

# **The Role of Psychological Flexibility in Supporting Individuals with Disabilities**

Ashley Greenwald, Ph.D., BCBA-D, LBA

Jodie Soracco, M.Ed., BCBA

Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities



# Disclaimer

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- Today's workshop is experiential in nature
- It may stir up some thoughts and emotions
- You are invited to participate and share during activities, but you never have to
- Out of respect for everyone in the room, please agree to confidentiality



# Psychological Flexibility

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The ability to be in the present moment with full awareness and openness to experience and to take action guided by values.







Your body is present.



Is your mind?

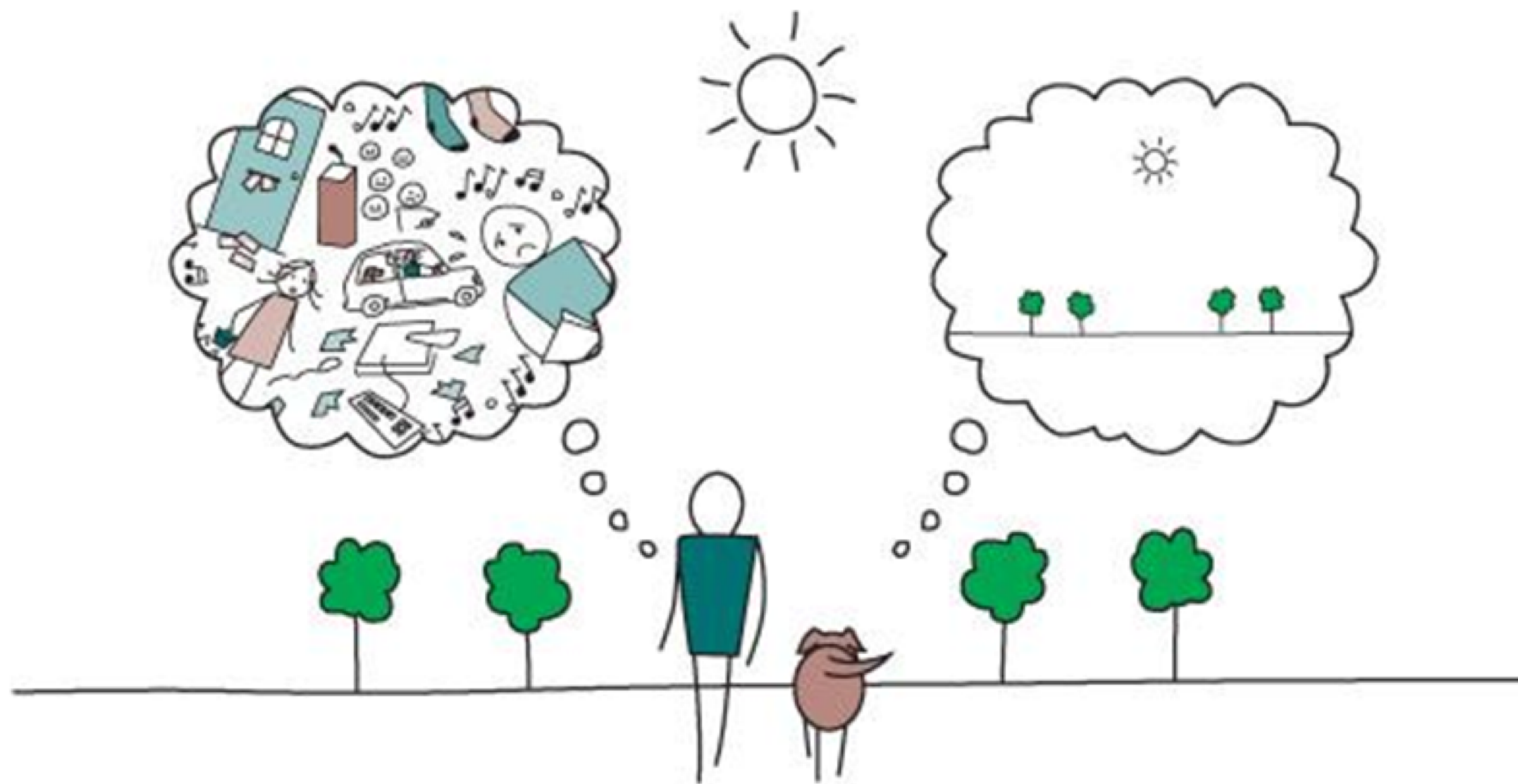


Past

Present

Future

Don't Know



Mind Full, or Mindful?

# Let's Practice!

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# Mindfulness

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Paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.

