

Matt Boone Stop Avoiding Stuff

Matt Boone: [00:00:00] So people often say I'm so lazy and I think lazy is the least interesting and least useful way to describe the behavior of avoiding what you're doing is staying away from something, some thought or story that your mind gives you, or some emotion that you don't want to feel like guilt or anxiety, or, you know, Oh, the physical sensations that go along with that, you're trying to stay away from the part that sucks.

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Diana Hill: I'm Dr. Diana Hill practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

Yael Schonbrun: From coast to coast. I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and [00:01:00] 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.

Debbie Sorensen: We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

Psychologist off the clock is sponsored by online training and continuing education from Praxis continuing education. They offer multiple formats of high quality training, including a live online courses, free webinars and on-demand courses.

Debbie Sorensen: Praxis gets some of the best names in the field. People who do really amazing trainings and you can do them so easily from home right now. I know I've really enjoyed some of the trainings that I've done in the past, and there's some great ones on the lineup coming up.

Diana Hill: Yeah, just looking at it, the lineup. Well, you can always do act immersion with Steve Hayes. That's fantastic. If you want to take a deep dive into an acceptance commitment therapy, but I was also really excited to see. Jonathan Kanter Robyn Gobin and Daniel Rosen are doing a course from ally to anti-racist, which is a six week course [00:02:00] using the contextual behavioral model of racism to cultivate personal and professional anti-racist action

I was also excited to see Dennis Tirch and Laura Silberstein. Doing a foundations of compassion focused therapy course for those that want to learn more about CFT.

Debbie Sorensen: you'll see some of our old podcasts guests that we've had on the show doing Praxis training. So check it out and you'll want to go through our website offtheclockpsych.com to register because you can get a \$25 off discount code for live training events.

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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.

Jill Stoddard: Hey everybody, it's Jill here and I'm here with Debbie to introduce this episode [00:03:00] with Matt Boone, where we talk about.

His book, stop avoiding stuff. , and today is January 8th. You'll be listening to this on January 20th. , and Debbie and I were just talking about the particular time in history that we find ourselves and how, alluring avoidance is right now. , I don't know if you can even hear how breathy I am because I'm.

I'm anxious right now. So that may be even coming through on the microphone. And I was just sharing with Debbie that two days ago on the day of the attempted coup my patient canceled on, on me because he couldn't concentrate. And then I sat in front of the television, literally for 11 hours with like a one hour break.

And Debbie, you were saying that you've been doing a lot of. Doom scrolling. So maybe we can talk about these behaviors that we tend to get into that feel like they work in the moment, but maybe are coming at a cost in reality.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. You know, I, I love the book and [00:04:00] also the interview that you did, because I think avoidance is so pervasive and so normal, so human, and yet often we don't see it for what it is on weeks like this, when stress is high for a lot of us and just, you know, this period in general, I think it's stressful.

We're feeling anxious and there's. Almost a sense of like, what's wrong with me? You know, like I should have it all together. I should be able to still go about my business and why am I glued to the TV and the phone? And I think, you know, when I think about my own as, as you say, doom scrolling, and I think what's going on there, you know, I have 10 minutes maybe between clients or I have time when, Oh, I thought maybe I'd go to bed or get some exercise or something like that.

Instead I'm obsessively checking the news, not in a stay informed way. It's more of a, like trying to do something about my own anxiety or something like that. And I, and I think we can be so hard on ourselves for doing that. And yet, if you think about it, what's going on [00:05:00] is this very unhelpful form of distraction and avoidance

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. And , I think when people consider avoidance, they might think more about the things we're not doing, but it's important to say that avoidance is anything you do or don't do that is meant to make you feel better or different in some way, or is meant to prevent some feared outcome.

And if you think about, you know, doom, scrolling or TV watching, you know, I realized when I think about that 11 hours of television, I got all the information in the first half an hour. Right? So that, like you're saying, it's not about staying more informed, but I think what it does is when you're so anxious and that anxiety is being fueled by uncertainty and lack of control.

We think that if we can just get a little more information, a little more knowledge that will have some sense of certainty, it gives us a perception of control. When in reality, it's really creating more uncertainty, [00:06:00] less control and more anxiety. So it sort of has that function of feeling like it's helping and working in the short term, but like really just making everything worse in the longterm.

Debbie Sorensen: well, I love that point. You're making about how it's not just what you're not doing. It's also what you are doing. And I think if you start to look out for it, you know, what do I do to avoid what do I do to control? And, but in a gentle way, you know, like recognizing that it's very normal to do this, but to take a look at it and think how's this working in my life.

It's like, you start to see it. In all kinds of ways, some ways they'll look pretty functional on the surface and yet may not really be very effective. So

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. And certainly if it's, if it is functional truly, right? Like if, if yoga or taking a bath makes you feel better, there's certainly nothing wrong with that. But I think when we're doing things that we think are helpful, but really look at the fact that it has some, costs that that's what we need to really keep an eye on.

[00:07:00] **Debbie Sorensen:** absolutely.

Jill Stoddard: Alright. Well, enjoy this episode with Matt boon.

I am incredibly excited to have my friend and colleague Matt Boone here with me today. Matt is a social worker, psychotherapist and public speaker who specializes in translating mental health concepts for the general public.

He is the coauthor with Jennifer Gregg and Lisa Coyne of stop avoiding stuff, 25 microskills to face your fears and do it anyway. And the editor of mindfulness and acceptance in social work. He is the director of programming and outreach at the student mental health services of the university of Arkansas for medical sciences, where he's an instructor in psychiatry.

