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POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING

A STRUCTURAL APPROACH FOR INCREASING WELL-BEING

INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR PRACTITIONER

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INTRODUCTION

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The ultimate goals of coaching are to increase self-regulation of clients and to guide them in a desired direction, a direction that results in subjective wellbeing or, using a more common term, happiness. This direction involves thoughts, beliefs and actions. Stated simply, self-regulation is the self in action aiming to experience a happy and meaningful life.

However, findings in the clinical field show that effective self-regulation may not always be considered an easy task. For instance, depression rates have been 10 times higher compared to 1960 and burnout rates are increasing every year.

So far, clinical interventions have focused on ways to decrease problems associated with self-regulation, focusing on the question: “What is wrong with people?” It is hard to deny that this entails an important question. In our attempts to answer the question, we have gained more understanding of many illnesses and have developed effective treatments for a wide range of problems. However, as an inevitable consequence of our focus on the negative aspects of wellbeing and health, such as distress and disease, we developed a great amount of attention to pathology. Psychology focused disproportionately on pathology and repair, and devoted relatively little attention to factors that “make life worth living.”

What we have learned over 50 years is that the aforementioned pathology-based view on human functioning does not move us closer to the prevention of serious problems. Indeed, the major advances in prevention have largely come from a perspective focused on systematically building competency, not correcting weakness. We have discovered that there are human strengths, such as courage, future-mindedness, optimism, and interpersonal skill that act as buffers against mental illness and promote healthy self-regulation.

1.1 Positive Psychology

Research on Positive Psychology aims to investigate what actions lead to optimal self-regulation, to wellbeing, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities. For instance, scientific studies attempt to gain more insight into what family factors contribute to children who flourish, what work settings lead to the greatest satisfaction among workers, what policies result in the strongest civic engagement, and how people’s lives can be most worth living. In addition, research in the field of Positive Psychology seeks to unveil factors that contribute the prevention of problems, such as depression, substance abuse or violence. In the past 30 years there has been a development of competency-based, more collaborative approaches to working with clients. Positive Psychology is amongst these approaches, which is predominantly directed toward clients’ preferred futures and strengths instead of their past problems and deficits.

1.2 This protocol

The goal of the current intervention is to bridge the gap between science and practice, by using Positive Psychology interventions to enhance wellbeing. Positive Psychology has brought us a diverse set of scientifically tested exercises and positive interventions; interventions that have been found to promote

wellbeing by fostering healthy self-regulation. Instead of primarily focusing on the question: “What is the problem of my client and how can this problem be solved?” the question is: “What does a valuable life look like in the eyes of my client and how can this be achieved?” Although both questions may seem similar at first glance, they are not. Repairing weakness is not the same as building strengths. Moving closer to a desired direction is not the same as preventing oneself to move in an undesired direction. Subjective wellbeing is more than the absence of mental illness or problems. Getting rid of fear, anger, and depression will not automatically fill you with peace, love, and joy. Getting rid of weaknesses will not automatically maximize your strengths.

The focus of this manual is not on what is wrong with the client and on repairing what is worst, but first and foremost on strengths, what is right with him, and on creating what is best. The goal of this protocol is to help your client to move closer to a desired outcome, to a desired goal. For an overview of the most important differences between traditional therapy and positive therapy/coaching, see the appendix.

1.3 Core Ingredients

The core ingredients of this protocol are awareness, behavioral change and coping.

Awareness

Awareness is the most important prerequisite for change. Change is impossible if we are not aware of the fact that something can or needs to change. Therefore, the first phase of the intervention is to enhance awareness of the desired outcome. In designing a positive outcome – instead of problem solving – the practitioner sets out to design something, and there is an output, there is something to achieve. It is not just a matter of removing a problem; there is a designed something that was not there before. The first phase includes the personal goals of the client. It involves the answer to the question: What does a valuable life look like? After uncovering the personal values and goals of the client, the next step is to investigate the discrepancy between these values and the current life that the client lives. In other words, the client becomes aware of the extent to which he or she is living in accordance with his personal values.

In the first phase, the practitioner also helps to increase awareness of personal qualities that signal optimal self-regulation. The client becomes aware of personal resources in terms of strengths that can be used to reach the desired goal. At the same time, attention is devoted to the possible factors that prevent the client from living a value-based life. These can be internal factors (e.g., rumination or ineffective emotion regulation) or external factors (e.g., unsupportive environment or tight deadlines). Awareness of these factors is an important step, because they may prevent a client from reaching the desired outcome.

During the process of change, when the client has already started making behavioral or cognitive changes, awareness remains a core ingredient. For instance, awareness of positive emotions such as joy, energy, or gratitude are indicators of a positive change. They signal that the chosen direction of change is a preferred one. Moreover, many clients are inclined to focus on “what still needs to be done.” Although it is good to envision the future and remember goals, too much focus on goals can sometimes cause goal frustration.

Behavioral Change

Once clients are aware of the desired pathway of change, the next step is manifesting change. The practitioner helps the client to move closer to the desired direction by offering advice or support. In addition, the practitioner monitors progress and discusses the progress with the client. The client determines whether he or she prefers to take small steps or prefers a more radical change.

Coping

Changing behavioral patterns is often easier said than done. A client may encounter a great variety of challenges on his way to change. Common examples include difficult emotions like frustration or fear, negative thoughts about the past or future, and negative feedback from the social environment. These and other challenges can hinder successful goal achievement. It is therefore important for clients to be able to deal effectively with these challenges in order to successfully stay on track.

1.4 Important messages

Depending on the nature of the personal goals of your client, the manual and practices may require some personal interpretation and usage. As in real life, it is really difficult to make a stepwise protocol that works for every client, for every problem and every goal. Moreover, although many of the exercises in this manual have been tested in scientific research and have been found to enhance wellbeing, this manual has not directly been tested in research.

2

CLIENT INFO

- 2.1 Name of Client
- 2.2 Address
- 2.3 Contact Details
- 2.4 Personal Information

CLIENT INFO & CONTACT DETAILS

2.1 Name of Client

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Other:

2.2 Address

3.3 Contact Details

Home

Work

Cellphone

Skype ID

Email(s)

3.4 Personal Information

Date of Birth

Marital Status

Significant Other's Name

No. of Children

Name(s) and Age(s) of Child(ren)

Occupation

Employers Name

3

SESSION 1

VALUES AND GOAL SETTING

The goals of the first session are to introduce each other, explain the nature of the present intervention and identify the client's values and goals.

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

- Introduce each other
- Discuss rules:
 - ♦ What clients disclose during the therapy sessions is kept in strict confidence and all information shared in sessions is considered privileged information and confidential.
 - ♦ Both client and practitioner are committed to being on time for sessions
 - ♦ Without honesty, the value of the sessions will be seriously affected in a negative way. Both practitioner and client are being honest about all matters discussed.
 - ♦ The client shares what he/she wants to share. The client always holds the right to not share information.
 - ♦ The practitioner evaluates the cooperation repeatedly with the client during the intervention
- Discuss the nature of your approach (positive focus; achieving desirable outcomes, fostering healthy self-regulation) with your client.

Discuss the desired outcomes, motivation and expectancies of the client. Ask the following questions:

Problem: What brings you here?

General goal formulation: What would you like to be different as a result of these sessions?

Progress: Where are you now on a scale of 0 to 10? How do you manage to be at that number?

Motivation: 10 means you're willing to give it your all, and 0 means you're not willing to put in any effort.

Confidence: 10 means that you are very confident, and 0 means you have no confidence at all that you can reach your goal.

