



Untethering from Cognitive Distortions with
Acceptance and Integration Training™
Melanie McGhee, L.C.S.W.

WHAT IS ACCEPTANCE AND INTEGRATION TRAINING?

Acceptance and Integration Training (AAIT) is an emerging and promising transpersonal approach to counseling, coaching, and spiritual direction, intended to free practitioners and clients from the energetic tensions that keep us bound to pain and limitations. Whereas traditional talk therapy relies on insight, cognitive effort, or mindfulness skills to produce change and relief, AAIT employs a spectrum of protocols to integrate polarized psychological energies. Such integrations tend to resolve problems, giving relief from suffering, while contributing to spiritual well-being and wholeness.

Spiritual well-being can be typified by increases in compassion and awareness, and decreases in reactivity. With AAIT, clients naturally experience decreased reactivity to previously triggering situations, along with expansions in present-focused awareness and compassion. With continued practice and additional training, clients and practitioners experience the intention that is at the heart of AAIT: waking up from the bad dream of who we think we are—the false-conditioned self.

This non-historic iterative approach evolves into a path for self-care, by both therapists and clients seeking a means to resolve problems, cultivate more satisfying relationships, and live a life of meaning. As clients embrace their home practice, the rewards of getting liberated from the compulsiveness of the false-conditioned self become evident.

AAIT aims to advance the field by empowering healing arts practitioners and our clients to readily reclaim and restore our inner state amidst life's challenges while dismantling the illusion of separation.

About the Founder:

Melanie McGhee, L.C.S.W. is the founder of Acceptance and Integration Training™. In addition to facilitating training and a clinical fellowship in AAIT, she has maintained a psychotherapy practice since 1984. Her practice is devoted to serving healing arts professionals who struggle with mood disorders. Ms. McGhee has studied with several

master therapists among them are Bob and Mary Goulding (founders of Redecision Therapy) Dick Olney (founder of Self Acceptance Training) and Zivorad Slavinski (founder of Spiritual Technology). AAIT is based on her years of study and practice with these masters along with a decades long interest in yoga and nondual philosophy.

Melanie is the author of an award-winning book, *An Illumined Life*, and has served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Utah, University of Tennessee, and Maryville College. When not chasing after their puppy, Will, she and her husband, David Patterson, Ph.D. are collaborating on research and a book about AAIT.

AAIT THEORY, PRINCIPLES AND PHASES

The theory, principles, and phases of AAIT form a crucible for transformation. The more completely we understand these, the stronger the crucible and the more impactful the work. The principles, serve as guides when we have wandered into the weeds of helping another or when trying to untangle ourselves from some limitation. They can serve as trail markers, helping us stay on course. While the phases insure our collaboration with our clients remains strong.

At its simplest, ACCEPTANCE + INTEGRATION = FREEDOM is the theory of AAIT. However, that's not easy to test.

AAIT Theory:

Psychological and interpersonal distress can be attenuated and remediated through a process of recognition, acceptance, and integration of associated energetic polarities driving the distress.

Such integration results in greater acceptance of self, others, and situations. The integration process produces an increased sense of freedom and an ability to make skillful choices, in response to previously problematic triggering situations.

Integration methods are learned and perpetuated by ongoing practice of the procedures.

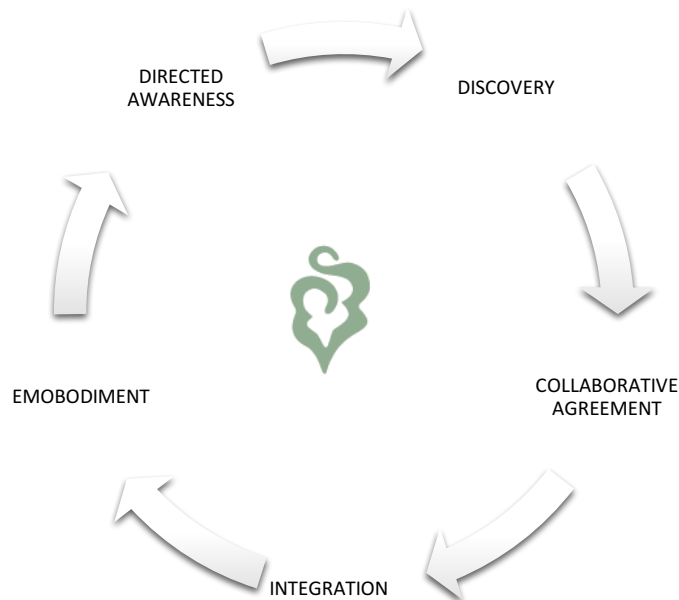
AAIT Principles:

1. The true self is not encumbered by the limitations of a narrative. The true self is a Being.
2. Taking responsibility for and tending to our inner state is the source of freedom.
3. Self-acceptance is a means and a measure of well-being.
4. Resolving reactivity can reveal higher states of consciousness.

