

ACT Mindfulness: Emotional Defusion Technique

The aim of this exercise is to detach from your emotions, and observe them, make contact with them, without being drawn into struggling or trying to repress them.

It is normal to have a constant flow of emotions, and also for some emotions to stick around longer than expected. Generally, people deal with positive emotions by trying to hold on to them, and painful emotions by trying to ignore, deny, or distract from them. Unfortunately, the more we struggle with a feeling, the more it can stick around. The aim of this exercise is not to try to change your emotional state, but rather to make contact with it, accept it, be as aware as possible of the emotions, accept that they are there for a reason, and allow them to be there as long as they need to be. Paradoxically, quite often people find that when they do this, their emotional state becomes more bearable, and their emotions start to shift and flow more.

Like many things, the intensity and duration of any emotion depends on the amount of energy and struggle we devote to it. It's important to remember that we don't need to struggle with emotions, suppress them, or even to act on them, we just need to notice them and let them pass in their own time.

Let's try out an emotional defusion exercise to see how this works in practice.

Sit quietly for a moment and run your awareness through your body. What do you notice that you are feeling, and where?

Take a moment to really tune into these feelings, almost to the point where you can see these in your body.

What do you see?

Where is it localized?

Is there more than one feeling?

What are the edges of the feeling like? (smooth, rough, hazy, polished?)

What is the feeling like – is it heavy, light, moving, still, is it all the same throughout, or made up of different parts?

If you could give it a name, what would you call it?

Now, take a moment to just sit with this feeling, and allow yourself to accept it. It may help to say something to yourself like,

'Even though I don't like this feeling, I accept that it is there for a reason, and I allow myself to sit with it.'

Take a few deep breaths into your stomach, and almost visualize yourself expanding around the feeling, making space for it, not trying to change it in any way, but finding yourself changing around it.

Do this a few times if you want to.

After having tried out this exercise, what did you notice?

How are you feeling? Be aware that the feelings as they are will continue to change, and dissipate and transform over time. If you find that you are feeling something too intense for the moment, try to sit with it, however you can also distract yourself out of it for periods of time if you need to by focusing on something else, or changing your location and activity.