PART 2 - LIFE DOMAINS

Ask your client to complete **Exercise 1.1 - The Wheel of Life** in the workbook. After your client has completed this exercise, list the one life domain that needs most attention and the satisfaction score with this life domain below.

This is the life domain of my client that needs the most attention right now:

This is the satisfaction score of this specific life domain:

PART 3 - VALUES

Ask your client to complete **Exercise 1.2 - My Top 5 Values** in the workbook. After your client has completed this exercise, list his/her 5 most important values below.

The 5 most important values of my client in the life domain that needs most attention are:

Value #1

Value #2

Value #3

Value #4

Value #5

Next, try to identify the specific meaning of each of the values for your client. What does it mean to live in line with these values according to your client? Why are these the most important values to your client?

Value #1:

means to my client:

is important to my client because:

Value #2:

means to my client:

is important to my client because:

Value #3:

means to my client:

is important to my client because:

Value #4:

means to my client:

is important to my client because:

Value #5:

means to my client:

is important to my client because:

PART 3 - GOALS

In the previous exercises, your client identified the life domain that needs the most attention and the things he/she finds most important in this life domain (his values). Now it is time to focus on the first step to change: finding out what exactly needs to be changed. Ask the client to answer the following question:

What exactly do you want to change in the life domain that needs most attention?

This is what my client would like to change in the life domain that needs most attention:

What would be needed to make this change happen? To answer this question, you may consider the values your client chose in exercise 1.2. Are there any values that your client believes he/she is not (sufficiently) living in line with? What action steps would be needed for your client to live more in line with these values?

This is what is needed to make the desired change happen:

Ask your client to set some concrete goals. The client may use **Exercise 1.3 - My Goals** in the workbook to list his personal goals. Make sure your client sets SMART goals (please see the chapter “Advice” in this manual for more detailed instructions on goal-setting).

My client set the following goals:

These are my client's most important goals:

Goal #1

Goal #2

Goal #3

Goal #4

Goal #5

PART 4 - CLOSING & HOMEWORK

In the last few minutes of the session, you may want to summarize what you discussed and give some feedback. Ask if there are any questions or concerns.

Homework

Ask your client to make a visual representation of his/her goals and or values (also referred to as vision board). This can be done digitally, by selecting images, photos, words, names, etc. from the internet and combining them in a PowerPoint file, or by hand, using magazines and other resources.

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SESSION 2

STRENGTHS

In this second session, the personal strengths of the client will be identified. In addition, obstacles or personal weaknesses will be addressed.

PART 1 - EVALUATION

Evaluate the experiences of the client between this session and the first session.

Did your client think about the issues that were addressed in the last session? Did your client talk about it with other people? Are there any things that your client wants to discuss concerning the last session?

How was it to make a vision board? If your client feels comfortable, you may take a look at it together and discuss the experiences of your client.

PART 2 - STRENGTH SPOTTING

Despite life's struggles, all persons possess strengths that can be identified and used to improve self-regulation and enhance wellbeing. In addition, client motivation is increased by a consistent emphasis on strengths.

Explain to your client what strengths are: Strengths are the things you are naturally good at. When people use their strengths, they feel energized and engaged. Strengths allow us to feel and perform at our best. Strengths can also help us to deal with difficult times. Examples of strengths are “persistence”, “creativity” and “gratitude” (for a more detailed definition of strengths, please see the chapter “Advice” of this manual).

At your best

Invite your client to identify two occasions when they have been at their best (when they felt at their best or performed at their best). The occasions can be of any duration from a few minutes to a year.

(It is important that being ‘at your best’ is meaningful to your client, not an attempt to impress or conform to what others think).

1. Get him or her to talk about the experience, re-living it as vividly as possible as they go.
2. Note down every example of a possible strength they display as they talk (use the space below). You may use the strengths overview on the next page for this purpose.
3. After they have talked about the events, invite them to consider the list you have noted down.

Possible strengths of my client:

Wisdom & Knowledge – strengths which involve acquiring and using knowledge	
	Creativity: Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
	Curiosity: Openness to experience: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
	Open-mindedness: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
	Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
	Perspective: Being able to provide wise counsel to others
Courage – emotional strengths which involve exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal	
	Bravery: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, or pain
	Persistence: Finishing what one starts, persisting in a group of actions in spite of obstacles
	Integrity: Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
	Vitality/Zest: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things half-way or half-heartedly, living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated
Humanity – interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others	
	Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people
	Kindness: Doing favours and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
	Social intelligence: Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick
Justice – strengths that underlie healthy community life	
	Citizenship :Working well as member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share
	Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance
	Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
Temperance – Strengths that protect against excess	
	Forgiveness & Mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful
	Humility/Modesty: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight; not regarding oneself as more special than one is
	Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
	Self-regulation [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions
Transcendence – Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning	
	Appreciation of beauty and excellence: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to arts to mathematics to science.
	Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things; taking time to express thanks
	Hope/Optimism: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
	Humour/Playfulness: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people, seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
	Spirituality: Knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

PART 3 - CLOSING AND HOMEWORK

In the last few minutes of the session, you may want to summarize what you discussed and give some feedback. Ask if there are any questions or concerns.

Homework

1. Ask your client to take a look at the list of 24 VIA strengths and select 5 strengths that he/she thinks characterize him/her best. This list is displayed in the workbook.
2. Ask your client to ask three other persons, preferably a friend and a family member, to assess his strengths. Your client should use the two homework forms with strength-related questions and ask others to select 5 (not more or less) strengths that they believe are characterizing him/her. Ask him/her to bring this list to the next session. Important: If possible, the client should ask why others believe he/she possesses certain strengths.
3. Ask your client to pay attention to feelings of energy, enthusiasm and passion. You can ask him/her to write down what he/she is doing, who is with him/her, and/or if any strengths are at play.
4. Ask your client to complete the VIA questionnaire online: <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths-Survey>.

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SESSION 3

BehaviorAL CHANGE

The goals of the first session are to further clarify the strengths of the client and start by making concrete plans for behavioral change.

PART 1 - EVALUATION

Evaluate the experiences of the clients between this session and the last session.

Did your client pay attention to feelings of energy, enthusiasm and passion during the last week?
Discuss what your client noticed and how these experiences may be related to strength use or valued behavior.

Put the 5 top strengths of the VIA questionnaire, the peer assessed strengths and your own assessed strengths in the table on the next page.

- Column 1 (Self): Record the five positive character attributes the client identified.
- Column 2 (Coach): Record the five positive character attributes the coach identified. Place a checkmark inside the box that corresponds to the attribute the coach thought most characterized the client.
- Column 3 (VIA): Record the top 5 strengths as evidenced by the VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire online.
- Column 4, 5 & 6 (Family): Record the attributes that others identified and thought best described your client.
- Column Seven (Composite): Add the number of times that each attribute was checked in the previous columns.

		Strength	Self	Coach	VIA	Other 1	Other 2	Other 3	total
wisdom & knowledge	1	Creativity							
	2	Curiosity							
	3	Open-mindedness							
	4	Love of learning							
	5	Perspective							
courage	6	Bravery							
	7	Persistence							
	8	Integrity							
	9	Vitality							
humanity	10	Love							
	11	Kindness							
	12	Social intelligence							
justice	13	Citizenship							
	14	Fairness							
	15	Leadership							
temperance	16	Forgiveness and mercy							
	17	Humility / Modesty							
	18	Prudence							
	19	Self-regulation							
transcendence	20	Appreciation of beauty							
	21	Gratitude							
	22	Hope							
	23	Humor							
	24	Spirituality							

The Strengths listed here belong to the VIA Classification ©Copyright 2004-2015, VIA Institute. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Names

Other 1: Other 2: Other 3:

Evaluate the scoring form:

What does the client notice when looking at the scoring form?

