# Therapy Session: struggling with feelings of failure and avoiding painful thoughts

T: Sarah, I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me today. Can you tell me what brings you to therapy at this point in your life?

C: Honestly, I've been feeling really stuck lately. I've been avoiding certain activities and thoughts because they make me feel like a failure. I'm not sure how to move forward without getting overwhelmed by those feelings.

T: Those feelings of failure can be really paralyzing, can't they? [defusion] Can you tell me more about what happens when you start to feel that way? What are some of the thoughts that come up for you?

C: Well, I start thinking about all the things I should've done differently in the past, and how I'm not good enough for the things I want to achieve in the future. It's like this constant self-doubt that's always lurking in the background.

T: That sounds really painful. It's like you're stuck in this cycle of self-blame and regret. [acceptance] Can you tell me more about what you're afraid of? What's the worst-case scenario for you if you allow yourself to experience those feelings of failure?

C: I'm afraid that if I give in to those feelings, I'll lose all motivation to try new things, and I'll just be stuck in this rut forever. I'm also afraid that others will see me as a failure, and that I'll be judged and rejected.

T: Those are some pretty intense fears. [values] What's most important to you right now? What are your values that you want to live up to, even if it's scary or difficult?

C: I guess what I value most is being honest with myself and others, and living a life that's authentic and meaningful. But it's hard to do that when I'm so caught up in these feelings of inadequacy.

T: That's a beautiful value to hold onto. [committed-action] What small step could you take today to move closer to living in alignment with that value? Even if it's just a tiny step, what would that be for you?

C: I'm not sure...I guess I could try to write down some of my thoughts and feelings without judgment, just to see what comes up. But it's hard to know where to start.

T: That's a great idea! [present-moment] Let's take a few deep breaths together, and see if we can bring some awareness to the present moment. What do you notice in your body right now?

C: I feel a bit anxious, I guess. My heart is racing a bit, and my stomach is tight.

T: Okay, let's take a few more deep breaths, and see if we can relax those physical sensations. [self-as-context] Can you imagine yourself as a context for your thoughts and feelings, rather than being identified with them?

C: Yeah, I think I can do that. I feel like I'm watching myself from outside my body, looking at these thoughts and feelings like they're just clouds passing by.

T: That's a great start! [defusion] Can you see how those thoughts and feelings are just patterns of language and perception, rather than an absolute truth about who you are?

C: Yeah, I think so. It's like, they're just words and thoughts, and they don't have to define me.

T: Exactly! And what would it be like to approach those thoughts and feelings with curiosity, rather than fear or avoidance? [acceptance]

C: It would be interesting, I guess. I'd like to see what comes up when I approach them with an open mind.

T: That's a great attitude to have! [present-moment] Let's take a few more deep breaths, and see if we can stay present with those thoughts and feelings. What do you notice now?

C: I feel a bit more relaxed, I think. My stomach doesn't feel as tight, and my heart rate has slowed down a bit.

T: That's great! [committed-action] What's one small step you could take today to move closer to living in alignment with your values, even if it's just a tiny step?

C: I think I could try to engage in an activity that I've been putting off, just to see what happens. Maybe I'll write a letter to someone I've been wanting to reach out to.

T: That's a great step to take! [values] What's the value behind taking that action, for you?

C: I guess it's just about being honest and authentic, like I said before. I want to live a life that's true to who I am, even if it's scary or difficult.

T: That's a beautiful value to hold onto. [self-as-context] Can you imagine yourself as a context for your actions and decisions, rather than being controlled by your thoughts and feelings?

C: Yeah, I think I can do that. I feel like I'm watching myself make this decision, and I'm okay with it, even if it's not what my thoughts and feelings are telling me.

T: That's a great start! [defusion] Can you see how those thoughts and feelings are just patterns of language and perception, rather than an absolute truth about who you are?

C: Yeah, I think so. It's like, they're just words and thoughts, and they don't have to define me.

T: Exactly! And what would it be like to approach those thoughts and feelings with kindness and compassion, rather than judgment or avoidance? [acceptance]

C: It would be nice, I guess. I'd like to be kinder to myself, and not be so hard on myself when I make mistakes.

T: That's a great attitude to have! [present-moment] Let's take a few more deep breaths, and see if we can stay present with those thoughts and feelings. What do you notice now?

C: I feel a bit more at peace, I think. I'm not as caught up in those thoughts and feelings as I was before.

T: That's great! [committed-action] What's one small step you could take today to move closer to living in alignment with your values, even if it's just a tiny step?

C: I think I could try to reach out to that person I mentioned earlier, and see what happens.

T: That's a great step to take! [values] What's the value behind taking that action, for you?

C: I guess it's just about being honest and authentic, like I said before. I want to live a life that's true to who I am, even if it's scary or difficult.

T: That's a beautiful value to hold onto. As we wrap up our session today, I want to leave you with a few questions to consider. What are some of the things that you're looking forward to exploring further in our next session?

C: I'm not sure...I guess I'm looking forward to continuing to work through these feelings of failure, and seeing if I can make some progress towards living a more authentic life.

T: That sounds like a great place to start! I'm looking forward to our next session, Sarah. Take care of yourself in the meantime.