

Wellbeing Session Act Introduction

WHY PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY?

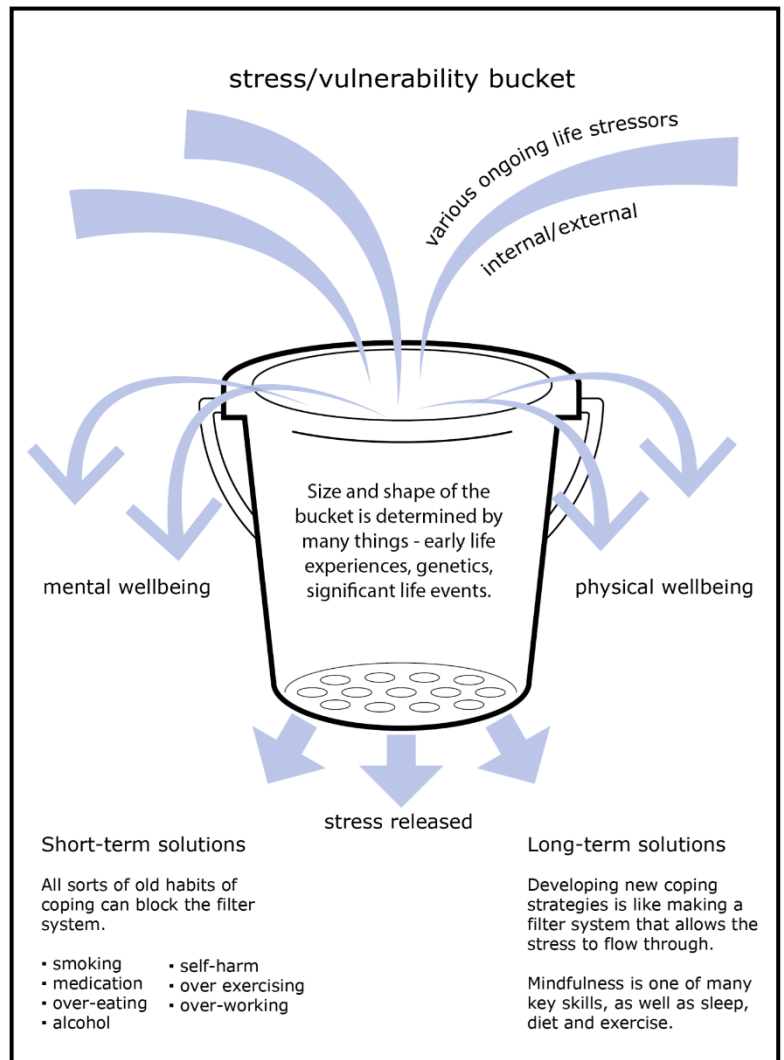
In the UK, work-related stress accounts for 37% of ill health and 45% of days lost (Health and Safety Executive, 2016). 1 in 6 people in paid employment will suffer a common mental health issue this year (Mental Health Foundation, 2016).

The estimated cost of poor mental health is £74 – £99 billion p.a. (Stevenson & Farmer, 2017).

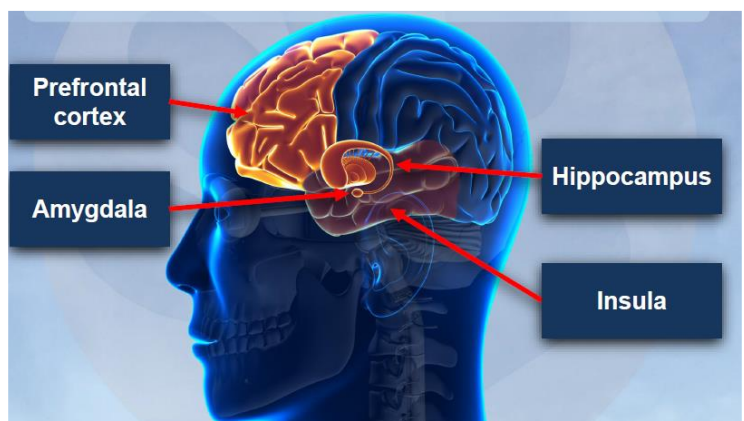
Acceptance and Mindfulness based approaches are increasingly being researched and recognised to be effective across numerous settings. There is a wealth of literature in both physical and mental health and wellbeing to prove its effectiveness that spans five decades. More recently over the last twenty years a specific approach called Act (Acceptance and commitment training / therapy) has been found to be hugely beneficial in the area of work and work-related health.

