

iAct

FOR LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE

The intervention comprised 12 brief digital exercises delivered over four weeks, covering the six ACT processes (two exercises per process). Three exercises were sent weekly via email or text message. Exercises were grounded in ACT and adapted to the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals. A transdiagnostic approach was adopted, aiming to teach core ACT skills with an emphasis on applying these strategies in daily life to promote the generalization of acquired competencies. Language was consistently inclusive and affirmative of diverse gender and sexual identities. Human involvement was minimal and limited to asynchronous personalized reminders and optional assistance via chat or email in case of questions, scheduling issues, or technical problems. At the completion of each module, a congratulatory screen was displayed to enhance motivation and adherence. Personalized supplemental materials were provided to support engagement.

EXERCISES:

VALUES

Following the introductory module, the first section addressed personal values through psychoeducation, reflection on cultural influences, and structured activities aimed at identifying, prioritizing, and operationalizing values. Participants were encouraged to explore experiences of social safety (e.g., "Who or what made you feel safe in those moments?"), which are central to counteracting the effects of rejection and discrimination. Accordingly, culturally salient values such as pride, community, historical memory, and queer joy were included, both to connect with collective experiences of resistance and affirmation as well as with personal lived experiences, and to cultivate positive identity-related states. A key objective was to help participants distinguish authentic values from those shaped by cis-heteronormative adaptation. For example, the value of discretion may reflect genuine preferences for privacy or sobriety, but it may also represent an adaptive response to stigma (e.g., "I must avoid visibility because being myself is unsafe"). The exercise thus guided participants to recognize such conditioning and reflect on what truly matters to them. In addition to these preliminary exercises, the values exploration then proceeded in three structured stages: (1) identifying moments of happiness, pride, or satisfaction; (2) deriving the underlying values from these experiences; and (3) prioritizing these values by ranking and scoring them. This process supported a shift from adaptive values to affirming ones, counteracting the internalization of transphobia and homophobia while fostering resilience through pride, belonging, and queer euphoria. At the end of the exercises, participants received a summary of the ACT processes and the full list of values and their own personalized responses.

COMMITTED ACTION

Exercises encouraged participants to translate values into concrete behaviors through SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) and to identify words, gestures, and actions aligned with their chosen values (e.g., affirming one's name/pronoun, setting boundaries in invalidating conversations, practicing self-care after stress). Participants were also invited to reflect on the emotions arising from imagining these actions, potential obstacles, and strategies to overcome self-sabotage. The exercise fosters resilience and agency, supporting coping and self-affirmation, and provides tools to address internalized homophobia and transphobia and act despite fear of rejection. Participants received a supplementary sheet summarizing the previous SMART goals exercise.

SELF-AS-CONTEXT

Short audio tracks introduced metaphors (e.g., the “calm center of the cyclone”), presented as symbols of inner safety from which to observe thoughts and emotions without being swept away, underscoring that an authentic self can remain grounded in the face of hetero- and cisnormative pressures. Brief exercises to foster perspective-taking and cultivate a stable “observing self”, while others targeted coping linked to internalized stigma: participants identified recurring thoughts associated with homo/transphobia internalization, selected their typical coping responses (e.g., worry, rumination, blaming others, negative self-talk ...), and evaluated short- and long-term costs. The exercise emphasized shifting from avoidance-based coping to authentic, value-consistent strategies. At the end of the session, participants received the “eye of the cyclone” metaphor audio along with a table summarizing the coping strategies they had identified.

COGNITIVE DEFUSION

Exercises were employed to facilitate participants’ recognition of self-critical cognitions as transient mental events rather than objective truths. Activities included thought re-framing (e.g., “I am having the thought that...”) to contextualize self-directed negative judgments (e.g., “I am wrong,” “I am unlovable”) as products of cultural stigma rather than inherent personal deficiencies. The practice began with an exercise in emotional awareness, in which participants were invited to identify their current affective state using Plutchik’s Wheel of Emotions (Plutchik, 1980). This was followed by the “Leaves on a Stream” guided imagery exercise, which involved visualizing thoughts, particularly self-judging and stigmatizing cognitions (e.g., “Being queer is not normal”), as leaves drifting away on water. This imagery was designed to foster mindful distance from recurring and distressing thoughts. Cognitive defusion was thus conceptualized as a coping strategy that enhances resilience by situating oppressive narratives outside the authentic self. At the conclusion of the practice, participants again used the emotion wheel to reflect on changes in their emotional state. To consolidate the intervention, they were provided with screenshots illustrating thought re-framing, the audio recording of “Leaves on a Stream”, and the emotion wheel for continued use.

ACCEPTANCE

This module emphasized acceptance and self-compassion, guiding participants to acknowledge difficult emotions (e.g., shame, guilt, loneliness, anger) as well as positive ones sometimes perceived as illegitimate (e.g., desire, euphoria, freedom). Exercises encouraged recognizing emotions in the body, remaining with them without avoidance, and responding with kindness rather than self-criticism. Participants used a structured table to identify triggering situations across life domains (e.g., family, relationships, work, identity, coming out, queer community), their avoidance behaviors, and the short-term benefits of such strategies. They then reflected on the long-term costs of avoidance and considered value-consistent alternatives. For LGBTQIA+ individuals, avoidance often functions as a protective response to minority stress (e.g., concealing identity, hiding a partner...) but can undermine authenticity and well-being over time. The exercise highlighted these costs and the ways avoidance reinforces internalized stigma. Participants received their recorded responses, along with the completed trigger-behavior-benefit table from the previous exercise.

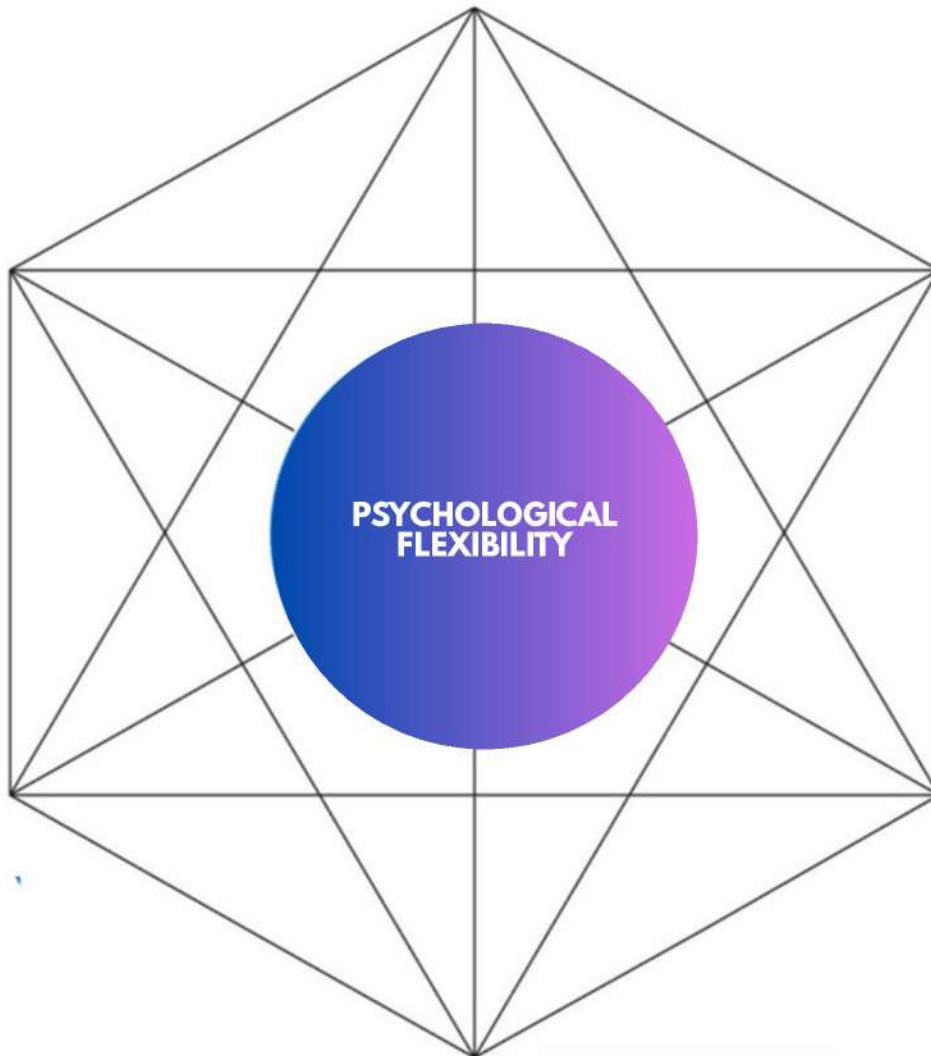
CONTACT WITH THE PRESENT-MOMENT

The final module focused on mindfulness and body awareness. Participants engaged in a mindfulness practice centered on recalling moments of authenticity and queer joy (e.g., participating in a Pride event), with an emphasis on expanding these positive sensations by imagining them as an overwhelming, shareable energy that could be carried into other areas of life. The practice then shifted to mindful body awareness, encouraging participants to relate to their bodies as safe spaces of experience rather than objects of judgment. The phrase “The body is your first safe place” was introduced as a counter-narrative to cultural messages framing the body as problematic or as a target of discrimination. The exercise aimed to foster greater acceptance and kindness toward one’s body, which for many LGBTQIA+ individuals may be shaped by dysphoria, internalized stigma, and discrimination. Drawing on the concept of the biopolitical body, the activity also highlighted how bodies are regulated by social and cultural norms that define what is considered valid, acceptable, or legitimate. Both practices sought to strengthen resilience, support acceptance of embodied identities, and cultivate queer euphoria. As supplementary materials, participants received audio recordings of the guided meditations.

YOUR ACT PATH

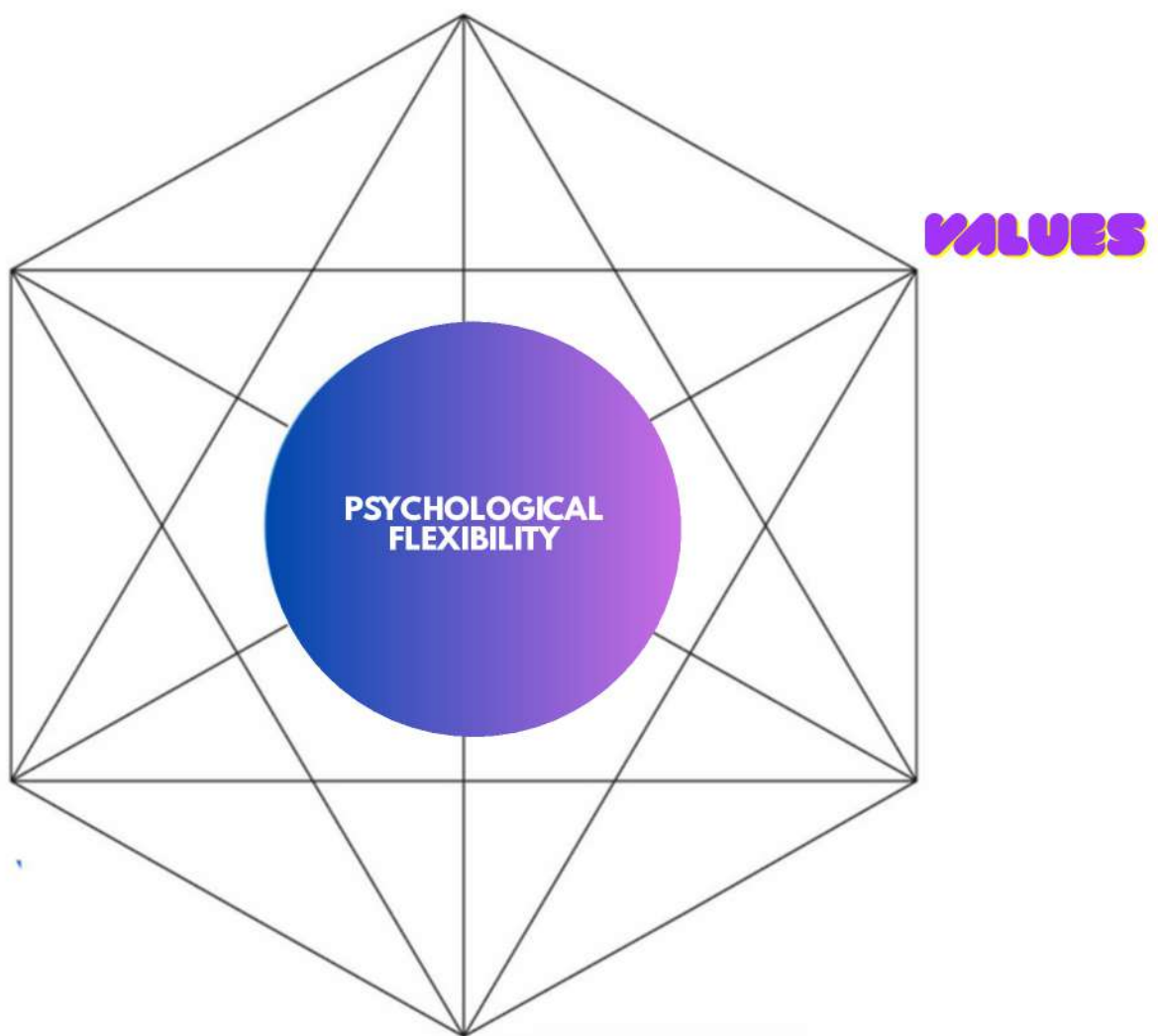
Welcome* to your ACT path

In the coming weeks, we will offer you exercises inspired by Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), an approach based on six fundamental processes:



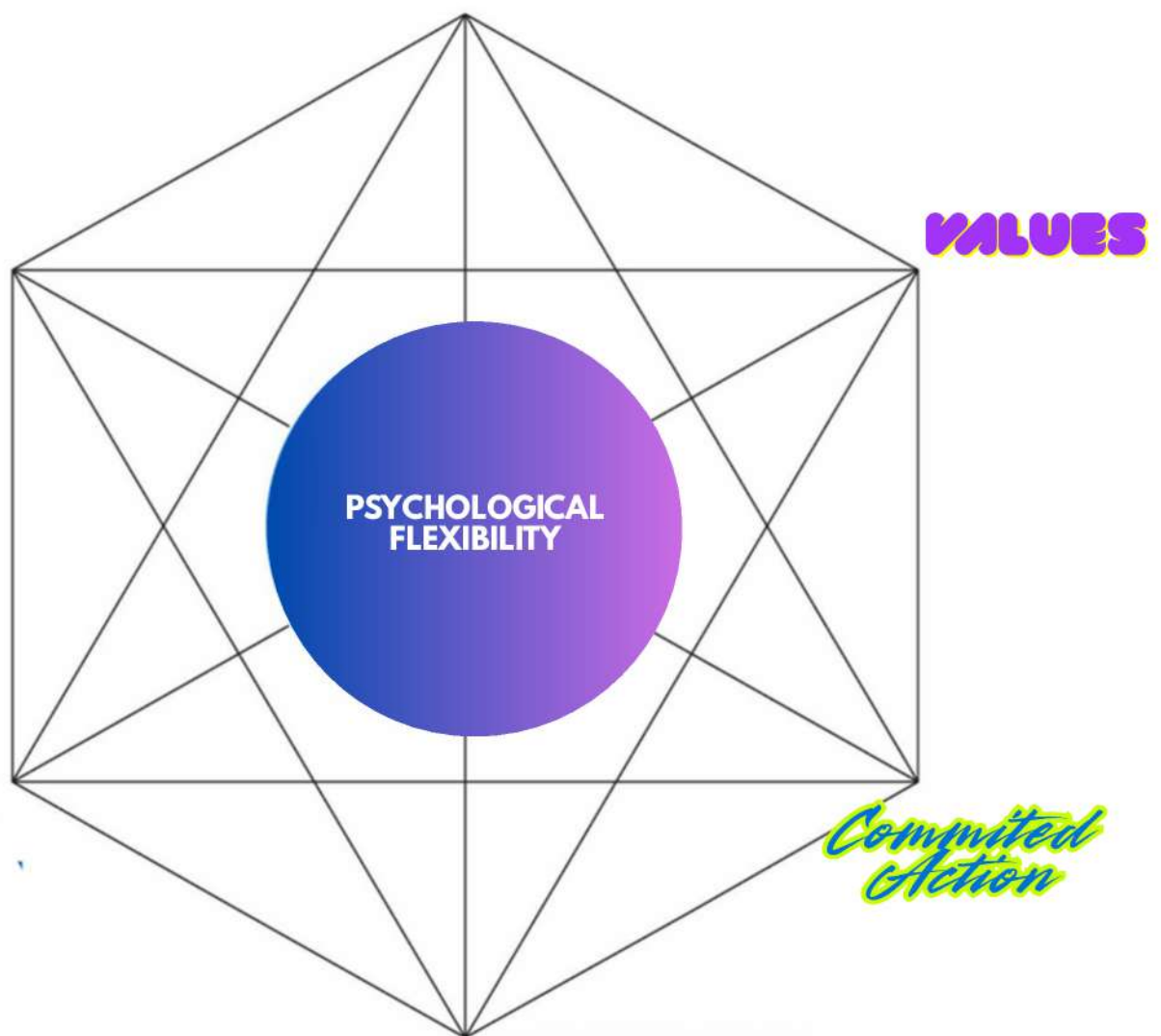
VALUES

Values: ACT doesn't just ask you to feel better, but to live a more authentic life. This means knowing what matters to you, what your values are.



