

Welcome to this special Autism Ontario webinar.

My name is Matthew Ley and as always, I will be your host.

Today we will be discussing healthy coping for caregivers using acceptance and Commitment therapy or ACT strategies with Katie Albert.

We'll be covering the why and the how of act, as well as going through some real world exercises that you can use day to day.

And of course, we'd be looking to get you answers to your questions.

Now, before we get started, there's a few things I need to get out of the way.

First off, opinions reflected in this webinar session are those of the speakers, myself and those that are on the desk.

They do not necessarily reflect Autism Ontario.

Please note that Autism Ontario does not endorse any specific therapy product, treatment strategy, opinion, service or individual.

We do, however, support and endorse your right to information and we strongly believe that you should do your own research and make your own informed decisions, which is what you're doing today.

By coming to this webinar with the aim

of being inclusive and respectful and representative of the many voices in our diverse community, we will use both identity first and person first. Referential language.

We acknowledge that the use of language is ever evolving and rapidly changing and so we'll continue to be an ongoing discussion within the autism community. More information on our specific language statement can be found in the resource section.

Okay, now with that I'm going to walk you through the overall platform.

I already mentioned the resources section number one. It's got our language statement.

It has the PowerPoint that you can download in both official languages, as well as a whole host of resources that help inform our conversation.

Make sure you get those before you leave today or you can grab them now and refer to them as we go.

My job basically is almost over other than taking your questions and getting you answers.

Submit your questions at any time in the Ask a Question box.

Those questions will be fed up to me in this laptop and I will aspire to get Katie to answer them for you.

If you're looking for captions or French translations, you can

click on the captions icon on the left and you'll notice a little language icon on the slides.

This has got the French slides in it.

If you click on that, you will be able to watch this presentation with French slides.

There's a survey on the left hand side of the screen.

It'll also pop up at the end.

We ask no matter when you leave,

you take that survey before you go.

It helps inform us and helps us do better at basically getting through better at doing these webinars, and it helps us choose what we're going to talk about.

Now, finally, if you need any help, you can drop a note in the Q and A box or click on the help icon and somebody will get back to you.

And with that, all done, like

I said, my job's almost done.

I'd like to welcome Katie Albert, mental health counselor, parent coach at the Right Path center and anchor families.

Katie, thanks so much for being here. It's my pleasure.

I'm really happy to be back.

Now, we've worked together before. Yeah.

Not everybody knows you talk a little bit about your background and what brings you to where we are today.

Sure, I'll do that quickly.

I have sort of two things that I do in my practice.

One is supporting autistic folks and their families in treating mental health.

So anxiety, depression, ocd, difficulties with emotional regulation and executive functioning.

And then I am also a parent coach.

So I support a lot of parents with their own journey of being a caregiver, both on, like, their own mental.

With their own mental health and on the practical side of how to support their kids.

So, yeah, that's what I do.

And I'm really excited to be having this conversation.

I think it's so important.

The caregivers need support, too, and I'm glad that we're able to offer some perspective on that.

We often talk about it.

You gotta be able to put that auction bag on you first before you help your loved ones and those everyone's seeing their learning objectives up on the screen.

Recognize and stay connected to your core values.

We're gonna explore strategies for effective responding to changes and challenges, or you'll learn those practical techniques.

But before we get there, what is act and why?

You're excited about the conversation. So am I.

But why is it an important conversation
for us to be having right now?

So when you are caring for somebody with
any form of disability or difference, depending on,
you know, anybody's own personal view of what
autism being autistic means to them. We are.

You are often confronted with
more struggle and challenge.

And learning to manage a life that is full of
uncertainty and challenge and struggle and how to do that
in a way that feels as fulfilling and aligned with
kind of the kind of person you want to be,
I think is a really great way to help caregivers
suffer less as they are on their journey as a
caregiver and feel fulfilled, even if they are struggling and
facing challenge, but to feel fulfilled and good about how
they are showing up in their caregiver. Role.

And it's inevitable that there's going to be more
of that uncertainty and more of that challenge.

And so I feel that ACT is a
really great way to navigate that experience.

And I see that in my clinical practice and
I see it in my own life too.

And you know, something you said there really resonated with

me is that as a parent, when we have a child, so much of our life becomes about that child.

Even more so when we have a child with some special needs. Yeah.

And so that idea about are you being your authentic self or, you know, the focus on yourself, I got to imagine when you first started introducing this to parents especially, that they don't have a lot of that when they come start talking to you.

And we all know that is very, very important as we get started. So.

So let's talk about the big question here was a part of the agenda, why?

Why use acceptance commitment theory or therapy or act?

So what you'll see sort of even on the next slide, is that there's a lot of research to support ACT as an intervention for caregivers that is effective, that can help you feel better about your life.

ACT more effectively.

We see caregivers, parents, but also people working with autistic people get better at their jobs when they are using this framework.

So I think the evidence is there.

And on top of that, I think that we really, when you have additional challenges in your life, you really deserve to

have tools and support to be able to navigate it.

And it's not all intuitive. Right.

And often people are so focused on helping their child that it's.

They're not helping themselves enough.

And the better you can help yourself, the better you can help your child.

So I think that's why app can be such a great tool.

You mentioned a lot of research.

First time I'm hearing about act, is it new?

Over the past, I mean, I would say over the past, actually five years or so, like this has started to be something that I'm seeing, like established organizations are starting to offer.

There's a lot of books being written about it, a lot of packages that are being offered.

So, yeah, it's sort of a new field.

It's sort of an offshoot of behavior analysis that's a little bit more cognitive, which is really cool.

For those of you, like me, who are new in the resource section there, we mentioned there's a bunch of resources on act, but there is one overview that kind of gives you some definitions and lets you know it's a great thing.

Takeaway, something you can bring in, when you are meeting

with, with professionals that are in, in your space as well to kind of give them that, that introduction.

Okay, let's get a little bit more.

I mean, I can already see the benefits.

It seems important as parents and caregivers that you know that this happens.

But let's get a little more into the why. Yeah. Okay.

So essentially, ACT is all about being flexible in the way you experience your surroundings, whether they are your physical surroundings or the surroundings like your mind. Right.

