

ACT for young adults (16-28 year olds)
 - ACT used in group format as prevention or an early intervention aimed towards psychological ill-health and stress
 Fredrik Livheim
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 www.livskompass.se

Educational Objectives

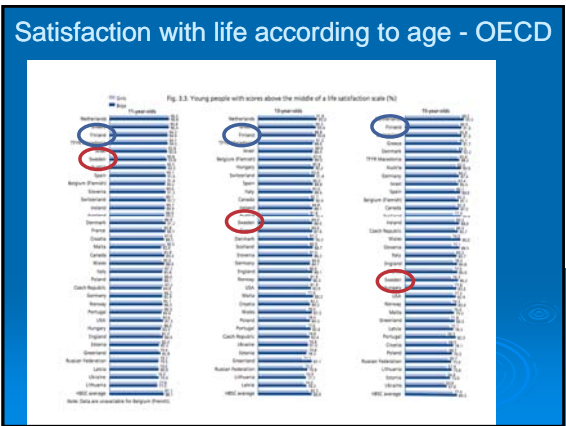
1. Learn how to apply an ACT-consistent group approach to presenting problems of diffuse mental health problems and stress.
2. Learn how to work with the "life-compass" as a tool for values clarification.
3. Learn exercises and metaphors that are easy to adopt and use in your own clinical work, either individually or in group settings.

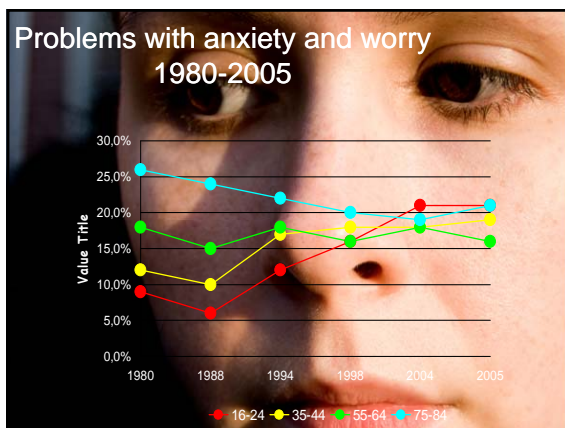
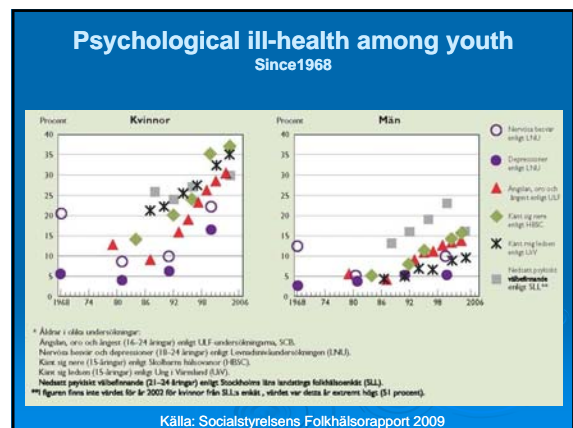
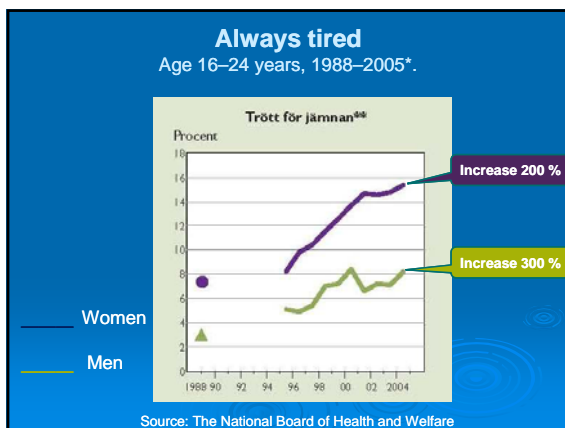
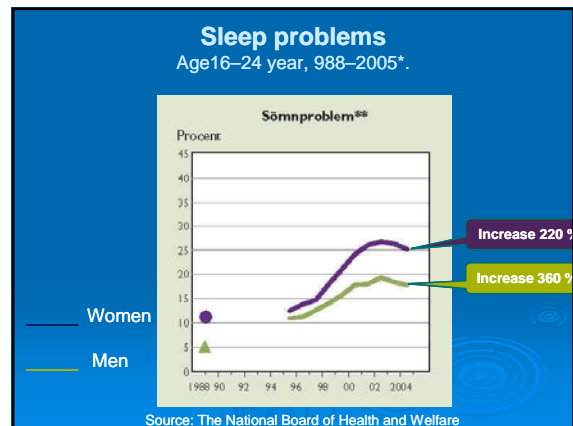
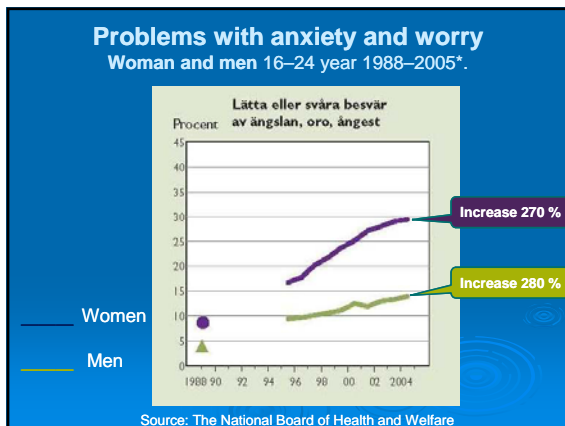
Overview