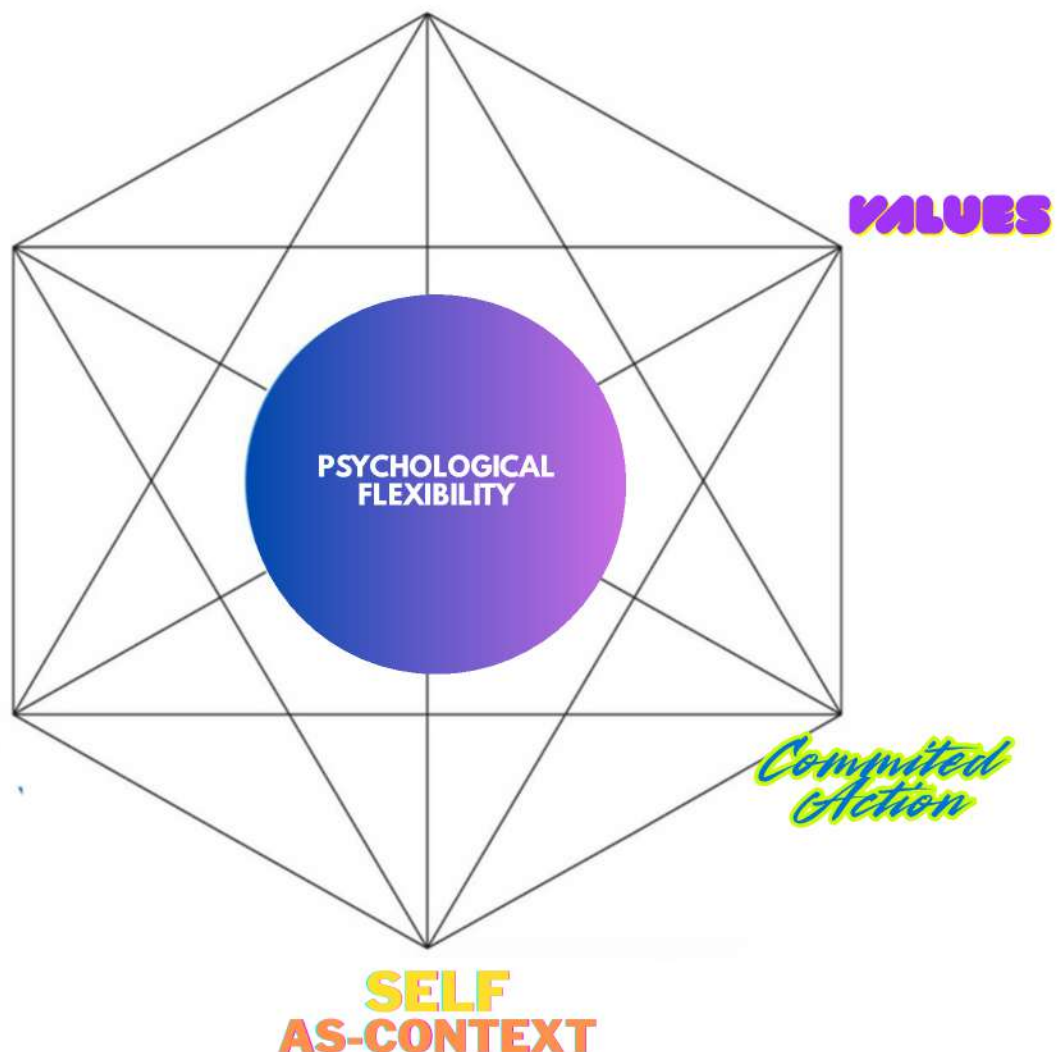
Committed Action

Committed Action: once your values are clear, the next step is to translate them into concrete, consistent actions to live in accordance with those values.



SELF AS-CONTEXT

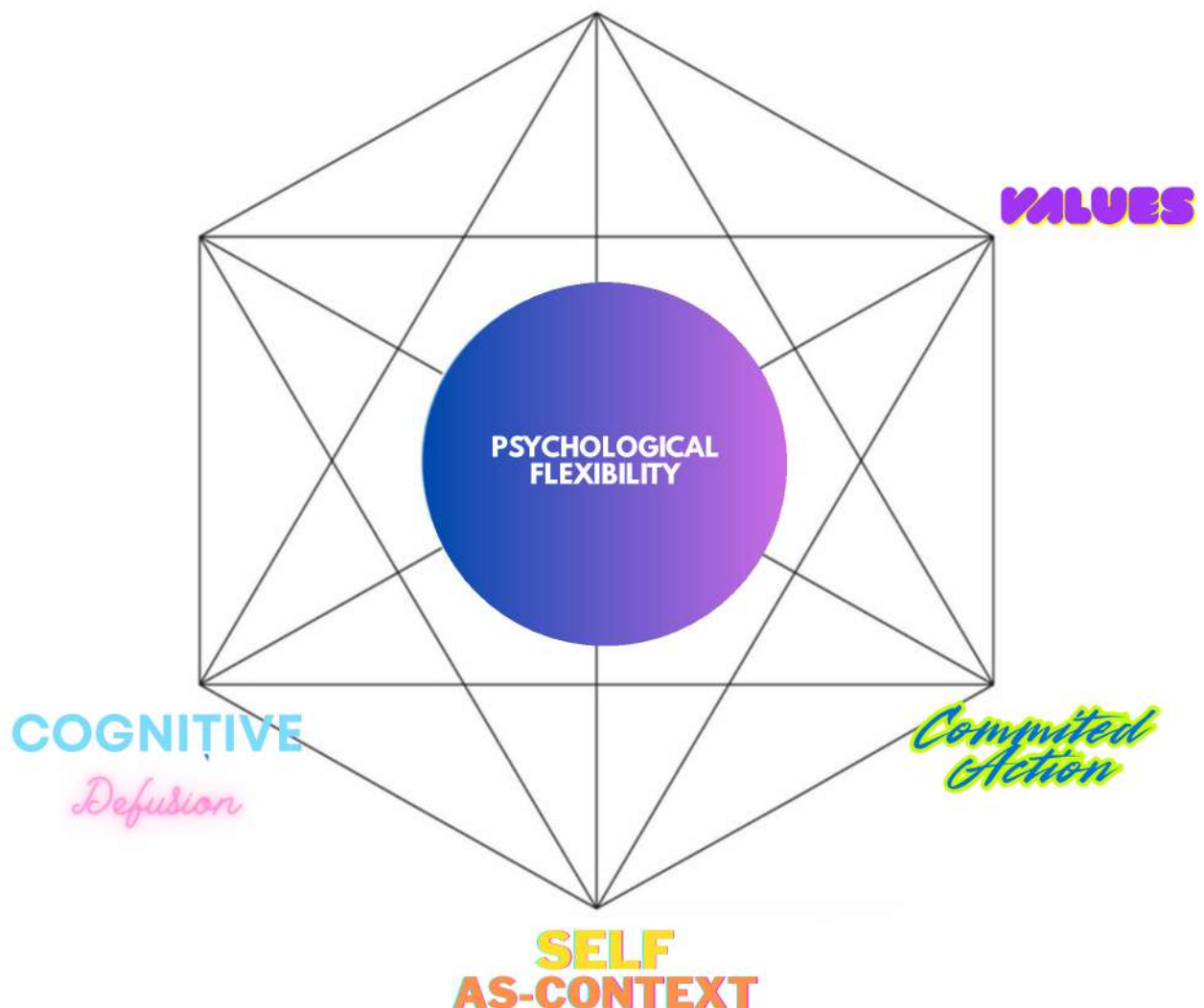
Self-as-Context: this is the most stable part of us, our observing Self, the awareness that can notice thoughts, emotions, roles, and experiences without being confused or entangled with them.



COGNITIVE

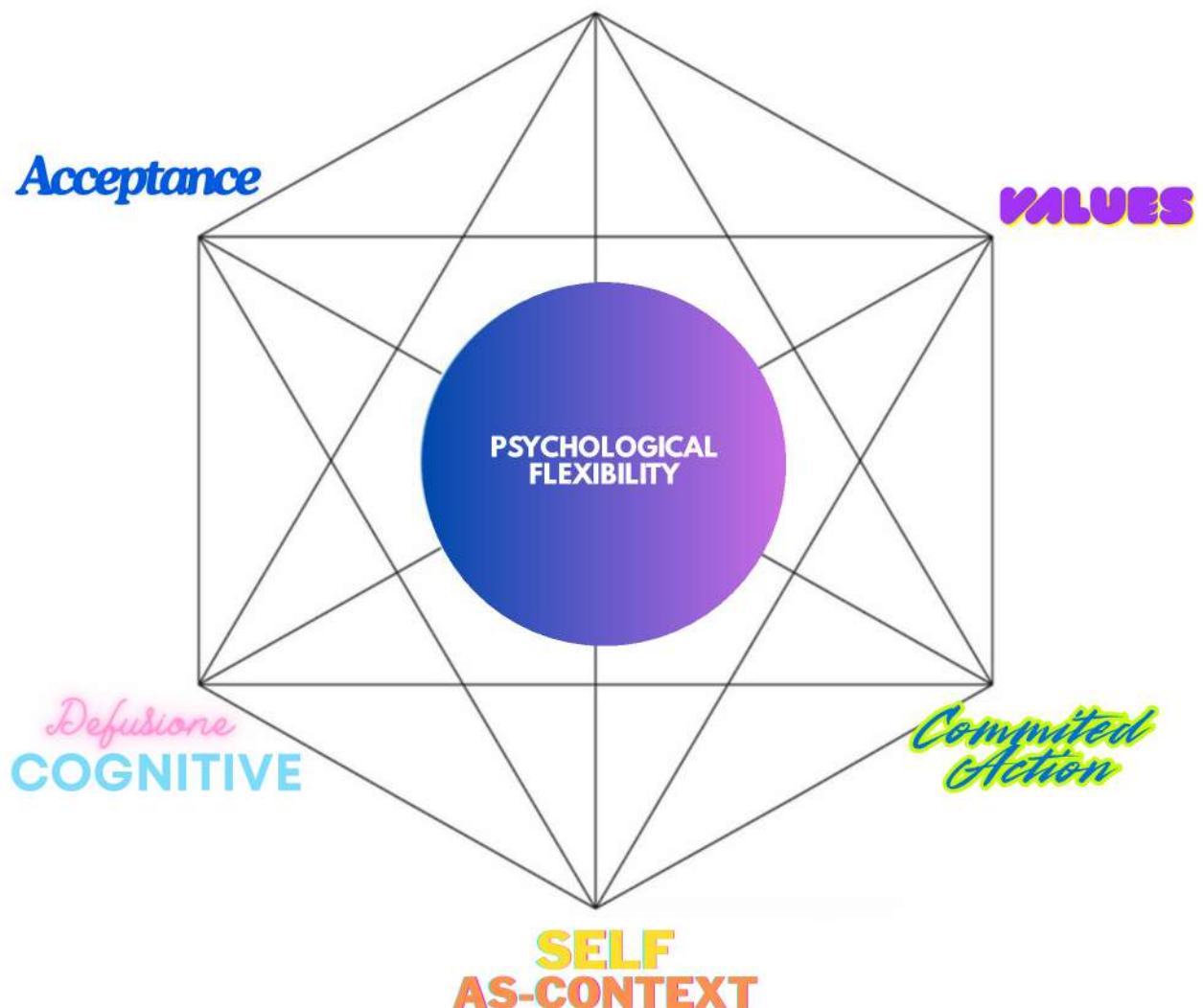
Defusion

Cognitive Defusion: we often fuse with our thoughts ("If I think I'm wrong, then I am"). Defusion helps us recognize thoughts for what they are: mental events, not absolute truths.



