

The new science of resilience: Psychological flexibility for School Leaders

HIAS

7 February 25

Hazel ANDERSON
TURNER

Who am I?

- Hazel Anderson-Turner
- Certified Business Psychologist
- ICF Professional Certified Coach
- Resilient leadership specialist
- Acceptance and Commitment Coach and co-host of The Coaching UnpACT Podcast
- Author of Coaching Through Burnout



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Resilience ISN'T
ABOUT

TOUGHNESS

FLEXIBILITY it's about

Our focus for today

How to apply the skills from Acceptance & Commitment Therapy to increase our resilience and psychological flexibility, with a specific focus on:

- Saving a boiling frog
- Connecting to what matters most
- Befriending our inner critic

What is Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)?

- Developed by Steven Hayes, Kelly Wilson and Kirk Strosahl.
- Derived from Behaviour Therapy.
- Focus on relating to ourselves differently and changing behaviours, rather than changing beliefs.
- Mindfulness + skills to relate differently to your thoughts + values-based action.
- The aim is to help us create a rich, full and meaningful life AND accept the pain that life inevitably brings.
- Born from a clinical setting but has much wider application.
- ACT supports us to have greater psychological flexibility.





Psychological Flexibility

The evidence

Increasing psychological flexibility has been shown to result in:

- Decreased work stress, increased self-efficacy, wellbeing and goal attainment (Skews, 2018).
- Higher well-being and better performance (Bond & Bunce, 2000).
- Increased task learning & enhanced benefits from higher job control (Bond & Flaxman, 2006).
- Reduced rates of burnout (Towey-Swift, Lauvrud & Whittington, 2022)

The Hexaflex

The processes that lead to psychological flexibility



Being Present

Consciously paying attention to our here and now experience instead of drifting off into our thoughts or operating on 'autopilot'.

Values

Clarifying what matters most, in terms of who we are and how we spend our time. An essential step in creating a meaningful life.

Taking committed action

Taking effective action, guided by our values, even when this brings up uncomfortable thoughts and feelings

Acceptance

Opening up and making room to painful feelings, sensations, urges and emotions.

Defusion

Stepping back and seeing our thoughts for what they are – a product of our mind.

Self as context (the observing self)

The separation of the thinking self (problem-solving, beliefs, memories, judgements etc.) and the observing self (the part of us that is aware of thinking, feeling, sensing, doing).

Saving a boiling frog



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What is our version of the boiling frog?

The frog:

- What is going on for us?
- What strategies are we using to survive?
- What makes it all feel worth it?

The pot:

- What temperature is our water?
- What resources are we able to utilise?
- What are the most challenging demands in our context?



A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a blue t-shirt, is laughing joyfully. She is in the foreground, slightly to the left. The background is a blurred crowd of people, some wearing winter coats and hoods, standing behind a metal barrier. In the upper part of the background, there is a set of stairs with a light green metal railing. The overall scene suggests a public event or a crowded outdoor setting.

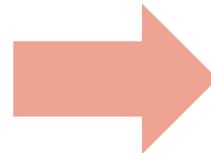
The autopilot of survival

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Breaking out of 'autopilot'

From

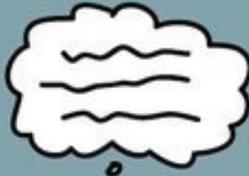
Unconscious
reacting



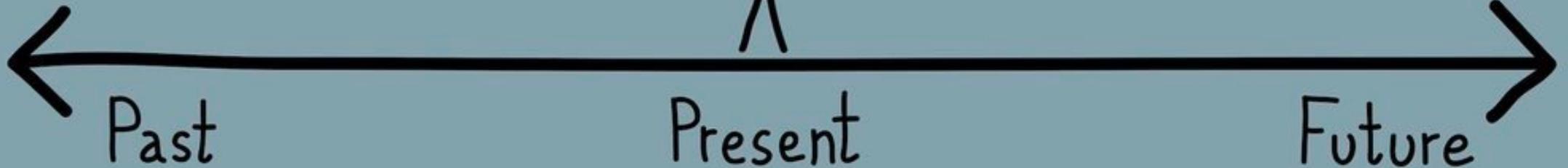
To

Conscious
responding

Your body is present.