Matt is also an ACBS peer reviewed act trainer and a former consultant for the VA act for depression, training rollout. He regularly provides act trainings for professionals and the general public, and he lives in little rock Arkansas with his wife, cat and guitars. And loves talking about mental [00:08:00] health with people who think psychotherapy and self-help are a bit cringy.

I love that, Matt. Welcome. Thank you so much for being here. I'm really excited to talk to you today.

Matt Boone: I am thrilled to be here. Thanks for having me, Jill.

Jill Stoddard: Awesome. Well, we're going to talk about your brand new book. I'm so excited about this. I was lucky to have an advanced review copy and arc or arc for people who aren't familiar with that word. and. You know, I get a lot of these as many of us in the field do. and what I loved so much about this one is it's a S 174 pages, and it's about seven inches by five inches.

So it's a pretty tiny book as far as self-help books go. And yet. There is so much just great valuable stuff packed into it. So why don't you first just tell us a little bit about the book. So what exactly is stop avoiding stuff and who is it for?

[00:09:00] **Matt Boone:** well, I'll start by saying it's for everyone because avoidance. And unnecessary control of your life tends to be something that shows up in all kinds of human suffering. So whether you're dealing with anxiety or depression or just garden, variety of procrastination, or, you know, not getting your taxes done on time, it's usually because you're avoiding something, but not the situation itself.

It's the situation, plus what shows up inside of you were you to do the thing that you're not doing?

So people often say I'm so lazy and I think lazy is the least interesting and least useful way to describe the behavior of avoiding what you're doing is staying away from something, some thought or story that your mind gives you, or some emotion that you don't want to feel like guilt or anxiety, or, you know, Oh, the physical sensations that go along with that, you're trying to stay away from the part that sucks.

And then if I [00:10:00] can help you or me and my colleagues can help you like encounter the part that sucks just a little more lightly with a little more skillfully. then you can do the things that are meaningful in your life.

Jill Stoddard: So what made you, I mean, first of all, I've no idea what you're talking about because you know, I've never procrastinated or now, I mean, I think that's, you're, you're right on the money there, that, that one of the things that makes the book so valuable is

that it's so incredibly relatable because, you know, avoidance is just part of the deal when it comes to being human, but we're so often.

Reacting on autopilot and doing it without even realizing it, you know, without realizing the ways in which it's, Making our lives small. Was there something in particular that made you think like, this is what I need to write a book about? You know, act as a newer therapy in general, but there are more and more act books coming out more and more act self-help books.

And this is a book that's based on acceptance and commitment therapy. How did you [00:11:00] decide to focus specifically on avoidance?

Matt Boone: Well, I would love to offer you a like beautifully realized kind of origin story of this book about how I decided that avoidance and my colleagues. And I decided that avoidance was like so important. We needed to put it on the cover, but really I pitched this book to Jen and Lisa, my co-authors, and then we pitched it to new harbinger, the publisher as the act bathroom book, we knew.

Jill Stoddard: Hold on pause for laughter. I'm kind of disappointed now, but. That didn't happen because that is hysterical. And I totally get why I will I'll I'll make sure there's a picture of the cover that's out when we announced the episode, but that's great. Sorry. Continue.

Matt Boone: so, so really the idea wasn't, let's write a book about avoidance. The idea was more, how can we write the most digestible book about act concepts and [00:12:00] skills and how would people be most likely to use a book like this? Like I thought about how do I read self-help books? Like I have never read a self help book from cover to cover.

In my life. and I've read a ton of them. and I guess that lots of people buy self-help books and just stick them on the shelf and like read 20 pages and don't read it again. And so I wanted something that people would actually read and then would actually get something from, and I was working as one of my roles in the job I was in at the time was curating a blog and I was like, look, this is a beautiful format that I resisted early on.

Cause I thought it was superficial. Like these are thousand word. Chunks of ideas from the field of psychology in my world, acceptance commitment therapy, but after doing it for awhile and editing a bunch of other people's blogs, including Lisa's and Jens, I thought this is actually really cool. This could be a book if we put all these together and then also.

I have a full-time job in life. And so it was functional in another way, too. I was like, how do I write a book and not destroy [00:13:00] myself? So I'm going to get to people I love who write wonderfully. And we're never going to write a chapter this longer than a thousand or 1200 words. And maybe we could do that.

We could actually succeed at that rather than just like, think about it and then destroy our lives, trying to make it happen. So instead of this is kind of pleasurable experience and then along the way, we never really thought it was going to be called the act bathroom book. But

we did spend about eight months coming up with the framing of the book while we were writing it.

And of course, what is at the heart of acceptance and commitment therapy. It's experiential avoidance. This thing that we all do as humans that we're built to do by evolution and by our learning, which is stay away from the uncomfortable stuff. Except as you noted, that leads to our lives being small.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, I'm stuck on the fact that you described it as digestible at the same time, you talked about it as a bathroom book. [00:14:00] But I will say it is definitely digestible. I think you have absolutely achieved that. and I don't know what the statistics are, but you're absolutely right. The statistics do exist out there that the number of people who buy books and never opened them or open them and only read part of them is astronomical. You know, it's rare for people to buy a book and read the entire thing through. So I think that's. Wise. I also think it's interesting. If you're willing to talk about this, you had recently sent an email to a professional group, announcing the book and you talked about how initially that one of the titles that was being thrown around was stop avoiding.