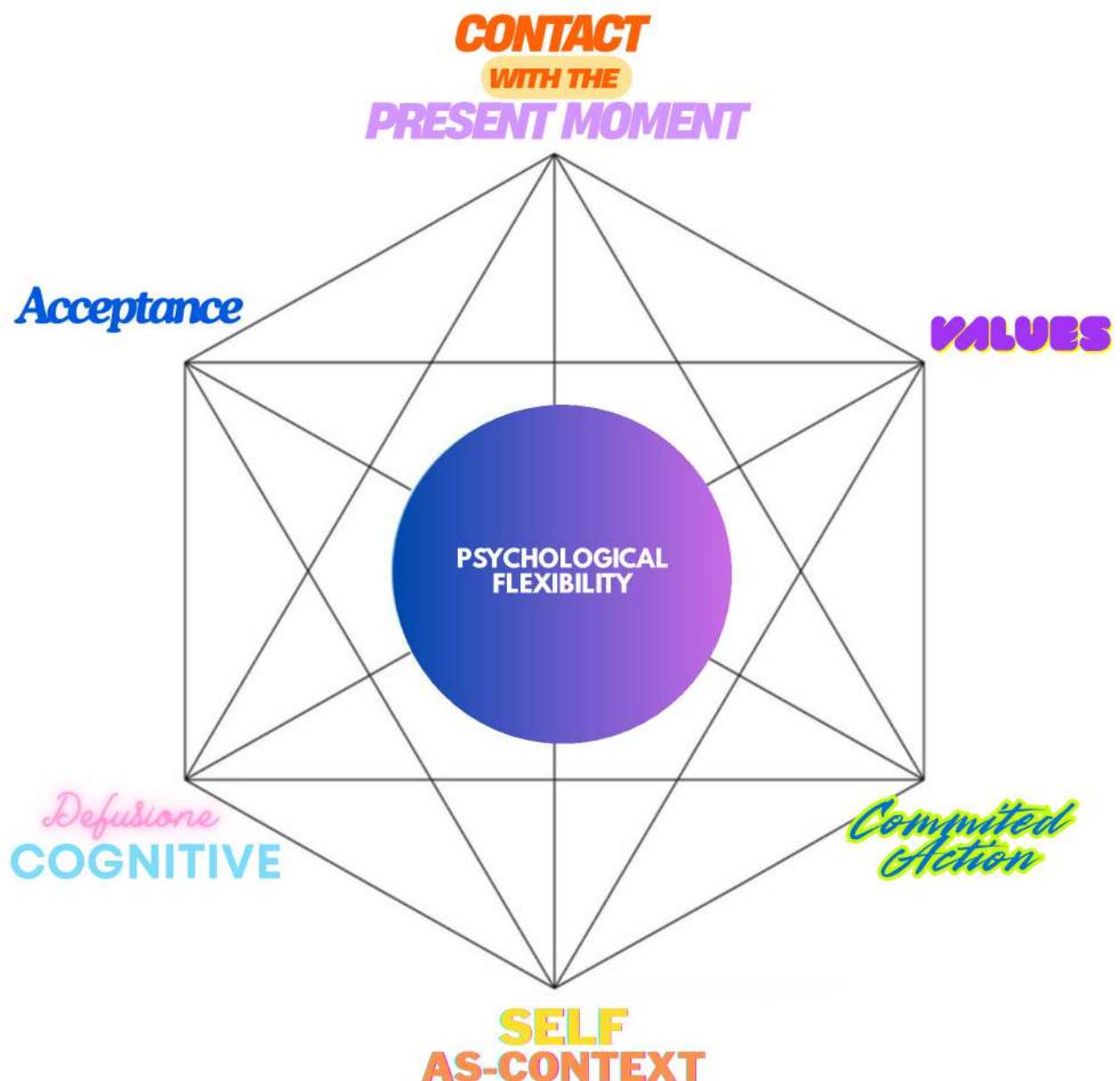
Acceptance

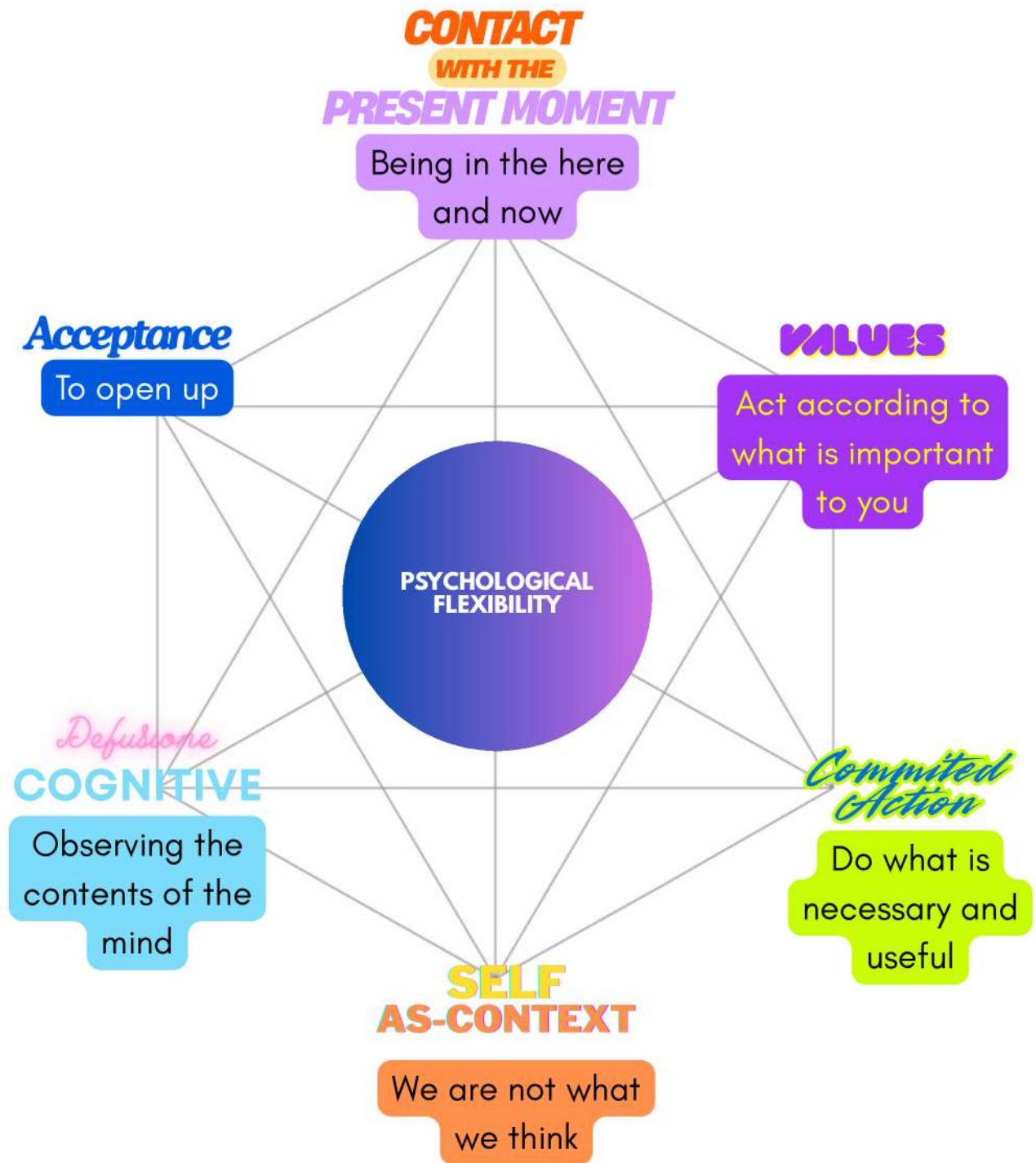
Acceptance: this involves learning to welcome difficult emotions and thoughts (such as shame, fear of rejection, the pain of loneliness) without attempting to control or suppress them.



CONTACT **WITH THE** **PRESENT MOMENT**

Contact with the present moment: we spend much of our time turned towards the past or projected into the future. Practicing presence means grounding yourself in the here and now, returning to the body and the present moment, where action and choice are possible.





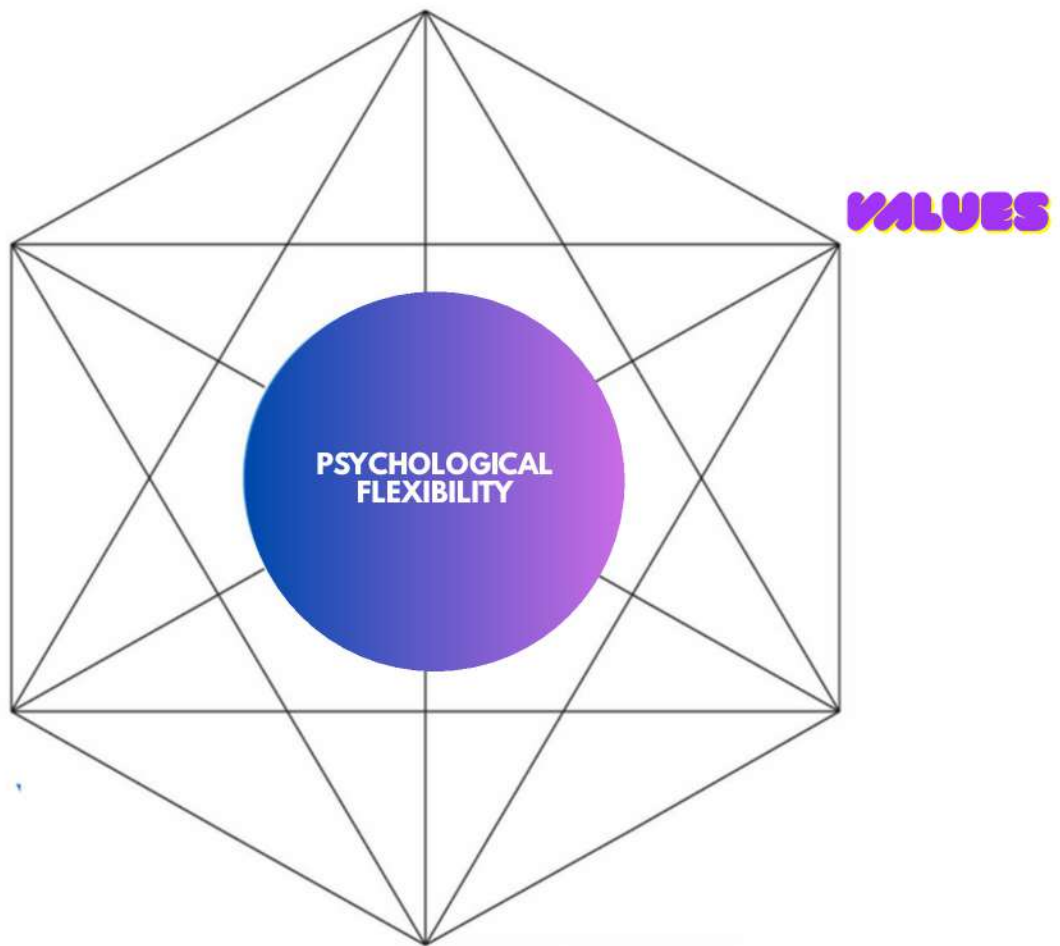
Make a
SCREENSHOT

and always carry it with you!

1^o WEEK

EXERCISE 1

VALUES





A look at your values

In this exercise you will find a list of the most common values you can choose from.

Your values describe the kind of person you want to be, the way you want to treat yourself, others, and the world around you.



They are the deepest desires of your heart, how you want to behave as a human being. Values aren't about what you want to achieve or obtain, they're about how you want to be or act in your life.



LIST OF VALUES

Indicate what your values are

- **ACCEPTANCE:** Being open and accepting of myself, others, life, etc.
 - **ACTIVISM:** Fighting in society for one's ideals.
 - **ADVENTURE:** To be adventurous, to actively seek out, create, or explore novel or challenging experiences.
 - **ASSERTIVENESS:** Making requests and refusing requests respectfully.
 - **AUTHENTICITY:** To be authentic, genuine, true, to be true to myself.
 - **BEAUTY:** Appreciate, create, and cultivate beauty in myself, in others, and in the environment.
 - **CARE:** Caring for myself, others, the environment, etc.
 - **CHALLENGE:** To continue to challenge myself to grow, learn, improve.
 - **COMMUNITY:** Sense of belonging and collective bond.
 - **COMPASSION:** Acting with kindness and sensitivity towards those who suffer.
 - **CONFORMITY:** Being obedient and respectful of rules and obligations.
 - **CONNECTION:** Fully engaging in whatever you are doing, and being fully present with others.
 - **COOPERATION:** Being cooperative and collaborative with others.
 - **COURAGE:** To be courageous; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty.
 - **CREATIVITY:** To be creative or innovative, to invent, to build.
 - **CURIOSITY:** Being curious, open-minded and interested; exploring and discovering.
 - **EMPOWERMENT:** Empowering yourself and others to act with autonomy and strength.
 - **ENCOURAGEMENT:** Encourage and reward behaviors that I value in myself and others.
 - **EQUALITY:** Treating others like myself and vice versa.
 - **EUPHORIA:** Claiming the right to pleasure, to celebration, to happiness.
 - **FAIRNESS:** Being fair to oneself or others.
 - **FITNESS:** Maintaining or improving my physical fitness, taking care of my physical and mental health and well-being.
 - **FLEXIBILITY:** Regulate your actions and adapt easily to changing circumstances.
 - **FORGIVENESS:** Forgiving myself or others.
 - **FREEDOM:** Living freely; choosing how to live and behave, or helping others to do the same.
 - **FRIENDLINESS:** Being friendly, sociable, or pleasant towards others.
 - **FUN:** Seeking fun; seeking, creating, and engaging in fun activities.
 - **GENEROSITY:** Being generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others.
 - **GRATITUDE:** Being grateful and thankful for the positive aspects of myself, others, and life.
 - **HELP:** Contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference for myself or others.
 - **HISTORICAL MEMORY:** Honoring the struggles and achievements of previous generations.
 - **HONESTY:** Being honest and sincere with myself and others.
 - **HUMILITY:** Being humble or modest; letting my achievements speak for themselves.
 - **HUMOR:** Seeing and appreciating the humorous side of life.
 - **INCLUSION:** Openness to the internal and external diversity of all people.
 - **INDEPENDENCE:** Being self-supporting, and choosing your own way of doing things.
 - **INDUSTRIALITY:** To be industrious, to work hard, to be dedicated to one's work.
 - **INTIMACY:** Opening up, revealing, sharing myself – emotionally or physically – in my closest personal relationships.
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- **JUSTICE:** Upholding justice and fairness.
 - **KINDNESS:** Being kind, compassionate, considerate, and caring for myself or others.
 - **LOVE:** Acting full of love or affection towards myself or others.
 - **MINDFULNESS:** Being aware, open, and curious about my experience in the here-and-now.
 - **OPEN-MINDEDNESS:** Thinking about things without preconceptions, seeing things from other points of view, and weighing evidence objectively.
 - **ORDER:** To be tidy and organized.
 - **PATIENCE:** Waiting calmly for what I want.
 - **PERSISTENCE:** Continuing with determination, despite problems or difficulties.
 - **PLEASURE:** Creating and giving pleasure to myself or others.
 - **POWER:** To strongly influence others, or to exercise authority over others, e.g., to take command, lead, organize.
 - **PRIDE:** To assert who you are, without shame.
 - **RECIPROCITY:** Building relationships where there is a right balance between giving and receiving.
 - **RESPECT:** Being respectful towards myself or others; being kind, considerate, and showing positive regard.
 - **RESPONSIBILITY:** Being responsible and accountable for my actions.
 - **ROMANTICISM:** Being romantic; showing and expressing love or strong feelings.
 - **SAFETY:** Protect, ensure the safety of myself or others.
 - **SELF-AWARENESS:** Being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and actions.
 - **SELF-CARE:** Taking care of your health and well-being, and meeting your needs.
 - **SELF-CONTROL:** Acting in accordance with my ideas and values.
 - **SELF-DETERMINATION:** Taking responsibility for defining yourself and your own path.
 - **SELF-DEVELOPMENT:** Continuing to grow, advancing, or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experiences.
 - **SKILLS:** To continually practice and improve my skills, and to be fully committed when putting them into practice.
 - **SOCIAL JUSTICE:** Commitment to a fair and discrimination-free world.
 - **SENSUALITY:** Creating, exploring, and experiencing experiences that stimulate the five senses.
 - **SEXUALITY:** Exploring or expressing my sexuality.
 - **SPIRITUALITY:** Connecting with things bigger than myself.
 - **STIMULUS:** Seeking, creating, and engaging in activities that are exciting, stimulating, or thrilling, that make me feel alive.
 - **SUPPORTIVE:** Being supportive, helpful, encouraging towards myself or others.
 - **TRUST:** To be trustworthy; to be faithful, sincere, and reliable.
- 



Each of us has values that have been formed over time, through experiences, relationships, and hardships. Your values have a history of unique challenges: times when you felt supported and times when you had to fight against judgment or discrimination.