***Why is a dog more mindful than a person?***



# Language – The Good

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Language is useful:

- Communicate
- Predict and plan
- Solve complex problems
- Develop rules to regulate behavior
- Learn from people and cultures that no longer exist
- Remember cool stuff



# Sweet Moment

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# Language – The Bad

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Language can create some challenges:

- Create an idealized future
- Form negative opinions about ourselves and others
- Construct hateful and prejudice beliefs
- Recall or relive traumatic events
- Develop rules for acting that are harmful and ineffective
- Language can make it difficult to maintain contact with the present moment



# Difficult Thoughts

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- We are all faced with difficult thoughts and feelings, including individuals with disabilities and their loved ones and caregivers.
- Difficult questions:
  1. What makes you feel sad?
  2. What is one hard thing to accept about yourself?
  3. Have you ever been let down?





# ACTIVITY

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Let's come into a mindful state and think about these questions a little more:

1. What makes you feel sad?
2. What is one hard thing to accept about yourself?
3. Have you ever been let down?



# “Mindfulness for Two” Activity

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- **Person #1: Express the answers to the questions above (30 seconds)**
  - Don’t explain them, just express them
- **Person #2: Appreciate (30 seconds)**
  - Let go of nodding, smiling, hand patting, agreeing
  - Don’t try understand, just listen nonjudgmentally
- *When I tell you to, we will switch roles*
- *“Eyes/Hands On” appreciation*



# RANDOM TRANSITION SLIDE

(...and things that the presenter's really value)



# Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT)

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- Rather than suppressing difficult thoughts and feelings, ACT emphasizes (Hayes & Stroschal, 2004):
  - acceptance of unpleasant emotions
  - de-fusion from difficult thoughts
  - clarification of one's personally held values and goals
  - enhancement of the client's effectiveness in moving toward those values and goals



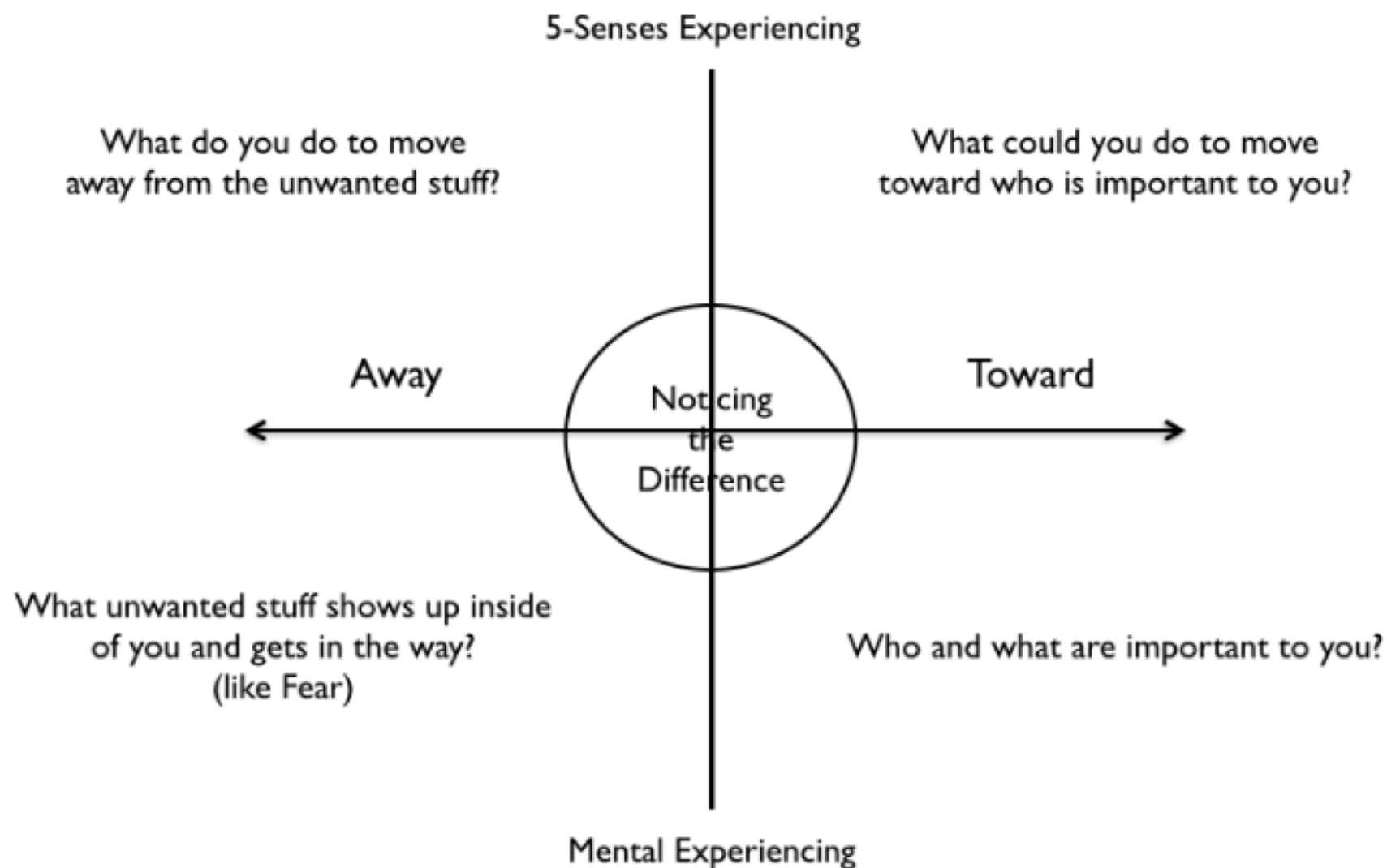
# Are You a Banana?