Wait, I don't know if I'm allowed to say that on the podcast without then giving us an E for explicit rating, but stop avoiding a word that goes along with being in the bathroom, right. A curse word, instead of stuff, the curse word for stuff. so I find that interesting. The publisher didn't want to call it a [00:15:00] bathroom book. But they were willing to put a curse word on the cover. And the last time I wrote a book, which wasn't that long ago about it be mighty came out a year ago. I was strictly forbidden from putting curse words in my book. So something, it sounds like something has shifted in this like popular culture of like all the books that are selling millions of copies have swear words on the cover, right.

How to UN-F yourself. What are some of the other ones? I mean, there's a bunch of them out there that have those words in them. is that a true story?

Matt Boone: that is a true story. you know, I didn't actually think that they would call it the act of bathroom book. I would say we're, we're having a working title, but this is what we want to do because. If it's not clear, you can jump to any chapter at any point after reading the introduction. So that's the idea here.

And so you can spend 10 minutes or five minutes doing something and also reading this book. but yeah, I think that they, you know, I think that that does sell it. I knew that that sold, and you know, they weren't heavy handed about it. They just suggested this would be a really good [00:16:00] idea. And we had to think about it because like, You don't want to, you don't want to just put your book in a drawer that no one will read, but you also don't want to undermine your message by being a little too glib.

And then there are three of us who would have to agree on this, and we all have different sensibilities and we all have different clients, you know, and I'm a little bit more scatological than Jen and Lisa. But, you know, Jen works with older folks and Lisa works with kids and maybe that title doesn't work so good for those populations.

And now I work at a university at a medical school. Maybe that wouldn't be so good for those populations. And so I think we took the careful routes, but I'm actually really proud of the title and how it came out. So I don't regret it at all.

Jill Stoddard: Well it's and it looks great too. I really liked the cover. And so why don't we talk a little bit about. The stuff that's in there. one of the questions I was going to ask you, you just answered, which is can I open to any page and do any microskills? So for someone who may be their [00:17:00] only act background is say, like listening to our podcast, Or maybe somebody as a first time listener, and this is their first exposure.

So why don't we do this? Why don't you first tell me your definition of acceptance and commitment therapy. In case we have a handful of new listeners, you know, we do cover a lot of act topics on psychologists, off the clock. Why don't you define for us, the way you understand acceptance and commitment therapy, and then how can readers, with, or without an act background, Use the book, like how much foundational knowledge do they have to have in act to be able to just open up to, you know, section five micro skill two.

Matt Boone: okay. So. Acceptance and commitment therapy or act is a cognitive behavioral therapy that leans on the behavioral tradition and incorporates acceptance, mindfulness and values skills to help people stop focusing on kind of getting away from pain or, you know, talking [00:18:00] back to their negative thoughts and start focusing on living a meaningful life in every moment.

And it's kind of based on that kind of intuitive knowledge we have, that's also backed up by tons of science that if you try to push something away, it's likely to get stronger, especially if it's something salient to you. You know? So we all know that from experience because I'm in front of audiences all the time.

And I say, what do you think would happen if I asked you not to think of a white bear for the next minute? And everyone knows the answer. And yet the very first thing we go to. With our friends and ourselves and our loved ones. And even our clients is some version of don't feel what you're feeling or don't look at it the way that you're looking at it.

And so act takes that knowledge from science and also from our practical wisdom and says, well, what are we going to do instead? So let's learn to relate differently to what's there without trying to push it away. So a negative thought is just a thought and I could notice it, you know, [00:19:00] learn how it impacts my life and maybe rules my life at times.

And sidestep that's influence and there are a billion techniques to help you do that. And then, you know, if I, if I'm avoiding something that's meaningful to me, because I'm going to feel guilty because I haven't been doing it, which is often what happens with folks, then how can I help you experience guilt in a different way, in a lighter way, in a way that's not so entangled, but doesn't depend on guilt going away before you act. and then from that place where you not entangled in your mind, and you're not fighting your emotions, identify what you really care about and do things that follow that. That's the acceptance part and the commitment part of act

and

Jill Stoddard: I think that that's great. That's so helpful. And I think one of the things, you know, I've, I've known you for several years now and I've attended a couple of your trainings. and I think one of the things you're really skilled at is being able to break some of these concepts down, break all of these concepts down [00:20:00] into, I mean, again, digestible, you know, accessible.

Easy to understand and easy to apply ways. And the book certainly does that. And I know, I think you have an act one training coming up with Praxis, or maybe an online training with Praxis that you do. That's like an introduction to act for therapists. Is that right?

Matt Boone: Yeah, there's an on demand webinar through Praxis, continuing education and training. That is a, like a basics for brand new people, introduction to acceptance and commitment therapy. And it's sort of positioned as something you could go to if you've never been to a training before, or you need a refresher before you do some of the more advanced stuff.

And that's really where I've cut my teeth as a trainer is training people who are brand new.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. And, and I can speak to that. When I went to a boot camp, I saw you do kind of the introductory. Day and you are an excellent, excellent trainer. and I, I was so grateful to get that, to get that experience. I learned about training as much as I learned about act from watching you do that. so tell us, I, I cut in there without you letting you answer the [00:21:00] second part of that question in terms of can people who have lots of act experience, no act experience like public consumers, versus therapists what's the best way for people to use the book. And it's, like I said, is it possible to go to like section six, exercise three.