5. The integration of two opposing states tends to alleviate psychological suffering.
6. The non-dual states of empty consciousness are an indication and mechanism of change. Cultivating an awareness of these states contributes to increases in compassion and present-focused attention, and decreases in reactivity.

Phases

Providing clients with a predictable rhythm of our time together supports them in feeling more at ease. They know what to expect. Moreover, the nature of these phases effortlessly instills the ability to engage in self-reflection, creating greater intra-psyche freedom and flexibility. Within the crucible of these phases is where training meets treatment.



In addition to addressing cognitive distortions, below are a few other applications:

Even as the creative application of this approach grows, healing-arts practitioners currently use AAIT to address the following goals, situations, and problems:

Psychological and Personal Wellness

- Mood disorders such as bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety
- Trauma
- Fears and phobias
- Addictions

- Emotional eating
- Self-esteem and confidence
- Doula services, including birth trauma
- Creativity
- Lack of confidence and self-esteem
- Anger management
- Shyness
- Goal achievement
- Decision-making
- Health and body-care issues
- The list continues to grow.

Relationship Wellness

- Healing complicated emotional relationships
- Healing emotional tension which inhibits intimacy
- Eliminating charged reactivity
- Increasing empathy and compassion
- Increasing acceptance of self and others
- Conflict resolution
- Assertiveness
- Improving listening skills
- The list continues to grow.

Spiritual Wellness

- AAIT, as a paradigm for spiritual well-being and growth, is congruent with the teachings of many spiritual traditions from the Bible to Buddhism.
- Removes layers of delusion that veil the real self, eliminating emotional, psychological, and spiritual charges that conceal our essential nature.
- Easily adopt qualities that are expressions of spiritual values such as patience, understanding, compassion.
- Spiritual directors and coaches use AAIT to help clients release the obstacles to achieving goals and living professed values.
- While applying this work, you begin to release deeply embedded impressions. These impressions contribute to our compulsive reactivity. In Sanskrit, these are called samskaras and form veils that cloud the experience of oneness. These veils are called malas and shroud the pure essence of consciousness abiding within; they distort our view of ourselves, others, and life.
- Most practitioners experience increases in compassion and present-focused attention, with decreases in attachment and reactivity, resulting in a steadier state of being and increased self-awareness.



COMMON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Adapted from David Burns, The Feeling Good Handbook

Get to know the patterns of self-limiting thinking and other cognitive habits. Learn to distort to identify your own patterns. In this way, become a better witness to the monkeys living rent free in your mind. Imagine you are you are playing hide-and-seek, learning to “catch” your self-limiting thinking. Challenge and transcend these cognitive habits.

Common cognitive distortions adapted from David Burns, *The Feeling Good Handbook*

1. **All or nothing thinking:** Looking at things in absolute black and white categories.
2. **Overgeneralization:** Viewing a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
3. **Mental filters:** Dwelling on the negatives and ignoring the positives.
4. **Discounting the positive:** Insisting that your accomplishments or positive qualities “don’t count.”
5. **Jumping to conclusions:**
 - a. MIND READING – assuming people are reacting negatively to you when there is no evidence for this assumption.
 - b. FORTUNE TELLING – arbitrarily predicting that things will turn out badly.
6. **Magnification or minimization:** Blowing things up way out of proportion or shrinking their importance inappropriately.
7. **Emotional reasoning:** Reasoning from how you feel: “I feel like an idiot. So, I really must be one.” Or, “I don’t feel like doing this, so I’ll put it off.”
8. **“Should” statements;** Criticizing yourself or other people with “shoulds” or “shouldn’t’s, musts, oughts, and have to’s.”

9. **Labeling:** Identifying with your shortcomings. Instead of saying, “I made a mistake,” you say, “I’m a jerk, a fool, or a loser.”
10. **Personalization and blame:** Blaming yourself for something you weren’t entirely responsible for, or blaming others and overlooking ways that your own attitudes and behaviors may contribute to a problem.



RECOGNIZING SELF-LIMITING COGNITIVE ACTIVITY

Disrupting thoughts and feelings that tend to constrict thinking is a challenge for many of us, especially for those who journey with a mood disorder. Ivana End of Words (IEW), the Universal Process (movie version), Deep PEAT 2, Verbal Reduction and Expansion (VRE) all tend to be *quite* useful in helping our clients untangle from self-limiting thoughts and other habitual ways of thinking that bind them to limited ideas or narratives.

Often these types of thoughts are based in worry about the future or regret about the past. They distort by limiting perception and perspective in the present. Regardless, we can easily spot and untether from distorted thoughts and help our clients do the same.