- **Why a course like this?**
 - Psychological health among young adults?
- **Does the intervention work?**
 - Summary of the research that is done
- **How spreading an ACT intervention in a large scale?**
- **What is the course about?**
 - Content of the course "ACT- To cope with stress and promote health"

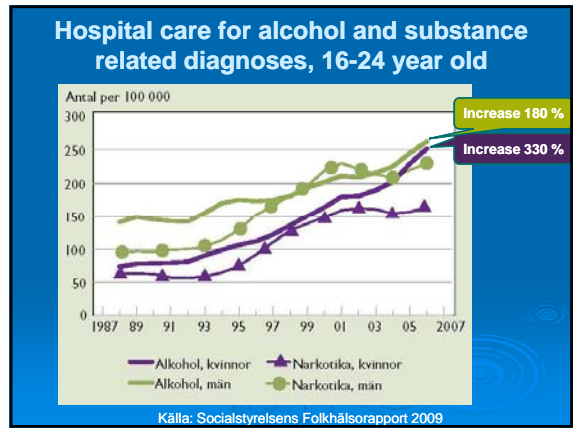
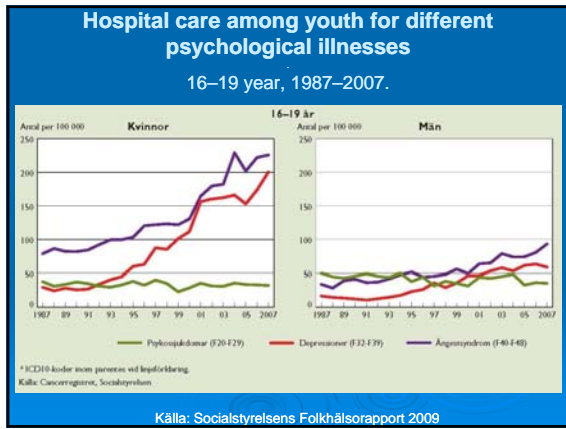
Why a course like this?
 Psychological health among young adults in Sweden?

The Swedish national Council of Health & The National Board of Health and Welfare





But these are "only" self reports!!!



What is the cause of those increases?

Why this course?

Young, healthy and depressed - a Swedish mystery

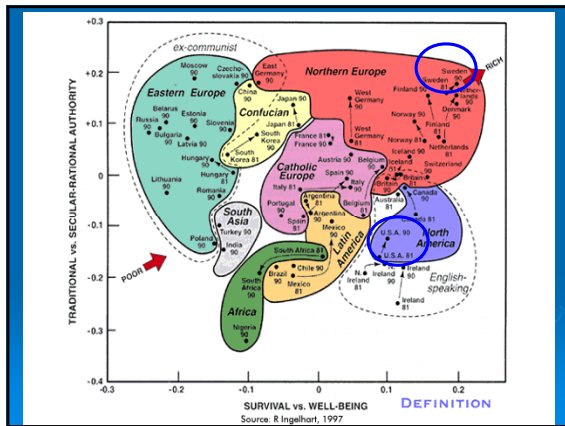
De unga hälsas inte utmärkt, men svenska barn och ungdomar skattar sin psykiska hälsa högt av alla skolelever i Norden och ligger i de många länder i Sverige och i andra delar av världen.

Why this course?

Zero tolerance towards suffering has its price

Barndomens Carl Lindgren och ungdomstidens Frank Lindgren kallas svenska sällna fågel. Först i sitt liv som författare och sedan som föreläsare och författare av böcker om psykisk ohälsa.

