ACT Choice Point

ACT: Choosing Your Next Move When Hard Feelings Show Up

A choice point is any moment when you can move toward the life you want or away from it. ACT trainers Russ Harris, Joseph Ciarrochi and Ann Bailey created the choice point as a map of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), and Harris later updated it. In any situation, difficult thoughts and feelings can hook you into away moves, while unhooking skills and your values help you make towards moves.

1 The parts of the map

Hooks What grabs you	Difficult thoughts, feelings, memories and urges that grab hold of you.
Away moves Moving away	What you do when you are hooked that takes you away from the life you want.
Towards moves Moving toward	What you do that moves you toward the life you want, hard feelings and all.
Unhooking skills Loosening the grip	Naming a thought, making room for a feeling, or coming back to the present.
Values Your direction	How you want to act and what you want to stand for.

Why does this work? *Most of us react to hard feelings on autopilot. Mapping the moment slows it down, so you can see that you have a choice. In ACT, you do not have to get rid of the feeling before you act. You can choose what to do while it is still there.*

2 An example

Part	What it looked like for Sam
Situation	*My manager asked me to present at Friday's team meeting.*
Hooks	*The thought "I'll mess this up", a tight chest, and the urge to call in sick.*
Away moves	*Saying I'm too busy, then scrolling my phone all evening to stop thinking about it.*
Unhooking and values	*Naming "I'm having the thought that I'll mess this up", and remembering I value growing at work.*
Towards moves	*Saying yes and spending 20 minutes on the slides tonight, nerves and all.*

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 Map your own choice point

Think of a situation that keeps tripping you up. Fill in each part of the map.

The situation:

The hooks: what thoughts, feelings, memories or urges show up?

Away moves: what I do when I am hooked

Towards moves: what I could do instead

My values here: how do I want to act in this situation?

Unhooking skills I could try:

Example: Silently say "I'm having the thought that...", take three slow breaths, feel my feet on the floor

4 Your next choice point

The next time this situation comes up, what is one towards move you will try?

Away moves are normal, and everyone makes them. The aim is to notice them sooner and choose towards moves more often. A therapist trained in ACT can help you practice this.

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