Matt Boone: yes, I think it's appropriate for anyone. It speaks to the human experience with an assumption that you don't know anything about act and that you don't even know much about psychology or behavioral principles, it's ideally consumed or to digest it consumed and digested by reading the introduction, which kind of frames, how to understand these micro skills that you're learning as ways to reduce the tendency to try to avoid the uncomfortable stuff.

that being said. You could probably just open it up and read the first chapter. That seems interesting to you and get something from it, for sure. so it has like two purposes, like, you know, it's positioned as a self-help book for the public. Which is the best way to market a book like this, [00:22:00] but, you know, I'm always thinking about training therapists.

And so I also think this is a good way for therapists to learn, you know, in conjunction with other core texts in the act cannon. It's also, if you need homework to assign to your clients and you're not doing act and kind of a protocol kind of way where you've got like session one involves one thing and session two involves another thing.

This is the kind of book that you could just say, well, Now that we've talked about, like how to treat your thoughts as workable or not workable useful or not useful instead of true or not true, which is an act concept. Read this chapter about workability. And so then the client can just jump, jump right into there.

They've got a thousand words to read about it, to reinforce what they've already learned and then a little, we call it teeny tiny practice. Thanks Jen Gregg, for coming up with that, that is like an actual. Practice that they could do over the course of a week. And I've actually throughout the course of writing the book, I've been road testing, some of the chapters by sending them to folks.

We also like, I've always wanted thousand words to explain this concept about like, what is an emotion? Why do [00:23:00] we have it? And how do you just let yourself feel an emotion rather than do what we usually do, which is get entangled in it or fight it. So read these thousand words.

Jill Stoddard: . I think it's so useful because in academia, I think you tend to find there's this. Culture of more words is somehow better and smarter. But culturally, I think we're finding ourselves at a time where even prior to the pandemic, we're recording this during the pandemic, but even prior to the pandemic, our attention spans.

Have been shrinking, you know what, the last 10 to 20 years of technological advances, I mean, I don't know about you, but I have a hard time sitting at a red light without thinking about whether I have a text message on my phone and I never used to be that way.

And so I think that you guys did a really good job of describing the act processes and concepts thoroughly. Like it's not that you cut corners and didn't say things you [00:24:00] needed to say. You said all the things that needed to be said in as few words as were needed, to be able to say them.

And, and I think people are gonna find that that's so useful because now, especially in the pandemic where everyone's bandwidth is like, Non-existent I think we need that more than ever. I think we need these bite-sized practices that we can just actively apply without having to use a ton of brain power to do it.

Like we just don't have the cognitive capacity for that right now. So it's, I, I don't think that that was your intention, but I think the book is very timely in that way.

Matt Boone: well, yeah. And as a person who loves words, you know, I was an English major. My wife is an English professor. We have more books than we can count or keep track of. I resisted I, yes, I resisted the blog suffocation of like, of everything for a long time, until I was charged with. Curating a blog and editing it. [00:25:00]

And then I realized that, wow, you know, the perspective that ACT comes from that really resonates with me as this very pragmatic perspective. You know, we could get really nerdy, but there's something embedded in act, which is like, what works for a given goal is really important. So it's not important, whether a thought is true or not like I'm a bad person.

We could fight that all day. But you know, that's an old learned behavior. That's probably going to show up in certain contexts. So let's ask a different question. Does this work and listening to it and following where it leads in your behavior, does that work for you? And so I had to actually, you know, give myself a talking to and say, does all those words make the difference that you hope that they make?

Or when you look at the world, you see how people are consuming media and consuming ideas. If they'd never read past, you know, the 500th word, it doesn't matter how great your writing is. So I kind of came around to that idea and started thinking, how could I distill or help the writers I work with distill or learn from them to see how they [00:26:00] distill like these concepts into really, easy to use kinds of, resources.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. And I also think it makes it more memorable. my dad, who I somehow managed to weave into every single episode, I have not on purpose. but many years ago, my dad had my dad's a businessman and an entrepreneur, and he used to have people come to him all the time to ask advice if they wanted to start a business, et cetera.

So he thought, you know, I'm saying the same thing to people over and over and over. I should put it down, write it down in a book. And his idea was basically your book for business. It was short bite-sized chapters with applicable advice, but he was ahead of his time in the idea. And he went to a publisher and they said, Nope, you know, every chapter has to be 30 pages or whatever it was.

And he said, no, that's not the book I want to write. So I'll just publish it myself. And, you know, there's quite a few typos in there. If you read it, you can kind of tell that it, it wasn't. It wasn't self-published by a very reputable self publishing company. Of course, [00:27:00] self publishing has also evolved a lot since that time, too.

But the reason I bring it up is I too have read many books in my time. I cannot tell you probably a single thing I learned in a gigantic fat textbook. But I could right now rattle off six things. I learned about business from reading my dad's book that I continue to think about and use and advise other people who now ask me about business constantly.

And so, you know, I think this really speaks to this idea of workability is like, if, what, the goal here is, is changing people's lives for the better, in the most effective way possible. How do we do that? And you know, another part of act is dropping rule, governed behavior. And I feel like there are rules that you come across in publishing and marketing and business, and, you know, in these kinds of things, and in some ways you've broken some of those rules.

With this [00:28:00] book. And I think it's a perfect example where breaking rules to make something be more workable and actually hopefully achieve the goal that it sets out to achieve is, is happening here.

