

# ACT for Post-Treatment Distress & Fear of Recurrence

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&

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# “Graduation” from active treatment

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# I “had” cancer?!

Why am I crying NOW?!

Who am I now?

My friends & family  
don't get it!

I should be doing more!



What if I can't keep up at  
work?

I feel abandoned!

WHAT IF THIS  
RECURS!?!?!?

## Are you done with treatment and feeling **anxious** or **distressed**?



Rocky Mountain Cancer Centers and the University of Colorado Boulder are offering a paid research study for post-treatment cancer survivors experiencing distress or anxiety. This study compares a 7-week skills group called "Valued Living for Survivors" to usual supportive care.

Eligible cancer survivors will be paid \$275 for study enrollment and completion of surveys and interviews.

### Eligibility criteria include:

- **Completed primary treatment** (surgery/radiation/chemotherapy) **within the past 24 months**. Continuing on hormonal therapies is okay.
- Patients who are now clear of cancer or for blood cancers, are under watchful waiting
- Ability to attend a once per week group in the Boulder/ Longmont or Denver area
- Experiencing moderate to high anxiety related to cancer or survivorship, such as:
  - Fears about recurrence or anxiety about the end of treatment
  - Surprising emotions as you return to the "post-cancer" world

Please contact Jill Mitchell, PhD, LCSW, OSW-C at 303-385-2003 to learn about this new group and study to assist post-treatment survivors.



# Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)

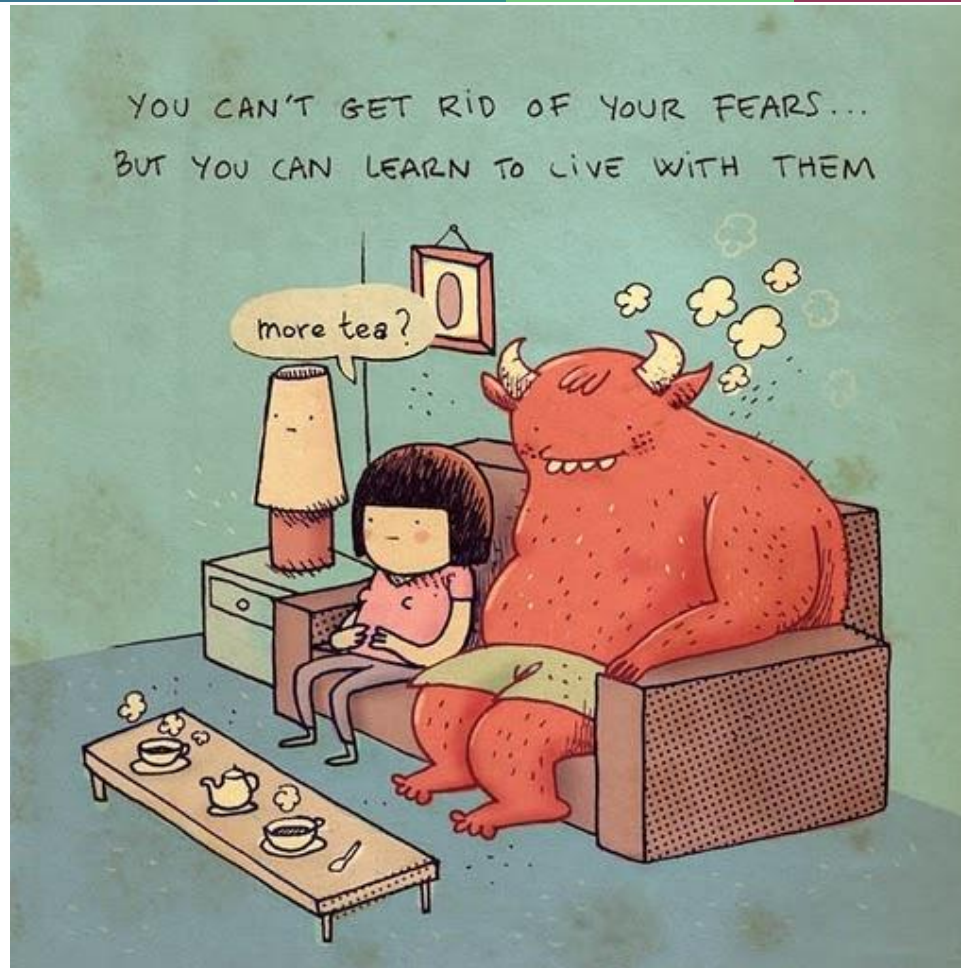
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**A**ccepting one's experience & being present

