

# Welcome!

## Supporting Psychological Flexibility with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy/Treatment

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# Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- Relational Frame Theory/Derived Relational Responding
- Acceptance and Commitment Training/Therapy
- What do we know? How has it been applied?
- Questions



# Before we begin



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## Relational Frame Theory and Language

- Relating stimuli is a quick and powerful mechanism that those with established language can engage in
- Several types of relating can occur
  - Equivalence – DOG = “Dog”
  - Opposites – Tall/short, hot/cold
  - Comparisons
    - Better/worse, bigger/smaller
  - Spatial
    - In/out
  - Hierarchical
  - Deictic frames – Perspective of the speaker
    - I/you, here/there, now/then
    - Useful for perspective taking

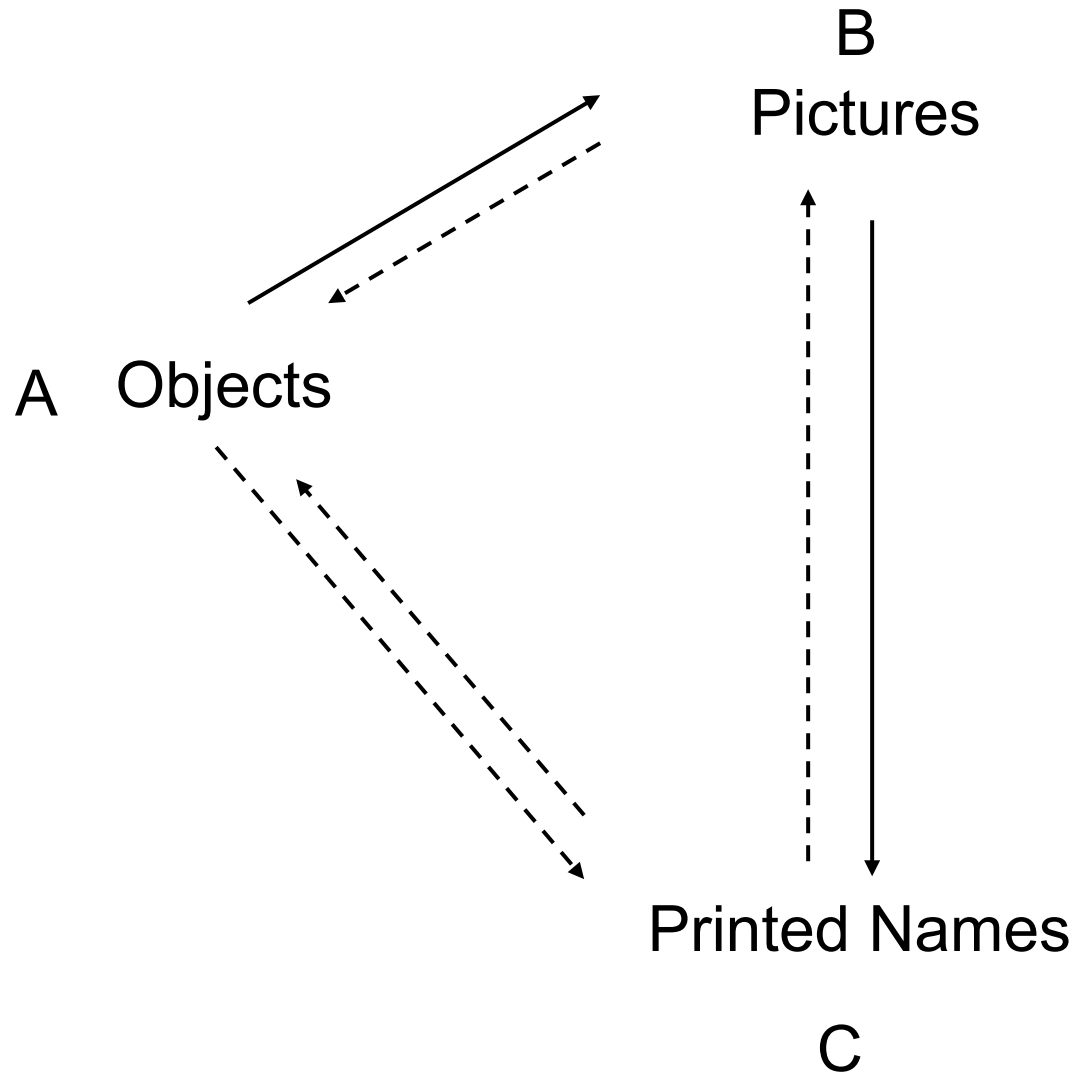
# Why is this important?