To which extent does the client recognize himself/herself in the most frequently identified strengths?

The 5 most important strengths (signature strengths) of my client are:

Strength #1

Strength #2

Strength #3

Strength #4

Strength #5

Ask your client to write down his/her signature strengths in **Exercise 3.1 - My Signature Strengths** of the workbook.

PART 2 - LINKING STRENGTHS AND GOALS

In session one, your client generated several goals. Discuss with the client:

Are there strengths that are currently being underused (used not often enough)?

Would your client like to use these strengths more? If so, what could your client do to use these strengths more?

Are there strengths that are currently being overused (used too often)?

Would your client like to use these strengths less? If so, what could your client do to use these strengths less frequently?

Are there strengths of your client that can be used to move closer to the personal goals? How can they be used for this purpose?

Are there strengths of your client that can be used to overcome the potential obstacles that have been specified in session 2? How can they be used?

PART 3 - ACTION PLAN

Together with the client, take a look at the goals that were formed during session 1. The purpose of this phase is to elicit behavior change and then to support the client's commitment to sustaining such change. To achieve this, the coach will support the discovery of the client's ideas about how to move forward. You may ask the client the following action questions to identify the first concrete steps for action. In this phase, you can offer options for action or recommend specific courses of action.

Which elements of the goal/goals does your client has the energy or desire to begin with?

What is most compelling/important for your client to address?

Are there strengths of your client that can be used to move closer to the goals? If so, which strengths?

How can the client use his strengths in the service of his goals? What actions can be taken?

What can your client do in the next week, no matter how small a step, that will move him/her (more) towards his/her goal? Ask your client to use the form in the client manual to list some concrete actions

What would help make the first step easier?

PART 4 - CLOSING AND HOMEWORK

Together with the client, translate the answers to the previous questions into concrete action steps.

My client has planned the following concrete actions for next week:

Action #1

Action #2

Action #3

Action #4

Action #5

In addition, your client should keep increasing awareness of strengths used. Your client may use **Exercise 3.2 - My Strength Moments** in the workbook to record activities that give him/her energy and/or result in positive experiences.

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SESSION 4

OBSTACLES AND COPING

The goals of this session are to monitor the client's progress towards achieving his/her goals and build the coping skills of the client.

PART 1 - EVALUATION

Evaluate the experiences of the client between this session and the last session.

Did your client manage to commit to the actions that were formed during last session? What did he/she notice or experience?

Evaluate exercise 3.2 "My Strength Moments". Did your client pay attentions to activities that allowed him/her to use his/her strengths? Together with the client, take a look at his/her recorded observations in the table and discuss the most important insights:

PART 2 - OBSTACLES AND WEAKNESSES

Did your client experience any hindrances or obstacles that prevented him/her from carrying out the planned actions? If there were obstacles this week, discuss the nature of these obstacles. These can be internal factors (e.g. rumination or ineffective emotion regulation) or external factors (e.g. unsupportive environment or tight deadlines). Awareness of these factors is an important step because they may prevent your client from reaching the desired outcomes.

Internal factors that may prevent your client from reaching his/her goals:

External factors that may prevent your client from reaching his/her goals:

Ask your client how he/she typically deals with internal obstacles (difficult emotions/thoughts/feelings in general). Does your client use avoidance techniques like distraction or suppression? Does your client use a rational way of coping, like analyzing, rumination, worrying, putting things in perspective? To which extent are these strategies helpful and effective?

Ask your client how he/she typically deals with external obstacles. What actions are taken? To which extent are these actions helpful and effective?

Discuss with your client what he/she could do to prevent these obstacles from interfering with her goals. You may offer suggestions here.

PART 3 - MINDFULNESS

Practicing mindfulness can be an effective way to increase awareness of both personal strengths and obstacles. Introduce the concept of mindfulness to the client. Before explaining the concept it often works better to let the client experience what mindfulness or mindlessness entails. The “1 minute of silence” exercise can be used for this purpose.

1 minute of silence

Ask your client to be silent for one minute and not to think during this minute. No talking, just being. Ask your client what he/she experienced. When doing this exercise, most of the time people experience the constant noise of thoughts. Moreover, they notice that it is impossible to stop thinking by trying not to think.

Evaluate the exercise with the client. How was it to do the exercise? What did your client notice?

The practitioner can now use the following description to explain the concept of mindfulness to the client:

“Mindfulness means paying full attention to the present moment in an open and accepting way. When we are mindful, our attention is focused on the here and now, on our experiences (like feelings and/or bodily sensations), on a conversation we are having with a friend, etc. Rather than being lost in thoughts about the past or the future, we are fully present in whatever is happening in this moment. A mindful person has the power to observe thoughts and then deliberately turn attention back to the present moment.

The nature of the attention is also very important in mindfulness. Instead of judging experiences and trying to avoid them, mindfulness requires an attitude of acceptance and non-judgment. In a mindful state, the individual allows experiences to be as they are, rather than to judge, fight, or control them.”

A guided meditation

In this phase you ask your client if he/she is willing to practice with mindfulness. If your client agrees, you can do a brief meditation together. Below you will find the transcript of the “three-minute breathing exercise.” This only takes three minutes (hence the name). You may also use different kinds of meditation here.

1. Awareness

“The first thing we do with this practice, because it’s brief and we want to come into the moment quickly, is to take a very definite posture ... relaxed, dignified, back erect, but not stiff, letting our bodies express a sense of being present and awake.

“Now, close your eyes if that feels comfortable for you. The first step is being aware, really aware, of what is going on with you right now. Becoming aware of what is going through your mind; what thoughts are around? Here, again, just note the thoughts as mental events, not as facts... So we note them, and then we note the feelings that are around at the moment ... in particular, turning toward any sense of discomfort or unpleasant feelings. So rather than try to push them away or shut them out, just acknowledge them, perhaps saying, “Ah, there you are, that’s how it is right now.” And similarly with sensations in the body... Are there sensations of tension, of holding, or whatever? And again, awareness of them, simply noting them. OK, that’s how it is right now.”

2. Gathering

“So, we’ve got a sense of what is going on right now. We’ve stepped out of automatic pilot. The second step is to collect our awareness by focusing on a single object—the movements of the breath. So now we really gather ourselves, focusing attention down there in the movements of the abdomen, the rise and fall of the breath ... spending a minute or so to focus on the movement of the abdominal wall ... moment by moment, breath by breath, as best we can. So that you know when the breath is moving in, and you know when the breath is moving out. Just binding your awareness to the pattern of movement down there ... gathering yourself, using the anchor of the breath to really be present.

3. Expanding

“And now as a third step, having gathered ourselves to some extent, we allow our awareness to expand. As well as being aware of the breath, we also include a sense of the body as a whole. So that we get this more spacious awareness... A sense of the body as a whole, including any tightness or sensations related to holding in the shoulders, neck, back, or face ... following the breath as if your whole body is breathing. Holding it all in this slightly softer ... more spacious awareness. And then, when you are ready, just allow your eyes to open.”

Evaluate the exercise with the client. How was it to do the exercise? What did your client notice?

PART 4 - ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance can be a powerful way to deal with internal obstacles, like difficult feelings and emotions. . Acceptance allows the client to deal with difficult emotions and/or experiences in a way that promotes goal- and value-directed behavior.

A possible way to introduce acceptance (as opposed to control) is by asking the client to control his/her thoughts for 2 minutes. This can be a neutral thought (a white bear) or related to the personal goal (a fearful thought). Probably the client will notice that control can lead to less control. In the same way, when the client tries to avoid or control negative experiences, they may backfire, causing the client to experience what he/she tries to avoid.