I am so excited to announce that the co-hosts of psychologists off the clock are hosting our first annual psychologists off the clock wise minds summit, how to adapt and thrive in today's challenging times. we have an amazing.

Lineup of speakers. We have Dr. Rick Hanson coming to talk about growing the good in your brain. Dr. Raphael Palayo is coming back . To answer our questions about how to sleep. We have Julie Lythcott-Haims who wrote how to be an adult. Who's coming to talk to us about empowering our kids in challenging times and JG harbinger from the art of charm podcast.

Who's going to talk to us about conversations that connect and many, many more including presentations from all four of the POTC co-hosts. Our summit takes [00:29:00] place on Friday, January 29th and Saturday, January 30th. The first 300 registrants will be able to register for free and we'll continue to release free tickets as we get donations and additional sponsors.

And after that, tickets will only be \$8 just to cover administrative fees. So we hope you will join us. We're really excited. You can check it out on our website at offtheclockpsych.com.

So let's talk about a few of

these skills. Okay. So the book has, six different parts and there's about three to six microskills in each one.

and I think the six parts are the six. Do they align with the act hexaflex?

Matt Boone: they almost do, but not quite.

Jill Stoddard: I have it in front of me. You might, you can hear some flipping pages if I look at it, but, okay. Let's see. So we've got building awareness, acceptance, dealing with your thoughts. they [00:30:00] almost do.

So will you just share with us maybe like one or two or three? Of course people are going to have to buy the book if they want to get all the juicy, like 30, some odd microskills, but, will you share with us a couple of your favorites

and then people can walk away from the episode and actually like have something that maybe they can try to make their lives better.

Matt Boone: sure I'll start with the introduction because I actually think that's the most important part of the book. I got to give credit to my coauthor Lisa Coyne. We wanted to help people understand. Negative reinforcement, right? When you take something painful away, a behavior gets stronger. Right? And that's what procrastination is.

What you're taking away is the discomfort of the guilt and the anxiety and the self-criticism and all that stuff. When you're trying to stay away from something that's hard. And then the behavior staying away from something that's hard, it gets stronger. Not to mention the fact that you were reinforced by the awesome, like smartphone that you're looking at.

[00:31:00] Right. And that's embedded in this idea of experiential avoidance, right? In ACT we avoid and control unnecessarily thoughts, feelings, sensations in a way that gets in the way of our life. But it's like, that's some nerdy stuff and I'm not going to use the word operant conditioning or positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement in a self-help book.

yes. And Lisa came up with you. Do you get. So all behavior has a small payoff or reward to it, whether you know it or not, and avoidance always has a reward. And so let's get, in tune

with what are the rewards to your avoidance? What do you get to stay away from that would be otherwise uncomfortable to have.

By your avoiding, whether it's just like , procrastinating on an assignment or something really big, like moving into a new career, starting a business, you know, breaking up with your partner, you know, all of the big things that we might put off.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. I like to, when I do talks or even with patients, or I think this is in my book, be mighty. I [00:32:00] say it works or we wouldn't do it. And at first people are like, what do you mean? It works? It doesn't work. It's bad. You know, everyone knows intellectually procrastination is quote unquote bad, but it works or you wouldn't do it.

You get something out of it or you wouldn't do it.

I think that's really important to set the stage with that, because otherwise, you know, that self-criticism comes up. That lazy word you brought up in the beginning of the episode is like, you're not doing this because you're, you're lazy it works or you wouldn't do it.

We

do. We get.

Matt Boone: And it's so non-stigmatizing because, is, you can really make a very clear and cogent argument that this is built into us, that like our ancestors had to stay away from what was uncomfortable in order to survive and propagate the species and all the other things that they needed to do. But now we still have that capacity and we have all these lovely, rich kind of more pleasurable things we could be doing.

Like. Doing nothing or looking at a [00:33:00] smartphone or lying in bed all day. And so it's really easy to get into these cul-de-sacs of behavior where we're doing the thing. That's a little bit easier because it feels better. And then we have a whole culture that reinforces that with kind of a feel good culture.

so I just love that intro because I think that that is a microdot awareness of how avoidance takes you away from pain. It's like one of the most important skills people can learn and it's certainly embedded in the act model for sure, but also in lots of other therapeutic models. Um, so that would be my number one.

Jill Stoddard: Well, let me ask you a question. So how do you have a specific way that you recommend people do that? So people who don't have a background in behavioral theory or act like if, if I'm listening to this for the first time and I think, Oh yeah, I guess I see how, when I procrastinate, like when I give myself permission to put off a task, I don't want to do I get some relief.

I see that now, how do I figure out what. What else I'm doing? Like how, how can I get more insightful about the ways that I'm [00:34:00] avoiding, where I might be getting something out of that and like, how do I know which of my behavior like we do, we get, sometimes I do something and I get something good. And that's not a bad thing.

Like I go to yoga and I feel more relaxed and it's good for my body, but I procrastinate or I smoked cigarettes and I still get something out of that, but it has a cost in the end. So is there a way that you specifically recommend people kind of, get more clear on that in their own lives?

Matt Boone: well, yeah, there's not one way and there's not a perfect way. Right? So one of the ways, reasons I resist the blog suffocation of the world is that every blog ends with five tips for, you know, making behavior change sounds really easy. And I don't think behavior change is very easy or there wouldn't be a bazillion self-help books.