- Transformation of function
  - Relating leads to changes in the “value” of the word/item
    - Example, gold is more expensive than silver, silver is cheaper than gold
      - Bronze is cheaper than silver and silver is cheaper than gold than bronze is cheaper than gold
      - Gold will be preferred over the others if you are investing in precious metals.
- What can this mean for people?
  - Language is a learned behavior
  - Relating can alter the function of the words we use
  - As with all behavior, it is influenced by the environment/context
  - Rule governance
- So our focus is on the function and not the content of language in treatment and therapy

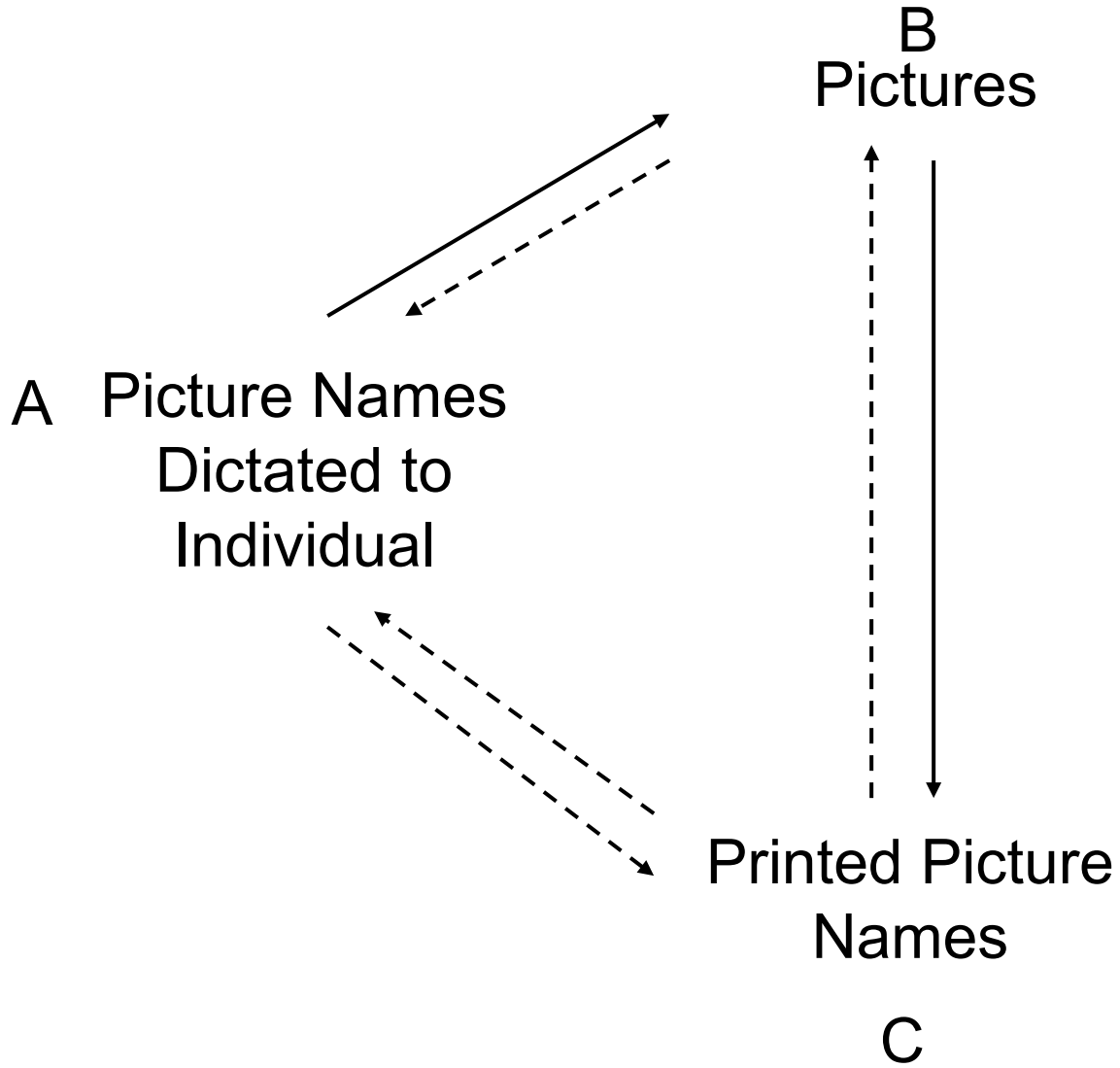
# Derived Stimulus Relations

- Symmetry/Mutual Entailment
  - If  $aRb$ , then  $bRa$ ; if  $aRc$  then  $cRa$
- Transitivity/Combinatorial Entailment
  - If  $aRb$  and  $bRc$ , then  $aRc$

