

Creating a Life with Meaning, Purpose, and Hope

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Disclaimers and acknowledgements

Nothing to disclose.

Concepts presented here are adapted from *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* by Steve Hayes and informed by the work of George Bonnano



Adversity

chronic illness
physical disabilities
chronic pain
discrimination
aces
family crises
racism
physical injuries
accidents/crashes
death of loved one
mental health struggles
loss of job
medical diagnoses
traumatic events



IMPACT OF MEDICAL CONDITIONS ON MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

People with chronic or serious medical conditions are at significantly increased risk for **anxiety, depression, PTSD, and substance use disorders**.

- Chronic illnesses (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, cancer) are associated with:
 - **2 to 3 times higher rates** of depression and anxiety

Medical conditions affect mental health through:

- **Biological Mechanisms**
- **Psychological Mechanisms**
- **Social Mechanisms**

(Moussavi et al., 2007; Scott, K. M., et al. (2007)



*Although the world is full of suffering, it
is also full of the overcoming of it.*

Helen Keller



Human Resilience



Resilience is the process of adapting in the face of adversity or significant sources of stress

- Resilience is ordinary & common, not extraordinary.
- Being resilient does not mean the absence of difficulty or distress.
- Resilience is not a trait -- it can be learned and acquired.



Resilient People

Optimism

Practice Kindness

Psychological Flexibility

Live in the present

Build strong relationships

Handle rejection



HOPE

Hope is a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals). - Snyder (2002)

Hope is complex, goal-directed cognitive, emotional, and spiritual process, incorporating trust, attachment, mastery, and survival. – Scioli & Biller (2009)



Hopeful People



- Hopeful individuals report:
 - Better **coping with illness** and **chronic pain**.
 - Improved **treatment adherence** and **health-related behaviors**.
 - Lower levels of **inflammation markers** and **physiological stress** responses.
- **Higher hope** is associated with **lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress**.
- Hope acts as a **protective factor** in trauma survivors.
- Individuals with higher hope report greater **psychological resilience** in adverse situations.

•Snyder et al 1991; Rustoen et al, 2010, Herth 2000
•Hirsch et al 2012, Birkman et al 2016





THRIVING



HARDINESS



Thriving: The belief that one can learn
and grow from both positive and
negative life experiences



Experiential Avoidance

Experiential Avoidance

Process of trying to avoid your own experiences (thoughts, feelings, memories, bodily sensations, behavioral dispositions) even when doing so causes long term difficulties



Experiential Avoidance is Basic

- Experiential Avoidance (EA) is built into human language
- EA is the tendency to try and alter the form, frequency, and/or situations that produce negatively evaluated thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations-- even when attempts to do so cause harm
- Increases the intensity and frequency of events
- Moves us away from valued life directions
- As a result, avoidance of physical/ psychological pain = suffering

