Introduction to ACT therapy and behavior change

Welcome back for another conversation all about how we can take actions to improve our high blood pressure. But today, we're actually going to focus on with this this conversation with our guest is all about ACT therapy and how we can utilize this type of therapy to really hone in on behavior change that will lead to healthier outcomes, like an improved blood pressure.

Today we have Dr. Dayna or Dr. Dayna Lee-Baggley with us today. How are you? Thanks. I'm good. Thanks for having me. Well, I'm excited to dove into our conversation.

I've interviewed you previously and you're a wealth of knowledge and you have a great book which will definitely hook you with the title Healthy Habits Suck, which we'll get to in a minute.

But you need to describe a little bit just about what ACT therapy is in general in kind of maybe the research behind it and how it kind of came to evolve.

Sure. So ACT is short for acceptance and commitment therapy, and it's a type of cognitive behavioral therapy or CBT. So we call it a third generation cognitive behavioral therapy.

The first generation was really like behavior modification, like Skinner or Watson, the second one was back style, which added cognition. So that's classic CBT that many people have heard of.

And then the third wave includes things like act, and it basically takes the things that worked well from the previous generations and adds some things that we also now know are helpful.

Things like mindfulness or acceptance based strategies. Did you talk about the six different components of ACT therapy and what those are exactly? Yeah.

So the model of ACT includes six different processes that we help people learn. The goal of ACT is to increase psychological flexibility and psychological flexibility, sort of your ability to do what's going to work in that scenario.

And so we're trying to add to people's behavioral repertoire so they have more options for behaviors to do, things that are going to be successful.

ACT principles, values, and goal setting

And basically, that model kind of says anytime we're being rigid in whichever way, whether it's always having to be a leader or always having to be a follower, for example, at some point that's not going to work in that scenario.

So adding to people's behavioral repertoire so they can do more things. So the six processes include things like value acceptance strategies, fusion diffusion or fusion self as context, present moment awareness.

I get them all. How many did they list at? We always add self-compassion as well and then committed action. That's the sixth one. And basically what those really mean is, can we do what matters?

Can we open up and can we be present? And that's what we're aiming for, is those kinds of skill sets. What I found really useful in using act in health conditions is that classic CBT is a model based on disorders.

It's a very well established intervention. We know that it works. It works really well for things like depression or anxiety, because there is actually this distortion that's happening in people's thinking that you can identify and you can see it across different individuals with the same condition.

And that's what CBT really targets, and it does a great job of that. When you start working with people with health conditions, it's not always a distortion that they're facing.

So, for example, working with somebody who has a diagnosis of cancer and they're worried about dying of cancer, that's not a distortion. There's a high likelihood at some point in their life, not maybe tomorrow or soon, but that they may die of cancer.

Right. Maybe 15, 20 years from now. But that could happen. And so act is really, to me, a model about human behavior. They call it trans diagnostic, meaning that we have over a thousand randomly controlled trials demonstrating the effectiveness of act for things like psychosis and OCD, but also things like procrastination and smoking cessation.

And so we've tested it across me, but community, it's tested it across numerous different conditions and found that it's effective. And to me, that really speaks to the fact that it's a model of human behavior and it helps explain behavior.

And so it became a much more helpful model for me to use when I was working with people with chronic disease and often trying to help them change their behaviors, because we can really just focus on doing things that are going to be workable and useful in the situation without having to try to find a pathology or a distortion in there.

So how does someone start? So so let's say someone's coming to you and I know your work with obesity clinics and different things, but how does someone even start this?

Like what is the the first entry into ACT therapy? Or how can someone maybe utilize it on their own? Like what? How do we begin? Yeah. So there are some tips that we can offer based on act that I think anybody could adopt without having to kind of go to therapy to learn about it.

So one of them is about finding a value driven reason for change. And so values and act are about how you want to show up as a human. So they're not what you want to get from life.

They're what you want to give to life. So that might be, you know, kindness, that might be compassion, that might be art. But there are things that you want to give to life as opposed to what we want to get from life.

And so it's about how you show up as a human. Values are always about moving towards something that matters, not about getting away from something bad.

So at a diagnosis of a health condition, people are often motivated to change their behaviors because of distress, because some bad thing is going to happen to them.