Your own thoughts and feelings, which are a huge part of how we experience the world.

So being often we have very automatic responses to things like guilt or anger or anxiety.

I'm anxious, I avoid, I'm anxious, I obsess, I feel guilty, I, you know, drink, whatever it is.

We can learn to be flexible about how we respond to the experience of guilt or the experience of anger.

We can learn new ways of relating to what we are thinking and feeling.

And that allows us to show up more effectively in our lives, in the physical world.

And that's what ACT is really all about.

And again, caring for, caring for a child is hard.

Being a parent is super, super

hard and a huge challenge.

And for people who have an autistic child,

that it's often the challenges or just the

intensity of it all is really amplified.

And so this need to be able to be

really self aware and accepting of emotions like anxiety

or dealing with uncertainty, feeling guilty, feeling resentment.

These are all very common experiences in parenting, but

I find that they're very amplified in caregivers.

It feels life or death. Right.

Like if I.

We're all afraid of breaking our children.

But in this case, if I don't do

this, you know, how do I advocate?

It's so much to carry and there's so.

Those emotions are so intense and having tools to navigate,

not just what's the best type of therapy and who

do I need to call, what should I do?

It's like, how do I deal with

the way I'm feeling about this situation?

It's a whole other world that can be addressed

and that can be really helpful for people.

When I hear automatic thoughts, I

think CBT is this closely linked.

Yeah, so this is like third wave CBT basically.

So it kind of incorporates some of those acceptance mindfulness tools.

It's not only cognitive, but it's a little bit almost more speech, spiritual and brings in those mindfulness based interventions as well.

And it doesn't have to be spiritual in like a religious sense.

There is a sense of like, you know, Getting in touch with who you are and being authentic to you as you navigate your life circumstance.

Okay, we got some questions coming in.

And, you know, I've already mentioned cbt, but there's a question that we're always going to have, which is how does act and letting things go work within an ABA framework?

That's a really good question.

So letting things go and acceptance and change is a really interesting thing.

Like, we can accept where you are in the present, but that doesn't mean that you are letting things go and not trying to make changes or better things. Right.

So ABA is very practical in that we are focusing on observable, measurable behaviors, and we're trying to make changes that.

That are going to benefit the individual that are, you know, involved.

You can accept where we are now and how painful it is and the thoughts and feelings you have about it. And maybe ABA is one of your actions that you take. So they really are very aligned.

We can accept what is now and what is in the present, and we can still act towards making changes that we believe will better our lives. So there's no.

There's no real, I think, conflict there.

Yeah, I think they can coexist really, really nicely.

Okay, well, like everyone here, I'm seeing your questions, guys, and there's a lot of, how can I, in this situation, that situation, and the other.

And I'm right with you.

So before, let's talk about how to act.

So this slide lays it out pretty cleanly, but walk us through it. Sure.

So really, act is about being aware of and accepting your.

Your circumstances, what the reality is, and then your own thoughts and feelings about that.

And to be present in anything you're experiencing, whether it's joy or anxiety, being really acutely aware of

who you are and what you value.

A lot of us don't give a lot
of thought to what our values are.

We're just like, living our life and being
able to give some thought to that.

And so when we are angry or we are frustrated or
we are anxious if we know, you know, the kind of
person we want to be in this world, what our values
are, we want to treat ourselves and others.

It can give us direction as we have those thoughts.

And then the last part of act, which
is really taking action, which is acting in
ways that are aligned with your values, irrespective
of what you are thinking and feeling. Right.

So we can accept any feeling and choose to act in
a way that is aligned with our values versus our thoughts.

So, you know, if you are feeling Resentful
towards your child or society or a therapist.

It happens, right? Of course it happens.

And we're going to talk about
that because that's perfectly normal.

And okay, we can accept that we can love
somebody and resent them at the same time and
have both of those feelings and act as.

That's the acceptance piece.

Like these two conflicting emotions.

Who do I want to be in.

Well, I have this feeling and in my circumstance.

And what actions do I want to take that
are aligned with who I want to be?

And I think the choice point, which is on the next
slide, actually maybe we can go to the next one too,
and then we can come back, is really about noticing how
when we have often negative or challenging emotions, sometimes we get
really swept away by them and we end up acting in
ways that take us away from the kind of person we
want to be and take us away from the values that
we hold versus towards.

So you can think about these
as towards moves or away moves.

This is a Russ Harris concept.

So being able to notice our triggers and our thoughts and
our feelings and really thinking about acting in ways that bring
us towards the kind of life we want to have and
the kind of person that we want to be, even if
we can't change our circumstance, how do we.

Who do I want to be in this circumstance? Who do I.

You know, when I look back at
this, what would make me proud?

These are questions that we can ask ourselves. Okay.

And do you want to go back to Russ for a bit? Yeah.

So I think this is a

really empowering and powerful statement.

But basically, you know, when you're faced with something challenging,

and I do want to say being autistic or having

a child who is autistic can be a challenge and

it can be the most beautiful experience. It can be both.

And so discussing the challenges does not take away

from the fact that it is a valued like

that people who are autistic are valuable and give

so much to society and that it can be

a joy and a pleasure to raise them sometimes.

But it can also be a challenge.

And both of those things are true.

We basically have four options.

We can leave the situation and being a parent.

You know, that's not on the table. No. Right.

We can stay and change what can

be changed and work within it. Right.

There's therapies, there's getting support.

There's things that we can do.

We can stay and accept what can't be changed and

live by our values, or we can stay and give

up or do things that make it worse. Right.

So if you, you know, an example would be, you

know, a lot of people, when we can't leave a situation, become really hopeless about it, or in order to manage all those difficult thoughts and feelings, do things that end up creating more pain and more suffering.

So this idea is really about, I may struggle and it may be hard, but I'm going to approach this with my values in mind and do everything in my power to respond into my own thoughts and feelings and to my situation in ways that don't make it worse and potentially make it better.

That first part, values. Yeah.

I can see as a parent, when.

When you, like, as I mentioned, as a parent, everything becomes about our child often. Right.

