

Episode 195: ACT Daily Journal

Diana Hill: [00:00:00]when you hear the word therapy, often you think that it's about treating a disorder or a problem. And what act is really about is helping you thrive in your life and live more fully and freely, have a greater range of motion. In your behavior, even when there's a lot of challenges that show up to just being human and places that we get stuck, we can all get stuck in our own thoughts or bogged down by our feelings act is about helping you get aligned with what you care about and continue to pursue that.

Debbie Sorensen: sometimes we think of emotions, especially the less pleasant ones is like something we don't want, but even with an anger, which is within feeling stressed or overwhelmed or afraid, like there's, if we actually tune in, in a certain way, we can use that

Yael Schonbrun: That was doctors, Diana Hill and Debbie Sorensen on psychologists off the clock.

[00:01:00]We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorenson, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of act daily journal.

Diana Hill: I'm Dr. Diana Hill coauthor with Debbie on act daily journal and practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

Yael Schonbrun: From coast to coast, I'm doctor Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown university.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors

we hope you take what you learned here to build a rich and meaningful life

Thank you for listening to psychologists off the clock..

Debbie Sorensen: We're thrilled to be partnered with Praxis Continuing Education here at Psychologist's Off The Clock because we really value our own continuing education. And I know Jill you've participated in a number of Praxis events.

Jill Stoddard: I have. Praxis is my favorite. I think probably the most memorable was when I participated in an ACT Boot Camp after I'd already been learning and doing ACT for about 15 years. And I still got [00:02:00] so much out of the training.

Debbie Sorensen: I have a memory of Steve Hayes jumping off of a phone book to demonstrate how small your committed action can be. And sometimes I'll bring up that

memory and use it with my clients. And that's probably from 10 years ago. Praxis also continues to evolve and change over time. It integrates new therapies as they come out.

it has trainings in Compassion Focused Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Radically Open DBT.

Jill Stoddard: If you go to our website at www.offtheclockpsych.com and visit our sponsorship page, you can get a coupon for \$25 off. So check it out.

Yael Schonbrun: This is yeah, out here with two guests that psychologist off the clock listeners may be familiar with doctors, Diana Hill and Debbie Sorenson

Welcome Debbie and Diana to your podcast.

Debbie Sorensen: Thank you. I really wouldn't want to have anyone else besides you and Jill and Debbie be the interviewer for this. So I'm so glad you're doing this

for us.

Yael Schonbrun: there's no other interviewer options other than the four of us. All [00:03:00] right. So let's have the two of you begin at the beginning for people who aren't familiar with acceptance and commitment therapy, who are just tuning in, you guys have put out a book about acceptance and commitment therapy. So I wonder if in kind of a nutshell, you can just describe what is acceptance and commitment therapy and what is this book offer to readers and, and we'll sort of of it in this episode.

Debbie Sorensen: So acceptance and commitment therapy is a behavioral therapy that is more acceptance based than some it's about making room for your emotions, moving toward your values, being more present with what's happening in your life. And there are multiple processes that, that we use enact therapy and the term that is sometimes used, we use it in the book to describe all of that is.

Psychological flexibility, which is really this concept of, you know, we all have thoughts and emotions. Some that are pleasant, unpleasant, helpful, close it. That's [00:04:00] normal, we're human. And how do we make room for all of them, those experiences, and still live a really effective and values driven life. How do we have the flexibility to continue to do the things that are important to us, be effective, have a meaningful life as all of that shows up.

, that's sort of a nutshell version of it. Diana, do you want to add to that?

Diana Hill: Yeah. And I think what, when you hear the word therapy, often you think that it's about treating a disorder or a problem. And what act is really about is helping you thrive in your life and live more fully and freely, have a greater range of motion. In your behavior, even when there's a lot of challenges that show up to just being human and places that we get stuck, we can all get stuck in our own thoughts or bogged down by our feelings act is about helping you get aligned with what you care about and continue to pursue that.

As you are human that faces the challenges of living. So act has been demonstrated effective with everything, [00:05:00] from people that struggle with anxiety or suicidal thoughts to people that want to be better at their chess game or better parents or better partners. And that's why this book is really designed for the general public, where you could be a therapist using it, but also just an individual that wants to thrive in their daily life.

Yael Schonbrun: , what prompted you ladies to choose to write a daily journal?

Debbie Sorensen: So, well, you know, the path to write a book is kind of meandering and it evolved. And so, you know, there were some definite things that kind of just changed over time. But I think truly our mission, in my opinion, Diana, I'll be curious what you think, but it's take. The principles that we find really helpful in psychology research and clinical work, and just get it out into the world in a way that's really accessible that people can integrate into their daily lives.

That's available to anyone. And that's understandable to anyone [00:06:00] which. To me, it's really what we're here for, with the podcast too. It's like, we want to, we love these ideas. We benefit from them ourselves. We're really passionate and excited about them and we use it with our clients and we want to share it with the world.