**C**hoosing a valued direction

**T**aking action

# Acceptance (vs. Avoidance)



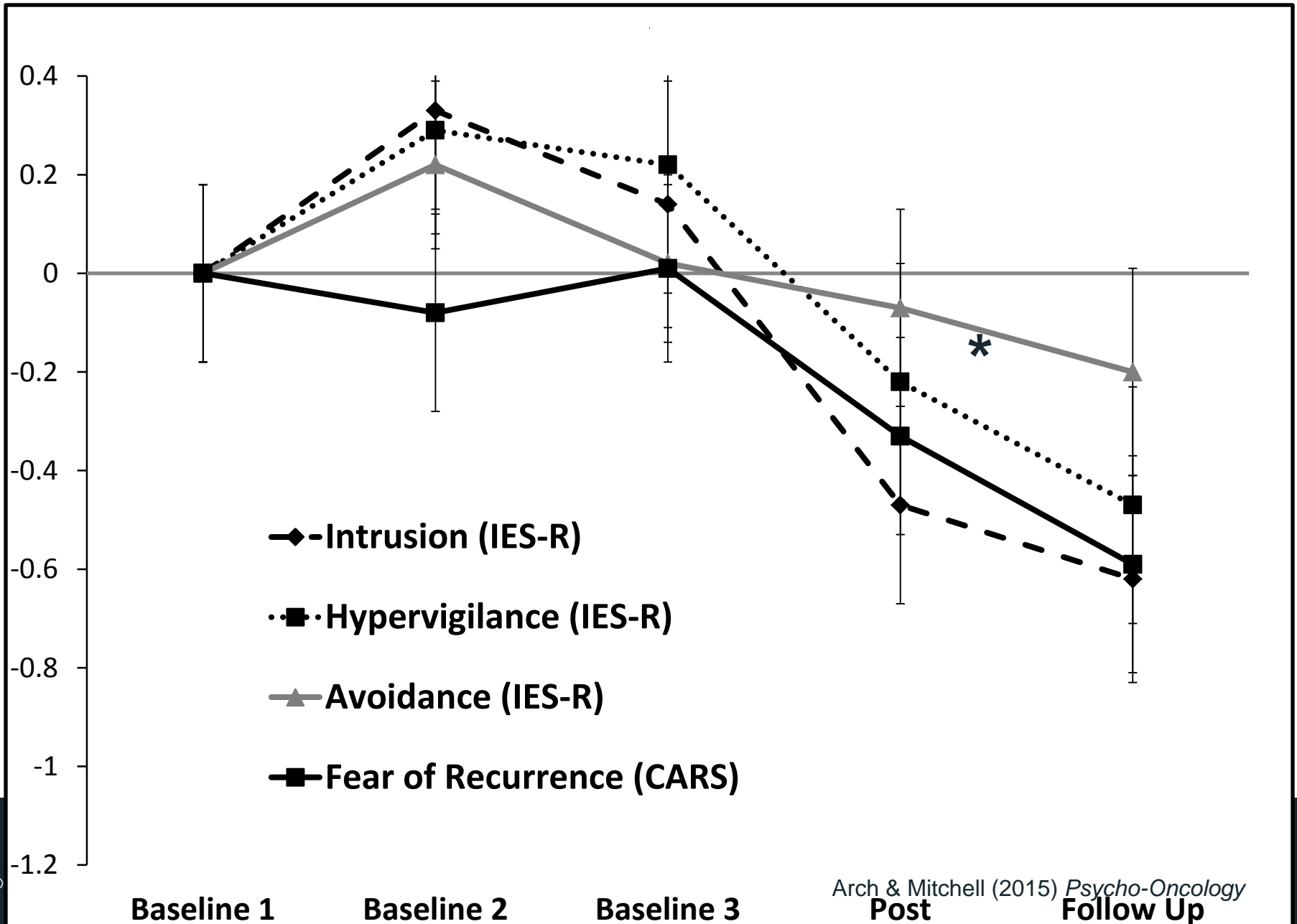
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# “Valued Living for Survivors” Intervention

