

Surviving College 101

Emotions

Student Workbook



**Counseling and Psychological Services
University of Arkansas
(479) 575-5276
Health.uark.edu**

Welcome to the Emotions 101 workshop! We hope that you find this workshop helpful in learning to recognize and better manage the concerns that led you to seek counseling services. Many people pursue therapy with the idea that their therapist will know exactly how to “fix” them. This workshop is specifically designed to help **you** get a better idea of what you want to change and how to get there.

Many of us think in terms of problems (i.e., what we don’t like about ourselves, what’s wrong with our lives, etc.) and forget to focus on what we actually want in our lives. It is almost as if we believe that erasing the unwanted parts of our lives would leave us with no problems. **Simply reducing pain does not guarantee pleasure.** This is why it is important to create a clear vision of what we want in our lives. Creating a vision of change supports our motivation for making the change, provides us with a roadmap to our desired goal(s), and shows us where we are on the journey of change.

As you begin your journey, please remember **change is not linear.** Be prepared for setbacks. Snags can be due to any number of factors including difficult situational events, changes in motivation, sliding back into old habits, fear of the unknown, etc. Many people find that they take one step back for every two steps forward. That’s okay. You could see this as an obstacle, or you could embrace this as a natural rhythm of the change process.

The main goals of this workshop are to give you tools to recognize your concerns and to develop a clearer idea of what you want to change in your life. Once you have developed your roadmap to change, you will have a better idea of where you need to go. You may decide to continue on your own or enlist other resources such as friends, family, advisors, professors, or professionals to help you reach your goals. You may even decide that this is not the right time for you to continue this change process, and you would rather focus your energy on other priorities. Whatever you decide, we can support you in your process and hope that this workshop will help clarify your goals.

If, at any time, you feel that you need additional support, please let your workshop leader know or contact **Counseling and Psychological Services at 479-575-5276 (24/7).** You may also find additional resources online at: **health.uark.edu.**

About Psychological Pain

Everyone experiences psychological pain. This could be sadness, anger, anxiety, heartbreak, embarrassment, etc. Not only is pain normal, but it communicates important information about our experiences. Much like how the pain from a paper cut tells us that we have an injury, psychological pain serves a similar function.

Most of us take care to minimize how often we feel psychological pain, but some pain in life is inevitable. Some of us try to minimize our pain so much that we unintentionally cause other problems or more pain. For example, someone who experiences anxiety when meeting new people may choose to avoid these types of interactions. Although the person will be successful in avoiding the anxiety of meeting someone new, that person may create other experiences, such as loneliness or sadness from missing out on new experiences. Furthermore, some methods of minimizing or avoiding pain can have more significant consequences. For example, someone might choose to manage anxiety with alcohol or other drugs, learn to shut off or numb feelings completely, or stay continuously busy to the point of physically exhausting or otherwise negatively impacting their body.

By changing our relationship with our psychological pain, we create flexibility.

We do not have to get stuck with one option: avoiding pain.

We can learn other strategies that will add a variety of tools to our psychological tool box. This is one of the goals of this workshop.

Although some amount of discomfort is inevitable throughout any change process, we want you to take care of yourselves and pass from any activity that feels like it is “too much.”

Internal Experiences and Our Responses

As mentioned, most people seeking counseling are experiencing some form of psychological pain, usually some **unpleasant or unwanted internal experience**, including thoughts (including memories and images), feelings, physical sensations, urges to act, etc. Basically, these unpleasant experiences or responses are what is going on inside of us that other people can't see or feel.

These internal experiences or responses are often prompted by external events such as conflict with a friend, not doing well in school etc. For example, the unpleasant internal experience of anxiety may be prompted by the external situation of doing poorly on an exam. No matter what the precipitant was, the result is something that is painful; an unwanted/unpleasant internal experience.

Without necessarily sharing why you originally sought counseling, what are some unwanted or unpleasant internal experiences students might seek counseling for? Examples could be: thoughts like, "I have low self-esteem", emotions such as sadness, physical sensations such as tension in your body, memories such as "I want to forget...", regrets like "I wish I never...", etc.

So what are some unwanted or unpleasant internal experiences that motivate people to seeking counseling?