Linking acceptance to goals and values

The most common emotion that prevents clients from achieving their goals and living in line with their values is fear. Fear can cause your client to stop moving in the desired direction. Some clients spend so much time dealing with negative thoughts and emotions by resisting them that they lose track of the desired direction. Therefore, it is important for the client to be able to deal with fear in a way that allows him/her to follow his/her aspirations and values.

Explaining the importance of acceptance in the context of goals and values can be done using a metaphor. Ask the client to take a look at the illustrations depicted on the next page. The pictures illustrate two different ways of dealing with difficult emotions and feelings, like fear.

In the first picture (fig. 1), behavior and choices (the route the person is walking) are guided by fear (the sign). The route that leads to the mountain is a valued pathway. It includes choices and behaviors that are meaningful to the person. However, although the route to the mountain is considered personally meaningful, the person fearfully avoids this route. The unknown of the future (the person does not know what the route to the mountain looks like) causes fear to rise and the person prefers to stay within his/her comfort zone. The fear is blocking his/her personal goals and values and he/she will keep walking in circles.

In the second picture (fig. 2), the person is taking action despite his/her fear. In this scenario, the fear is no longer blocking his/her personal goals and values. The person is willing to experience the fear, but without following through on fearful instincts and fear-based decisions. The fear may still be present, but it no longer determines the choices the person is making. The person is willing to trade his/her comfort zone for a life that is in line with his/her values, even if this new route is (occasionally) accompanied by fear. This also allows the individual to expand his/her comfort zone, as the new path, once followed, will become more comfortable.

Acceptance means allowing negative thoughts and emotions to be present, experiencing them fully, but not letting them stop you from living the life you want.

Explaining the difference between avoidance and acceptance can be easily done by usage of the word “but.” An example of avoidance is: “I would love to write a book, but I am afraid it will not be good enough.” Acceptance would be: “I would love to write a book, and I am afraid it will not be good enough.”

fig. 1 Avoidance-based coping:
Fear preventing value-based living

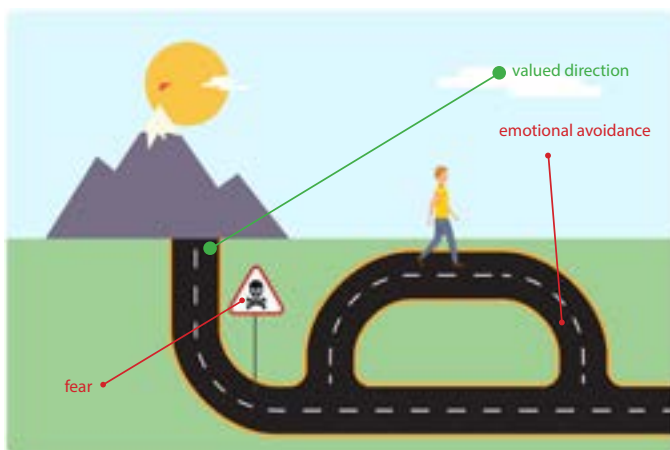


fig. 2 Acceptance-based coping
Fear not preventing value-based living



Ask the client to identify up to 5 fears that are currently blocking the pathway to his/her goals. The client may list these fears using **Exercise 4.1 - Feelings Blocking Goal Achievement** in the workbook.

Fears that are currently blocking the pathway to my client's goals:

Fear #1

Fear #2

Fear #3

Fear #4

Fear #5

Practicing acceptance

Although the client may understand the concept of acceptance, he/she may still find it difficult to imagine how acceptance is applied in real life. Common questions are: “How do I accept an emotion?” and “Does acceptance mean that I accept every situation?” In order to make the concept of acceptance more concrete and understandable, clients may benefit from a guided meditation in which the client applies acceptance-based coping. The following meditation can be used for this purpose:

Pre-Meditation:

Try to think of something that is bothering you. It may be a scenario that you are or have been worrying about. It can be a scenario that has happened in the past or something that may happen in the future. Try to think of a scenario that is able to elicit an emotional reaction. In this meditation you will imagine yourself in your chosen scenario.

If at any point you realize that the meditation is too much, you have the option to open your eyes and/or wiggle your fingers and toes which will help reground you to the present. You can also try bringing the focus of your attention back to your breath. If this does not help and you do not wish to continue the meditation, then respect yourself by stopping.

The Meditation:

1. Begin by closing your eyes if that feels comfortable for you. If you choose to leave your eyes open, then focus your attention on your feet and let your gaze softly rest and remain there for the duration of the meditation.
2. Start to notice your breath, each inhale and exhale. After at least five breaths, notice where your body is making contact: feet touching the floor, back on the ground, bones on a chair, etc.
3. Now, bring the challenging scenario you've chosen to the forefront of your mind. Really try to imagine yourself in the scenario; what happened or may happen? As vividly as possible, imagine the situation.
4. As a result of this imagination, you may notice that certain emotions arise. [you can ask your client to raise his hand if he experiences an emotion. If not, you may give him some more time or continue anyway].
5. What emotions are you experiencing? What thoughts are going through your mind?
6. Now try to focus on your body. Often, emotions are represented in our body. What feelings arise in your body? Simply observe what you feel in your body. Maybe you feel tension or other sensations. Perhaps you experience a tightness in your stomach, around your heart or neck. Whatever you experience, try to stay with the sensations and be gentle on yourself
7. You can use the breath as a vehicle to do this. Direct awareness to the part of the body where those sensations are strongest. 'Breathe into' that part of the body on the in-breath.
8. Rather than pushing this experience away, try to let it be. In silence, you can say to the feeling: “It is OK,

you are allowed to be here.” “Whatever it is, it’s OK. Let me feel it.” See what happens if you allow yourself to experience whatever you experience in this moment. Just stay with the awareness of these bodily sensations and your relationship to them, breathing with them, accepting them, letting them be. You can repeat “It’s OK. Whatever it is, it’s OK.”

9. Perhaps you notice that the feeling gets more intense. Maybe the feeling remains the same or reduces. It may also move in your body. Whatever happens, it is OK. Simply allow it to be. Observe what happens. Remember to stay with the experience with curiosity and kindness. You are experiencing sensations without reacting.
10. Often, thoughts can distract us from the present-moment experience. Maybe there are thoughts about the scenario or about this exercise. That’s OK. Simply notice when your attention is focused on thoughts and then kindly direct your attention back to your experience in the present moment.
11. Continue to discover what happens within your body and mind without tightening or resisting it. You can try to hold together in awareness both the sensations in your body and the sense of the breath—breathing with the sensations. When you notice that the bodily sensations are no longer pulling for your attention, simply returning 100% to the breath and continuing with that as the primary object of attention.
12. If, in the next few minutes, no powerful sensations in your body arise, try this exercise with any bodily sensations that you experience, even if they have no particular charge.
13. Now slowly let your chosen scenario go out of the focus of your attention. Wiggle your fingers and toes. Slowly open your eyes and come back with your attention to the present room.

Evaluate the exercise with the client. How was it to do the exercise? What did your client notice?

In the previous exercise, your client identified fears that may prevent him/her from reaching his/her goals. Discuss how acceptance may help your client to get closer to his/her goals.

PART 5 - CLOSING AND HOMEWORK

1. Ask your client how he/she wants to continue realizing his/her goals. Preferably ask him/her to list a few concrete actions for this week. Note that your client may also include actions that help him/her to deal with potential obstacles here.

