



BEYOND ATTENTION: TREATING ADHD THROUGH THE LENS OF SELF-REGULATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

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Learning Objectives



Discuss ADHD as self-regulation disorder



Learn about the psychological costs of ADHD



Review ACT processes



Gain practical ACT tools for intervention

- Children with ADHD struggle beyond executive functioning
 - Emotion regulation
 - Stress sensitivity
 - Rejection sensitivity / peer rejection
 - Poor view of self
 - Reliance on immediate reinforcers/impulsivity

- Hosseini et al. 2024; Vanzin et al., 2019

Emotional Dysregulation

The Psychological Cost

Chronic
corrections

Negative sense
of self/Identity

Avoidance

Feelings of
shame

Lazy, stupid

Difficult tasks;
emotionally
laden situations

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy



3RD WAVE COGNITIVE
BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION



SEEKS TO INCREASE
PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY
AND “WORKABILITY” OF LIFE

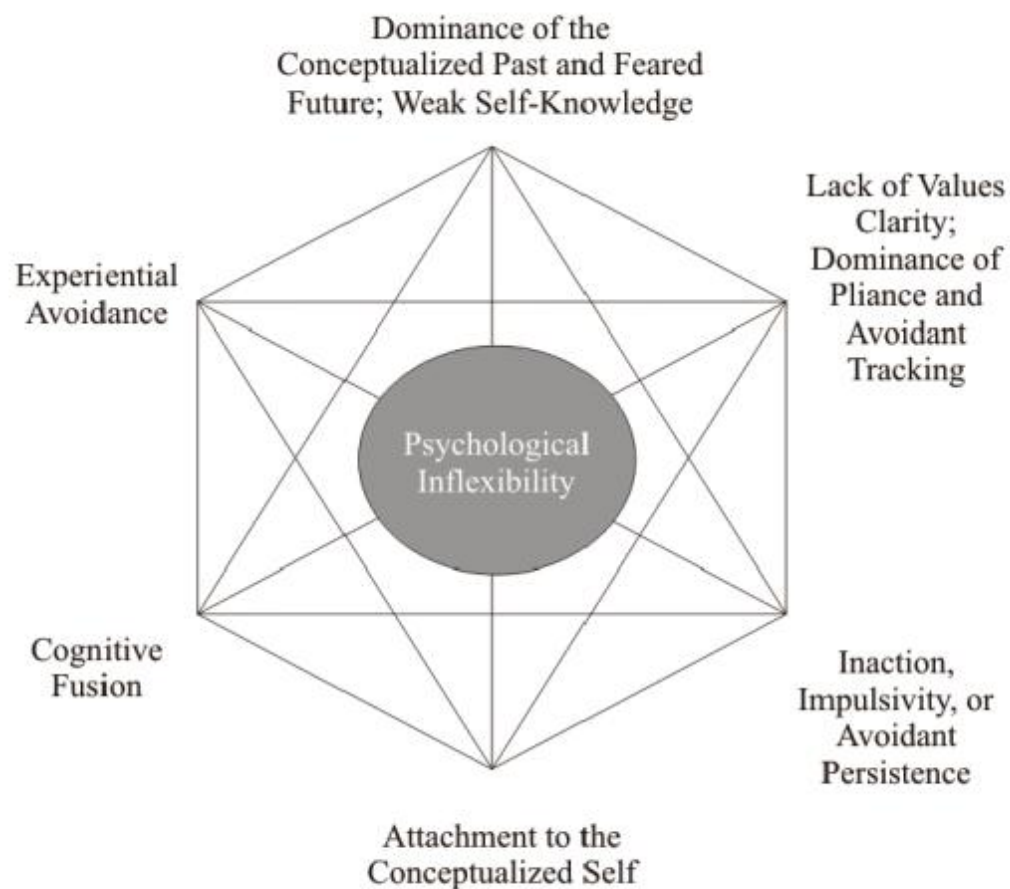
What is a “mind?”

- Public and private language
- Language is a double-edged sword
 - Positive uses of language?
 - Negative uses of language?
- Private verbal behavior as experienced by
 - Clinicians
 - Students/patients

Language enables us to feel pain

- This can occur on the happiest of days
 - Recall a painful memory
 - Fearfully make a negative prediction
- Human beings handle their pain ineffectively
 - Self-defeating
 - Self-destructive

ACT Model of Psychopathology



ADHD Meets ACT psychopathology

- Procrastination → Experiential Avoidance
- "I'm lazy" → Cognitive Fusion
- Emotional flooding and rumination → Present-moment gaps
- Inaction/impulsivity → lack of committed action

ACT Hexaflex



Defusion

- Observe thoughts as passing events/stories
 - Not fused truths
 - Provides distance
- “I’m having the thought....”
 - that I can’t start
 - That I can’t do this
 - That I’m lazy
- Leaves on a stream

Present moment/Mindfulness



Increase awareness of thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations



Learn to observe ADHD symptoms without judging them



Remain in present moment

Stop ruminating about past or future
Improves regulation of attention and emotions

Vanzin et al., 2019

Self Awareness / Acceptance

- Make conscious choices even in difficult moments
 - Decrease impulsivity
 - Decrease struggle against symptoms or strong feelings (e.g., overwhelm)
- Accept ADHD diagnosis (and move forward)
 - Self-acceptance

- Clarify personal values
 - Values sort
- Align actions and behaviors with what matters
- Shift from "I should" → "This matters because..."
- Take small steps toward committed action in the face of procrastination or inattention

Values

- Pause and breathe in the present moment
- Name the urge
 - “I’m having the thought...”
- Practice present moment
 - Feel your feet on the ground
- Visualize the urge as a wave
- Reconnect with values
 - Where does this urge fit? Does it?

Urge Surfing

Conclusion

- Preliminary data suggests that ACT is an effective augmentative intervention for ADHD
 - May help reduce impulsivity
 - May decrease feelings of shame/increase self worth
 - May decrease scores on the Vanderbilt/ADHD symptomology



References

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