



South London and Maudsley **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Psychosis Clinical Academic Group (CAG)

KING'S
College
LONDON
Founded 1829

University of London

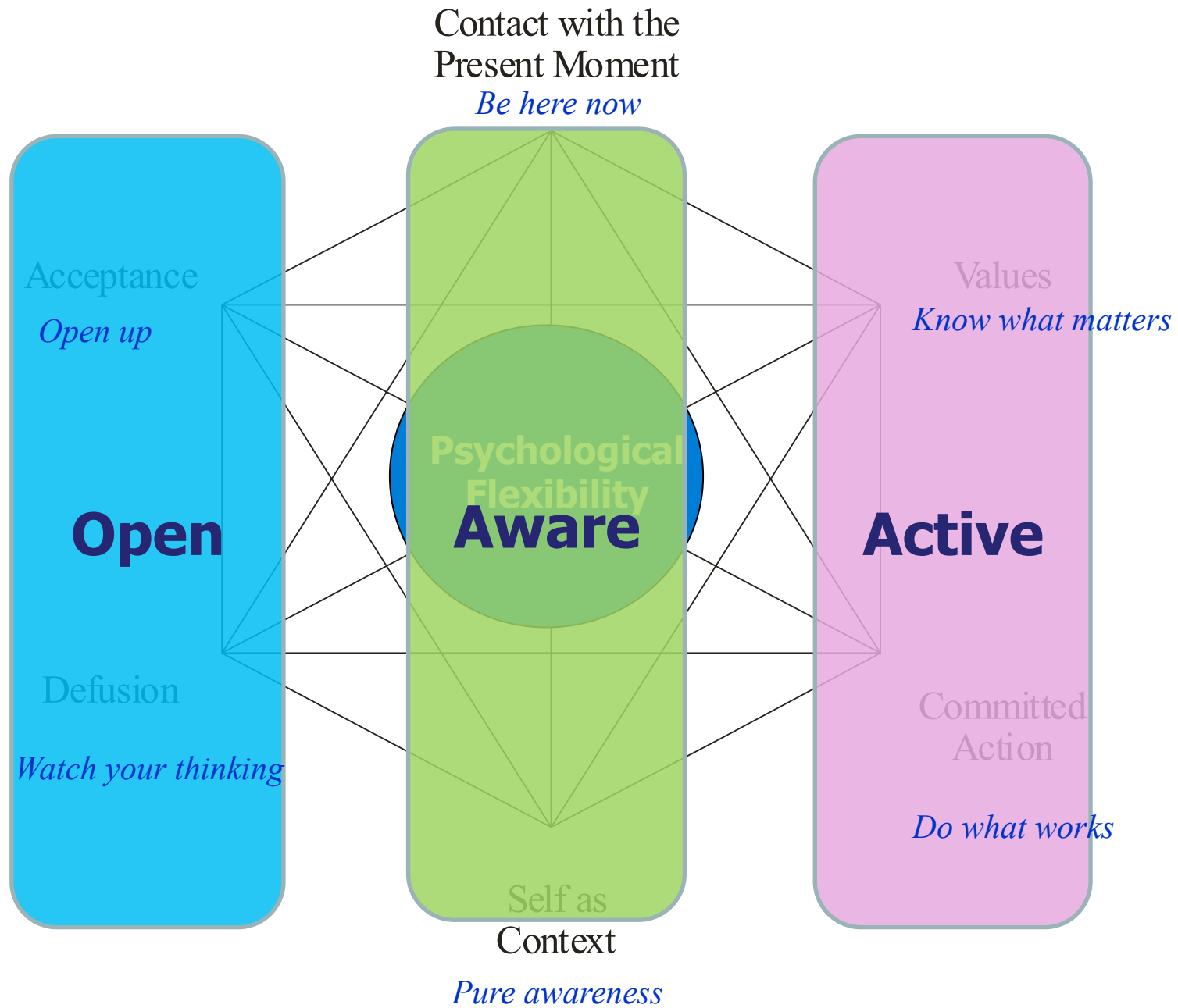
Acceptance & Commitment Therapy for persisting auditory hallucinations: case formulation

Eric Morris

 KING'S HEALTH PARTNERS

Psychological Flexibility

The ability to contact the present moment fully as a conscious human being, and based on what the situation affords, **changing or persisting in behaviour in the service of chosen values.**



Hayes et al. (2011)



MINDFULNESS

Present moment awareness training

Untangling from difficult thought and emotion

Finding your resilient sense of self

VALUES-BASED ACTION

Clarifying your most valued life directions

Using values as a guide to goals and daily behaviour

From: Flaxman, 2011

Why ACT for Psychosis?