And it's not that we forget our values, but our focus is not on always being our best self.

We want to be the best parent we can be, but not always our best self.

Talk to me about how we get reconnected with our values and what that looks like.

I love that question.

I think giving it some thought.

And a lot of your values translate into the kind of family you want to have and the way you want to parent.

But a lot of values actually transcend your identity

as a parent or like, or, you know, the way you were before you were a parent.

Like, you know, you could value cooperation and generosity and authenticity and joy and creativity or nature.

Like all of these things.

Can we bring these things into our parenting?

And so a lot of us lose part of our identity when we become a parent.

I know that I had that experience for sure.

And just taking some time to think about what kind of life are you trying to build for yourself and for your family?

Who do you want to show up as in this world?

How do you want to treat yourself?

How do you want to treat others?

What would be like, one or two words you would use to describe that, you know, values are not outcomes, like it's not being successful or being the best parent ever.

You know, I value patience, and I'm not always patient, but I value it. Right.

And so being able to just think about who you want to be and what's important to you and the kind of family and the kind of life you were trying to build for yourself and your family and just taking a moment, which can sometimes feel like we don't

have a moment, but I really would encourage you to do so, to really think about what your values are, because it can really guide how you want to show up when you are consumed by worry, anxiety.

While you're advocating doing all the things that you have to do being a caregiver.

So generally speaking, you know to.

If you're working within the ACT framework. Yeah.

Is this something that is done with a professional?

It can be. It can be. Okay. It can be.

There's great books on ACT and some of those will be in the resource section for sure.

There's some great self help books.

There's some great books for, for clinicians on act.

There's some great trainings on act.

But I think it's, it's honestly I, I

think one of the things that's beneficial about this is it can be pretty simple. Yeah.

In like it's accepting my response, my reactions, you know, choosing valued direction and taking action.

And I think that, you know, you could, you

could do many sessions with a therapist on ACT

or you could even just know that and think

about your values and like that could be transformative.

So like with any form of therapy you can

go really deep, but you can also just take those core principles and start using them right away. Okay.

The, one of the resources, it's the resource list. It's one PDF but it's got links to all of that stuff. That's the one you want to grab for some of those books, the caregivers website and more. So I'm very interested in this.

I may have thrown you off part, but I think now we're getting, let's assume that we've established what those values are.

Now we have to turn that into the actions we're going to take. Correct.

So talk to me about that process.

So we have to notice how we're feeling. Right? Right.

And be able to see our values even while we are consumed with grief, anger, guilt, frustration and, and being able to regulate those emotions is really important.

And I'm actually, we're going to get into some ideas and exercises to be able to do that.

Those are coming up so that, you know, sometimes we know outside of the moment how we would want to be able to show up, but then when we are having big emotions, it's really hard.

So ACT is really about learning to respond

and relate almost differently to those emotions too.

You know, if you think of for example, guilt as just being like a really important reminder about your values versus this horrible thing that you have to then beat yourself up about and feel tons of shame around and, and you know, get stuck in for the rest of the night.

Like when I experience guilt now, I just say, hey, have I betrayed one of my values?

Oh, I did.

Oh, thank you so much. Guilt.

I'm so Glad you you showed up to remind me that like this isn't how I want to do this. Great.

Okay, you can go now.

Yeah, I have some action to take now versus like getting stuck in it and suffering in that guilt. Right.

So when, if you can thank your guilt, like this is such an act thing.

It's like responding flexibly to the emotion of guilt versus resisting it, versus hating it, versus struggling with it.

I can, I can actually be grateful for my guilt because it's so useful to me and I can love it. Yeah.

And then I can.

It can serve its purpose and then I can let it go. Yep.

And that's just a very different way to manage guilt.

So that would be an example of that, right? Yeah.

Very curious how anxiety works in that way.

Hope and anxiety being. Being kind of different. So.

So this is really about this process too is around.

We are never going to be perfect. No.

You know, you may value patients, you may value

being a strong like being a strong advocate.

You may value neurodiversity and celebrating,

you know, your child's differences.

And you will not show up perfectly 100% of the time.

And part of this is just about reflection.

You know, how did I do?

Is there anything I'd want to change?

Am I proud of how I handled this?

If I am amazing, pat on the back. If I'm not okay.

What do I want to do differently next time when

that feeling shows up or when that situation happens?

So it's not about being perfect.

It's about being self aware and being able to reflect

so that we can continue to try to make more

of those to work moves so we can feel good

about how we are showing up in challenging situations.

Okay, so we got ideas and exercises.

This is a big part of the presentation.

We wanted to get there. We have a ton of questions.

Okay, great.

I can't wait to answer them.

So I'm going to paraphrase guys because there's so many and there's so many that are. That are.

I call it similar.

So I see a bunch about overwhelming, overwhelming.

Burnout, overwhelmed while taking care.

Taking care of the child.

Lots of this, lots of this kind of stuff that isn't exactly, you know, I know overwhelmed is something you feel, but it's not.

I don't know if you can point it to as closely as guilt.

Oh, I didn't act this way.

Overwhelm is like it's often that there are too.

You feel there are too many things to address.

Like there's your feelings. Right.

There's the Sensory overload.

There's the fact that something actually has to get done.

Maybe there's 20 things that have to get done.

Like something's knocked down over there, this kid's about to jump off a dress, or this person's melting down. It's.

It's this feeling of, I can't handle this, like I need to shut it down. And it's a very.

I think it is one of the most prominent emotions that I, that I hear people describing to me in my work, that parents feel. That parents feel. And especially parents who are caring for a child who is autistic.

So I guess is the question, like how to manage that maybe if you could, without getting into exercises. Let's just say that that's it. I'm overwhelmed. I got way too much going on. Yes. I'm struggling with that.

And it's primarily related to when, you know, to the care, to the care side. Take me through the act process. I look at my value, go back to my values. What do I do? Yeah.

So the first step is noticing, like, I'm overwhelmed. And it's so amazing. Overwhelm actually is often an emotion we experience before other ones. So a lot of the. We'll often get angry when we're overwhelmed and we often get angry at PE for making us overwhelmed. And it's not always anybody's fault. It's just there happens to be too many things going on. You know, you get angry at the person on the phone that you're trying to book

an appointment with because they don't.

