

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

## Case study: Hospital ward

### Client background:

Evelyn is a 65-year-old woman admitted to an oncology ward with advanced breast cancer. She feels a sense of hopelessness, reporting grief over the life she is losing due to her condition. Evelyn is withdrawn, reluctant to speak with staff or family, and expresses that she feels like a "burden."

**Setting:** A consultation by the ward psychologist, Melissa, within a 20-minute session during daily rounds.

### Intervention:

#### Contextual interview:

Evelyn is asked about her life before her diagnosis to explore her love-work-play-health context. She shares that she used to love gardening and spending time outdoors. Talking about her relationships, she becomes tearful about not being able to physically help her family anymore.

#### Problem context:

Evelyn rates her distress about losing independence and being a "burden" on her family as 10 out of 10. Melissa carefully acknowledges and validates her pain but pivots towards identifying small aspects of meaning she still holds. For example, Evelyn speaks about how much she still cares for her family.

## Case study: Hospital ward (continued)

### Two life paths metaphor:

The "Two Life Paths" metaphor is introduced. One path involves avoiding conversations with her family and staying withdrawn to protect them from her perceived burden. The other involves opening up by sharing something meaningful - and perhaps challenging - with them, even in small, low-intensity ways, such as asking for their company during meals.

### Present moment awareness:

Using breathwork, Evelyn is asked to slow down and focus on how her body feels when imagining sitting with her family. Melissa gently helps her notice any warmth in her chest or subtle shifts in physical sensation (e.g., her shoulders loosening when imagining being with them). This creates a sense of grounding in the present moment.

### Behavioural experiment:

Evelyn commits to an experiment: expressing gratitude or love to one family member during their next visit. She shares that she'll simply tell her daughter, "I love having you here." This acts as a small step to re-engage in meaningful connection.

### Follow-up plan:

A subsequent brief intervention could explore Evelyn's sense of contribution outside physical capabilities, reinforcing how her presence provides emotional support to her family. The FACT framework continues to integrate short-term skills into meaningful, values-driven action.