- Symptoms lend themselves to ACT approach:
- Anomalous experiences – primary experiences that are not easily changed
- Unusual nature of experience either:
 - Encourage focus (search for meaning, understanding, personally salient)
 - Leads to suppression / avoidance (scary, unwanted, socially inappropriate)
- Thinking style (jumping to conclusions, inflexibility)
- Recovery focus

Experiential acceptance & psychosis

- **People who cope poorly with voices** use more distraction and thought-suppression strategies (Romme and Escher, 1993).
- Acceptance & mindfulness in voice hearers associated with less distress, voices appraised as less powerful (Morris et al., submitted)
- **accepting voices associated with less compliance** with harmful commands (Shawyer et al., 2007)

Experiential Acceptance & Schizophrenia

- People with schizophrenia **use less acceptance** compared to suppression and reappraisal strategies. Acceptance is related to better psychosocial outcomes (Perry et al, 2010).
- Over time, **experiential acceptance shows positive associations with quality of life and affect** (Vilardaga, et al, 2013).

Loss of attentional flexibility as the salience of voices as sentient beings captures attention.

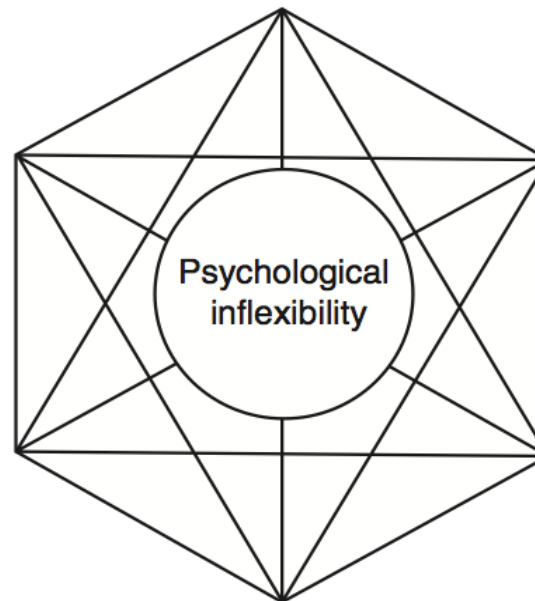
Perceived interpersonal dynamics activate automatic engagement or resistance reactions, impeding connection with the current context within the external world

Experiential avoidance

Investment in struggle, escape and avoidance (resistance) prevents positive action

Cognitive fusion

Beliefs about voices and voice content are responded to as if literally true, triggering engagement or resistance and negatively impacting on functional activity



Connection with values overridden by preoccupation with voices. Involvement with voices displaces valued living

Resignation/entrapment *puts committed action on hold*. Actions driven by voices or resistance to voices rather than values

Domination of self as content, defined by self-referential voices and other beliefs (e.g. powerless, inferior, flawed, mad), interferes with the ability to make useful life changes. Lack of decentred awareness (diminution of 'I/here/now' perspective) leads to being lost in habitual reactions and engulfment with voices

Thomas, Morris,
Shawyer & Farhall,
2013

Formulating in ACT for voices

Is there struggle? With what?

- Sensory experience?
- Content?
- Meaning?

Looking for choice:

“given this difficult experience, how do you want to act?”

Defusion around content and beliefs about voices

Willingness as alternative to struggle

Values as life direction, rather than voices

A Case Example

Thomas, Morris, Shawyer, Farhall, 2013

Hazel

- 33 year old, white British woman
- persistently hearing voices for 9 years
- referred for psychological therapy in a recovery-oriented mental health team.
- “I just want to live my life, not the life my voices want me to have...”

Mental Health & Circumstances

- diagnosed with schizophrenia
- stable dose of clozapine
- living in supported accommodation
- attending day centre, has not worked since diagnosis
- Risk: past deliberate self harm, periods of hopelessness, acting on commands?

Experience of Voices

- “like a crowd at a football pitch”, occurring 3-5 times/day
- lasting up to an hour and as loud as her own voice.
- heard outside of the head, male and female, and unidentified.
- content as 90% unpleasant and negative.