- ### The increase is mainly due to 4 causes:
- 1. Increased unemployment**
 - Political issue, but we can influence how to cope with unemployment. One study underway.
 - 2. "Individualization"**
 - More choices
 - Less acceptance for psychological suffering
 - This is what the course mainly addresses.
 - 3. More alcohol**
 - Working with through addressing experiential avoidance. Also working on a separate protocol.
 - 4. Less sleep**
 - Probably related to stress and lifestyle. We are addressing this.



But what if I make the wrong choice!?!

You always want to make the best choice when there is such great freedom

- The ability to handle this open situation does not seem to have developed in the same pace as new possibilities has been added.
- Bad things (i.e., violence, suppression) that earlier was considered "natural" are not accepted. This can lead to an experience of that problems are increasing although the "phenomenon" is not increasing.
- The attitude towards psychological problems can have been changed, meaning that acceptance for psychological problems can have decreased.

All those choices!

The stressreaction

Fight-flight reaction

Relocation of resources

Important for survival

Evolution in a new perspective
- We are facing new kind of threats

The mind is a don't-get-eaten machine, which is sometimes useful

Sometimes the don't-get-eaten machine is not as useful



Food for thought...

In our development we are in a head on collision with evolution, with language we can literally stress ourselves to death.

We need to learn strategies that are working so we can cope with how we are "languaging" with ourselves.

- Fredrik Livheim

How can I cope with my thinking so it does not stress me to death?



CD with 6 mindfulness exc. livheim@gmail.com

Why this treatment?

- Psychological ill-health has increased with 200-300% since the beginning of the 80s.
- The problem is well documented **BUT** very little research is done about what to do about it.

Summary of research on this ACT-format

Format of the intervention

- **What is this:**
A short ACT group intervention for psychological ill-health, stress, depression and substance abuse.
- **Format:**
4 sessions á 3 hours, total of 12 hours
- **Who gives it:**
Psychologists, School counselors, School nurses, Teachers, Medical doctors, Social workers

Summary of research on this format

➤ Summary

4 studies done, at least 5 new underway

➤ Done:

- RCT in school, 230 students ages 16-19. 2004 & 2006 (Livheim, Jakobsson & Wellin)
- RCT, ACT for stressed teachers 2007 (Altbo & Nordin)
- ACT for youth at a drug clinic and youth psych. 2008 (Stavenow)
- RCT for 106 social workers 2010 (Michanek & Brinkborg).

➤ **Underway:** 1. SNIPH replicates in schools. 2. Study at unemployment offices. 3. Study at drug clinic. 4. Study in institutional care. 5. In schools for "screened youth".

ACT for the Prevention of Stress and Anxiety in High School

- A Randomized Trial and One Year Follow Up

RCT in school, ages 16-19. 2004 & 2006 (Livheim, Jakobsson & Wellin)

- 230 students in two different secondary schools were randomized to either control- or ACT intervention group.
- 115 students got the ACT-course, 9 hrs (3 hrs x 3)
- The aim of the intervention was to increase the student's capability to cope with stress and to prevent psychological and physical illness

Did the ACT-intervention work?

- Results two weeks after intervention:
Significant decrease of anxiety and higher levels of functioning within biggest area of problem in life.
- 88% of the students were satisfied or very satisfied with the course.

Comments on post measure

➤ Boy 17 year Intervention group

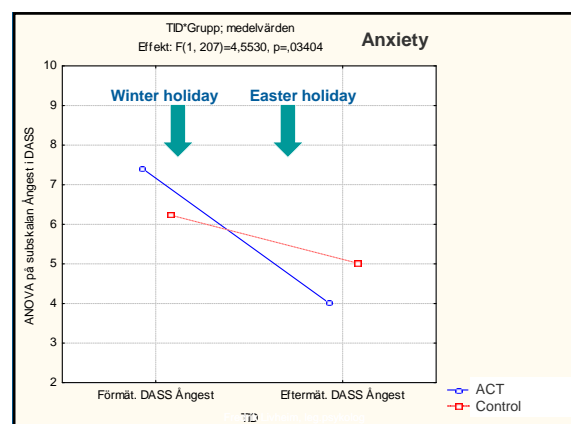
I really dig the CD hard. Thanks for it, it has helped me tremendously. This course has thanks to the exercises given me more insight about myself, my values. Almost like seeing myself from an another perspective. I have understood the meaning of being depressed, to fall into the vicious circle and how one can get out of it. Clean versus dirty discomfort: to understand that has given me greater self control.

➤ Boy 16 year Intervention group

Excellent and extremely interesting course. I wish more of the time in school was used to necessary courses like this. That would make going to school so much more exciting and interesting.

