

# ACT, Aging, and Alzheimer's: Reflections on how to support values-based living in older adults

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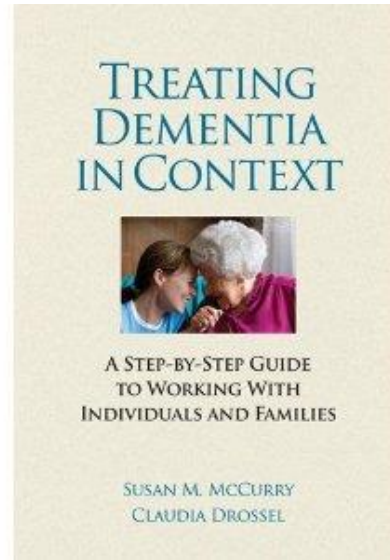
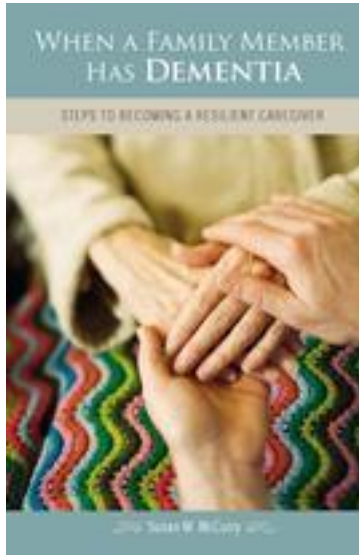
October 14, 2023

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# Conflict of Interest Disclosure



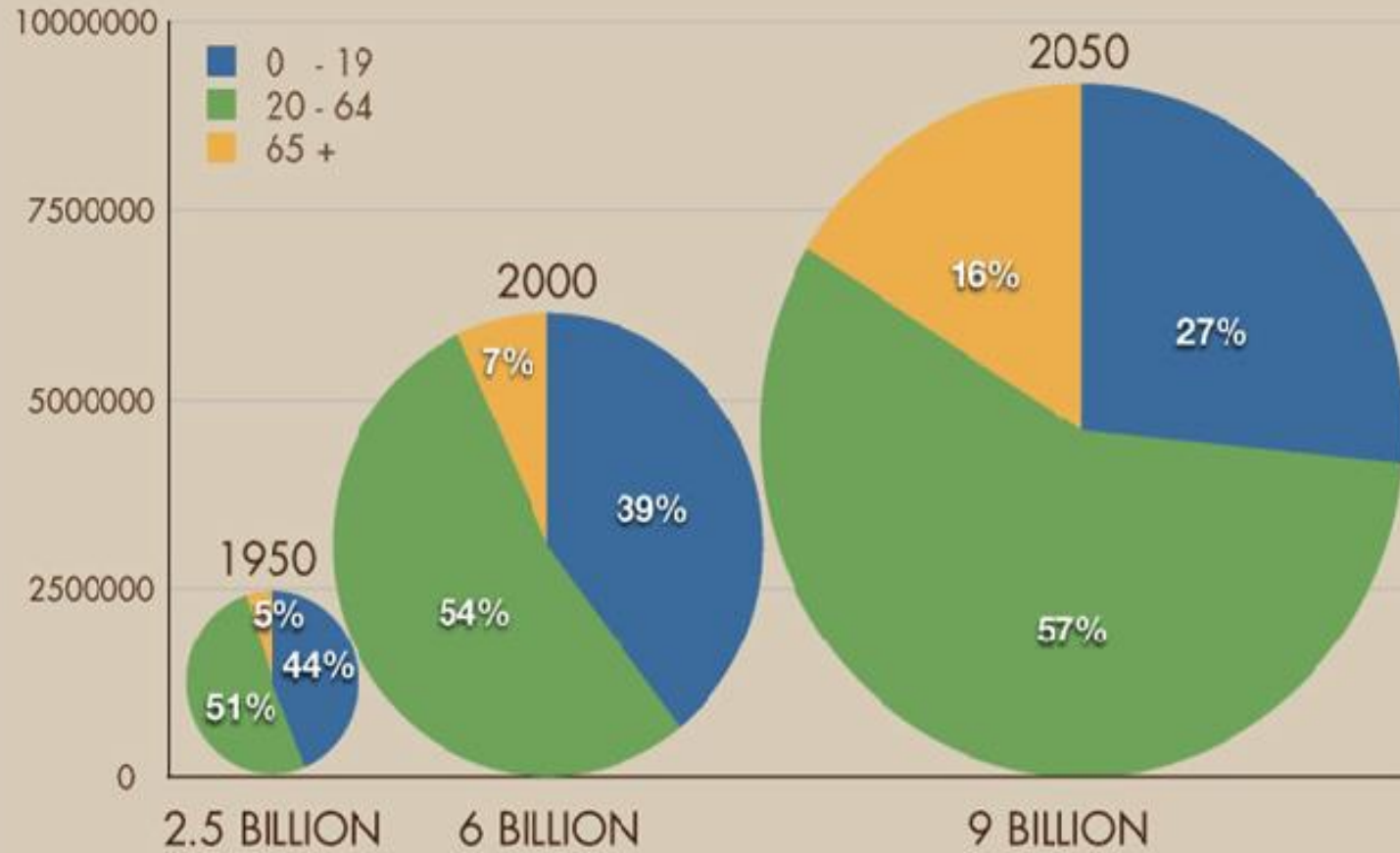
*Some content from this presentation will be derived from materials that Dr. McCurry has published on dementia care.*



