

ACT SKILLS ASSESSMENT

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Settle In

Today:

Participants will:

- Use the Psychological Flexibility Skills Assessment Tool to identify current levels of functioning and skill deficits related to a specific ACT core process.
- Identify psychological flexibility skills within a client vignette and match them to corresponding checklist categories (acknowledge, approach, or related communication skills).
- Formulate behavior analytic intervention plans that incorporate ACT-aligned teaching strategies while preserving conceptual and procedural fidelity to ABA.

Experience & Acknowledgements:

10 years of ACT exposure and experience between:

- Countless Workshops, Readings, and more...
- Dr. Szabo's courses/groups
- Dr. Emily Sandoz's work and consultation
- Lou Lasprugato's peer groups

Clinically I have used ACT resources:

- Children
- Social Groups
- Adults (both neurodivergent and neurotypical)

The Psychological Flexibility Skills Assessment Tool is an amalgamation of learnings over the years through my experiences with minds brighter than my own, through the lens of a BCBA

Assumptions

ACT is a Language Based Therapeutic tool rooted in functional contextualism and relational frame theory.

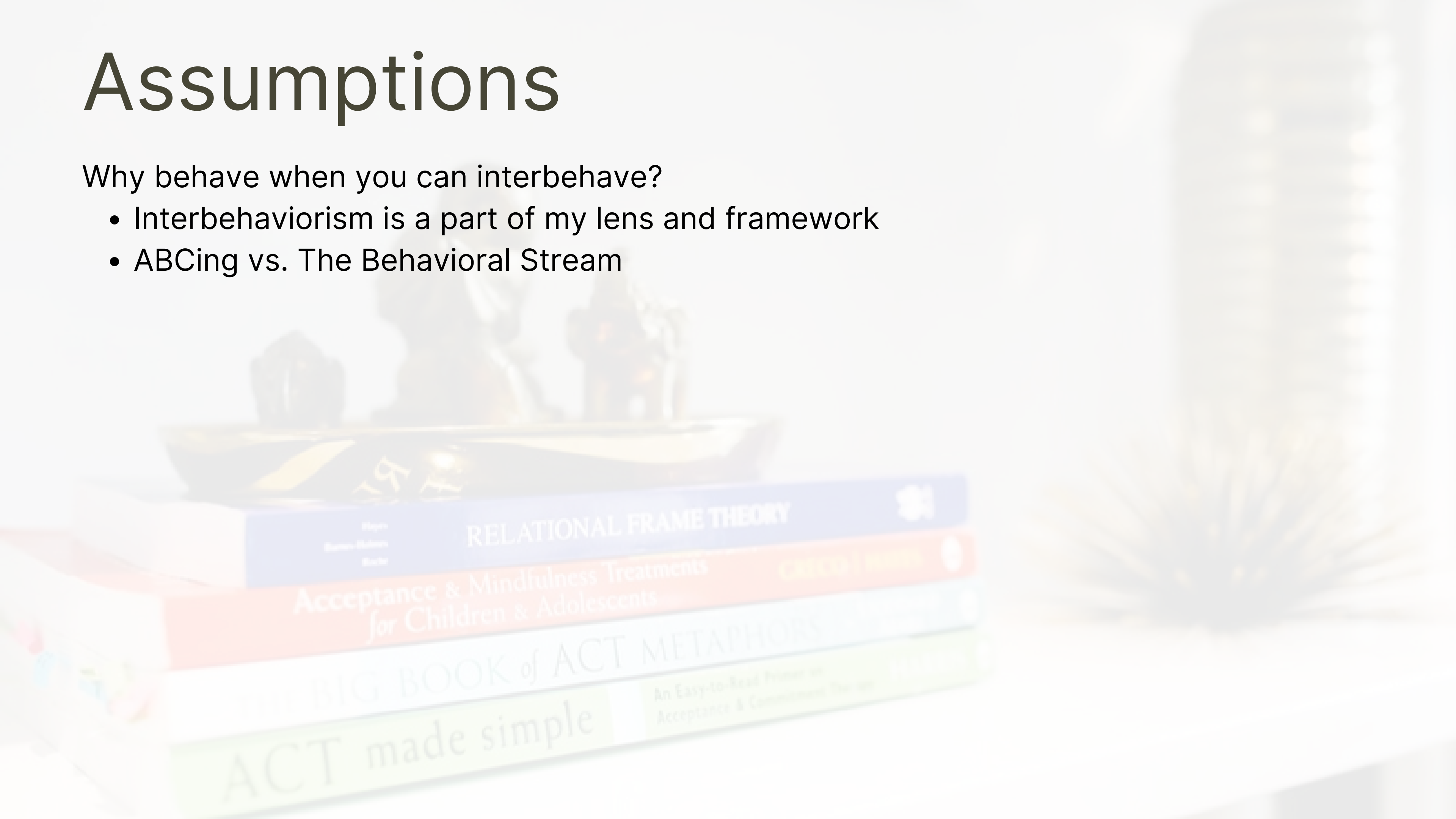
This means it's a language based intervention (aka we're talking!)