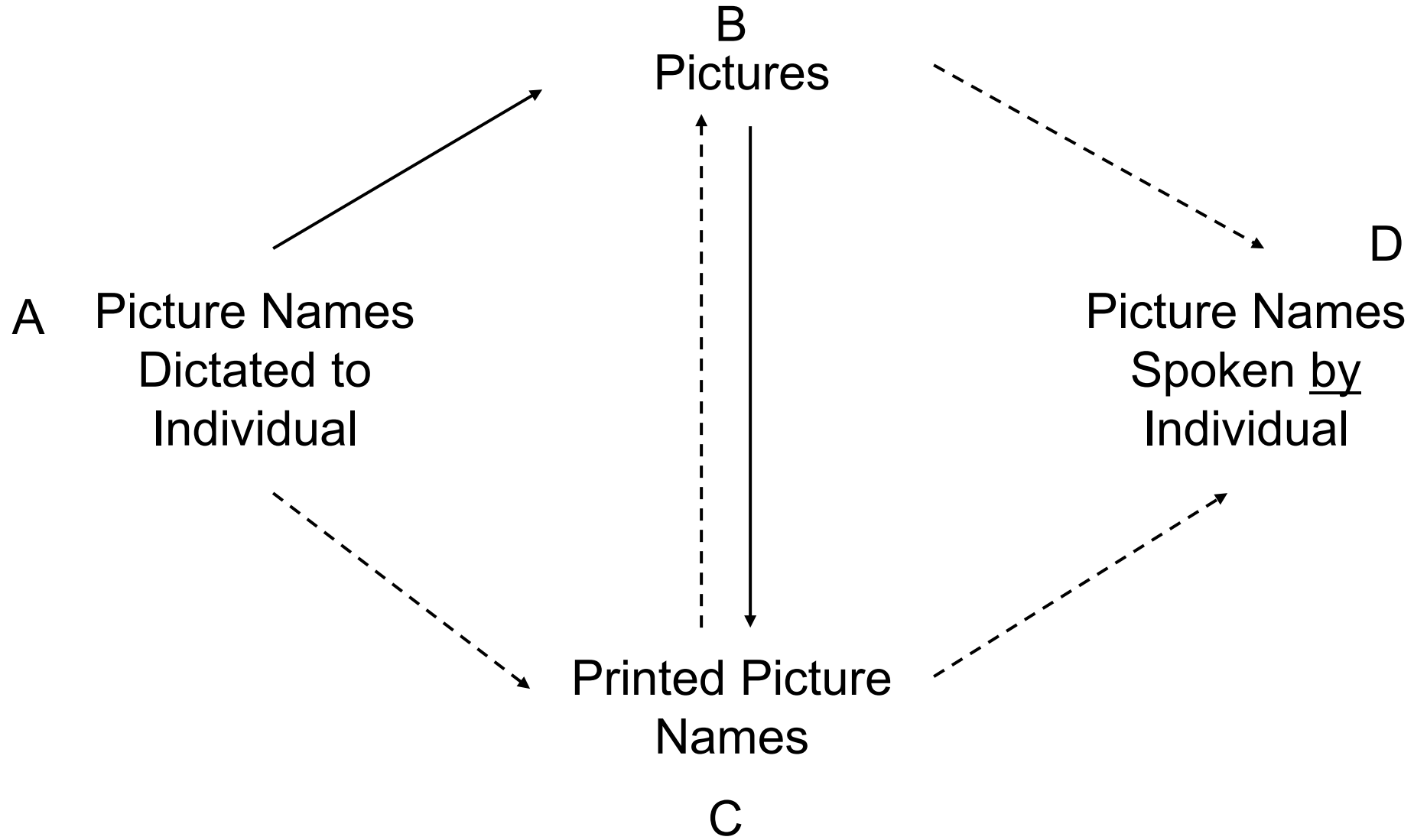
R = general conditional relation between samples and comparisons



Adapted from  
Sidman & Tailby (1982)







# Teaching relational skills (Derived Relational Responding)

- Derived responding occurs when untrained responses follow the teaching of related responses
  - Responding to a stimulus in relation to other stimuli.
  - This includes stimuli associated with reinforcement and punishment
    - Operant and respondent conditioning
- Responding “as if” the stimulus were present
  - Spiders
- We can learn through direct teaching, experience, and through language
  - Rule governance



