

How To 'Drop Anchor'

What is 'Dropping Anchor' and How Does It Help?

Dropping anchor is a very useful skill. You can use it for handling difficult thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, urges and sensations more effectively; switching off auto-pilot and engaging in life; grounding and steadying yourself in difficult situations; disrupting rumination, obsessing and worrying; focusing your attention on the task or activity you are doing; developing more self-control; and as a 'circuit-breaker' for impulsive, compulsive, aggressive, addictive or other problematic behaviours.

What is involved?

Dropping anchor involves playing around with a simple formula: **ACE**

A: Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

C: Come back into your body

E: Engage in what you're doing

A: Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

Silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is 'showing up' inside you: thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, sensation, urges. Take the stance of a curious scientist, observing what's going on in your inner world.

And while continuing to acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, also

C: Come back into your body

Come back into and connect with your physical body. Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following, or find your own methods:

- Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor.
- Slowly straightening up your back and spine; if sitting, sitting upright and forward in your chair.
- Slowly pressing your fingertips together
- Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders.
- Slowly breathing

Note: you are not trying to turn away from, escape, avoid or distract yourself from what is happening in your inner world. The aim is to remain aware of your thoughts and feelings, continue to acknowledge their presence *and at the same time*, come back into and connect with your body. In other words, you are expanding your focus: aware of your thoughts and feelings, and also aware of your body while actively moving it.

And while acknowledging your thoughts and feelings, and connecting with your body, also

E: Engage in what you're doing

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing.

Find your own way of doing this.

You could try some or all of the following suggestions, or find your own methods:

How To 'Drop Anchor' - continued

E: Engage in what you're doing

- Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see.
- Notice 3 or 4 things you can hear.
- Notice what you can smell or taste or sense in your nose and mouth
- Notice what you are doing

End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task or activity at hand.
Ideally, run through the ACE cycle slowly 3 or 4 times, to turn it into a 2- 3 minute exercise.

NOTE: *please don't skip the A of ACE*; it's so important to keep acknowledging the thoughts and feelings present, especially if they are difficult or uncomfortable. If you skip the A, this exercise will turn into a distraction technique – which it's not supposed to be.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF THIS PRACTICE?

There are many possible purposes for practicing this skill. Most of them are listed in the first paragraph on the previous page, but in addition, this skill is often used as a first step in handling flashbacks, panic attacks, chronic pain, and many other issues. So, if you are not sure why your counselor or health practitioner has recommended you to practice this, and how it can help you with your issue, please ask them to clarify the aim of it.

MODIFY THIS AS NEEDS

If you're pushed for time, just do a 30 second version: run through the ACE cycle once
If you're up for a challenge, run through the ACE cycle extremely slowly, over and over, for 5 to 10 minutes.

There are literally hundreds of ways to modify this exercise, to accommodate your needs (e.g. physical pain) or overcome any difficulties you may have with it. Please ask your counselor or health practitioner how to do so.

PRACTICE OFTEN

Also remember, you can practise these kinds of exercises, any time, any place, any activity.
And it's a good idea to practise them often in less challenging situations, when your thoughts and feelings are less difficult, so you can build up your skill levels.
Over time, the idea is to use this in more challenging situations, when your thoughts and feelings are more difficult.

FREE AUDIO RECORDINGS

If you wish, you can download some free audio recordings of 'dropping anchor' exercises, varying from 1 minute to 11 minutes in length. You can listen to these and use them as a guide to help you develop this skill. You can download or stream them from the left hand box on this webpage : <https://www.actmindfully.com.au/free-stuff/free-audio/>

Computer Screen Exercise

- Choose a self-judgement story (one sentence).
- Think that story over and over for 30 seconds.

Picture your laptop screen

- Picture your story written across the screen in plain black text
- Play with the color, picture the text in green, blue, pink
- Play with the font. Try visualizing the text in italics, in bold, in a font from a children's book
- Visualize the plain black text again and play with the format: smooch the words together, space them far apart, run them vertically down the screen
- Visualize the plain text again and animate the words like a cartoon-have the words jump up and down, wriggle like a caterpillar or spin in a circle
- Visualize the plain text again and imagine a karaoke ball bouncing from word to word and sing along to happy birthday or a song from the radio

Adapted from Russ Harris, ACT Made Simple

Some Common Values (Not 'the right ones' – just common ones.)