And I wouldn't have a job nor would you, right. We'd all be taking care of behavior with no problem, but, you know, What I recommend to most folks is some [00:35:00] version of what our first micro-skill is, which is, getting curious about the world. Like, just start by opening your eyes in some way. So for some clients, for example, in my office, I've done this a couple of times this week.

Cause it's the end of the semester. I'm just meeting people. For one shot before they go away for the holidays. And I'll say, let me introduce you to an important behavioral principle when we're not doing what we care about. It's because it's uncomfortable. And if you can be with the discomfort for awhile, it will probably a shift and change.

It will come back and go away. But see what happens when you just be with the discomfort for a while and don't wait until it goes away and see if that changes your behavior and like, This is totally not scientific, but about 50% of people who, I just say that to come back and say, wow, that made a big difference.

It never occurred to me.

Jill Stoddard: that surprises me. It's such a regular part of my world and lexicon. I think it doesn't occur to me that that's new information to a lot of people probably.

Matt Boone: and, you know, it's new information to some very smart people. My, [00:36:00] my clients right now are medical students, nursing students, PA students, public health PhDs. These are some smart cookies, right? They know more about things that I will never know about. And, but they've been focusing elsewhere, which I think is the case for most of us.

Most of us are not like looking at human behavior all day long. and so this is the one principle I want to teach to everyone the minute they walk into my office. And then to get your question just a little more, get curious. So get curious, could be just simply now I have this knowledge in my mind and I'm going to start paying attention, but, you know, we both know, and probably people listening know that that doesn't always change behavior.

So I'm often recommending that people will do something that like helps them put structure around their curiosity. Like once a day, Sit down for five minutes and, you know, Mark, all the things that you did that were about staying away from something uncomfortable, you know, some kind of tracking, I think this is why in the CBT and act and DBT world and many other therapies.

There's [00:37:00] just a lot of worksheets. You know, when I got into this field, I cringed a lot at worksheets,

Jill Stoddard: Well, awareness is not sufficient, but it's necessary. You know, I always think of the example. I'm not a regular nail biter, but I will literally look down at my hand sometimes and go, Oh, My nails are gone. Like when did that happen? Right. So if that's a behavior that I ever want to change, I can't do anything until I increase my awareness of when I'm doing that, you know, but it's such a, it's a habit that's so far out of my awareness.

It's impossible to change. So, you know, I think that's a really, it is a necessary first step for anything then to happen after the fact.

Matt Boone: Yeah. So the first couple of chapters are all kind of based in mindfulness, but taking mindfulness out of the realm of meditation practices, which, you know, I'm all for, I'm a regular meditator myself, but it's hard to sell to all of humanity. It's helpful to say mindfulness is just a quality of paying attention.

So [00:38:00] let's practice paying attention to things. And then we get to some like formal mindfulness practices a little bit later, and other chapters I really like are chapters that are like, how did just notice what you're feeling. You know, you'll ask someone, what do you feel? And they're like, well, my boss is really a jerk and I, and I got up this morning just dreading work.

And then they tell you a story. And so, I love to say. An emotion. This is not perfectly scientific, but this is one way to think of it. And emotion has three parts. There are the sensations you feel the urge is you experienced and the thoughts you have. So what about just stopping and breaking it down into those three components and observing that and describing that without getting into the stories and.

This is so different from the way most of us relate to our emotions. People say I'm feeling my feelings cause they talked for 60 minutes in a S in a therapy session, but they really told you a lot of narrative, which might be useful, but sometimes they'll get you closer to feeling what you're feeling or even knowing what you're feeling.

those are the [00:39:00] chapters I've been sending to my clients lately, because it's just helpful for the therapy in any therapeutic model, right. How to feel your feelings. It's also a good strategy for therapists to do in their offices with clients like pause name, describe don't get into too many details.

Jill Stoddard: . I think we skip that part a lot of times. You know, kind of jump right to the willingness practice before we do the let's make sure you're even aware of what's happening in your body and what an emotion is.

Matt Boone: And this awareness is actually kind of beginning to shape the process of willingness, like often what I'll do with the client in my office. I'll just say, would you like to

do something different with this? Would you be willing? And then we'll just do this observing and describing and I'll stretch it out.

I'm like, I'm any other sense that, you know, I'll make it really long. And then afterwards I'll be like, Okay. So that was shame. How often do you spend that much time with shame and there'll be like never, I was like, [00:40:00] and what happened? Well, it was interesting. I, you know, they noticed their curiosity. They noticed it didn't kill them.

They, you know, it's like a little bit of exposure, right? Exposure in the guise of just, you know, education about emotions.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. One of the things that I love to do that I find really effective is having people, just switch up a routine of some kind. So let's say for example, you shave, you sh if you're a man and you shave your face or a woman and you shave your legs. Okay. You have a routine way of doing that, right?

There's a, there's a set order of steps that you take and you probably do it with your right hand and you have a ritualistic way of doing these kinds of things. And you could pick anything that we do reg with regularity. And so what I'll say is if you normally sh I'll take a woman who shaves their legs, if you normally shave your right leg first, and you start in the front of your leg and you go in order from left to, right, I want you to start in the back of your leg, then go to the front.