Tracing the history of your values will help you better understand how they were formed and what they have meant to you over time.

- Choose one of the values that are most important to you today and tell its story.

- When did you first realize that this value was important to you?

- Was there a time when you felt compelled to put it aside or hide it? What happened?



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- Have you ever had the support of someone who helped you live this value more freely? Who or what made you feel safe in those moments?

- Look to the present and the future: how does this value guide you today, in your concrete life?

- What obstacles do you still face today in living it to the fullest?

- What would help you live it more fully and authentically?



Make a
SCREENSHOT

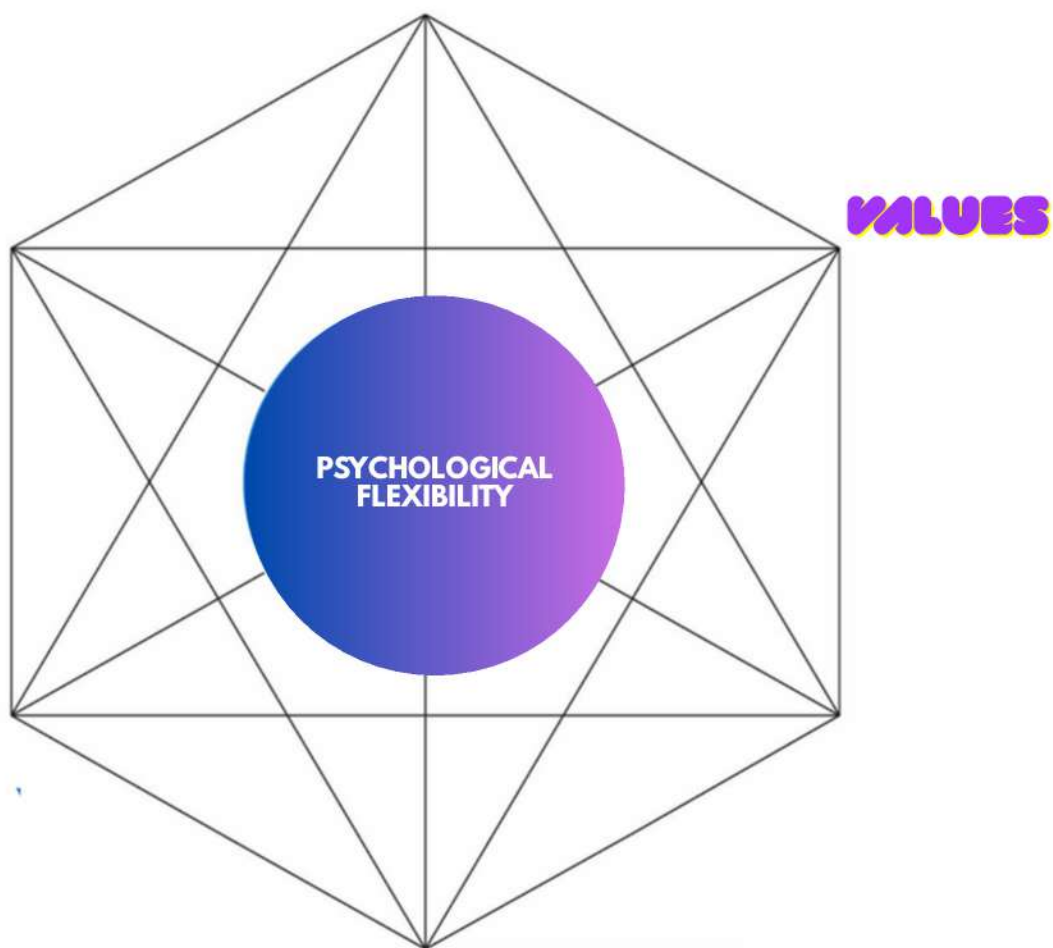
and always carry it with you!



1 WEEK

EXERCISE 2

VALUES





First steps to define your values

Values refer to what is most important to you in life.

VALUES...

**They are not objectives:
values are in the here and now,
goals are in the future**

**They include ourselves and
others**

They don't need to be justified

They are freely chosen

**They need to have a priority
order**





We live immersed in a culture that takes for granted that all people are **HETEROSEXUALS** and **CISGENDER**.

Marginalizing anyone who deviates from these expectations.

This dominant narrative can profoundly influence how we construct the idea of:

Who we should be.

How we should behave.

What we should want from our life.

It's possible that some values we think we hold aren't really ours, but have been internalized as responses to fear, rejection, or the need to fit in to feel accepted or safe.





For example, saying:

“For me it's important to be discreet”

It could be a value related to confidentiality or sobriety, but it could also be a way of saying:

“I don't want to attract attention, because I've learned that showing myself as I am can be dangerous.”

→ In this case, “discretion” is not an authentic value, but an adaptation strategy.



Another example:

“It's important to me to be strong and independent.”

If this value stems from years of feeling rejected or unsupported by the people around you, it could mean:

“I can't count on anyone, so I feel like I can never ask for help.”





Take a step back from these external influences and try to recognize what really matters to you, beyond social expectations.

Exploring your authentic values means:

- Distinguish what is deeply yours from what you have learned to adapt.
- Making room for parts of yourself that you've had to hide to protect yourself from judgment, exclusion, or violence.
- Imagine what it would be like to live your life feeling completely safe, loved, and respected.

Step 1: Identify

Identify and describe a time when you felt very happy.

Identify and describe a time when you felt truly proud of yourself.

Identify and describe a time when you felt truly fulfilled.





Step 2: Determine

- Look at the moments you described and try to identify the values that reflect them.
- Write your core values here (e.g., authenticity, family, personal growth, etc.)...

Deepen your values

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

What kind of partner
would you like to be?

FREE TIME

How would you like to
spend your free time?

WORK

What career goals are
important to you?
What kind of professional
relationships do you want
to develop?

FRIENDSHIPS

What relationships do you
consider important to
cultivate?
What kind of friend would
you like to be?

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

How would you like your
relationships with your
family to be?

SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP

What does being part of a
community mean to you?
What kind of contribution
would you like to make to
your community (queer or
otherwise)?



Step 3: Prioritize values

- Now prioritize your values.
- What's most important to you right now? Rate each value on a scale of 1 to 10.

How closely do you live your values? Assign a value from 1 to 10 to each value.



Now you have a clear vision of what matters most to you. Your values guide you toward a meaningful life.

Remember that you can review the screenshot whenever you want.



With this exercise you have completed the first step of this journey: the section on values!

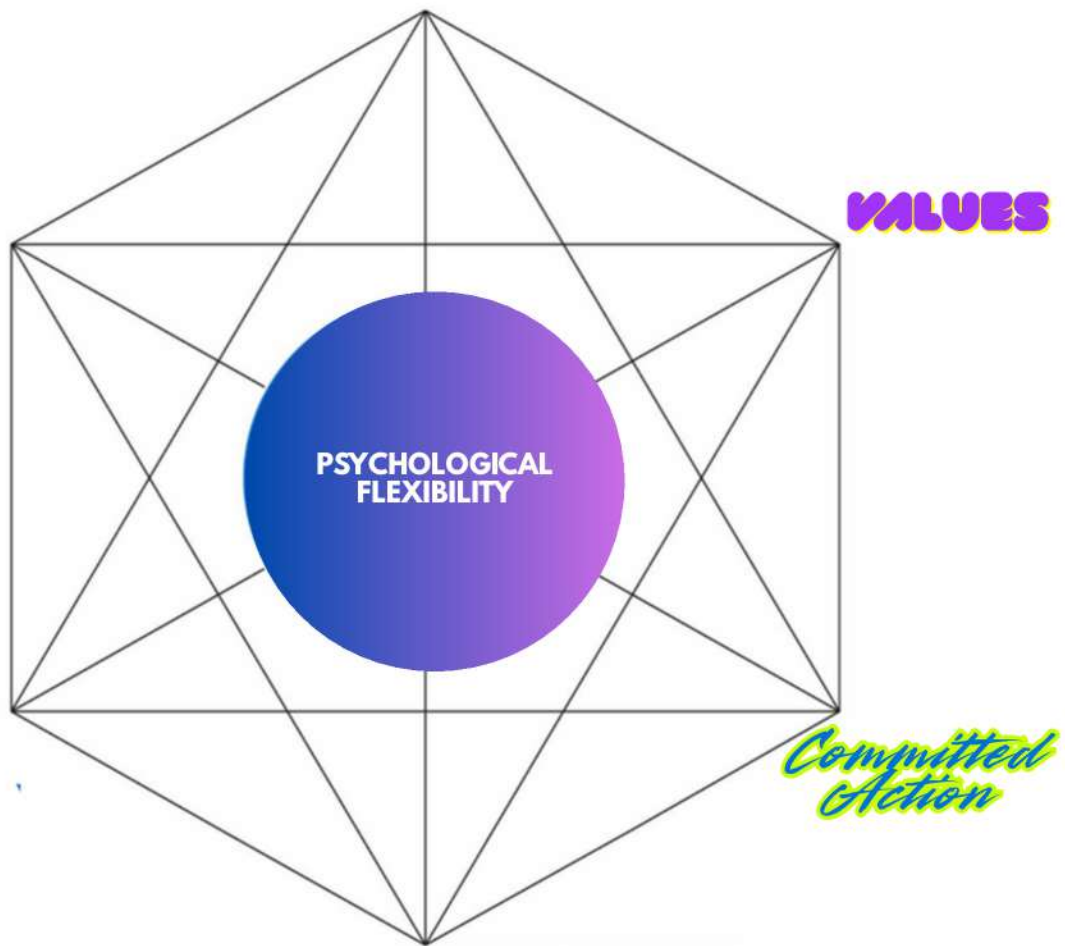
Every step you've taken has helped you clarify what really matters to you.

When you feel lost, you can come back here to find direction and direct your actions towards what is important to you.



1 WEEK EXERCISE 3

Committed Action





You may have experienced difficult, disabling, or even dangerous situations from which there seemed no way out.

Even in those moments, no matter how difficult, there is always a possibility of choice. And every choice can bring us closer to, or further away from, what truly matters to us: our values.

Every complex situation can be addressed in different ways, for example:

To leave: to walk away from people, spaces, or situations that make you feel unsafe, judged, or invisible. Leaving can be an act of self-care and self-protection.

Staying but giving up your values: this is the choice we often make to survive, to avoid conflict, to protect ourselves, but over time it can take us away from who we truly are.

Stay and live by your values: If you can't (or don't want to) leave, you can choose to stay and act in accordance with what's important to you. This can mean:

- Change what can be changed, such as demanding respect, setting limits, educating, creating safer spaces.
 - To accept what you cannot change right away — such as others' judgment, exhaustion, or fear — while still choosing to remain true to your values.
- 



Now that you've explored your values, it's time to take a concrete step toward them.

Choose a value from those you have identified.

Reflect:

- In what areas of your life do you feel this value is taking up more space?
- Is there anything you could do to get closer to this value?

For each value you choose, think of real actions, even small ones, that you could implement in the next few days.

Write down the actions with the criteria of a SMART goal:

SPECIFIC → What exactly will you do?

MEASURABLE → Can you measure the results achieved?

Achievable → Is this a realistically achievable goal?

RELEVANT → Does it have a great importance in your life?

TEMPORARILY DETERMINED → When will you do it? (specify date, time, location)

For example, if your value is "community," a specific goal might be: "I will attend a queer group this Saturday at 6 pm."



Choose your goal _____

What exactly will you do?

Can you measure it? How?

Is this a realistically achievable goal?

Is it relevant to your life?

Specify date, time and location.



Make a

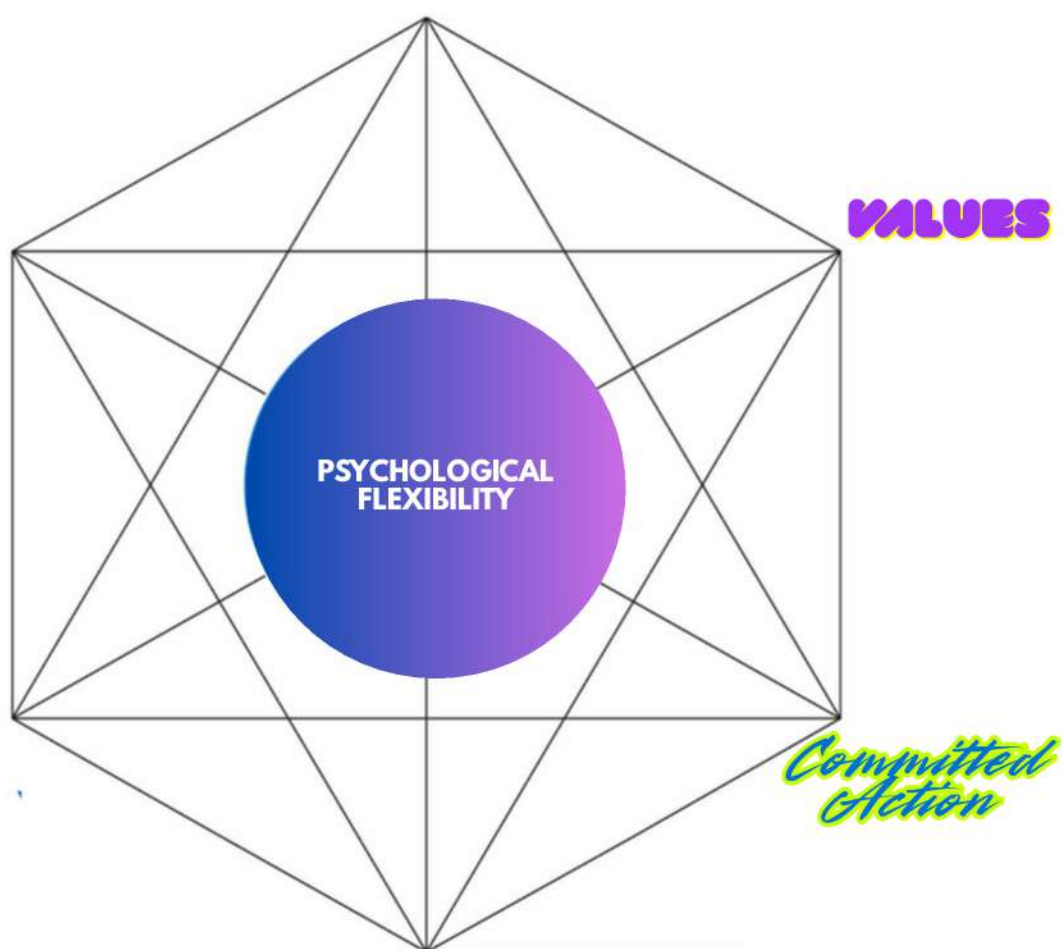
SCREENSHOT

and always carry it with you!

2° WEEK

EXERCISE 4

Committed Action





Now choose a different value from the ones you selected last time.