➤ Boy 16 year Intervention group

I opened up in the beginning, did the CD a couple of days, but oh no. I do not notice any results, and believe me, if I answer more positively on this questionnaire it is not due to the course. Constructive critic? Give up, give us pills against the stress!



Results one year after intervention

Interaction effects [group] x [time] in favour of the ACT-group. Results are based only on data from one school due to low return rates.

Significant interaction effects:

➤ Better general health

Measured by General Health Questionnaire (GHQ). Effect size , 0.14 Cohen's D

➤ Less stress

Measured by Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Effect size 0.16 Cohen's D

Interaction effect on trend level:

➤ Improved psychological flexibility

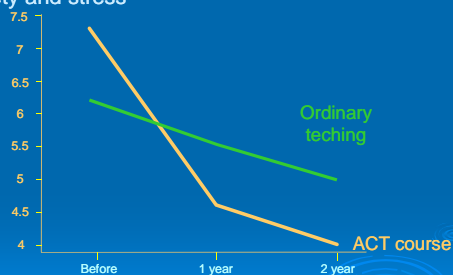
Measured by Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ 8)

Comments one year later

- **Boy 19 years Intervention group**
I have approximately as much to do now as when the course started, yet I feel less stressed now. I do not know if it is because I have taken part in this course or not, I believe mainly it depends on that I have started to accept things I cannot control over much more.
- **Girl 17 years Intervention group**
I have not used the CD, I don't seem to take me that time. But the course has made me realise that the world does not end if something takes too much time or if there is something I do not manage to finish. NO STRESS!
- **Boy 18 years Intervention group**
The CD is very good! I still use it. I have not become a bit better at doing homework, but due to the course I now I feel so much better. I do accept that I do not always manage everything, but do what I have time to. One thing at a time.
- **Girl 18 years Intervention group**
It has been a good and interesting experience! Still of immediate importance. I experience an improvement of myself.

Results two years after intervention

Anxiety and stress



Results two years after intervention

Interaction effects [group] x [time] in favour of the ACT-group.

Significant interaction effects:

- Less stress
- Less Anxiety
- Improved cognitive processing
- Improved general health
- Improved psychological flexibility.

Does the ACT-intervention work in clinical setting and with group leaders new to ACT?

ACT - To prevent stress and promote health *Psychological Treatment of Youth under Stressful Conditions* – A pilot evaluation of the impact of ACT in an adolescent group 2007 Emma Stavenow

Pre- post data in the ACT-group.

Significant effects:

- Higher experiences of subjective well-being
- Improved psychological flexibility
- Better general health
- Less stress
- Less depressive tendencies

ACT for social workers

- RCT by Brinkborg & Michanek 2009

106 social workers in the city of Stockholm

Randomization to our ACT-groups (n=70, totally 12 hrs) or waitlist (n=36).

Significant interaction effects:

- Less stress Cohens D: 0.72
- Less burnout Cohens D: 0.50
- Better general health Cohens D: 0.38
- What grade do you give the full course?
Average: 4.5 (1-5)

Two cool new studies...

1. ACT in group (12 hrs) versus SSRI in primary care
2. And ...

FORUM Partnerskapet för psykiatri ACT via Iphone, VIARY 



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How spreading an ACT intervention in a large scale?

What has been done so far?

- 150 group leaders are trained (until 2010)
- 6 new instructors are trained
- Manual and workmaterial is ready
- A homepage is existing
- 5 new RCTs are on their way
- Collaboration with school doctors and other

To become group leader

- Courses are given by Stockholm County Council and Karolinska institutet.
- 4 sessions á 6 hours (total of 24 hours)
- Group leaders are giving an own group while learning the method.
- Group leaders are leading groups two and two.
- Group leaders are recruiting groups themselves.
- Group leaders need written permission from their nearest boss.

To become group leader

Written questions on:

- Get out of your mind and into your life
- "ACT made simple"
- Film one of the sessions given.

To become group leader

The education is aimed at professionals wanting to hold courses for 16-28 year olds.

Possible group leaders include:

- Psychologists
- School counselors
- School nurses
- Teachers
- Medical doctors
- Social workers

Registration &

information: livheim@gmail.com

What is the course about?

- Content of the course "ACT- To cope with stress and promote health"

ACT – To cope with stress and promote health
Fredrik Livheim

www.livskompass.se

Some important ingredients in this treatment:

- Learn to cope with the stress that is inevitable in our lives
- Normalizing of the fact that life hurts (parts of the time).
- Investigate into how we want our lives to be
- How can we deal with obstacles so that we can create the lives we want to live?