Don't have one soon enough. Right. It's the last person.

You're already overwhelmed.

Something happens.

The first thing to do when you're overwhelmed is like to notice it and to say, like, accept it.

Like, I am overwhelmed.

And to have self compassion, like, this is a lot.

Yeah, this is a lot that

I'm having to manage right now.

Then it's like, okay, what are my values?

And when you're super overwhelmed, it can be very hard to do that.

Which is why doing some of this

on the front end is really important. Right.

Safety, you know, that's probably one of the things that you want to think about maybe being cooperative, maybe being kind, maybe being effective, and then thinking, okay, my favorite thing to do when I'm overwhelmed is one thing at a time.

What, what is like, what do I have to do right now if I can only do one thing?

And I think that if you can notice that you're overwhelmed and recognize, okay, when I'm overwhelmed, you know, My values are to still be effective and

to still treat people with respect and kindness versus, you know, like, yelling at everybody or going and hiding in the bathroom, which I have done.

But what are your values in that situation?

And then saying, okay, I'm going to take action one thing at a time, one thing at a time.

And that can really, really help.

But noticing that is such a big step, and also owning it and having compassion for yourself while you are overwhelmed, recognizing that, you know, you can't fix everything, you can't make everything go away, and you can feel overwhelmed, you can notice that, and you can take action in ways that's aligned with the kind of parent or advocate or person that you want to be in that moment.

Okay.

So when it comes to advocating, yeah, that could be stressful, too.

If you've never had to do it yourself or if you feel like it's not being effective, it's not your fault, always if it's not.

But someone here is looking for support on feeling less consumed by the stresses of advocating.

Any ideas or thoughts there? Yeah.

So I think some of the exercises will really.

I want to hold onto that example and touch on it as we're going through, if that's okay.

I think that would actually be a really, really good way to do that.

Okay, last one, and then we will get there.

Thinking about the future.

People are either struggling to think about the future or because there's so much right now, or the future is what's causing the anxiety and stress.

Do you have any approach to that?

So I think that's also going to come up, and I'm going to bring that up.

But I think people have different responses to these big worries about the future, and one of them is avoidance.

Like, I'm just not going to think about it.

I'm going to procrastinate the things that I have to do. Right.

Which is probably not totally aligned with how you would, you know, want to show up in that situation.

And then the other one is sort of the opposite, which is, like, obsessing. Like.

Like this other viewer was saying, like, I can't let it go.

I'm just constantly thinking about the

future, constantly thinking about advocating.

I never stop. Right.

And both of those can really impact our mental health, because when we avoid something, anxiety build.

And sometimes when we're obsessing and doing, like, you know, working so hard at something and making it our number one priority and not bringing in time for relationships and rest and all of these things, that also impacts our mental health.

And we can often feed our anxiety.

So these are really common emotions in this situation.

And I think some of the ideas and exercises I'm about to cover, I will bring those questions in.

All right, well, let's. Let's get to them.

Let's get to them. Great.

Self compassion is the first.

Okay, so the idea of self compassion is that you should treat yourself with kindness and respect as you go through something hard.

Often our internal dialogue, the way we talk to ourselves is awful. Is awful.

And we would never talk to a friend or a loved one in the way that we talk to ourselves.

We are so hard on ourselves.

And we can have compassion for

ourselves when we're experiencing pain.

And there's a number of ways to do this.

If you go onto the next slide, one is
just to acknowledge, like, this is really hard.

And even just the power of, like, being in a
chaotic situation, just going like, I am so overwhelmed.

This is really hard to yourself.

There's something really powerful about that.

Letting go of self judgement.

Not like, I'm a failure.

Why can't I do this?

Just like, no, this is hard.

This is really, really hard.

And to be kind to yourself and making space for
that overwhelm or making space for that guilt or making
space for the wishing that it wasn't that situation and
validating yourself by saying, yeah, this is really hard.

And I'm not alone.

There's a lot of people who attended this webinar because
you aren't alone and you can be there for yourself.

Even the simple act of, like,
putting your hand on your heart.

I do this a lot.

And just being like this is really hard.

You can do it in the

kitchen while everybody's melting down. You can do it.

You know you can do it.

If you're in bed and you can't sleep, just like, give yourself some physical touch and affection and compassion.

And it doesn't make the situation go away.

No, it doesn't change what overwhelmed you or the challenge you're facing.

But if you are facing challenge, you may as well do it with kindness and support towards yourself.

Because if you don't, that's just an extra challenge that you have to.

Often the way we experience our suffering adds additional suffering.

So if we can kind of get that piece sorted out and be kind to ourselves, then we suffer less.

And we suffer less as we struggle, because we're all going to struggle no matter what.

This can't be easy because, you know, automatic thoughts, you know, those things we say to ourselves we'd never say out loud, are things we said to ourselves, probably our whole lives.

So is it changing the language?

Is it the function?

So what's so interesting about act, which is a little

different than cbt, is we're not fighting the thoughts.
We're not trying to get rid
of them or even disprove them.
We're just trying to notice them and accept them.
But we don't have to believe them. We don't have to.
They don't have to mean everything.
They are not our whole world.
They are just a thought that
is passing by like a storm. Okay.
And there's, like, a metaphor almost, of thinking of a lot
of our thoughts and feelings as, like, a big wave. Yes.
And you want to be anchored as the
wave comes and then let it go. Right.
So sometimes for some people, CBT strategies,
and CBT is a wonderful strategy, and
there's a lot of evidence behind it.
But sometimes with cbt, we're engaging so much
with our thoughts, trying to disprove them, getting
into the content of them, rationalizing with attribute,
and just be like, whoa, I'm noticing that.
I'm calling myself a total loser.
All right? I'm just.
I can notice that, and, like, it doesn't have
to be true, and I can allow myself to
think that, and I can notice it.