My client has planned the following concrete actions for next week:

Action #1

Action #2

Action #3

Action #4

Action #5

2. Ask your client to reserve a few timeslots per day to apply **Exercise 4.1 - Three-minute Breathing Space** in the workbook.
3. Ask your client to practice the three mindfulness and acceptance exercises this week. The client may practice at home by using the two guided meditations of this session in audio format or use the written instructions in the client manual.



7

SESSION 5

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Research on positive emotions has repeatedly shown that cultivation of positive emotions broadens people's action repertoire and can help to contribute to a process of positive change. In this session, the coach will assist the client in experiencing more positive emotions and thereby contribute to the process of change.

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

Evaluate the experiences of the client between this session and the last session.

Did your client manage to commit to the actions that were formed during last session? What did he/she notice or experience?

Did your client experience any hindrances or obstacles that prevented him/her from carrying out the desired behavior? If so, how did he/she deal with this?

Did your client practice mindfulness and/or acceptance this week? If so, what were his/her experiences?

PART 2 - POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Increasing positive emotions is a powerful way to build the client's resilience. A direct way to allow your client to experience the impact of positive emotions is by doing the following exercise:

Gratitude for important people

"One of many gratitude practices is to remember the people who have profoundly influenced you in your life. These are the people who had a great positive influence on you: grandparents or parents, teachers, bosses, a spouse, a child, or some iconic person you have never even met. Consider these people, mention their names, and tell me how they contributed to your life."

Ask your client to mention 3 names of people who are or have been very important to him/her. Ask him/her to explain to you why these persons are/were important. Your client may use **Exercise 5.1 - Gratitude for Important People** in the workbook to list these people and provide details about their positive influence.

Discuss the exercise. How was it to do this exercise? Did your client experience any emotions?

Positive emotion brainstorm

In order to generate more positive emotions, you can help the client to generate possible ideas for increasing positive emotions in his/her daily life. The exercise below can be used for this purpose and targets the type of positive emotions that are experienced least often/are most underrepresented from the client's day to day life.

Step 1

From the list below, which of the ten positive emotions does your client feel least daily? Choose one number to work with.

Types of Positive Emotion:

1. Amused, fun-loving, or silly
2. Awe, wonder, or amazement
3. Grateful, appreciative, or thankful
4. Hopeful, optimistic, or encouraged
5. Inspired, uplifted, or elevated
6. Interested, alert, or curious
7. Joyful, glad, or happy
8. Love, closeness, or trust
9. Proud, confident, or self-assured
10. Serene, content, or peaceful

Step 2

Write the three words from the number that your client picked under "The least experienced positive emotions of my client" on the next page.

Step 3

Take ten minutes to discuss how your client can increase the opportunities in his/her life to experience the three emotions. Let your mind wander and don't limit your possibilities. Possible categories for your ideas include:

- Activities that you already do, but could do more often
- New activities
- Changing your mindset about current activities

The least experienced positive emotions of my client:

Emotion #1

Emotion #2

Emotion #3

Ideas:

Idea #1

Idea #2

Idea #3

Idea #4

Idea #5

Idea #6

Idea #7

Idea #8

Idea #9

Idea #10

PART 4 - CLOSING AND HOMEWORK

1. Ask your client how he/she wants to continue realizing his/her goals. Preferably ask him/her to list a few concrete actions for next week. My client has planned the following concrete actions for next week:

My client has planned the following concrete actions for next week:

Action #1

Action #2

Action #3

Action #4

Action #5

2. Ask your client to select one or more positive activities to carry out this week. These positive activities can (but do not necessarily have to) serve as consequences for being able to successfully commit to the goals. In other words, your client may use these positive activities as a reward for acting in line with his/her goals and values. Your client can think of small rewards like watching television, buying a small gift, spending time with friends, etc. Your client may also use the list of activities that was generated in the previous exercise as a guide or source of inspiration. In any case, these activities should elicit positive emotions.



8

SESSION 6

EVALUATION AND THE FUTURE

The goal of this final session is to evaluate the intervention and the coach and make concrete plans for the future.

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

Evaluate the experiences of the clients between this session and the last session.

Did your client manage to commit to the actions that were formed during the last session? What did he/she notice or experience?

Did your client practice one of the exercises to increase positive emotions? Which exercise(s) was/were done? What did your client experience?

Are there any other things your client would like to discuss?

PART 2 - EVALUATION

Discuss with your client his/her opinion about the intervention and your role as a coach.

Does your client notice a difference after these sessions? If so, discuss the nature of this difference.

Did your client manage to change his/her behavior more in line with his values?

Did your client manage to use his/her strengths more?

What were positive aspects of the intervention?

What were positive aspects of the practitioner?

Which aspects of the intervention can be improved?

Which aspects of the practitioner can be improved?

Ask your client to consider the things he/she learned about him/herself during this intervention and formulate a personal “take-home message”. Your client may use the form of **Exercise 6.1 - My Take-home Message** in the workbook to write down his/her message.

This is the take-home message of my client:

PART 3 - THE FUTURE

Discuss how your client wishes to proceed after these sessions.

How would your client like to proceed after these sessions? Are there certain commitments that he/she wants to make? Perhaps there are actions, exercises or other aspects of the intervention that your client would like to continue doing or develop further in the future.

If your client wants to continue in certain way, discuss how he/she want to continue and how your client will make sure that he will stay on track (and stay committed). You may offer suggestions of course.

Close the intervention. Thank your client for his/her cooperation and, if applicable, discuss options for future contact.

9

ADVICE

- 4.1 Session 1
- 4.2 Session 2
- 4.3 Session 3
- 4.4 Session 4
- 4.5 Session 5

4.1

SESSION 1

THE WHEEL OF LIFE EXERCISE

- The Wheel of Life exercise can be used to clarify priorities for goal-setting, allowing the client to plan so their current life becomes closer to their desired life: increasing balance between the different life domains. Note that it is important to first understand what “balance” looks like for the client before trying to make this determination based on the results of this exercise. Not everyone is going to want the different domains to be in perfect balance. It all depends on the client’s values.
- Note that “balance” is not necessarily reflected by the wheel. In fact, most often, the wheel is a firm reminder of how “unbalanced” a client’s life is. Therefore, this exercise may serve to inform clients of any gap between perceived “balance” and reality.
- The Wheel of Life is not a picture of the past. It is a snapshot taken in the moment and because of this, it is subject to change. The wheel provides the client with data in the “now,” and the practitioner may use that information to point out the gaps between what is true today and what the client wants for the future.
- When used on a regular basis, this tool is excellent to help your clients to see how far they have come. Repeated measures allow clients to monitor their progress in perceived life balance. Periodic balance checks can highlight useful patterns and facilitate client behavioral change.
- A client may also ask someone who knows them well to complete the scores for them. At times, it may be helpful for a client to understand an outsider’s perspective. Preferably, this is someone who the client trusts and whose opinion the client values.
- When clients are unsatisfied with specific life domains, they may want to drastically improve their satisfaction with these domains. Especially for perfectionistic clients, the awareness of low levels of satisfaction may automatically trigger a need to drastically increase them. However, setting unrealistic goals is likely to cause frustration and lower wellbeing. For instance, several studies have shown that when people have idealized positive fantasies, their motivation and energy to achieve these goals dramatically decreases (e.g. Kappes & Oettingen, 2011). The practitioner should assist the client in setting reasonable targets for improving wellbeing. Instead of motivating them to work toward a 10, the practitioner should help clients to shift the focus from being the best to simply being better, offering them permission to strive without the burden of emotional self-flagellation. A solution-focused strategy may work well here. For example, if a client rates his relationship satisfaction with his wife a 5, the practitioner could ask: “What could you do this week to move your 5 up to a 6?”