- Is this talk therapy? Maybe... Topographically
- Does this method include functional analysis? Yes... but
 - It's a moment to moment functional analysis
 - We're cueing into how the prompts are functioning for the learners (Aversive, Appetitive, Acknowledge, Approach)
 - Clinician are a part of the functional analysis
 - We're reflecting on how did it function for the client? AND How did it function for me?
 - Are both the client and myself in an aversive and/or appetitive space?

Assumptions

Why behave when you can interbehave?

- Interbehaviorism is a part of my lens and framework
- ABCing vs. The Behavioral Stream



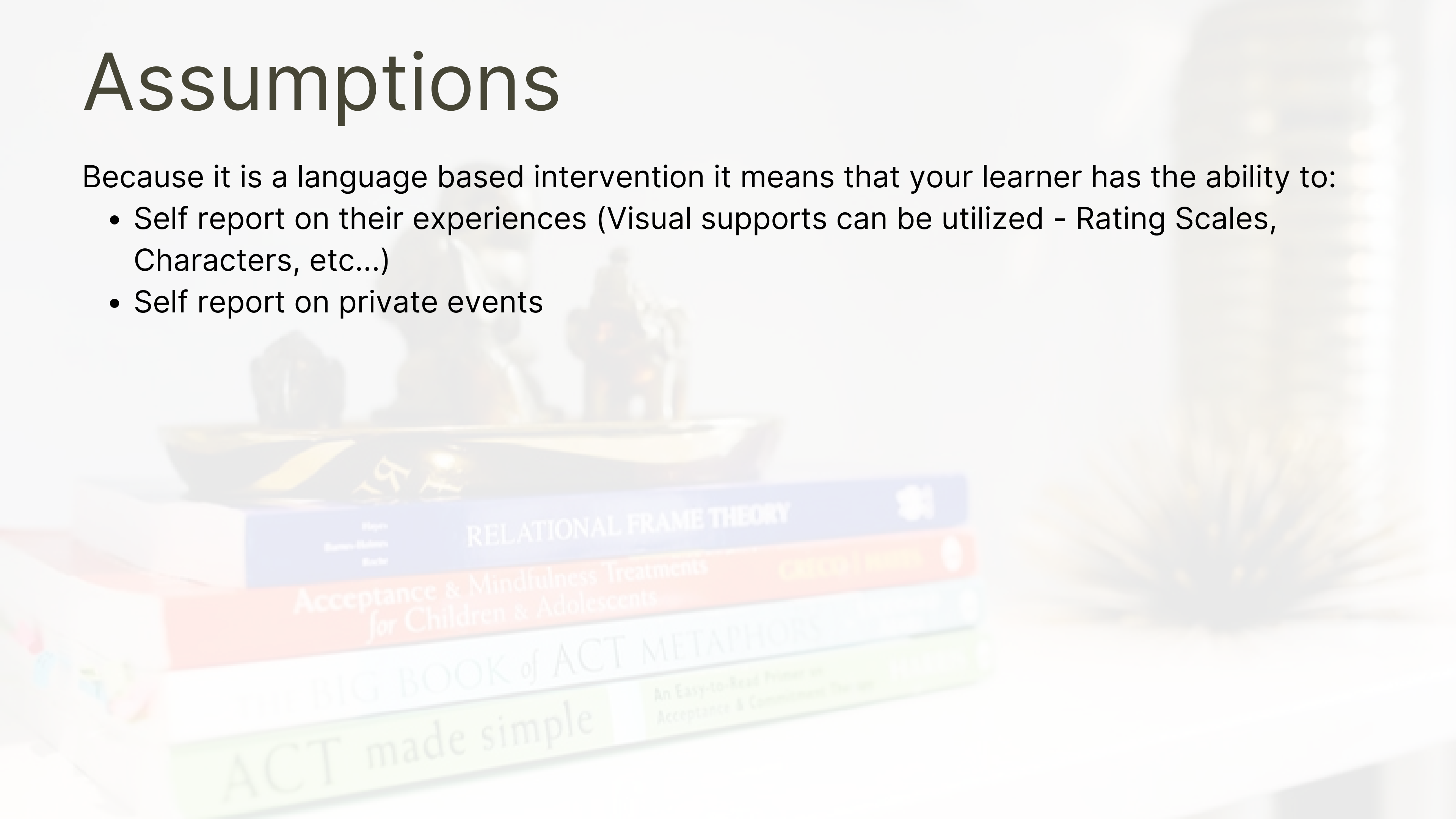




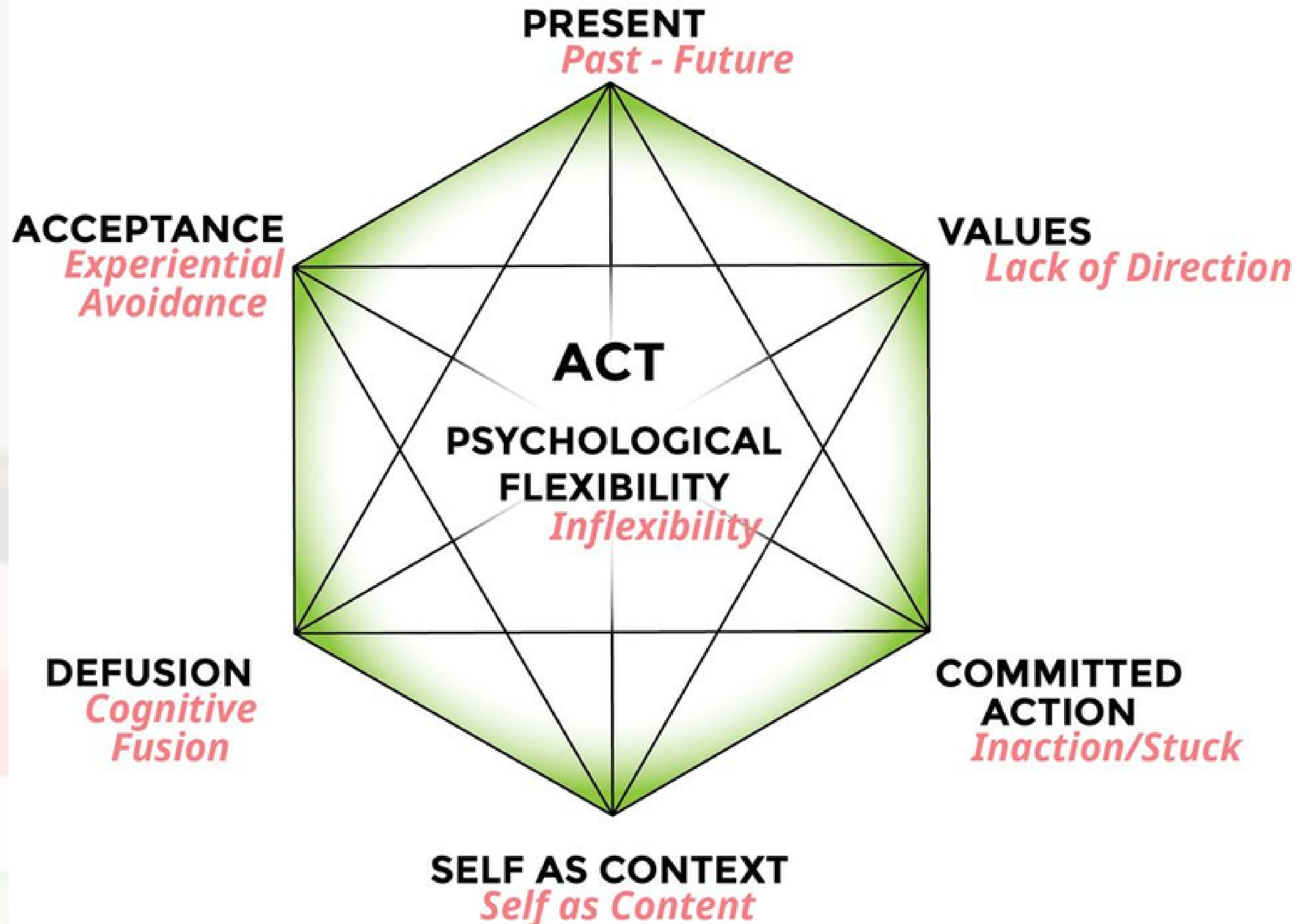
Assumptions

Because it is a language based intervention it means that your learner has the ability to:

- Self report on their experiences (Visual supports can be utilized - Rating Scales, Characters, etc...)
- Self report on private events



ACT HEXAFLEX



Terminology

Appetitive: The stimuli, variables, people, places, etc... that open us up to experiences, that expand our behavioral repertoires. The “places” we feel joy, connection, aliveness... aka the reinforcing spaces

Aversive: The stimuli, variables, people, places, etc... that close us down, that limit us behavioral repertoires. The “places” we feel like hiding, fighting, running...

Acknowledge: The tacting, the awareness that some variable, stimuli, people, place is present within the context of the behavior

Approach: The experiencing, an extended duration of time spent with the stimuli, people, places present within the context of the behavior