Session 1

– About stress, language and acceptance



This weeks thought

"Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced"

- Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)



Participant and group leader

Overview for the course

- How has that worked for you?
- Don't believe a word we are saying!
- What does your experience tell you? Your experience is your guide. Try and investigate.
- Give yourself one month and try this full out (that is a small part of your life that can change a lot).



CD with 6 exercises

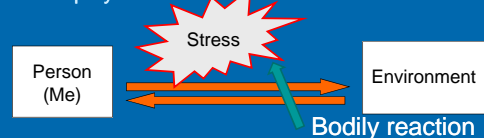
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Session 1

- Frames (secrecy, content etc)
- What is stress?
- Shall I change or accept?
Break
- Avoiding thoughts and emotions
- Thinking can produce suffering
- Mindfulness
- Practice at home

What is stress?

Stress is a bodily reaction that comes up in the interplay between people and environment



Stress

"- This is too much! I am not coping! I will not make it!!!"

(My experience is that the environment puts more pressure on me than I can manage to meet up to)

What can cause stress?

- an exercise

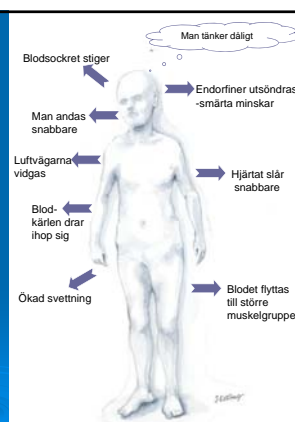
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The stressreaction

Fight -flight reaction

Relocation of resources

Important
for survival



The brain is not always our friend

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Our brain is a:
"do not get killed machine"
developed in a world full of dangers



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Have you ever been stressed?

- What happens in the body?
- Thinking?
- Mood?
- Behavior (things we do)?

Signs of stress

Signs of stress

➤ Physical signs:

- ☞ Problems with sleep
- ☞ Headache
- ☞ Pain in stomach
- ☞ Racing heart
- ☞ Tensions in the body
- ☞ Ache and pain
- ☞ Dry mouth
- ☞ Impotency/no lust for sex

Signs of stress

➤ Mood:

- ☞ Irritation
- ☞ Feeling exhausted
- ☞ Cry attacks
- ☞ Lack of emotions

Signs of stress

➤ Thinking:

- ☞ Confused
- ☞ "Brings school home"
- ☞ Difficulties to prioritize
- ☞ Problems with concentrating
- ☞ Forgetful
- ☞ "Tunnel vision"
- ☞ Don't see possibilities

When we are distressed, we tend to narrow our focus and see fewer of the alternatives. Life is a banquet, but sometimes we only see a single bowl of cold porridge.



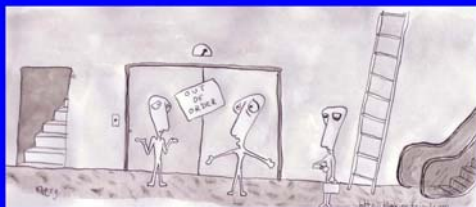
Signs of stress

➤ Things that one do:

- ☞ Eats much more or much less
- ☞ Use of alcohol or drugs to numb oneself

"Now, what are we going to do? "

When we are not in the moment, we miss opportunities to discover what works.



Two ways of handling stress

To oversimplify, there are two ways:

- 1. Remove the cause of the stress

- It is good and reasonable to change bad conditions! And it can also be difficult to live the life we want to live without being exposed to stress. When working or studying it is difficult to completely avoid

- 2. Change the interpretation of stress

- That is to find good ways to relate to stress. Work with our capability to manage the demands we are faced with.

School and work are two big areas where people gets stressed.

What is effective for stress?

1. Change or get rid of things that stresses you

2. Accept what we cannot change or get rid of

3. Restoration, including sleep

4. Exercise

5. Mindfulness,

being here and now, and relate wisely to difficulties

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What is effective for stress?

1. Change or get rid of things that stresses you

Things we can, and maybe should change?

- Workload
- Getting organized (calendar, asking for schedules etc)
- Relations

Do you have suggestions about things you should change?

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What is effective for stress?

1. Change or get rid of things that stresses you

2. Accept what we cannot change or get rid of

3. Restoration, including sleep

4. Exercise

5. Mindfulness,

being here and now, and relate wisely to difficulties

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S:T Franciskus prayer

God, give me the strength to accept what I cannot change, courage to change what I can change.

And the wisdom to know the difference.

