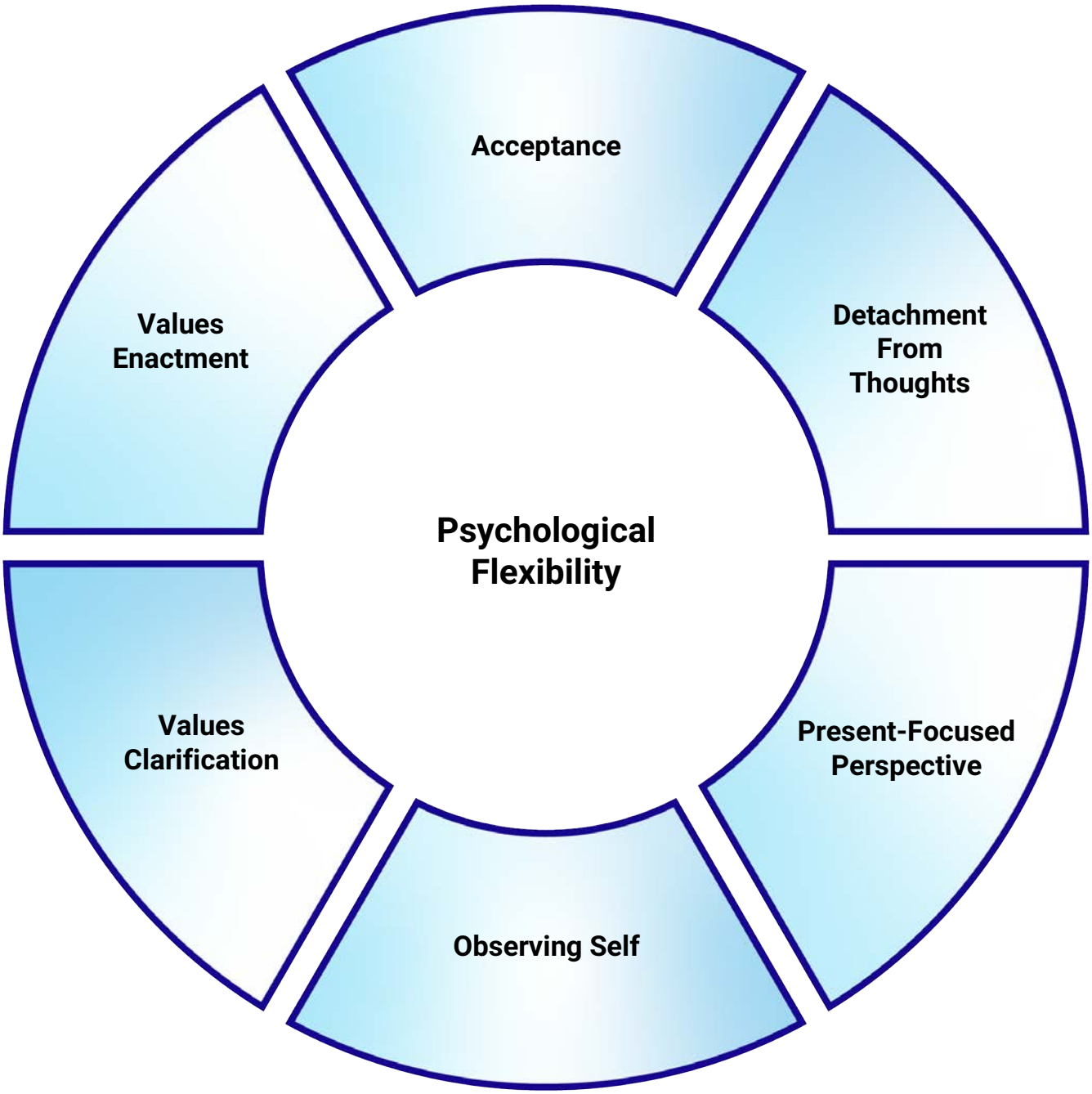
Becoming Psychologically Flexible

ACT skill

Psychological flexibility is the ability to adapt to life's difficulties while remaining true to one's values. This skill consists of six key components, which are illustrated below. Developing these traits leads to greater resilience, emotional tolerance, and overall well-being.

Read on to learn about these traits. Use the action steps to become more psychologically flexible and enjoy its many benefits. Practice regularly for the best results.



 © 2023 Therapist Aid LLC

Becoming Psychologically Flexible

ACT skill

Acceptance

Embrace your inner experience.

What you resist tends to persist. Let go of your struggle against uncomfortable thoughts, emotions, and sensations. By accepting your experience, you gain energy and insight.

Action Step: *Notice the next time you try to push away an unpleasant emotion. Instead, allow it to be there, and explore how it feels in your body. What is it like not to resist your experience?*

Detachment From Thoughts

Learn to step back from your thoughts.

It's easy to be consumed by thoughts, especially if you see them as always true. But thoughts are often distorted *interpretations* that reflect our fears and insecurities more than reality.

Action Step: *Imagine your thoughts projected onto a movie screen. Sit in the back row and watch the scenes unfold. Is the story familiar? Can you observe the movie without getting lost in it?*

Present-Focused Perspective

Live in the now – not the past or future.

Your entire life takes place in the present moment. You can't turn back time or fast-forward to the future. All you have is this moment, so practice being fully present to it.

Action Step: *When you're lost in thought, engage your senses to connect with the present moment. Notice two things you can see, hear, and smell in your immediate environment.*

Observing Self

Connect with the "observing self."

The *thinking self* is always analyzing, planning, interpreting, and judging your experience. But the *observing self* simply notices thoughts, feelings, and activities without getting caught up in them.

Action Step: *Bring attention to your thoughts. Then ask yourself, "Am I these thoughts, or am I the one who is aware of these thoughts?" If the latter, you are connecting with the observing self.*

Values Clarification

Explore and define your highest values.

What is most important to you in this life? Dare to ask this question, and answer it by deciding on the values you want to live by. Repeat this exercise periodically, since values can change.

Action Step: *Reflect on your role models growing up or individuals you currently admire. What qualities do they embody? Which of these traits do you want to adopt or nurture for yourself?*

Values Enactment

Put your values into action.

Values are like a compass – they point you in the right direction, but you still have to make the journey. Do this by coming up with *specific* goals that embody your values, and then take action!

Action Step: *Name your three most important values, then set a concrete goal for each one. For example, if one of your values is friendship, make a point to see or call a friend each week.*

© 2023 Therapist Aid LLC