I don't have to grab onto it and believe it, Right.
And just be like, whoa, there's my
brain saying that I'm a loser again.
Here it goes.
But there's no resisting. It's like, it's okay.
That's just something my.
My brain likes to do.
And the only way to really know
is that is this next step, right? Which is.
Or this idea, I guess, or
strategy is being open and present.
You're not going to it. All, right?
To the joy, to the pain, to the
guilt, whatever, to the anxiety, to the uncertainty.
And so I think the viewer who was talking about
advocacy and never being able to put it down.
This is a metaphor that I just, like, made up
one day when I was talking to one of my
clients, which was like, imagine you are sitting in a
valley, and there are so many mountains all around you,
you cannot climb them all at once.
It's okay to choose in this moment, what mountain,
what hike do you want to go on?
What feels like the most important one, right?
And you can't beat yourself up that you can't, you know,

cut yourself into five and send, you know, a piece of you up each mountain like you are a human being.

And sometimes to just to, like, to imagine yourself sitting in this valley and there's so many mountains to climb and just say, you know what?

I can't climb them all at once. Right.

And maybe this morning I'm climbing this one, and then this afternoon I'm climbing this one.

You know, this morning I'm calling the school, and then this afternoon I've got to call OAP and you know, then I have another mountain, which is like sleep or, you know, and.

But you can't do it all at once. And when you try to.

That's so overwhelming.

And sometimes you need to sit down and eat some trail mix with M&Ms, and just stop climbing any mountains.

And that's essential, you know, one mountain at a time, you know, moment to moment.

And giving yourself permission to sit down and have a snack and enjoy the beautiful valley or mountain that you're on. Right.

And stop climbing sometimes.

So I think that can be a really beautiful metaphor if you're feeling super overwhelmed and unable to stop.

Right.

Because if you have other values, of course, you probably value advocating for your child and being an incredible parent.

There's also probably a lot of other things, maybe nature, maybe creativity, maybe music, that are so important to you and you need to make time for them too.

And it's important.

So you can't climb every mountain all at once.

And you can sit down and have a snack and enjoy the scenery. That makes sense. Yeah.

Okay.

The other one, I actually do want to bring that in too, which is don't suffer twice.

We're talking a lot about uncertainty and anxiety.

So often we will get so stuck worrying that something bad is going to happen.

You know, what if we don't get this funding?

What if my child never finds a life partner and they want one?

What if they never find good friends?

What if somebody gets sick?

And it can be really empowering.

So when we worry about the future, that's really smart.

Our brains are doing that for a reason.

Anticipating things that we need to consider

in order to stay safe and thrive.

But sometimes when there's no action to take, I could have the thought, what if I get cancer tomorrow? Right?

And you know, okay, I'm already like, I'm not.

I don't smoke.

I'm trying to sleep well, I'm trying to this like, I'm taking my action so I can suffer worrying about that, worrying about all of those things now in this present moment when it's not happening.

And then I'll have to suffer again if it happens.

So then I'll have to suffer twice.

So it can be really empowering.

To just say, I'm not going to suffer twice.

I'm going to trust.

I'm going to do what I can do.

But once that is done, I am going to say, all right, I've taken the action I need

to take to prevent this to the best of my ability, because we can't control everything.

And then if the thing that I am so anticipating, you know, my child gets rejected, I don't get the funding, I, you know, I will suffer then.

But right now, I might as well, you know, watch a great movie or enjoy my child and laugh or go for a walk.

Because if I suffer all the way up until

that moment and then suffer again, what's the point?

It's not happening now.

And if it does happen, I trust myself.

I trust myself to suffer and deal with it then, but I don't have to do it now because it's not happening now.

So that can be a really great way to manage uncertainty about anything.

But in this context, often there is a lot of uncertainty about what is the transition to adulthood, what's this going to be like?

And so that can be a really helpful way to navigate worries about the future.

Okay, closing the circle. Okay.

This is a great one, too.

Again, around advocacy and worry, worrying about your child.

So often what we do is.

And this is sort of related to the not suffering twice is we.

Instead of just.

If you think about a decision you have to make as a circle, so you start at the top and you have to collect information, make decisions, take action, and.

Or we have to collect information about the decision that we need to do.

We need to reflect.

Often what we do is we just end up
going around the same circle over and over again.

This is called obsessing. Right.

Have you collected the information
needed to make the decision?

Often what keeps us trapped is that we
can't accept the downside of any decision.

And we're searching.

Our anxiety wants us to search for certainty and
for a decision that doesn't have any downside.

And decisions without downsides don't exist. Right.

And so that can get us trapped in
a loop, or it's the guilt about the
downside or the uncertainty of a downside.

So then we get trapped in loop.

We spend so much time basically going
around and around in a circle.

So what I really encourage caregivers to do is to
say, I need to close this circle, and then I
need to stop walking around in the same circle.

I need to make a choice and accept the downside. Right.

You can make a really great choice that is
aligned with your values that is well thought out.

And you can have a poor outcome and you can

make a bad choice and have a great outcome.

There is a point where we are no longer in control.

Right.

Have you closed the circle?

Have you learned the information you need?

Have you thought about your values?

Have you closed the circle? Yes. Okay.

I'm not going to keep walking around in circle

because then I'm spending more time suffering, not being

in the present, not giving myself time to enjoy

things about my life that I.

Or about my child that I want to enjoy.

So I think this is also just like a

nice metaphor, like, are you walking around in the

same circle over and over again once it's closed?

Go on a different path, choose a new circle

or a zigzag or a triangle or whatever it

is that you said something there about the information.

And I know that in some cases, with some

of these more complex matters, like, you know, advocacy

at school or what's going to happen and that,

and that sort of thing is, is.

Is the idea that sometimes you don't have all the

information yet and you need to move past it.

Because I see that with my wife all the time

where it's like, look, we don't have the data.

I think I'm thinking about it very young.

We have to take a risk now or we
need to wait till we have more data.

We can't worry about it till we have that data. Yeah.

To make that, that's got to be. That's very hard.

Trusting ourselves to make mistakes and make
the wrong decision for the right reason.

Right is a really hard thing.

But as a parent, and especially as a
parent of a person who is autistic, you're
going to have to do more of that.