What we usually needs to accept

- That we will die
- Time – The present, our history and our future
- The body - functions, pain, illness
- Looks
- Thoughts, images and dreams
- That we have to act
- Emotions - negative and positive
- Other people

What we usually needs to accept

- Crises and other difficult circumstances
- Mundane days
- Night and sleeplessness
- Being tired
- Sexual orientation
- Unability to accept

The brain is not always our friend

Our brain is a "Don't-get-eaten-machine"

- We have gotten this far thanks to our brain and logic...
- The brain is good at dangers and sudden threats...
- When we lived in caves...
- Modern man has existed for 35 000 years...
- The fight-flight mechanism...
- Sadly the body reacts in the same way confronted with a lion as stress associated with an exam (or other psychological stress).

The difference between inner and outer problems

➤ Outer problems:

"If there is something you do not like, figure out a way to get rid of it and get rid of it"

➤ Inner problems:

"If you are not willing to have the thoughts and emotions, then you are stuck with them"

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Inner problems:

"If you are not willing to have the thoughts and emotions, then you are stuck with them"

Why is that so?

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The best lie detector in the world



Do not think...

... at the numbers:

1
4
7

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Even beautiful experiences can evoke pain

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Some people are so stupid to have anxiety. That is clever

Natural pain or unnecessary pain?

Natural pain, natural discomfort:

- Are we going to have during our lives.
- Varies in intensity.
- It is natural that life hurts parts of the time.

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Unnecessary pain, unnecessary discomfort

- Comes when we do not want to experience the natural pain, then we add "unnecessary pain".
- Through acting wisely on "natural pain", we can avoid creating more pain for ourselves. For instance not be so stressed over being stressed.
- Remember the example of the broken arm. The arm is broken (natural pain) and how I react upon this can cause more (unnecessary) pain. .

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Negative emotions and thoughts are like bees without stingers. They seem scary. Do you really have to run from them?



Acceptance and willingness as an alternative

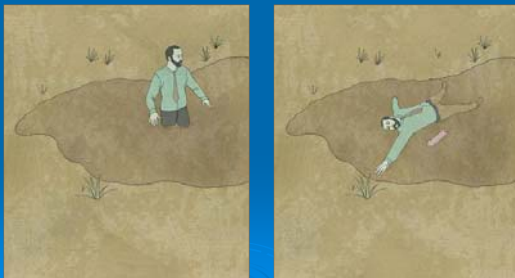
- An exercise

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Five animals

1. The deer
2. The bear
3. The monkey
4. The crane
5. The eagle

To fall into quicksand



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Why can it be hard to accept?

- Most of the time we can control outer problems, so we use the same strategy on inner problems.
- Control sometimes work in the short run.
- Happiness = absence of pain (the medical model)

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The "medical model"...

A very tragical misunderstanding within psychology?



Swedish doctors:

**CURE
YOUR
WORRY
AND
ANXIETY**

new method this summer

About life



x

Session 2 – Your life compass

- The cool and important stuff that really matters in life



How much have you practiced?

1. Mindfulness **Max 8 + 5 points**

a) Exercise 1 or 2 at least 4 times/week
Max 8 points (4 poäng/vecka)

b) Extremely present in an everyday activity.
Max 5 points (om minst fem dagar/vecka, 4p om fyra dagar/v o s v)

2. Acceptance **Max 4 points**

What happens when you accept? When you struggle?
Max 4 points (2 poäng/vecka)

3. Change **Max 4 points**

Have you made a change? Workload? Overview? Relations?
Max 4 points (bedöm själv vilken poäng du ger dig, 4 = stora förändringar)

4. Exercise **Max 4 points**

At least a 30 minutes fast walk twice a week.
Max 4 poäng (två poäng/vecka)

Total max 25 p 4

Övat hemma

Namn	CD (max 8 p)	Presence (max 5 p)	Acceptance (max 4 p)	Change (max 4 p)	Exercise (max 4 p)	Total (max 25 p)
Hanna M	1	5	2	1	4	13
Julian S	3	5	2	2	4	16
Carolina J	7	5	4	0	4	20
Ola S	1	3	2	1	4	11
Emelle H	4	5	4	3	4	20
Marianne K	3	3	4	2	4	16
Bela H	3	2	4	3	4	16
Sofie M	4	5	2	4	4	19
Birgitta T	4	4	2	2	4	16
Niklas W	4	5	4	0	4	17
Jan N	2	5	2	4	2	16
Tove A	2	4	4	2	4	16
Marica L	6	5	4	0	4	19
Åsa Sjöwall	4	4	2	2	4	16

5:1

The life compass

Goals and meaning in life...