Now, if they don't manage this condition. And while that will help get people started in behavior change, it doesn't result in long term change. Because if you start associating those health behaviors with something scary and something threatening, then over time you don't want to do them because you've attached them to something that's, you know, negative.

What we want to do is attach those health behaviors to something that matters to you. That's something that is important to you. That's about how you're trying to show up in the world, and that's about finding a value driven reason for change.

And so in that context, we actually don't think about health as a value. We think about health as a means to an end. What are you going to do with that health?

What are you going to do with the extra energy? What are you going to do with extra years of life? Why do those things matter to you to go that one step further?

It's not just I'm going to avoid some bad health outcome. That's not a value driven reason for change. Having better

health. What's that? Why is that important to you? Right.

What matters to you about your life? And there's lots of conditions, chronic health conditions that actually managing your condition helps you show up better in the moment because putting better fuel into your body and your eating habits, exercise, physical activity, stress management, sleep, all of these things will actually help you show up as a better human today to do the things that matter to you, not just what it could do for you in the future. Right.

And so those become value driven reasons for change. And we want people to find those reasons. So whether that's about being the parent you want to be, whether that's about being a high performing person, about the work that you do, your hobbies that you do, it's to help you show up as the person you want to be.

And then that becomes the reason to do the hard work of health behaviors, because as I said, they suck in the moment, they're harder in the moment, they're more difficult. And so we have to attach them to some really deeply meaningful reason for change.

The second thing that we can then move to is how do you structure your goals to be more effective? An act can also speak to this so this is about picking a manageable amount of change, right?

So people try to change everything all at once and we basically don't have enough self-control or battery to be able to do that.

Finding personal values and motivation

And so you want to pick manageable amounts and build your way up to the eventual behavior. As you practice it, it gets easier. And so then you can add more of them together.

We also want people to think of a do instead behavior instead of a don't do behavior. There's lots of health recommendations people will get that are don't do behaviors, don't have high salt, for example.

But you want to think about what are you going to do instead? So what are the substitute foods you're going to use instead of what are the healthy things you can add?

Because that makes us feel less deprived because you're focusing on the things you can have instead of the things you can't. I remember a patient saying, You know, I can't eat pickles anymore and I'm so upset.

But I never even liked pickles until they told me I couldn't have them. Like this is actually a well-established effect in psychology called the thought suppression effect that the more you try to not think about something, the more you think about it, right?

And so if you set that up all your goals about what not to do, you're just going to all of a sudden want them more than you did before. And so figure out the do instead goal.

Think about adding things in instead of taking things away, and the healthy thing can start to crowd out the unhealthy things. Lastly, make your goal a behavior rather than a thought or feelings.

So often people will list goals like I want to enjoy going to the gym or I want to want to eat salad for dinner. Those are not things that we have direct control over there, governed by a part of our brain that runs automatically and unconsciously that we don't have direct control over.

We do have direct control over our behavior. Not a limited control, but much more control than thoughts or feelings. And so if you set a goal about something that you inherently don't have control over, you're going to fail at some point.

And so instead set yourself up for success by picking a goal that you actually can influence. You do have control over which is your behavior, right? So behavior being something someone else could see you do.

And so whether you enjoy going to the gym doesn't matter whether your body moved to get to the gym and you did your exercise, that's the win. Right? And so because we will often can still dislike the actual behavior, right?

So if you ask me if I want to go to the gym, the answer is no. It's really hard work and it's sweaty and uncomfortable. Right. But if I ask myself, do you want to go to the gym or do you want to yell at your kid at bedtime?

Right, then I'm more likely to go to the gym. It's still a difficult behavior, but I know it's going to help me show up as the parent that I want to be, and that's what makes it worth it to do this difficult thing.

And we all do difficult things in the service of our values all the time. This is already in your repertoire of behavior. You already know how to do this.

You just need to attach these health behaviors to what matters to you to find a long term source of motivation right. Even to get to some target weight, for example.

I still want to be a good parent, so I'm still going to go to the gym. Right. Making it a goal driven behavior means there's a finish line, but with a health condition, there's no finish line.

You have to keep going. If it's value driven, that's always about how we want to show up. And so that allows us to have a long term, you know, motivator for change.

And that's also what the literature shows, is that when we add these value driven reasons that can really prompt sustained behavior change over time. That's really helpful.