Choose a situation in which you can put that value into practice and write

Words **Gestures** **Physical**
ACTIONS

That can help you move in the direction of your chosen value.

Words

For example, if you have chosen “authenticity” as your value and your family of origin as your situation, you can think about **words** like:

“I would like to be able to talk to you openly.”

“This part of me is not a phase.”

“I need you to call me by my name/pronoun.”

What are your **words**?





Gestures

- Share an article, video, or story that tells something about you.
- Walk away from conversations that make you feel bad.
- Offer to listen to a family member who is making a sincere effort to understand you.

Choose your gestures _____

Physical ACTIONS

- Choose whether and how to get closer: hugging, being in the same room, or taking up physical space.
- Pamper yourself after stressful family moments (a shower, a massage, a walk).

Choose physical actions:





Notice any thoughts or emotions that arise when you imagine doing this action.
What encourages you?

What is holding you back or scaring you?

COMMITMENT: Write a concrete goal that you have identified and that is linked to a personal value of yours.

OBSTACLES: What obstacles might prevent you from pursuing this goal?

STRATEGIES: What could you do to address these obstacles?





Section complete!

You've completed the committed action section.

It is not the magnitude of the action that counts, but its direction.

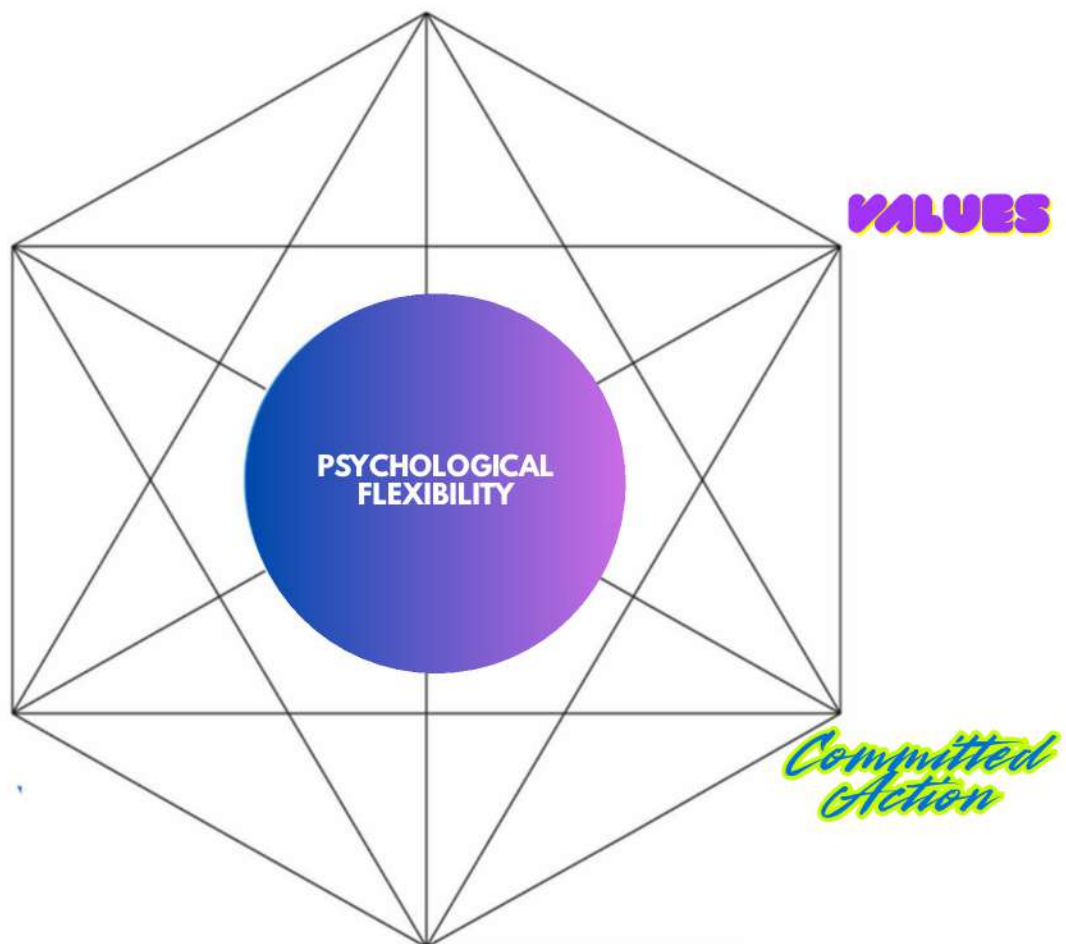
Every decisive step you take towards your values builds a fuller, more meaningful life.



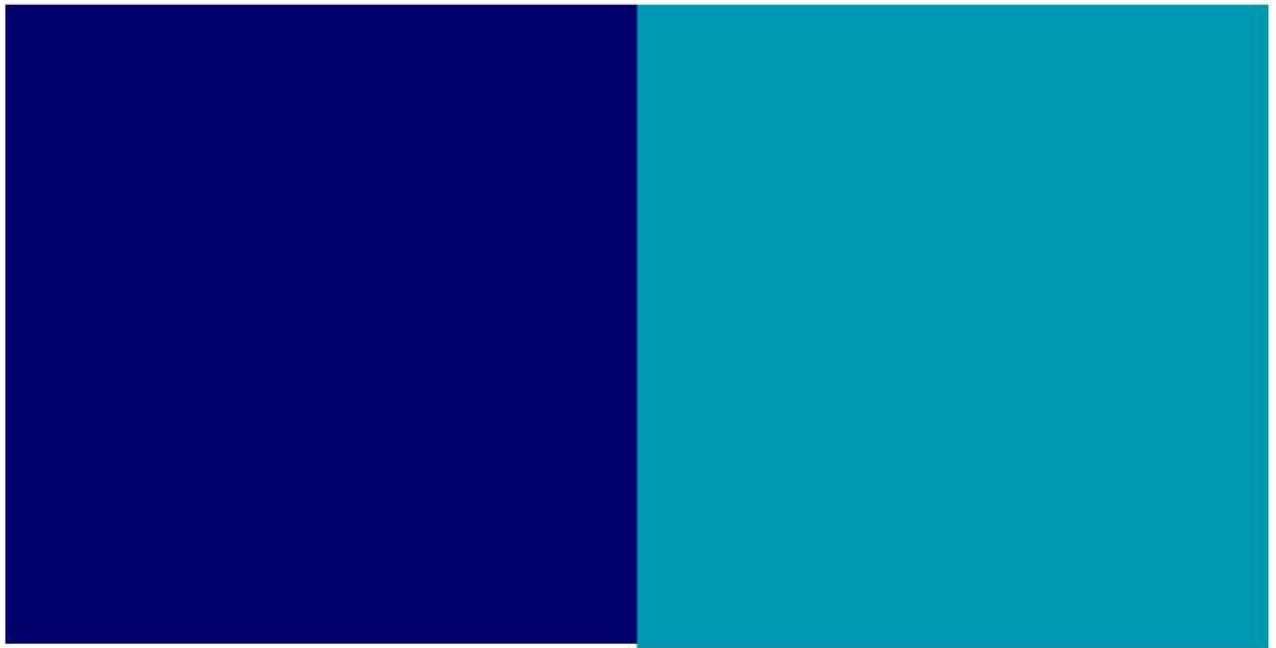
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WEEK

EXERCISE 5

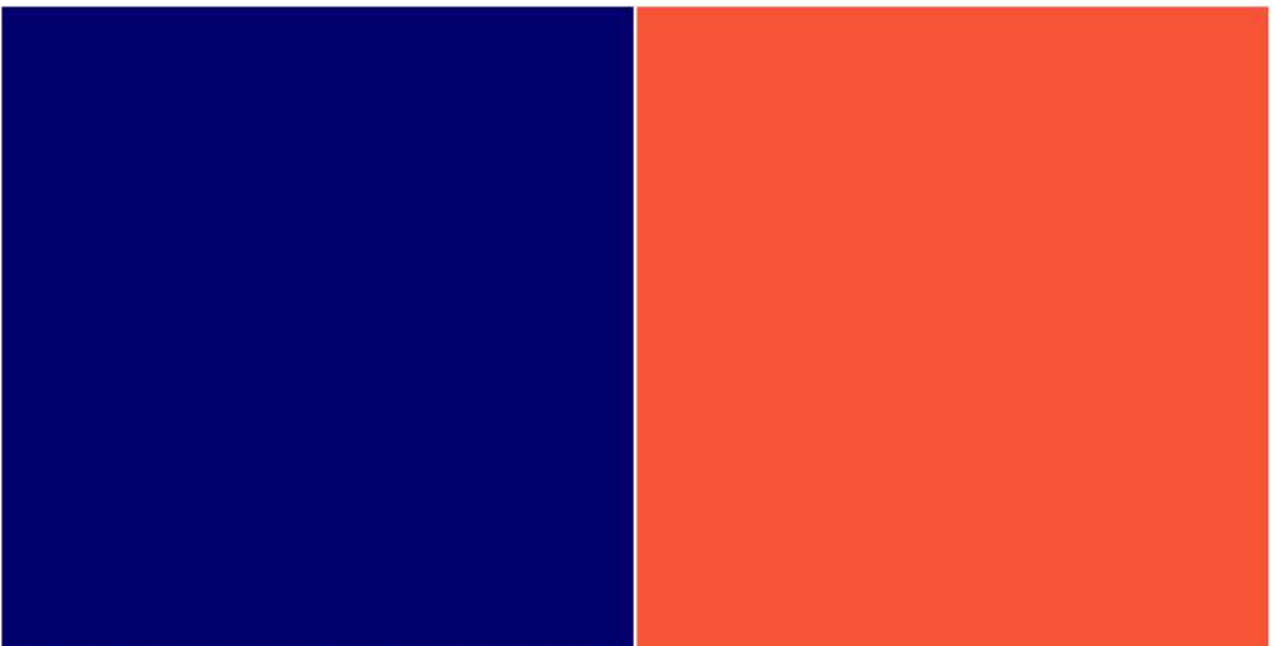
SELF AS CONTEXT



SELF
AS
CONTEXT



The metaphor of the
ANTHROPOLOGIST





METAPHOR - audio file -

An anthropologist travels the world with a clear goal: to observe. He studies different cultures, ways of living, speaking, and behaving. He witnesses rituals, daily interactions, and family dynamics, but does not intervene.

He doesn't judge what happens, he doesn't try to change anything. He gathers information, takes notes, and remains a witness. His effectiveness lies precisely in his ability to remain present yet separate, involved yet not emotionally involved; he's there to observe, not to participate; he's there to see, not to merge with what he observes.

Likewise, within every person there is a part that can observe thoughts, emotions, memories, sensations, without becoming prey to them. Without completely identifying with them.

This part is called the self as context or the observing self.

It's not a role, it's not a label, it's not a story.

It is a stable internal space in which all the contents of experience, beautiful or painful, can be noticed, welcomed, and allowed to pass.

Just like an anthropologist on the streets of a foreign city, the observing self looks, recognizes, and lets be.

There's no need to fight or flee, just watch.

The metaphors were adapted from Scarlet (2013) and Stoddard (2013). You can find the original versions in The Big Book of ACT Metaphors: A Practitioner's Guide by Dr. Jill Stoddard and Dr. Niloofer Afari.





For many LGBTQIA+ people, aspects of their identity can become the subject of external narratives, stereotypes, judgments, or rejection.

"True love is only between a man and a woman"

"Bodies must look a certain way to be valid."

"Being transgender or non-binary is a phase."

These narratives can generate repetitive thoughts, painful emotions, and feelings of disconnection from the self.

Developing the ability to observe your experience without being defined by it is essential to your well-being.



Observing Self

It is the part of us that observes what happens: thoughts, emotions, sensations, memories, without being overwhelmed or defined by all of it. It is the stable and welcoming internal space in which we are present and free to choose how to act.





Developing the ability to observe one's experience helps people not to automatically react to thoughts, emotions, and situations.

You become freer to choose behaviors consistent with your values, rather than acting impulsively or driven by suffering.



THE EYE *of the* **CYCLONE**

*Finding a stable center within yourself, even
when thoughts and emotions are intense.*





METAPHOR - audio file -

Close your eyes.

Imagine a huge cyclone swirling around you. A moving, intense, powerfully rotating vortex.

Within this cyclone are thoughts, emotions, memories.

Things that can disturb, hurt, confuse.

Voices telling you you're not enough.

That you should be different.

That you will never be accepted.

Now visualize yourself at the center of the cyclone. In the heart of the storm, all is calm.

The wind is blowing around, but you are standing still.

Rooted*.

Present.

You're not trying to stop the cyclone.

You're not fighting the wind.

You are choosing to stay in your center.

Notice that there is a stable space within you.

A part that observes, that welcomes, that is not swept away.

A part that can remain, even when everything around it moves.

This part is your Self as an Observer.

It doesn't judge, it doesn't resist, it doesn't control.

Observe. And that's it.

And even when there is chaos outside, you can find tranquility within.





How are you feeling?

Describe your emotions and thoughts at this moment

What reflections do you have after listening to the audio?



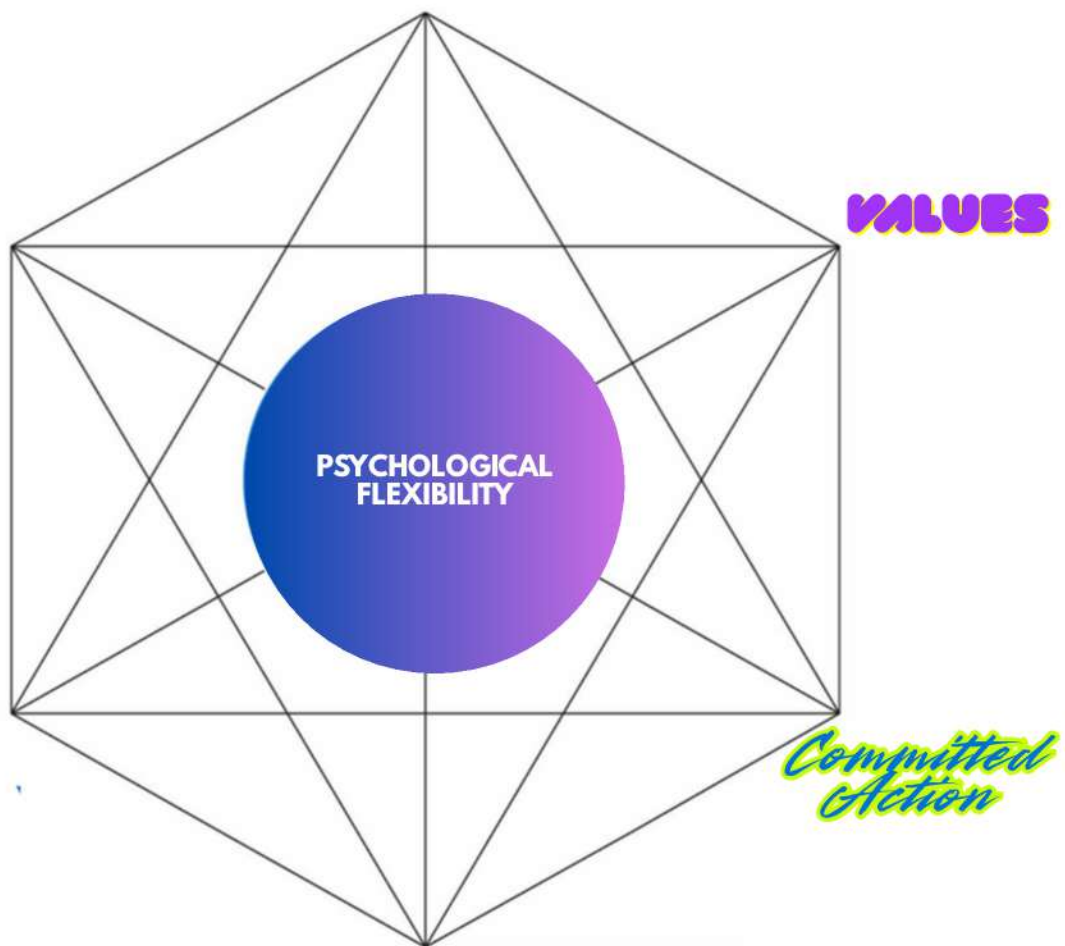
You can return to this exercise whenever you feel overwhelmed, whenever your thoughts are racing, whenever your emotions seem too strong.



