WORKSHEET 30 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

The willingness dial

Choosing to open up to discomfort for what matters (openness)

AIM

Introduce the notion of “willingness”: not the level of anxiety, which cannot be controlled, but the degree of openness to discomfort that one chooses in order to do something important.

WHO IT IS FOR

Avoidance, anxious procrastination, preparing an exposure or a committed action.

DURATION

10 min in session; before each difficult action

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Distinguish two dials: anxiety (it can’t be adjusted at will) and willingness to feel it (that one can be chosen).
2. Show that with low willingness, anxiety becomes an obstacle to flee from; with high willingness, it becomes a passenger.
3. Before an important action, ask: “To move towards what matters to you, how willing are you to feel whatever comes, from 0 to 10?”
4. If willingness is low, reduce the size of the action rather than forcing.
5. Take stock afterwards: what did willingness make possible?

POINTS TO WATCH

> Willingness is not imposed under pressure: it must be linked to one of the person’s values. Don’t confuse it with “gritting your teeth”.

REFERENCES

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D. & Wilson, K. G. (2012). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change (2nd ed.). Guilford.

Harris, R. (2019). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-to-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (2nd ed.). New Harbinger.

PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 30 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

The willingness dial

You can't adjust your anxiety like a thermostat. But you can choose how willing you are to feel it in order to do something that matters to you. That is the willingness dial.

1. The action that matters to me: _____
2. What I might feel (thoughts, emotions, sensations): _____
3. My willingness to feel it for this action, from 0 to 10: ___
4. If it is low, I make the action smaller. Then I do it.

Action	Anxiety /10	Willingness /10	What I did

What did my willingness make possible?

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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