



Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Managing Tobacco Cravings and Tobacco Use

Megan Kelly, Ph.D.

**Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, UMass Chan Medical School,
Worcester, MA, USA**



Goals

- To help train you in ACT for cravings and tobacco use
- To help you to work more effectively with your clients
- To give you new ways to help clients new ways to address cravings

Poll Question!

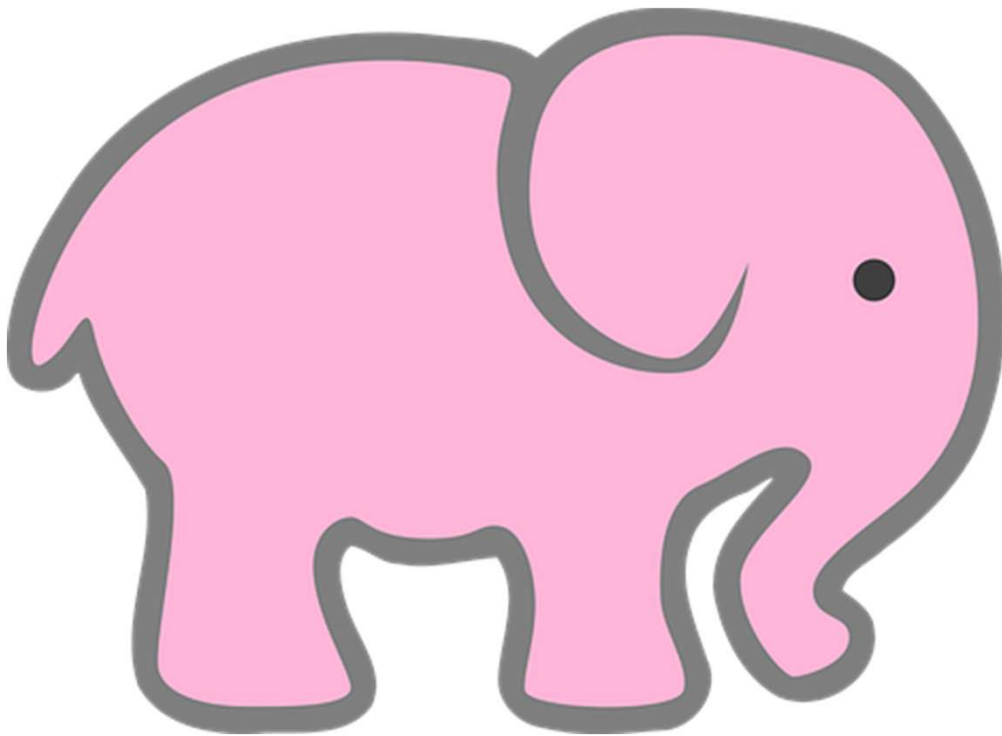
Do you currently use ACT for tobacco cessation with clients?