Unsure of what is causing the voices:

- Real people contacting her 80%
- Created by own mind 50%

Voices appraised as powerful and knowledgeable

Experiences of Voices 2

- Voices frequently criticize & give advice
- Voices are “evil” – trying to make her do bad things, in order to destroy her
- Believes that voices interfere with her experiencing happiness, in that she can’t have trusting relationships
- Afraid ++ of acting on commands to hurt others
- Ashamed about times she has acting on commands, ruminates about this frequently

Coping Strategies

tries to suppress voices through distraction

- listening to music
- thinking of other things
- keeping busy

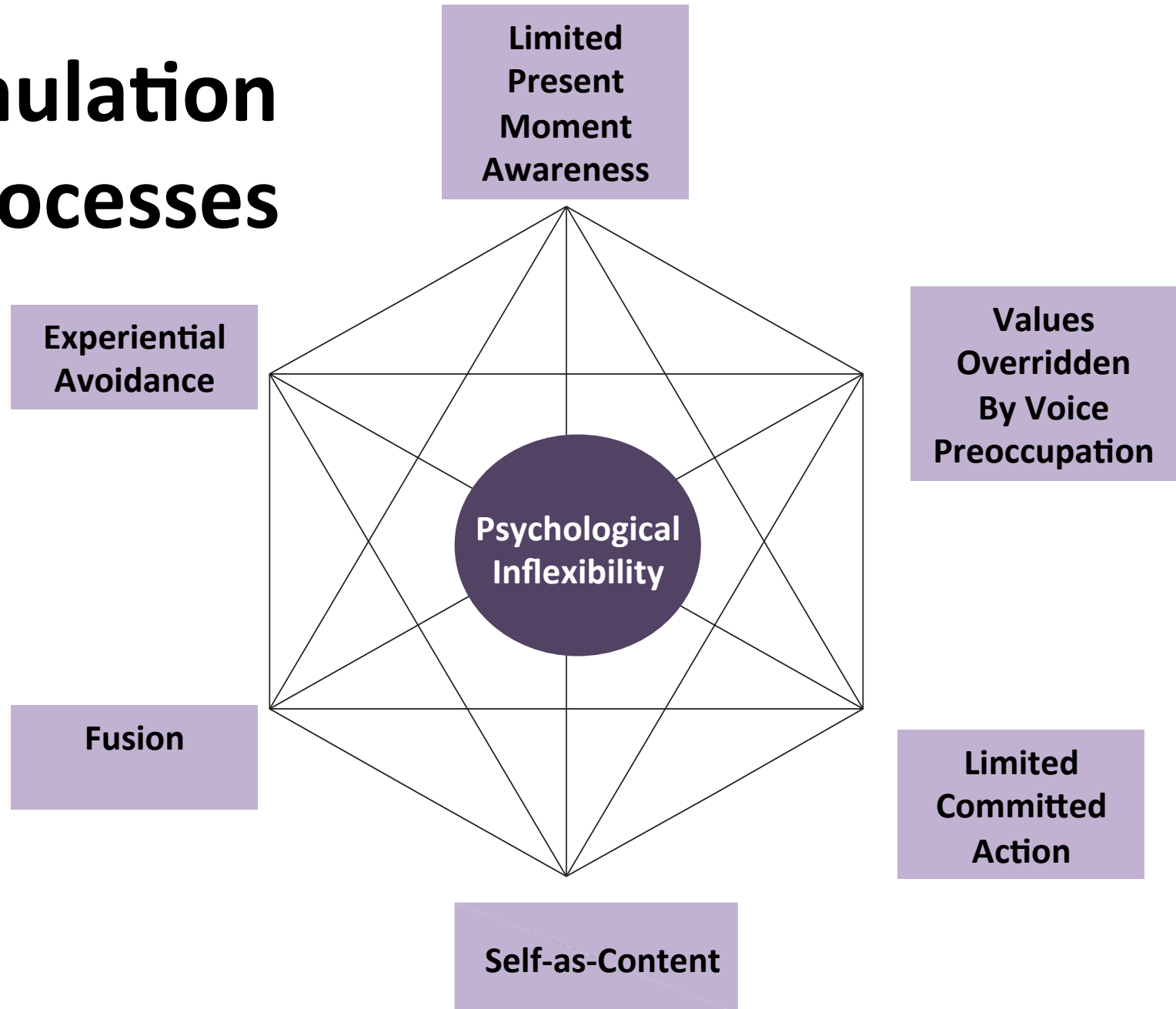
Tries not to upset voices