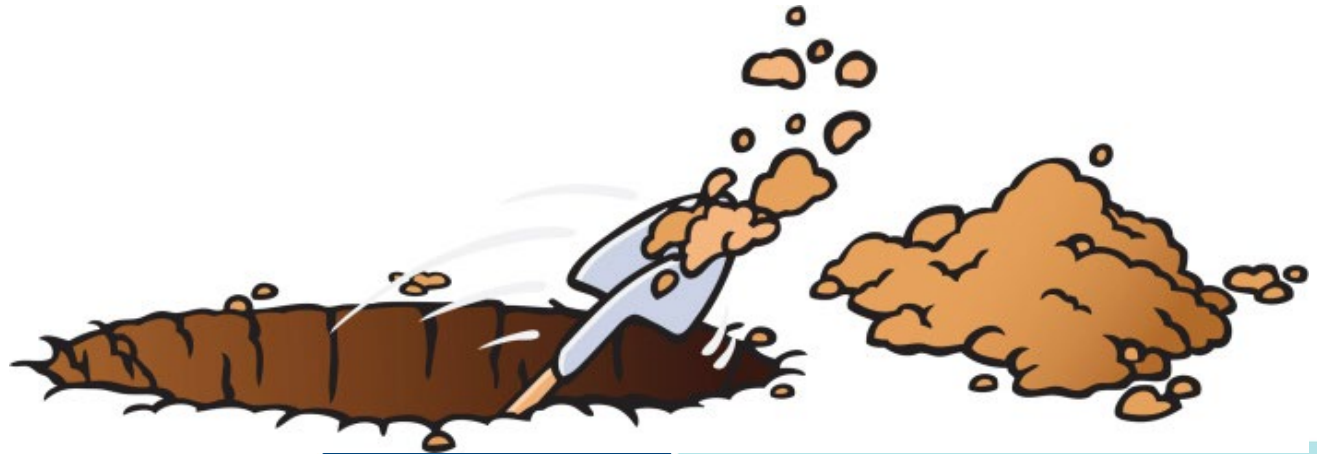


SUFFERING
PAIN
SUFFERING

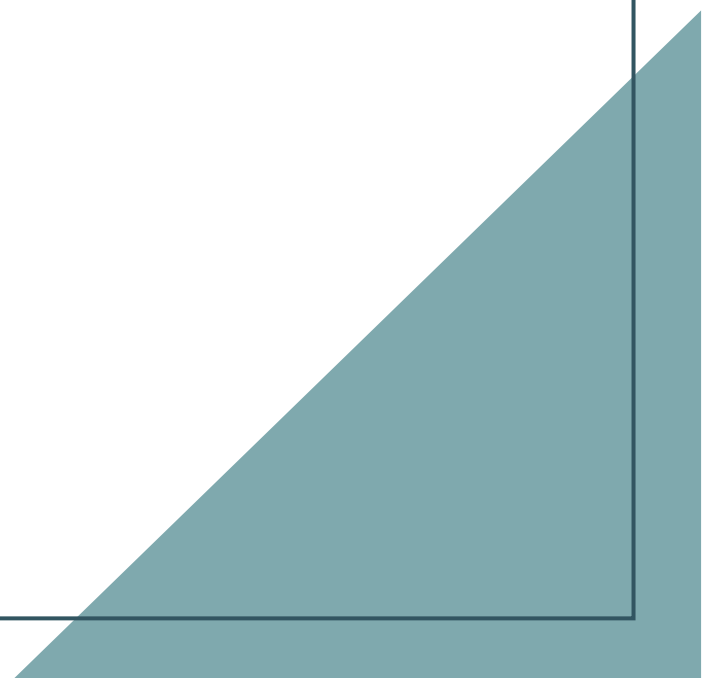


Creative Hopelessness – Human Struggle

- Fully opening to the reality that trying too hard to control how we feel gets in the way
- Confront the Agendas
 - › Coping strategies review-
short and long term effectiveness



Experiential Engagement



Acceptance

Direct moment-to-moment contact with events and taking experience as what it is and not what we think it should be