Although some psychological pain in life is inevitable, most of us try to minimize or avoid experiencing it. But, often times, our attempts to minimize or avoid pain unintentionally lead to other problems, perpetuate the pain and/or leave us feeling stuck.

Now, think about your own unwanted internal experiences and take a moment to reflect back on your responses to managing them. Take a look at the handout below. You will notice a section labeled "Facing the Current Situation." On the left is a column to list what you have tried in an attempt to avoid, eliminate, or control your response. On the right is a column for writing what these strategies have prevented you from doing. Take a few minutes to work on this.

Facing the Current Situation

What have I tried in an attempt to avoid, eliminate, or control my unwanted internal response? <i>(e.g., I don't attend parties because I am anxious when meeting new people)</i>	What have these strategies prevented me from doing? <i>(e.g., I have missed out on several opportunities to see close friends, I haven't made any new friends, I'm lonely)</i>

We try a lot of different things to avoid, minimize or control unwanted internal experiences. These strategies can be effective for external situations. For example, if you don't like a new shirt you just bought online, you can return it. Problem solved.

We tend to apply these same problem-solving strategies to our inner experiences and believe that we should be able to control the way we think and feel in the same way we control problems in our environment. For example, to avoid the anxiety of interacting with new people, someone may avoid these types of interactions all together. While they may be successful in avoiding the anxiety of meeting someone new (solving the problem in the short term), they may create other experiences, such as loneliness or sadness from missing out on new relationships and experiences.

Some of the methods that we use to minimize or avoid pain can have more significant consequences. For example, someone might choose to manage anxiety with alcohol, other drugs, food, shopping, etc. They may learn to shut off or numb their feelings completely. They may avoid by staying continuously busy to the point of physical exhaustion.

Basically, our go-to control response isn't helping us. So now what? If what we are doing isn't working for managing our unwanted internal experiences, what do we do?

Recognition and Mindfulness

We start with **Recognizing** the unwanted internal experience by slowing down and checking in with ourselves. In other words, before moving forward, we must arrive at where we are. It's like a map. In order for us to go to our destination, we need to know where we are starting.

The next exercise is intended to help you arrive where you are at in the present moment and begin to recognize your internal experience. The exercises introduce the core strategy of **mindfulness**, which is to purposefully notice or recognize yourself, as you are, right now with an attitude of openness and curiosity. You will begin to build the skill of checking in with yourself so that you are better able to determine what action, if any, you can take to live your life more fully.

AGE Technique

We will use the AGE Technique. AGE stands for: Arriving-Gathering-Expanding

There are three basic steps to this practice

- **Arriving** – The first step involves stepping out of auto pilot by asking yourself, “Where am I?”, “What’s going on?” The aim is to recognize the moment that you are in. This is finding the “You are here” sign on the map.
- **Gathering** - The second step involves gathering the scattered or wandering mind to focus on one thing only. In this exercise, we will continue building the skill of focusing on breath.
- **Expanding** - The third step adds a level of complexity. It will have you practice holding focus on both the breath and the body simultaneously.

Remember: If it ever feels like too much, feel free to stop doing the exercise.

Begin by settling yourself into a comfortable position where you are sitting. Perhaps sitting upright with your feet flat on the floor, your arms and legs uncrossed, and your hands resting in your lap or on your thighs, whichever is more comfortable. Let the body express a sense of being present and awake.

Now close your eyes if that feels comfortable for you. If not, keep them open and soften your gaze, focusing on something a few feet in front of you and toward the floor.

The first step is being aware, really aware, of what is going on within you right now....Becoming aware of what is going through your mind. What thoughts are there? As best you can, just noticing the thoughts as mental events. Simply observing the thoughts.
(Pause)

Then taking some time to notice the feelings present in this moment. In particular, noticing any uncomfortable or unpleasant feelings...maybe these are feelings you've been avoiding or

feelings that have been building, trying to get your attention...Rather than trying to push them away or shutting them out, turning towards them. Allowing yourself to just acknowledge these unpleasant feelings, perhaps saying to yourself, "Ah, there you are, that's how it is right now." *(Pause)*