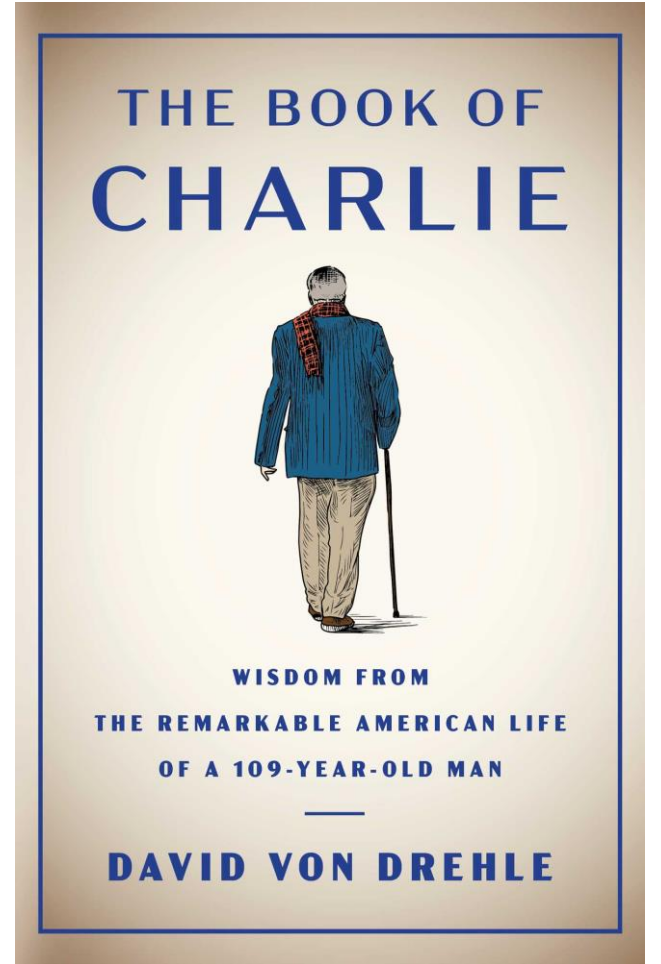
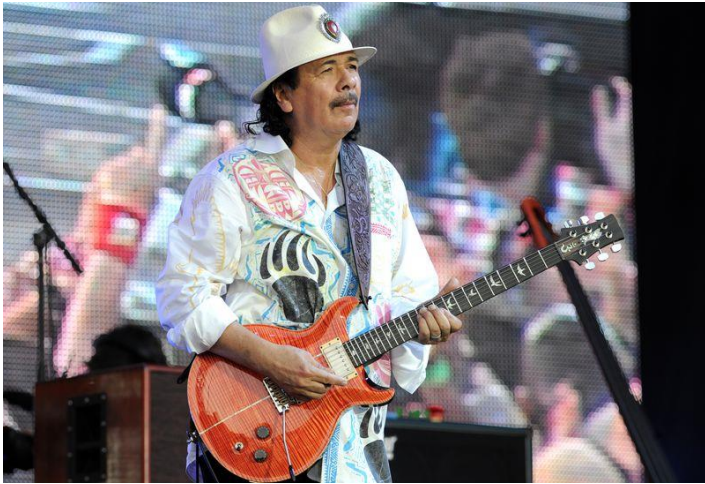
REFLECTION:  
“At what age is a person  
old?”