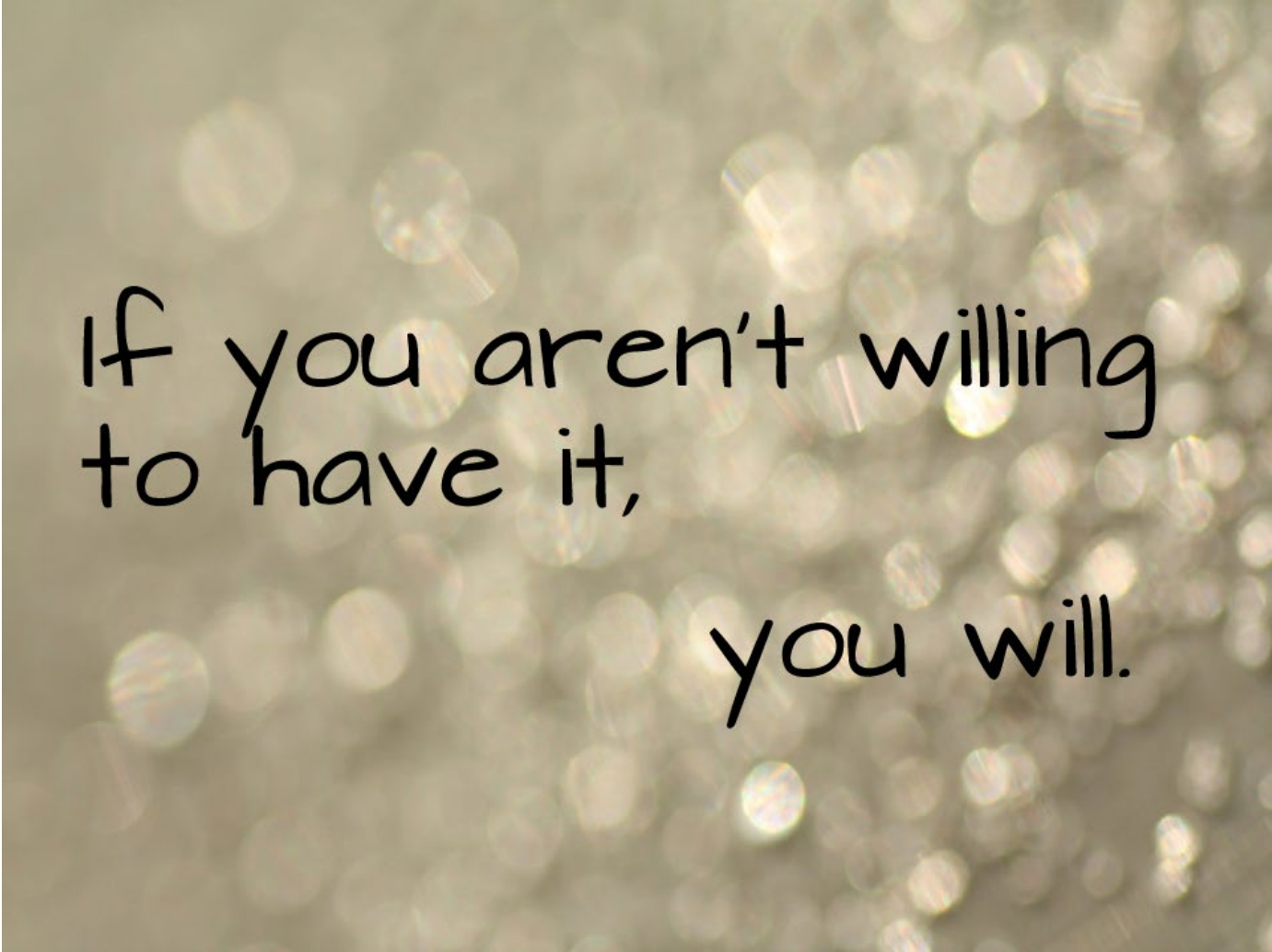
Willingness

“Willingness is accepting what is, together with responding to what is, in an effective and appropriate way.”

-Linehan



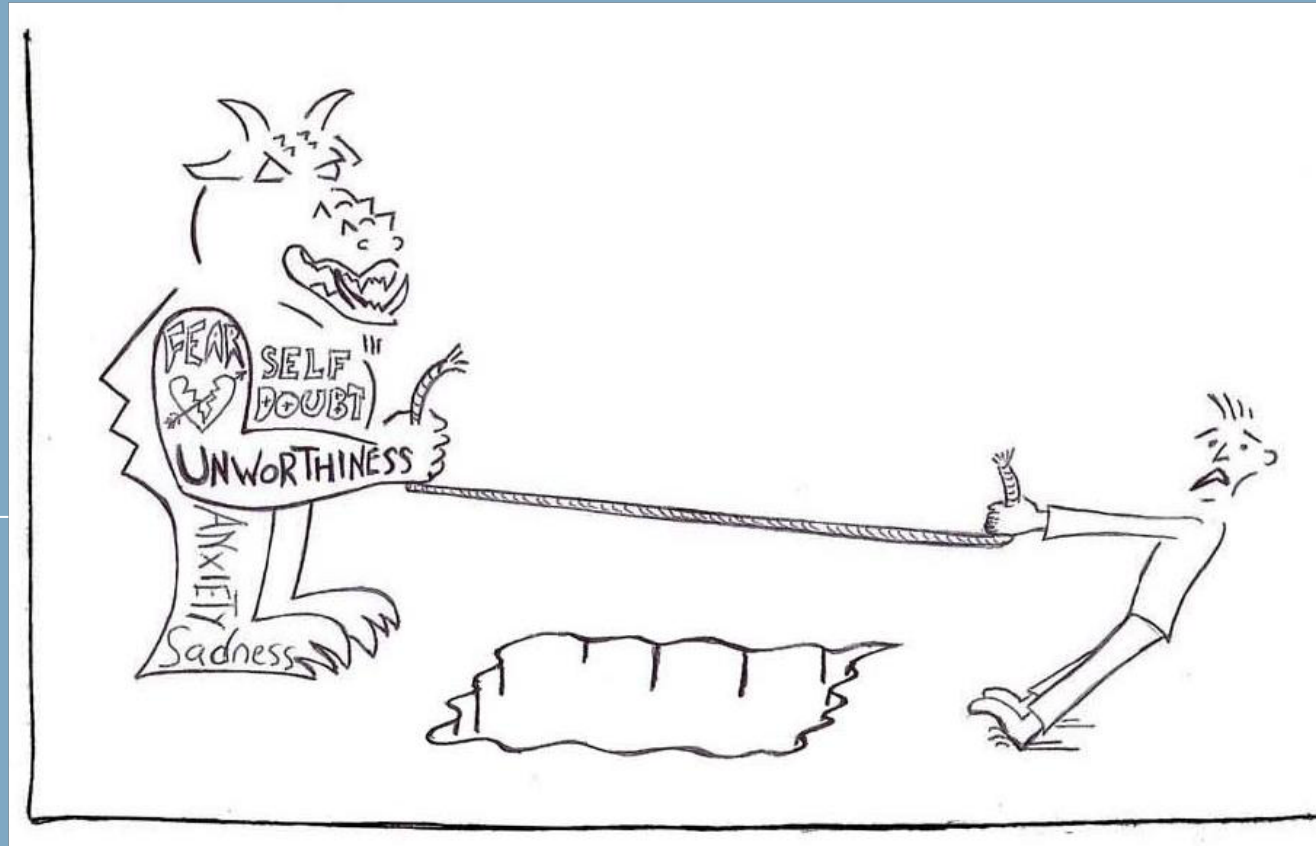
Why willingness? Because....