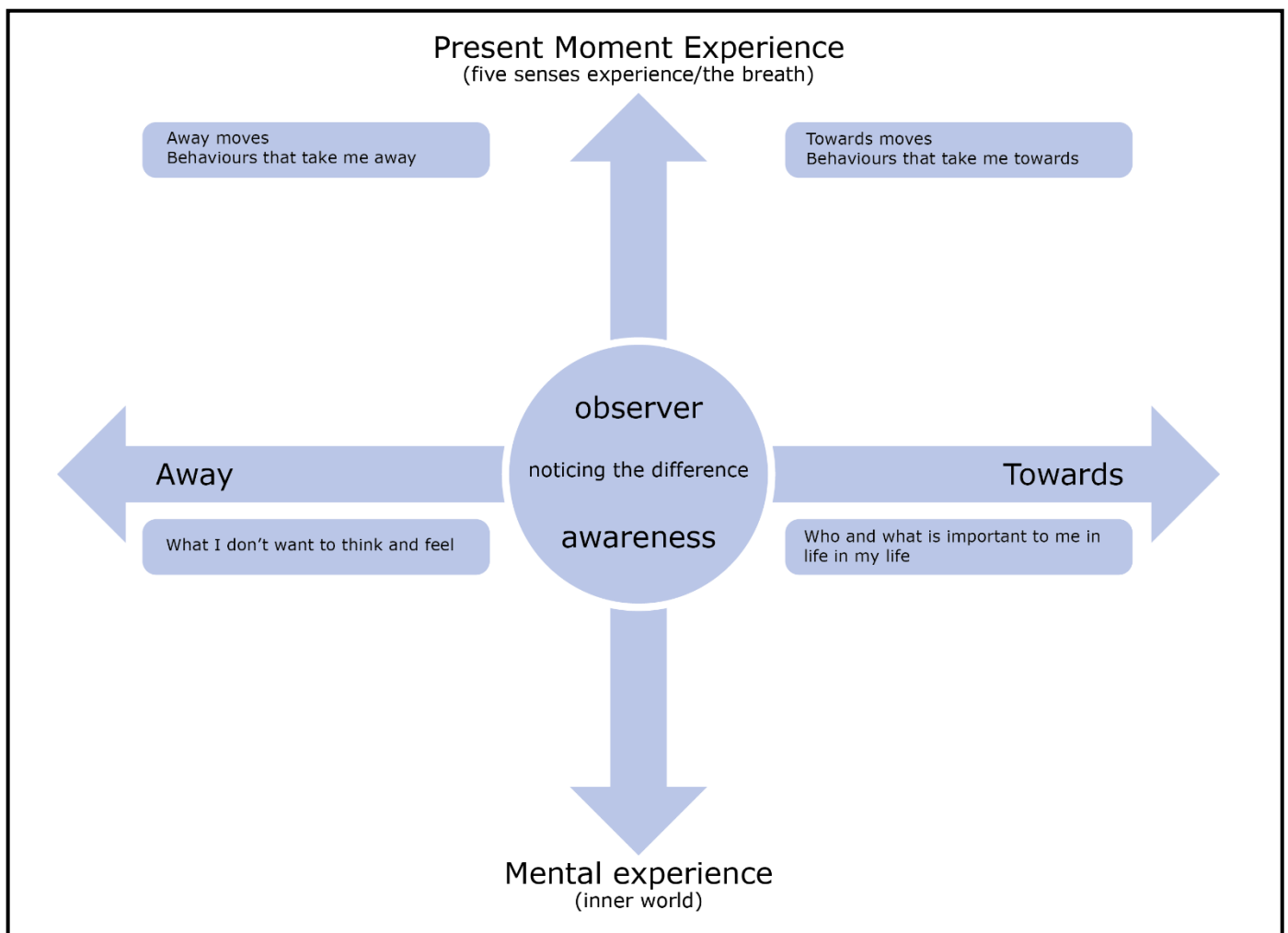
More than 20 studies have shown that psychological flexibility predicts a wide-range of positive work-related outcomes – including work attitudes, wellbeing, job performance and absence rates (Bond, Flaxman et al. 2013) ...

But what do we mean by *Psychological flexibility*? It involves cultivating a range of skills so that you can live a life based on what matters to you while at the same time creating the ability to roll with what life throws at you.



Evolutionary Science: How do our evolved brains help or hinder? Distinction between the Human Brain and Mind.





YOUR VALUES (WHAT MATTERS TO YOU)
ARE LIKE A COMPASS SETTING. THEY GIVE
YOU AN OVERALL DIRECTION TO TRAVEL IN
RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON A FINAL
DESTINATION.