So how does someone even begin to determine what those values are? You kind of hinted to it, but I actually had a patient because I'm trying to incorporate more of this act, you know, having people start thinking about values and why they're making healthier decisions.

They're moving their behaviors towards that. And someone said, you know, no one's ever asked me what my values are and I've never thought about it. And she actually started crying, which moved me.

I was like, Oh, my goodness. I've always thought about certain values and different things. It's just kind of how my brain was or maybe, you know, my upbringing, I don't know.

But how do you even start that conversation with someone? Maybe this is a foreign concept and they're really struggling on how to even figure out what their basic values are.

Yeah, so I would say for most people it's a new concept. Our culture kind of focuses so much on goal driven behavior rather than value driven behavior.

So for many people, it's the first time they've even thought of it. We have an expression about where there is pain, you'll find your values. So it's actually not uncommon for people to tear up when they're thinking about their values because they're deeply meaningful to them.

They're important, and they bring that sense of being touched by something that like, you know, is brought about by tears. It's also painful if you're not being consistent with your values.

And so if something really bothers you, that also is a clue to your values, because not being it is so painful or not being able to show up that way is so painful.

The easiest place to start with values is who's important to you. Some people would argue it always comes back to the people in your life anyway. Right.

And so you can always start with who is important to you. And and the question again is, how do you want to show

up for them? Not who do you want them to be, not how do you want your relationship to be?

Using ACT for health priorities and chronic conditions

How do you want to show up for them? What would matter to you? And it's really perfectly okay to just plant the seed and then let people germinate on it, right? Let people think about it.

You don't necessarily want to figure out your values in 5 minutes. They should be things that you keep thinking about. Right? So we have values for our research lab.

We have values for our company, we have values for our household. I have values about how I'm trying to be a parent. I have a values about how I'm trying to be a colleague or a professional.

Right. So they're ongoing things. You want to be thinking about. They will change different ones will become different priorities at different parts of your life.

That's okay, too, right? But you want to find that deeply meaningful reason for a change that's going to help you do the hard work of being healthy. And one of the things I often talk about with physicians is, you know, do no harm has sort of turned in to avoid death.

Right. And so we have sort of done this thing of prolonging death, but not necessarily prolonging living. And so imagine if do no harm meant help people live the most meaningful life possible.

If that's what do no harm meant, imagine the conversations we would have, right? That at a basic level, this is a why question. Why are we doing this? Why are we doing this hard work?

What matters about this? Don't finish with health. That's not the answer to end up what's the next question? What will the health allow you to do or to contribute to the world or care about people?

That's when you get to the value driven reason for change. And so it's a great thing to just keep asking, right? When I'm seeing somebody for therapy, I want to know the why every single session.

Why are we doing this right? I had one patient who is trying to quit drinking and she had liver disease. So she really did need to quit drinking. And so, like, you know, what are you going to do more of or less of?

You're not drinking. And she came up with she was going to do her dishes more. And I was like, you mean we're doing all this work so you can clean more dishes?

Well, no wonder you don't want to quit drinking. I wouldn't want to quit drinking either if it meant I had to do more dishes. Right. Avenge Lily. We got around to.

If she did more dishes, she could have more people over. And so the value driven reason was really to socialize, right? To be able to connect with people.

So I was like that I am in for I am not going to do all this work with you just so you can do more dishes. But I am totally down for doing this work so that you can connect with people better, so you can have a better social life, that you can have more people that matter to you in your world.

That's a great reason for change. And so have the conversation again and again about why this matters to people. It's really helpful for them to be reminded that it helps them show up for the people who matter most and the things that matter most to them.

Okay, so someone has high blood pressure or heart disease or any health condition, any health behaviors, you know, moving in that direction, eating healthy, like you mentioned, exercise are all going to benefit regardless of if we're just talking in broad strokes.

Most of the time when you hear coaches or maybe the media is like, you know, prioritize yourself, make yourself number one, it's you to show up. You got to take care of yourself first.

So, you know, step me first type of mindset. So how does this differ from that in what would be the benefit of moving towards an act type of use, that kind of instruction to benefit yourself in health?

Yeah. So we, we definitely, you know, sometimes so definitely you need to be higher on your own priority list to take care of your health. It takes time and energy to like manage a chronic condition, but trying to convince people who don't have themselves high on their own priority list that they should be higher is usually a really tough sell.

