

ACT · SELF-REFLECTION PRACTICE

Understanding Suffering



A two-week self-reflection worksheet

Purpose of this worksheet

To help you better understand what holds you back from the life you want, where suffering comes from, and how the avoidance mechanism works.

This is **not a test or a diagnosis**, it is a self-reflection tool based on the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Fill it in each day, for a few minutes, ideally at the same time of day.

Without judgment

Write honestly. There are no right or wrong answers.

If you miss a day

Simply continue the next day. Don't go back and criticize yourself.

Next to each table

You will find an example to help you get started.

01

Week 1: Understanding

Three themes that will help you understand what you want from life, where suffering comes from, and how avoidance works. Each day begins with a short theory section.

What holds me back from the life I want?

Theory in brief

ACT therapy assumes that suffering often comes not from difficult experiences themselves, but from how we deal with them, especially when we avoid what matters to us in order to escape discomfort. The first step is to notice the gap between what truly matters to you (your values) and how you actually behave day to day.

- ① **If stress and fatigue did not exist today, what would you do differently at work, in relationships, in your free time?**

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- ② **Imagine yourself a year from now, the person you want to be. What is holding you back the most from moving in that direction right now?**

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- ③ **Fill in: on the left, what truly matters to you; on the right, what you actually do.**

What matters to me

EXAMPLE

Connection with my children, truly being present with them.

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What I actually do

EXAMPLE

In the evening I am so tired that I just sit next to my phone, not really talking with them.

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Noticing the gap in everyday life

Yesterday you named what matters to you. Today, simply notice when a gap appears between that and your actual behavior, without trying to fix it right away.

1 When today did you notice a gap between what matters to you and what you actually did?

2 What was happening around you at that moment? What was the situation?

3 Today's observation

Searching for the source of pain: our attitude toward difficulties

Theory in brief

We often think the situation itself is what troubles us, but a significant part of our suffering comes from what we tell ourselves about it. Fatigue is a sensation, but the thought “I can’t cope” or “this shouldn’t be happening” is already an interpretation that adds extra suffering. In ACT this is called cognitive fusion, believing our thoughts are absolute truth.

- ① **When you felt difficulty today (fatigue, irritation, anxiety), what did you immediately tell yourself about it?**

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- ② **Fill in for situations where difficulty arose.**

Situation → Feeling / emotion → Automatic thought

EXAMPLE

SITUATION

A colleague did not mention me in the presentation, even though I contributed to the project.

FEELING / EMOTION

Tension in the chest, resentment.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

“No one ever notices me, I don’t matter.”

SITUATION

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FEELING / EMOTION

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AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

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SITUATION

.....

FEELING / EMOTION

.....

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

.....

Separating thoughts from facts

Yesterday you started noticing thoughts about your difficulties. Today try to separate them from the facts themselves: a sensation is what is happening in the body; a thought is what you think about it.

EXAMPLE

Sensation: pressure in the chest. Thought about it: "I can't get through this day."

- ① Did you notice a thought today that was about the pain (e.g. "this is terrible", "I'm weak"), rather than the pain itself (e.g. "I feel tired in my body")?

- ② Today's observation

The avoidance mechanism in the brain

Theory in brief

When we feel discomfort, the brain naturally looks for a way to avoid it, this is the fight-or-flight system that has existed since ancient times. Avoidance (procrastination, overeating, staying overly busy, isolation) briefly reduces discomfort, so the brain 'learns' that it works, and repeats this behavior. The problem is that over time, whatever is being avoided often only grows stronger, because it is never resolved, only postponed.

1 Fill in your list of coping strategies and their effects.

EXAMPLE

COPING STRATEGY

I browse the internet and social media instead of talking with my partner about what is worrying me.

SHORT-TERM EFFECT

I relax for a moment, I forget.

LONG-TERM EFFECT

I feel even more distant, the conversation still doesn't happen.

DOES THIS BRING ME CLOSER TO WHAT MATTERS TO ME?

No, it moves me further away from the closeness I want.

COPING STRATEGY

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SHORT-TERM EFFECT

.....

LONG-TERM EFFECT

.....

DOES THIS BRING ME CLOSER TO WHAT MATTERS TO ME?

.....

Noticing the week's pattern

- ① Look back over this week's entries. What recurring pattern do you notice between the situation, the thought, and the avoidance behavior?

- ② What surprised you most this week?

Weekly summary

- ① If you could choose one thing you'd like to change next week, based on what you've learned, what would it be?

02

Week 2: Applying it in daily life

You will apply what you noticed, following the same structure each day: situation, feeling, automatic thought, what you did, and the effect. The goal is not to force a change in behavior, but to consciously observe what is happening.

Tracking situations

Situation



Feeling



Thought



Action



Effect

EXAMPLE**SITUATION**

My boss sent a sharply worded message about a delayed project.

FEELING / EMOTION

Anxiety, shame.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

"I'm incompetent, everyone can see it."

WHAT I DID

I avoided replying for several hours, scrolled through the news.

EFFECT

The tension didn't go away, it was just postponed, I felt even worse in the evening.

SITUATION**FEELING / EMOTION****AUTOMATIC THOUGHT****WHAT I DID (AVOIDED / ACTED ON A VALUE)****EFFECT (CLOSER TO OR FURTHER FROM WHAT MATTERS)****SITUATION****FEELING / EMOTION****AUTOMATIC THOUGHT****WHAT I DID (AVOIDED / ACTED ON A VALUE)****EFFECT (CLOSER TO OR FURTHER FROM WHAT MATTERS)**

Tracking situations

Same structure as yesterday: situation, feeling, thought, action, effect. You will find an example on the first day of week two.

Situation

→

Feeling

→

Thought

→

Action

→

Effect**SITUATION****FEELING / EMOTION****AUTOMATIC THOUGHT****WHAT I DID (AVOIDED / ACTED ON A VALUE)****EFFECT (CLOSER TO OR FURTHER FROM WHAT MATTERS)****SITUATION****FEELING / EMOTION****AUTOMATIC THOUGHT****WHAT I DID (AVOIDED / ACTED ON A VALUE)****EFFECT (CLOSER TO OR FURTHER FROM WHAT MATTERS)**

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Situation → Feeling → Thought → Action → Effect

SITUATION

FEELING / EMOTION

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

WHAT I DID (AVOIDED / ACTED ON A VALUE)

EFFECT (CLOSER TO OR FURTHER FROM WHAT MATTERS)

SITUATION

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→

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→

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Two-week summary

① What did you learn about your avoidance patterns over these two weeks?

② Which automatic thought recurred most often?

③ Which coping strategy did you use most often?

④ What has changed in your understanding since Day 1?

⑤ What one small step in the direction of what matters to you would be meaningful right now?