Now turning your attention to the sensations present in your body. Just observing... acknowledging the sensations.... Are there sensations of tension?...pressure?... perhaps feeling your heart beating?... whatever you are feeling...noticing where those sensations are in the body. Just allowing yourself to become aware of them...allowing them to enter into your awareness...simply observing them for what they are in this moment...*(Pause)*

Now you've got a sense of what is going on right now. You have **Arrived**. You've stepped out of automatic pilot and into your experience. *(Pause)*

The second step is to **GATHER** your awareness by focusing on a single thing—the movements of your breath. So, now, really **gathering** yourself, focusing your attention on the movements of your belly...the rise and fall of your breath...Spending a minute or so focusing on the movement of your abdominal wall just below the rib cage . . . moment by moment, breath by breath, as best you can...noticing the differing sensations of your belly and chest as you breathe in...and as you breathe out...*(Pause)* Simply being aware of the feeling of the air entering the mouth or nose, gently expanding the lungs, and slowly leaving the body...You may observe the mind wandering off. That's okay. Simply noticing and gently returning your focus to your breathing. *(Pause)*

Knowing when the breath is moving in and when the breath is moving out... Noticing, if you can, whether there is a pause between breaths...how does it feel when you inhale...what does it feel like when you exhale...curiously observing your breath *(Pause)* Just concentrating your awareness on the pattern of movements, breathing in and breathing out ... gathering yourself, using the anchor of the breath to be really present in the current moment. *(Pause)*

Now, as a third step, allowing your awareness to **Expand** beyond your breath and into the body. Bringing your awareness to your whole body as well as to your breath...creating a more spacious awareness... Noticing any areas of tension or holding. If you feel like it, briefly scanning the body, releasing any tension you might observe as you breathe out ...feet, legs...buttocks, back...stomach, hands, arms...shoulders, neck, face, and scalp... Following the breath as if your whole body is breathing... Holding it all in this slightly softer . . . more spacious awareness... *(Pause)*

In a moment, returning to your usual sense of awareness, bringing with you a sense of calmness that wasn't there before...a sense of your capacity to gently hold your experiences in your awareness...holding and observing your experiences lightly...aware that they are your experiences, at least for now, and, as with all experiences, subject to change with each new

moment.

And then, when you are ready...taking a deeper breath, slowly breathing out and just allowing your eyes to open whenever you are ready. *(Pause)*

Language Tips (2 minutes)

We want to give you a couple of tools that involve small changes to language. As you become aware of your experiences, try adding the words, “I am having the thought...” or “I am having the feeling....” For example, “I am having the thought that I am going to fail my class.” Or “I am having the feeling of guilt.”

Instead of fighting your experiences or feeling like you have to *do something* about them, this will help you recognize thoughts or feelings for what they are: just thoughts and feelings. No judgment or action is needed. It’s about just observing them. This will begin to allow you more flexibility and space between your experience and yourself.

Next, try to **replace the word “but” with “and.”** For example, instead of saying, “I want to do well in school but I have anxiety so I can’t,” try saying, “I can feel anxiety **and** go to class.” You can have both at the same time. The purpose of utilizing this tool is to increase flexibility in your thinking and to allow you to do the things you want or need to do without getting stuck in your unwanted internal experiences.

Take a few moments to practice these on **skills below:**

Language Tips

Improve recognition of thoughts and feelings: “I am having the thought...” or “I am having the feeling....”	Increase flexibility in thinking by replacing the word “but” with “and”: “I can feel anxious <u>and</u> go to class”

Change and Openness

Let's take a moment to look at two strategies for helping ourselves: One is change and another is openness.

- **Change** is an excellent strategy when we need to address or change something **outside of ourselves**, something that is not us.
- **Openness** is an excellent strategy when we are experiencing unwanted or uncomfortable internal experiences, including thoughts, feelings, or sensations.

Now let's focus more on **Openness**. We want to highlight that being open does **not mean allowing others to abuse us** or giving up wanting to improve situations or behaviors that are readily changeable. Instead, openness means accepting yourself and your internal experience **as it is now**, and allowing yourself space to move forward.

Selecting a Strategy

Let's talk about when you might select each of these strategies. What would be an example of a situation that might call for change? For example, if we are struggling **academically** should we accept that or is that something subject to change?