And I think a daily journal, um, ya'll, you know, you've seen it. It's like we try to make it really bite-sized so that it's not super time-consuming, it's something that you can integrate into your life. Um, so that was my, reason behind doing it this way.

Diana Hill: Yeah, I think that Debbie and I have talked a lot about not only how we use these act principles with our clients, but also how we use them in our life and what I was sort of envisioning as we were writing, is that the therapist. Is using this journal for themselves and then they're passing it to their clients because I think it might be helpful for their client.

And as I think Debbie said it so well of how do we take these concepts that we've learned after hundreds of interviews with people in studying act for many years, and also practicing it in our lives and break it down into a book that you can use systematically [00:07:00] and really apply it to the real world of living.

Debbie Sorensen: I think one thing, one thing to add to that as a therapist is that sometimes I want to give my clients something to do, but if it's too much. I mean, honestly, it's the rare client that's gonna do something major in between sessions. And so I think just doing like something that's like more doable was also a piece of it.

Diana Hill: It's me. That's not going to do more

Debbie Sorensen: Well, that too.

Diana Hill: So I'd take like five, 10 minutes in the morning to journal and actually started journaling. Around the second episode that Debbie and I did on habits. I talked about how I wanted to start a journal practice, and I had been unsuccessful. And now it's just, I do it in the mornings and it's really five to five minutes, sometimes three minutes.

And that's about how long these daily practices are. But then if you build them up over time, then you're, then you're building on this practice of act so that it really becomes part of how you're living.

[00:08:00] **Yael Schonbrun:** Really early episodes kissing the frog. I think it was,

Debbie Sorensen: about

morning routines.

Yael Schonbrun: it was a really powerful one for me. Cause I remember it really vividly, although I haven't listened to it in forever, but Debbie, you were talking about how you have a hard time waking up early and you guys had this whole conversation about like breaking it down into these tiny habits.

And that is really what I love about your book is that it is bite-sized it walks you through it really step-by-step and I'm almost answering my next question for you. So I'm going to pause myself and ask you Diana. What do you think sets this book apart from other books about acceptance and commitment therapy?

Diana Hill: Well, I think it offers a lot of avenues into act. So one Avenue is through writing and through the journaling aspect and writing about these ideas through journal prompts. But another Avenue is, it takes. The concepts of act and describes each of the six core processes. Plus we add on the bonus seventh of self-compassion and intentional use of [00:09:00] time, and it describes what they are.

Then you go through day by day and write about it and do a little mini exercises about it and really personalize it. So it's, it's personalized act. In your life learning as you go. And then it has Debbie and my voice along the way, because we talk, we get these little vignettes, which was actually my favorite part with Debbie was writing these little stories about how we use act in our life and going back and forth on our stories.

And. Debbie actually had a really good story about an egg sandwich that fell on her lap that didn't make it in because we had to cut it out. And, and I had a really good story about being a feeling like I was a bad egg in my life, but that then we've had these two great egg stories that didn't make it, but

Debbie Sorensen: We had to cut. We had to edit down a lot.

Yael Schonbrun: edit out

Diana Hill: painful editing. Yeah, but, but the stories are sort of like we're humans doing this with you. And, and I think that's also part of the experience of reading the book. You feel like Debbie and I are, are along the path with you as you go.

[00:10:00] **Debbie Sorensen:** I also think we wanted it to pass. I just read this somewhere and I can't remember the source. I feel really bad, but the mom test, like, would your mom. Assuming your mom's not also, you know, a psychologist or someone in the mental health field. Like, could your mom read it and get something out of it? And actually, my mom has

been interested in act and I've given her a few books here and there, but sometimes she's like, I'm still not quite sure if I really know what they're talking about.

It just was, I think some of the books I've given her are just a little bit too dense and we really wanted to make it like, you know, these bite-size reading things that are like understandable. That was the aim is to just kind of break it down into. A simpler way of thinking about some of these

Diana Hill: And it passes the mom test, but then it also passes. The psychiatrist, psychologist, expert tasks. So dwell. We were reading the book, we pass it along to a friend to, um, give a testimonial to who's at who's a psychiatrist at a huge big [00:11:00] name school. And she was wanting to give it to her friends to use as well.

So it's, it's both the mom tests, but then approved by people like Yael Schonbrun, Dr. Yael Schonbrun who wrote an endorsement for it?

Debbie Sorensen: We did. Yeah. We wanted to stay also very true to the science and the, yeah. I mean to the, um, substantial parts of it too, at the same time, we don't want to.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm almost I want to get back to sort of this stepped procedure of the journal and some of the habits that it guides you in building, because I was sort of struck that Robin Walzer, who has been a repeat guest on our podcast, uh, wrote the wonderful forward for your buck.

