

Self-acceptance

Exercise

15 min.

Client

No

Learning to Rate Behaviour Rather Than The Self

Self-acceptance refers to the relationship an individual has with himself, and is conceptualized as the acceptance of self despite weaknesses or deficiencies. Some scholars have added the term “unconditional” to the concept to emphasize the fact that self-acceptance is not based on self-evaluation against some standard, but a relational stance in which the individual accepts himself at a very fundamental level (Ellis, 1977), regardless of whether certain expectations or standards are met. Unconditional self-acceptance means that “the individual fully and unconditionally accepts himself whether or not he behaves intelligently, correctly, or competently and whether or not other people approve, respect, or love him” (Ellis, 1977, p. 101). A person with high self-acceptance does not feel “less” than others because of his weaknesses and failures and does not feel “better” than others because of his strengths and successes. Self-acceptance is the hallmark of a healthy relationship with the self.

Note that self-acceptance does not mean that the individual refrains from evaluating his behaviour. The individual does reflect on his behaviour and is willing and motivated to make changes and improve the behaviour, but the evaluation of the behaviour is detached from an evaluation of the self. When confronted with personal shortcomings, the individual evaluates his actions and still experiences sadness, disappointment or loss. Importantly, however, the self as a whole is not devalued. This individual realizes that he:

- *is not a bad person when he acts badly; He is a person who has acted badly*
- *has faults and can work on correcting them without blaming, condemning, or damning himself for having them*
- *can identify weaknesses without defining himself by them*

The reason the self as a whole is not devalued is that the individual experiences himself on a fundamental level as worthy of esteem and love. This individual knows and feels deeply that he is “enough”, and that a mistake or shortcoming does not mean that he is not worthy of love. In this exercise, clients explore the difference between rating the self and rating behaviour.



Author

This tool was created by Hugo Alberts (PhD).



Goal

This tool aims to help clients differentiate between rating the self and rating behaviour with regards to past mistakes and regrettable actions.



Advice

- This exercise can also be used as homework. For instance, at the end of the day, clients may reflect on the mistakes or regrettable actions of the day and practice evaluating their actions rather than their whole self.
- After completing this exercise, clients may practice at home with increasing daily awareness of self-evaluation. The practitioner may instruct clients to notice self-evaluation, pause and then replace the self-evaluation with an evaluation of the behaviour only. Over time, this may be a powerful way for clients to relate differently to their mistakes.



Suggested Readings

Ellis, A. (1995). Rational emotive behavior therapy. *Current psychotherapies*, 5, 162-196.

Ellis, A. (1977). Rational-emotive therapy: Research data that supports the clinical and personality hypotheses of RET and other modes of cognitive-behavior therapy. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 7(1), 2-42.

Tool Description

Instructions

We all make mistakes, and we all do things that we are not proud of from time to time. However, the way in which people evaluate their mistakes or regrettable actions can differ. While some people may see such actions as proof of being a “flawed” or “unworthy” human being, others may see them as inevitable occurrences that are merely a part of being human. In this exercise, you will explore these two ways of evaluating mistakes or regrettable actions.

Step 1: Identify past mistakes

Make a list of 5-10 things in your past that you are not proud of or that you wish you did differently. For example, you may have forgotten a close friend’s birthday, or said something unkind to someone, or became overly angry at some driver, or made a mistake, or treated someone unfairly. List each of these past regrets in the first column in the table below.

Step 2: Evaluate yourself as a person

For each of the actions listed in the first column, evaluate yourself as a person for making the mistake. What personal characteristics could explain the mistake? Write down this global evaluation of yourself in the second column.

Step 3: Evaluate your behaviour

Now, in the third column, evaluate your behaviour with regards to the mistake. What actions or behaviours could explain the mistake?

<i>Past mistake or regrettable action</i>	<i>Evaluation of the self</i>	<i>Evaluation of behaviour</i>
I forgot my friend’s birthday	I am a lousy friend; I am careless	Forgetting the birthday was not very thoughtful of me

Step 4: Reflection

- How was it to do this exercise?
- Do you feel differently about yourself when you consider your responses in the second column versus the third column? If so, how?
- Which responses (second or third column) are more motivating in terms of improving yourself to do better next time?
- Going forward, will you aim to evaluate yourself or your behaviour with regards to mistakes or regrettable behaviour? Why?