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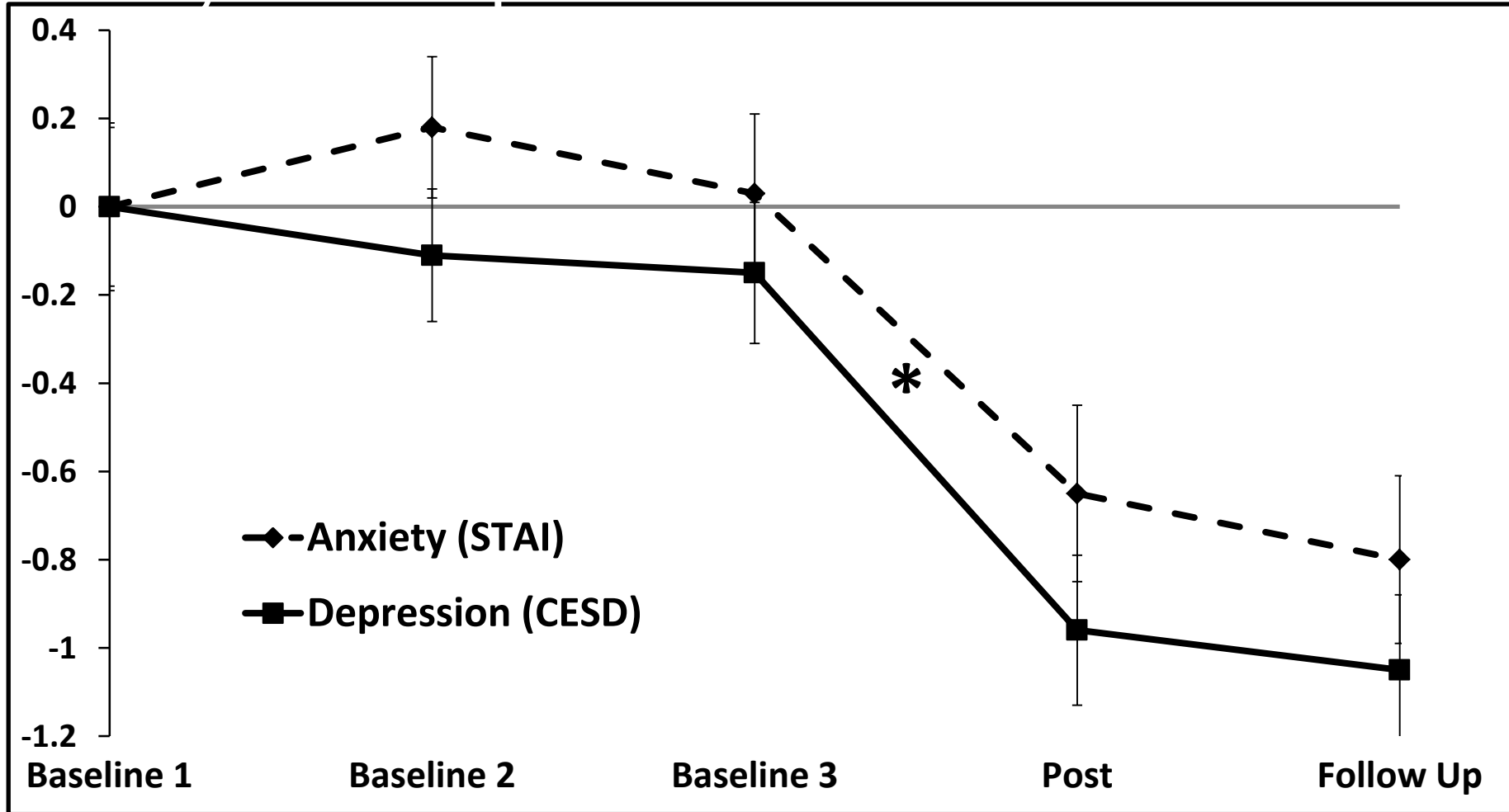
- Weekly psychoeducation group
- 7 weeks/2 hrs per week
- Practicing ACT-based skills using:
  - Discussion
  - Meditation
  - Guided imagery
  - Writing exercises
  - Drawing / turning thoughts into “characters”
  - Committing to valued behaviors
  - Weekly home practice
  - Mapping out and acting out what is going on in our minds

