



Acceptance and Commitment Theory

Enhancing Psychological Flexibility for Work-Parenting Success

Self-as-Context – Week 6

Florentia Amuenje

(University of Namibia), 9 April 2025

A bulletin board with several sticky notes. One note says 'TAKE A BREAK', another says 'DESCANSO', and others have checkmarks and the word 'WORK'. A teal circular graphic is on the right side of the board.

Week 6 - Talking Points

- Recap – Week 5
- What is Self as Context?
- What is Self as Content?
- Why it Matters for Parents?
- Application to Parenting and Work
- Metaphor – The Sky and the Weather
- Practices to strengthen the Observer Self
- Exercise/Reflection - Activity

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Opening Quote

“You are not your thoughts, your emotions, or your roles. You are the one who observes them all.” Unknown



Recap Week 5 - Acceptance

- ✦ Critical component of psychological flexibility
- ✦ Self-Awareness - identify when avoiding difficult emotions
- ✦ Acknowledge/name difficult thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations
- ✦ Make space for these emotions - Without trying to avoid or control
- ✦ Take values based action (patience, understanding)
- ✦ Acceptance is not giving up or resigning to difficult emotions



Six Core Processes of ACT

1. Cognitive Defusion
2. Acceptance

3. Self-as-context

4. Values-driven living
5. Present-moment awareness
6. Committed action



Self as Context

- Today's focus is **Self as Context**
- The Self-as-Context - Process in ACT (Psychological Flexibility)
- The goal of ACT: **Psychological Flexibility**

You are **not** your thoughts or emotions – you are the one
noticing them



Who Are You, Really?

- “Your mind is a storyteller, not a truth-teller.” – Russ Harris (self-stories not always accurate)
- “The problem is not the problem. The problem is the way we think about the problem.” – Captain Jack Sparrow (Thoughts create stuck patterns when fused.)
- “You are not guilt, not frustration, not even pride.”



What is Self as Context?

- Ability that helps us observe thoughts
- **Not** our thoughts, feelings, emotions or roles
- Beyond the Story of Me
- Not defined or ruled by thoughts
- You are noticing your thoughts
- Observer Self or the Noticing Self



Understanding Self-as-Context

- Observing self - stable awareness **behind** thoughts, feelings
- Noticing self - deeper awareness of thoughts without being them
- You are not your roles or thoughts
- Creates space to act with values not emotions
- Step back from self-stories
- Key to become a mindful leader and present parent



Workplace Example – Self-as-Context

- **Thought:** 'My manager thinks I am unreliable'
- **Reframe:** 'I am noticing that thought'
- **Action:** Clarify expectations, show up for meetings

You are **not** the angry employee - you are the one noticing the anger



What is Self as Content?

- Narrative/Story we hold about who we are
- That we are our thoughts, feelings, roles and experiences
- *Version* of self - shaped by internal experiences
 - *"I am a bad parent because I disciplined my child."*
- Stories fused with emotions - take them as absolute truths
- Become overly identified with these stories
- Rigid, reactive, avoidant, instead of responsive and value-driven



Understanding Self-as-Content

- Identity shaped by thoughts, labels, stories
- Get stuck in self-stories - lose flexibility
- Examples: 'I am a bad team player', 'I am not a good parent'
- Limits flexibility and responsiveness

You are **not** the failing team member - you are aware of those thoughts



Workplace Example – Self-as-Content

- **Thought:** 'My manager thinks I am unreliable'
- **Behavior:** Avoids meetings, does not speak up
- **Impact:** Missed promotions, increased anxiety

Fused to rigid self-stories - impacts work and parenting - Rigid behaviour

Job performance and confidence

The image shows a corkboard with several sticky notes. One prominent note says "TAKE A BREAK". Other notes have words like "WANT", "CANNA", and "WITH". To the right of the corkboard is a large teal circular graphic. The title "Why it Matters for Working Parents" is overlaid in a yellow font across the top of the image.

Why it Matters for Working Parents

- Work and Parenting dual commitment - emotionally intense
- Work-parenting conflicts - adds strain
- Fusion with painful past experiences, memories and stories
- Self as Context creates space to choose flexible,
- To commit to values-driven actions

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Workplace Application

- Observe team conflict without personalizing it
- Detach from thoughts, feelings, emotions
- Align with and commit to values based actions
(contribution, respect, integrity)

This practice improves teamwork – respond optimally rather than emotional reaction


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Parenting Application

- Notice self-doubt or guilt
- Step back - observe thoughts and emotions
- Parenting actions based on values, not emotions

This shift creates more space for compassion and clarity, even during difficult parenting moments.

The Sky and the Weather



“You are the sky.
Everything else – it’s just
the weather.”

- Pema Chödrön



Metaphor = The Sky and the Weather

- You = The Sky that holds all weather
 - Sky is always there no matter the weather
 - You are - no matter the emotions
- Emotions and thoughts = The Weather
 - Weather changes – cloudy, storm, rain, thunder ...
 - Emotions pass - frustration, fear, anger - not you



Strengthen the Observer Self

- Create distance - See thoughts and feelings as separate from who you are, rather than identifying with them
- Promote acceptance: Recognise thoughts and feelings as the weather, learn to accept without judgment or resistance
- Foster self-awareness: More aware of thoughts and feelings as they arise and pass, rather than being caught up in them



Reflection Activity

Recall a tough work moment:

- What happened?
- What thoughts/feelings came up?
- Can you describe these from the **Observer** Self?

The aim is not to change the thoughts, but to observe them from a distance.



Observer Log (3 Days)

“You are not the storm. You are the silence beneath it.”

Situation	Thought/Emotion	Observer Description	What I Did?
Child yelled at me	“I am a bad parent”	“I am noticing shame”	pause, compassion



Closing Quote

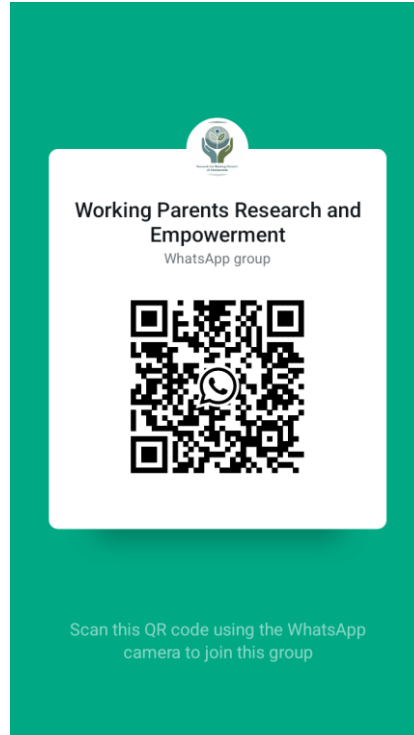
“In the stillness of observing, we find the strength to choose our next step.” Unknown



Announcements!

- Focus Group Discussion Invitation
- WhatsApp group – Scan QR Code
- Website postings
- Homework will be shared
- Stay engaged and remain on this Train - give aways:
 - ✓ Check out the ACT Wise Breakfast!
 - ✓ Shopping Vouchers
 - ✓ One on One Coaching
 - ✓ Loading!

Scan QR Code





Week 7 - Values-based living

Objectives:

- Clarify Values to guide actions
- Know what Matters
- How values increase psychological flexibility



Thank you so much!