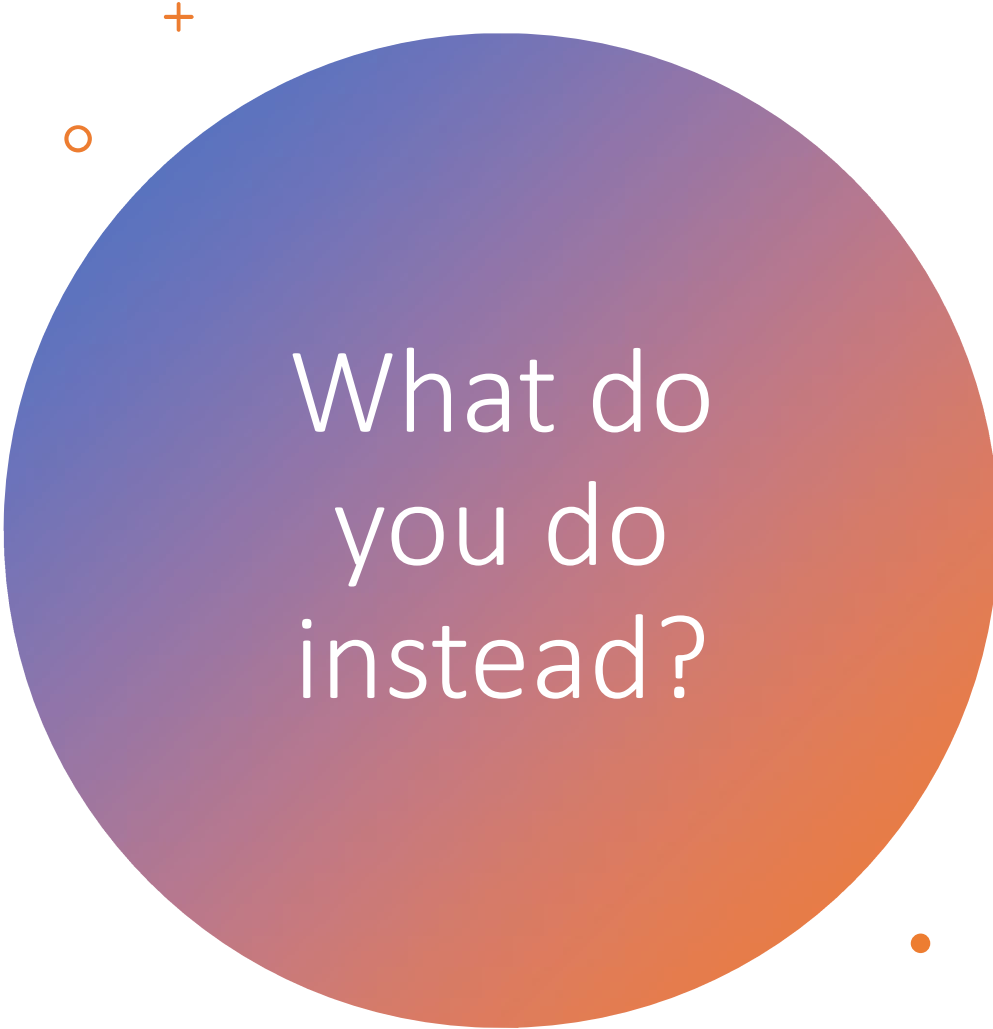
What is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Addictions?



- ACT helps people to become more aware of contextual and internal cues for tobacco use (e.g., emotions, thoughts, cravings) without judging or acting on these experiences.
- It encourages people to behave in healthier, alternative ways consistent with their values.
- According to ACT theory, these strategies help to weaken the tendency to use tobacco while helping people to focus on moving in life directions that are more rewarding and that lead to good quality of life.
- It is listed as an evidence-based treatment for addictions by SAMHSA.



- ACT focuses on reducing the unhelpful control of thoughts (e.g., “I need to smoke” on the client.
- Trying to control these thoughts is the problem.
 - Pink elephant
- ACT emphasizes thoughts and emotions don’t just “go away” if we tell them to.
 - If only that were true!



What do
you do
instead?

Accept thoughts and emotions.

Stay in the here and now, don't judge our experiences

Focus on what brings you meaning in your life – i.e., move towards your values

Breaking
down ACT
into three
pieces...

Accept

Choose

Take action

What are Cravings?

- Cravings are our brain's programmed response to cues from our environment.
- When these cues are connected to tobacco, an addiction to can develop over time through experience.
- Biological, behavioral, psychological, social, and environmental factors all lead to our developing of cravings and addictions, including:
 - Having a family history of addiction
 - Seeing others engaging in the addictive behavior
 - Availability of the things we crave
 - Messages from advertising and films, and
 - Sensation seeking

Why Do We Experience Tobacco Cravings?



Myths about Tobacco Cravings

Myth #1: Giving in to the cravings decreases stress.

Myth #2: Managing cravings is all about willpower.

Myth #3: Having tobacco cravings means that we need tobacco.

Myth #4: We should be able to control our cravings.

Myth #5: We need to stop having cravings in order to move forward and change our lives.