Danger

Poisonous

Arachnid

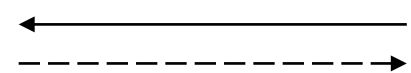
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Hairy

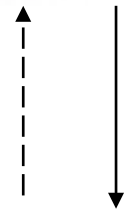
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Danger

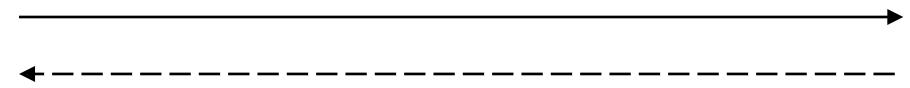


Poisonous

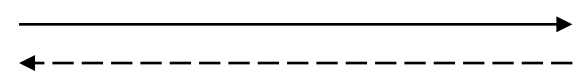


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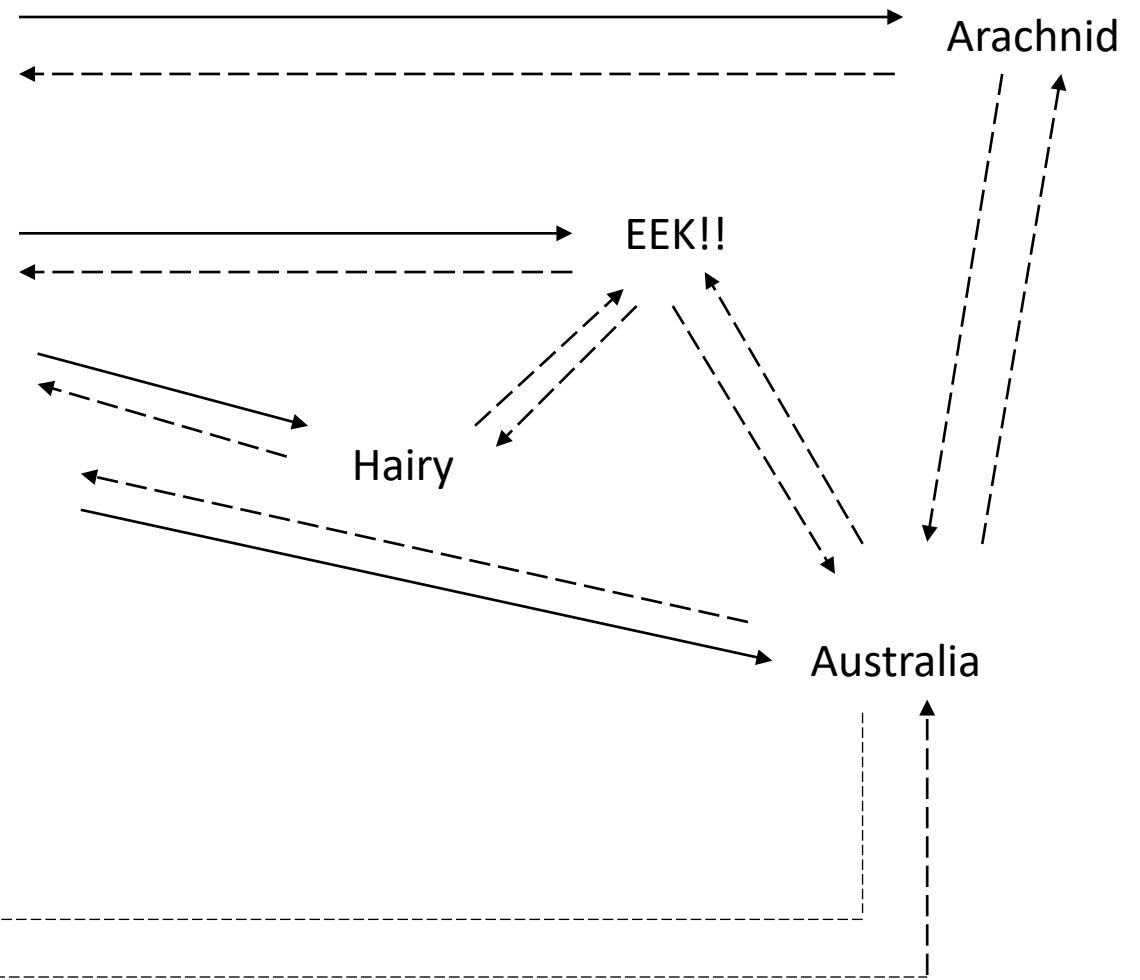
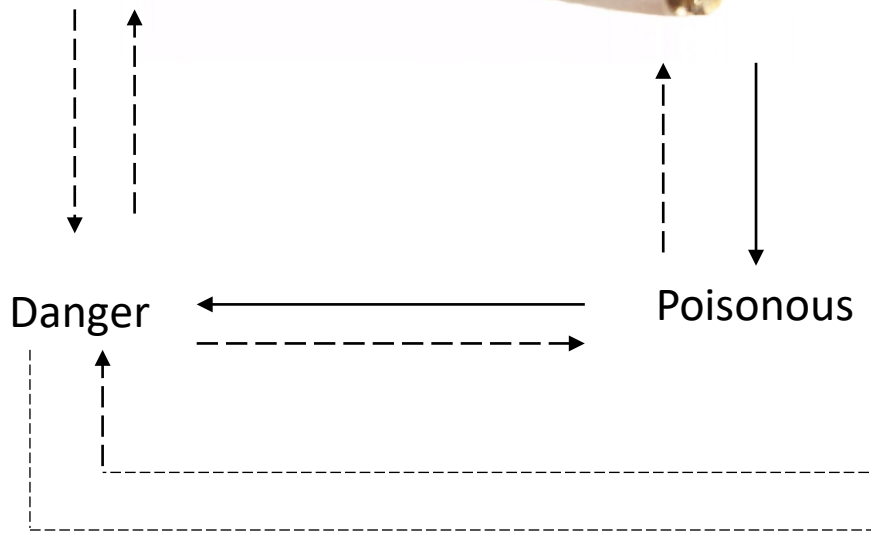
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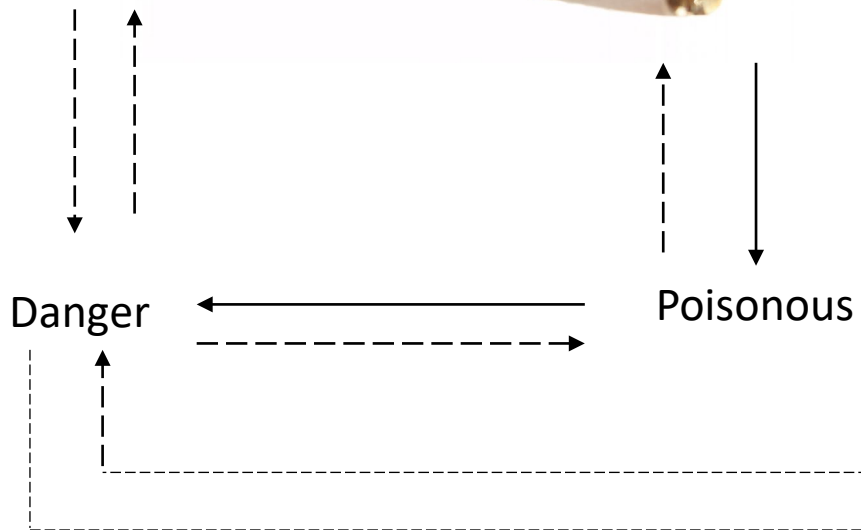