1. In childhood, how did you view old people?
2. How do you view them now?
3. What are your deepest fears about aging?
4. What are you most looking forward to (or what is your greatest pleasure now)?

# POPULATION BY AGE GROUP











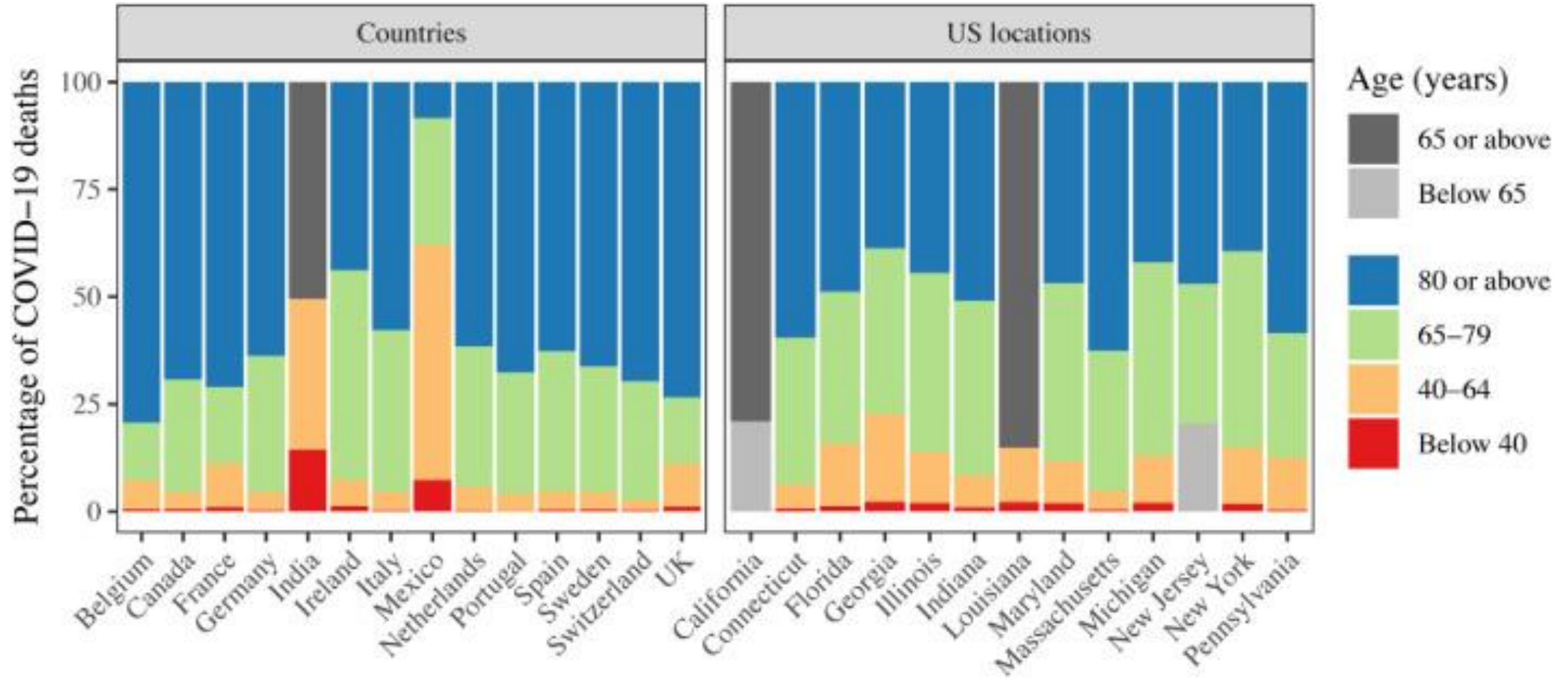
needing retired senior complainers Poor forgetful Interesting  
 experienced Lonely Sick slower retired Old good incompetent Old bad weak poor  
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 confused vulnerable targets boring health Sick