Flipper, you know, go in all different, then, then do part of your left [00:41:00] leg, then go back to your right leg. And a couple things happen is first of all, it forces awareness because you have to pay attention because you're doing it differently. It kicks you right out of autopilot, but it does it in a way that's fun and playful and not intimidating for someone who's first learning how to do this, rather than saying, you know, next time you feel.

guilt, you know, make space for it. You know, it's a way to kind of build this, like both the awareness and the willingness muscle. and then it's, now that you're noticing this experience, notice everything that shows up because it feels weird and wrong and awkward, and most importantly, notice the urge to switch back to the way you normally do it.

Because it's that urge that happens like right before we kind of react in a habitual typically avoidant sort of way. And if you can notice that urge and really be with that and let yourself keep moving forward with [00:42:00] this thing, that just kind of feels weird. Then you can start to build that muscle. And it's kind of a two for one, it's like the awareness and the willingness.

At the same time. Now there's no values built in there, but it's just practice so that you can start to let this stuff generalize into some of the other areas

Matt Boone: I am stealing that. Jill, I'm gonna, I'm gonna pull that one out in my next session with a client. I love that. That's beautiful.

Jill Stoddard: Well, and you can also do it in session. Like actually, what let's do this on the air right now with listeners. Cause everybody can do something, right? So like right now, you

and I have headphones in so we could switch our headphones to the wrong ears. What I often do in a webinar is I take my eye glasses.

I wear glasses and I put them upside down. So now not only do they feel bad on my face, but I also can't see very well because my prescription, Oh, there. Okay. Matt and I, I'm going to have to take a screenshot of this for sure. Okay. All right. He and I are both sitting here [00:43:00] with our glasses on upside down.

And so for you guys listening, you can put your watch on your wrong hand. You can pull your socks underneath your foot so that they're like halfway on your foot. , what else could people do? You could like put your hair in a weird barrette type thing, anything that makes you feel weird?

That isn't what you normally do. And then just notice like Matt, I'm sure you're noticing discomfort around your glasses, both in terms of your vision and the feeling on your face. And there's that urge like, Oh, I just want to put him back. And I know that as soon as I put them back, I'll be able to see normally, and I'll get this big rush of relief and like, can we sit here and let there be space for all of that?

Matt Boone: That's so amazing. I could see how you could easily tie it to, like, I can imagine saying to a client and this very behavior that you're doing right now, sitting with your glasses on your face, upside down as silly as it seems is [00:44:00] exactly the behavior we're going to work to build up to when you feel like bingeing.

And having that like uncomfortable urge to not, to not binge, which you know, is probably connected to your values and probably better for you, but like, you don't have a lot of practice. It's sitting with this uncomfortable thing.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. Yeah. Cool. All right. We can put our glasses back. So hopefully people tried that out. The other way. I like to do it as with, what are they called? Bean Boozle jelly beans, which, or Harry Potter, bertie's bots, jelly beans. They're jelly beans that have flavors like stinky socks and vomit. And so you get a white one and you don't know if it's going to be coconut or spoiled milk.

And you can do willingness prep, awareness, and willingness practice, like notice, curiosity, or dread, and then eat it. I have a YouTube video of my kids and I doing this together. Actually. That's pretty funny, especially when my six year old boy finds out that, I don't know if I got this one [00:45:00] that one of the flavors is booger and he says, Ooh, I would like that flavor.

Matt Boone: I surely appreciate that that's online when he's like 25.

Jill Stoddard: Right. I know it's memorialized forever out there in YouTube world. and, and so I think it is, it's like these small, easy to practice and apply practices that people can do in this kind of like you. And I just did that exercise and it's pretty powerful inside of like 30 seconds. And, you know, the book is filled with all sorts of that, you know?

Like I said six parts with three to six of these kinds of, of exercises throughout. I'm curious. So, you know, I personally, the reason that I feel really passionate about act and have like made it my mission to try to share it with as many people as possible through podcasts and writing and, and whatnot.

In addition to the therapy room. But not everybody has the resources or desire for therapy. So, you [00:46:00] know, I think a lot of us share that mission of, like you said, blogging, you know, trying to get the word out about these incredibly powerful skills to as many people as possible. And so for me, part of that mission comes from a place of living this in my own life and absolutely.

Crediting act with having a life that I love and it is not pain-free. And in fact, I would say that I am more anxious today than I've ever been in my life, but the reason is because I go for stuff that I want to do that I otherwise would have liked. Dove for the comfort zone, because it felt so scary and so vulnerable.

And so I'm curious if it's the same for you. Like how did you come to act and what role does it play in your life personally?

Matt Boone: So what drew me to act with some of the lessons I learned in my twenties before I knew what act was, [00:47:00] I was an aspiring professional musician. I'm a guitar player, songwriter singer. and at some point I just started having chronic pain in both of my hands. that prevented me from handwriting, typing, lifting anything.

And no one could figure out what it was. And yeah, no spoiler it's been 27 years and still, no one knows what it is. So I'd been living with chronic pain in my hands, my arms, for a long time. And it was the most derailing thing that I've ever experienced in my life before, since, because think about like how essential your hands are to you.

And I was at this time, an undergraduate in college. and so writing, I was an English major writing papers, taking notes, my whole life and chronic pain. [00:48:00] Wasn't really a term of art so much back then. And certainly not among people who are 22 years old. and I was going to lots of doctors and not finding the answer and, I saw a therapist who introduced me to mindfulness and acceptance.

Basically, I think his background was in 12 step and he was also an avid meditator and he taught me to meditate and he taught me to really just experience what I was experiencing rather than try to fight it with all of the things I was doing, which was mostly just worrying. You know, interestingly, I like to point this out to everybody.

