

ACT FOR CANCER:
BRINGING LIFE TO
THE MOMENT YOU'RE IN

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FIRST THINGS FIRST

TODAY:

TALK ABOUT WHY CANCER IS PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO COPE WITH
(THINGS I DON'T NEED TO TELL YOU)

TALK ABOUT WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS HELPS

DESCRIBE AN INTERVENTION THAT CAN HELP CANCER PATIENTS (AND EVERYBODY
ELSE) COPE WITH HARD THINGS

TRY IT OUT A LITTLE

FIRST THINGS FIRST

ME:

PSYCHOLOGIST

PROFESSOR

CANCER COACH (PSYCHO-ONCOLOGIST)

SINCE 1995 I HAVE STUDIED, DELIVERED, TRAINED, AND TAUGHT AN INTERVENTION CALLED ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY, DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE HAVE MORE VITALITY AND COPE WITH HARD THINGS

SAW MY FIRST CANCER PATIENT IN 2002, HAVE WORKED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY WITH CANCER PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES SINCE 2007

FIRST THINGS FIRST

WRITE DOWN SOMETHING YOU STRUGGLE WITH
(CODE WORDS OKAY)

STUFF YOU DON'T NEED ME TO TELL YOU

CANCER IS TOUGH EMOTIONALLY.
ABOUT 35-65% OF CANCER PATIENTS
EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANT EMOTIONAL
DISTRESS

DISTRESS LOOKS DIFFERENT BETWEEN PEOPLE AND FOR THE SAME PERSON AT DIFFERENT TIMES

- NOT ALL PHASES OF TREATMENT ALIKE
- DIAGNOSIS
- PRE-TREATMENT/WAITING
- TREATMENT(S)
- POST-TREATMENT OR BETWEEN TREATMENTS

RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

CANCER TYPE/STAGE
YOUNGER AGE
BEING FEMALE
BEING SINGLE

OFTEN CHARACTERIZED BY:

ROLE DYSFUNCTION

NEGATIVE SELF-PERCEPTION

DISRUPTED DAILY LIFE

DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

UNCERTAINTY
HELPLESSNESS
LONELINESS

COMMON EXPERIENCES

LAST WELL BEYOND DIAGNOSIS AND
TREATMENT

LUCKILY, THESE CAN BE INFLUENCED BY:
SOCIAL SUPPORT
COPING STRATEGIES

BUT WHAT COPING SKILLS?

HOW TO GET REAL SOCIAL SUPPORT?

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY IS A
MINDFULNESS-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPY THAT
TARGETS AVOIDANCE, WITH A FOCUS ON HELPING
PEOPLE MAKE INTENTIONAL, MEANINGFUL
BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

WHEN IT'S NOT IN THERAPY, WE CALL IT ACCEPTANCE
AND COMMITMENT TRAINING

ACT BASIC PREMISES

- 1. THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ARE NOT THE PROBLEM (EVEN CANCER THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS)
IT IS OUR RESPONSES TO THEM THAT MATTER
- 2. SOMETIMES ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS (EVEN CANCER-RELATED) BACKFIRE AND REDUCE OUR VITALITY
IT IS NATURAL, BUT DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK WELL FOR US
- 3. WE CAN DEVELOP MORE INTENTIONAL RESPONSES (EVEN IN CANCER)
FLEXIBLY MOVING TOWARD OUR VALUES RATHER THAN AWAY FROM THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

WHY WE GET STUCK

STRUGGLING IN ACT IS OFTEN
ATTRIBUTED TO 6 INTERRELATED
PROCESSES

GETTING LOST IN
THE CONTENT OF
THOUGHTS,
RATHER THAN
NOTICING THEY
ARE THOUGHTS

LIVING IN THE PAST AND FUTURE

HOLDING TOO
TIGHTLY TO PARTS
OF OUR IDENTITY

AVOIDING
OUR
DIFFICULT
EMOTIONS,
THOUGHTS,
FEELINGS,
MEMORIES,
ETC

NOT ATTENDING TO INTENTIONS AND VALUES

INACTIVITY AND
SHORT-TERM
DISTRACTION

ACT AS AN INTERVENTION
TARGETS EACH OF THESE 6
PROCESSES THROUGH TARGETED
EXERCISES TO:

INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT

NOTICE THE
PROCESS OF
THINKING RATHER
THAN JUST THE
CONTENT OF THE
THOUGHTS

DEVELOP A
MORE FLEXIBLE
SENSE OF SELF

ACCEPT DIFFICULT EMOTIONAL CONTENT

CLARIFY
PERSONAL
VALUES

TAKE ACTIONS TOWARD VALUES

IN OTHER WORDS, RATHER THAN ***CHANGING***
DIFFICULT WORRIES AND EMOTIONS, ACT
TARGETS HOW WE ***RESPOND*** TO DIFFICULT
WORRIES AND EMOTIONS

ACT EFFECTIVENESS

ACT GENERALLY CONSIDERED EFFICACIOUS ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF PROBLEMS

A 2020 ANALYSIS OF 20 META-ANALYSES (12,477 PARTICIPANTS) : CONSISTENT EFFICACY ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF DISORDERS, DIAGNOSES, AND TRANSDIAGNOSTIC GROUPS

- SUPERIOR TO MOST ACTIVE INTERVENTION CONDITIONS,
- SIMILAR TO CBT

ACT EFFECTIVENESS WITH CANCER

- ALTHOUGH NOT A LOT OF LARGE, HIGH-QUALITY STUDIES YET, IN CANCER ACT RELATED TO:
 - REDUCED DISTRESS
 - IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE
 - REDUCED ANXIETY
 - REDUCED DEPRESSION
 - INCREASED PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY
- INCLUDING IN ADVANCED CANCER

LET'S PRACTICE A FEW SMALL SKILLS

SKILL 1: COME TO THE PRESENT

WHEN MIGHT THIS BE USEFUL?

WHEN WE'RE AHEAD OF THE DATA (SCANXIETY)

WHEN WE'RE LIVING IN A FUTURE THAT HASN'T HAPPENED YET

WHEN WE'RE COMPARING THIS LIFE TO AN IMAGINARY LIFE WITH NO CANCER

SKILL 2: NOTICE YOUR MIND

WHEN MIGHT THIS BE USEFUL?

WHEN WE'RE BRINGING JUDGMENT TO OUR SITUATION, OUR CANCER, OUR
CHOICES

WHEN IT FEELS LIKE THIS IS INTOLERABLE OR CAN'T BE HANDLED

SKILL 3: CLARIFY YOUR VALUES

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "VALUES"?

WE MEAN HOW YOU *REALLY* WANT TO BE,
GENUINELY, IF YOU WEREN'T WORRYING ABOUT
CONTROLLING YOUR OWN FEELINGS OR THE
FEELINGS OF PEOPLE AROUND YOU.

WHAT KIND OF PARENT, FRIEND, CHILD,
SIBLING, PARTNER, PROFESSIONAL, AND
HUMAN BEING DO YOU WANT TO BE?

CURIOUS

AWARE

GRATEFUL

KIND

SILLY

THOUGHTFUL

FORGIVING

NON-REACTIVE

AUTHENTIC

HARD-WORKING

HOW WOULD YOU WANT TO BE, ON YOUR BEST DAY?

PRESENT

BALANCED

EMPATHETIC

LOVING

CONNECTED

WARM

COMPASSIONATE

HELPING

SPONTANEOUS

CARING

GENEROUS

YOUR ANSWERS ARE YOUR VALUES

NOW ON THE OTHER SIDE OF YOUR CARD,
WRITE DOWN THE FIVE VALUES THAT MEAN THE
MOST TO YOU.

NOW TAKE A MINUTE TO THINK ABOUT HOW
TO INCORPORATE THESE VALUES INTO YOUR
LIFE A LITTLE MORE.

NOW WRITE DOWN 2 TEENY TINY ACTIONS YOU
COULD TAKE TO
LIVE YOUR VALUES

IMAGINE MANY SMALL WAYS YOU COULD DO
THIS EVEN AT THE CONFERENCE TODAY.

OR IN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS

EVEN ON HARD DAYS

WHEN MIGHT THIS BE USEFUL?

WHEN OUR LIVES FEEL LIKE JUST CANCER

WHEN WE'VE LOST OUR VITALITY

WHEN WE HAVE RELATIONSHIPS THAT MATTER

WHEN WE WANT RELATIONSHIPS THAT MATTER

OKAY, SUMMING IT UP

1. COME IN TO THE PRESENT
2. BACK UP FROM YOUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS
3. MOVE TOWARD YOUR VALUES

SIMPLE, RIGHT? 😊