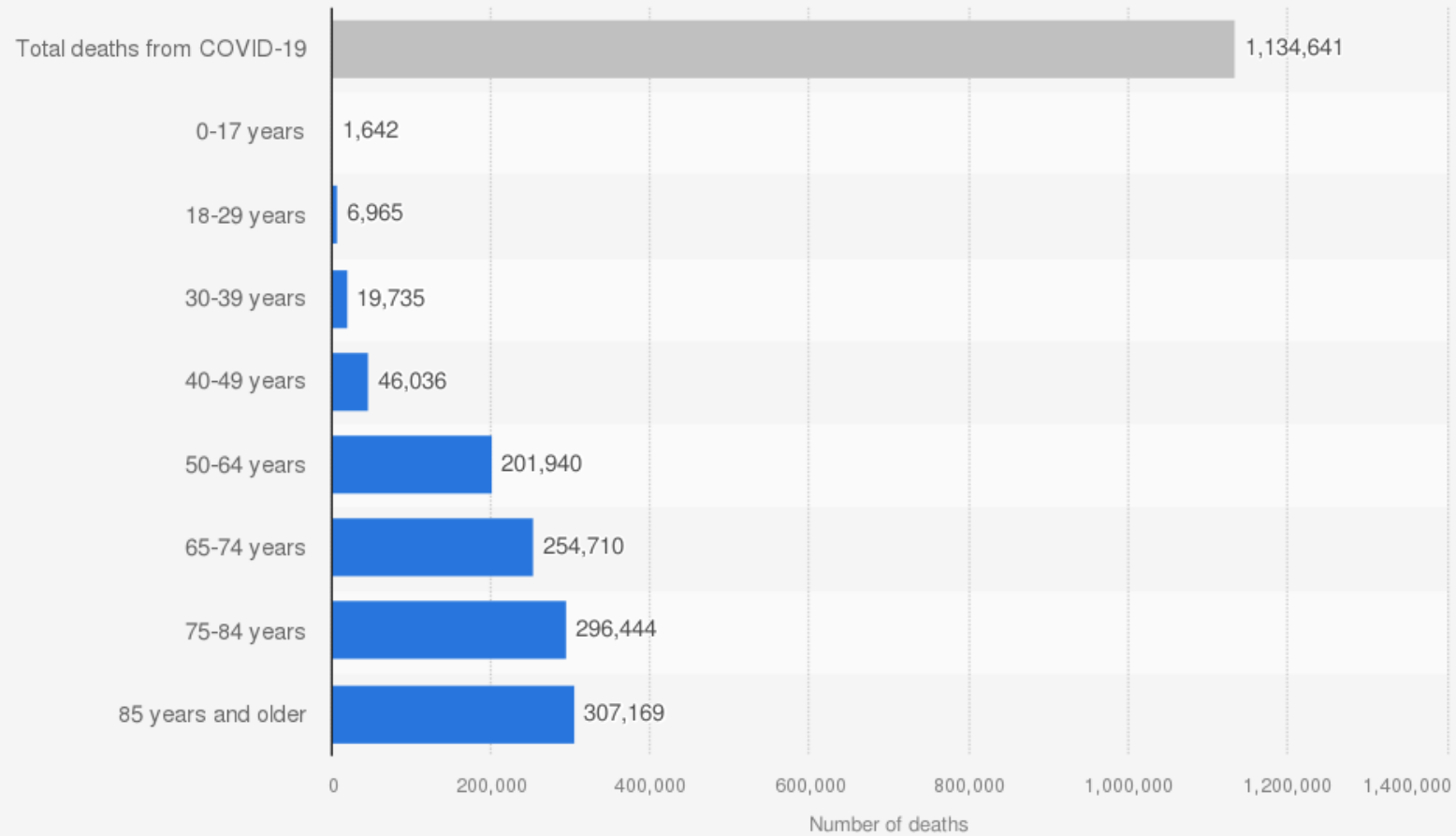




# COVID-19 and Mortality by Age



## Number of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) deaths