

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY EXERCISE

APPENDIX C

We'd love to kick-start this exercise with some basic understanding: Optimism isn't about feeling happy all the time. In fact, optimism isn't about happiness at all. Optimism is all about our ability to move through life's obstacles with perspective, vulnerability, authenticity, and accountability. One essential component to working through each of these mindsets is psychological flexibility.

What the heck is psychological flexibility?

Psychological flexibility is the byproduct of our choices. On any given day, we have choices that either move us closer to acceptance or avoidance. When we make choices toward acceptance, we become more psychologically flexible. When we make choices toward avoidance, we become less psychologically flexible.

In essence, our levels of optimism are derived from our daily choices and actions. If we want to take care of ourselves and enhance our optimism, we must choose to accept some things about ourselves and our situations that may be uncomfortable.

So, if acceptance drives this whole psychological flexibility stuff, what do we work on accepting? First, we *do not* have to accept any form of abuse or neglect. That would be the opposite of what we're after. We *do* accept moments as they come as well as the circumstances we find ourselves in, and *all* the emotions that come with them.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY EXERCISE: THE LAVA LAMP

In this exercise, we pretend we're in a dimly lit room. Located in the center of the dimly lit room there is a glowing lava lamp. Inside the lava lamp are our thoughts, feelings, or troubling memories. We attempt to turn off the lava lamp, but there is no "on/off" button, nor is there a plug/outlet. In fact, the more we try and turn off the lava lamp, the closer we are to the glow and brightness.

EXERCISE:

Observe the lava lamp closely. Do your best to adopt the persona of a scientist. Evaluate the bubbles in the lamp—take notes. Each bubble is a feeling, thought, or memory. Become curious about them. What shape are they? What do they look like? How do they move? Allow yourself to be there, breathe it in. What feelings come up in your body? Keep observing them.

RATIONALE:

These types of exercises are only a small portion of what is known as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). These exercises are designed to create a process wherein an individual connects with a difficult thought or emotion. When we are willing to observe our feelings this way, it helps us become more open to developing a more authentic connection with our emotions and thoughts. Essentially, we want to reach a point where our feelings aren't something we fight or avoid. Remember, the key to opening ourselves up to uncomfortable feelings is the exact same key to opening ourselves up to joyful and pleasurable feelings as well. The goal is to actually *feel*.

REFLECT:

Write down what you observed and how it made you feel.

What did you learn about yourself?

What did you learn about your emotions?

What did you learn about thoughts?