You'll be able, you know, if you look
back and you say, that was a mistake,
but I made it for the right reasons.

When we use act and when we're thinking about our
values and who we want to be and saying, like,
even though that didn't turn out the way I wanted,
and maybe I have regrets about it. Right.

I respect the decision that was made,
even if I don't like the outcome.

So that can allow you to move forward. Right.

There is no certainty with so much, even the things
that we have data about, you know, like, so to
give yourself permission to make a mistake, obviously we don't

want to make huge mistakes, but, you know, we might.
And to trust yourself and your child and
everybody's resilience too, to notice and to reflect.
And if we need to make changes.

After we make a mistake, so be it.

But if we make a mistake for the right reasons, at
least that is something, you know, we can live with.

But if we get stuck, unwilling to make
a mistake, we actually often cause more suffering.

Right.

And act in ways that are less
effective for us and for our child.

And so we're actually just trapped. Yeah.

And we're not being effective, and we're not.

We're not helping.

So that can give you permission to let it
go and say, I considered the information I have.

I've considered my values.

I can make a decision, might be the wrong one.

If I make a mistake, at least it
will have been for the right reasons.

I've closed that circle, and now I can move forward.

And often the next learning has to come from experiencing
the choice you made, the downside and the upside.

So we have a few here that I was going to

get to, but I think we kind of dealt with it.
People dwelling on sort of the negative
aspects and being overwhelmed by those thoughts.
When I listened to everything you said,
I could be saying this wrong.
So I want to ask the question, but it seems
like it's key for us to make a decision. Right? Totally.
So we have to. Sounds like if I.
Society doesn't want us to make decisions, Right. Yeah.
So if I'm struggling in this circle and I'm walking
around it over and over and over again, I need
to ask myself, do I have the data?
What decision most aligns with my values?
Make the decision and tell myself that I
will deal with potential consequences when they happen.
Yeah. And.
But I think it's.
It's human nature to.
To think, you know, I picked.
I picked the chocolate mousse, not the apple pie.
I wonder how good that apple pie was.
So once you've done that, is it just practice gets
us to a point where we can do it.
What's so sad about that is if you don't
enjoy the chocolate mousse because you were thinking about

the apple pie, like, what's the point either.

So what gets you to this?

It's practice, but I think it's also
this realization that I am suffering when
I'm going around in this circle. Right.

My anxiety is making me feel like
it's protective and it's effective and it's
loving, and it's what needs to happen.

You're doing it because you believe that's how
to be a loving caregiver to your child. Right.

But what's actually ironic is that outside
of that circle of that choice.

There is a whole world and you're missing out on it.

And some of what's out there is painful.

And so much of it is beautiful.

Whether it's, like, things about your child or things
out there in the world, whether it's a cup
of coffee, whether it is a relationship with your
spouse or your friends or work that you really
like, or sunshine or leaves falling.

You know, being present in the world even when we have
these big decisions to make and recognizing that when we get
too stuck in that circle or trying to climb every mountain
with our eyes closed, like, we suffer more. Right.

You are adding to your suffering and

you're probably not being more effective.

And because anxiety is just there to keep us effective and to keep us safe, it can be very soothing to say, like, hey, I know why you're here and why you're doing this, but, hey, it's not.

I don't need, Like, I don't need you. Like, I already.

You brought me to where I need to be now.

And so that can be.

That can be very powerful to realize that it's not actually going to lead to more effectiveness.

You know, you could clean your toilet for five minutes or three hours and it's going to be the same amount of clean.

And a lot of the time this is the same thing.

It's like scrubbing your toilet for 30 minutes when you could have spent, scrubbed it for five and then gone and watch a great show or enjoyed delicious food that you like.

So you're just.

You're just tapping into the joyous parts of your life when you might not have to. Right? Yeah.

All right.

And that's where we're going to next.

Quick question I'm going to answer.

Is this being recorded?

Yes, it is. It is recorded.

It'll be available at the same link by tomorrow morning, maybe probably later on today.

You can go ahead and share the link you used to register or refer people to the Autism Ontario website, where there's this and much more.

You've talked about it, you've left tidbits for this idea of joy, the great show, the great coffee, this talk about adding joy.

So I love this metaphor.

If you think of your life as a jar of marbles, and if you think about the top of the jar, maybe having some marbles or inside it that are actually too big to take out, some of us really feel like, I can't be happy in my life service and I don't even want to use.

I can't have a meaningful, joyous life in this circumstance, right?

We might have thoughts like that.

And when we're practicing act, we're like, oh, my mind is having a thought that I can't be happy because I have too many things to advocate for, or I'm too worried about my child's future. Like, I can't be happy.

You may not be able to take that giant marble out of the jar.

What is my child's life going to
be like when they become an adult?
How am I going to pay for all of
the therapy that I want to get my child?
How am I going to deal with the
fact that there is a screaming meltdown every
time we have to put winter boots on?
Like, how can I be happy?
And you can have a joyful, meaningful life
even if that challenge stays in the jar?
And how do we do that?
We have to say, okay, I'm going to add joy.
And when you add joy, you do not remove pain.
You could just say, I'm going to have a screaming.
I have a child who's having a screaming
meltdown every day, and it's really painful.
And maybe they say hurtful things or maybe
they harm themselves or maybe they hurt me
or their sibling or they're breaking things.
And this is a reality of my life.
And, you know, maybe we are involved and
interventions that are going to make that better.
But right now, this is my life.
And what can I add?
Is it a delicious cup of coffee?

Is it meditation? Is it a good book?

Is it a walk in nature?

Is it, you know, laughing with my partner?

Is it a phone call to a friend?

Like, give yourself permission without fixing anything to just add joy.

Because if you have to have the pain, you might as well.

Our life is just a bunch of moments, and the more of them that are joyous and meaningful, the better.

And we can add those even if we can't fix the hard thing.

And to give yourself permission to do that, sometimes you're like, if I can't fix this, I can't have joy.

But it's not true.

And your mind might tell you that it's true.

But in act, we can learn to say, oh, my mind's gonna do that thing where until this is fixed, I can't have joy

Until I know that I have all of this sorted out.