in the U.S. as of June 14, 2023, by age\*



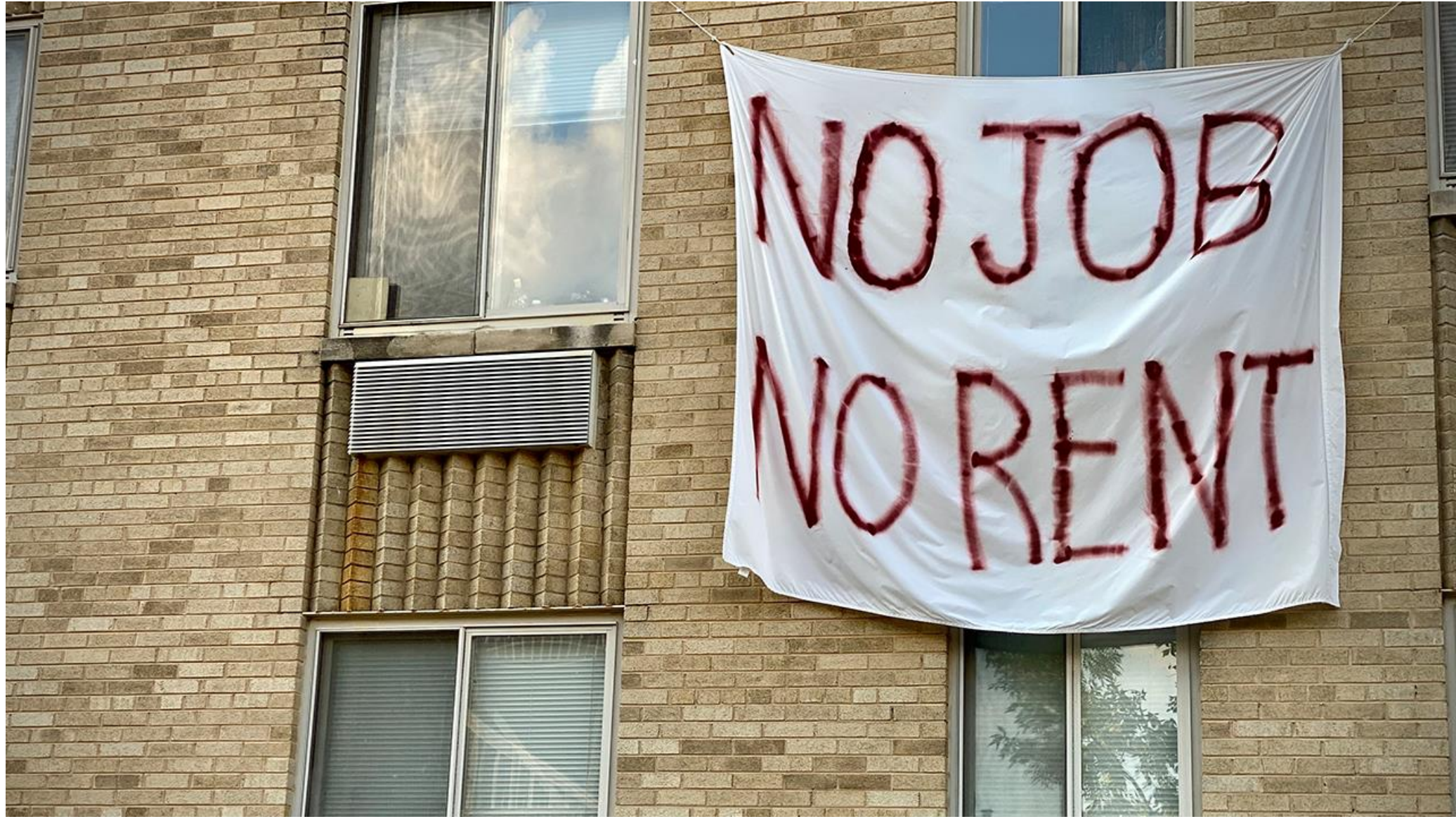
**Sources**  
NCHS; CDC  
© Statista 2023