Is your mind?

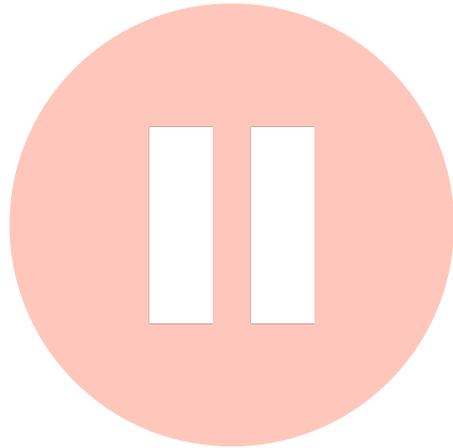


DOUG NEILL

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Space and Pace



How can you create the
space to *pause* and
notice?



How can you control the
pace your mind is
working at?

Connecting to what matters most

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What are values?



Values enquiry

1. Imagine that it is your 80th Birthday party and your friends, family are each standing up and saying something about how you had lived your life, the person you had been and what had been important to you. What do you hope they would say?
2. Reflect on a time when you were proud about how you 'showed up'. What qualities were you showing in that moment?
3. What behaviour in other people really winds you up?



Values

Acceptance	Safety	Service	Empathy	Independence
Family	Beauty	Connection	Support	Patience
Inner strength	Fulfilment	Happiness	Creativity	Winning
Power	Leadership	Loyalty	Honesty	Fairness
Achievement	Empowerment	Spirituality	Order	Community
Freedom	Challenge	Consistency	Trust	Harmony
Integrity	Fun	Health	Dignity	Wisdom
Respect	Learning	Nature	Hope	Growth
Adventure	Compassion	Structure	Passion	Kindness
Friendship	Gratitude	Courage	Wealth	Individuality
Joy	Love	Home	Equality	Curiosity

How does identifying our values help us to stay resilient?



**When we choose what we
care about, we also choose
what will cause us pain.**

Uncomfortable emotions reframe



We are angry/sad/disappointed because something we care about is at threat, has been lost, ignored or broken.



Our emotional reaction shows that we care.



If we didn't care, we wouldn't experience uncomfortable emotions.



Often the way that we deal with uncomfortable emotions can limit our ability to live the life we really want to live.



The skill is in being able to anticipate the particular discomfort we are likely to experience and have strategies for how to live with the discomfort.