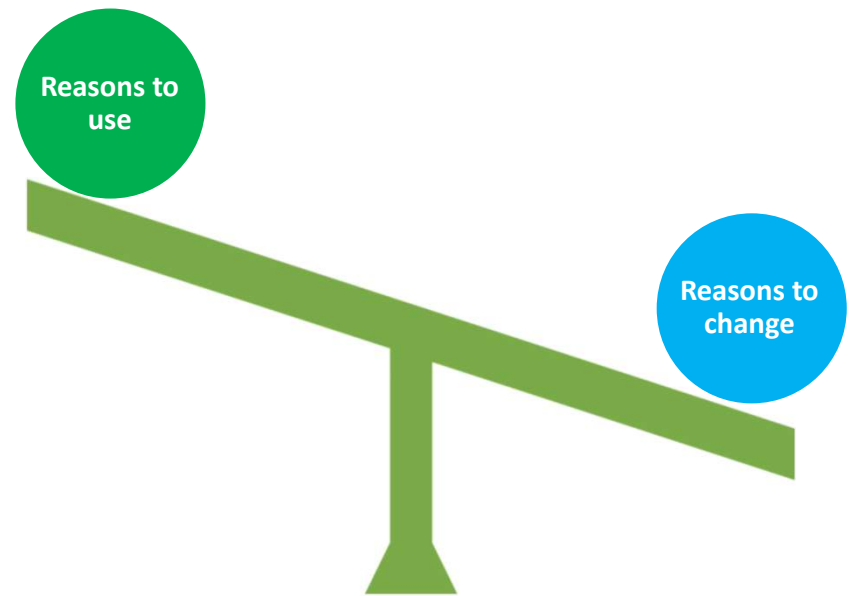
Others?

Poll Question!

From an ACT perspective, what is the primary target when a client experiences a craving?

It's Important to Review Reasons for Using vs. Reasons to Change

- What are some reasons for using?
- What are some reasons for changing?
- Compare these (and also weigh them)



Common Reasons to Use



Social Situations



Feeling Good



Managing our Emotions



Managing Pain



Poor Self-Esteem



To Be More Productive

Common Reasons to Change

Being Healthier

Living Longer

Feeling Healthier

Managing Pain

Improvement in Mental Health

More Money

Relationships

Freedom

Being Proud of Yourself

Others?

External Triggers

PEOPLE
Places
THINGS

- They are triggers that we often encounter in our daily lives.
- These are what we usually call “people-places-things” triggers.
- Examples:
 - Seeing other people smoking
 - Being in a favorite place to smoke
 - Seeing tobacco products
 - Smelling tobacco on your clothes

Internal Triggers



- Internal triggers are triggers that come from within your body.
- We often use tobacco to change internal states – for instance, to stop experiencing the craving, to feel less stressed, and to distract ourselves from emotions like sadness, anxiety, and anger.
- We also use tobacco in order to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Managing External Triggers

- Limit exposure to external triggers
- Alter external triggers
- Use substitutes

Managing Internal Triggers

- We can't manage internal triggers, like the emotions of anxiety, anger, and sadness in the same way that we manage external triggers.
- The more we try to not have anxiety, depression, and anger, the more we may experience them.
- Therefore, we need to use the strategies of acceptance and willingness to manage these triggers.

GRANT ME THE SERENITY
TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE,
COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN,
AND WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

Exercises That Can Help You Take a Step Back from Your Cravings

- “I am having the thought...” or “I am having the feeling...” (Hayes, 2005)
- Thank your mind for your thoughts
- Think of your cravings as a bossy person
- Leaves on a stream (Hayes, 2005)
- Urge surfing



I am having the thought...

- When we have a craving, we often say to ourselves, “I need X, Y Z.”
 - “I need to smoke.”
- Is this really a “need?”
- Preface the thought with “I am having the thought that I need X, Y, Z.”
- Notice the difference it makes. What happens?