And so ACT allows us to go in a totally different direction to get to the same place. And that becomes, well, what is at the top of your priority list already?

And let's help you recognize that managing your your health condition actually helps whatever is at the top of your list, it's going to help you be a more patient parent.

It's going to help you be a more loving spouse. It's going to help you be more compassionate friend. It's going to help you be more effective at your job.

So whatever is already at the top of your list, let's help you recognize that managing your health condition allows you to do those things, to be there for those people as a way of, again, motivating a value driven reason for change so that we don't have to convince people to put themselves higher.

Handling setbacks, rumble strips, and negative self-talk

We just have to help them recognize that managing their health is going to help them do all the things that are already at the top of their priority list.

Perfect. And so if you have someone who is utilizing their value based goals, you know, using the values to motivate them and pull them forward toward this positive impact in their life, what did they still hit up against?

Some difficulties where they're really struggling just to continue moving, like continue to progress. If someone gets stuck, what is kind of the next level of intervention that we can do?

Yeah. So first of all, we want to recognize that it's actually difficult to move towards your values. It's difficult to make a life that's meaningful and purposeful.

Right. We talk about if your life was a painting, is it full of color? But it is hard work to make a life that's full of like a painting that's full of color. Right.

So we recognize that in the moment, picking the value driven choice is actually the harder choice. Right? It's a lot easier for me in the moment to lie on the couch than to go to the gym.

And it will always take less energy to lie on the couch than to go to the gym. Does it matter if I'm a triathlete? Right. It'll still take more energy to go to the gym.

And so we recognize in the moment that those things, you know, that the value driven choice is often the harder one in the long run. It helps you build a life that matters.

There's lots of color in the painting of your life. So what we also help people do is to build skills that will allow them to make more towards models that allow them to be more psychologically flexible, as we said.

And that's when those six processes come back into place. So skills around self-compassion that helps us get back on track faster. The skills of diffusion and acceptance are about how do you deal with difficult thoughts and feelings that show up, that get in the way, whether that's like, I don't want you or I don't have time for that, whether it's

feeling guilty that you're going to the gym.

And so we can teach people those skills that help them make more towards moves. And I describe it sometimes like a rumble strip. So on the highway, if you hit a rumble strip, you know it like it's really bumpy and jarring and it makes you go back to the center of the lane.

And it's sort of like when we're trying to make change in our lives, it's like there's a rumble strip over the exit, right? And so you will encounter discomfort.

You will have these thoughts and feelings that try to get us to stop making change. And that's why you want to be really clear that that change is a value driven change, that that's important to you.

And our goal isn't to get rid of the rumble strips, it's to increase your willingness to to go over the rumble strips, to increase your willingness to experience discomfort in the service of your values, which is, again, I think a different way that goes about it is that we're not trying to wait for you to feel confident enough to do it.

We're saying, can you hear all those thoughts and feelings and do it anyway because it's a value driven choice. And then there's a whole host of skills that we can teach people to manage their thoughts, to manage their feelings so that they can go over those rumble strips.

So, you know, for anybody listening, even just recognizing it's a rumble strip, right? Like, Oh, there's that rumble strip of me, you know, feeling discomfort in whatever way that is.

Right. And then to ask yourself the thoughts and feelings, are they going to lead you towards your values or away rather than thinking? Is it true or false?

Like, are you too tired to go to the gym? I don't know. And I don't know how we actually, like, determine that. Right. But the better question is, is this going to move me towards or away?

If it's going to move you towards, then go for it. If it's going to move you away, then we want people to use the skills we've given them to recognize that that's not going to help me and I'm going to make a towards move instead, even when all those difficult thoughts and feelings are still there.

Right. And so, for example, there's a chapter in the book about taking guilt for a run. Right? Which is, I don't not feel guilty when I'm at the gym. I've just learned to tolerate and accept that the guilt is going to be there.

Because I know that in the end, I'm actually going to show up as a better mom for my kid even while I'm feeling guilty at the gym. Over time, it does like lesson no notice the rumble strips as much because you get better at going over them, right?

And so ask yourself towards or away the really simple way of reorganizing your thoughts about value and like about your values instead of what's true or false, right or wrong, good or bad, towards or away.