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# The Psychological Flexibility Model Matrix

Kevin L. Polk, Ph.D.





# ACT Matrix Activity

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Quadrant 1: Who and what are important to you.

***Examples: Family, Relationships, Being a Good Mother,  
Honesty, Trust, Health***



# ACT Matrix Activity

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Quadrant 2: What unwanted thoughts and emotions shows up inside of you and get in the way?

***Examples: “Not good enough”; “No time”; “Not smart enough”; fear of failure***





# ACT Matrix Activity

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Quadrant 3: What do you do to move away from the unwanted thoughts and emotions?

***Examples: avoid certain people, alcohol consumption, bury yourself in work tasks***



# ACT Matrix Activity

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Quadrant 4: What could you do to move toward who and what is most important to you?

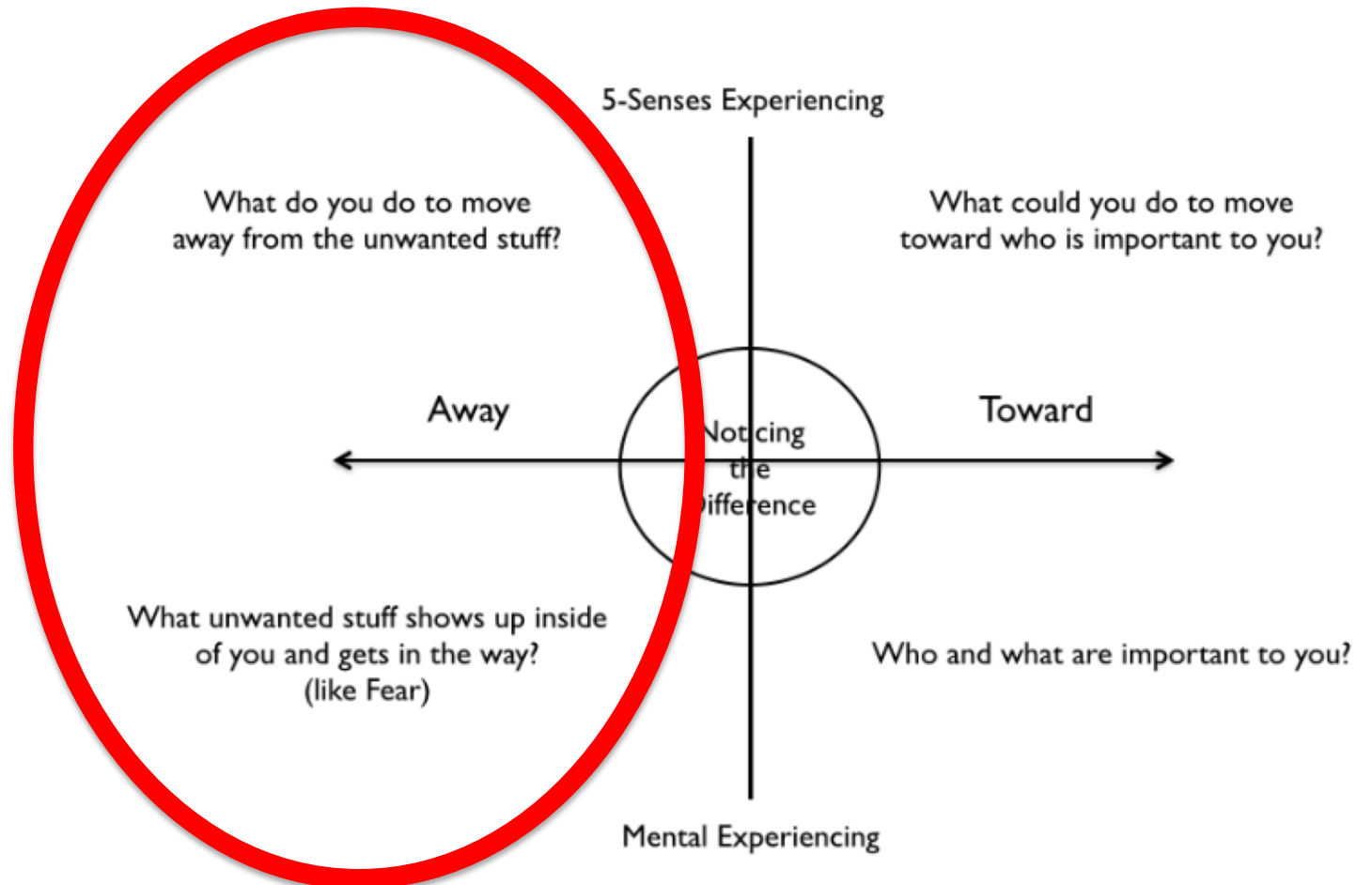
***Examples: spending time with children; healthy exercise;  
trying something new***



