

Second Installment of Radical Acceptance March 12, 2021

Radical Acceptance in a Time of Uncertainty

In this time of uncertainty, it is understandable and valid to feel anxious. Of course, you are anxious; we have never lived through a pandemic, political polarization, and economic hardship like this. While all of us are dealing with unprecedented stress, there is a skill from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to help us get through this difficult time and succeed in living more peaceful lives. This is the practice of Radical Acceptance.

What is Radical Acceptance?

Radical Acceptance is a distress tolerance skill that keeps pain from turning into suffering. While pain is part of life, the practice of Radical Acceptance allows us to keep that pain from becoming suffering. This method helps us accept reality without a tantrum or with negligence. In other words, we learn to let life be what it is.

This does not mean we roll over and become helpless. We acknowledge that denying reality will not change the facts. Denial keeps us stuck in upsetting thoughts such as: “This is unfair,” “Why me,” and “Why now?”

Radical Acceptance is not approval of reality. It is completely and totally accepting with mind, body, and spirit the present facts, even if we do not like reality, and even if it currently cannot be changed. By choosing to accept things that are out of our control, we escape the suffering of endless unhappiness, bitterness, anger, or fear.

The Coronavirus is here. It is contagious, its spread is beyond our control, and widespread illness leads to changed lives, upended schedules, employment sidetracked, and the economy in shambles. No matter how unfair it is, it is not within our control to change the reality of its presence or its impact on our lives.

Completely accepting reality is challenging and painful but focusing on what can be controlled instead of the forces outside our influence, can be liberating. Our energy is freed from the fight with reality so we can focus on effective coping skills, and we can take care of ourselves.

Practicing Radical Acceptance (by Marsha Linehan):

1. Observe that you are questioning or fighting reality (“it shouldn’t be this way”).
2. Remind yourself that the unpleasant reality is a fact that cannot be changed (“this is what happened”).
3. Remind yourself that there are causes for the reality (“this is how things happened”).
4. Practice accepting with your whole self (mind, body, spirit) - Use accepting self-talk, relaxation techniques, mindfulness and/or imagery.
5. List all the behaviors you would engage in if you did accept the facts and then engage in those behaviors as if you have already accepted the facts.

6. Imagine, in your mind's eye, believing what you do not want to accept and rehearse in your mind what you would do if you accepted what seems unacceptable.
7. Attend to body sensations as you think about what you need to accept.
8. Allow disappointment, sadness or grief to arise within you.
9. Acknowledge that life can be worth living even when there is pain.
10. Do pros and cons if you find yourself resisting practicing acceptance.

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) is a type of therapy that emphasizes finding balance, especially in interactions with others. Some people are prone to react in an intense manner toward certain emotional situations (whether responding quickly, experiencing a higher level of emotional stimulation, and/or taking a long time to return to baseline levels). DBT teaches skills that help people cope with sudden, intense surges of emotion.

Mindfulness – The practice of being fully aware and present in the moment

Distress Tolerance – How to tolerate painful emotions in difficult situations and not act in self-destructive ways

Emotion Regulation – How to change emotions that you want to change

Interpersonal Effectiveness – How to ask for what you want or say “no” while maintaining self-respect and positive relationships

By Andrew Harris, MS, LPC

<https://hopeway.org/blog/radical-acceptance>