That's good. And you had mentioned these negative thoughts in like how you deal with it in the book and the healthy habits suck. But can you just talk about, you know, because many people have these this negative chatter that's ongoing and you kind of like you kind of hinted to like when you try to push something like that away, it just gets louder.

How does someone begin the process of learning the skills on dealing with the negative chatter that's ongoing? Yeah, so we actually want to pay more attention to them, not less, but then decide about whether you want them to guide your behavior.

Right. So one of the metaphors we talk about in the book that's a classic apt metaphor is about passengers on the bus and it's about imagining that your thoughts and feelings are passengers on the bus and they sometimes sort of take over the bus and take you places you didn't mean to go.

Right. And so if that was the case, you know, this skill we want the bus driver to have isn't to ignore the passengers. Right. They'll just get louder.

If you don't like acknowledge that they want to get off the bus. Right. You don't have to debate the passenger seat. The bus driver doesn't have to convince the passengers that the route they're going to follow is okay. Right.

What we need to do is to recognize that we can acknowledge the passengers and follow our route anyway. Right. So if you imagine you were a bus driver and a passenger said, hey, could you drop me off at my house?

It's like, you know, on Main Street, the third house from the left, right, a bus driver would say, like, I'm sorry, but I have a route I need to follow.

Right? Your route is your values. And all these skills are about dealing with those passengers differently, not to kick them off the bus, because to kick them off the bus would mean that you you permanently have no thoughts or feelings, which is probably a sign of brain damage and not somewhere we want to go.

Right. These are normal things for humans to experience is part of the human condition to experience yucky thoughts and feelings. And so instead we want to remind people that they're in charge of the bus.

You can acknowledge them, they can all be there and you can still choose your behavior. So focus on your behavior. And over time again, you can build skills so that those passengers and thoughts don't they're not as sticky.

They don't get you don't get as caught up in them. We don't get as hooked by them. And those are the skills that we teach and act perfect. And before we go on with the rest of the conversation, could you describe your book where people can actually get it?

Yeah. So it's called Healthy Habits How to Get Off the Couch and Live a Healthy Life, even if you don't want to. And you can order it online. Basically from any of the online bookstores, there's not that many people with Lee Baggley as a last name.

And so pretty much if you put that in, you'll find my book.

Book, resources, and applying ACT to anxiety and stress

It is also available in an audiobook and we are also trying to convert some of that content into an app to allow people to make change on a daily basis as well.

So again, trying to make use of technology, one of the values for our company is about helping to reduce human suffering and to increase access to science based information.

And so, you know, there are many people who will never have a chance to connect with a health psychologist. And so we're trying to give some of those skills in the book, in the app, so that people can have some of that knowledge to help reduce their suffering and, again, make the painting of their life more colorful.

I love the metaphor for making the painting in real life more colorful. I'm going to start you. Can see that part of it stopped, you know, I mean, like it's not sunshine and rainbows.

If you want a fully colorful painting, it means you do hard stuff. It means your heart gets broken. It means you make you have failures, you have setbacks. Right.

But that's a fully lived life and that's really what we're aiming for. Well, I mean, it makes sense. You have to have suffering in order to have compassion.

And despite the reds to have, you know. The complement to two sides of the same coin. Right. You can't have love

if you don't also sometimes have loss or pain.

Right. Two sides of the same coin. Those difficult thoughts and feelings are the ticket of admission for a meaningful life. And so we want to give people the skills to like allow them to be there.

That's the acceptance part, right, is about not trying to change the stuff you really don't have control over so that you can do things that matter to you so that you can live a value driven life, which isn't an easy life.

Right. But it's a really deeply meaningful life. And I think especially in the world we live in now, it seems so chaotic and there's so much suffering and so many things that don't seem to be going well.

That's especially when you need to be value driven, right? That's especially when we need to be mindful of how what am I contributing to the world? How am I adding to the world?

And so we need especially to be value driven when life is uncertain. Yeah, absolutely. And I think that was a lovely addition to the this part of our conversation.

So is as far as you know, you have your book in in the app as well. What are some other resources that maybe someone can look for in maybe this discovery?

Because I have gone down some deep wormholes or rabbit holes, whatever you want to call them. Looking at allergies, I find it so valuable, just even in my own thinking as I learn more.

