

Creative Hopelessness in a Nutshell

In Plain Language: *Creative hopelessness* means fully opening to the reality that trying too hard to control how we feel gets in the way of living a rich, full life.

Aim: To increase awareness of the emotional control agenda; to experience that it's basically unworkable, and discover why this is so.

Synonym: Confronting the agenda.

Method: Look at what the client has done to try to control how he feels, examine whether it's made his life better or worse, and get him in touch with the unworkability of his actions. This creates openness to an alternative way of handling thoughts and feelings.

When to Use: When the client is strongly attached to an agenda of emotional control. In many ACT protocols, it's a precursor to the rest of the work.

THREE SIMPLE QUESTIONS

Creative hopelessness interventions are constructed around three simple questions:

1. What have you tried?
2. How has it worked?
3. What has it cost?

First, we ask, "What have you tried doing to get rid of these difficult thoughts and feelings?" We ask the client to come up with every single control strategy he has ever used.

Next, we ask, "How has it worked in the long run?" We ask the client to assess whether in the long run, it has actually worked: Has it reduced her pain? Has it enriched his life?

Finally, we ask, "What has it cost you when you have over-relied on these methods?" We ask the client to notice the costs—when these methods are used excessively or inappropriately—in terms of health, well-being, relationships, work, leisure, energy, money, and wasted time.

Join The DOTS

The Join the DOTS worksheet given below simplifies CH. It is self-explanatory. You can fill this in with the client in session, prompting her and giving feedback. Or you can draw it up on a whiteboard (especially useful with groups). Or you can simply talk through it with the client without using the worksheet.

JOIN THE DOTS

What are the main thoughts and feelings that are problematic for you? Write these down under “Body” and “Mind”. Next, write down everything you have tried to get rid of, avoid, suppress, or escape. Or distract yourself from these thoughts or feelings.

D-Distract: How have you tried to distract yourself from these thoughts and feelings (for example watching TV)

O- Opting out: We often opt out (Quit, avoid, procrastinate, or withdraw from) people, places, activities and situations when we don't like the thoughts and feelings they bring up for us. What are some of the things you opt out of?

T- thinking: How have you tried to think your way out of it (for example, blaming others, worrying, rehashing the past, fantasizing, positive thinking, problem-solving, planning, self-criticism) have you dwelled on thoughts such as “What is?”, “IF ONLY.....”, “Why ME?”, ‘Not fair!’ or similar things?

S- Substances, self-harm, other strategies: What substances have you tried putting into your body (including food and prescription medication)? Have you ever tried self-harming activities- for example, suicide attempts, or reckless risk-taking? Are there any other strategies you have ever tried- for example, excessive sleeping?

DID these strategies get rid you of your painful thoughts and feelings in the long run so that they never came back?

When you have used these strategies excessively, rigidly, or inappropriately, what have they cost you in terms of health, vitality, energy, relationships, work, leisure, money, missed opportunities, wasted time, or emotional pain?



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