

The Clean and Dirty Discomfort Diary

Sometimes the difference between the ordinary discomfort that arises in the course of living and encountering problems, versus the discomfort that develops because of the use of avoidance and control strategies, is called clean versus dirty discomfort in ACT.

The easiest way to appreciate this difference is to keep a clean versus dirty discomfort diary for a week. This diary will help you pinpoint what triggers avoidance and your key avoidance strategies. Once you are aware of these, you can use ACT interventions like defusion, mindfulness, and acceptance of discomfort to get you moving in the direction of your values.

Over the course of a week, use the table on the next page to record your responses each time you encounter difficult thoughts or feelings.

Each time you experience such a situation in which you feel 'stuck' or where you are struggling with unwanted or difficult thoughts and feelings, complete one row as follows:

1. Describe the situation - what happened to cause your discomfort?
2. What was your initial reaction? What did you think or feel? What immediately 'showed up' in the way of thoughts, feelings, and sensations?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 0 = none and 10 = extreme, what was your level of distress?
4. What actions did you take to avoid the discomfort? Did you struggle with things you didn't like? Did you criticize or bully yourself? Did you try to shove your reactions back or pretend they weren't there? Did you try to distract yourself with food, alcohol, smoking, TV, etc.?
5. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 0 = none and 10 = extreme, how did your distress level change after your distractive action?

Dr. Jo Nash

Clean Versus Dirty Discomfort Diary					
Situation	Clean Discomfort (My initial reaction)	Initial distress level	Dirty Discomfort (What I did with my initial reactions)	Secondary distress level	