Relations

(partners, family, friends, parenthood)

Breaking down values into action, an example:

Value	Action	Hindrance
Friends Have many friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call Linda and ask about taking a coffee - Ask Peter in my course if we shall study together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'll be too nervous • They don't want to be w. me • I'll seem desperate • I am boring to be with



Relations

Different ways to deal with hindrances:

1. Compromise with thoughts
2. Persuade thoughts
3. Accept thoughts
4. Accept thoughts and take action

It seems like your negative thoughts stand in the way, stoping you from going in your valued direction

But really, those negative thoughts are just along for the ride. They show up. They say turn right, turn right. But you can still choose to turn left.

Take your difficult thoughts and feeling in a firm grip and walk towards what you think is important.



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"but" or "and"?



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To go towards what I think is important



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Session 3 – Hindrances and flexibility



Which passenger is telling you what to do now?

Session 3

- Repetition of session 1 and 2
 - Follow up of practice at home
 - Introduction to session 3
- Pause*
- Psychological flexibility
 - How we are valuing and judging by using language
 - Landing in our observing selves
- Pause*
- Practice at home
 - Short repetition

This weeks thought

"Even the person that does not dare to live dies one day"

- Thomas DiLeva

I am scared of hights!



"To dare is to loose foothold for a while.
To not dare is to loose oneself"
- Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

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What is most important?
- The goal or the road there?



A definition of mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way:

on purpose,

in the present moment

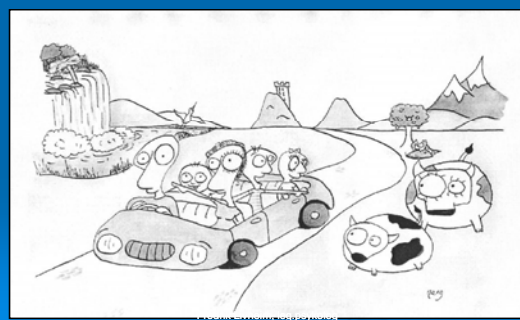
and nonjudgmentally

- JON KABAT-ZINN

- Are we there soon?!?

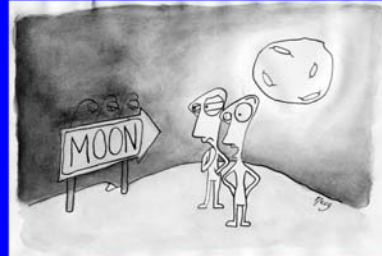


Mindfulness



An object you never have seen before!

"The moon is looking pretty black today."



Why mindfulness?



Regular training has according to research many good effects, among other:

- Lessens stress
- Can prevent depression or relapse in depression
- Lessen anxiety, stress and gives better thinking.
- Increases the body's immune defense and ability to self heal.
- Gives better sleep
- One gets better at handling pain.
- One gets more clever
- We become more free to choose how we want to live life. We can learn to feel feelings, see thoughts for what they are AND choose how we want to ACT upon them. Thus we can create the lives we want to live.

Defusion from language

Differences between

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| ➤ Actual properties: | ➤ Valuing/judging
(about the actual properties) |
| - This is a plastic pen | - This pen is ugly |
| - The door is rectangular | - The door is bad |
| - My colleague is talking | - My colleague is stupid |
| - I weigh 79 kilo | - I am fat |
| - I have blond hair | - Blond hair is disgusting |

Different ways of "relating"

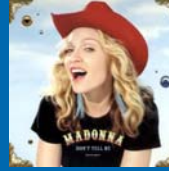
(valuing/judging about the actual properties)

For instance:

- Good – Bad
- Pleasant – Unpleasant
- Bearable – Unbearable
- Cool – Geeky
- Better then – Worse then
- Safe – Unsafe
- Clever – Stupid

... and so on

Imagine Madonna or Bono...



In what way are:

- You worse then Madonna/Bono
- You better then Madonna/Bono
- You the cause of starvation

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Our thinking creates suffering

The paradox, the tough part is:

Language is great, but:

- I can imagine how my reality is worse then other peoples
- Gives awareness about painful events
- Can compare self to ideals
- Awareness about death
- We can imagine future pain
- I can compare myself with (unrealistic?) ideals

Beauty ideals seriously harms you and people in your surroundings



Some ideals kill!