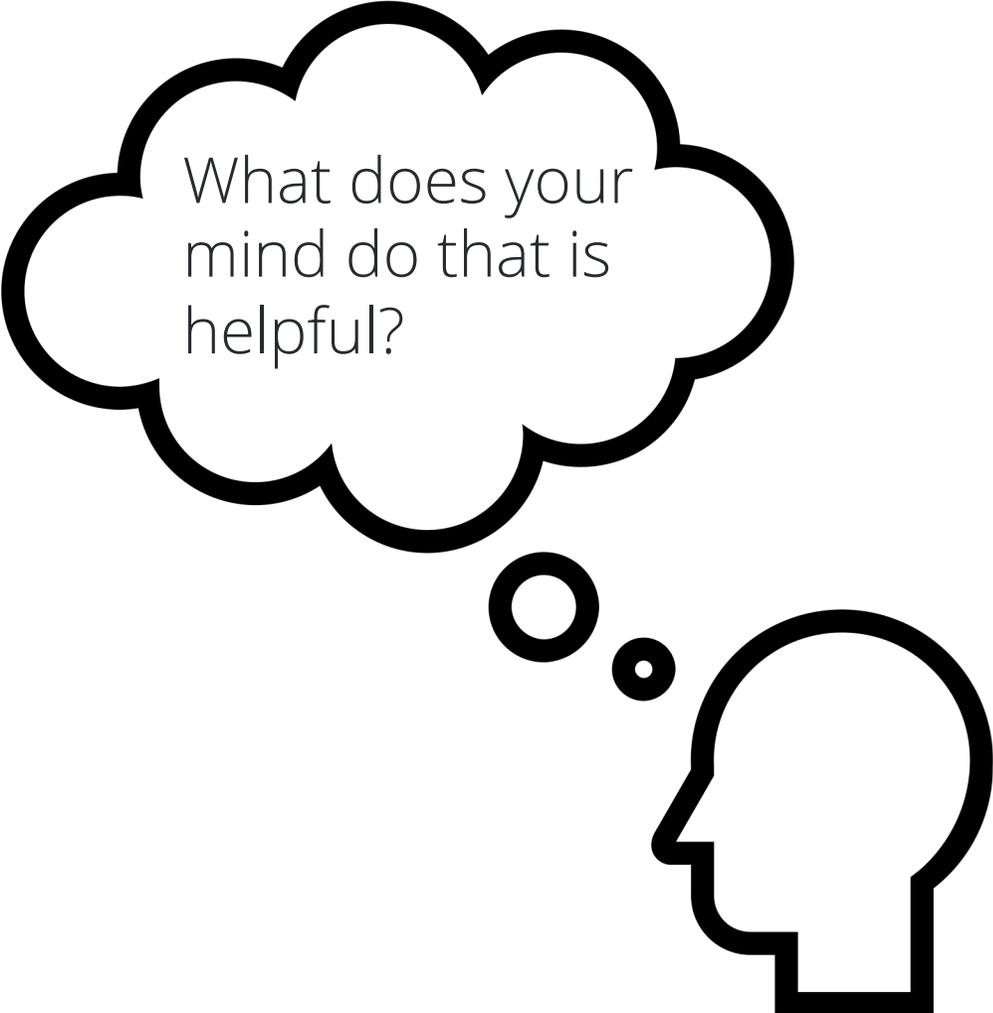
What do your core values tell you about...

- The challenges you are facing?
- The particular emotional discomfort you can expect?
- The things you need more of in your life?
- What you need to prioritise right now?



Befriending our Inner Critic

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What does your
mind do that is
helpful?



What does your
mind do that is not
so helpful?



You're going to mess it up again

You've just made an idiot of yourself

It's all your fault

The Inner Critic

What are the 'stories' your inner critic likes to tell?

'I'm not clever enough'

'I always say something stupid'

'I am a failure'

'I'm not good at public speaking'

'I am a bad parent'

'I am fat'