Think of your cravings as a bossy person



- When you have a craving, think of that thought as a bossy person pushing you around.
- Ask yourself who is actually in charge here?
- Is your craving in charge or are you in charge?
- Think about how you might respond to someone who is pushing you around, like your craving.
- Can you stand up for yourself and tell that thought that you're in charge and you'll make the decisions here?
- It helps to separate your thought from yourself and decide how you want your life to look like.

Leaves on a Stream

- Notice each thought as a leaf drifting by.
- Let them come and go without holding onto them.



Urge surfing

- Cravings only last a few minutes - they peak like an ocean wave and then break.
- Being hit and caught into a high ocean wave may feel like a lifetime, but waves and cravings, really only last a few minutes.
- Can you wait the craving out?





Urge Surfing

- As you experience a craving, bring yourself back to the awareness of your breath.
- Imagine your breath as a surfboard that can help you to ride the craving.
- Notice any physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts:
 - Do you feel anxious or on edge?
 - Thoughts like, “I need to smoke,” “I can’t handle this,” “I want this to go away.”
- Watch as these sensations, feelings, and thoughts rise, peak, and eventually subside.
- Use the breath as a vehicle for riding out these experiences and to bring you back to the present moment until your craving passes.

Self-Compassion

What kind of a teacher/coach are you to yourself?

Consider the things that you tend to say to yourself. Would you say those things to another person, especially one who has had life throw all kinds of difficulties at them and is trying to get back on their feet? Would you say these things to a friend, a loved one, a child?

If you said such things to them, how would they react? Would they want to be your friend, your confidant?

Why would you want an unsympathetic critic to be your friend, your supporter? Wouldn't you prefer a compassionate teacher or coach instead?

Values

- **Chosen life directions that help create a rich, full, and meaningful life**
 - What matters most to you
 - Values reflect your deepest desires for how you want to act and who you want to be
- **Values...**
 - Provide us motivation and inspiration
 - Help guide choices and actions
 - Are our lighthouse in the storm
- **Exercise:** Values clarification



Values

- Exercise: What would it say on your tombstone?
 - Alternatives: Funeral/Retirement Party/100th Birthday Party
 - Questions:
 - What stands between you and living life a values-based life?
 - What do you value?
 - What are specific goals related to those values?
 - What are the barriers (thoughts, feelings, other experiences) to living out those goals?