# Addressing the “Stuck Loop”

**STUCK  
LOOP**

The Psychological Flexibility Model Matrix  
Kevin L. Polk, Ph.D.



# Tug of War with a Monster



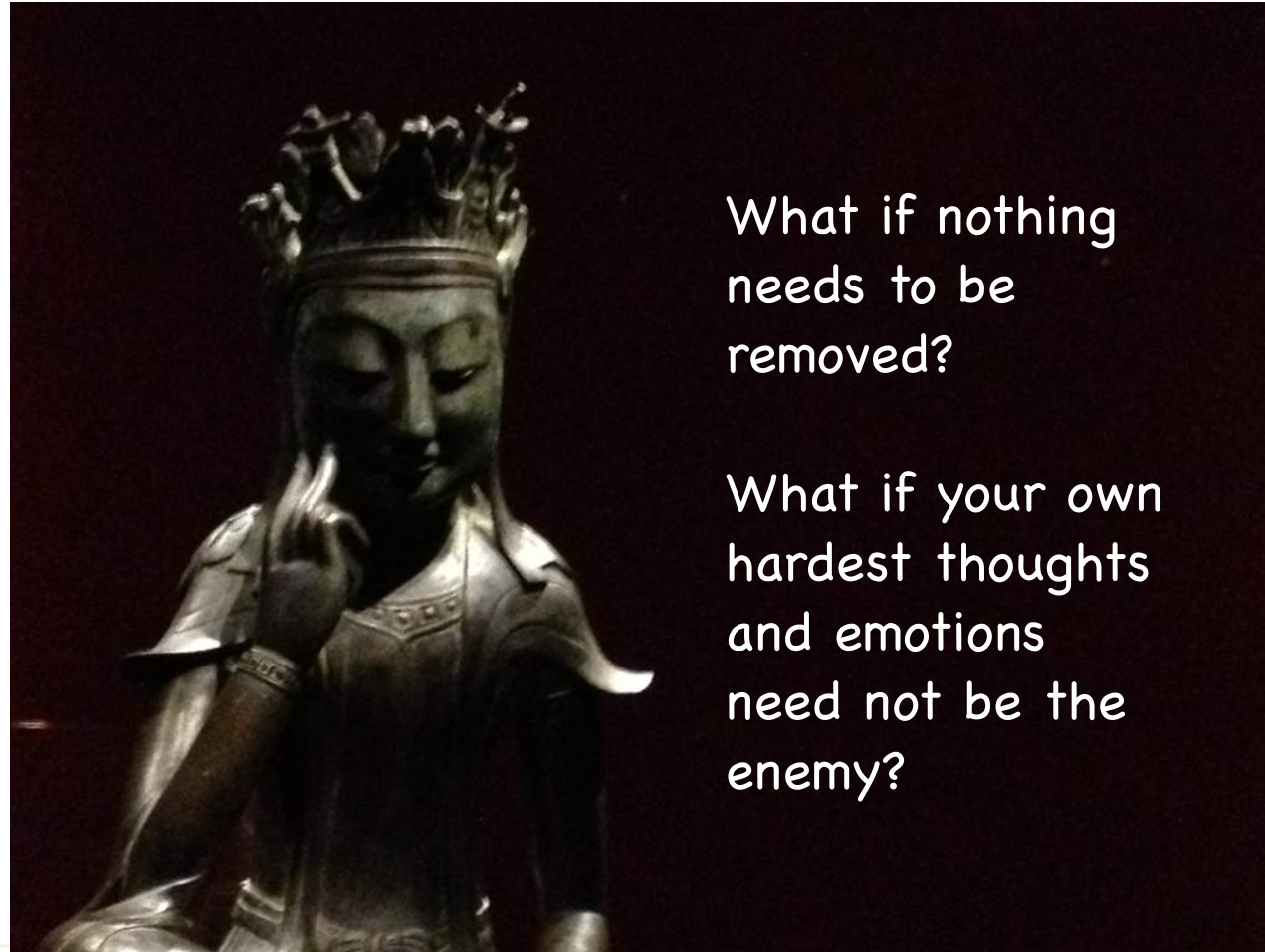
# Large Group Discussion

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How can mindfulness and psychological flexibility be used to help support individuals with disabilities?



# Thank You



What if nothing  
needs to be  
removed?

What if your own  
hardest thoughts  
and emotions  
need not be the  
enemy?



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# ACT RESEARCH



Nevada PBIS Technical Assistance Center  
College of Education  
University of Nevada, Reno/0285  
Reno, NV 89557-0502

# ACT Research

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- ACT has been successfully used to treat:
  - **anxiety and stress** (Bond & Bunce, 2000; Twohig & Woods, 2007; Zettle, 2003),
  - **pain** (Dahl, Wilson, & Nillson, 2007)
  - **substance use** (Gifford, Kohlenberg, Hayes, Antonuccio, Piasecki, Rasmussen-Hall, & Palm, 2006; Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Bissett, Piasecki, Batten, Bird, & Gregg, 2006),
  - **depression** (Zettle & Hayes, 1986; Zettle & Raines, 1989)
  - **burn out** (Hayes, Bissett, Roget, Padilla, Kohlenberg, Fischer, Masuda, Pistorello, Rye, Berry, & Niccolls, 2006)





# Research Specific to Disabilities

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- ACT with a variety of populations is extensive (Powers et al. 2009)
- Research with the DD population is limited but seems to be increasing-particularly examining language and RFT (Najdowski, 2015).
- Pahnke et al. (2014) examined ACT-based skills training in adolescents with ASD by implementing a modified ACT protocol in a group setting and compared outcomes using a test and control group



# Mindfulness and Disabilities

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- Parents of children with disabilities reported statistically significant less stress and significant increases in mindfulness, self compassion and well being after the program (Bazzano et al., 2010)
- There is evidence in the effectiveness of mindfulness for managing various physical and psychological health problems including stress, anxiety, depression and pain (Baer 2003; Chiesa and Serretti, 2010).



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# BONUS VALUES SECTION