In this case, there may be external factors that are readily changeable. For example, we can revise our study habits, get a study partner or a tutor, or consult the professor.

Some situations may be more difficult because they require us to use **both Change and Openness** to experience change. For example, if we are **anxious** around people, and we value relationships and belonging, we might need to be **open** to feeling anxious in order to be around people and **change** our level of connection. What are some other examples? List them below:

Being open means **completely accepting, in the moment, without fighting or judging** whatever internal experience shows up; we do this in order to do what is important to us. Additionally, being open means being committed to a course of action- even when we experience discomfort- because that action is valuable to us.

Values and Choices

Sometimes it's hard to commit to an action, especially when discomfort is involved, because we don't really know what is important to us. However, we can begin to identify what is important by having the conversation about that which gives our life value, meaning, and purpose. These are our values.

Emotions 101

Values are our ethics, principles, ideals, standards or morals. They are the ideas, concepts and actions that fill your life with worth and importance. In contrast to

setting goals, values are not specifically about achieving something in the future. Rather, **values are about living in the moment and doing the things that embody our personal vision.**

Values Compass

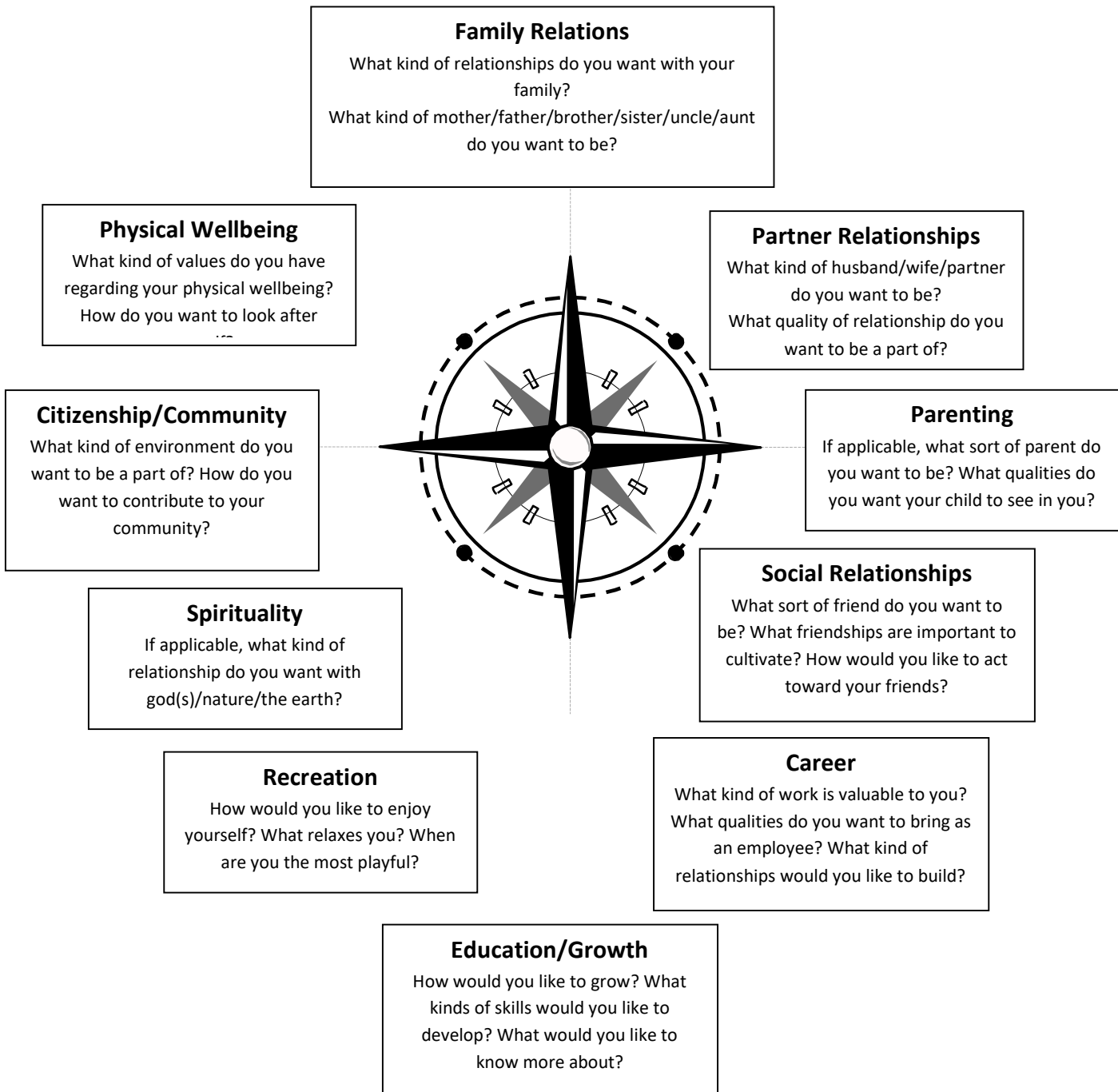
Let's spend a few minutes beginning to refine your values and how important each of them are to you. On the next page you will find the *Values Compass worksheet*.