I can never do anything fun or joyous or meaningful.

That thing could be volunteering or giving back.

Whatever it is, like, add it.

Joy is not a reward.

No, it is a right that we have. Fundamentally.

You can always add it whether you have the opportunity

to do it for an hour or two minutes.

Make time to add those small moments
of joy in whatever way you can. Yeah.

Okay.

The power of.

And I love this one. Okay.

So two things can be true.

And this is sort of builds on this idea of adding joy.

I can be in so much pain and have
all this worry, and I can add joy. Right.

So I can love my child and feel resentful towards
them for how much time and energy they take up
or the fact that, you know, they hurt me and
love them and value them and be grateful for them.

Like, you could believe that.

I wouldn't be on any other path, yet

I resent you at the same time.

And often we're so hard on ourselves when we
have conflicting emotions and we almost try to make
sense of it so we get stuck.

How can I resent you and be
grateful for you at the same time? Well, you just can.

Yeah.

You know, and when you can just accept those conflicting
emotions and not struggle with them and feel like one

of them has to win, then we get stuck in the suffering, and it makes the suffering worse. So, you know, I can feel stressed and overwhelmed and really proud of how I'm supporting my child and how I'm showing up and advocating. And so when you don't feel like you have to have one predominant emotion, and then all your emotions and all your views and experiences have to go together and be friends. If you can let go of the struggle trying to figure out which one you're feeling or which one is right or wrong or feeling that you're a hypocrite for having both. Like, it's so powerful to just say, and, yeah, and I love my child and I feel this way. And when you're being hard on yourself, you can suffer from just depression or crippling anxiety and be a great parent. Totally. And I think that this idea that gratitude doesn't replace pain is really, like. I find sometimes when I'm working with people and we try to talk about acceptance and gratitude, they almost like there's a defensive reaction like, how could you tell me to do that when I'm in this situation? And it's like, no, it's not a betrayal to your pain or challenge to feel grateful for the

parts that you're grateful for or to appreciate them.

You can make space for both.

And I think that that can be really helpful before we move on.

I am currently regretful that I didn't catch this question before we move to this slide, because it was so good, and it was about joy. Okay.

And the question is, and it's a big one.

Okay, can't wait.

How do I find something that gives.

That gives you joy? It might.

This question might sound ridiculous, and there are no ridiculous questions, but it might.

But seriously, nothing feels joyful.

So what if you're in that spot? How do you add that?

Mark, I'm glad that you brought that up.

So if you are depressed, one of the, like, hallmark symptoms of depression is not feeling fulfilled and not feeling that anything does bring you joy.

So I think my first step would be have you. Have you.

So one of the things that we can do when we're.

When you're depressed, whether it's clinically, you're just, you know, feeling low and feeling like nothing is feeling joyous.

Something called behavioral activation, where you commit to

doing behaviors that are aligned with your values
and that are likely to bring joy.

So the things that bring human beings joy
often are human connection, nature, creativity, music, laughter.

So I would encourage you to commit to adding some of
those activities in, whether they bring you joy or not.

Often.

Sometimes we're waiting for that pinch of joy or excitement to
happen before we're willing to put on the music or go
to a concert or, you know, cook dinner, right?

Or, you know, do your hair.

Honestly, we're, like, waiting to feel motivated
or feeling a tinge of joy.

And what behavior activation about is doing it anyway?

I expect that. I feel this.

You know, I forget.

I think it was one of my supervisors.

Her name was is Lynn Lyons.

She said the hallmark slogan of
depression is, what's the point?

Yeah, what's the point? Yeah, what's the point?

Why would I do my hair?

Like, I'm a mess.

Like, why would I do my hair? What's the point?

You know, my life's so hard.

Why would I cook dinner?

Like, why would I put on it?

Like, what's the point?

If you commit to behaving in ways that may bring you that joy, even when you don't feel like it, you may find that you experience some joy, and I would really encourage you to do that.

And if it's still really, really hard, like, we want to think about maybe treatment for depression, whether it's, you know, and there are, you know, resources and ways of managing that, it can.

Sometimes it's that we're not giving ourselves permission, and sometimes it might be depression. And in both situations, that commitment of, like, what used to bring me joy, What.

What do I like the idea of?

And committing to bringing some of it in is a really good first step.

And not waiting to feel like it and not waiting to feel like there's a point and do it anyway.

And that is actually can be really, really effective.

So I would encourage you.

I found coming out of out of COVID

it felt like I aged a ton. I don't know what it was.

I know a lot of us did, but it was about coming

out and then trying to do the things that I did previously and not finding as much joy in it and questioning it.

Right. And what.

For me, it was about finding how to do those things or similar things at the speed I'm operating at.

Yeah, right. It was a. It was just.

It was just a function of tweaking it to be able to find the joy in it again.

And no, I wasn't going to find the joy in those things the way they were before.

That's a great question. Thank you.

Just hot off the press just got this, but Autism Ontario will be offering a workshop titled Caring for the Caregiver, where we will discuss how to find joy.

Caregivers gear caregivers to the programs and services.

Oh, that's instruction for me.

Go to the resource section and you will find the programs and services resource page where you can learn about that event or about that talk. Okay.

Hands as feelings.

Okay, so we're gonna do something here, right?

We're gonna do something. Yes. Okay. Okay.

So this is, I think, a cool exercise when you're feeling overwhelmed by your emotions, whether it's guilt,

whether it's anger, whether it's frustration, whether it's anxiety,
and it's something that you can kind of carry
with you and do at any point.

So I want.

And if you are at home watching this, I
would love you to actually try doing it.

And Matt, I'm gon do it and

I'm going to do it myself too. Okay. Okay.

So I want you to imagine that
your hands are intense feelings or sort
of unhelpful stories that you tell yourself.

Like, I'm not effective, I can't do anything. Right.

I'm, you know, I. What's the point?

My child is never going to have a meaningful.

Whatever your stories are, whatever your thing
is, I'm in so much pain.

Whatever it is, I want you to
imagine that your hands are that story.

Are those thoughts, are those feelings.

And I want you to take them and I want
you to put them like right up over your eyes. Like that?