VALUES EXPLAINED

According to Wilson and Dufrene (2009), values can be defined as: “freely chosen, verbally constructed consequences of ongoing, dynamic, evolving patterns of activity, which establish predominant reinforcers for that activity that are intrinsic in engagement in the valued behavioral pattern itself” (p. 66).

Simply put, a value is about what a person wants to be doing with his or her life. Values are chosen consequences that can never be fulfilled. Rather, they serve as motivation for certain behavioral directions. Whereas goals can be achieved, values cannot be achieved. For example, a value of being creative can never be fulfilled. Even if the person creates a painting (a concrete goal), it would be silly to say, “Now that I have created this painting, I’ve accomplished creativity. Now I’ll proceed with the next thing.” Therefore, values are best formulated as verbs, in that they are not something that is ever fully achieved. For example, a value might be “being creative.” Value congruence is the extent to which an individual’s behavior is consistent with the stated value.

Values help clients to choose directions for their lives that are in line with what is truly important to them and help them construct goals that promote behavior in those directions. Values are the answer to the question: “In a world where you could choose to have your life be about something, what would you choose?” In this phase of the assessment, clients identify their personal values that are essential to the domain they have chosen to work on.

Characteristics of values

Values must:

Be chosen freely

Example: If an individual doesn’t cheat because someone tells the individual not to, or because the individual knows that they will get into trouble by law, the individual is not freely acting on their values of honesty and integrity.

Be chosen from among alternatives

Example: If an individual doesn’t cheat because they’re taking a test in an empty room without any way to cheat or external resources, the individual cannot say that they chose not to cheat. There must always be an alternative in choosing the value.

Result from thoughtful consideration

Example: If an individual doesn’t cheat because it never occurred to them to do otherwise, there is no value at play. If they cheat thoughtlessly or carelessly, it does not reflect a value. Only when they carefully consider alternatives and consequences and then make a choice is value reflected in that decision.

Be something that an individual lives by

Example: The individual lives by honesty and integrity. Considerable time and effort are spent developing honesty and integrity. The individual may have to make sacrifices to live with honesty and integrity.

Be comfortable for the individual to share with others

Example: The individual is proud to share that they choose not to cheat. Further, the individual will try and convince others not to cheat. Through actions and words, the individual demonstrates that they value honesty and integrity.

COMMON VALUE IDENTIFICATION PITFALLS

A common problem in this phase is the coach's failure to detect goals that are presented as values by the client. For example, the client may say, "I want to be happy" or "I want to be rich." This sounds like a value, but it is not. Being happy is something you can have or not have, like an object. Having a lot of money is a goal, not a value. A value is a direction—a quality of action. By definition, values cannot be achieved and maintained in a static state; they must be lived out. A practical way to avoid this confusion is to place any value statement that is actually a goal statement under the following microscope: "What is this in the service of?" or "What would you be able to do if that was accomplished?" Very often, this exercise will reveal the hidden value that has not been stated. Some "values" are really a means to an end, in which case they are not values at all.

PROPER GOAL FORMULATION

The coach should make sure that client set goals that are SMART:

- **Short- and long-term goals:** Create both short-term and long-term goals. Long-term goals are more abstract, fuzzy visions of the future. An example of a long-term goal is: "I will spend more time with my kids." Short-term goals, on the other hand, are more direct and concrete than long-term goals. Short-term goals include actions you will take: when and where you will do so, and who or what is involved. This is a short-term goal: "I will take the kids to the park on Saturday afternoon to play baseball."
- **Meaningful:** The goal should be genuinely guided by personal values, as opposed to following a rigid rule, trying to please others, or trying to avoid some pain. Make sure the goal has a sense of meaning or purpose.
- **Approach:** The goal should not be formulated as a movement away from an undesirable state. For

example, “I will be less stressed about work.” Avoidance goals do not provide a specific outcome target. Instead, the goal should be formulated as a movement toward a specific state or objective. E.g., “I will enjoy a fulfilling balance between work demands and personal relaxation.”

- **Realistic:** The goal should be realistically achievable. When setting goals, consider health, competing demands on the client’s time, financial status, and whether the client has the skills to achieve it.
- **Time-framed:** The goal should be specific. Therefore, it is important to set a day, date, and time for it. If this is not possible, set as accurate a time frame as you possibly can.

Please note that the SMART acronym used here is a bit different from some other versions.

ADDITIONAL GOAL SETTING ADVICE

- When setting goals, it is important to inform clients that they should take small steps. When clients get too focused on big and abstract long-term goals, they may become demotivated because reaching them may take much longer than they expected.
- Clients should be aware of the necessary balance between short- and long-term goals. Too much focus on short-term goals can result in a disconnection from the bigger, motivating picture. Too much focus on long-term goals can pull clients out of living in the present, getting sucked into the mindset of “I’ll be (only) happy once I’ve achieved that goal.”
- It is advisable for the practitioner to make sure that the goals that are formulated by the client are realistic. Unrealistic goals can result in negative emotions because they confront the client with a big reality gap: a large gap between current reality and desired reality.
- Clients who have a low level of self-efficacy (the belief that they can actually carry out the behavior) can be assured by posing the following question: “What’s the smallest, tiniest, simplest, easiest step you can take in the next twenty-four hours that will take you a little bit further in that direction?” In this way, the focus is on small steps that are feasible in the eyes of the client.
- If a client does not like to complete forms, goal-setting can be done conversationally. However, writing it down during the session makes it more tangible and provides the client a valuable reminder to take away.
- In reviewing goals, the practitioner can amplify changes that already have begun.

USING THE TERM 'HOMEWORK'

Many clients do not like the sound of the word “homework.” It carries different sorts of negative connotations. The coach may prefer to use the term “practice” or “experiment.” For example, the coach might say, “Would you be willing to practice something between now and next session?” or “Would you be willing to experiment with doing this and see what happens?”

THE VISION BOARD

The goal of this exercise is to help clients connect to their personal values in a creative way. The present exercise allows a playful and intuitive search for one’s core values that, when finished, can easily function as a visual reminder. Living a meaningful life is likely to be facilitated by increased awareness of one’s core values.

Inform your client to be creative. Here are some options:

- Use pen and paper to make drawings.
- Use a scissor to cut pictures and texts from hardcopy magazines and glue them together on a piece of paper.
- Use apps, like Bloom (<http://appcrawlr.com/ios/bloom-2>) or Corkulous Pro (<http://appcrawlr.com/ios/corkulous-pro>).
- Use PowerPoint or Keynote to build a presentation with images, photo’s, text and so on.

Exposure to the vision board can serve as a prime or reminder. Therefore, your client can put the vision board where it can be seen every day (e.g., on the refrigerator or office desk). Note that some clients may consider their board a private source of inspiration. If this is the case, they should think of a place that limits the people who can view their work. The point is that your client’s vision board should be accessible to him/her and shouldn’t be placed where he or she will fall out of the habit of looking at it.

When creating the vision board, it is important to enjoy the process and work intuitively. Rather than creating the vision board in a rational mode (a lot of thinking and internally debating), it often works best to just go with the flow; select images or texts that feel good or appropriate, without overthinking it. Prioritizing can always be done afterwards.

4.2

SESSION 2

EVALUATING THE VISION BOARD

After your client has created the vision board, ask him/her if he/she would like to discuss the vision board together. Allowing the client to share the vision board with the coach/therapist can not only enhance the connection between both, but can also create a fruitful starting point for behavioral change. Questions that can be addressed during the evaluation are:

- Can you explain to me what we are looking at?
- How was it to create this board? What did you experience while making it?
- What did you learn from this exercise?
- To what extent do you think you are living in line with the values that are on this vision board?
- What kind of goals can be formulated based on your vision board?