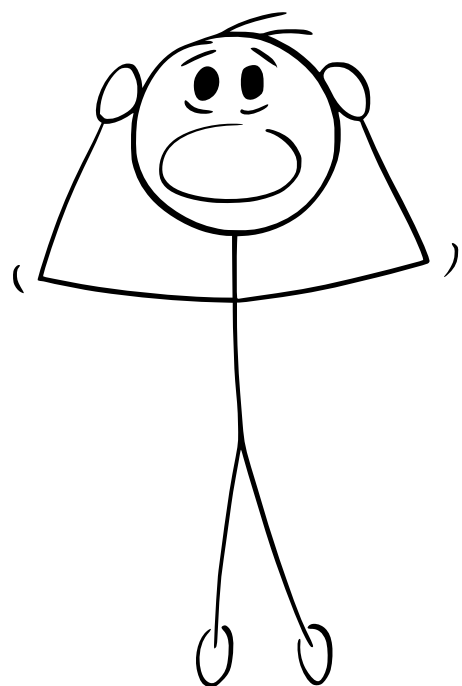


Appetitive



Aversive

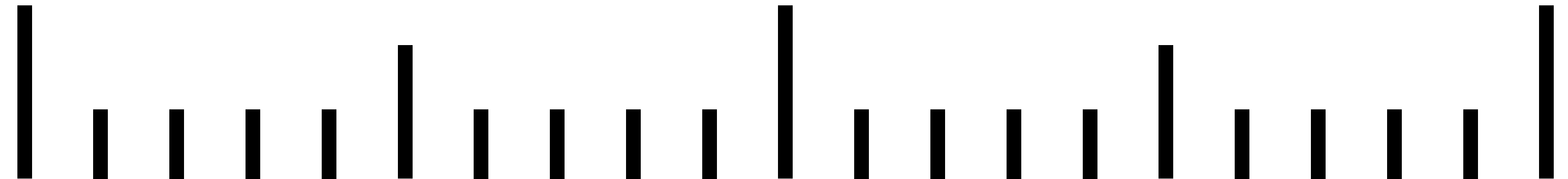




Inflexible
Process

Acknowledge

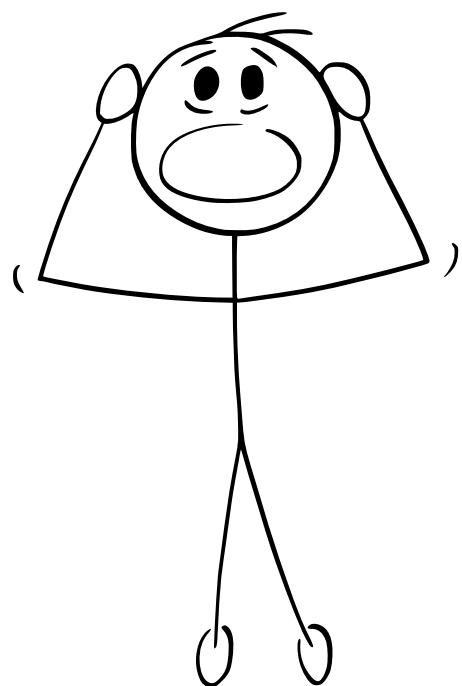
Approach



Inflexible
Process

Acknowledge

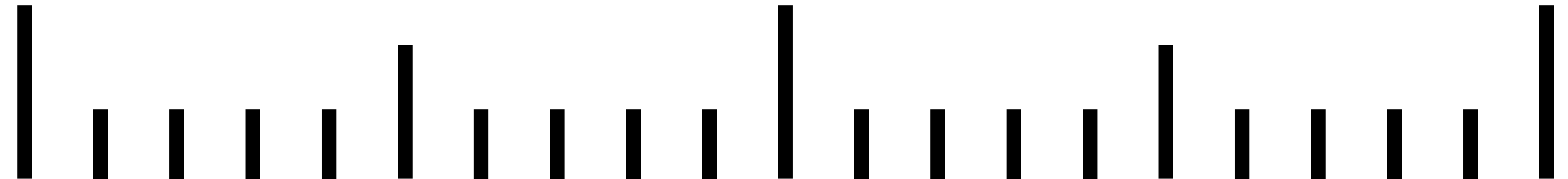
Approach



Inflexible
Process

Acknowledge

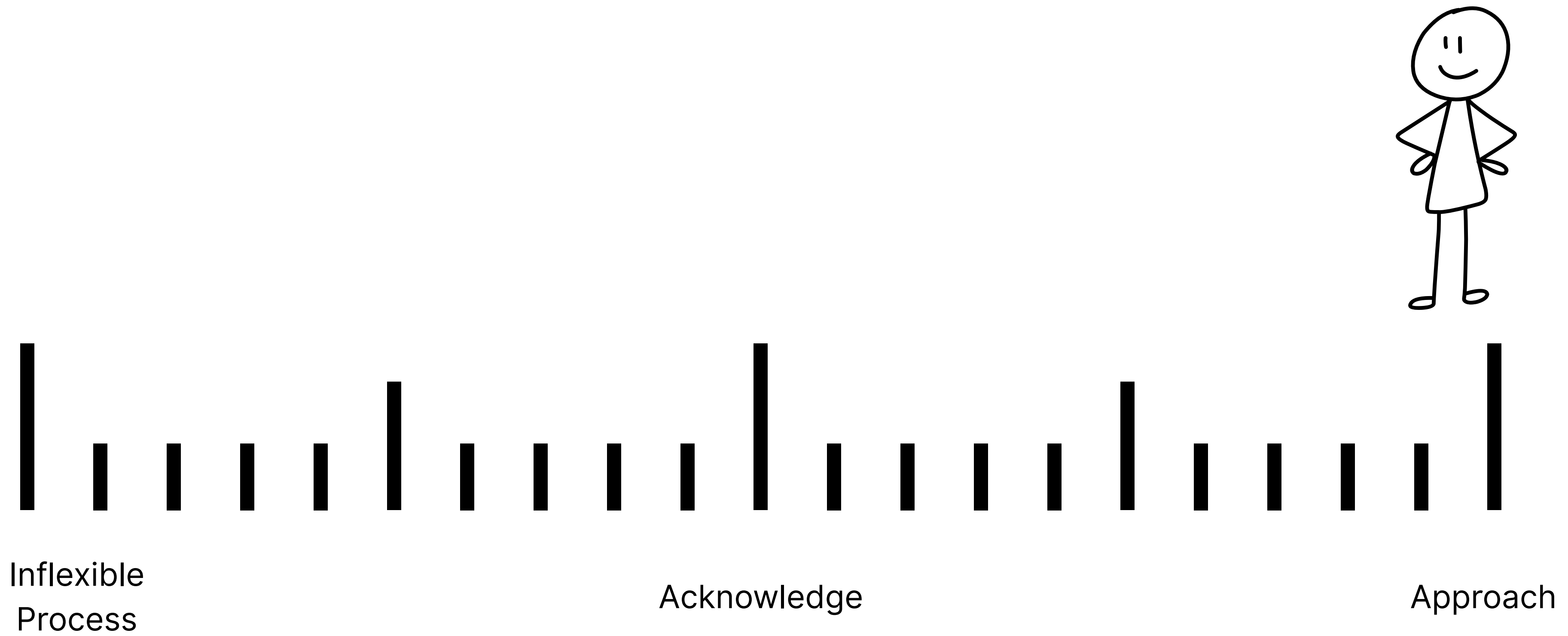
Approach



Inflexible
Process

Acknowledge

Approach





Psychological Flexibility Skills Assessment Tool



Self Reflection

- Looking at the materials provided, which skills do you personally notice yourself engaging in and/or using most often in your own life or work?
- How do you model these skills for others?
- Which skills do you find more challenging or less natural to engage in — and in what contexts?
- When you face a difficult situation, which skill from the tool do you naturally lean on first?
- Which skills would you like to strengthen for yourself to model them more effectively for clients?
- How might your own tendencies (strengths or gaps) influence how you teach or prompt these skills with clients?



Case Vignette

Eli is a 12-year-old in 6th grade who was referred for support due to frequent avoidance of tasks that he perceives as “too hard” or “pointless.” His teacher says he’s capable but often gets “stuck in his head,” repeating negative self-statements. During math class, when given multi-step problems, Eli mutters under his breath, “I’m bad at this” and “I’m just going to get it wrong anyway.” When the teacher offers help, he shrugs and says, “It doesn’t matter,” but makes no attempt to start. In group activities, Eli tends to defer to peers. If asked directly to contribute, he often says, “They’ll do it better than me” or “I don’t have a good idea.” If a peer offers reassurance, he laughs nervously and changes the subject.



At home, Eli's parent reports he talks a lot about what he can't do and will avoid trying new things if he thinks he might fail. Last weekend, when invited to play a new board game, he said, "No, I'll mess it up for everyone," and stayed in his room.

