

# **Attuned Breath Centering: A Contemplative Practice for Cognitive Defusion -- Integrating Psychology and Spirituality to Activate Well-Being**

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## **I. Purpose of this Workshop**

This workshop offers pastoral caregivers a tool to provide centering and to center themselves while responding to the psycho-spiritual distress of client(s). The caregiver will learn skills, which complement the methods of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), to treat psycho-spiritual distress and educate clients in the elements of a contemplative practice, which is accessible and broadly-framed. In this way, clients and/or caregivers can integrate the practice as an adaptive intervention or ongoing support strategy, which activates their sense of well-being.

## **II. What is Attuned Breath Centering?**

Attuned Breath Centering (ABC) is a contemplative practice of paying attention to intention while mindfully breathing. Developed by this writer, it is in step with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and specifically its principle of Cognitive Defusion. This practice grounds you in the present moment and frames your experience in terms of what you value. It activates presence, acceptance, and commitment as the foundation for transforming psycho-spiritual stressors and experiencing well-being. This process increases psychological flexibility and can relieve symptoms of anxiety, pain, and other forms of physical, emotional, and psycho-spiritual discomfort.

Notably, the same practice that supports (centers) clients also supports (centers) caregivers who offer it. Thus, the caregiver enters into a practice-centered relationship with the client, strengthening the therapeutic alliance while providing mutual benefits.

The practice is scalable since it is experienced as an interdependent process. In a group setting, ABC offers each participant a sense of well-being as it activates the group's ability to connect, integrate differences, and function (get needs met).

Please feel free to try it out<sup>(1)</sup>:

Visit Resources (audio) section of "Trusting Transitions" website:  
[www.trustingtransitions.com/resources.html](http://www.trustingtransitions.com/resources.html)

### III. **Benefits of Attuned Breath Centering**

- **Comfort and Behavioral Shift**
  - can reduce/relieve symptoms of anxiety, panic, etc.
  - can alleviate symptoms of pain (physical, emotional, psycho-spiritual)
  - can provide adaptive coping
    - including cases of
      - recovery from addictive behaviors and substances
      - chronic pain and/or anxiety
- **Adaptability**
  - Settings / contexts
    - Clinical
      - Acute care
      - Day Treatment
      - Other healthcare settings
    - Non-Clinical
  - Populations
- **Scalability**
  - Individual
    - Integrating different aspects of oneself
      - can resolve sense of inner “conflict”
  - Collective
    - Small groups and family systems
    - Large groups and family systems
    - Community-based programs
      - Religious (broadly-framed services)
      - Secular
- **Accessibility**
  - Religious or secular framing
  - Language (form of practice)
    - Spoken or written
    - Movement (including sign language)
    - Imagery
    - Music

### IV. **How does ABC work? (Key Elements)**

*Attuned:*

- Mindful
  - monitoring of feelings and thoughts
- Reflective
  - Contemplative inquiry to identify intention

- e.g., “What keeps me going?”
    - e.g., “Right now, what’s most important?”
  - Repeating inquiry if response identifies strategy/outcome as distinct from intention
    - “I heard you say that phone calls from loved ones keep you going. In what way do they keep you going?”
    - “and what is important about that?”
    - “sounds like . . . [reflect what you hear, if possible including their words] means a great deal to you. Would you say a bit more?”
- Simple
  - Distill essence of intention by simplifying to one word or phrase
    - keeps me going: “God in me”
    - important now: “God be with me”
    - keeps me going: “trusting”
    - important now: “now”
  - Utilize vocabulary of Non-violent communication (NVC) <sup>(2)</sup> to reframe intention in terms of core values, esp. if participant is conflicted
    - e.g., “when no one asked your opinion, did you feel annoyed because you wanted some consideration and respect? Maybe something else?”
    - “sounds like you’re caught between a rock and a hard place. I wonder if you’re needing space (or freedom, clarity, shelter, flexibility)?”