Exercise: Thinking of the different roles that you take on in your life:

- Husband / wife / partner
- Son / daughter
- Mother / father
- Friend
- Employee / Employer

Question. In that role how often do you *feel* gloriously happy and *think* that you are doing an amazing job at it? Highly likely that a lot of that time you don't *feel* or *think* that way but there is something about the importance / value of that role that maybe helps you to make space for the discomfort that inevitably shows up as you continue in that role? This is what we mean by willingness / acceptance. We couldn't last 40 years in a marriage or as parent / colleague / friend or family member without making lots of space for the difficult thoughts and feelings that show up frequently.

What happens to me, my behaviour, when my mind offers up statements such as "this is not working"... am I more likely to move towards my values currently or away?

Developing our own *psychological flexibility* is starting to discriminate where we are on the matrix diagram above.

DEVELOPING THE OBSERVER SELF

The observer part of ourselves is the lesser known of the three selves. The thinking self and Physical self tend to be how we define ourselves as people. Yet this can cause problems for us and make us less flexible in our approach to ourselves, others and the world.

ACT explicitly links mindfulness to values and taking committed action: it is mindfulness for a purpose!

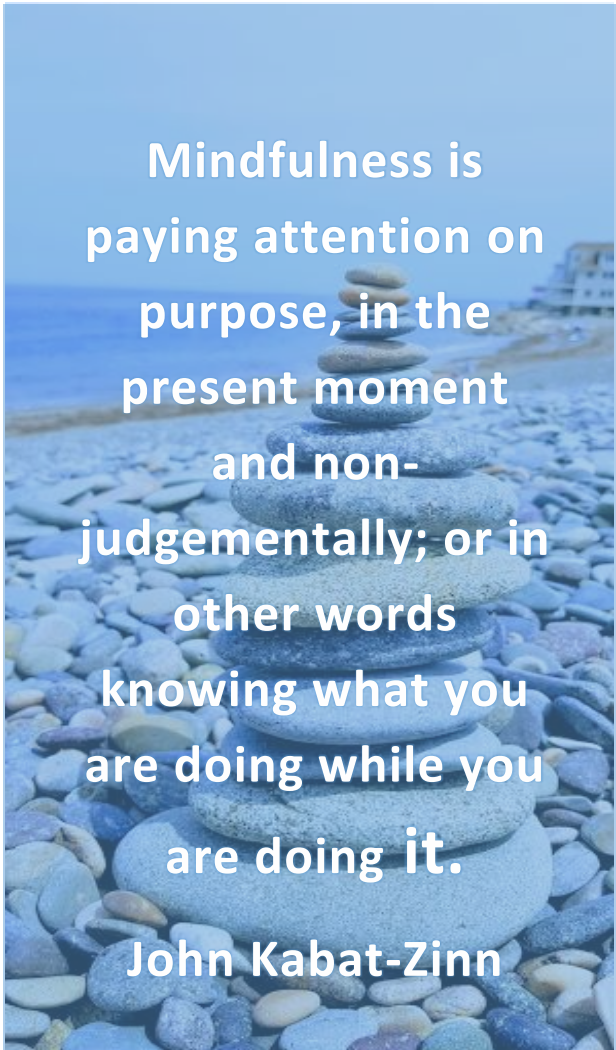
What do we mean by mindfulness?

It is not a single activity like Meditation, rather it is better understood as a range of skills that help an individual to learn to be more compassionate towards themselves and their own experiences and others around them.

These skills are described as:

