

The Observing Self

Reflection prompts and a guided exercise on self-as-context

Research-informed use. ACT concepts are presented as processes in a psychological-flexibility model. Values are directions for action rather than achievements; defusion changes the relationship to thoughts rather than proving them false.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

A short client handout on the observing self, the part of us that notices thoughts and feelings without being them. Two pages of reflection prompts are followed by a guided exercise that can be read aloud in session or recorded for home practice.

HOW TO USE IT

Introduce the idea in session with the exercise on page 4, then send the prompts home.

AT A GLANCE

AUDIENCE	Client Resource
FORMAT	Short handout
FAMILY	ACT · values · mindfulness

4

PAGES

2

WORKSHEETS

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TEACHING PAGES

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THE OBSERVING

The Observing Self · worksheet

THE OBSERVING SELF

Describe a time when you were able to step back and observe your thoughts and emotions without getting caught up in them.

How does it feel to recognize the part of yourself that is separate from your thoughts and experiences?

What values or qualities do you associate with the observing self?

Think about a recent decision you made. How might the observing self approach that decision differently from the reactive self?

THE OBSERVING

The Observing Self · worksheet

THE OBSERVING SELF

What values or aspirations does the observing self prioritize when making choices and taking action?

How can you cultivate a sense of connection with the observing self in moments of decision-making or action?

Reflect on the idea that the observing self is always present, even in moments of distress or confusion. How does this perspective offer a sense of stability and resilience in the face of life's challenges?

THE OBSERVING

The Observing Self · information

OBSERVING SELF Find a comfortable position either sitting or laying down. Close your eyes or soften your gaze. Take a deep breath in through your nose and slowly exhale through your mouth. Take another deep and steady breath. Now, bring your awareness inward. Get a sense of inside yourself and the space you're sitting in.

Become aware of all the sounds around you. Now let your awareness find your breath wherever you feel it the most maybe that's in your nostrils, or your chest, or your abdomen. Let your awareness ride the waves of your inhales and exhales for a moment. Now imagine that your mind is an ocean. Deep in this ocean, beneath the surface, it is calm and peaceful.

No matter what is happening on the surface of the ocean, whether it's smooth or choppy, or even stormy, deep in the ocean of your mind it is tranquil and serene. Imagine that from the depth of your ocean you can look up towards the surface and notice all the things happening up there. Whether it's wind or rain or waves you can see it, but remain in the tranquil depths of your ocean. Now imagine that at the surface are all your thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

It is worries and memories and problems. From your place at the bottom of your ocean it is possible to be aware of all of those things without being swept away with them, to know that those things are not the totality of who you are.

You can have these thoughts and feelings and also be able to just notice them with the understanding that they are not your identity- they are simply part of your mind's experience. Now we'll practice guiding your focus towards and away from the surface. Choose something that is at the surface of your mind. Maybe it's a thought, a worry, an emotion, or a sensation. Let your attention go to it. Notice it, observe it as if it were an object floating on the water.

Now bring your awareness back down to your tranquil depth. Again send your awareness up to the surface and observe it and then draw your awareness back down. Notice that you have a choice of where you send your awareness. Notice that you have the ability to observe things without being swept away by them. This place at the bottom of your ocean is your observer self. It is the part of you that can observe everything and be unchanged by it.

1. Keep in view

Spending time with your observer self at the bottom of your ocean will strengthen your ability to distance yourself from the influence of your thoughts and emotions.

2. Keep in view

Take some time to experience just sitting with your observer self at the bottom of your ocean.

3. Keep in view

Focus on your breath for a few moments and when you're ready bring your awareness back to the room.