*Breath:*

- Presence (being here now)
- Contact (comfort, discomfort, “neutral” sensations)
- Acceptance (open, non-judgemental awareness)

*Centering:*

- Connecting
  - Breath with intention
    - e.g., “Breathing in, <. . .> keeps me going”
    - e.g., “Breathing out, <. . .> is most important”
- Activating
  - Focus

- Re-directing attention from maladaptive (unproductive) thought patterns towards intention to connect with core values
  - Understanding
    - reframing stressors as indicators of what one values
    - relieving sense of conflict and confusion
  - Well-being
    - Experiencing wholeness of mind/body/spirit
- Integrating
  - Meaning (through)
    - Ritual, which expresses what one values
      - art, music, ... “creative arts” expression
      - religious rituals including prayer
      - other “self-care” rituals
      - replacing unproductive rituals (e.g., addictive behaviors) with any of the above
  - Differences (through)
    - Presence and Acceptance
      - Distinct physical sensations
      - perceived contradiction
      - perceived conflict
    - Dialogue
      - Identifying and integrating aspects of self
        - can utilize clinical method of *Voice Dialogue*<sup>(3)</sup>
      - Voicing requests in relationship
        - can be incorporated in petitionary prayer
        - requests of oneself
        - requests of another person(s)
        - can utilize *Non-violent communication (NVC)*<sup>(2)</sup>

## V. Psychology Meets Spirituality

Attuned Breath Centering is in step with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and its principle of Cognitive Defusion.

What is Cognitive Defusion (CD)<sup>(4)</sup>?

Experiencing thoughts, images, emotions, and memories as what they are, not what they appear to be.

CD is one of the six core principles utilized in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a branch of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

ACT

- is an empirically based psychological intervention
- uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies together with commitment and behavior change strategies
- increases psychological flexibility

ACT differs from traditional cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in that

- rather than trying to teach control
  - of thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories and other private events
- encourages
  - "just notice" (open awareness)
  - accept
  - embrace

ACT views the core of many difficulties to be due to the acronym, FEAR:

- Fusion with your thoughts
- Evaluation of experience
- Avoidance of your experience
- Reason giving for your behavior

And the healthy alternative is to ACT:

- Accept your reactions and be present
- Choose a valued direction
- Take action

### **ABC is a way to ACT.**

#### **VI. ABC in Action: Primary population treated**

Who: Persons living with HIV who report history of trauma, emotional deprivation, mental illness and substance use (some in recovery).<sup>(5)</sup>

Where: Housing Works' West 13<sup>th</sup> Street  
Adult Day Treatment Center  
New York City

Housing Works, Inc. is the largest minority-run social service and advocacy agency in the U.S. for persons living with HIV/AIDS.

When: February 2006 – October 2009

What: Treatment of individuals and groups

- Considerations in treatment
- Partnership with interdisciplinary team
- Patterns identified in treatment
- Integration with “Healing Community” interdisciplinary care model<sup>(5)</sup>
  - Purpose
    - Integrate broadly-framed spirituality as foundation for interdisciplinary care
    - Offer accessible and inclusive community-based contemplative practice as key element of this integration
    - Meet needs
      - Core values: safety, trust, respect
  - Application within Day Treatment Program
    - Individual treatment including care planning
    - Interdisciplinary therapeutic groups
    - Healing Services
    - Community-building Programs

## VII. **Commentary**

- a. How can the benefits of ABC be measured?
- b. Adaptability and considerations for other contexts

- Healthcare
  - Adult Day Treatment
  - Acute Care
  - Short-term recovery
  - Long-term Residential/Rehab
  - Hospice
- Military
  - Veterans
  - Active duty
- Prison
- Other workplaces
- Home/Family
- Community

## VIII. Resources and References

(1) Downloadable audio examples of Attuned Breath Centering  
([www.trustingtransitions.com/resources.html](http://www.trustingtransitions.com/resources.html))

(2) Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D., Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, 2nd. Edition, 2003, Puddledancer Press.  
Resources available at: <http://www.cnvc.org>.

(3) Hal Stone, Ph.D., and Sidra Stone, Ph.D., Embracing Our Selves, The Voice Dialogue Training Manual, 1989, Nataraj Publishing.  
Resources available at: <http://www.voicedialogue.org>.

(4) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acceptance\\_and\\_commitment\\_therapy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acceptance_and_commitment_therapy)  
see also:  
Steven C. Hayes, Act in Action: Cognitive Defusion, 2008, New Harbinger Publications, U.S

(5) Fleischman, J., Healing Community: Transforming Trauma in Relationship, 2008, PlainViews, Volume 5, No. 11  
(<http://www.plainviews.org/v5n11/lv.html>)

## IX. Contact Info

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