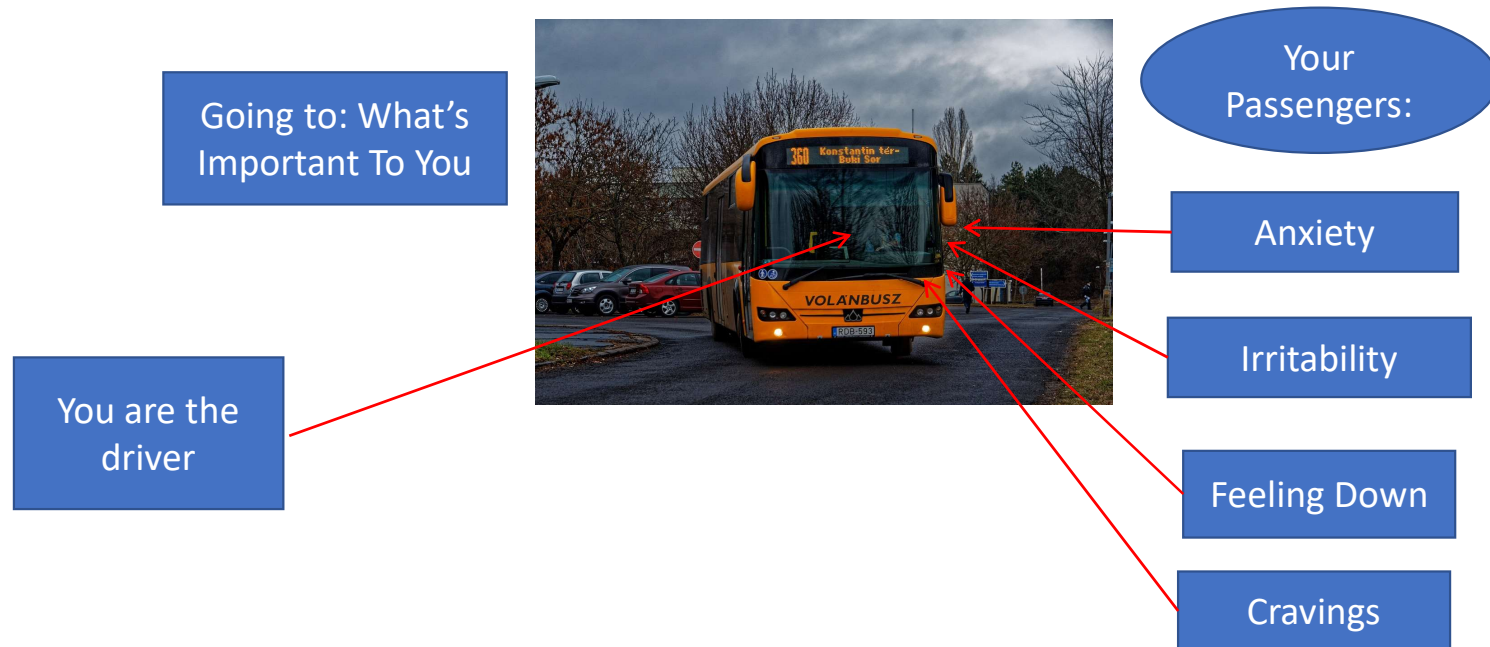
Values Exercise

	How important is this value to you? (0-10)	How much reward or meaning have you have gotten from this value in the past 2 weeks? (0-10)
Love		
Forgiveness		
Family/Intimate relationship		
Work achievement		
Friendship		
Financial success		
Self-respect		
Inner Harmony		
Personal growth		
Physical beauty or attractiveness		
Physical health		
Approval by others		
Kindness		
Honesty		
Wisdom		
Spirituality		
Personal freedom		
Other values:		