**Additional Information:**  
United States; January 1, 2020 to June 14, 2023

The background is a dark blue gradient with several faint, light blue icons of viruses or cells scattered across it. The text is centered and reads:

# **COVID-19:** **LESSONS LEARNED**

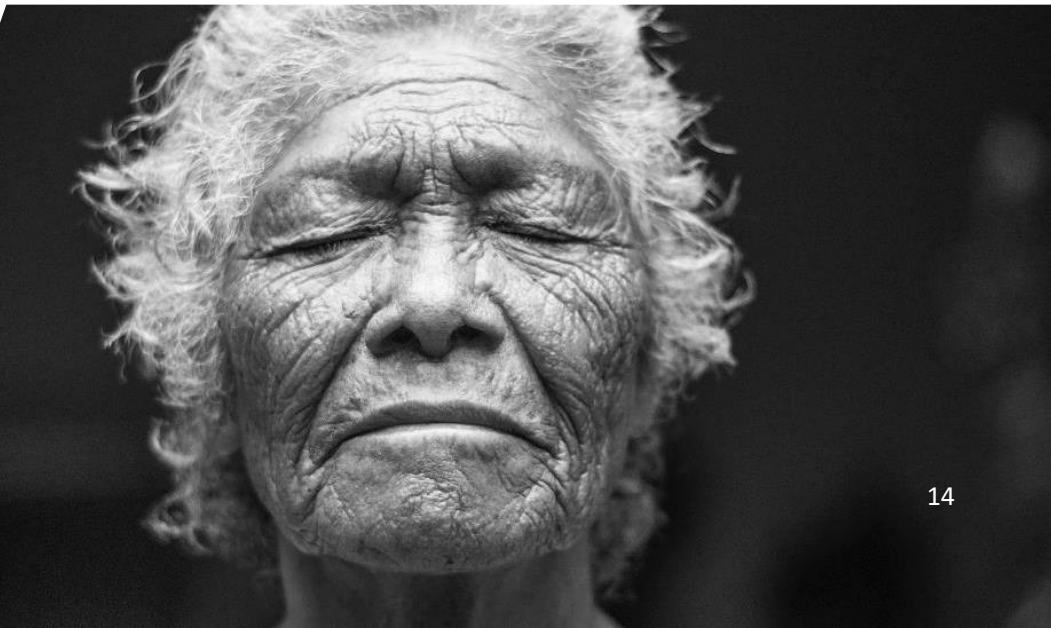
























# Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

## The Central Therapeutic Process:

### *Psychological Flexibility*

“the ability to contact the present moment more fully... and to change or persist in behavior when doing so serves valued ends”

