



## The Hexaflex and Inner Compass: A Reflective Practice

### ACT

Exercise

30 min

Practitioner

No

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is an intervention that cultivates psychological flexibility for greater resilience and improved mental health. ACT processes and related techniques help develop a client's ability to stay in contact with the present moment and act in accordance with their values, even in the presence of unhelpful thoughts and uncomfortable or distressing emotions [1].

The ACT model is illustrated using the "hexaflex," (*Appendix*) which represents six interrelated core processes: self-as-context (also called the observer self or transcendent self), the present moment (also called mindfulness), acceptance (sometimes called willingness), defusion, values, and committed action [1, 2].

These processes support clients in developing flexible responses to difficult inner experiences rather than defaulting to reactive avoidance strategies that reinforce suffering. ACT practitioners facilitate clients "pivoting" toward values-based living by teaching them skills that activate the core processes of psychological flexibility [3].

The concept of a practitioner's inner compass is a metaphor for the 'felt sense' [4] used to map out the client's process using the hexaflex and the client's values as the practitioner's 'true north'. When setbacks occur and avoidance arises, a client's behavior has deviated from their values. The practitioner's use of their 'inner compass' to attune to the client's process supports directional clarity, by focusing on clients' values like a north star that indicates when detours or roadblocks occur. This reflective exercise uses the client's values as a directional reference point to help navigate setbacks and identify choice points in sessions.

For example, when the client describes an identification or fusion with an aspect of inner experience that leads to overwhelm and rigid avoidance [5], sessions can become stuck as a choice point emerges. Using the hexaflex and inner compass metaphor as a post-session reflective practice can help map the narrative detours involved and identify the types of interventions or exercises that'll help to get things back on track.

In this way, the metaphor of the inner compass works in tandem with the hexaflex as a navigational guide for practitioners. Using the metaphor as a regular post-session tool will help new or inexperienced ACT practitioners maintain a focus on the client's values during sessions as they navigate the client's process. This is essential for identifying choice points and then collaboratively mapping the way forward.



Using the hexaflex and inner compass together supports a rich, dynamic session reflection. Practitioners can evaluate how well they've supported clients in developing psychological flexibility and clarify where future work might be needed [3, 6].



## Author

This tool was created by Jo Nash, Ph.D.



## Goal

This tool helps new and inexperienced ACT practitioners reflect on client sessions using the hexaflex and inner compass metaphor, by focusing on the client's values as the practitioner's 'true north'. By doing so, practitioners can enhance their sensitivity to client-centered practice, monitor psychological flexibility processes, and strengthen values-based interventions in sessions.



## Advice

- The ACT hexaflex is a guide, not a checklist. Use the model to notice or map out patterns rather than to direct conversations (*Appendix*).
- This tool is to encourage your reflection as a practitioner on whether the client connected with their values during the session, and if not, which processes could support a realignment and anchoring with values. The client's values act as the true north for your inner compass during sessions and post-session reflections.
- This tool is for practitioner reflection, not client instruction (unless ACT psychoeducation is the session goal).
- If you find difficulty identifying any active hexaflex process during a session, it may indicate sticking points, areas of experiential avoidance, or therapeutic drift worth exploring.
- Each session may emphasize one or two processes more heavily. Identifying the session's "dominant" process can guide intervention and homework planning.



## References

1. Hayes, S. C. & Smith, S. (2005). *Get out of your mind and into your life*. New Harbinger Publications.
2. Harris, R. (2022). *The happiness trap* (2nd ed.). Robinson.
3. Hayes, S. C. (2019). *A liberated mind: How to pivot toward what matters*. Avery.
4. Vanhooren, S., Grosemans, A., & Breynaert, J. (2022). Focusing, the felt sense, and meaning in life. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies*, 21(3), 250-268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2022.2028660>
5. Hayes, L. L., Ciarrochi, J. V., & Bailey, A. (2022). *What makes you stronger*. New Harbinger Publications.
6. Harris, R. (2021). *The reality slap* (2nd ed.). Hachette UK.



# The Hexaflex and Inner Compass: A Reflective Practice

## Introduction

This reflection tool invites you to explore a recent client session through the lens of the ACT hexaflex and 'inner compass' metaphor. It can be used after a session or to aid supervision to deepen awareness of the coaching/therapeutic process, client progress, intervention, or homework planning. As you use the tool more and more, you will begin to internalize the hexaflex and inner compass metaphor to help you navigate client narratives, processes and detours during sessions.

### Step 1: Session snapshot

Briefly describe the focus of the session. What were the key issues, emotions, or behaviors discussed?

### Step 2: Inner compass check-in

The client's values are the true north of your inner compass. Checking-in, did the client refer to or move toward a meaningful value in this session?