Committed Action

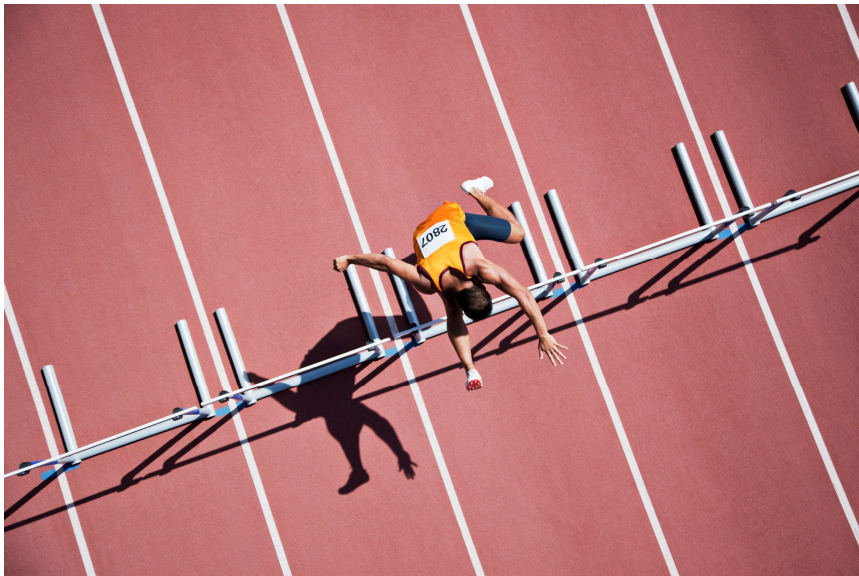
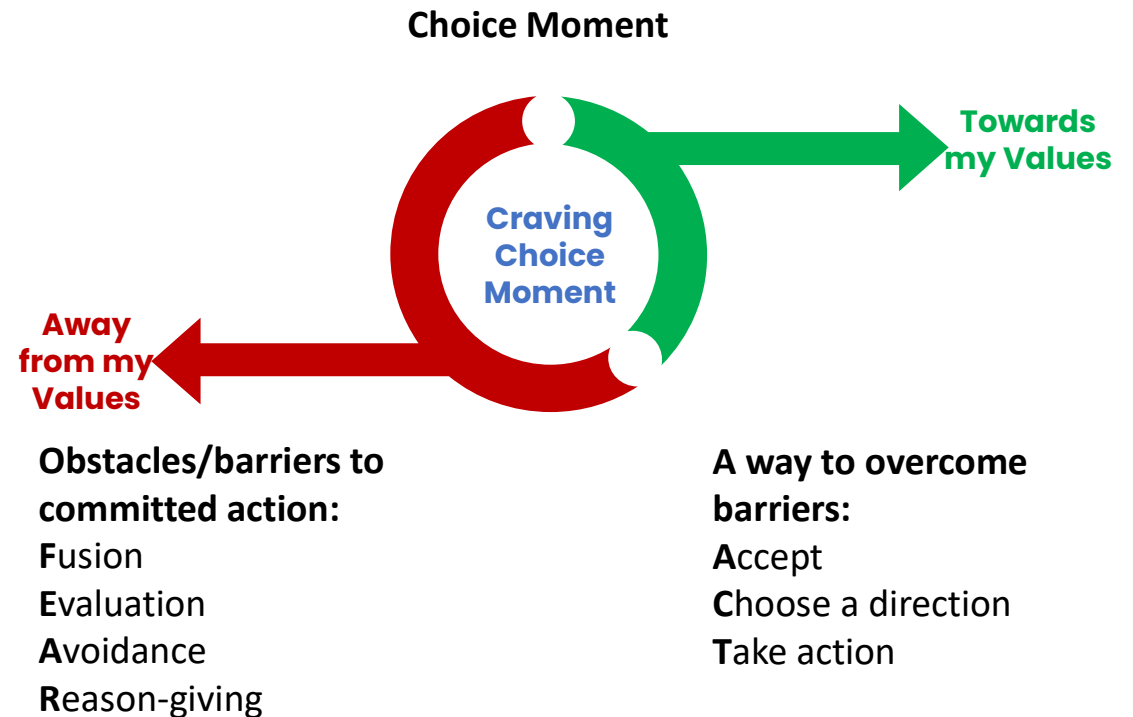
- Choose one valued life domain that your goal will be in the service of.
- Choose a goal motivated by your values.
- If the goal is an activity that will fill the void of smoking, try to find activities that don't cost a lot of money, can be done frequently, and that are rewarding.
- It really helps to avoid goals that are framed in a negative way, like, "I'll be less angry," or "I will get upset less often."
- Try to reformulate these goals in a positive way and something that can be accomplished. For instance, you could make the goal, "I will tell my son I love him 5 times a day," or "I will attend a yoga class this week."

Helping People Make A Choice Based on What Is Important to Them



- You are the driver on the bus, going to a place important to you...
- You have noisy passengers, bullying you to take a “safer,” “more comfortable” detour
- This detour will get you off your path, it will get you lost
- YOU are the driver...you can decide where you want to go and what you want to do

Overcoming Barriers to Committed Action



Common Challenges to Managing Cravings

Being in an environment that supports tobacco use

Boredom

Substituting one addictive behavior for another

Experiencing physical pain

Not having enough support or not having helpful support

Poll Question!

Integrating ACT with evidence-based cessation care

A client has strong nicotine dependence, significant withdrawal, and recurrent cravings despite practicing ACT skills. What is the most appropriate clinical response?

Addressing Slips

- Slips are a brief return to tobacco, but are not a return to full use.
- Slips happen.
- We do not have to listen to what our minds are telling us. We have not failed. We are not weak.
- There is nothing in this situation that defines us that way.
- Our minds will come up with all sorts of labels – they do not represent who we are.