# Results: Traumatic Impact of Cancer & Fear of Recurrence

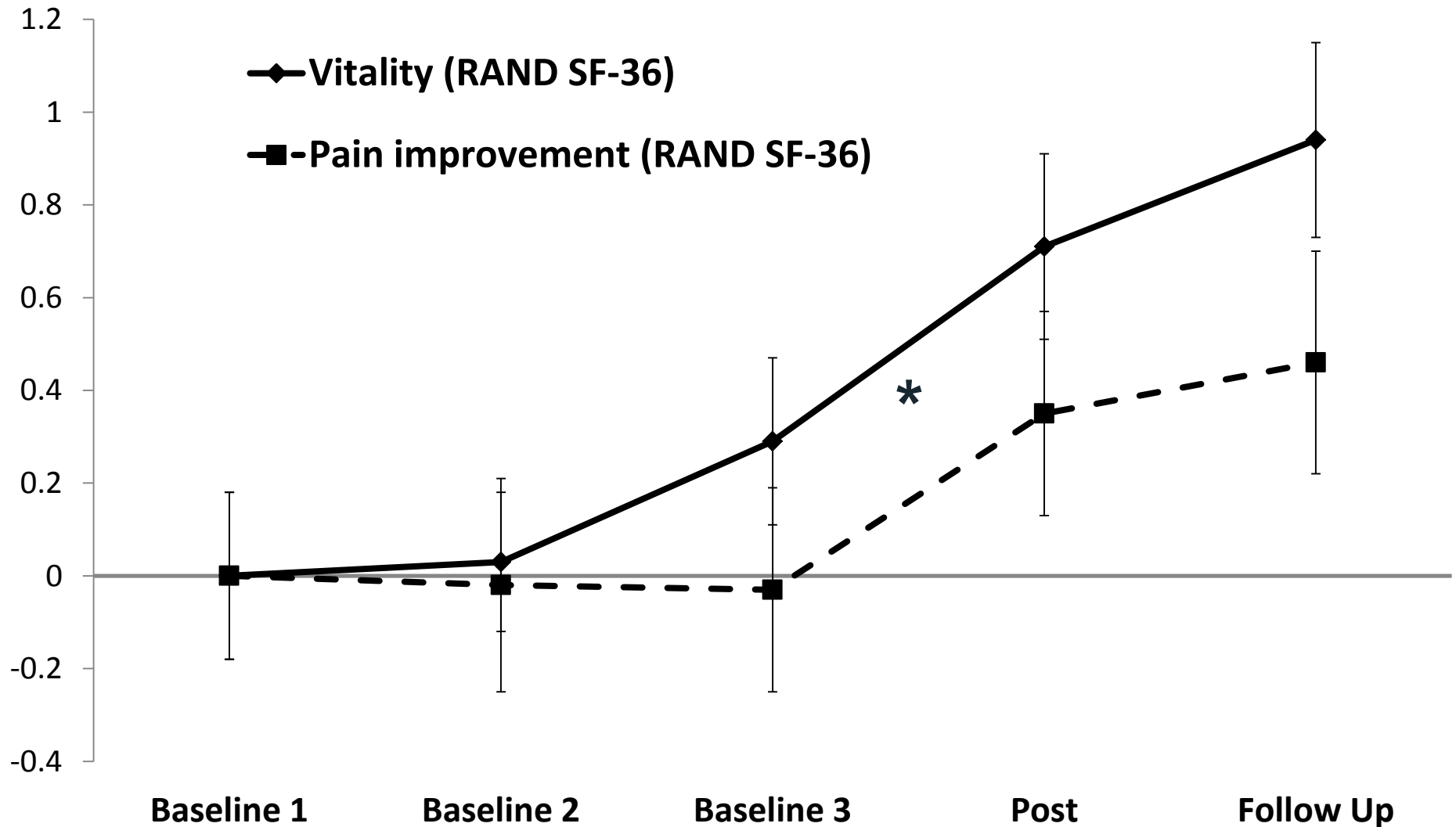




# Results: Anxiety & Depression



# Results: Vitality & Pain



# Mindfulness & Awareness

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# Mindfulness Resources

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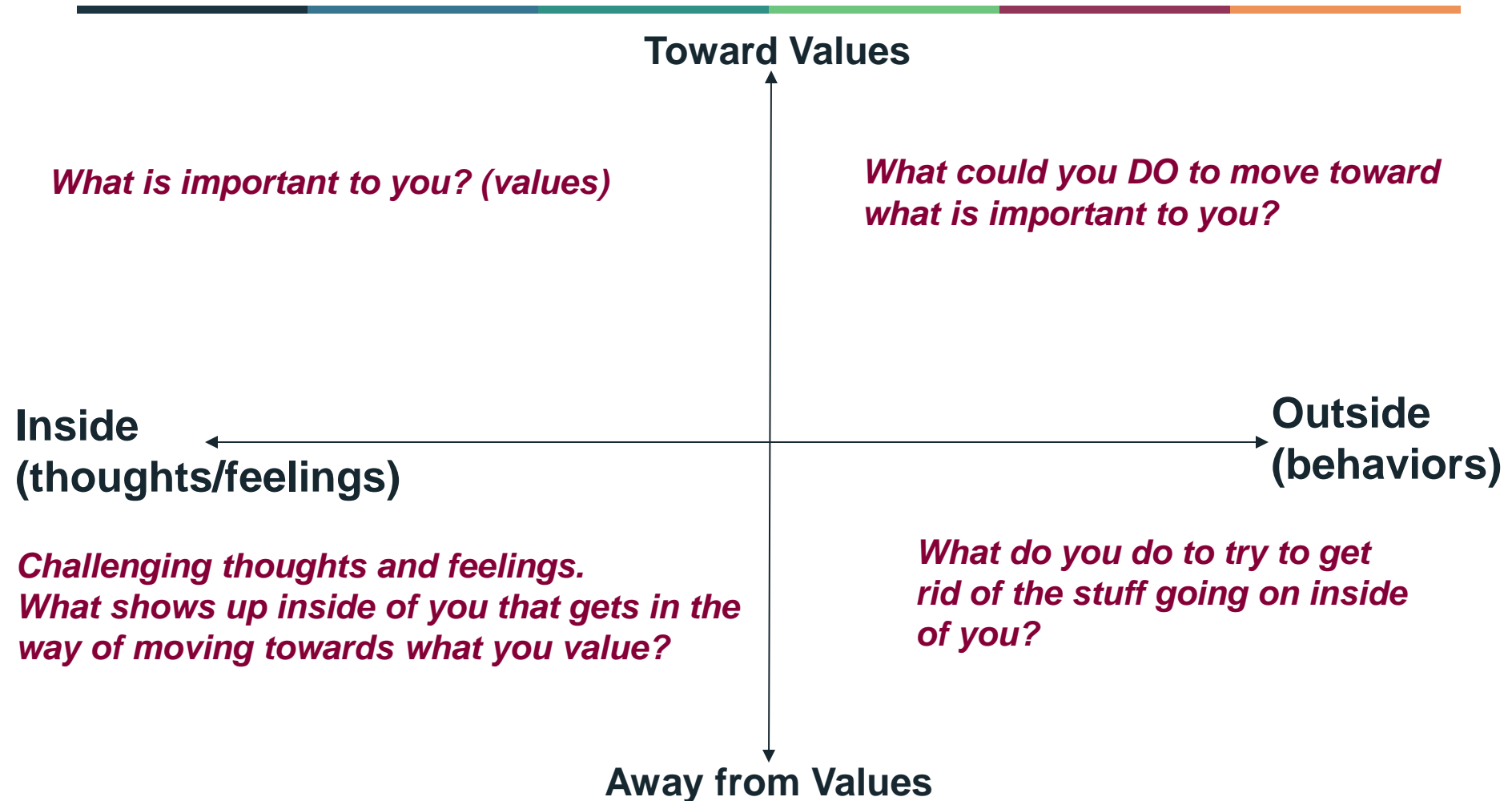
**The Free Mindfulness Project**  
**[FreeMindfulness.org](http://FreeMindfulness.org)**

**UCLA's Mindful Awareness Resource Center**  
**<http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>**

**[Mindful.org](http://Mindful.org)**

# Compass

(\* **Adapted** from Dr. Kevin Polk's "Matrix", see [DrKevinPolk.com](http://DrKevinPolk.com) for more information)





