

## In Session Case Conceptualization with Parents: Setting the Stage for an ACT Perspective

This case conceptualization worksheet offers guidelines for how to work with parents in a therapy session. Consider asking your client the questions presented below as a way to step back and track your client's behavior. This will help you begin to build your skill in noticing the *process* of the therapy session, including the function of your client's in-session behaviors, such that you can choose effective interventions in the moment.

Questions to ask your client	Goal of the questions	What to do in session
<p><b>What is the problem you've been working on?</b></p> <p><b>When you do x, what is that about? What do you hope might happen?</b></p> <p><i>E.g., trying to make _____ go away</i></p>	<p>To help your client describe the problem, in their own words. This will help them defuse from their own behavior, and take some perspective; to support your client's tracking of their behavior such that they begin to become aware of its function.</p>	<p>Notice the client as they describe the problem. Be curious about what shows up for them. Maintain a collaborative stance.</p> <p>Reinforce that the client's behaviors make sense; empathize without judgment.</p> <p>Consider the function of your client's behavior – what does it get them? What does it help them avoid? What triggers or consequences seem to maintain it?</p>
<p><b>What is it like for you when you do x?</b></p>	<p>This question serves as an exposure for avoided private events, and will help shape your client's self-disclosure and connection with their thoughts and feelings. This is an important goal; supporting your client's willingness to share with you their experiences is critical to your ability to conduct a thorough functional analysis of their behavior.</p>	<p>Look for your client's subtle shifts in attention, emotion, or activity level during the session. When you notice these, have your client slow down and ask, <i>What just showed up for you, as you said that?</i></p> <p>Empathize with your client; let them know you appreciate their disclosures.</p>

<p><b>What have you tried to fix the situation?</b></p> <p><i>E.g., what has the client tried so far?</i></p>	<p>This question will help you identify your client’s unworkable parenting behaviors.</p> <p>These will be behaviors that the client comes back to again and again, and they will have predictable effects. They may feel familiar, and have similar antecedents across situations. They also very likely belong in a the same functional class (e.g., avoidance of _____)</p>	<p>Keep a working list of behaviors, such as...</p> <p>...yelling at my child</p> <p>... social networking instead of help with homework</p> <p>...avoiding confrontation</p> <p>...telling myself it doesn’t matter</p>
<p><b>How has that worked?</b></p> <p><i>E.g., (proto-values intervention) How’s that been going? Is life how you want it right now?</i></p>	<p>The goal here is to support your client’s accurate tracking of their behavior – in other words; to support their awareness of how their behavior <i>works</i>.</p>	<p>Structure situation so you’re your client comes to his/her own conclusions. Don’t explain to the client, but simply notice, take stock, and empathize.</p> <p>Try experiential exercises to help the client “get” this on a gut level rather than logically or intellectually. For example, you may lead the client through an exercises in which they</p> <p>...imagine a difficult interaction with their child;</p> <p>...Put themselves back into their own shoes, in that moment;</p> <p>...Notice how their body feels/felt in that moment</p>

<b>What has this struggle taken away from you?</b>	This will help you get a sense of the cost of engagement in an unworkable struggle for the parent. Helping parents contact this will set the stage for values work.	Experiential exercises to consider:  ...Can you remember the last time you felt “good” or “happy”?  ...Can you go back to before this started? (sometimes they can’t)  ...Imagine there’s a place where everything in your life was set right...(values exercise)
<b>If things could be different, what would your life/your family/your parenting look like?</b>  <b>Why did you become a parent?</b>  <b>When I ask these questions, what shows up for you?</b>	This question will begin a conversation about values, and help your client contact those things that feel vital and important to them.	Note whether “not possible” shows up for client. See if you can get a sense of how stable and deep that experience of “not possible” or “not for me” is.  Consider using an experiential exercise on values here.
<b>What obstacles get in the way of you building this life/family/your parenting the way you wished for?</b>	Assess what the client’s perceptions are of why they are “stuck”. Link this with behaviors that promote and maintain being stuck. What are the antecedents to those behaviors?	Experiential Exercises  ...Values work/noticing obstacles  Process: This may occur over the course of several sessions. Call the client’s attention to what happens when the antecedent occurs, as well as how the behaviors worked.