And she talks a lot about discipline. So I'm curious what the two of you would say about why is discipline so important in psychological flexibility and. What advice do you have for folks who feel that they lack discipline when they pick up this book and they say, well, I didn't, I'm not disciplined.

What advice do you have for them?

Diana Hill: I'll take that one because I actually have a rock [00:12:00] in my office that says discipline on it. And it's one of actually the six paramitas and Buddhism, where are there's discipline, generosity, meditation, a number of different sort of philosophies. And when I think about discipline, I actually think about it more.

And it maybe in a different way than other people would think about the term discipline. I actually think about discipline from a place of kindness and compassion. And as I think Rondo Merwin talked about, talked about this on our show, quite a bit of that attuned parent, that caring parent. And we write about that in the book, Debbie, a bit of how to be an attuned parent that's tuning into what your needs are while also, um, Sort of holding space for you to continue to pursue what matters to you.

So there's a degree of discipline in that, but it's not discipline in a harsh punishment. It's more of like a soft container to be in. I don't know what you want to add.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I feel like I'm going to be, maybe I'll be at [00:13:00] sound a little bit like a. Curmudgeon for saying this or something, but I have actually some pretty strong, like negative associations with the word discipline, because of that connotation that Diane is

talking about, which is a sense of like the sort of rigid, like, you must do this or else, no matter what kind of thing.

And personally, I'm not a fan. I don't like that a sense of it, but I think, you know, really what Robin's talking about in the forward. And I think Diana, you know, I appreciate that you have a different definition than my. What causes me to have that reaction, but it's just the sense of like, just staying the course, you know, like if you really care about, for instance, in the case of our, our book, like if you really care about practicing act and that kind of thing, you know, it's important to just keep doing it, to keep putting it into practice, keep trying it to keep kind of some moving forward in the direction that matters to you.

And that does sometimes take a little, I guess, discipline to use the word.

Diana Hill: But this is the important thing about words. Because words [00:14:00] are just words, but then our mind has all these different associations with words like discipline for, for one person may be like, Whoa, that feels like punishment. Or that feels like a container that is, is, is mean or mean parent or a mean teacher.

And for someone else, discipline may feel inspiring because it feels like a sense of, yeah. I'm committed to something and I'm okay. You know, day after day, I'm practicing this thing I have discipline around. So it's, that's part of also what we do in the book is we talk about language and we talk about our minds and what our minds tend to do with language and how we oftentimes don't step back and look at our thoughts, like, huh, I wonder, I'm curious this word discipline.

Why, you know, what, how do I want to approach it? And what would be most helpful for me in this situation?

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And I, I think too, that you guys are bringing up some really good examples of like in response to the word you or to the sentence, you have to be disciplined in order to practice something new, [00:15:00] like the practices within acceptance and commitment therapy that your mind might then go to. I can't write, which is like a very black and white.

A thought that comes up from lots of us when we get overwhelmed by the idea of something. But that's just a thought. And if we kind of peel back from it, as you guide people to do in your book, we can say, it's a thought it's not a hundred percent true or untrue. It's just a thought. But when we get attached to that thought, like I'm not disciplined, I can't do that.

It really drives our behavior or, or prevents us from engaging in a behavior. But if we can step away from that thought. And this is exactly what acceptance and commitment therapy allows you to do is develop some practices to step away. And to be curious, as you're saying Diana, and to consider like, can I hold that thought and take some action anyway, can I be uncomfortable and do something?

And, and so I think you're right, that if we just. Develop a different relationship, even with the word discipline and figure out how to incorporate it into our lives in ways that are more

value [00:16:00] aligned. And that keep us, as you're saying, Debbie, moving forward. That that's exactly what act is.

Debbie Sorensen: Flexible

discipline. Right? It's like,

Yael Schonbrun: Exactly. Yeah. So it kind of gets me to the next question, which is the role of self-compassion, because when things get hard, we tend to like eat up on ourselves. Like, I'm not good. I can't do this. So Diana, I wonder if you can talk us through why self-compassion and self-care is so important when it comes to building the psychological flexibility.

Diana Hill: Yeah, well, Debbie and I wrote a book together during a pandemic as moms and, uh, so

Debbie Sorensen: through a little digression about how bad timing of that.

Diana Hill: That's fantastic. Perfect timing to write a book about psychological flexibility.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay, good reframe. Thank you.

Diana Hill: so we we started off with, we got to put another chapter in here before we launched into these six core processes and the six core processes that we've been [00:17:00] alluding to are, uh, being present, practicing, acceptance. Being able to diffuse or step back from your thoughts, uh, knowing what your values are, taking care, committed action towards those values.

And also being able to take perspective on yourself and, and your own self story. And so before we launched into those, we wrote a whole chapter and you spend a whole week on developing some skills around self compassion, self care, and intentional use of time. And the metaphor of the story that we use behind that has to do with preparing the soil.