Values are your heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave; the qualities you want to bring to your ongoing behaviour. They are not about what you want to get, have, achieve or complete. They describe how you want to behave right now, and on an ongoing basis; how you want to treat anyone or anything you interact with (including yourself); the qualities you want to embody in your own actions (and often want to encourage in others).

Below are some common values. Note: there are no such things as 'right values' or 'wrong values'. It's like our taste in ice cream. If you prefer chocolate but I prefer vanilla, that doesn't mean that my taste in ice cream is right and yours is wrong – or vice-versa. It simply means we have different tastes. Similarly, we may have different values. Please read through the list and for each column, tick 3 to 5 of the MOST IMPORTANT VALUES that you would like to bring more consciously into the way you behave. Probably many of these values are important to you - the aim is to just pick 3 to 5 of the MOST IMPORTANT for this domain of life that *at this point in time*. (It may change later).

WORK/EDUCATION I want to behave in ways that are:	RELATIONSHIPS I want to behave in ways that are:	PLAY I want to behave in ways that are:	HEALTH I want to behave in ways that are:
Accepting	Accepting	Accepting	Accepting
Adventurous	Adventurous	Adventurous	Adventurous
Assertive	Assertive	Authentic	Authentic
Authentic	Authentic	Assertive	Assertive
Caring	Caring	Caring	Caring
Committed	Committed	Committed	Committed
Compassionate	Compassionate	Compassionate	Compassionate
Cooperative	Cooperative	Cooperative	Cooperative
Courageous	Courageous	Courageous	Courageous
Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative
Curious	Curious	Curious	Curious
Efficient	Efficient	Efficient	Efficient
Empathic	Empathic	Empathic	Empathic
Engaged	Engaged	Engaged	Engaged
Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Friendly	Friendly	Friendly	Friendly
Forgiving	Forgiving	Forgiving	Forgiving
Fun-loving/humorous	Fun-loving/humorous	Fun-loving/humorous	Fun-loving/humorous
Generous	Generous	Generous	Generous
Genuine	Genuine	Genuine	Genuine
Grateful	Grateful	Grateful	Grateful
Helpful	Helpful	Helpful	Helpful
Honest	Honest	Honest	Honest
Kind	Kind	Kind	Kind
Loving	Loving	Loving	Loving
Mindful	Mindful	Mindful	Mindful
Open	Open	Open	Open
Playful	Playful	Playful	Playful
Reliable	Reliable	Reliable	Reliable
Respectful	Respectful	Respectful	Respectful
Responsible	Responsible	Responsible	Responsible
Self-caring	Self-caring	Self-caring	Self-caring
Sincere	Sincere	Sincere	Sincere
Supportive	Supportive	Supportive	Supportive
Trusting	Trusting	Trusting	Trusting
Trustworthy	Trustworthy	Trustworthy	Trustworthy
Other?	Other?	Other?	Other?
Other?	Other?	Other?	Other?

Goal-Setting

1. Pick A Domain

Choose **JUST ONE** life domain to work on: health, work, education, leisure, personal growth, spirituality, parenting, friends, family, intimate relationship, other.

Domain:

2. Choose Your Values

Choose 1 or 2 values (maximum 3) that you want to bring into play in your chosen life domain. These values will motivate and inspire the actions you take to pursue the goal.

Values:

3. Set a SMART Goal

S = Specific (Do not set a vague, fuzzy, or poorly-defined goal like, 'I'll be more loving'. Instead, be specific: 'I'll give my partner a good, long hug when I get home from work'. In other words, specify what actions you will take.)

M = Motivated by values (I.e. double check this goal is aligned with the values in step 2.)

A = Adaptive (Is this goal likely to improve your life in some way?)

R = Realistic (Make sure the goal is realistic for the resources you have available. Resources you may need could include: time, money, physical health, social support, knowledge and skills. If these resources are necessary but unavailable, you will need to change your goal to a more realistic one. The new goal might actually be to find the missing resources: to save the money, or develop the skills, or build the social network, or improve health, etc.)

T = time-framed (Put a specific time frame on the goal: specify the day, date and time — as accurately as possible — that you will take the proposed actions.)