STRENGTHS DEFINED

Strengths are characteristics of a person that allow them to perform well or at their personal best. Strengths include positive attributes, abilities, thoughts, behaviors, and resources.

In the context of work and performance, strengths typically refer to characteristics of individuals that allow them to feel and perform at their best. When people use their strengths, they feel energized and engaged. Strengths allow people to feel and perform at their best. Scientific research has consistently demonstrated that using one's strengths is associated with higher levels of wellbeing. For example, people who use

their strengths have been found to experience more positive affect, vitality, self-esteem, job satisfaction, and work engagement. The following definition of a strength is most suitable in the context of work and performance:

"... a strength is a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energizing to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance" (Linley, 2008, p. 9).

In the context of hardship, strengths refer to characteristics that allow humans to effectively cope with difficult times. Examples of these characteristics include optimism (positive expectations of the future),

gratitude (being able to see the positive despite the negative), and mindfulness. In this context, strengths can be defined as:

“the capacity to cope with difficulties, to maintain functioning in the face of stress, to bounce back in the face of significant trauma, to use external challenges as a stimulus for growth, and to use social supports as a source of resilience” (p. 203, McQuaide & Ehrenreich, 1997).

References

- Linley, A. (2008). *Average to A+: Realising strengths in yourself and others*. Coventry: CAPP Press
- McQuaide, S., & Ehrenreich J. (1997). Assessing client strengths. *Families in Society*, 78, 201–212.

BEYOND THE VIA APPROACH

In this manual, the VIA approach to strengths will be used. When spotting strengths it is important to remember that this approach only addresses a very limited set of human strengths. In reality, there are possibly many hundreds of different strengths that are currently not listed by this approach. Probably, the majority have yet to be explicitly identified, defined, or named. So, the strengths considered by this approach can best be viewed as a good starting point, rather than a complete set of available human strengths. Using the VIA list of strengths facilitates structural strength detection by other people in the client's life, but the coach is encouraged to also consider strengths other than the 24 VIA strengths.

ADDITIONAL STRENGTH-SPOTTING QUESTIONS

The following questions can be used in addition to the question addressed in the “at your best” exercise:

Activities

- What do you like to do?
- What activities make you feel fulfilled?
- What brings positive energy into your life?
- What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
- What activities can you not wait to do again?
- What activities make you feel completely absorbed?
- What activities excite you?
- What do you find is always left until last/un-done on your to-do-list?
- Tell me about an activity or task that comes easily to you.

Interest

- What kinds of stories in the news always capture your interest?
- What were your favourite subjects at school?

Happiness/Subjective wellbeing

- When would your friends and family say you are at your happiest?

Coping

- When faced with an overwhelming obstacle, what's my "go to" way to overcome it?
- What are the strengths that others acknowledge in me?
- What was the most successful project you ever tackled, and what made you successful?

Authenticity

- When do you feel like the "real you"?
- Describe a situation in which you feel most like 'yourself'.
- Where do you feel at peace?
- Where do you feel calm?

Energy and Passion

- When are the times when you feel fully engaged as opposed to merely pretending to be or being partially engaged?
- What are three things that you are passionate about?
- What makes you feel passionate about the above three items listed?
- Where does your attention naturally focus?

Performance

- When are you self-disciplined? When are you productive?
- What are you particularly proud of?
- When are you creative?
- When do you deliver results seamlessly?
- What did you do as a child that you still do today, only probably better?

Flow (present moment absorption)

- When in life do you play?
- When do you lose track of time? At what instances do you enjoy the ride instead of looking to reach your end goal?
- When engaging in what activities do you feel in a state of flow?

- When do you experience the feeling of being in the “zone”?

Mission/Calling

- What do you feel is your true calling in life?
- When do you feel like you’re doing what you’re supposed to in life?
- What have you learned quickly, catching on with minimal effort?
- When do you feel motivated?
- Which items do you want on your to-do list, but never make it on there?
- What in the future are you looking forward to?
- What would you say is a successful day?

4.3

SESSION 3

THE STRENGTH SCORING FORM

An example of a completed inventory is displayed below. The names below the inventory represent the names of the three persons that the client has asked to select his strengths. As you can see, although not all sources have identified the same strengths, there is considerable overlap in 5 of them, namely creativity (4), love of learning (3), integrity (4), love (4), and fairness (4). These strengths are likely to be the signature strengths of this client. In addition, the inventory also provides insight into possible blind spots: strengths that are mentioned by others, but not by the client himself. In the current example, integrity is an example of a potential blind spot. The inventory may also shed light on possible opportunities for growth: strengths that are mentioned by the client himself, but which are not or not often recognized by other sources. Perspective is a potential area for growth for the client in the example below. Perspective is only mentioned by the client, but no other source believes this strength to be present (at least not in the top 5).

		Strength	Self	Coach	VIA	Other 1	Other 2	Other 3	total
wisdom & knowledge	1	Creativity	X	X		X	X		4
	2	Curiosity							
	3	Open-mindedness							
	4	Love of learning	X		X	X			3
	5	Perspective	X						1
courage	6	Bravery						X	1
	7	Persistence		X					1
	8	Integrity		X	X		X	X	4
	9	Vitality				X			1
humanity	10	Love	X	X	X		X		4
	11	Kindness						X	1
	12	Social intelligence							
justice	13	Citizenship							
	14	Fairness	X	X		X		X	4
	15	Leadership							
temperance	16	Forgiveness and mercy							
	17	Humility / Modesty			X				1
	18	Prudence				X	X		2
	19	Self-regulation							
transcendence	20	Appreciation of beauty							
	21	Gratitude			X				1
	22	Hope					X	X	2
	23	Humor							
	24	Spirituality							

Names

Other 1: John Wright (colleague) Other 2: Mother Other 3: Will Connel (friend)

HOMEWORK - MY STRENGTH MOMENTS

Many clients have busy lives, filled with routine activities. This homework exercise works best if a new routine is created. On a daily basis, clients may set their phone alarms at three random moments. These alarms require the client to pause for a moment and consider the current activity, their experiences, and possible strengths or weaknesses that are used during the activity.

Being able to look inside is a process that is required here. Note that this process requires an open and honest attitude. Clients may experience resistance or a lack of energy when performing tasks that they feel they should like or should be good at (for instance, because the task involves a great part of their current job or role). This exercise requires clients to step beyond their beliefs and opinions on how they should be or feel, and start focusing on what is really going on in terms of their experiences. It can be helpful to inform clients beforehand about this quality that is needed during the present exercise.

4.4

SESSION 4

THREE-MINUTE BREATHING SPACE

Many clients often falsely perceive mindfulness exercises as something one must become good at. Therefore, before and during mindfulness exercises it is important to emphasize that it is not the goal of the practice to monitor and evaluate one's performance as being good or bad. Quite the contrary, participants are encouraged to be kind and compassionate to themselves. This means that they are encouraged not to negatively evaluate or punish themselves if they were distracted by thoughts, but to simply observe and accept what happened. Perceiving mindfulness exercises in terms of success and failure will negatively interfere with the ability to be present and will increase the likelihood of negative emotions and thoughts. In a similar way, experiencing boredom or negative emotions can stimulate thoughts supporting the belief that one is not able to meditate. This can be prevented by stressing that the goal of the exercise is not to experience a certain state or to stay focused all the time, but rather to become aware of what is happening in the present. Clients should be informed that being distracted or experiencing difficult emotions are not signs of failure, but rather natural processes.