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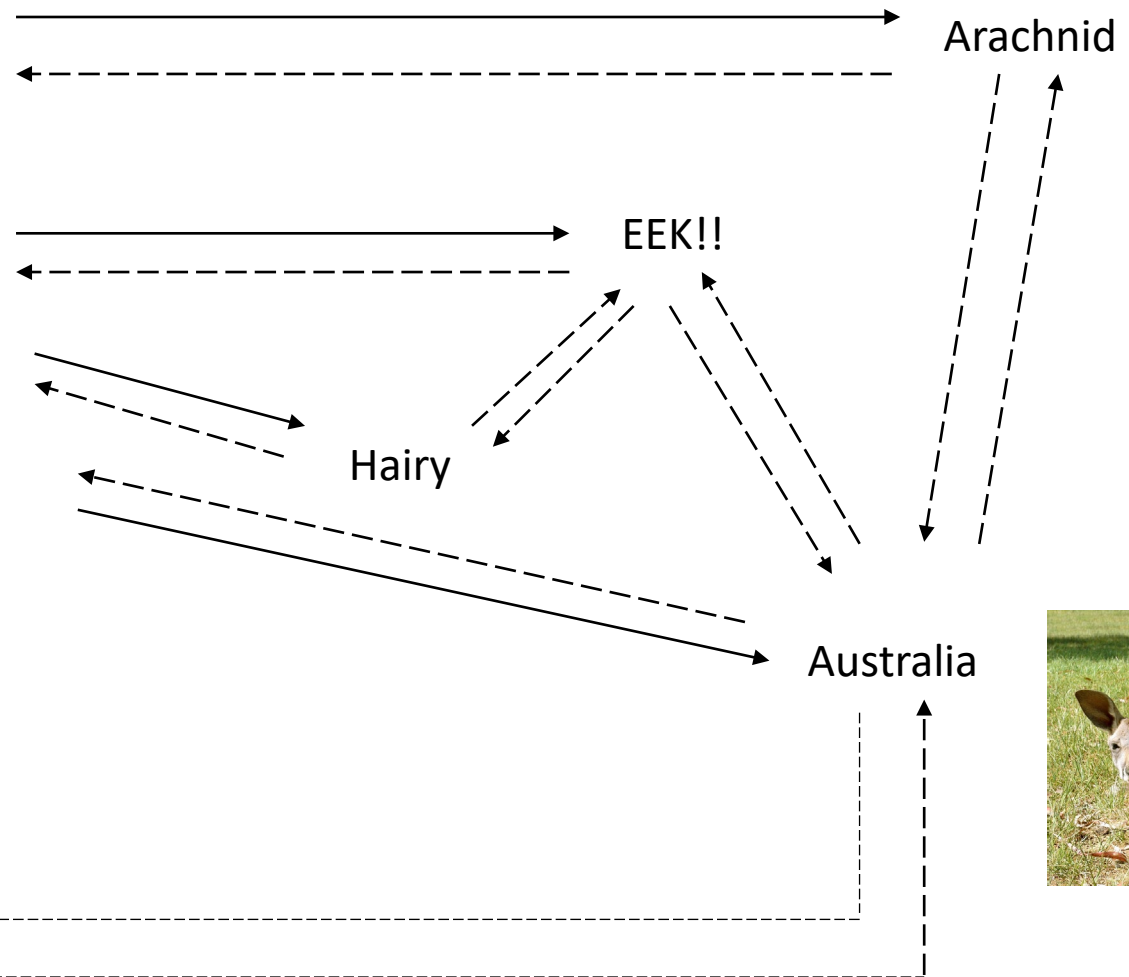