In a recent session, Eli was introduced to a "thought detective" activity. When asked to notice what his mind was saying during a drawing task, he said, "It's saying I'm not creative." With prompting, he was able to say, "That's just a thought" but then added, "But it's probably true."

When working on a preferred task, Eli occasionally verbalizes positive private events ("I think this is turning out nice") and stays engaged even if a mistake occurs, but this only happens in highly familiar, low-demand situations.



Therapist: “Hey Eli, before we start, what’s your mind saying about math class today?”

Eli: shrugs, looks down “I don’t know.” (Aversive/No in the Acknowledge Space Yet)

Therapist: “Okay, let’s check in — are you thinking about math right now or something else?”

Eli: “Math.” (Acknowledge Space)

Therapist: “Can you tell me the first thing your brain says when you see a math problem?”

Eli: “...That I’m gonna mess it up.” (Acknowledge Space)



Therapist: “What’s another thought your mind gives you when you see a hard problem?”

Eli: silent, taps foot (Aversive/No Acknowledge)

Therapist: “Let’s try this — if I guessed, would I be close? Maybe something like, ‘I’m not smart enough’?”

Eli: “Yeah... that one.” (Acknowledge Space)

Therapist: “Want to try saying it in a silly voice or singing it to ‘Happy Birthday’?”

Eli: small smile but no attempt (Acknowledge - Approach Space)

Therapist: “Okay, let’s sing it together. Ready? One, two, three—”

Eli & Therapist: (sing) “I’m not smart enough...” (Approach Space)



Therapist: “What happened to the thought when you sang it?”

Eli: “It sounded silly... but my brain still kinda believes it.” (Approach Space)



During the interaction, the therapist observes that Eli:

- Requires moderate to high prompting to tact private events.
- Responds more to forced-choice prompts (“Is it this or that?”) than to open-ended ones.
- Needs modeling and co-participation to complete defusion exercises.
- Shows brief willingness once engaged but does not initiate on his own.
- Remains partially fused to thought content (“still true”) even after defusion attempts.
- Engages more when the task is playful, collaborative, and short.



Case Vignette - Marisol



Case Vignette - Darius



Interventions

- Guided Metaphor work
 - Big Book of ACT Metaphors
 - General Metaphors that can help lead to more individualized Metaphor work
- Paired Choice of Defusion Exercises
 - Not every exercise lands for every learner... It's okay to do a preference assessment of exercises to see which was had more impact
- Layering Frames (RFT Mapping)
 - Varied relational frames can help add to the network of flexibility
 - We can't remove a relational frame but we can help expand.



- Relational Frames
 - Frames of opposition (can help establish a continuum of responses)
 - Frames of comparison (find similarities to other behaviors and show room for expansion)
 - Frames of temporal markers (perspective taking)
 - Frames of hierarchy (Value domain, value qualities, valued actions...)
- Verbal Prompting
 - What's true at this moment?
 - What's the "story"?
 - What's based on this context?
 - What's the history of this rule?
 - What resulted in reinforcement?
 - What resulted in punishment?
 - "Is this a 'have to' or a 'choose to'?"



- Verbal Prompting
 - Whose voice is that rule in?
 - Is this your rule or someone else's rule about what you "should" be or do?
 - Pliance
 - Society
 - Relationships
 - Culture
 - Social Systems

Questions?

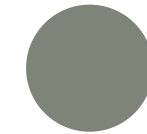
What's coming up for you?

Where can you apply this?

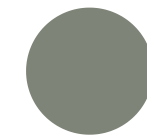
What questions do you have for me?

What other resources might you need?

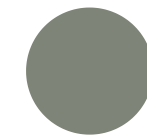
Things to Do:



Ask Questions!



Keep Learning :-)



Reach out & Connect

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stay Tuned! Full version of the Tool will be available by September 15th!