ACCEPTANCE OF FEELINGS

- Rather than giving clients instructions to apply acceptance at home, it is very important to first apply the instructions together in this session. In this way, the coach can address questions, difficult experiences and so on that emerge as a result of the practice. In addition, after clients have a taste of what acceptance means, it is easier to explain the concept in more detail.
- If at any point your client realizes that the meditation is too much, inform him/her that he/she has the option to open the eyes and stop.
- It is important to inform the client that the goal of acceptance of emotions is not to get rid of the emotion. For many clients, this sounds very confusing. After all, what is the purpose of emotion regulation if the goal to feel better is not achieved? As a coach, it is important to address the paradoxical nature of avoidance and control. There are several ways to do this.
 - Let the client experience that trying to control something can lead to the opposite effect: losing control. Ask the client to control his thoughts by instructing him/her to not think about something.
 - Many problems that clients have are because of their tendency to control them and get a grip on them. You can ask clients to continue controlling and avoiding their experiences as they used to do

and report how it went during the next session. Although this option is quite extreme, it can generate the willingness to give up control and be open to new alternatives.

- In some cases, after clients have successfully applied acceptance of emotions, they start to notice that by allowing emotions to be present and stop fighting them, the painful emotions actually fade away quickly. As this happens, a new challenge is introduced. Some clients may start to apply acceptance as a way to get rid of emotions. In this case, acceptance is not true acceptance anymore; true acceptance means allowing every experience to be present, even if one does not start to feel better.
- By introducing a goal to acceptance (e.g., feeling better), the focus is not on the present moment anymore and the acceptance has become “conditional” acceptance; “I will allow these emotions to be present, but they must go away.” In fact, this is the same process as avoidance; one is not truly willing to experience reality as it unfolds. It is important to explain this to clients.
- Note that learning to apply acceptance can be a very challenging task for many clients, especially when control-based strategies and avoidance are the default way of coping with difficult experiences. The reason why many people use control strategies is that in the short term, they do work. For example, if I try to suppress my emotions, the immediate consequence is that I don’t feel them. However, after a while, the suppressed emotion is likely to backfire and over time, a negative relationship is cultivated with difficult experiences.
- In order to train acceptance-based coping, time and patience are required. Clients may also want to take small steps in learning to apply acceptance. For instance, start by allowing emotions to be present for a brief moment of time and switch back to the default strategy again. Over time, clients may extend the amount of time they allow emotions to be present.

AVOIDING PRESSURE

A potential trap for the practitioner is to view the client’s behavior change as a requirement for therapy to be considered a “success.” When the client’s commitment wavers or the client goes back to old avoidance behaviors, the practitioner should avoid pressuring the client to get the goals and actions accomplished. The harder the practitioner pushes on the client, the more resistant the client can become. It is important for the practitioner to realize that choosing valued behavior is a choice only the client can make. Choosing not to go forward with a plan is a legitimate choice, as long as it actually is a choice. The gentlest way to work with a client in such circumstances is to completely validate the client and the dilemma he or she is facing. The coach might say: “If this were my life and I were seeing the consequences you are seeing, I could well imagine myself choosing not to go forward.”

4.5

SESSION 5

ACCEPTANCE-BASED COPING EVALUATION

When evaluating the client's attempts to introduce more willingness to accept difficult experiences, it is important to reassure the client that this approach usually takes quite some time to learn. For clients who are used to avoiding negative experiences, allowing these experiences to be present is often a serious challenge. Every step the client takes to allow negative states to be more present, no matter how small, should be praised and encouraged by the coach.

The coach may decide to spend some additional time evaluating the acceptance-based practice of the client and/or do another acceptance exercise together with the client before proceeding with the positive emotion part of the session.

BROADEN AND BUILD

This session relies on Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden and Build Theory, a well-developed body of research which has expanded to become the most rigorous method to review the effect of positive emotions and to predict their short and long term outcomes. Just like negative emotions cause narrowing thoughts to focus on the specifics of a problem – positive emotions expand thought- action repertoires and encourage an upward spiral of positive emotions. The Broaden-and-Build Theory is based on two hypotheses:

The Broaden Hypothesis

Positive emotions broaden thought processes by increasing the attentional focus to more options in the environment. This in turn, effects the individual's immediate thought action repertoire for example; if someone experiences the emotion of interest they will have the urge to learn more and explore different actions to do so (Fredrickson, B. 2001). The Broaden and Build research focuses primarily on the 10 most frequently experienced positive emotions of: Joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love. (Fredrickson, B., 2001)

The Build Hypothesis

Research has shown that positive emotions influence cognition and behavior. The positive results of this are immediate in sparking a continued cycle of positive emotions. Through the exploration of new ideas or novel actions the person builds individual skills and resources, which could be either physical, social and/or intellectual in nature (Lopez, S., 2009). These become a resource center which can be accessed at a

later time to assist in coping with a difficult situation, leading to greater resilience. Resilience improves an individual's ability to maintain wellbeing during stressful events and the corresponding negative emotions which are an inevitable and necessary part of human survival.

The Undoing Hypothesis of Positive Emotions

Behavioral theorists present that negative emotions play a vital role in survival. The emotion of fear, for example, assists a person to narrow their attention onto how to escape the current threat. Negative emotions thus induce focused thought and corresponding directed action. The body prepares itself to take this action by increasing cardiovascular reactivity, thus shifting blood flow to the musculoskeletal system (Levenson, R., 1994). This has played a vital role for the human species however high intensity, prolonged sympathetic responses can become harmful and increase the risk of heart disease (Fredrickson et al., 2000). The research produced by the Broaden and Build Theory has found that positive emotions do not in themselves induce changes in cardiovascular reactivity but if a person is at a baseline negative emotional state, the elicitation of positive emotions can undo cardiovascular reactivity effects to bring it to a neutral state. Positive emotions thus not only broaden thought-action repertoires, build resources and improve resilience for stressful situations but can also directly and immediately impact physical wellbeing.

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APPENDIX

5.1 Differences between traditional therapy and positive therapy/coaching

5.1 Differences between traditional therapy and positive therapy/coaching.

Traditional therapy	Positive therapy/coaching
Interventions are meant to increase wellbeing by diminishing that which impedes or destroys human flourishing	Interventions are meant to increase wellbeing by enhancing that which causes or constitutes human flourishing
Avoidance goals: away from what clients do not want (problems or complaints)	Approach goals: towards what clients do want (preferred future, what clients want to have instead of their problems or complaints)
Goals (sometimes) defined by the therapist Past- or present-oriented: cause-effect medical model	Goals always defined by the client Future oriented, letting go of cause- effect medical model
Analyzing problems is important	Designing positive outcomes and analyzing exceptions is important
Focus on problems and weaknesses	Focus on solutions and strengths
Conversations about what clients do not want: positive reinforcement of “problem-talk”	Conversations about what clients do want instead of their problems: positive reinforcement of “solutions-talk”
Clients are (sometimes) seen as incompetent (deficit model)	Clients are always seen as competent (strengths and resources model)
Therapist gives advice	Therapist asks questions to elicit client’s expertise

Traditional therapy	Positive therapy/coaching
Resources must be acquired, new skills must be learned	Resources are already present. Clients may want to become better at some skills
Therapist's theory of change	Client's theory of change; therapist asks: "How will this help you?"
Therapist indicates end of the therapy	Client indicates end of the therapy
Success is defined as the solving of the problem	Success is defined as reaching the preferred outcome, which may be different from (or better than) solving the problem
Higher percentage of depression, burnout, and secondary traumatization among therapists Traditional therapy	Lower percentage of depression, burnout, and secondary traumatization among therapists Positive coaching