2°
WEEK

EXERCISE 6

SELF AS CONTEXT



SELF
AS
CONTEXT



Recognizing thought cycles

If you are an LGBTQIA+ person, you may have felt thoughts inside yourself such as:

*"I'm wrong."
"No one will ever truly love me."
"I will never be accepted for who I am."*

We live in a society that continues to be structured around heterosexuality and cisnormativity.

This means that ideas about what is "right," "normal," and "desirable" are often not neutral: they are designed to reflect, protect, and legitimize those who are heterosexual and cisgender.

HETERO-CIS NORMATIVITY doesn't just manifest itself in openly discriminatory attitudes or acts of violence: it's also that silent system that assumes all people are heterosexual, that makes "joking" jokes about homosexual people, or that assumes your gender.





Over time, these messages filter into us, even when we rationally reject them, becoming part of the way we think, evaluate, and treat ourselves.

This is what we call **internalized
homophobia**
&
transphobia

That is, a series of hostile cultural messages that have been absorbed since childhood and which have generated self-criticism, shame, mistrust, and social withdrawal.



What thoughts can you recognize as stemming from internalized homo-transphobia?

What strategies do you use to manage them?





Here you will find a list of different ways of thinking that you may have experienced.

Check the ones you have experienced among the following, and add others if you wish:

- Worrying
 - Ruminating about the past
 - Fantasizing about the future
 - Imagining escape scenarios (e.g., leaving your job or your partner)
 - Imagining revenge scenarios
 - Imagining suicide scenarios
 - Thinking "It's not fair..."
 - Thinking "If only..."
 - Thinking about killing yourself
 - Blaming yourself
 - Blaming others
 - Blaming the world
 - Talking to yourself in a logical way
 - Talking to yourself in a positive way
 - Talking to yourself in a negative way
 - Analyzing yourself (trying to understand why you are like this)
 - Analyzing the situation (trying to understand why it happened)
 - Analyzing others (trying to understand why they are like that)
 - Using substances (alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, etc.)
 - Using food to regulate your emotions
 - Other
- 



REFLECTION

Once you have completed the list, for each item ask yourself:

Did this strategy eliminate my painful thoughts and emotions in the long term?

Did it bring me closer to a rich, full, and meaningful life?
If the answer to question 2 is "no," then what has this strategy cost me in terms of time, energy, money, health, relationships, and vitality?





Remember that you have the opportunity, every time a thought arises in your mind, to access that neutral space of the observing self.

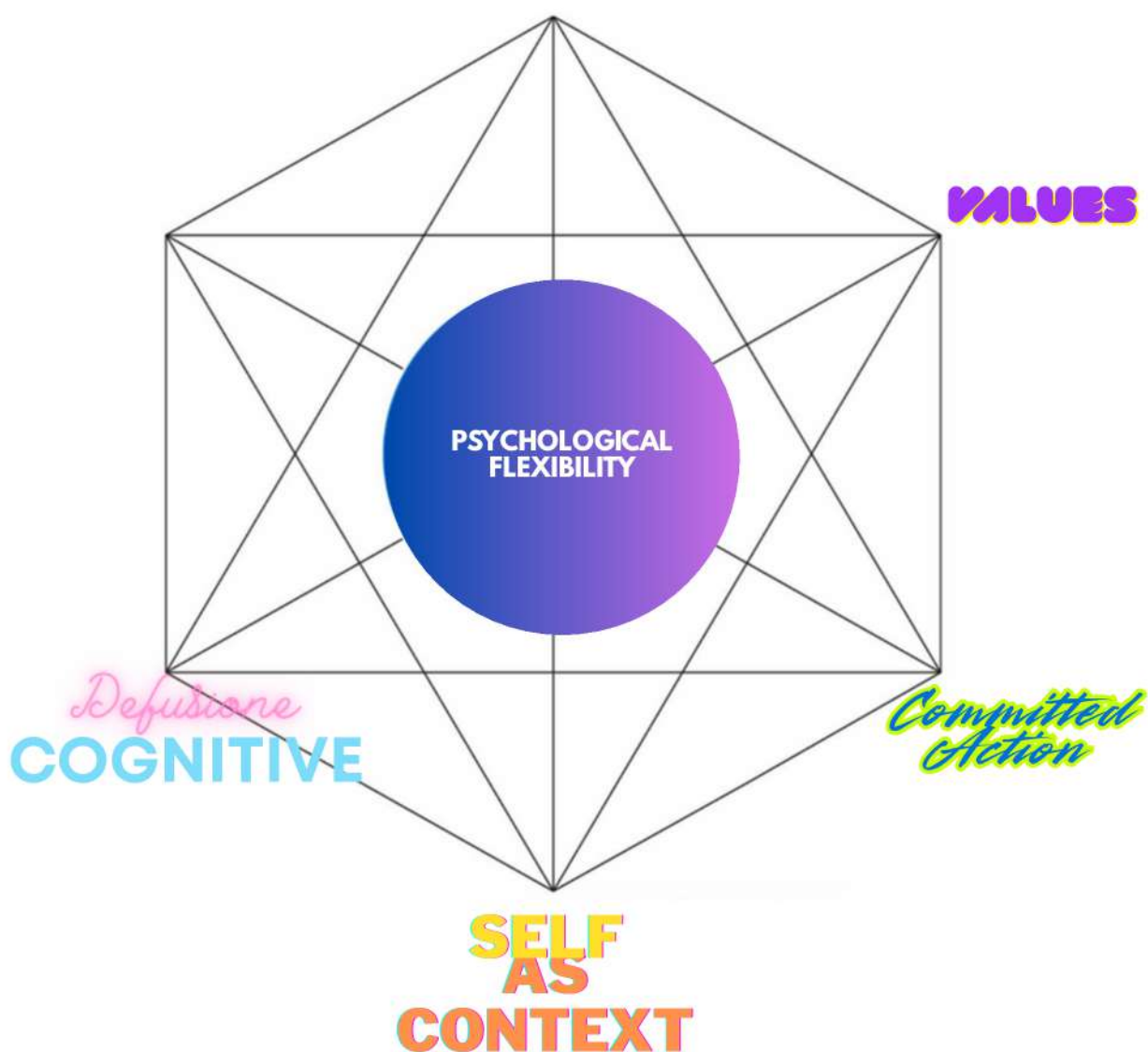
THE EYE
of the
CYCLONE



You've completed the section on the self as context!
You have connected with that place within you that is
space, openness, and presence.
From there, you can welcome everything that comes,
without letting it define you.

3^o
WEEK
EXERCISE 7

Defusione
COGNITIVE





When the mind produces painful or unpleasant thoughts, it may seem that these thoughts are

ABSOLUTE TRUTHS

But these are just mental events, phrases the mind constructs. Reframing these thoughts can help you distance yourself and observe them from the outside, reducing their emotional intensity.



Identify a thought that makes you feel bad, for example:

You are wrong

Now rephrase it by adding this sentence before the thought:

"I'm noticing that, right now, my mind - conditioned by years of internalizing cultural messages about what a person should be - is telling me I am wrong."





Now add the context you are in while your mind is formulating this thought:

"This is me, sitting in a room on the third floor, in the city of Padua, in northern Italy, on a planet orbiting the sun, and I am having the thought that I am wrong."

Other reformulations that can help you take distance from your thoughts might be:

"I'm useless" → "I'm having the thought that I'm useless."

"I'm not lovable" → "This is me, while thinking that I'm not lovable."



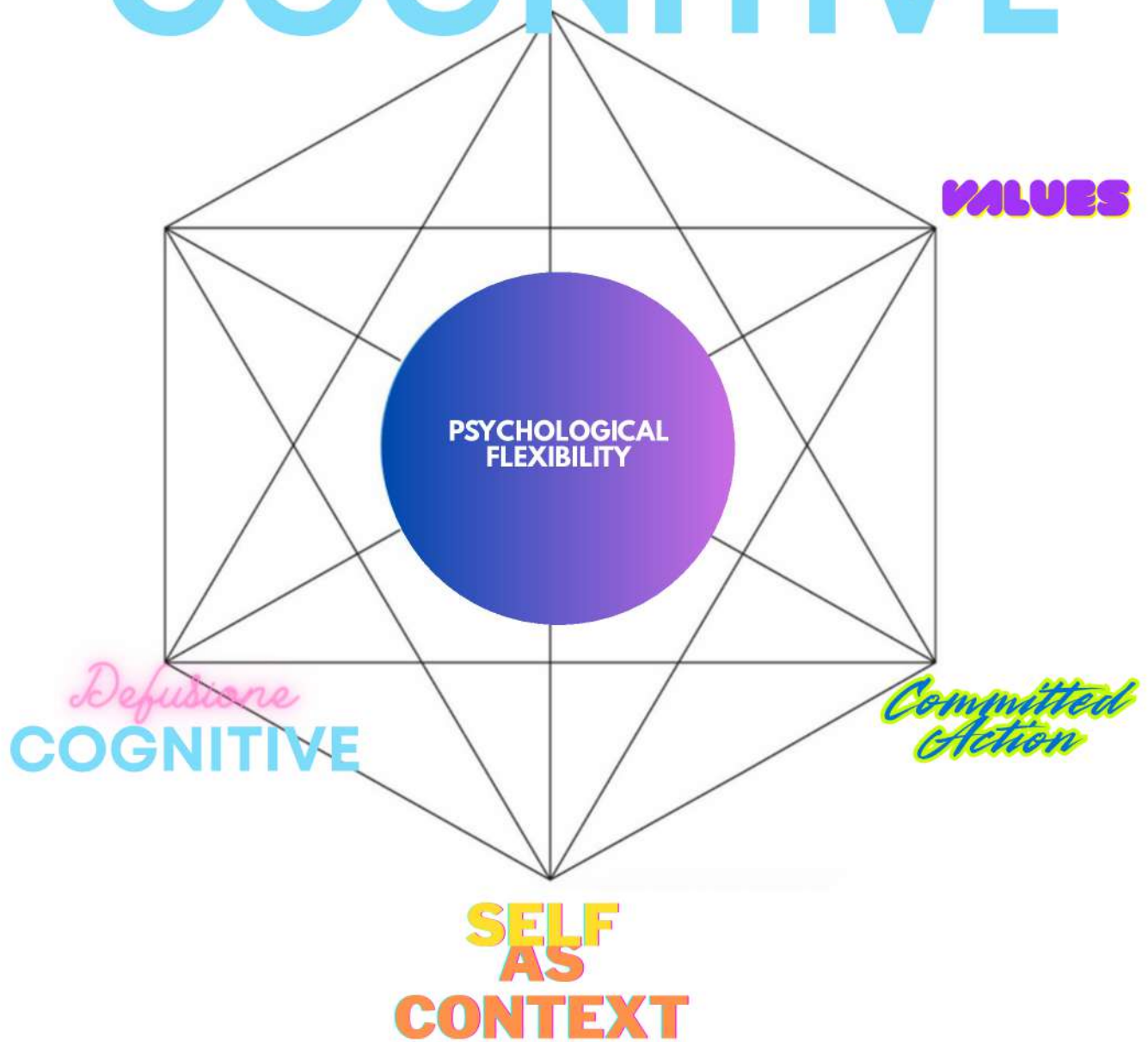
Have you managed to create some distance from your thoughts?

How does the rephrased thought make you feel compared to the original thought?



3^o
WEEK
EXERCISE 8

Defusione
COGNITIVE

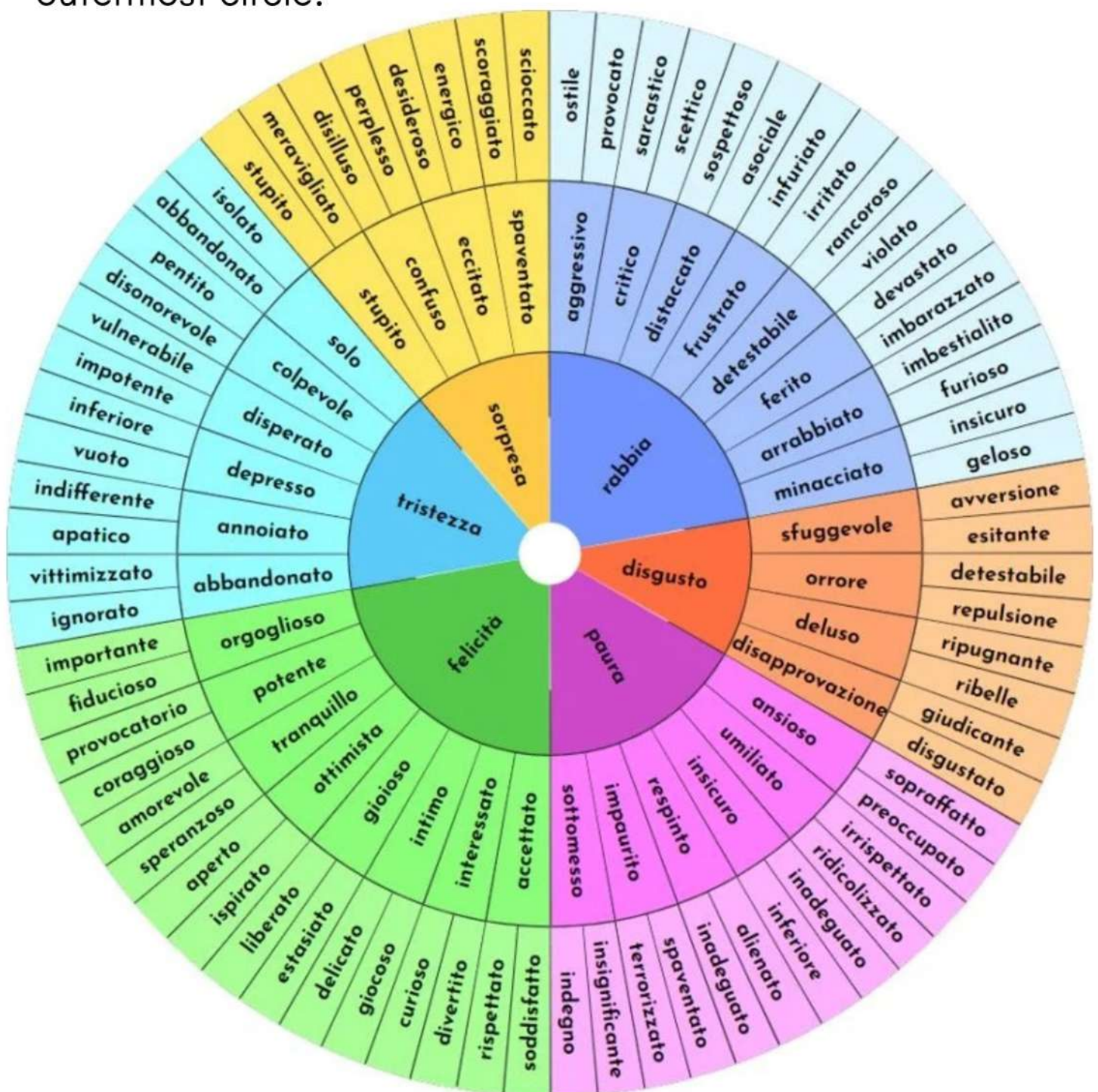


How do you **FEEL?**

Starting from the center of this wheel, identify the emotion you are feeling right now.

