

ACT Hexaflex and Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) identifies six interconnected processes known as the *Hexaflex*. Together, these skills promote the ability to remain present with difficult experiences while choosing actions that are consistent with personal values.

1. Acceptance

Acceptance involves making room for thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and circumstances rather than automatically fighting, avoiding, or controlling them. Acceptance does not mean approving of something or giving up on change. It means acknowledging what is present so that a person can respond to it more intentionally.

Connection to Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy: MBE uses mindfulness and nature connection to help people observe experiences as they are. Nature provides frequent opportunities to practice acceptance by observing natural processes such as changing weather, seasonal cycles, growth, decay, and uncertainty without requiring them to be different.

2. Cognitive Defusion

Cognitive defusion involves learning to observe thoughts rather than automatically treating them as facts. Instead of being controlled by thoughts such as "I can't do this," a person learns to recognize, "I am having the thought that I can't do this."

Connection to Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy: MBE uses mindful awareness and Nature as Metaphor to create distance from unhelpful thought patterns. Thoughts can be observed like clouds moving across the sky, leaves floating downstream, or other natural phenomena that arise, change, and pass away.

3. Present-Moment Awareness

Present-moment awareness involves intentionally noticing what is happening in the here and now rather than becoming lost in memories, predictions, worries, or other mental activity. Mindfulness strengthens the ability to return your attention to your current experience.

Connection to Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy: Present-moment awareness is central to MBE. Natural environments provide rich opportunities for engaging the senses and noticing sights, sounds, smells, textures, movement, and bodily sensations. Nature can serve as an anchor that continually brings attention back to the present.

4. Self-as-Context

Self-as-context involves recognizing that a person is more than their thoughts, emotions, memories, roles, or circumstances. It is the perspective of the observing self, capable of noticing changing experiences without being completely defined by them.

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Connection to Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy: MBE uses nature to help people experience themselves as part of a larger interconnected system. Nature can also serve as a metaphor for the observing self. Just as the sky remains while clouds and weather move through it, a person can learn to observe changing internal experiences without defining themselves by those experiences.

5. Values

Values are personally meaningful qualities that provide direction for how a person wants to live. Unlike goals, which can be completed, values are ongoing directions that guide choices and behavior. Examples include compassion, courage, connection, creativity, honesty, and kindness.

Connection to Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy: MBE encourages people to explore their relationship with themselves, other people, and the natural world. Nature can help clarify what matters by providing opportunities to reflect on connection, reciprocity, stewardship, belonging, and the qualities people want to embody in their relationships and communities.

6. Committed Action

Committed action involves taking purposeful steps guided by personal values, even when difficult thoughts, emotions, or circumstances are present. It transforms values from abstract ideas into observable behavior.

Connection to Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy: MBE emphasizes putting mindfulness and nature-based insights into practice. A person can use time in nature to identify a valued direction and then translate that insight into concrete action in daily life. Committed action may involve changing a behavior, strengthening a relationship, practicing self-care, connecting with community, or developing a deeper relationship with the natural world.

The Hexaflex and MBE

The six ACT processes work together rather than functioning as separate skills. MBE adds the natural environment as a setting, resource, metaphor, teacher, and source of connection for practicing psychological flexibility.

Acceptance creates space for experience.

Cognitive Defusion changes our relationship with thoughts.

Present-Moment Awareness brings us into the here and now.

Self-as-Context helps us observe experience without being defined by it.

Values provide direction.

Committed Action turns values into meaningful behavior.

Together, ACT and MBE provide a framework for helping people become more psychologically flexible while developing a deeper, more mindful relationship with themselves, others, and the natural world.