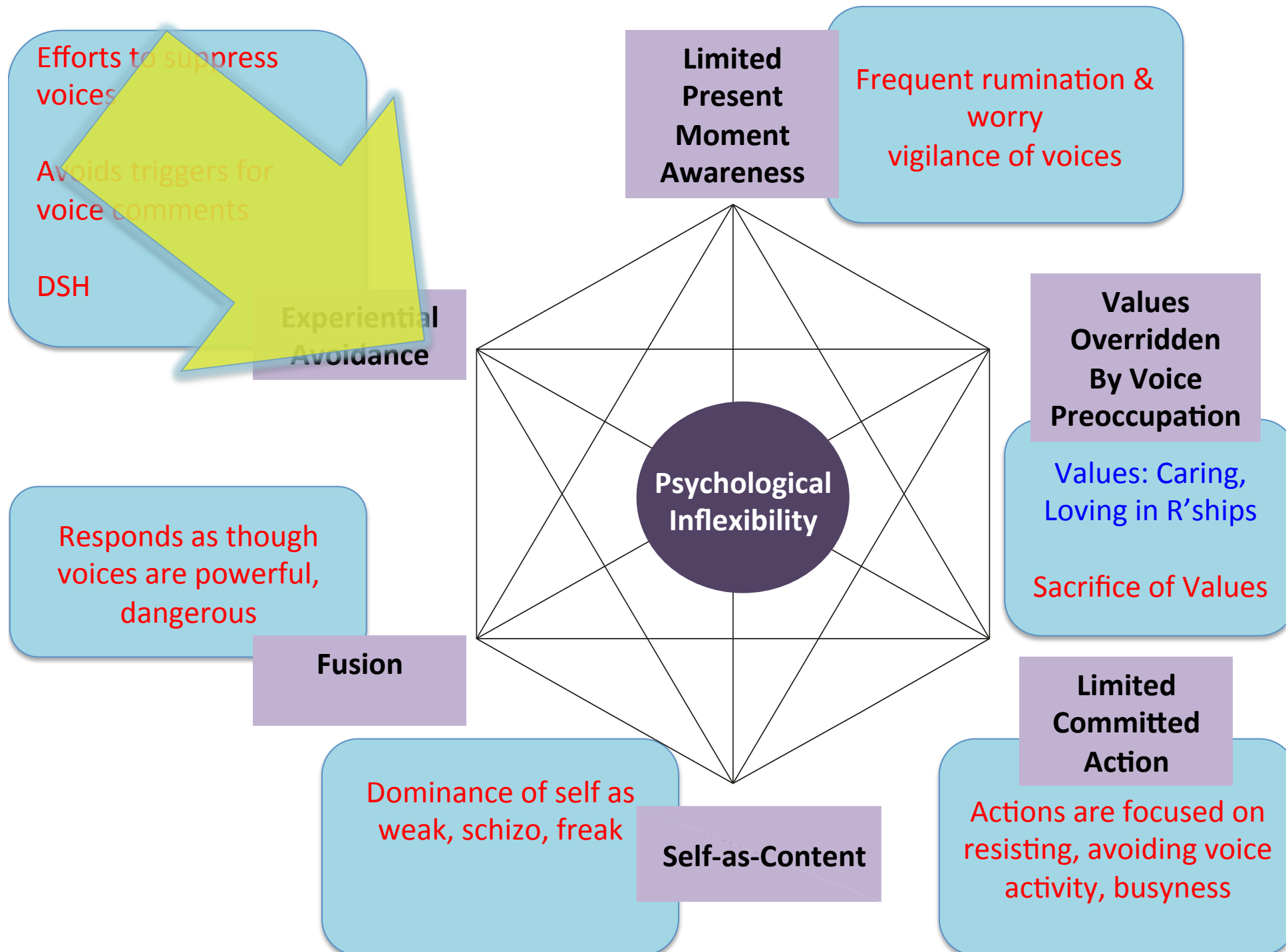
- avoiding social contact in general & particularly involving trust and closeness

Outcome & Process Measures

| | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Beck Depression Inventory | 51 |
| Beck Anxiety Inventory | 24 |
| PSYRATS | 37 |
| MANSA | 3.58 |
| Voices Acceptance (VAAS) | 46 |
| Voices Action (VAAS) | 30 |
| Non-judgemental Awareness (KIMS) | 14 |

Formulation of Processes





ACTp

10 sessions (treatment study)

- building willingness through defusion and acceptance
- with a valued action focus

Each session:

- Present moment exercise
- Valued actions this week
- Practice of acceptance/ defusion toward barriers
- Planning of next valued actions
- Review of main points (summary sheet)

