



Self-Searching for Acceptance – CLICK FOR VIDEO INTRO: <https://youtu.be/gP1pide35HM>

Acceptance is rarely (if ever) just a brief event. Rather, acceptance is much more of an extended process of increasing self-awareness. Certain “eye-opening” events can speed up the acceptance process. Still, even when life situations open our minds to different new facts, it is essential to actively seek to mentally test and confirm or disprove various realities and perspectives that are presented to us. If we can be open minded about examining and questioning ourselves and what we see, then we can learn to accept the truth about important life lessons and adapt our lives as needed for self-growth. It takes courage to ask the tough questions that lead to acceptance.

Consider the following diagram:



Notice in the **middle** of the circle are **THINGS WE HAVE ACCEPTED** (aka the **circle of acceptance**) – These are facts about life and ourselves that we believe and recognize as true, valid, and accurate. We no longer doubt things within this circle of acceptance because we have seen evidence that these things are true and factual.

- For example: A child may believe that he or she is going to be a professional athlete, however most children grow up and eventually learn that this is not going to be true. Accepting the fact that “*I am never going to be a professional athlete*” becomes part of the inner circle of acceptance

The **gold spotted area** just outside the circle are **realities we are working on accepting**. These facts have not yet entered the circle of acceptance. Every now and then one of these realities may enter our awareness thus bringing us closer to acceptance but it is still a long-term process of self-awareness

- For example, a person may not accept he or she has a problem with alcohol, but various realities may start creeping into the circle of acceptance. Things like DUI's, arguments when drunk, late to work because of hangover, are events that increase awareness of the reality: “*I have a problem with alcohol*”



Finally notice how **ASKING QUESTIONS** is a way to increase self-awareness. When we can do honest self-examination, it is like opening a doorway into the circle of acceptance to let in new truths and realities. See on the diagram how asking questions opens the circle of acceptance to let various facts and perspectives in.

- Again, for example a person with an alcohol problem (who has not yet accepted it) gets a DUI and the person ASKS QUESTIONS of themselves such as:
 - *Did I get a DUI because I am not in control of my drinking (even though I feel like I am?)*
 - *Is there a realistic chance I am going to get another DUI if I keep going to the bar and getting drunk? Am I possibly going to experience other alcohol related problems if I keep drinking?*

These types of soul-searching honest questions can lead to acceptance of the fact that alcohol is a problem right now. It is also important that we answer these questions by being honest with ourselves.

The Stages of Acceptance

The Maybe Stage – (Opening our mind to things that may be true even though we may not want them to be true or we are afraid or avoidant of accepting)

The main process of the Maybe Stage is to consider the possibility that we may be wrong. People who spend their lives always insisting that they are right about everything will not grow and advance. Even when we “feel” like we know something, it’s important to recognize that feelings can be deceiving, even strong feelings. If there is evidence telling us that we need to consider an adjustment in our viewpoint, then this is especially important. Take note of your resistance. Be honest about your own fears and excuses

Examples

- *Two people in the last two weeks commented that I have an anger problem. I have always thought that I am a calm person who is in control of my anger, but maybe I need to reconsider this?*
- *I always considered myself a “recreational” drug user who didn’t have a problem, but I must admit I am going through money much quicker these past several months. Maybe I really am losing control?*

Survey the Evidence - If there is evidence that something is wrong it is important to examine that evidence even further. Here are some ways to do this:

- Speak with people who care (and who will tell you like it is) – For example, ask a friend: *What do you think about (present evidence of a problem) - Do you think I should make a change here?*
- Investigate: Try a “change experiment” which is a temporary behavior change to learn more. For example: *“I am going to see if I can go two months without any drug use to help see if I really am losing control”*
- Ask an expert – Get an assessment from a neutral expert like a doctor or therapist. This will add even more evidence to the situation.

Lock in and Move Forward – If it looks like a problem is present in life, this is where acceptance really comes into play. Ignoring reality just postpones problems and consequences. Things often do not get better if we bury our head in the sand or just avoid the truth. Rather, lifestyle adjustments can be challenging at first but in the long run can lead to a much better overall life. Over time, people who accept a situation and adjust their lives as needed, are usually grateful they made changes rather than waiting until things got much worse.



Acceptance Discussion Questions:

Why is acceptance challenging and why does it often require courage? – Why are people often afraid of acceptance?

What is something that you have had to accept in life and how did you come to accept that reality or situation?

What is something that you are in the Maybe Stage about (Something you have not accepted but are thinking about perhaps changing in life at some point?)

If you are in a program right doing this worksheet, how does acceptance play into the situation that brought you into this group? (Substance use or mental health for instance)

Even though acceptance can be difficult how can acceptance increase happiness? Why is it often worth it to have the courage to change especially when you look at the big picture in life?

Finally, what is one take-away from this discussion that you will work on going forward (Even if it's just something small, every effort is worth it)

