Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
Cognitive Defusion Intervention

**Definition:** Cognitive defusion techniques attempt to alter the undesirable functions of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours rather than trying to alter their form, frequency or situational sensitivity (Hayes, 2006). These techniques attempt to change the way one interacts with or relates to thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. This defusion technique aims to help the client observe their experience in order to change their behavioural response to the situation (Forsyth & Eifert, 2007).

**Process:**
1. Before getting to this intervention collect information regarding the types of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours the client experiences within the anxiety-provoking situation. Ex. Information from the LIFE Form.
2. Go over the event that caused the client to become distressed (the LIFE Form) in order to refresh their memories of the experience.
3. Explain that the client may experience some discomfort during this exercise, but the point is to become an impartial observer of their experience and engage the Wise Mind. If discomfort arises, pause and participate in a quick mindfulness activity to regroup, and continue.
4. Psychoeducate the client on the concept of the Wise Mind. The Wise Mind, or impartial observer, can look at thoughts, feelings, and behaviours from the outside, simply observe them, and extend compassion towards these experiences in order to not act on them. The Wise Mind is able to see thoughts as thoughts, feelings as feelings, and actions as actions.
5. Draw on a flip chart a circle with the words “Wise Mind/Observer” in it. Then draw three circles with the words “Thoughts”, “Feelings”, and “Behaviours” in them. Draw lines connecting the “Wise Mind/Observer” circle to the other three.
6. Have the client write observational statements within each domain. Ex. “I had the thought that everyone was judging me,” versus, “Everyone was judging me.” Try to remain in one domain at a time to avoid confusion and flush out all of the observations the client can make about the experience.
7. Once the client has observed their experience fully from this perspective ask the client to compassionately take in what the Wise Mind sees.
8. Debrief the activity by asking the client how they feel and if they are comfortable with this activity. Explain to the client that having the ability to observe our experience allows us to choose how to respond to the situation instead of acting on our emotions or thoughts, which may not produce the desired outcome. Repeat this process if the client wants more experience with this technique, or if the client is confident, encourage them to try it as homework. This technique can be done as a stand-alone or in conjunction with the LIFE Form, which may simplify explaining the internal experience.
LIVING IN FULL EXPERIENCE—THE LIFE FORM

A Life Enhancement Exercise

Date: _____________________________________________________________________________
Time: _____________________________________________________________________________ A.M./P.M.

Check off any sensations you experienced just now:

☐ Dizziness  ☐ Breathlessness  ☐ Fast heartbeat  ☐ Blurred vision
☐ Tingling/numbness  ☐ Unreality  ☐ Sweatiness  ☐ Hot/cold flashes
☐ Chest tightness/pain  ☐ Trembling/shaking  ☐ Feeling of choking  ☐ Nausea
☐ Neck/muscle tension  ☐ Detached from self

Check what emotion best describes your experience of these sensations (pick one):

☐ Fear  ☐ Anxiety  ☐ Depression  ☐ Other: ____________________________

Now rate how strongly you felt this emotion/feeling (circle number):

0 ——— 1 ——— 2 ——— 3 ——— 4 ——— 5 ——— 6 ——— 7 ——— 8
Mild/Weak  Moderate  Extremely Intense

Now rate how willing you were to have these sensations/feelings without acting on them (e.g., to manage them, get rid of them, suppress them, run from them):

0 ——— 1 ——— 2 ——— 3 ——— 4 ——— 5 ——— 6 ——— 7 ——— 8
Extremely Willing  Moderate  Completely Unwilling

Describe where you were when these sensations occurred: __________________________________________

Describe what you were doing when these sensations occurred: __________________________________________

Describe what your mind was telling you about the sensations/feelings: ______________________________

Describe what you did (if anything) about the thoughts/sensations/feelings: ______________________________

If you did anything about the thoughts/sensations or feelings, did it get in the way of anything you really value or care about? If so, describe what that was here: ______________________________


References