You will see some questions that will help you think through your values. Then use **page 12** to write them down. As you complete this worksheet, you may find that some of the values aren't applicable to your life or aren't very important. That's ok. You are the person that gets to decide what is and isn't important to you.

In the next few minutes, fill out the worksheet and take some time to look at this as you continue working towards living your life more fully.

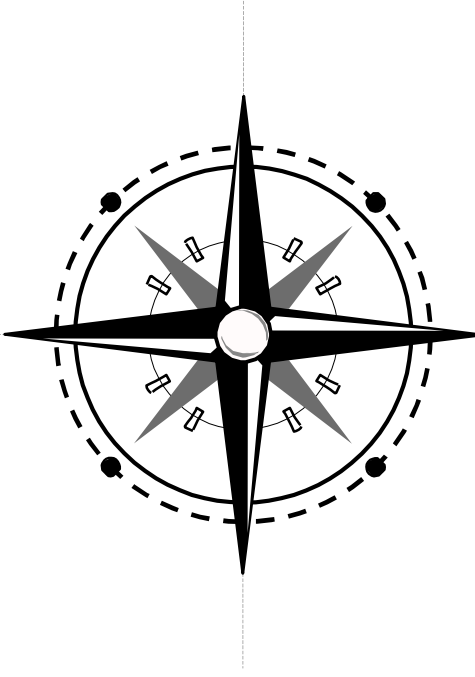
Values Compass

Values are what we find meaningful in life. They are what you care about and consider to be important. Values are different for everybody, and they can change over time. The domains below are valued by some people. Leaving aside any obstacles for the moment think about what is important to you, and what you think makes for a meaningful life that you could value.



Adapted from: Wilson, Sandoz, Kitchens, & Roberts. (2010). The Valued Living Questionnaire: Defining and measuring valued action within a behavioural framework. *The Psychological Record*, 60, 249-272.

For each of these domains write a quick summary of your values, such as, “to live a healthy life and take care of my body” (physical wellbeing), or “to be a good friend to people who need me, and to enjoy my time with the people I love” (friendships). Rate each domain for how important it is to you from 0 (not important) to 10 (very important).

<p>Physical Wellbeing</p>	<p>Family Relations</p>	<p>Partner Relationships</p>
<p>Citizenship/Community</p>		<p>Social Relationships</p>
<p>Spirituality</p>		<p>Parenting</p>
<p>Recreation</p>	<p>Education/Growth</p>	<p>Career</p>

Journal Exercise: Values

Consider these questions as you think about your values. You can refer back to pages 11-12 as necessary.

If you continue to avoid your unpleasant internal experiences, how long are you willing to wait to live your life according to your values?

In your waiting for the unpleasant internal experiences to go away, how much are you giving up in the mean time?

What do you think would happen if, instead of waiting for an unwanted internal experience to go away before you started living your life to the fullest, you just started living your life and openly accepting your experiences?

Conclusion

We hope that you make a commitment to continue practicing the skills you learned in this workbook. Take some time to use the resources in your workbook to practice. We also encourage you to remember that, even when using these skills, you will have moments when you experience unwanted internal experiences; this is normal part of life. Our hope is that, with continued practice, these skills will help you get unstuck in these experiences and to put your energy towards the things that you value.