Both Debbie and I are. Have a little garden patch and we know about sort of the importance of, of, of making your soil nutritious before you plant seeds. So self-compassion is, is the, is the nutrients in which we can draw upon when we're practicing psychological flexibility, because it is hard to take committed action towards, towards the things that matter to you.

You're going to trip up and you're going to make mistakes and it's going to be, you're going to be vulnerable. [00:18:00] And if you have a compassionate mind, To be able to turn towards yourself and towards others in a more caring way is going to help you out and be able to help you keep that discipline of, of, um, flexible discipline of committed action and other parts of that psychological flexibility.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Like if you think about it, what we don't want is for people to be like, okay, I bought my copy of X, daily journal. Now I have to do it perfectly. And now I have to, you know, I think even in what I love what you said about like making mistakes and having compassion and sometimes it's hard and sometimes we get so hard on ourselves.

I think it's important to. Have that sense of common humanity, which is that, you know, we all struggle and these things are hard and we're all doing our best that we can. And so I think starting just to add to what Diane is saying, just starting from that place of compassion, just felt really a [00:19:00] nice place to tend to our soil as we got started.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And we have like a couple of episodes on self-compassion. If listeners are interested in diving really deep into it, but it is such an important place to start whenever you're doing something new or something difficult. I mean, chances are, if you haven't done it before, it's because it. It's been difficult to do it.

So if you're picking up act daily journal, then know that you're going to start with some self-kindness because it will help you to enter in, you know, in a more effective way.

. , so Debbie, we've talked a little bit about the six processes of act.

I wonder if you can give us some clinical examples or examples from friendships, and family about seeing these processes and action to give us a more full flavor of like, what is, what does it look like? So pick your favorite process. Give us an example.

Debbie Sorensen: Oh, where to begin.

Well, so one of the core processes that one of the six core processes that we have act that we write about is [00:20:00] values. And this is like a vignette of actually many.

I have many clients. Who have struggled with this? Um, during the pandemic, I think a lot of people are feeling stressed and maxed out and anxious and are feeling like actually more irritable irritable than usual lately where they're just like things that I know. Can we all raise our hands? Yeah, me too. Um, but.

So, whether it's like your kids or your spouse or your mom or your coworkers, or just, you know, the world in general, I I've noticed a lot of people are just like more snappy or more critical or more just not their best selves. And so one of the things that I've really worked with a lot of clients is first of all, when you're, when you are more consistent with your best self, when you're really interacting with people, More consistently with your values, what does that look like?

And then it sort of connects to the other core processes, right? Cause like how can you [00:21:00] notice that you're starting to feel that way you can notice the anger and the irritability start to build and sort of pause and check in and then reorient yourself toward that person you want to be. So, you know, instead of yelling at your kids 15 times to put on their shoes and brush their teeth. It's like just taking that moment to pause and to be less irritable because I think, yeah, it's really easy to stray from your values when you're feeling those kinds of emotions.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that. I love that example. Diana, do you have an example?

Diana Hill: Yeah. You know, I have an example that I think the act take on being present. And I know that a lot of people have heard about mindfulness and it's become kind of a buzzword, but I. Kind of linking with Debbie and how these act processes really reflect each

other and you can't have one without the other, in some ways they start to, um, we spend a whole last chapter on [00:22:00] integration, but being present and aligned with your values, right.

At the same time or how being present can help point us to our values. And one of the, um, the things that I know noticed or have noticed with the pandemic as well, is that because we're. In these positions where we have many roles colliding at once and we're, we're at home and we're working and we're also making more meals maybe than we use, used to make.

And all of these demands on, on us that sometimes we can rush through our lives and not be present in the important parts of our life. And just the other day I was going, you know, I was rushing around in my morning brush around and I. Head down, looking at my phone and my child came up to me and asked me something.

He's like, mommy, I'm making a smoothie, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I was so in my phone, I didn't hear him. And my partner came up to me and said, he just asked you. To go walk and get some kale to go make this movie. He just asked you that. [00:23:00] And he's not going to keep asking you that, you know, for my, my older son, doesn't ask me that question anymore.

Right. And so it reminded me, yeah. Have like these moments where there's small little micro moments that matter to us and how to bring our attention and be present in them because they're connected to something that's important. And I think with all of our struggles around technology and. Time boundaries and all of this, the simple process of being present and connecting with what matters to us can actually make us feel a lot better in our lives, even if nothing changes about our lives.

And that's really the magic of act, because nothing on the outside world has to change in order for you to be able to maybe relate to your inside world a little bit differently, and that will change how maybe you feel in your life.

Yael Schonbrun: that was that was such a good example. And I, that situation, that's one of the core things of act that I love that it's really about working. On your [00:24:00] relationship to your thoughts, your feelings, your actions, it's to S you know, to some extent it's about making changes, but it's also really about just change shifting how you relate.