	Yes
	No



If yes, which value(s) seemed most alive?

If no, what value(s) might have been helpful to explore?

### Step 3: Identify core hexaflex processes

For each process, note whether it was active or absent in the session and include a short description or example:

ACT core process (alternative name in brackets)	Present? (tick if yes)
<b>Self as context</b> (observer self): The foundational core process, the space where everything happens and is observed by non-judgmental awareness.	
Description/Example from session	
<b>Present moment</b> (mindfulness): The attentive connection to the here and now that grounds the client in the embodied present moment.	
Description/Example from session	



ACT core process (alternative name in brackets)	Present? (tick if yes)
<b>Acceptance</b> (willingness): The open state that willingly permits all inner experiences (feelings, sensations, and thoughts) free of avoidance.	
Description/Example from session	
<b>Defusion</b> : The state of observation that notices thoughts as transient words or storylines but doesn't buy into them or identify with them.	
Description/Example from session	
<b>Values</b> : What matters to the client and what they want to stand for.	
Description/Example from session	
<b>Committed action</b> : Any action taken to live life flexibly in alignment with values rather than the rigid pursuit of goals.	
Description/Example from session	



#### Step 4: Psychological flexibility assessment

Overall, did the client show signs of psychological flexibility?

	Yes, expanding it
	No, seemed stuck
	Mixed

Briefly describe what contributed to flexibility or rigidity.

#### Step 5: Practitioner reflection

What ACT interventions or metaphors did you use (e.g., mindful check-in, willing hands, leaves on a stream)?

What felt effective and why?



What could be refined or improved?

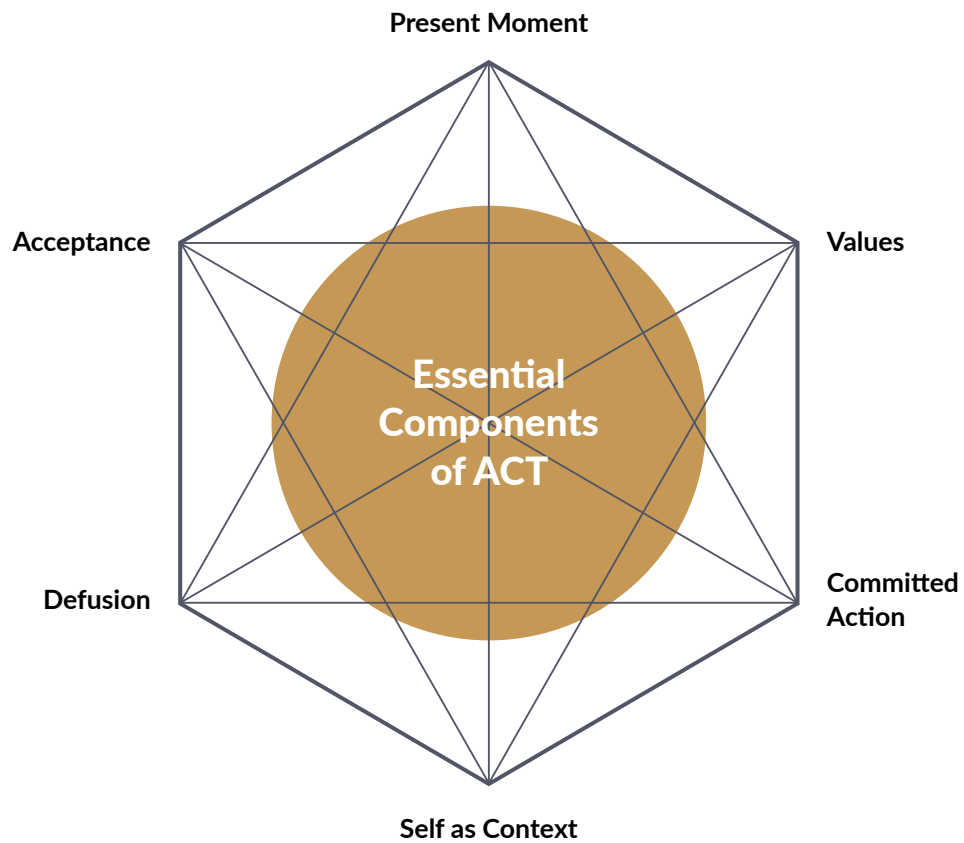
#### Step 6: Planning forward

Based on today's session, which ACT process(es) might you focus on next time to support the realignment of your client's behaviour with their values?



## Appendix: Visual Aids

### 1. The ACT Hexaflex



### 2. Inner Compass Visual Metaphor: Client Values as the Practitioner's 'True North'.