**you
are not
your
thoughts.**

Thinking mind & Observing mind



EE

4G



09:24

Thursday 28 December



WHATSAPP

17m ago

Oscar Sutton 🚗

😬 okay



TWITTER

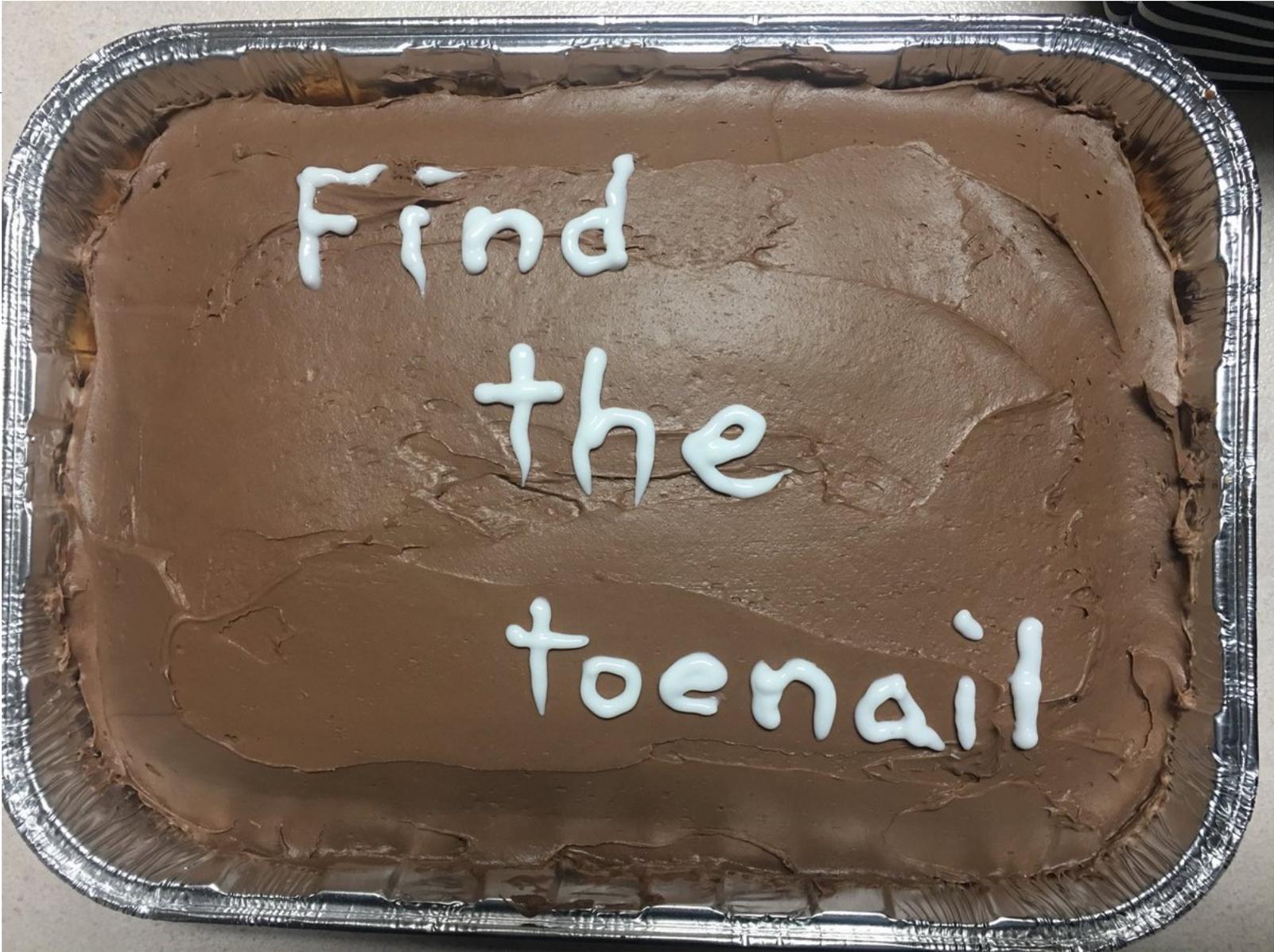
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Luke Chesser just liked Unsplash's photo