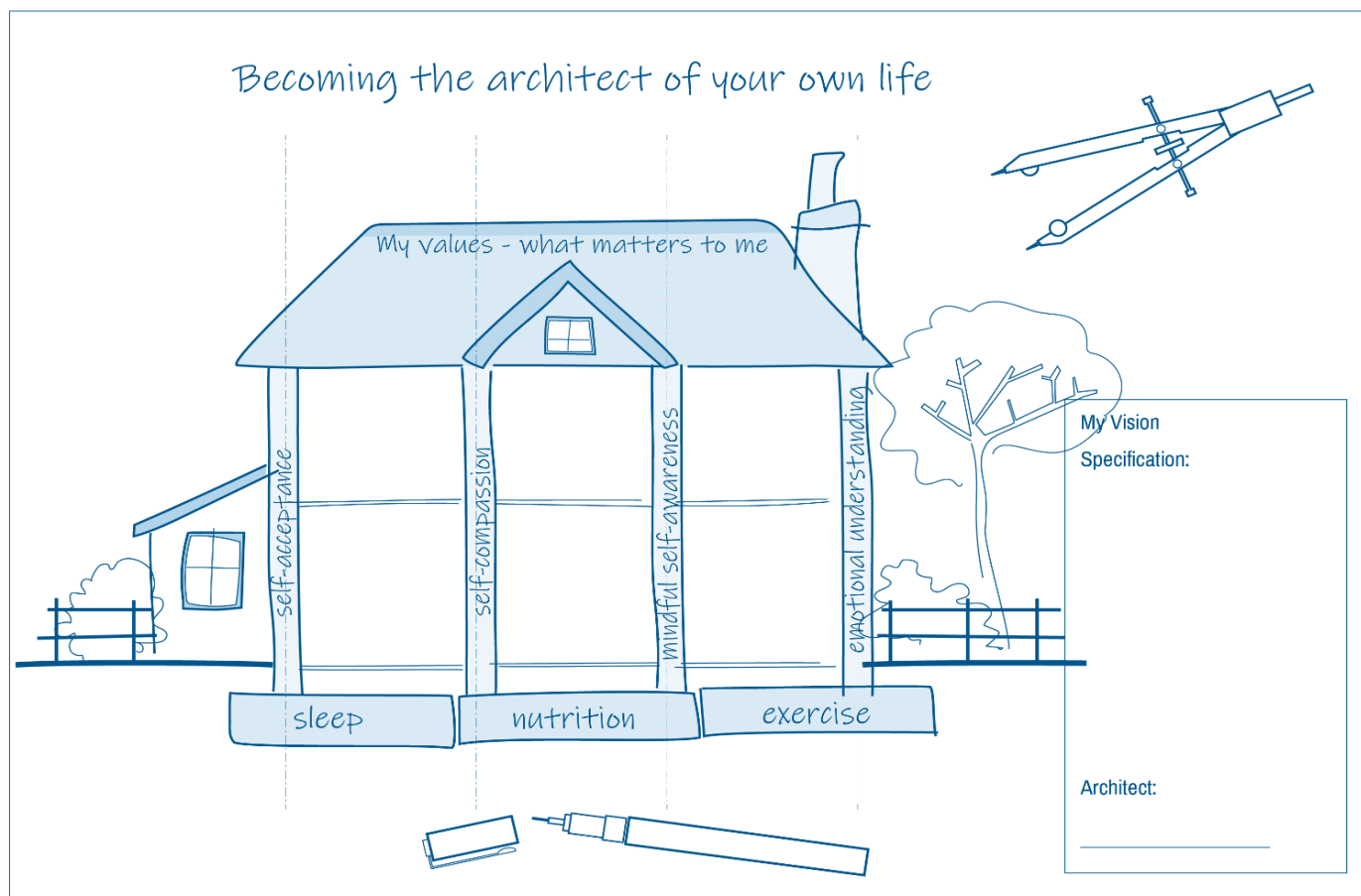
- Observing – paying attention to sensations such as the feeling of wind in your hair
- Describing – describing your inner experiences such as emotions and sensations
- Acting with awareness – focusing on what you are doing in the present moment
- Accepting without judgement – accepting negative experiences without judging it as bad
- Non reactivity to inner experiences – having inner experiences, such as impulses or self-doubt and not behaviourally reacting to them
- Non-attachment – relating to experiences in a flexible, balanced way, without clinging or suppressing the experience

Acceptance and Mindfulness are often introduced together and go hand in hand, this is an important part of the Act approach and often one that is misunderstood. Sometimes it is preferable to discuss the concept of *willingness* as a more appropriate description of the skill being developed.



**Mindfulness is
paying attention on
purpose, in the
present moment
and non-
judgementally; or in
other words
knowing what you
are doing while you
are doing it.**

John Kabat-Zinn



Definition of Compassion

Compassion can be defined in many ways but most experts would agree that it involves both awareness and committed action: "A sensitivity to the suffering of self and others with a deep commitment to try to relieve it" (Dalai Lama).

The importance of developing qualities of self-compassion.

It is interesting that most of us can relate to the concept of an *inner critic*, the way our minds have evolved give us this natural bias to the negative. Cultivating, nurturing and growing the inner capacity for kindness is something we are all more than capable of as a human species as we are programmed for nurture. We just have to increasingly use it so that we don't lose it! Like developing a muscle and preventing wastage!

- What if you started each day with a question to yourself – How will I best look after myself today?
- What would be one small act of kindness you could give yourself this day? This week? This month?

Question: Discussion in small groups about adopting an ethos of self-care and self-compassion – how would this change your working day? How would this influence your practice as a team?

I'm Ace

Identify your feelings – name the emotion (anger/ sadness/fear)

Mindful awareness to what you are feeling right now, describe the experience

Allowing – let your experiences simply be what they are (no need for the mind to figure them out / no need to ask why / no need to get rid of them)

Compassion – how can you show kindness to yourself at the most difficult times (in your actions, or are there photos, songs, words that have meaning to you)

Embrace your values and what matters to you as a person in your life (bring to mind or carry a picture of something, somewhere or someone that matters)