Acceptance and Commitment Therapy 101: An Experiential Learning Session
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Pennsylvania Speech-Language Hearing Association Conference – Lancaster, PA
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Disclosures
- Relevant financial relationship(s)
  - Scott: PSHA invited speaker – travel, lodging, honorarium; Co-Founder, 3C Digital Media Network, LLC; Act to Live podcast
  - Jaime: PSHA invited speaker – travel, lodging, honorarium; Act to Live podcast
- Relevant nonfinancial relationship(s)
  - Scott: Professor at the University of Akron – Akron, OH
  - Jaime: Private Practice – Frisco, TX; adjunct instructor – University of North Texas – Denton, TX

**Because this course is experiential in nature, handouts will be available via email AFTER the completion of the course.**

Summary
The field of communication disorders has a long history of counseling clients using psychotherapy techniques. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a mindfulness-based psychotherapy approach that assists clients in living a valued-based life through the development of psychological flexibility. Clients can cultivate psychological flexibility in order to cope with and manage their communication disorder by experiencing the six core principles of ACT – 1) contact with the present moment, 2) acceptance and willingness, 3) thought defusion, 4) self as context, 5) defining values, 6) committed action. By incorporating these principles into therapy, clinicians can guide their clients in practicing willingness to come in contact with all thoughts and feelings that may arise in a given moment.

During this experiential training, presenters will guide attendees through exercises to help them better understand each core principle of ACT and provide clinical examples using ACT with individuals who stutter and individuals with other communication disorders. Furthermore, this session aims to provide functional activities that participants can use to complement their current clinical practices. All individual and small group activities will be followed by large group debriefings/discussions, so that participants can ask questions and learn from each other.
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
Hexaflex – Core Principles

**Contact with the Present Moment**
- **Be in the “now”**
- **Opening up to whatever comes**

**Valued Living**
- **Knowing what matters to you**

**Experiential Acceptance/Willingness**
- **Be in the “now”**

**Thought Defusion**
- **Observing thoughts as they come and go without attaching meaning or judgment; detaching from thoughts**

**Transcending Self/Perspective Taking/Self as Context**
- **Observing self: pure awareness of thoughts, behaviors, moods**

**Psychological Flexibility**
- **Be present, open, and do what matters to you**

Harris, 2009; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
Hexaflex – Applied to Stuttering Moments

**Dominance of Past/Future Thoughts**
- **Thinking about others’ perceptions of stuttering, past stuttering experiences, future fears of talking and stuttering**

**Experiential Avoidance**
- **Blocking, averting eye gaze, shame, guilt, silence**

**Cognitive Fusion**
- **“I stutter all the time. I ALWAYS stutter.”**

**Stuttering Moment**
- **Psychological and Physical Behaviors**

**Distorted Values**
- **“I MUST BE fluent, because I value communicating with others.”**

**Unworkable Actions**
- **Not saying what you want to say (in various speaking situations)**

**Attachment to the conceptualized self (self as content)**
- **“I stutter, that is all I do. So I CAN’T talk in class.”**

Higuera, 2009
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Hexaflex – What a PWS CAN Do

Contact with the Present Moment

Be in the “now” during all speaking situations

Experiential Acceptance/ Willingness
Opening up to whatever stuttering-related thoughts, reactions, and behaviors arise

Thought Defusion
Observing thoughts regarding stuttering moments, reactions, situations as they come and go without attaching judgment

Psychological Flexibility
Be present, open, and do what matters to you

Valued Living
Knowing what matters to you, as you relate to speaking situations and stuttering moments

Committed Action
Creating goals to engage in speaking situations related to your values

Transcending Self/Perspective
Taking/Self as Context
External perspective of whole self; pure awareness of thoughts, behaviors, moods about stuttering self

Palasik & Michise, 2015

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Hexaflex – What SLPs CAN Do

Contact with the present moment

Teach clients a meditation practice during a session and at home (focus on breathing, coming in contact with thoughts, all thoughts, and letting go of thoughts)

Experiential Acceptance / Willingness
Encourage clients to be willing to examine options for negative thoughts about stuttering

Defusion
Teach clients to play with words and language to reduce meaning attached to negative thoughts in order to let go of negative thoughts

Psychological Flexibility
Be present, open, and willing to talk when you have something to say

Valued Living
Discuss a “Values Tree” and who the clients are at the core

Committed Action
Connect values with everyday speaking situations, stuttering modification and fluency shaping techniques, and other life behaviors

Transcending Self/Perspective
Taking/Self as Context
Encourage clients to observe all their behaviors, both psychological (thoughts) and physical behaviors related and not related to stuttering

Palasik & Michise, 2015