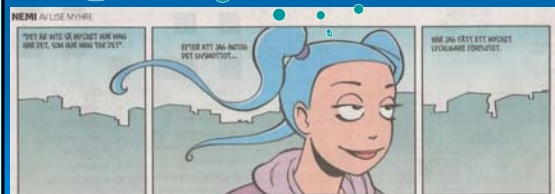


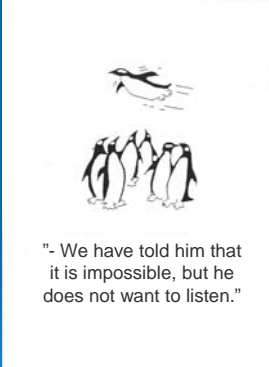
Clean vs. dirty discomfort...

It is not so much how you have it, but how you take it

since i realized that...


my past is not a big problem anymore





"- We have told him that it is impossible, but he does not want to listen."

The farmer and the horse...




Milk, milk, milk

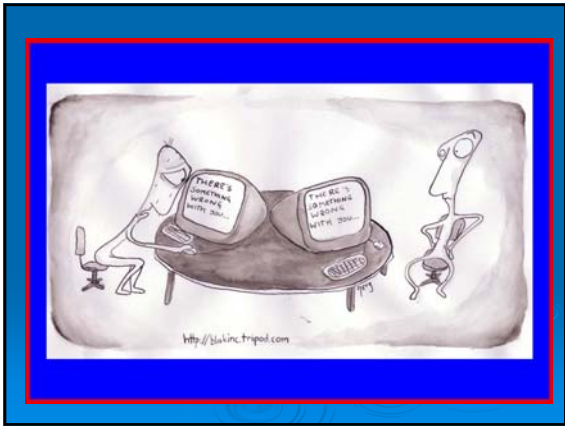
" See....That's the stuff I was talking about."



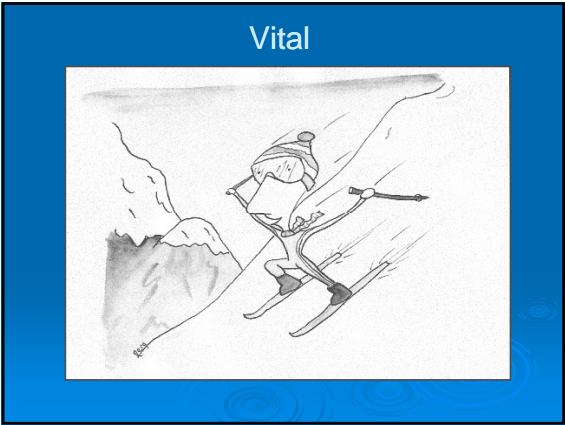
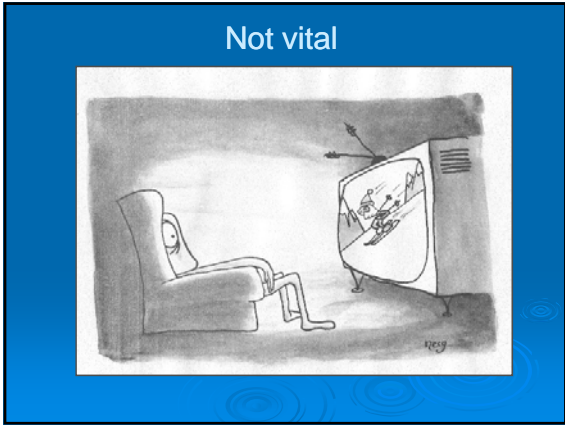
I am stupid!

Life is like a chessboard





Shut off the autopilot...
Do something new or opposite!



To get run over



14

Standing up for myself - to say no



15

Dare to choose

- dare to say no
and
dare to say yes



- Gör egna val och följ dem.
- Säg ja utan tvekan och mena det. Det ger dig förutom mycket att göra även många olika erfarenheter.
- När vi säger ja ofta lär vi oss för det mesta en massa nytt. Kolla av med dig själv vad som är steg i riktning mot att skapa det liv du vill leva.
- Kom ihåg att du alltid kan be om betänketid innan du ger ett definitivt svar.
- När det gäller arbete och överenskommelser kan det, innan du säger definitivt ja, vara bra att kräva att få veta vilket ansvar detta innebär eller förhandla eventuell lön.

19

An exercise in compassion



28

He is watching.



**Give Him
a good show.**

65

Good luck!!!

Create the life you want live!



A summary of the intervention in three words,

Accept

Choose

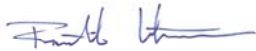
Take action

ACT

Educational Objectives

1. Learn how to apply an ACT-consistent group approach to presenting problems of diffuse mental health problems and stress.
2. Learn how to work with the "life-compass" as a tool for values clarification.
3. Learn exercises and metaphors that are easy to adopt and use in your own clinical work, either individually or in group settings.

Thank you!



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