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# NOW WHAT?



# Derived Relational Responding

- “Wh” Questions – Daar et al. (2015)
- More-less requests – Carol and Barnes-Holmes (2009)
- Categorization – Lee et al. (2015)
- Naming repertoire may be needed to derived relational responding
  - Speaker and listener behavior
- Review of literature – Gibbs and Tullis (2021)
  - 53 Studies included.
  - Broad application
  - Areas for future understanding/development

# Comorbidity

- Overall psychiatric diagnoses are high in autistic individuals
  - Simonoff et al. (2010) 70% with one dx, 41% with 2 or more
    - Most common social anxiety, ADHD, ODD
  - Rim et al. (2023) – High risk of comorbid diagnosis in South Korean sample
    - Late diagnosis – higher risk
- Functional impairment
  - Example: How does anxiety interfere with social engagement and subsequent social development?



# Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

- ACT is a functional contextual therapy approach based on Relational Frame Theory which views human psychological problems dominantly as problems of psychological inflexibility fostered by cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance. In the context of a therapeutic relationship, ACT brings direct contingencies and indirect verbal processes to bear on the experiential establishment of greater psychological flexibility primarily through acceptance, defusion, establishment of a transcendent sense of self, contact with the present moment, values, and building larger and larger patterns of committed action linked to those values.
- Stephen C. Hayes (Source: [https://contextualscience.org/the\\_six\\_core\\_processes\\_of\\_act](https://contextualscience.org/the_six_core_processes_of_act))

# ACT Framework

- Functional Contextualism
  - The context of an event allows us to understand, predict, and control it in pursuit of meaningful goals
- Psychological Suffering
  - We are not good at problem solving
  - Adhere to ineffective rules based on our learning history
- Cognitive Fusion
  - Control of behavior through literal language
    - “If you do that, you are bad”
- Experiential avoidance – Avoidance or attempts to control painful private events
- Psychological flexibility
  - The ability to contact private events without trying to change them and moving forward towards goals and values

