

Tolerating Uncertainty

Objective

To increase your tolerance of the uncertainty in your life.

What to Know

Uncertainty is an unavoidable part of life. No one can predict the future, so you must learn to accept there is some degree of uncertainty in everyday life. In some situations, there is a great deal of uncertainty.

Most people simply accept uncertainty as a natural part of life, but if you have anxiety, you might find it hard to accept uncertainty – particularly in certain situations. If you worry too much, uncertainty can magnify your worries, anxious feelings, and even physical problems associated with stress.

You might try to avoid situations that will increase your awareness of uncertainty. Perhaps you avoid travelling, changing jobs, or meeting new people. You might even avoid going to the doctor for a check-up because just making an appointment triggers your worry that something might be wrong with your health.

Avoiding situations that trigger your uncertainty will only diminish your life and narrow your choices. However, with practice, you can learn to accept aspects of life that are ambiguous and uncertain that cause you to worry unnecessarily. This worksheet is designed to teach you a simple process that can help you deal with uncertainty. The acronym, A-P-P-L-E, will help you remember the mindfulness skills you need when you are uncomfortable with uncertainty.

Acknowledge - Notice and simply observe uncertainty as it enters your awareness.

Pause - Let go of the impulse to react. Put your mind on “pause” and breathe calmly.

Pull Back - Remind yourself worry is talking, and your need for certainty is unhelpful and unnecessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Thoughts are not facts.

Let Go - Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass and you do not have to respond. Imagine it floating away in a bubble or cloud.

Explore - Explore the present moment. Notice your breathing and the sensations in your body. Notice the ground beneath your feet. Look around and notice what you can touch, see, hear, and smell. Shift your focus to something else – mindfully and with your full attention.

The only way to learn to tolerate more uncertainty in your life is to put yourself into situations that would normally bother you and then see that being uncertain is not so bad. You can tolerate the thoughts and feelings that go with uncertainty, and you can learn to live in the moment. You can use the APPLE technique to develop an attitude of acceptance, letting go, and paying attention to your thoughts and feelings rather than trying to avoid them.

What to Do

Using the chart below, describe situations that commonly trigger your uncertainty. Rate how uncomfortable you feel, where 0 = no discomfort, to 10 = extremely uncomfortable. Then choose at least one situation to practice the APPLE technique. See how many minutes you can spend each week tolerating uncertain situations, and eventually see if you can spend *more* time tolerating uncertain situations.

Situation	Date	Rate your discomfort	Minutes

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Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 1 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