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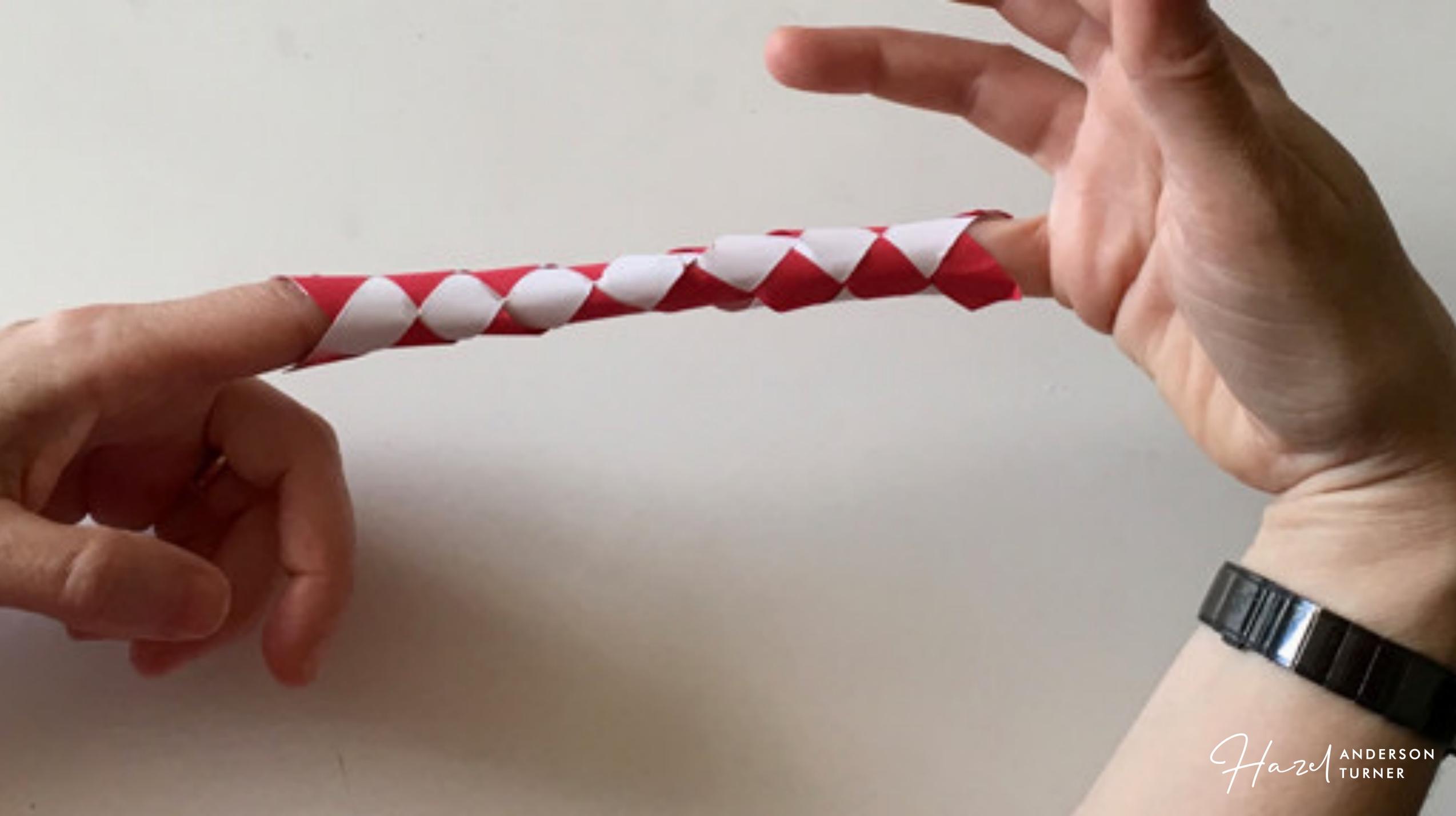
Common Strategies for uncomfortable thoughts

Thinking:

- Argue
- Dismiss/ignore
- Ruminates/problem-solve

Distraction:

- Technology
- Food
- Alcohol/drugs





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Fusion & Defusion

Fusion

- The absolute truth.
- Command/rules you have to obey.
- A threat you need to get rid of asap.
- Something that's happening here & now.
- Something that requires all your attention.

Defusion

- May or may not be true.
- Definitely not something you have to obey or follow.
- Not a threat to you.
- Is merely words or pictures in your head.
- May or may not be important.
- Can be allowed to come and go of its own accord.

Defusion

I am...

I'm having the thought that I am...

I'm noticing that I'm having the thought that I am...

The 3 Ns

Notice

Name it

Now what?



**What support would
I give a friend in that
moment?**

Self-compassion

“Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism.”

“At the most basic level, self-compassion simply requires being a good friend to ourselves.”

Kristin Neff



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Self-compassion

- Mindfulness
 - I'm feeling angry/sad/worried...
 - I'm noticing that I'm having the thought that I have failed
- Common humanity
 - How I am feeling is understandable because of the values I hold
 - What I am experiencing is a really human reaction. I am not alone in this.
- Kindness
 - I'm going to be ok, whatever happens
 - What do I need most right now?





In order to become more psychologically flexible:

1. Notice how warm you are in your 'pot' and consciously take action.
2. Use your values as a compass for the choices you make and to help you to understand your emotional reactions.
3. Change your relationship to your critical inner thoughts to a more compassionate one and develop the skill of 'defusing' with thoughts that consume you.

When we are psychologically flexible, we are able to both *care deeply and hold lightly*



Further Reading & Resources

- The Happiness Trap - Russ Harris
- The Little ACT Workbook - Michael Sinclair & Matthew Beadman
- A Liberated Mind - Steven Hayes
- Coaching Through Burnout – Hazel Anderson-Turner
- <https://hazelandersonturner.co.uk/>
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