

# Acceptance and commitment therapy case studies in focused ACT (FACT)

## Case study: Prison setting

### Client background:

Martin, a 29-year-old man incarcerated for burglary, presents behavioural challenges within the prison. He has frequent outbursts of anger directed towards staff and other inmates and reports feeling "trapped" and unable to manage his frustration. Martin also expresses shame about his past actions but has difficulty connecting with any sense of purpose or identity beyond criminal behaviour.

**Setting:** A brief therapy session with Anita, during a prison behavioural health consultation.

### Intervention:

#### Contextual interview:

Anita begins by exploring Martin's life context, asking about his relationships before prison, his routines within the prison, and his long-term hopes. Martin shares that growing up, he often resorted to anger when feeling judged or disrespected. His hopes include seeing his young daughter after release, but fears rejection based on his past.

#### Problem context:

Martin is asked to rate his distress about anger on a scale from 1 to 10. He gives it a 9 and shares that he's driven by social interactions that feel disrespectful. The focus shifts to how avoidance strategies (e.g., acting aggressively or withdrawing) keep him stuck, rather than moving closer to his long-term goal of reconnecting with family.

## Case study: Prison setting (continued)

### Metaphor: The web of life:

Using the "Web of Life" metaphor, Martin is guided to view his current behaviours (e.g., anger, disconnection) as part of a tangled web. Some threads (avoidance of respect issues) feel protective but catch him in a spiral of repeated conflict. He is encouraged to notice opportunities for stepping outside the web and observing without reacting.

### Present moment practice:

Anita facilitates a grounding exercise: Martin places his feet flat on the floor and notices his breathing, his hands, and his heart rate while imagining such triggering moments of conflict. Through this, he learns to pause during those moments to create space between reaction and action.

### Behavioural experiment:

Martin plans to practise a brief form of defusion when triggered by disrespect: silently labelling the anger as a thought ("Here's my anger about being disrespected") instead of fusing with it. He practices this experiment within small, everyday conflicts in the prison.

### Follow-up plan:

During another brief check-in, Anita would build on this by introducing a "values check": asking what type of person Martin wants to be for his daughter and structuring his actions within prison around that identity.