



COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES
www.commonlanguagepsychotherapy.org

VALUES EXPLORATION AND CONSTRUCTION

John T BLACKLEDGE, Morehead State University, Kentucky 40351, USA, ph +1 606-783-2982; & Association for Contextual Behavioral Science Board of Directors

Definition: Helping clients to explore and choose values to strive for by ongoing, evolving patterns of activity that are rewarding in themselves.

Elements:

In discussion with the therapist clients look at and select life-long directions of behavior that the clients value for their own sake and can sustain indefinitely by a stream of satisfying activities. Examples of valued ongoing pursuits are: education, which is unending, unlike getting a degree; being a loving spouse, which involves continuing support that is never complete, unlike a short-term reconciliation; being a caring parent, which might include regularly assisting children with homework, helping them think through problems, attending their sports events. Clients are encouraged to choose values to strive for that are personally meaningful, not lip service to prevailing norms, in interactions arising in a session (Case illustration 1 below) or by structured experiential exercises (Case illustration 2 below). Clients are also helped to uncover and devise ways of overcoming barriers to pursuing valued directions such as feeling inadequate when seeking long-term intimacy with a partner, or finishing professional training to engage in valued work with colleagues to care for other people.

Related procedures: Motivational interviewing, goal-setting, guided imagery.

Application: In individual- or group ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy).

1st Use? Hayes & Wilson (1994) in ACT, long preceded by related procedures in other therapies.

References:

1. Hayes SC, Strosahl KD, Wilson KG (1999) *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change*. New York: Guilford.
2. Hayes SC, Wilson KG (1994). Acceptance and commitment therapy: Altering the verbal support for experiential avoidance. *The Behavior Analyst*, 17, 289-303.
3. Luoma JB, Hayes SC, Walser RD (2007). *Learning ACT: An Acceptance and commitment therapy skills-training manual for therapists*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.
4. Wilson KG, Murrell AR (2004) Values work in acceptance and commitment therapy: Setting a course for behavioral treatment (p120-151). In S Hayes, V Follette, M Linehan (Eds.), *Mindfulness and acceptance: Expanding the cognitive-behavioral tradition*. New York: Guilford.

Case Illustration 1 (Blackledge, unpublished)

Therapist: “When you talk about time with your daughter Ava you get excited, animated. She’s very important to you, isn’t she?” *Client John*: “Yes, she’s everything to me.” *Therapist*: “One thing jumps out when you talk about her - you really want to be ‘there’ for her. Is that right?” *John*: “Yeah..., I really do.” *Therapist*: “What kind of father do you really want to be to her?” Long pause: “I want her to know how much I love her, support her in what she’s doing, make her feel cared for, secure.” “You want

to be a loving, supportive, caring father, and give her a safe, secure home. Is that right?" John nods enthusiastically. *"You're so animated as you talk about your relationship with Ava, it strikes me we've hit on one of your values. But to be sure - if no one else ever knew you valued doing these things for her .. your wife, parents, friends, neighbors, me.. would you still do these things for her?"* Pause: *"Yes .. I would."* Therapist (to elicit specific actions according with this value): *"What exactly could you do today to show her how much you love her, just one thing consistent with that value?"* John: *"Well, usually when I get home from work, I just eat dinner, relax, and let my wife take care of Ava. Tonight, I could get down on the floor and play with Ava, and pull her up on my lap and read a book to her"*.

Case Illustration 2 (Blackledge, unpublished)

Therapist: "Let's do an exercise to figure out what's crucial to you as a person. Sit comfortably and close your eyes. [Client settles and becomes aware of her breathing and other sensations] Think of your best-ever memory about anything that's happened to you. Scroll back through the best moments of your life. Raise a finger when you have your best, or almost-best, memory of something in mind..."

"Now focus on every detail of that memory .. pull it into the room with you now. Picture where you were then, everything around you, who was with you, their faces, what you and others were doing and saying .. what you were feeling and thinking .. Let that memory's events play themselves out in front of you now, from start to end .. Attend especially to what you were doing back then, how you were behaving toward others, toward the world? ..What kind of person were you being? .."

The therapist focused on aspects of the client's memory that made her animated and open. These concerned being loving to her husband and children and helping them do something important. Asked if she'd like to have more such moments with them, her answer was a resounding "Yes!", that they made her feel "alive", showing that a core value had been identified.