For those who are struggling with dysregulated mood, the thoughts they are having, the stories they are telling themselves feel completely real, like carved in stone. They have a kind of heaviness to them. They feel true.

Walking your clients through recognizing cognitive habits as outlined below can help in these ways:

- aids in gaining experiential understanding that they are NOT the thought
- prepares them for the work of untangling from the thought
- inspires a willingness to engage in home practice aimed at embodying a more satisfying state of being.

Approached with lighthearted vigilance, spotting self-limiting cognitive habits can begin to feel like a game of hide and seek. That said, when depression or grief is heavy and complicated, it does NOT feel like a game. For these habits limit and skew their perspective, causing a great deal of pain. Supporting our clients in untangling from them when they are NOT with us empowers them to *take responsibility for and tend to their state as the source of their freedom.*

Helping your client learn to recognize a self-limiting cognitive habit:

1. Identify the disruptive thought. Invite your client to FEEL the thought. This does two things. First, the client can begin to feel that they are HAVING the thought, the thought isn't having them. The invitation FEEL encourages them to experience the thought rather than just thinking it. This engages and invites the client to sense thoughts, images, emotions and sensations associated with the thought, that are likely below conscious awareness.
2. Ask them, *"Can you feel yourself feeling the thought or having the thought?"* This question comes from spiritual technology trainer and author, Vladimir Stojakovic. The question helps our clients consciously recognize themselves separate from the thought, someone who is HAVING the thought, closer to true self.

If they can't feel themselves having the thought, if the thought feels like it's them, they are likely stuck in an identification with the thought. Identifications and related identities are best addressed using Deep PEAT 4 or Integra (Both taught in AAIT Fellowship Training Group).

Even if they can't feel themselves having the thought, move to step three. Just take note of how entangled this cognitive construct may be.

3. Ask your client, *"Does the thought feel kind of heavy, like it's solid like marble or granite?"* Yes, this is leading the client. Most have never considered their thoughts in this way and feel a kind of relief with the description.
4. Pointing to something in the room ask your client, *"Think the thought, 'There is a blue ball in the corner.' Does the thought feel heavy like matter or light like air?"*

Thoughts that are not distorted tend to be more present based and feel lighter.

Try it out. FEEL a normal thought, something like, *"It's hot /cold outside."* Does it feel like air or earth, matter? Now FEEL a self-limiting thought. Does that feel like air or matter?



UNIVERSAL PROCESS
Developed by Zivorad Slavinski

The integration of two opposing states can alleviate psychological suffering.

The universal process (UP) is a simple oscillation technique that typically culminates in a psychological integration. With one integration, the problem being addressed is typically resolved. With repeated integrations, there is a gradually expanded sense of wholeness and wellbeing.

UP can be used to resolve problems and integrate various needs and feelings. Such integrations aid in decreasing reactivity to the various challenges of life. It is one of the foundational methods you will teach clients.

Essentially, in this process we alternate between experiencing the two opposites, taking a breath at each turn. After two or three rounds, you feel/experience them at the same time while taking a breath.

Universal Process Steps:

1. Identify the polarity associated with a problem and an opposite.
2. Instruct your client to find an experience of the first polarity, feel or experience that polarity, briefly describe it and take a breath. It might be a thought, image, emotion, sensation or some combination. Your client can use their own experience of the polarity or some situation in which they saw someone else have that experience or the way they imagine that state or polarity would feel. Experience that feeling. In other words, they can lean into what you imagine a state would feel like.
3. Instruct your client to find an experience of and feel the second polarity. Ask them to describe it to you and take a breath.
4. Repeat steps two and three once or twice more.
5. Instruct your client to feel / experience both polarities at the same time and take a full breath.

6. Ask what is happening between them. **This is an essential step for the success of the procedure.** After two or three rounds (sometimes more) of rocking between two opposing states, the polarities will generally merge, integrate. Another way to inquire about this is to ask, “*Are they one for you or can you feel them separately?*”
7. Repeat steps two – five until your client reaches integration – usually two to five rounds.

Polarities integrate in three different ways:

1. They vanish. What is left in their place is emptiness.
2. Your client can feel there is no difference between them.
3. Polarities visually merge and cannot be experienced separately, your client cannot feel one without the other.

After integration, ask your client the following **control questions** to insure a complete process:

1. “*Are you able to feel them separately?*” They should NOT be able to feel one without the other.
2. “*In the future, will you be able to manifest both with equal ease? In other words, will you be able to choose between the two states?*” Often, in the state immediately following an integration, the question makes little sense because you cannot feel them separately in that moment. Another way to get at this is to check on the original problem.

