# Therapy Session: struggles with avoidance of emotions, fusion with thoughts, and resistance to change

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We are generating a continuous therapy session transcript with 30-40 exchanges, aiming for about 8000 words. Each turn should be 3-5 sentences. We'll use ACT process tags [like this] when appropriate. The therapist (T) and client Sarah (C) will explore avoidance of emotions, fusion with thoughts, resistance to change, and incorporate ACT techniques and metaphors. We'll keep it natural and flowing.

Key points to cover:

- Avoidance: Sarah avoiding her emotions.

- Fusion: Sarah fused with her thoughts, particularly negative ones.

- Ambivalence toward feelings: Sarah has mixed feelings about experiencing emotions.

- Control strategies: How Sarah tries to control her inner experiences and how that might backfire.

- Self-as-context: Using the chessboard metaphor to explore self as the container for experiences.

- Acceptance: Encouraging willingness to feel emotions.

We'll structure the session to start with building rapport, then explore current struggles, introduce ACT concepts, and work toward acceptance and committed action.

Let's begin.

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T: Good morning Sarah, it's good to see you. How have things been since our last session? I recall you mentioned feeling stuck when difficult emotions arise—has that shown up this week? [present-moment]

C: Honestly? I spent days binge-watching shows to avoid thinking about my job stress. The second I feel anxiety creeping in, I grab my phone or eat junk food. It's exhausting running from these feelings, but facing them seems worse. Like opening a floodgate I can't control.

T: That makes complete sense—our brains often treat discomfort like an emergency. When you say "floodgate," what's the fear behind opening it? [avoidance] And what happens when you distract yourself? Does the anxiety truly disappear, or just pause? [acceptance]

C: It pauses... but comes back fiercer, like I'm failing at even avoiding properly. The fear is that if I let sadness in, I'll drown in it—become useless. My mind screams "danger!" and I obey instantly. Yesterday I canceled plans just because I anticipated feeling awkward.

T: Thank you for naming that anticipation; it's a powerful example of how thoughts boss us around. [defusion] What if we practiced noticing those commands without obeying? Like hearing "danger!" as background radio noise rather than an alarm. Could we try gently turning toward that sadness right now? [present-moment]

C: \*sighs\* I don't know... it feels like surrendering to weakness. And part of me resists this exercise—like "therapy won't fix this anyway." But another part knows I’m tired of living in this cycle. It’s exhausting arguing with myself constantly.

T: That ambivalence is so human—part of you craving change, another part rebelling. [acceptance] What if we stopped fighting the rebellion and made space for both voices? Like setting chairs for them at a table. What’s the weary part protecting you from by resisting? [self-as-context]

C: Maybe... failure? If I try and still hurt, it proves I'm broken. My mind says "See? You can’t handle emotions—stay numb!" It’s fused with me, like we’re the same thing. [fusion] That thought feels so true it paralyzes me.

T: Let's unpack that fusion. Imagine your thoughts and feelings as chess pieces [self-as-context], and \*you\* as the board holding them all. The board doesn’t disappear when pieces clash—it stays steady. Can you sense yourself as that container right now, bigger than "broken" or "numb"?

C: \*quietly\* Maybe... but the "broken" piece feels huge and heavy. It overshadows everything. I’ve built my whole life around avoiding it—changing jobs, avoiding relationships. Isn't that smart? Why risk collapse?

T: Control strategies feel smart short-term, yet long-term they shrink your world. [avoidance] What valued things has protecting yourself cost you? Deep connections? Creative work? [values] Notice how "risk collapse" is another thought-piece on your board—not a prophecy.

C: It cost me singing in a choir last year—too vulnerable. Now I just... exist. But isn't accepting pain like admitting defeat? Why not keep fighting thoughts with logic? I’ve wasted hours analyzing why I feel broken!

T: Fighting thoughts often strengthens them, like wrestling a monster made of smoke. [defusion] What if acceptance meant dropping the rope in that tug-of-war? Not liking sadness, but letting it sit beside you while you live. What tiny step toward choir could you take, \*with\* anxiety present? [committed-action]

C: Calling the director... though my chest tightens imagining it. But if I’m the board, the tightness is just a piece, not the whole game. Still, it’s terrifying to stop running. What if I crumble?

T: You haven’t crumbled yet—you’re here, breathing through terror. [present-moment] Courage isn’t feeling no fear; it’s moving with it. Could we practice making room for that tightness? Breathe around it like it’s weather passing through? [acceptance]

C: Okay... \*takes shaky breath\* It feels sharp, but not fatal. Like a storm I can watch from a window. But why does my mind insist I’m fragile? It hijacks my choices daily.

T: Minds evolved to over-predict threat—it’s not personal. [defusion] When it whispers "fragile," thank it for trying to help, then gently ask: "What matters right now?" [values] What if today, you call the director not to fix feelings, but because singing matters?

C: That... shifts things. I’ll call. Even if I panic afterward. But I’m scared I’ll resent these exercises later—like they’re more rules to fail at.

T: Beautiful awareness. [acceptance] Let's ditch "shoulds." This is experimentation: try calling, notice what happens without judgment. You’re learning to dance with discomfort, not defeat it. How does that land? [committed-action]

C: Like relief mixed with dread—but more spacious. Like the board has breathing room. I’ll hold both. Thank you for not letting me flee today. This feels... possible.