And I love that example of part of the shift can even just be, be more present in whatever it is that you're doing. And on the one hand it's so small and on the other hand, it's so powerful. I will also say it's, it's not easy, it's small, but not easy. And, and I wonder if the two of you can maybe speak a little bit to what is so challenging about being more present and maybe some, some tips that you might have, or people that really struggle to be present in those small moments.

Diana Hill: Well,

one thing is that it's

not our fault. I mean, I think our brains are designed not to really be present. And then our worlds are pulling our attention away from the present moment. So in some ways we, we beat ourselves up or make mindfulness and other [00:25:00] to do so that's not what we want. To intend here at all, but at the same time, it's hard because sometimes what's in the present moment is uncomfortable or painful.

And, and so slowing down to move through and be with something that's uncomfortable is one of the, um, the most found skills that we can learn as humans. Because what we'll find, I think, and many of us have found this over the course of our lives. The things that are most painful for us are things like losing someone you love or being in an argument with a person that you really care about or fighting for a cause that really is important to you or parenting.

And those are things that are worth slowing down for. So it's both this like, Oh, I know that I care about these things and it they're uncomfortable and painful at times. And being present with them is uncomfortable. And that's where I think some of the act skills can be particularly helpful because we don't throw the baby out with the bath water [00:26:00] with that.

I don't know if you want to add to that, Debbie.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. I mean, I think just to echo what you're saying about how the human mind is not really, it kind of trips us up in this department. I think we, here's an active way to think about it is that we have, we're so caught in the content of what's happening and we're so just in our heads and our verbal world and the tasks that we need to do, and we're thinking about the future and we're, you know, we're just caught up in all that all the time.

And I don't think it's really realistic to imagine that we're going to just be. So in that there's like a perspective shift that has to happen. And I think to, to be able to be more in the present moment, to be more in contact with our direct experience. And I don't think it's realistic to imagine that we're going to be like that 24 seven.

I think it's pretty fleeting actually for most of us. I mean, maybe there are certain contexts in which you can contact, you know, if you're on a meditation retreat or something like this. Um, but I do think that with practice, like [00:27:00] we can. Um, you know, we can just build that into our lives more and more, but you really do sometimes need to, there may be situations in which it happens sort of automatically, like we can just get really into our direct experience without much effort.

But I do think that over time, it's something that you can continue to build.

Diana Hill: That's a muscle and a practice that you can cultivate and grow over time. Like any of these six core processes are all things that you can train and yourself. And I know that the three of us have all noticed that, cause we're all act practitioners and we're doing it in our lives that we can see change.

Happening over time, like, Oh, this used to be really hard for me, but now I can see, okay, well, what's important here. This is what's most, what's most important. I'm gonna slow

down, get present and tend to that. Or I can do a better job at perspective, taking in this moment when I'm in a conflict. Right? And so over time, you'll, you'll be able.

And that's the idea of the, of the [00:28:00] book is that this is a, this is a process. This is a process. This is a practice. There's no end point. Just keep on working it and, but then you start to get the feedback of the benefits of it. And so you want to keep on doing it?

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I mean, I think that's, what's hopefully compelling. It's it's therapy that we do, but it's also a set of practices that each of us co-hosts. Have adopted into our lives because it helps us live more fully, you know, in part, because it helps us to be more present, but just backing up a second, I have to share that. I just read, a study uh, I'll have to find it, uh, so that we can cite it in the show notes, because I can't remember who that researchers were, but that showed that when people were brought to a room with no stimulation, if they were given a choice between no stimulation at all or shocks.

They chose the shocks because that is how uncomfortable we are in just sitting with our thoughts with no stimulation.

[00:29:00]**Diana Hill:** There's another part of that stimulation thing I want to add. And this is one of the terms that Debbie and I talk about is the emotional avoidance roundabout. And we ended up calling it the roundabout. Cause it reminds me of that, um, Griswold movie, the European family vacation movie, where Chevy chase is driving around in circles.

And he says, look, kids there's big. Ben look, kids there's big Ben. And by the very end, he's like exhausted. He's exhausted, everyone's asleep. And he's like, hating this. And that's what emotional avoidance is. Right. We get caught in these cycles of avoidance of things, as simple as looking at the phone in the grocery store.

So part of it is yes, we're. Distracted or we have a hard time without stimulation, but part of it is also we're distracting from, and, and so part of what being present allows us to do is actually be able to be with the very things that we're distracting ourselves from. And sometimes those things, the feelings, the thoughts, the sensations that we're distracting [00:30:00] ourselves from, they tend to rebound.

And they tend to get stronger. Our minds don't like to be controlled and neither do our feelings and there may be something in there. And this is where Debbie's expertise in developmental psychology really came out. When we were writing together, there may be something in there with our emotions. That's, that's useful that we don't want to distract from.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I'm actually, I'll give a nod back to my recent episode on kids and emotion. Well, it was on emotional intelligence intelligence in general, but with Mark Brackett, who is at the Yale center for emotional intelligence and works a lot with kids and about using your emotions. Labeling them understanding them, but also then using them as a source of information, which I think sometimes we think of emotions, especially the less pleasant ones is like something we don't want, but even with an anger, which is within feeling stressed or overwhelmed or afraid, like there's, if we actually tune in, in a certain way, we can use that.