Example using Receiving / Giving

*Find an experience of receiving, feel **receiving**, tell me something about receiving.*

*Find an experience of giving, feel **giving**, tell me something about giving.*

*Find an experience of receiving, feel **receiving** and tell me something about it.*

*Find an experience of giving, feel **giving**, tell me something about giving.*

*Find an experience of receiving, feel **receiving** and tell me something about it.*

*Find an experience of giving, feel **giving**, tell me something about giving.*

*Feel / experience **giving and receiving at the same time**, take a full easy breath and notice what’s happening between them.*

If they have merged, the process is complete. If they have not, repeat the process. After two rounds or so, use IEW to explore what could be good and bad about the polarities integrating.

Universal Process Short Instructions:

Identify the polarities.

With each pass, find an experience of the polarity, feel / experience it, breathe and describe.

_____ vs _____

Feel both at the same time, full easy breath

What’s happening between them?

Are they one for you or can you feel them separately?

Stabilization

Fill with light.

Forgive if applicable.

What do you know now that you didn’t before?

How will knowing that inform your thoughts, words or deeds in the coming days?

Universal Process “*Movie Version*” Instructions:

1. Identify the self-limiting thought. Ask your client, *if that idea was a movie or novel what would the title be?* Give it a short title. Name it. Remember that a distortion feels static or heavy, while other thoughts feel more dynamic, airy.
2. Ask, *what movie or story would you rather be watching or reading? What story might someone who is in a more pleasing state tell themselves?* This story will likely not feel as “real” as the distortion. That doesn’t matter. Encourage them to

feel it AS IF they felt it. With the UP, we don't need to solely rely on our own experiences, imagine someone who feels it.

3. Ask your client to find an experience of the first story, FEEL it, describe it and take a breath. It can be the same experience.
4. Ask your client to find an experience of the second story, FEEL it, describe it and take a breath.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 once or twice more.
6. Ask your client to take a breath, experience both stories at the SAME TIME.
7. Notice what's happening between the two stories. If your client can separate them, if they can feel one without the other, repeat the process. In the beginning this can take up to four rounds. With just a bit of practice, you will likely integrate in the first two rounds. The test question is to ask if you can separate them. After two or three rounds, you could use IEW to facilitate integration --- what could be bad about them merging? What could be good about them merging.

A stable integration occurs in two ways:

1. they vanish and you can't find either story anymore - if that happens, you will still ask yourself if you can feel one without the other
2. you cannot feel a discernable difference between the stories, they swirl or mingle and you can't feel them separately.

After checking on the original problem, encourage your client to pause in the spaciousness of the integrated state with a few easy breaths, or focus on the feeling in the body and expand that with the breath.

If the problem does not feel fully resolved, consider other points of view and work from the other point of view about the problem.



IVANA END OF WORDS CLIENT INSTRUCTIONS

Developed by Ivana Tomanovic

The non-dual states of empty consciousness are an indication and mechanism of change. Cultivating an awareness of these states contributes to increases in compassion and present-focused attention, and decreases in reactivity.

Ivana End of Words (IEW) can be used to facilitate an integration by disrupting hidden, subconscious resistance to integration. It can also be used to address a variety of unsatisfying suboptimal states of being.

Instructions

With IEW, we are using the fundamental polarities of good and bad to facilitate integration. It is important to understand that all situations and experiences have both good and bad. Think of a bad situation or person, can you find something good about it or them? Think of a good situation or person, can you find something good about it or them?

Untangling from distorted thoughts and feelings:

1. Identify the self-limiting thought or feeling. It might also be a cluster of thoughts and feelings. However, the more specific the better.
2. FEEL the thought or feeling (TF). *What's bad about HAVING this thought/feeling, (insert self-limiting thought)?* Repeat the thought or feeling silently Be careful, you are not debating the content of the TF. You are only considering, what is bad about HAVING that specific TF.
3. FEEL the TF. *What's good about HAVING the TF, _____?*
4. FEEL the TF. *What ELSE is bad about having the TF, _____?*
5. FEEL the TF. *What ELSE is good about having the TF, _____?*
6. REPEAT steps 4 and 5 until you reach the end of your words. There is a bit more inner spaciousness. It will start to feel like you are reaching. Pause there.

7. FEEL the TF. Now does it feel like air or earth?
 - a. If it feels like air, fill yourself, particularly the space where the TF used to live with light, forgiveness, thankfulness. Nature abhors a vacuum.
 - b. If it feels like earth, repeat from the beginning with holistic processing from other relevant points of view about the original self-limiting TF.



Next Steps:

- Practice, practice, practice. Choose a list of opposites and integrate daily
- Reserve your spot for AAIT Essentials in Asheville, Spring 2019
- Apply for the 2019 – 2020 AAIT Fellowship Training Group
(visit AAIT.solutions for more info)

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