If you aren't willing
to have it,
you will.



Tug of war with monster



Thriving: The belief that one can influence
one's surrounding and the outcome of
events

BETWEEN THE STIMULUS AND THE RESPONSE
THERE IS A SPACE, AND IN THAT SPACE IS YOUR
POWER AND YOUR FREEDOM.

-FRANKL-

“Hope isn’t a denial of what is, but a belief that the current situation is not all that can be. You can recognize something’s wrong, but also that it’s not the end of the story.”

-Thema Bryant, PhD



How to Cultivate Hope

Micro-Joys – small joys in moments

Gratitude

Spirituality

Flexibility

Connections and Community

› Acts of Kindness



Thriving: Being committed to finding
meaningful purpose in life

“The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” Ralph Waldo Emerson



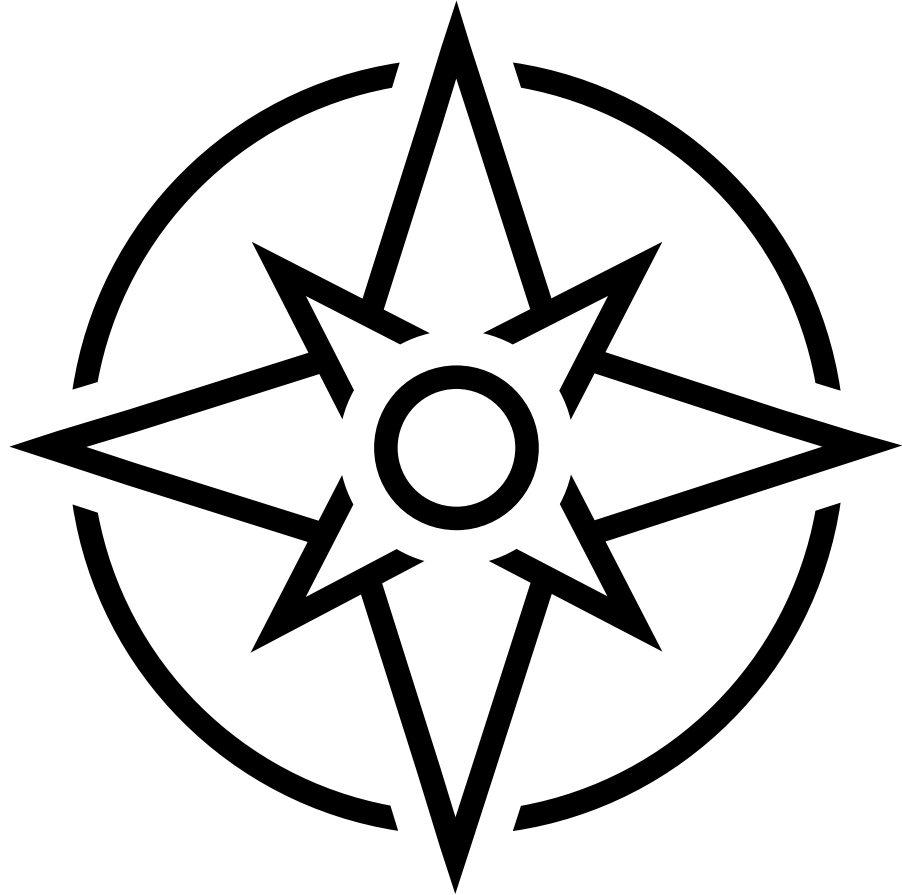
Know What Matters

Values

Purpose

Meaning





What are values?

What are goals?

How are values
different from goals?



Choice and Values

Values are self-chosen qualities of purposeful action

- › They are not goals, they are not feelings, they are not outcomes

Intentional action linked to chosen values



Committed Action



Creating Road map:

- › Identify Actions
- › Expected Barriers and Strategies



Psychological Barriers

F – fusion

E – excessive goals

A – avoidance and discomfort

R – remoteness from

Harris 2009





***If you want to live a meaningful life,
you have to find a way to
bring meaning to your life....
this requires intention.***



Follow-up Clinical Resources

Harris, R. (2009). *ACT made simple*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

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Questions?

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