**Inside  
(thoughts/feelings)**

**Outside  
(behaviors)**



**Toward Values**

**Inside  
(thoughts/feelings)**

**Outside  
(behaviors)**

**Away from Values**



## Toward Values

**Inside  
(thoughts/feelings)**

**Outside  
(behaviors)**

*Challenging thoughts and feelings.  
What shows up inside of you that gets in the  
way of moving towards what you value?*

## Away from Values

- Self-judgement that “I’m not doing enough”
- Fear of recurrence



## Toward Values

### Inside (thoughts/feelings)

*Challenging thoughts and feelings.  
What shows up inside of you that gets in the way of moving towards what you value?*

- Self-judgement that “I’m not doing enough”
- Fear of recurrence

### Outside (behaviors)

*What do you do to try to get rid of the stuff going on inside of you?*

- Hide in bed and watch junk TV all day
- Overeat

## Away from Values

## Toward Values

**Inside  
(thoughts/feelings)**

**Outside  
(behaviors)**

*Challenging thoughts and feelings.  
What shows up inside of you that gets in the way of moving towards what you value?*

*What do you do to try to get rid of the stuff going on inside of you?*

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**Away from Values**

# Cognitive Defusion

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- Label thoughts: “I’ m having the thought that .....
- Sarcasm: “Thanks mind!” / “That’ s a good one mind!” / “Nice one!”
- Get off your BUT!: Use “and” not “but”

Instead of: “I could have lunch with a friend, but I’m tired”

Try: “My mind is saying I’m tired **AND** I’m going to have lunch with my friend anyway because that is of value to me.”

- Draw the thought as a character or caricature – get playful!



## Toward Values

*What is important to you? (values)*

- Health
- Family
- Exercising my creativity

**Inside  
(thoughts/feelings)**

**Outside  
(behaviors)**

**Away from Values**

## Toward Values

*What is important to you? (values)*

- Health
- Family
- Exercising my creativity

*What could you DO to move toward what is important to you?*

- Take a 30 minute walk
- Write a letter to my loved one
- Paint a picture

**Inside  
(thoughts/feelings)**

**Outside  
(behaviors)**

## Away from Values

# Value-Based Commitments

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Value: \_\_\_\_\_

- What can I do in the next **hour** that would be consistent with this value?
- What can I do in the next **day** that would be consistent with this value?
- What can I do in the next **week** that would be consistent with this value?
- What can I do in the next **few months** that would be consistent with this value?

## Toward Values

*What is important to you? (values)*

- Health
- Family
- Exercising my creativity

*What could you DO to move toward what is important to you?*

- Take a 30 minute walk
- Write a letter to my loved one
- Paint a picture

**Inside  
(thoughts/feelings)**

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**Away from Values**

## Toward Values

*What is important to you? (values)*

*What could you DO to move toward what is important to you?*

**Inside  
(thoughts/feelings)**

**Outside  
(behaviors)**

*Challenging thoughts and feelings.  
What shows up inside of you that gets in the way of moving towards what you value?*

*What do you do to try to get rid of the stuff going on inside of you?*

## Away from Values



# Key Take Aways from ACT

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- Identify & share your fears or challenging thoughts
- Work toward acceptance instead of avoidance
- Observe your mind (thoughts need not control our actions)
- Shift your relationship to your thoughts (instead of the content of the thought itself)
- Clarify your values & make value-based goals
- Embrace self-compassion

# Some things to try?

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- Explore mindfulness meditation
- Create your own personal “compass” using the chart I discussed today
- Find a group of post-treatment survivors & share your inner fears/thoughts
- Play with defusion strategies
- Get clear on what you VALUE (& write it down!)
- Set some small doable goals based on what you value
- Invite patience & compassion for yourself through this process!!!
- Consider finding an ACT therapist in your community

# Where to find more info on ACT?

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- Find an ACT therapist at:  
Association for Contextual and Behavioral Science:  
<https://contextualscience.org/act>
- ACT Matrix: [DrKevinPolk.com](http://DrKevinPolk.com)
- Harris, Russ (2008) [The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living](#)
- Wilson, K. & T. Du Frene (2010) [Things Might Go Terribly, Horribly Wrong: A Guide to Life Liberated from Anxiety](#)

# Thank-you!

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