Once you have identified it, specify more precisely what you feel by selecting, in the central circle, one of the four words that best describes your emotions.

Specify even further by identifying the emotion in the outermost circle.





Leaves on the **CURRENT**

Audio – **LEAVES ON THE CURRENT**

In the audio recordings, the extended feminine form is used. We have chosen to use the extended feminine as a political and visibility-oriented linguistic choice. We acknowledge that some people might not identify with this form. However, the use of the feminine has a critical and symbolic function: it is not related to individual identity, but intended as a collective political stance aimed at overturning the masculine linguistic norm. After various attempts, we chose to avoid neutral forms because, in audio format, they proved less accessible and potentially exclusionary. We therefore opted for a solution that ensures clarity and inclusion.

“Imagine watching the slow flow of a river: see the water sliding over the rocks, flowing between the trees, and finally reaching the lake; sometimes a large leaf floats by and the current carries it away.

Imagine sitting beside the river on a warm, sunny autumn day, watching the leaves floating in the current, and try to focus on your thoughts.

Each time one comes to mind, imagine that thought written on one of the leaves drifting away with the current. If words or images come to mind, try to picture them as if they were printed on newspapers or magazines, and those pages were resting on the leaves lying on the river...





They might be thoughts stemming from experiences of:

- Victimization, such as “I deserve what happened to me.”
- Stigma, such as “Being queer is not natural.”
- Lack of openness, such as “I can’t say who I really am; I would be rejected.”
- Internalized rejection, such as “I’ll never find someone who loves me for who I am.”
- Internalized homophobia/transphobia, such as “I’ll never be man/woman/person, enough.”
- Negative expectations, such as “I won’t be able to find a job.”
- Perception of social insecurity, such as “It’s better if I don’t show myself; I could put myself in danger.”

The goal is to stay on the riverbank and let the leaves float and be carried away by the current: do not try to make them flow faster or slower, do not try to change the thoughts resting on the leaves—simply observe them as they drift by... take note of what is happening.

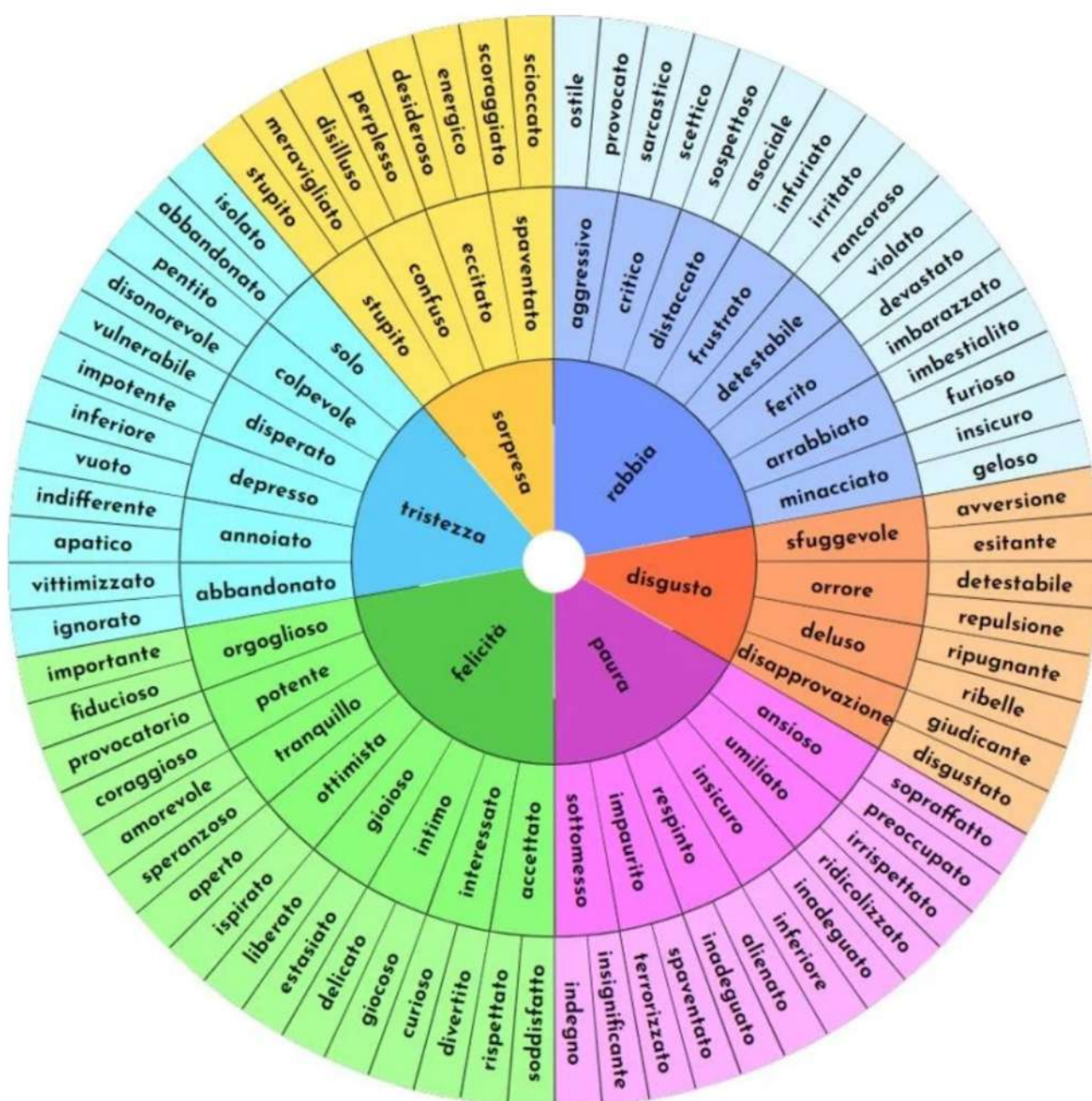
Note: each time a new thought comes to mind, place it on one of these leaves and let the current take it away. Continue this exercise for at least five minutes.”



Notice how each thought came and went.

How did you feel as you let these thoughts go?

How do you **FEEL?**





REMEMBER:

Thoughts are not you. They are mental events learned in a historically hostile context.

You don't have to believe it.

Some thoughts are just echoes of a system that made you feel marginal; they don't reflect your value.



You may ask yourself:

- Is this thought new or is it an old narrative?
 - Does it really help me or does it limit me?
 - Is it my experience speaking, or the voice of the dominant culture?
 - What would happen if I don't listen to it, even just for today?
- 



Cognitive Defusion Section Unlocked!

You have learned to observe your thoughts without letting them dictate.

You've created space between yourself and your thoughts.

This skill can change your relationship with your mind.

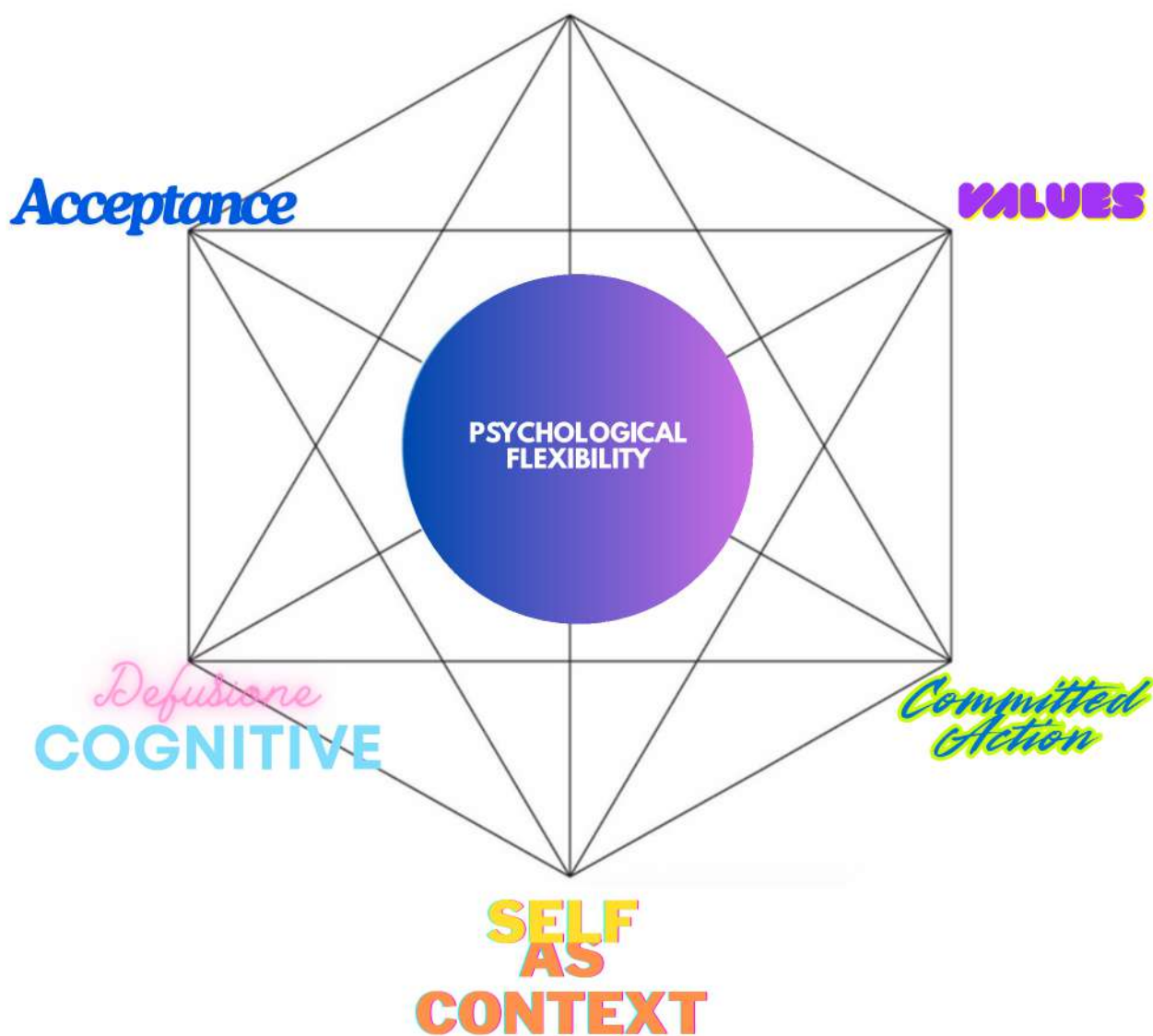
Keep practicing it.



3^o WEEK

EXERCISE 9

Acceptance





The experiences of LGBTQIA+ people can be marked by rejection, invalidation, disaffirmation, or discrimination, and emotions such as shame, guilt, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy can become deeply rooted.

To manage these emotions, it is important the:

SELF-COMPASSION

That is, behaving towards oneself as one would behave towards a loved one.

Self-compassion allows you to:

- Acknowledge your suffering, without denying or minimizing it.
- Respond with kindness, rather than self-criticism or harshness.





Acceptance : being with what is, even when it's uncomfortable

Acceptance does not mean "approving" or "resigning yourself," but allowing the experience to be present just as it is. This means making space for difficult emotions and painful thoughts, stopping the struggle against them or the attempt to avoid them.

For an LGBTQIA+ person, this could mean:

- Making space for the anger from years of invisibility;
- Embracing the pain of family rejection without turning it into self-criticism;
- Accepting the fear of being yourself in hostile environments, without feeling ashamed of it.

Self-compassion and acceptance work together.

Acceptance allows you to stay with the experience, even when it's intense. Self-compassion helps you respond to that experience in a kind, present, and deeply human way.

You don't have to "earn" self-compassion or even acceptance. They're practices, not rewards.





Think of an emotion that you find hard to accept: shame, a sense of inadequacy, anger, loneliness, guilt.

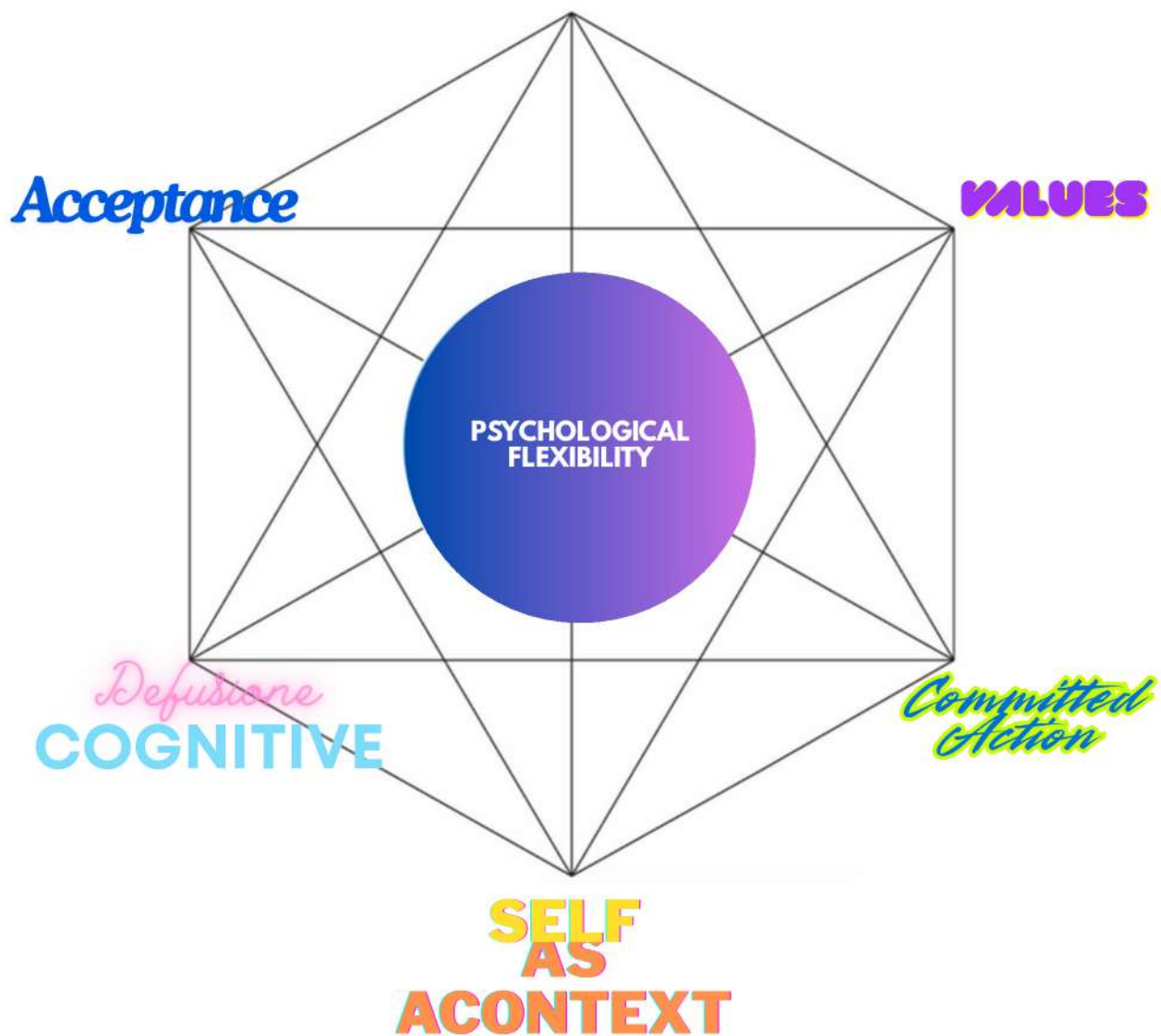
Or a positive emotion that you fear may not be "legitimate": desire, euphoria, freedom.