We can [00:31:00] be curious and learn something based on how we're feeling.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm just sort of reflecting here. Cause I think one of the times that I'm most likely to pick up my phone. Is when I'm a little bit bored, hanging out with my kids. I think that any parent knows this, this impulse, but if I am sort of to ask myself, what, what is that telling me?

That is really informative, that, that is a good thing to pause on. And that, you know, among the many things that our emotions can tell us, it's sort of what the meaning is,

Debbie Sorensen: We've had a number of guests on the show that we've been inspired by, and that are offering you our listeners discounts on their programs. If you go to our website offtheclockpsych.com, you'll be able to find coupon codes for the programs of Dr. Judson Brewer, Dr. Rick Hanson and Jen Lumenlun. So go check it out at, offtheclockpsych.com and start learning today.

Diana Hill: I think that, why we distract ourselves so much is that we're caught up in thoughts and trying to just, you know, not feel, but we're feeling and [00:32:00] where act is really helpful is first just noticing that like be on the lookout and what Debbie and I talk about is like, start to be on the lookout for self stories.

You don't even have to challenge them. You can just notice them. Oh, that's a story that I'm in and then you can, Oop. Okay. What's important to me right now. Hmm. My, maybe my kids or even using the skill of impermanence, because I will guarantee you that 20 years from now, you would give a thousand million dollars to have these little boys back in this way with their little bodies and their little hands and their little high voices and their little, you know, all the aspects of, I have two little boys.

So I just. Want to eat them up. They're so cute. And they drive me nuts. So, but I think perspective taking yeah. Perspective, taking and values can be really helpful in those moments when we're, um, you know, sort of, and it's okay to check out sometimes too. I don't say don't ever go on your phone, but [00:33:00] if you want to feel a little bit more enriched in moments where you're feeling a little blocked.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that and I love that because it's such, um, it's a joke. Core element of acceptance and commitment therapy is one that I use a lot in the therapy room where I just ask people like, how's that working for you? Because if it's working well, it's not such a problem. But if you feel like it's preventing you from standing for something that's really important to you or experiencing something or contributing in a particular way, that that really matters.

And it's something to really look at more closely and to consider, you know, what are the values, what would be the committed action that could be different? What's the self story that's getting in your way. So I just admitted on the podcast that I check out a lot when I'm

with my kids, but you guys did a really good job. I thought of sharing some of your real personal stories in the act daily journal.

And I'm just curious, how hard was it to share some of those personal elements

Diana Hill: what does it come to the end? [00:34:00] So I had some exposure to vulnerability for the first many, many, many chapters. Uh, you know, it was interesting because I think that the story part. There's the part of writing a book, they think about the audience, but there's also a different part of writing a book, which is when you're writing it with a friend.

And one of the things that I really appreciated in writing this book with Debbie was writing these stories back and forth and getting to know Debbie a little bit more through her stories and the ones that were Debbie has such. She's just like a goof ball and so lovable and also so real. All right. And so she tells these stories that I would be cracking up and then I would send her my story and I would feel so scared that I'm, you know, all of my judgments and my self stories.

So it comparison comes up and then appreciation of this person that I'm writing a book with comes up and then ultimately, Just feeling really cared [00:35:00] for because we would give each other feedback and that's kind of hard. And at the end, we, I think we both felt really good about what we put out there. So I think the stories are important and they're a little view into both Debbie.

It's not like this is a, you know, biography situation or a memoir, but it's just a little view in to some of the things that we struggled with or that we think about. And just day to day stuff.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I think our listeners may not know that we've really. Philosophically have a reason why we share some stories like this. And I think we didn't, we got exposure to doing this through writing the book and putting some stories about ourselves into the book, but also on the podcast, we talk about some of our own struggles in our own stories.

And what people may not know behind the scenes is if that's very consistent with something philosophically that's going on here, which is in the old school model of. Psychotherapy that therapist is this blank [00:36:00] slate, this expert and the model. I think that we all, as co-hosts subscribed to is more like we're all human.

We all have our struggles. It's very normal to have these feelings and to have these kind of things. And. I think what we really wanted to do through sharing personal stories. They're really like day to day examples for the most part. And we wanted to just have some things that other people could see themselves into.

And it's partly just us sharing about ourselves, but then also partly we were hoping that people would say, Oh, I'm not the only one who sometimes, you know, has these moments. And I think that, um, We do that on the podcast as well. And I do think it feels vulnerable at times. And there's this question of like, do I sound a certain way and this and that, and, you know, giving feedback to each other and that kind of thing, it definitely felt a little scary sometimes, but I think we were doing it for

Diana Hill: That's the psychological flexibility part, right? So the, the psychological flexibility being willing to feel that [00:37:00] vulnerability and, Oh, am I putting myself out there in the service of what you're saying? This really. Intentional use of self-disclosure. And I think as therapists, that's, there's this fine line, right?