Write your SMART goal here:

4. What Are The Benefits?

Clarify for yourself, what would be the most positive outcome(s) of achieving your goal? (However, don't start fantasising about how wonderful life will be after you achieve your goal; research shows that fantasising about the future actually reduces your chances of following through!) Write the benefits below:

Step 5. Prepare For Obstacles

Imagine the potential difficulties and obstacles that might stand in the way of you achieving your goals, and plan for how you will deal with them if they arise. Consider:

- a) what are the possible internal difficulties (difficult thoughts and feelings, such as low motivation, self-doubt, distress, anger, hopelessness, insecurity, anxiety, etc.)?
- b) what are the possible external difficulties (things aside from thoughts and feelings that might stop you, e.g. lack of money, lack of time, lack of skills, personal conflicts with other people involved)?

If internal difficulties arise in the form of thoughts and feelings, such as:

Then I will use the following mindfulness skills to unhook, accept, drop anchor, etc:

If external difficulties arise, such as:

a)

b)

c)

then I will take the following steps to deal with them:

a)

b)

c)

Step 6: How Realistic Is This Goal, On a Scale of 0-10?

10 = this is completely realistic, I'll definitely do it.

0 = this totally unrealistic, I'll never do it.

Your goals need to be reasonably realistic: at least a 7. So if you can't score at least a 7, then change the goal - make it smaller, simpler, easier until you *can* score a 7. If necessary, change the goal altogether.

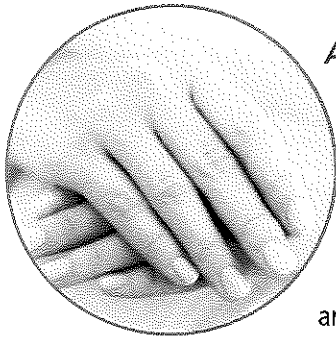
Step 7. Who Are You Going To Share This With?

Research shows that if you make a public commitment to your goal (i.e. if you state your goal to at least one other person), then you are far more likely to follow through on it. If you're not willing to do this, then at the very least make a commitment to yourself. But if you really do want the best results, then be sure to make your commitment to somebody else.

Read through your SMART goal one more time, then make a commitment out loud that you are going to follow through on this. Ideally say this aloud to someone else, but if not, say it aloud to yourself.

Activity: A Self-Compassion Exercise

Adapted from The Reality Slap, by Russ Harris



A Compassionate Hand

I invite you now to find a comfortable position in which you are centered and alert. For example, if you're seated in a chair, you could lean slightly forwards, straighten your back, drop your shoulders and press your feet gently onto the floor.

Now bring to mind a current, significant challenge. This might be something that's happening that you don't feel you have the skills to handle. Maybe it's on-going self-criticism. Maybe you are struggling to communicate your thoughts or feelings. Or, you find yourself frequently impatient.

Take a few moments to reflect on the nature of this challenge — to remember what happened, to consider how it is affecting you, and to think about how it might impact your future. And notice what difficult thoughts and feelings arise.

Now pick one of your hands and imagine it's the hand of someone very kind and caring.

Place this hand, slowly and gently, on whichever part of your body experiences the most pain. Perhaps you feel the pain more in your chest, or perhaps in your head, neck or stomach. Wherever it is most intense, lay your hand there. And if you're numb, lay your hand on the part that feels the numbest. (If you're feeling neither pain nor numbness, then simply rest your hand on the center of your chest.)

Allow your hand to rest on you, lightly and gently; feel it against your skin or against your clothes. And feel the warmth flowing from your palm into your body. Now imagine your body softening around this pain: loosening up, softening up and making space. If you're numb, then soften and loosen around that numbness. (And if you're neither hurting nor numb, then imagine in any way you like, that in some magical sense your heart is opening.)

Hold your pain or numbness very gently. Hold it as if it is a crying baby, or a whimpering puppy, or a priceless work of art.

Infuse this gentle action with caring and warmth — as if you are reaching out to someone you care about.

Let the kindness flow from your fingers into your body.

Now use both of your hands in one kind gesture. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Let them gently rest there, and hold yourself kindly. Take as long as you wish to sit in this manner, connecting with yourself, caring for yourself, contributing comfort and support.

After reading this scrip, continue this for as little or as long as you wish: five seconds or five minutes, it doesn't matter. It's the spirit of kindness that counts when you make this gesture, not the duration of it.