Slips As A Learning Experience

- It can help if we recognize that this slip was an important learning experience.
- If we have a slip, it indicates that we have identified a situation that we need to address to ensure success.
- Afterall, we learned how to smoke. We weren't born doing these things – we learned to include these behaviors in our lives.



High Risk Situations For Relapse

Feeling overconfident or
complacent.

High levels of stress.

Conflict with others.

Pleasant times with others.

Any others?



Managing Relapse

- Relapsing is not the end, it can be the point of a new beginning, as we always have a choice of how to behave in this moment.
- A relapse is also a signal of emotional pain that needs to be dealt with more effectively and we likely need more support.
- If we have relapsed to tobacco use, it will be vitally important to consider whether extra help is needed to manage the relapse.



Managing Relapses

- “S.T.O.P.” (Harris, 2009)
 - Slow down
 - Take note
 - Open up
 - Pursue valued actions



Getting Support

- Benefits of Social Support
 - It buffers us from the effects of stress.
 - It can help us improve our ability to cope with life events.
 - It can help talk us through challenging cravings.
 - It can encourage us to follow our values.
 - It can promote good health and positive life choices.
 - It can help us to adhere to our committed action plans.
 - It makes us healthier.
 - We are social animals and as such we achieve things better when we are closely connected with others.
 - Giving social support itself leads to emotional, physical, and social benefits for us.



How to Use Social Supports for Help in Managing Cravings

- Ask for help.
- Brainstorm your craving game plan.
- Ask for encouragement.
- Partners in committed action.

Dealing with Unhelpful Supports

- In a straightforward manner, say “no thanks.”
 - Example: “No thanks. I don’t smoke.”
 - Make sure to be confident, clear, and make eye contact to communicate that you are decided.
- If people keep insisting, people can use the broken record technique. No explanation is needed.
 - Explaining oneself may cause someone to fall into a trap where once they provide one reason, the person will find a way to counter that reason and it will make it all the harder to resist.
 - Just because ACT focuses on acceptance of thoughts and feelings, sometimes avoidance is necessary!





Dealing with Unhelpful Supports

- Approach this situation by suggesting another activity that won't lead to cravings, asking friends for support, or leaving the situation entirely.
- It can be really helpful to practice how to respond to these situations ahead of time.
- In our practice, we usually role play different ways of reacting to these types of requests.
- It might be helpful to practice some responses to these situations:
 - "Just have a cigarette. Life is too short to worry about it."
 - "You are so grouchy. You might as well have a cigarette."
 - "Just one cigarette isn't going to hurt you."

Medication Is An Important Component of Recovery

Medication can be helpful for managing cravings for smoking.

Medications can help ease withdrawal symptoms and help people to focus better on other internal and external triggers for smoking.

Medications are often part of effective treatment for moderate to severe addictions to tobacco and are recommended.

Choice Moment



Obstacles

- Tactics to control cravings
- Stories we make about ourselves
- Believing in the illusions our mind produces
- Autopilot mode
- Stigma & Shame
- **FEAR**
 - **F**usion with thoughts
 - **E**valuation of experience
 - **A**voidance
 - **R**eason-giving
- Challenges to Managing Cravings
- Unhelpful social support

Aids (skills)

- Managing external & internal triggers
- Acting with willingness
- Values identification
- Cognitive defusion
- Mindfulness- Being in the present moment
- Self-compassion
- Values-based goals
- **ACT**
 - **A**ccept your reactions and be present
 - **C**hoose a valued direction
 - **T**ake action
- Managing Slips and Relapses
- **STOP**
 - **S**low down
 - **T**ake note
 - **O**pen up
 - **P**ursue valued actions
- Identify helpful sources of support
- Build a helpful social support network
- Communication skills
- Deal with unhelpful support
 - Leave
 - Change what you can
 - Accept what you cannot change and act based on values.
- Seek Additional Professional Help (e.g., Medications)



THANK YOU

Megan.Kelly@umassmed.edu