences, fulfilling the yearning to feel.