Yeah, for sure. And I mean, there's an expression about the first person you should do act with is your self, right? So again, we do this all the time.

Like I ask myself towards or away all the time. I think about my values all the time and rumble strips and all of those things, right? So I think it's really helpful for all humans to understand how their minds work, understand how they can live a meaningful life, which again is something different than being happy.

Right? Because it doesn't necessarily mean you're happy when you have a meaningful life. You feel proud of it. You feel pleasant emotions, right? You feel positive about your life. You feel proud.

But it's not always a happy life again. It often involves, like, struggle to make a painting that's full of color. So there are a lot of activities, courses, there are many books made for the public on various topics, including things like anxiety and depression, anger management relationships.

So there are lots of resources that you can access. They will often have values, activities and diffusion activities and acceptance activity that you can practice on your own as well.

And so that's one way of getting more information about act, and that's certainly kind of what our efforts are about too, is trying to increase access to that information, which we feel can really help people, really help reduce human suffering and help people live meaningful lives.

Perfect. Yeah. One of the books that I read was Elevated Mind by Dr. Hayes, and I interviewed him, which was really phenomenal. It's like, I wish I could just talk to him all day, but but, you know, in, in context to hypertension and anxiety, stress is can you can see a significant rise in someone's blood pressure.

So you had mentioned that this can be beneficial for someone who's dealing with those type of emotions. What are the kind of the more useful tools or the beginning of someone to kind of understand how anxiety can actually improve with this type of therapy?

Yeah. So again, active in evidence based intervention for anxiety along with like, you know, health behavior change. One of the things you want to think about in relation to anxiety is that in a sense of your brain, and we call it our survival brain, it's like that unconscious, automatic part of our brain that's responsible for emotions and

automatic thoughts.

And it's not something you can directly control. It just it functions outside of conscious awareness, right? That's where emotions come from. And so if your survival brain has interpreted something as a threat, then it will then treat it like a threat.

And the way that brain works is threats are like bear attacks or lion attacks. And so it'll activate your whole system, right? The sympathetic nervous system to deal with this bear attack.

Now, it might just be you got bad news in an email or like the project got delayed. Right. But if we if our survival brain interprets that as threat, it will activate that whole system to deal with it.

And that's where we can see symptoms of anxiety as well as those stress responses that are not great for hypertension. Right. So, you know, there was this study done where they had people who considered themselves lucky and then people who considered themselves unlucky and like read a scenario and then talk about the scenario.

So one of the scenarios was you go to the bank and while you're at the bank, there's a robbery and you get shot in the arm right? So the unlucky people are like, Well, how unlucky am I?

Go to the bank and I there's a robbery and I get shot, right? The lucky people were like, How lucky am I? I only got shot in my arm. And so kind of begs the question, where are they really lucky people?

Or have they just figured out how to interpret everything as lucky? Right. Most of us won't come up with a lucky explanation or a non-threatening explanation, right?

But you can train your brain to come up with a non-threatening explanation, right? You can notice the automatic response, which we can't change. But then you can decide how far down a rabbit hole are you going to go with that thought?

Right. Or you know, are you going to choose to interpret it differently? And so that takes awareness, right? This is where that three ends again of notice it, name it, normalize it.

You have to be paying attention and have awareness of what's happening to yourself to be able to make those choices. One of the ways we talk about it is to drop the football.

So if you imagine, you know, your thoughts are a football, you know, you'll never be able to do this. This is a disaster. And you can either run with the football like, oh my gosh, I don't know how I'm going to get this done.

This is terrible. What's going to happen, going to get fired, right? That's going to run in with the football. Right. Or you can imagine putting the football down, which is just kind of some self-talk around.

I think it's the football and it's going to lead me away. I should just put it down now. Your brain will send you another football. No, no, it's really bad.

This is a really bad thing, right? And you can choose to run with the football or to put the football down, right? Sometimes you might have a lot of football sitting beside you on the day.

But and it these are what we call rinse and repeat skills. You don't just do them once. You do them again and again and again. But but they can help you.

And so run with the footballs that are leading you towards your values and put down the footballs that are leading the way. Again, it's a skill that you can learn to not get as hooked by your thoughts.

Right. There was one study that suggested, you know, the feeling of anger, the chemical reaction that creates

anger only lasts 90 seconds, nine zero, one minute and a half.

