

Emotional awareness exercises

Exercise 2: Acceptance of Emotions Meditation Tool

Many people employ control-based strategies to deal with emotions. Control-based strategies, like suppression, aim to decrease the frequency and intensity of unwanted emotions. However, deliberate suppression of emotions is conceptualized as experiential avoidance and it has been found to contribute to a great diversity of negative outcomes.

A different way of dealing with emotions is through acceptance. In contrast to control-based strategies, the individual accepts and experiences the emotion fully, without attempting to alter, avoid, or control it.

Acceptance involves a non-judgmental attitude toward emotions and requires a willingness to stay in contact with the uncomfortable, often negative feelings that accompany them. By intentionally focusing on the experience of the emotion in a non-judgmental way, the “observing self” is strengthened. This allows one to detach from the emotion, thereby decreasing the chance that behaviour will be guided by emotion. In other words, mindful awareness prevents individuals from getting immersed in or identifying with the experience of the emotion, enabling a more flexible response.

Meditation goal

The goal of acceptance of emotions is not to get rid of the emotion. The idea behind acceptance is that over time, the relationship with the emotion can change. Through the repeated practice of this technique, you may cultivate a different relationship with difficult emotions. Instead of perceiving them as unwanted, which will trigger attempts to avoid or suppress the emotion, one can accept them as an inevitable but transient part of the human experience.

Consequently, you can realise that negative emotions are not that threatening and that they will fade away naturally when they allow them to be. At a deeper level, acceptance of emotions can also enhance self-knowledge. By denying or avoiding our experiences, we also prevent ourselves from extracting useful information from our experiences. Fear, for instance, can provide insight into our values. After all, when we do not care, we often do not experience fear. In some cases, fear can make us aware of things that we find important in life. By suppressing fear, we also prevent ourselves from learning from it.



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Tips

If, at any point, you realise that the meditation is too much, you can open your eyes any time and stop.

When practicing meditation for the first time, you may find it difficult or impossible to experience emotions while visualising a scenario. Even if you're not able to elicit emotion, doing the meditation can still be valuable; doing rather than talking about acceptance makes it more concrete and understandable.

As stated before, the goal of acceptance of emotions is not to get rid of the emotion. For many people, this sounds very confusing. After all, what is the purpose of emotion regulation if the goal to feel better is not achieved?



Pre-meditation instructions

Try to think of something that is bothering you. It may be a scenario that worries you. It can be a scenario that has happened in the past or something that may happen in the future.

Try to think of a scenario that elicits an emotional reaction. In this meditation, you will imagine yourself in your chosen scenario.

If, at any point, you feel that the meditation is too much, you have the option to open your eyes and/or wiggle your fingers and toes, which will help reground you in the present. You can also try bringing the focus of your attention back to your breath. If this does not help and you do not wish to continue the meditation, then respect yourself by stopping. You may always choose to do this exercise again later and improve your emotional acceptance through smaller steps.



▶ Play meditation



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Reflection

In the space below, write about your experience in the meditation in as much detail as possible. Writing about your experience of this emotion will enhance your understanding and familiarity with it.