Now follow these steps:

- Give the emotion a name: recognize it and call it what it is, without judging it.
- Observe it: where do you feel it in your body? Does it have a shape, a color, a weight?
- Breathe with it: take a few slow, deep breaths, allowing space for the sensation.
- Remember that you are not that emotion: you are the container that can hold it, not the emotion itself.
- Be kind to yourself: speak to yourself as you would to someone you love who is feeling that same emotion.
- Stay present: even if it's uncomfortable, the emotion will pass. You can stay with it without running away.



Acceptance





Sometimes we do things that seem to protect us: we shut down, we adapt, we avoid situations or people.

In the short term, this may seem helpful:

"I don't declare my sexual orientation so I don't risk being excluded"

"I don't let people know my partner, so they don't judge me."

But in the long run, these behaviors distance us from establishing authentic relationships and from feeling fully ourselves.



Examples:

TRIGGER: an aperitif with colleagues. I'm afraid the conversation will turn to who my partner is.

BEHAVIOR: *I avoid mentioning them, I change the subject*

BENEFIT: *I avoid the discomfort*

TRIGGER : *I feel like an impostor when I'm with other queer activists.*

BEHAVIOR : *I stay silent, I exclude myself from the group*

BENEFIT: *I avoid confrontation, I avoid the fear of being judged as "not enough"*





	TRIGGER What is the emotion or thought I'm trying to avoid?	BEHAVIOR What behavior do I implement to manage it?	<i>BENEFIT</i> <i>What do I get from that behavior (short and long term)?</i>
Family			
Friendship			
Relationship with partner			
Work			
Identity			
Coming out			
Queer community			
Other			





When you analyze your behavior, ask yourself if you are trying to achieve one of the following:

- Avoid a difficult situation
- Avoid uncomfortable thoughts or emotions
- Reduce anxiety or sadness
- Receive attention
- Meet a deep need (e.g., belonging, safety, respect)
- Feel as if you are “solving the problem”
- Maintain an unrealistic image of yourself
- Have control over the situation

Final reflection

- Which emotions do you try to avoid most often?
- Do these behaviors bring me closer to or further away from the life I want?
- What could I change?

You've completed the section on acceptance!

You've learned that pain can be present... without controlling your life.

To accept does not mean to give up. It means to stop fighting against what you cannot change, so you can move toward what truly matters.



4th WEEK

EXERCISES II

CONTACT WITH THE PRESENT MOMENT

CONTACT
WITH THE
PRESENT MOMENT

Acceptance

VALUES

PSYCHOLOGICAL
FLEXIBILITY

Defusion
COGNITIVE

Committed
Action

SELF
AS
A CONTEXT



In this exercise, you will practice mindfulness, a simple yet powerful way to bring attention to the present moment.

Mindfulness means being aware of what is happening inside and outside of you, moment by moment, with openness and without judgment.

It's not about "emptying your mind" or "doing everything right," but about observing thoughts, emotions, and sensations for what they are: experiences that come and go.

You can simply let the voice guide you, breathe and notice what happens.



Sometimes the day rushes by. And we forget to be present, to truly listen to ourselves.

This mindfulness practice is an invitation: slow down, breathe, and come back to yourself. You don't have to do anything special. Just listen.

Thoughts will come, that's normal. Let them pass, like clouds in the sky.

Here there's no judging, no "success" or "failure." You gain experience.





GENDER JOY MEDITATION

Find a comfortable position — sitting, lying down, or standing — as long as it allows you to feel stable, grounded, and at ease.

Now close your eyes, if you wish, and bring your attention to your breath. Observe its natural rhythm without changing it.

Now bring to mind a moment when you felt fully yourself — in your identity, in your essence — right as you are, happy to be able to express who you are with pride. It could be a recent or distant memory: a Pride event where you danced together with your community, a song that makes you smile when you think of it, a meeting with a meaningful person, an affectionate gesture, a cuddle — or any moment in which you felt free, able to be authentically yourself.

Now focus on the details of that experience.

When did it happen?

Where were you?

Who was with you?

What physical sensations did you feel?

What emotions were present?

Allow yourself to relive that moment, letting the positive sensations arise and spread throughout your body.

Now that you've brought back this moment of joy, happiness, or euphoria, bring your full attention to the body as it is now.

Rather than analyzing or explaining the experience, explore it through your physical sensations.

Ask yourself: Where do I feel joy in my body — perhaps in my chest, face, hands, or belly?

What shape does it have?

Is it warm? Cool?

Still or moving?

Light or intense?

Does it change over time as you observe it?

Try not to interfere — just stay in contact.





If you don't feel anything, that's perfectly fine; even the simple intention to stay present and listen is already a form of connection.

Now take a deep breath and place a hand on the area of your body where you feel this emotion.

Stay here for a few moments, simply observing.

Feel the warmth of your hand in contact with the emotion.

Take a few deep breaths and listen to yourself.

Now try to extend this feeling of joy.

Imagine sharing it with other loved ones.

Visualize this positive, powerful energy — capable of influencing other aspects of your life, bringing serenity and a joyful, positive attitude.

Consider how these emotions contribute to your sense of identity and belonging.

Now gradually bring your attention back to the present moment.

Notice the contact of your body with the surface beneath you, the sounds around you, the rhythm of your breath.

When you're ready, slowly open your eyes.

Carry with you the awareness that joy is an integral part of your experience — and that you can recall it whenever you wish.



You've just spent a few minutes being with yourself, in the present moment.

How was this experience for you?

During the day, try to notice — even just once — when you get lost in your thoughts.

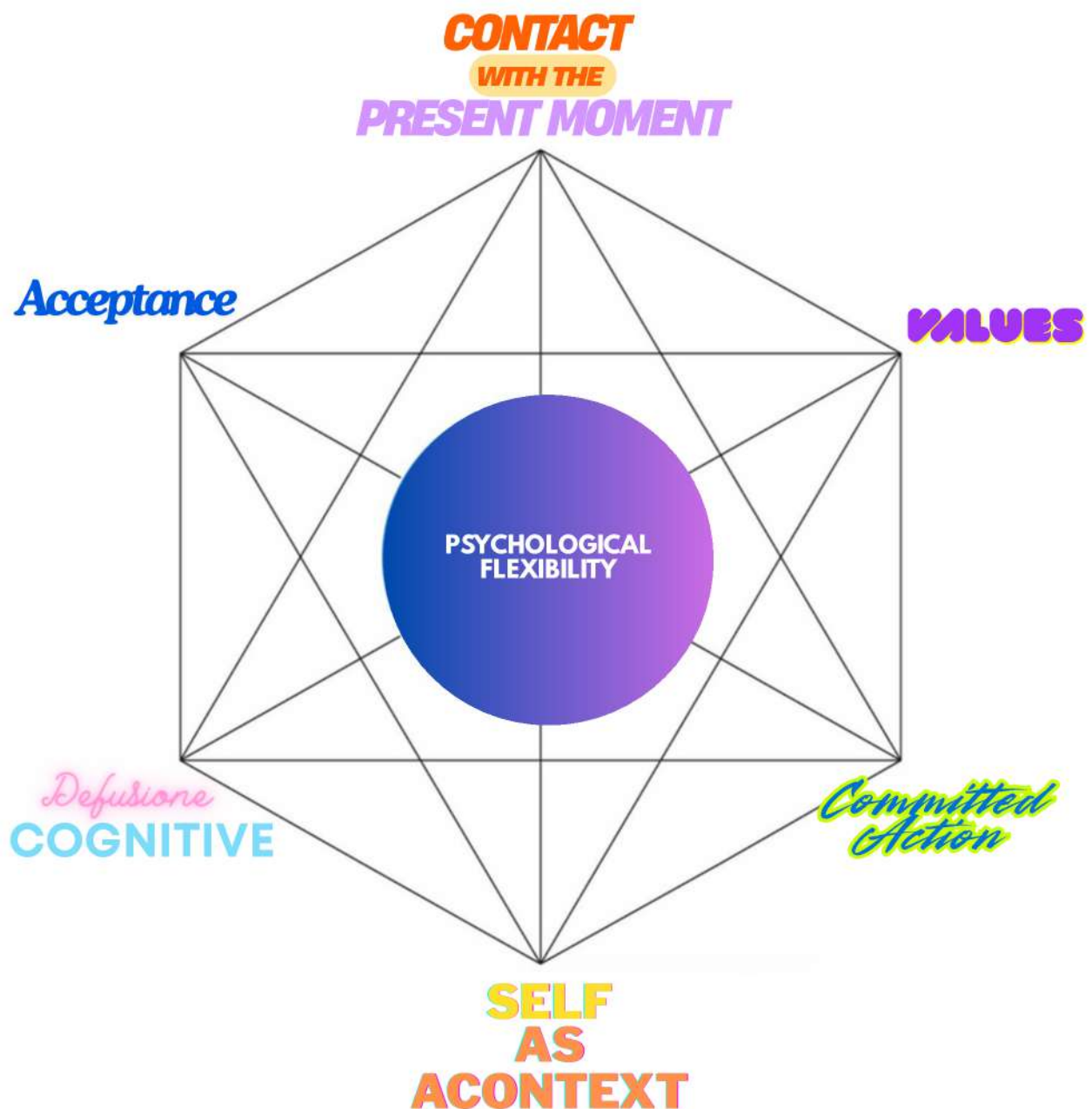
And see if you can come back, even if only for a single breath.



4th WEEK

EXERCISE 12

CONTACT **WITH THE** **PRESENT MOMENT**





In this exercise, you will bring your attention to your body, as it is in this moment. Not to judge it or change it. But to inhabit it.

The body is your first

SAFE PLACE

The place where you live every experience. Sometimes, however, we distance ourselves from it, caught up in criticism or expectations. This practice invites you to reconnect, gently, to notice your body with kindness, without having to change anything. Just feel, welcome, be there.

If thoughts, emotions, or tensions arise, that's okay. You don't have to push them away, just notice them. Observe them and gently return to your breathing or sensations.

This is a space for you. To listen to you without rushing. It's a time to connect with yourself in a fuller, more human way.





MEDITATION ON THE BODY

Take a moment to find a comfortable position. It could be sitting, lying down, or standing if you prefer. There is no right way to be here — there is only your way.

Inhale and exhale. Let the breath accompany you.

Now bring your attention to your body, just as it is in this moment, without changing anything, without asking anything of it. Observe. You can start from the surface — the clothes, the skin, the weight of your body, its contact with the surface beneath you.

Now let your attention go deeper. Notice where you feel warmth or tension, and relax.

This is your body. It is the body you have today.

When thoughts come, observe them. Maybe they are judgmental, blaming you — or perhaps, on the contrary, they are appreciative and satisfied. They may be phrases you've heard many times spoken by others, images that do not resemble you, sentences like:

"You should be more feminine!"

"That body isn't suited for certain clothes."

"With that appearance, you can't expect too much."

Looks that stop at one part of the body or pass over you as if you weren't there. Comments that reduce the body to an object to be evaluated — sometimes explicit, sometimes disguised as advice or jokes.

It may happen that, after hearing them so often, some of these messages have slipped under your skin — and that a part of you has started to judge yourself by the same standards, as if there were only one right way to have a body: thin, toned, straight, conforming.





But the body is not born to resemble a standard.

The body is what allows you to move, to change, to adapt, to be yourself.

It is not a project to be corrected — it is a place to inhabit.

And today, you can stay here for a moment with what is, even if it's uncomfortable.

Stay with your thoughts, observe them without letting them in too much.

They are things you've encountered, not things that define you.

Inhale and exhale.

Now try bringing attention to a part of your body that you often neglect or actively avoid. Recognize it, observe it, and repeat silently to yourself:

"You are part of me, and today I see you."

If you wish, you can place a hand there — not to change it, not to judge it — only to be with that part.

Bring your attention to it, not to the idea of it, not to its image, but to the living matter it is. Notice how your breath moves, the tension, the contact with your hand.

Your body has a memory — not the memory of the mind, but a subtler one, living in the tissues: in the small tightnesses you no longer notice, in the shoulders that rise without you asking them to, in the half-held breaths.

It lives in the automatic gestures — those you make to protect yourself, to go unnoticed, to adapt — and in the silences of the body, in those areas that seem numb, distant, or confused, as if they were not entirely yours.

Perhaps there are parts that contract even when there is no danger, parts that tense out of habit.

This is not a mistake; it is a response, a trace left by something your body has gone through.





Where do you feel heaviness in your body?
Where do you feel emptiness?
Where is your body still seeking a safe space?

You don't need to change it — only notice it.

Now slowly repeat:
"I feel you."
Even if I don't understand you yet, I am listening to you.

Your body is not neutral.
It has grown in a world that has set boundaries, labels, and expectations.
It has learned to contract, to camouflage itself, to resist.
These traces are not always visible, but they can be felt — carried under the skin.

And yet, the body is also capable of regenerating, of finding new support, new paths, of softening.

Let your breath descend and flow — don't force it, just follow it.
If there are tensions, you don't have to fight them; you can bring your breath and the warmth of your presence there.

This body is yours.
Even if others have tried to decide for you, making you feel wrong, judged, or guilty — this body is yours, and it is alive and present.

Stay here a moment longer.
Then, when you feel ready, you can slowly open your eyes, carrying this awareness with you:

Your body is more than what you have internalized from the outside — it is what you can choose to feel today.





You listened to your body, perhaps even with difficulty or discomfort, but with presence and respect.
How do you feel after listening to this audio?

Is there a feeling you want to remember?

We often spend the day inside our bodies... without really feeling it. Today you gave it space.

You have completed the section on the present moment!
Small moments of presence can change a day.

You have completed the final stage of your ACT journey.
Bring this awareness with you: you don't have to control everything. You just have to be there, one step at a time.



All visual materials and design elements were created using Canva (Canva Pty Ltd, Sydney, Australia)