After the minute and a half, you have to be generating thoughts to keep the anger going. And so you have no choice over the 90 seconds. That's an automatic reaction from your survival brain.

But you have choice after the 90 seconds about whether you fuel that, whether you run with those footballs or whether you put them down. That's your choice point, not whether you experience the initial feelings, but how you choose to deal with them after they've shown up.

Is that that's really interesting. The chemical description of anger, is there something similar with anxiety or is it more of like the diffusion techniques you're describing, diffusing away from the the thoughts that are provoking the anxiety?

Right. So I would suggest that that that I haven't seen the other studies per se, but but basically any emotional response is probably similar to that anger situation where you have that chemical kind of neurotransmitter or response and that shows up, but then you have to keep that going in some way.

Right. And so with anxiety, what we really want to think about is actually befriending your anxiety, right? If you think about your anxiety, like, you know, some of those little yappy dogs I remember my friends have like one of my friends has that like a Chihuahua.

And I saw this Chihuahua like go up against this German shepherd and start yapping at the den. I was like, Are you serious? Like that German shepherd could just bite you in, like, one gulp, right?

Anxiety's kind of like the little yappy dogs, right? And you want to think about taking care of your anxiety just the same way you would. And like a puppy, right?

Or a dog who's like, yapping. You want to treat it with kindness, but also not let it be in charge of you. Right. And so that's actually about noticing your anxiety, making space for it, taking care of it.

It's about changing that attitude of when it shows up instead of, Oh no, to be like, okay, come on, let's go. Right, what are we going to do? And again, sometimes even just naming it, oh, here's anxiety, right?

Sometimes people name their anxiety puppy, for example. Right? But even just naming it actually shifts it out of your survival brain into your prefrontal cortex where we can make decisions and problem solvers.

What we're aiming for is what we call wise mind, which is where your emotional mind and your logical mind overlap. So it's not a better situation to have no emotions.

That's a terrible situation, right? You cannot have like a painting of your life full of color. If you don't have emotions, it's necessary for a meaningful life.

But also, sometimes emotions don't give us good advice about how to behave. They Sometimes pick short term strategies, because again, they're coming from our survival brain, which works on a short term gain.

It's not playing. The long game is playing a short game. And so recognizing is this a short game or a long game? Right. And then your choice isn't about whether those thoughts or feeling show up.

It's about what you do afterwards. So again, people often, if they've gone through something difficult, like, for example, I do couples therapy. So if a couple had gone through an affair, you know, they would say, Well, I'll know I'm over it when I never think of the affair.

And I'm like, okay, we're in trouble because that's not how brains work. Brains are going to remember stuff that was important, that was meaningful. So it's not ever going to forget that you had an affair.

Like imagine there is some like cave person who got attacked by a bear, survived it and then forgot that bears existed. The next day. That's not our ancestor, right?

Our ancestor is the one who remembered there was bears forever more and watched out for bears. Right. So your brain will always remember this event. It will always show up with some emotion because it mattered to you.

The only way for it not to matter to you is if the relationship doesn't matter to you, in which case we should help you guys break up. This relationship really doesn't matter to you, right?

And so it's not about whether the thoughts show up. Getting over something is about choosing whether you run with the football when it shows up or whether you put the football down, right.

So when people are trying to deal with their emotions, we often have this sense of trying to control them or get rid of them from showing up at all. And our goal is actually to make friends with them, to make space for them.

When you do that, there are a lot less powerful, right? When you recognize that you can choose behaviors, even when your emotions tell you otherwise, it's completely possible based on how our brains are wired, right?

That then you, you it doesn't matter what emotions show up because you can still choose value driven behavior, even if those emotions are there. And so there's a lot of skills, in ACT, that we can use for stress management.

We do it in workplace training all the time, even like leadership training as well as sleep. Right. We would say like sleep is a really important habit for well, for all humans, especially if you have a chronic disease.

So we can apply these skills to almost anything. You know, we've I've yet to come across something we couldn't apply ACT skills to, to, like help people make change.

Now, that's, that's all perfect. So if anything, you guys start with checking out Dr. Dayna's book, Healthy Habits Suck as the first to correct me every time I just think about the title.

And we want to thank you so much for sharing your expertise with us today. Thanks for having me.