Worrying is also avoidance it's like keeps you away from your experience, keeps you away from more painful thoughts. It keeps you away from doing stuff. So I would just be in my head all day long worrying, understandably about like, what the heck was I going to do with my life and what was wrong with me?

and that was such a powerful experience to discover that like I could just experience the pain as a sensation. And not as a [00:49:00] sensation plus the whole narrative I had about it

and all the worries and that, that gave me some freedom and how it actually helped me be more courageous because it wasn't so scary to have the pain.

[audio_only_16778242_Jill_Stoddard-4](#): Hmm.

Matt Boone: And because of that experience with that therapist, I became a therapist. There was also this like practical, like what can you do with your life? If your hands hurt, you could talk for a living.

yeah. And so when I got into the field, I really wanted to offer people these same lessons, but I didn't really have a methodology for it.

I couldn't get everyone to meditate. I didn't really know how to talk about acceptance really well in a way that actually changed behavior rather than just talk about acceptance, which is what most of us do. and I was curious about like, Mindfulness-based stress reduction and dialectical behavior therapy.

But when I stumbled into act, I thought, Oh my gosh, this is exactly what I've been trying to do with clients, but it's connected to science. it has a really well-developed theoretical model and have like a hundred interventions I could draw from. And I could develop my own interventions from this model because it's a very flexible model.

That's [00:50:00] about the process of change rather than the specific technique that you used. And so it just became my kind of whole, My whole kind of professional focus once I got into it. but you know, I still continue to apply these principles in my life. And it's like, I'm still a work in progress. Like you described yourself as being more anxious today than, than other times in your life, you know, like I've discovered life continues to be hard, you know, and that you kind of learn these lessons.

In different ways in different contexts over the course of your life. So for example, what I learned in my twenties was to act boldly and think about the consequences to my body later. Right. And that was great. Cause I often discovered the things didn't bother my body as much as I thought they would, or that if I had pain, it wouldn't be.

It wouldn't last as long as I thought, or they could do more than I thought I could. That was such an incredible lesson for me. And like just boldly saying, I'm going to [00:51:00] do this first and then worry about the consequences later. I mean, I did talk to my doctor and say, well, I destroy myself if I incur pain.

Like, I don't think so. but you know, in my forties, I noticed that that became a rigid behavior that was insensitive to the consequences that were not so great because my body changed that my eye, I would experience more pain in those situations that I would, that I actually had to take care of myself in a different way.

And that's that kind of rule governed behavior. You talked about, like, I took my value, which was like live boldly and it became so rigid. It wasn't sensitive to the consequences and I realized, Oh, wow. I need to like get up from the computer every 20 minutes. I need to take big breaks at the end of the day and not work 80 hours a week and all these kinds of things

that I wasn't paying attention to because I was inhabiting this idea of living boldly, which is like a beautiful kind of act way of thinking in the world.

But now I have to boldly take a break and boldly say no to things and, you know, boldly focus on [00:52:00] other parts of my life. And that is a whole new lesson. That's probably just as hard for me to learn as learning to be bold was in my twenties.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. Oh, that's so that's really cool. That's, that's so interesting. And, and how these things do shift over time and, and that what it requires to live boldly changes over time. And even if there are still like, Big bold things that are similar to what you did in your twenties, that in order to be able to say yes to those, you have to say, say no to some of these other things are that you have to practice self care, create some other scaffolding, to be able to do those things and really being sensitive to those changes over time.

I love that.

Well, Matt, this has absolutely flown by. I can't believe that we're already over our time together. Thank you so much for being here. I really want to encourage people to check out the book. I was thinking it, it reminds me a little, I, I coauthored the big book of act metaphors with Niloo [00:53:00] Afari, which is more, you know, metaphors and exercises for therapists to use in therapy.

And I think this book adds so much in that it can be used in that way and also for the public to get this book and use it on their own and for therapists, to give it to clients, to be able to use on their own. Like you said earlier as, as homework assignments, I mean, it's, it's so flexible and it's in its application and I just loved it.

Congratulations. I hope lots of people find their way to it because they think it's going to help a lot of people.

Matt Boone: Thank you, Jill, this has been a great pleasure.

Jill Stoddard: Tell me, where can people find you if they want to learn more about you and what you do? What's the best way to do that.

Matt Boone: they can find out more about me at @matthewsboon.com.

Jill Stoddard: an E.

Matt Boone: been with an a M a T T H E w S B O O N E N. That's my email address, but it's also my website. [00:54:00] So yes, just Google Matthew boon. And after you get a few, there's a cricketer in Australia and maybe a baseball player. I'm the, I'm the red guy

Jill Stoddard: you're the third Matthew

Matt Boone: yeah, clearly I haven't optimized my marketing potential here with my website, but yeah, you could find me, and you can find me on the new harbinger website to w next to the book there's links to our various, websites.

Jill Stoddard: Perfect. And we list everybody's books on our website and in our show notes. So if people want to come to off the clock, psych.com to find Matt and Lisa and Jen's book, they can do that too. So thanks Matt.

Matt Boone: you're welcome. And I'll say I actually am not averse to people reaching out to me. I love to hear from folks. So if you want an email, go ahead.

Jill Stoddard: Ooh, that's a, that's a good invitation take, take him up on that mats. Awesome. Talk to Matt. All right. Thanks Matt. Take care.

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