Central ACT Exercises

Noticing exercises / mindfulness

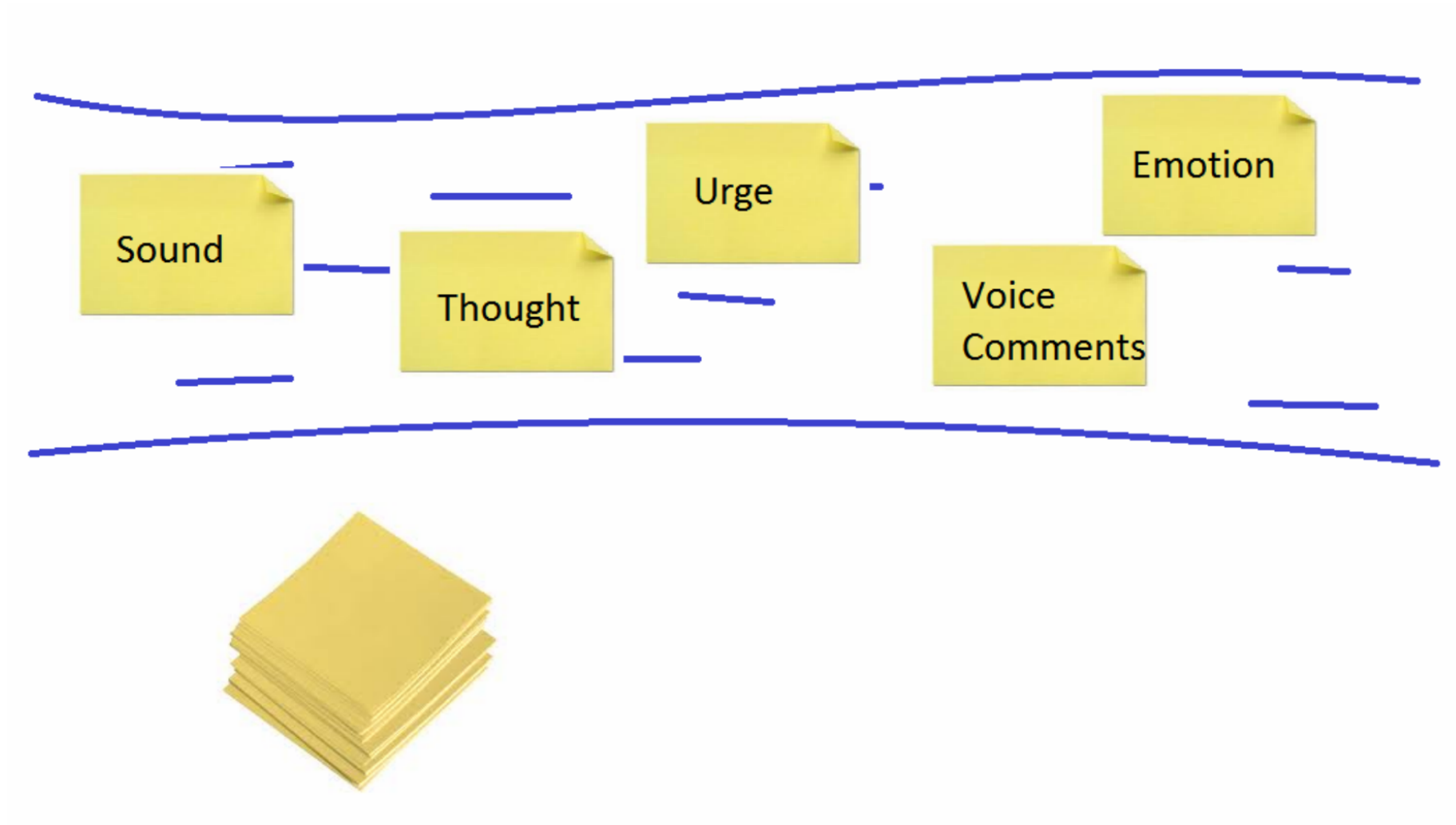
Values : work – love – play

- Lifetime Achievement Award

Building Acceptance

- Tug of War with Your Voices (the Monster)
- River of Experiences (paper version)
- Taking Your Voice for a Walk

River of Experiences



Conclusion

- The Psychological Flexibility model can be used to formulate the processes contributing to distress and disability in the context of voice hearing
- ACT provides one way to strengthen flexibility in response to voices & private experiences in general
- A focus on values-driven action provides motivation and a recovery orientation