# What are Values?

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- Your values may be similar *or* different from the another's values
- Values are what we personally find most meaningful in our own life

***How are values different from goals different?***



# Identifying Your Values

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- Values work is the heart of ACT
- Important to spend time on identifying and understanding what is most important to us
- Once values are identified, we can begin to choose the behaviors that result in living in-line with our values



# Identify Your Values

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Take a few minutes to think about what is most important to you. You can write your answers down or just think about it to yourself.

Helpful questions to answer:

- What do you hope for?
- What do you hope people will remember about you?
- What makes a good life?



# Valuing Ourselves

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- What do you think is your main purpose in life?
- Who is the wisest person you know?
- What does freedom mean to you?
- What do you hope for?
- Which do you prefer, blending in or standing out?
- What would you most like to achieve?
- What's the most important thing to you right now?
- Imagine you could achieve anything - what would it be?
- Have you dreamed of doing something extraordinary?



# Valuing Relationships

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- How do your values differ from those of your family?
- What do you hope people will remember about you?
- What does it mean to love?
- What does forgiveness mean to you?
- Who is the most compassionate person you know?
- What would it be like to trust?
- What does it mean to be seen or heard?
- Who would you most like to thank?
- What makes a friend?





# Valuing Living

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- What makes a good life?
- What does independence mean to you?
- What makes you strong?
- Have you ever wanted to create?
- What is it like to learn?
- What would you do if you were rich?
- Who has taught you the most in life?
- What does it mean to find peace?
- Have you ever longed for something?



# Valuing in the Presence of Difficulty

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- What has struggling taught you?
- Have you felt despair?
- What is the hardest thing to accept about yourself?
- Have you ever been let down?
- Have you ever been bullied?
- Have you ever been lost?
- Has fear travelled with you?