Because you don't want to be using self-disclosure just for like, let me tell you about what happened for me this week, but you want to be using self-disclosure because either you're modeling vulnerability or you want to create closeness, or you want to create this as a safe place for you to disclose.

And that really I'm not on sunlight. Mountain up here, looking down at you that I've succeeded at something that you aren't succeeding at, but really I'm right along the rock face with you. And I'm climbing my own rock and you have your own rock over. So I think that that's also the function of the story is Debbie side, which is really a really nice way of saying it.

Yael Schonbrun: I have to say I mean, the book is such, it's so great on so many levels in terms of instruction, but it made me feel closer to the two of you and helped me to get to know you, but also just brought the material to light. So I was wondering if you each would be [00:38:00] willing to read a vignette, um, to give the listeners a taste of, of what they'll get in, in the book in its entirety.

Diana Hill: Sure I'll start. Um, with one that comes from the committed action chapter, which we titled fall on purpose, and the story gives a little nod to one of the co-founders of act Kelly Wilson. And so I just want to start by saying that act has a long lineage of people that have been working really, really hard to develop these concepts and ideas and they, and they over time have.

Come together. And so Debbie and I just throughout the book, we give, um, credit to those folks. And one of them is Kelly, who was one of the first people that I learned act from. So I say I've always been afraid of falling. And as a kid, I wouldn't climb trees and never made it past the bunny slope, skiing and yoga.

I conveniently step out and use the bathroom. When it's time for headstands. Then I learned that falling is part [00:39:00] of committed action. In an actual workshop, Kelly Wilson stood wobbling in a yoga pose and said, what if falling were part of the posts falling on purpose was radically freeing for me. If I fell on purpose, it meant I could try all sorts of things.

Surfing a podcast, homeschooling starting new friendships today, committing to falling on purpose, opens my life to fresh opportunities.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that. And I mean, I think that is such a great embodiment of growth mindset. It's sort of an opening up to the discomfort of making mistakes and allowing that to open you up to all sorts of new parts of living. It's that's beautiful. I love that. That'd be heaven that you.

Debbie Sorensen: Should I do the one about plunging into the swimming pool or the obsessive thinking about a baked potato.

Yael Schonbrun: Potato was my

Diana Hill: plus

Debbie Sorensen: So you have daily, this is baked potatoes. This is under the cognitive diffusion section about how we relate to our thoughts and day three wild and wacky [00:40:00] thoughts. Okay. A few years back, I briefly and done successfully tried eating fewer carbs. One day at lunch, I saw a baked potato in the cafeteria at work and told myself I can't eat that potato.

It has carbs. Guess what happened? I spent the rest of the day obsessing about the baked potato and telling myself to stop thinking about it. The more I told myself to stop thinking about it, the more I couldn't help it. Every minute or so I pictured that potato, if I had just allowed myself to think freely about that boring, old baked potato, perhaps it wouldn't have turned into something so big in my head that day life lessons in the cafeteria.

Diana Hill: Really makes me want to bake potato right now.

Debbie Sorensen: Don't here's an act exercise. Don't think about a big potato. No, I'm just kidding.

Yael Schonbrun: think that's such a, I mean, I like that, uh, formulation of the, the white bear.

Debbie Sorensen: Thought suppression.

Yael Schonbrun: the white bear. I feel like the baked potato would work better for more people. That one really is hard to

Diana Hill: well, [00:41:00] that's one of the things if you're inexperienced act. A therapist. There's a lot of act exercises that we've done like a million times over and we're kind of sick of them. And so, well, the other thing that we really tried to do in this book was come up with fresh metaphors and ideas and exercises that maybe people haven't seen before.

So that it's just another, it's kind of freshens up your practice a lot. You know, when you go to a workshop, you get a little bit of like, Oh, I'm motivated again. To go and do this thing that I've been doing for 15 years. So I, um, that's, that's why I love this story like this, because it's a good example.

And anybody can come up with, uh, an example of something that they've tried to not think about that keeps on popping up in their head as an example of cognitive diffusion.

Yael Schonbrun: So for the two of you, I mean, you can use your personal experience or experience in teaching this to patients, to clients, but what are some of the biggest challenges when it comes to putting acceptance and commitment therapy? Processes into practice. What do you think are some of the biggest [00:42:00] hurdles that people struggle with?

Debbie Sorensen: I think that just some context that makes it hard. I mean, part of it is our biology and how we just get into our. Very human ways of being, which can be unhelpful. I

think that, um, we also all have our history and our patterns that are just really easy to kind of fall back to even the unworkable ones, the ones that are not working so well in our lives.