# Core Processes of ACT

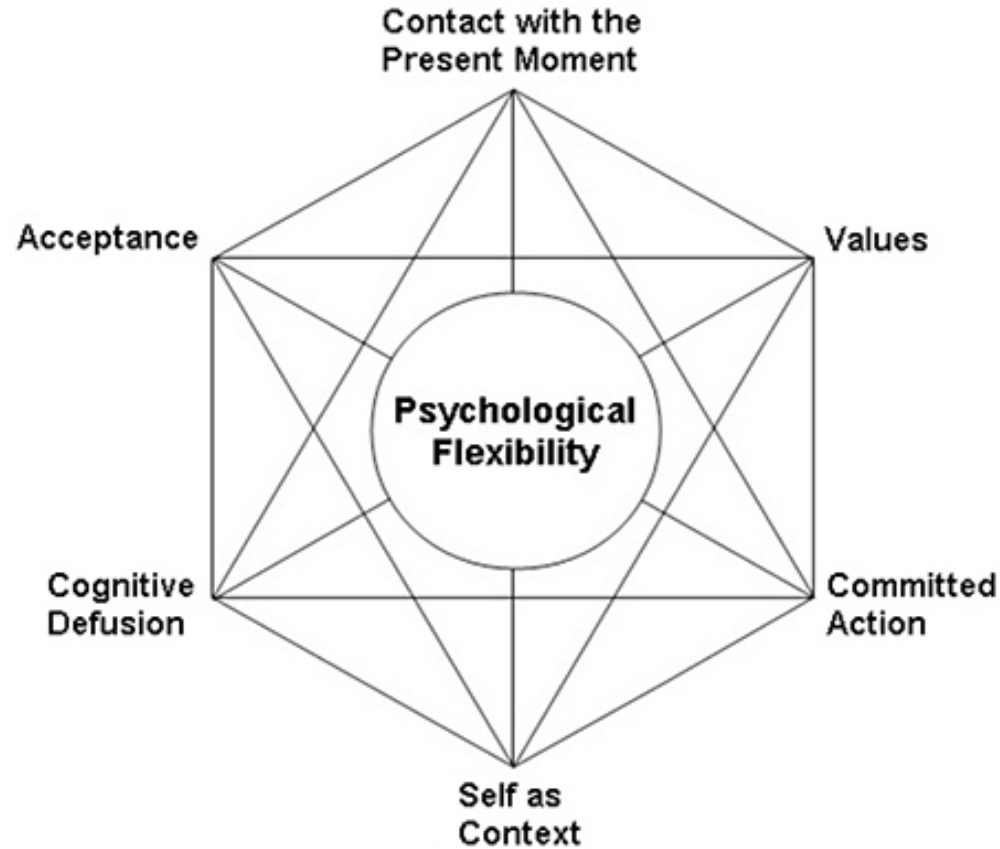
Process	Description
Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience feelings and thoughts as they occur</li> <li>• Experience them as they are</li> <li>• When we attempt to alter or avoid = difficulty</li> </ul>
Cognitive Defusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are not your thoughts</li> <li>• Tell me what you did and not how you feel about what you did</li> <li>• Thoughts = behavior. Change the function of behavior</li> </ul>
Being Present/ Present Moment Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe that is occurring now</li> </ul>
Self as context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior occurs in a context (private and overt)</li> <li>• “I” becomes the context for observing one's own behavior</li> <li>• I/Here/Now</li> </ul>
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ways we want to live our lives</li> </ul>
Committed Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving towards our valued outcomes</li> </ul>

# Psychological Inflexibility (Zhang et al., 2018)

- Fusion
- Experiential Avoidance
- Conceptualized Self
- Rigid Attention of Past and Future
- Unclear values
- Inaction, Impulsivity, or persistence avoidance