Yes.

Okay, great.

And so when your hands are up
over your eyes, what can you see? Nothing. Nothing.

You could just see your hands. Right.

You could just see that story and remember
how we talked about sort of not getting.

You can have a thought, you know, what's the point?

Or this is too hard or I can't
handle this or life is unfair and.

Or I'm the worst and we don't have to believe it.

It doesn't have to be the whole world.

There is your thoughts and feelings and then
there's a whole other world out there.

So what I want you to do now is I
want you to take your hands and I just want
you to put them in your lap or on the
table or whatever and you can switch the slides now.

So when your feelings or your hands are in
your lap, what can you see now, right?

You can see your values, you
can see what matters to you.

You can see the kind of person you want to be.

Potential solutions, reality.

When we're so blocked by the thoughts that we're having
and the feelings that we're having, we miss out on
the fact that there is much more happening than just
the thought we are having right now.

There is a value system that we hold.

There is other people around. There is.

There's so much.

And so we don't have to get rid of
our thoughts in order to be effective and make,
you know, decisions based on our values. We.

But we can take them away from our eyes, right?

And that's what act is really
about in that we can notice.

Hey, I'm having the thought that I'm a total failure
and I hate my life and it doesn't have. That's not.
That thought is not everything.

You know, there's also the, you know, delicious
cookies I brought to my kids school yesterday
and the fact that we laughed so hard
when they said something really funny.

And the fact that I've put dinner on the table,
even if it was cereal every night this week and
that there is a beautiful tree outside and that I
really like this music and all of that is still
there and that thought is there.

And to be able to just, you know, even
to do this when you feel overwhelmed or feel
really like a good term is sort of hooked,
like you're really connected to that thought.

If you actually do this action, it can prompt you

to get a little bit of space between the thought
you're having or the story your mind is saying or
the feeling that you're experiencing and what else is there.
And get a little space and you're a person
noticing the feelings you're having versus just the feeling.
And so doing this action can be a physical prompt
to kind of get your body in that space.
Hey, I am more than just this feeling.
And there's other things around me that I
may want to pay attention to here.
And so that can just be a nice exercise
to kind of prompt you to do that.
You're not getting rid of your feelings.
You're just taking them away from your, you
know, your eyeballs so you can see more.
So we got a comment here that I just
had a huge weight off my shoulders hearing this.
Thank you for saying it.
Lots of people really feeling
like they've learned a lot.
I'm so glad to hear that.
But we do have people who, maybe
due to the state they're in. Yeah.
Or what they have or haven't done coming into
the session, are looking for where to start.

So let's just say we've left here and
this was a sales pitch for act. I know it wasn't.
Let's just say it was.
And they think this could be great. Where do they start?
Okay.
So again, there's a good resource section I would.
If you're really interested in act
reading a book about it.
There's a great book called the Happiness Trap.
I don't know if I'm supposed to
endorse that, but there's some great.
There are some great books on it, which
I think could be a good list.
There's lots of great videos on it
as well, and that can be helpful.
But where would you start? I want you to.
The first thing I would do is think about your
values at a moment where you're not stressed out.
Who do I want to be in my life?
And the next step would be to
just be this observer of your mind.
Thinking about, like this week I'm just going to.
Instead of trying, like being totally unaware and caught up
in everything I'm feeling, I'm going to just try to
take a step up and observe the thoughts and feelings

that are happening in my mind and in my body.

I've thought a little bit about my values and

I'm observing my mind and even just those two

little changes would be really curious to see how

you can show up a little bit differently.

And I think that the few exercises that we talked

about, like choosing one mountain to climb at a time.

If there's a decision you're looking to make.

Thinking about closing that circle, Thinking about.

Think about, am I scrubbing a toilet for

two hours instead of sitting and putting my

feet up like these little ex.

Or the reason I like focused

so much on just those exercises.

You can Try these out with

whatever feeling that you're feeling.

You can use the whole power of.

And like, I don't need to feel bad

about the fact that I'm feeling too conflicting

at once and get stuck in it.

You can even just do the simple

thing of having self compassion for yourself

as you're going through something hard.

Just these little things are.

I think those exercises we did are great places to

start just doing those things in your daily life. Life.

Take some time to think about your values.

Take some time to think about.

Okay, I'm going to try to observe my thought as if it is a TV show almost or like I'm reading a book and maybe trying some of the exercises that we discussed.

When you notice anxiety, guilt, overwhelm or anger, which are all really common shared experiences. Right.

Come up.

Okay, so once again, the resource section, the resource list.

I'm looking at it right now.

There's about 20 different things there, including online supports, books, websites, videos and the like.

Before we part ways for the day, what do you want to leave our audience with?

What do you think is, you know, your moment of Zen or your final.

I think what I would want to leave the audience with is you're not alone.

There's a lot of people in this webinar. Yeah.

And that what you are going through as a caregiver is probably a lot.

And that you deserve kindness from yourself and from the world and you deserve to take care of yourself.

And that the struggle, if you are struggling,
that that struggle does not mean that you
cannot have a joyful, fulfilling life.
There is a lot of room for that, even in
the pain and in the challenge that you're experiencing.
And I would, I would leave you with, I would hope
that there can be after this, maybe just some openness or
hope in adding some of that joy that living by your
values can bring into your life and recognizing that even though
the situation is really can feel, you know, being a parent
is something you will do for the rest of your life
so you don't have to change what's hard about your role
as a parent or caregiver.
To have a more joy and more fulfillment in your life.
And you deserve that.
And there's hope and you can do it. Amazing.
I want to echo the tens or hundreds of comments.
They're all pouring in saying, thank you.
It was a great session.
I know I personally learned a lot
and I hope everyone did too.
Thank you so much for having me.
As a reminder, before you go, there will be a survey.
That survey will pop up or it's on the left.
Please complete that survey before you leave.

This webinar will be available on demand later today and tomorrow and on the Autism Ontario website, where it's open to anyone.

The more people that come through these programs, the more webinars we are able to do.

So please pass it along to anyone who you think might find this informative.

And until next time, we will see you on our next Autism Ontario event. Thank you.