Like there are, there's usually something keeping it going. And so I think, yeah, it's just, um, it's just really easy sometimes to slip into our old patterns and habits that are maybe not so helpful.

Diana Hill: And then I think there's. Real external barriers to speaking of context as well. Like there's real exp external barriers because sometimes, you know, take the pandemic for an example, right. That affected different people differently. Some people weren't super [00:43:00] effected by the pandemic because they could go about their lives.

And in working in, you know, virtual worlds or they had a lot of financial resources or, you know, and then for some people there was external barriers that. Really made it worse for them. And that's not something that you have a lot of control over, uh, often. So I think that, that's the other thing that in no way are we saying, like, you're going to read this book and then all of a sudden you're going to come like a psychologically flexible Ninja and you can just like take on the world.

Right? It's it's more about giving, giving some tools and ideas around, even in the face of some external obstacles, how. How you can help yourself out. Um, and I think, you know, an example of that, maybe something like, um, You know, I think about it like new parents and they're sleep deprived and they have this baby that's really demanding on them and maybe they feel like they need to go back to work and the [00:44:00] pressures of balancing going back to work or having a baby or having another child or having now the financial demands of being a parent where a psychological flexibility could help, would be. Helping you get organized around just in this moment right here. Right now. What's most important to me and what's my next move that I needed to make. And so I do think that there's real life things that make it hard to be psychologically flexible. And I feel that in my own life all the time. So,

Debbie Sorensen: Well, that's that's part of our mission of making it more in people's daily lives. You know, sometimes we just like. Not thinking about it. We're not, you know, we're not, we forget to tune into our values for instance, or to maintain a particular habit or to check in with the present moment or something like that.

And so the more we can just get in the habit of integrating it into our daily lives, the more likely we are to keep, keep the processes going

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, that awareness is so key. [00:45:00] And I do think that having, it's almost like having flexibility about your flexibility, you know, just recognizing that life happens and that you have to kind of move Diana. I think this is actually a metaphor that came from you way, way back. At one point, when we were talking about acceptance and commitment therapy, and I was probably seeking some advice for you about a patient, but you talked about like, it's, it's a little bit like a Rubik's cube, right?

Like we kind of want to solve the whole thing, but if. You know, several of the sides are just not workable or they're just not the ones that we're working on in that moment. You're just better off focusing on the side that's facing you and figuring out what is your next move on

that side, knowing that there's other areas that are also important, but it's more effective to focus on one side at a time and pick that side from a value oriented perspective.

And that, that metaphor actually really stuck with me.

Diana Hill: And I'll add on to that metaphor to say, and the purpose of solving a Rubik's [00:46:00] cube. Once you solve the Rubik's cube, it's done. And it's not fun anymore. Cause it's solved. Actually the joy of the Rubik's cube is in the, moving the parts around and like, Oh, I wonder if this fits here and how can I move this there?

And that you're not trying to get to some perfect end point of a perfect Rubik's cube because actually you don't want to have a perfect Rubik's cube because then you can never play with it because it's perfect. And it just sits there on yourself and you look at it as like, Ooh, I solve that Rubik's cube a long time ago, but I'd rather have a Rubik's cube that I can play with and fiddle with and feel a little satisfaction when I get to have those little things to line up.

And that's more, what I think being psychologically flexible in your life is like, than it is getting to some solved point at the end. And yeah, sometimes it's helpful. To narrow down our perspective and be like, okay, what am I looking at right now? And sometimes it's helpful to expand our perspective and say, I need to let this side go and like, look around at the other sides too, because there may be [00:47:00] some other things that I want to tend to here or there's other parts to this whole.

And that flexibility part of being able to zoom out and zoom in that's the perspective taking component of the six core processes that we work with people on helping to train flexibility, even in your perspective.

So that was such a good metaphor in such a great place to, to wrap this up. But before we let our listeners go, I just wanted to share that. I think that everybody should pick up this book because it's a great, um, overview of ACT is great for experts. It's great for newbies. Um, it's one of the most fun books on acceptance and commitment therapy that I've read and I'm so excited because I understand that. New Harbinger is partnering with us to do a book giveaway. So can you tell us a little bit about that?

Debbie Sorensen: Yes. Well, we're trying to get the word out about the book, and we're also trying to get the word out about this podcast. So if you go to Apple podcast and you write us a review, you'll be in a drawing for one of the five books [00:48:00] that we are offering from New Harbinger, and they'll send them directly to you.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So once you write your review on Apple podcasts, just let us know. So send us an email at, off the clock, psych@gmail.com or you can email us through directly through our webpage. And then once we hear from you, we'll enter you into the drawing and hopefully you'll get a, one of the five free copies.

Diana Hill: So good luck and thank you so much, Debbie and Diana for joining me today to talk about your awesome new book. Congratulations. I'm so proud of you guys.

Yael Schonbrun: thank you. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for doing the interview with us today. It was really fun

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