# Hexaflex

Acceptance and  
Mindfulness



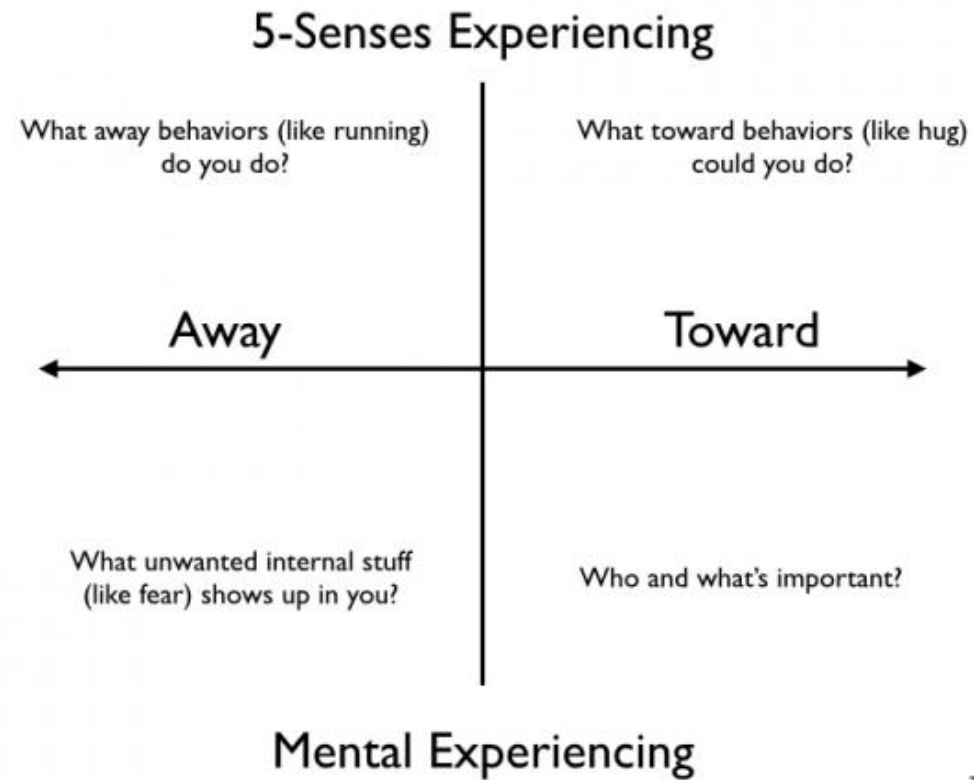
Commitment and  
Behavior Change

# Application

- First step is working with the client to determine the function of their overt and covert behavior
  - Objective descriptions of behavior and not subjective/value-laden/psychological processes
- Focus is always on the client
  - Are we moving towards their goals?
- Look for cause and not reason
- Experiences are meant to happen in therapy
- Growth comes from challenge
- Work on what is present in the moment
- You are not trying to convince your client to change.
- Frequency is not important, function is
  - “What is this in the service of?”



# ACT Matrix



- Mindful Action Plan

<b>Mindful Action Plan</b>		
<i>I am here now, accepting the way I feel and noticing my thoughts, while doing what I care about.</i>		
<b>Addressing Internal-World Issues</b>		✓
<b>I Am</b>	Notice if you are being influenced by any unhelpful self-descriptions. Let go of any problematic thoughts that you are believing about yourself.	
<b>Here Now</b>	Center your situational awareness on what you are doing. Notice what is happening here and now, and rather than getting wrapped up in events not in your present control, let go of these distracting events. Focus on what is relevant to your actions.	
<b>Accepting</b>	Allow yourself to acknowledge any emotions you are having without trying to control the emotions. Be willing to simply have those feelings while moving forward with valuable actions.	
<b>Noticing</b>	Prepare to simply notice thoughts that arise while moving forward with your valued actions. Let those thoughts go if they are not helpful. Treat distracting thoughts as disconnected from action while choosing to act in a meaningful manner.	
<b>Doing</b>	<b>To-Do List</b>	
<b>What I Care About</b>	<b>Values-Based Motivation</b>	
	-- Personal Values: Describe your motivation for engaging in your chosen actions and why you aim for optimal performance.	
<b>Designing Success with Performance Management</b>		
Make sure all required resources for successful actions have been acquired.		
Publicly announce your commitment to meet performance goals.		
Alert your accountability partner about your commitment and goals.		
Describe incentives, performance criteria, and deadlines:		



# ACT Exercises and Metaphors

- Exercises
  - Drop the rope
  - Perspective Taking - ACT Matrix
  - Mindfulness - meditation/present moment
  - Defusion - writing thoughts on pieces of paper (carry it or crumple it up), repeating the phrase over and over again, say it in a silly voice
- Metaphors
  - Getting "hooked"
  - Monsters on a boat
  - Passengers on a bus
  - Leaves on a river
  - Jumping
- Additional behavioral interventions and therapy techniques
  - Exposure and shaping

# Measures of Psychological Flexibility

- Subjective
  - Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II (Bond et al., 2011)
  - Personalized Psychological Flexibility Index (Kashdan et al., 2020)
  - Psy-FLEX (Gloster et al., 2021).
  - Multidimensional Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire
- Can be combined with objective behavioral measures

# Applications

- Practitioners suggest ACT is transdiagnostic – Dindo et al., 2017
  - Can be useful for a variety of diagnostic presentations or nonclinical populations.
- Small sets of data for parent support – Juvin et al., 2021
- Small N studies
  - Interview skills – Hutchinson et al., 2019
- Reviews – Byrne and O'Mahoney, 2020
  - Small number of studies

# Future Directions

- More research needed
- Extensions for children and adolescents
- Process approach and individualized
  - What may work well or need modification

# Questions



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