Hayes, et al 2006

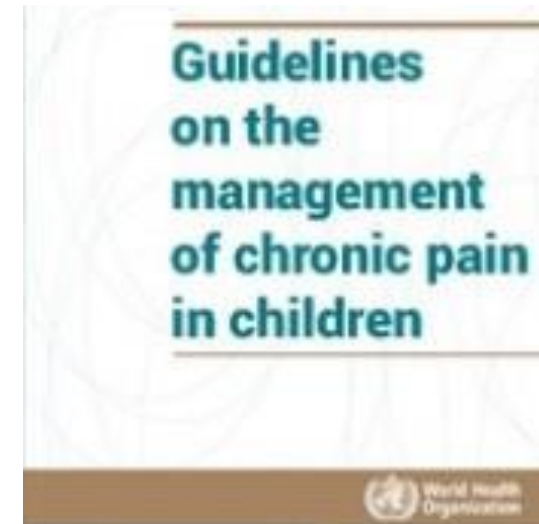
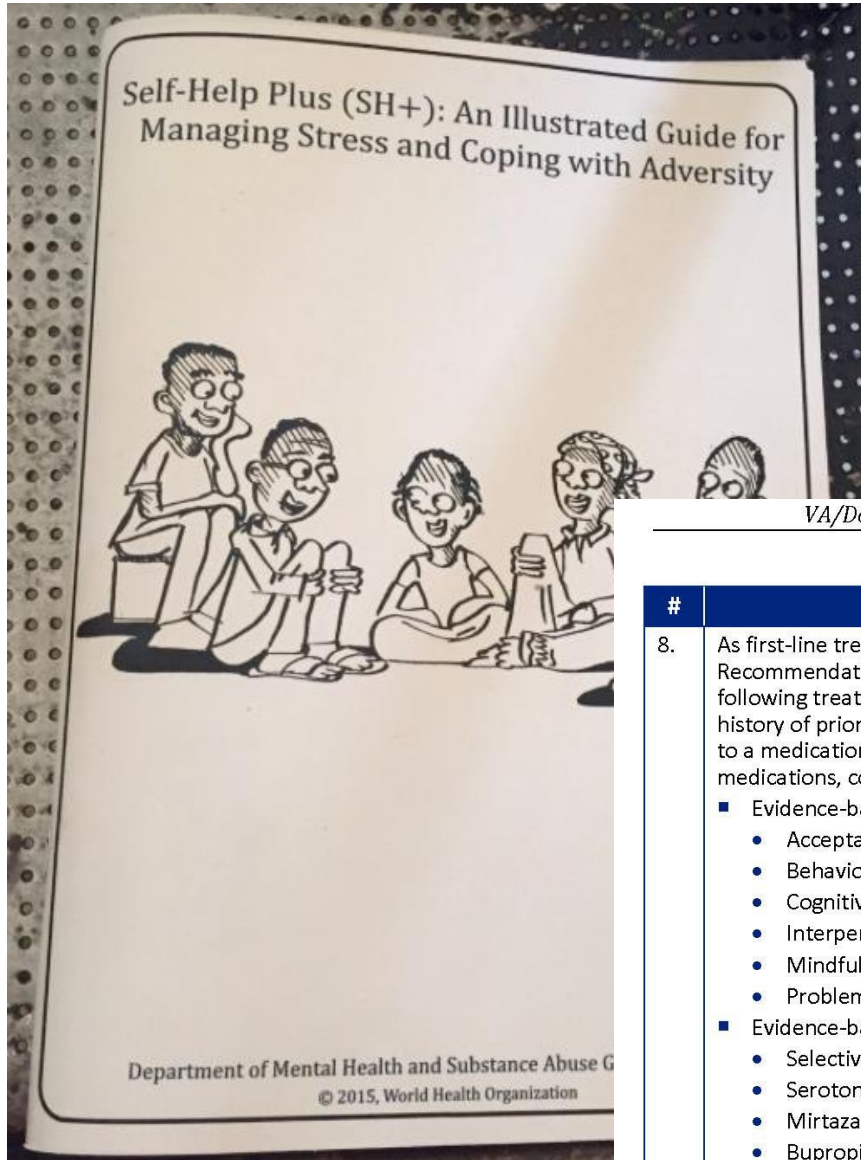


## Research on ACT (n=1051 RCTs as of September 2023)

1. Almost 40 years of research covering nearly every area of human functioning in mental, behavioral, and social health, including in older adults
2. Research is global and comes from all parts of the world, not just WEIRD\* countries
3. Increasing focus on processes of change, not just outcomes

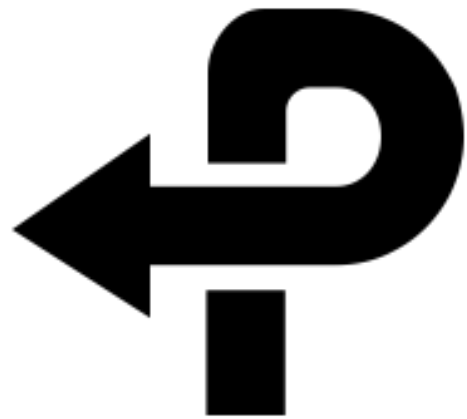
\*WEIRD = Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic



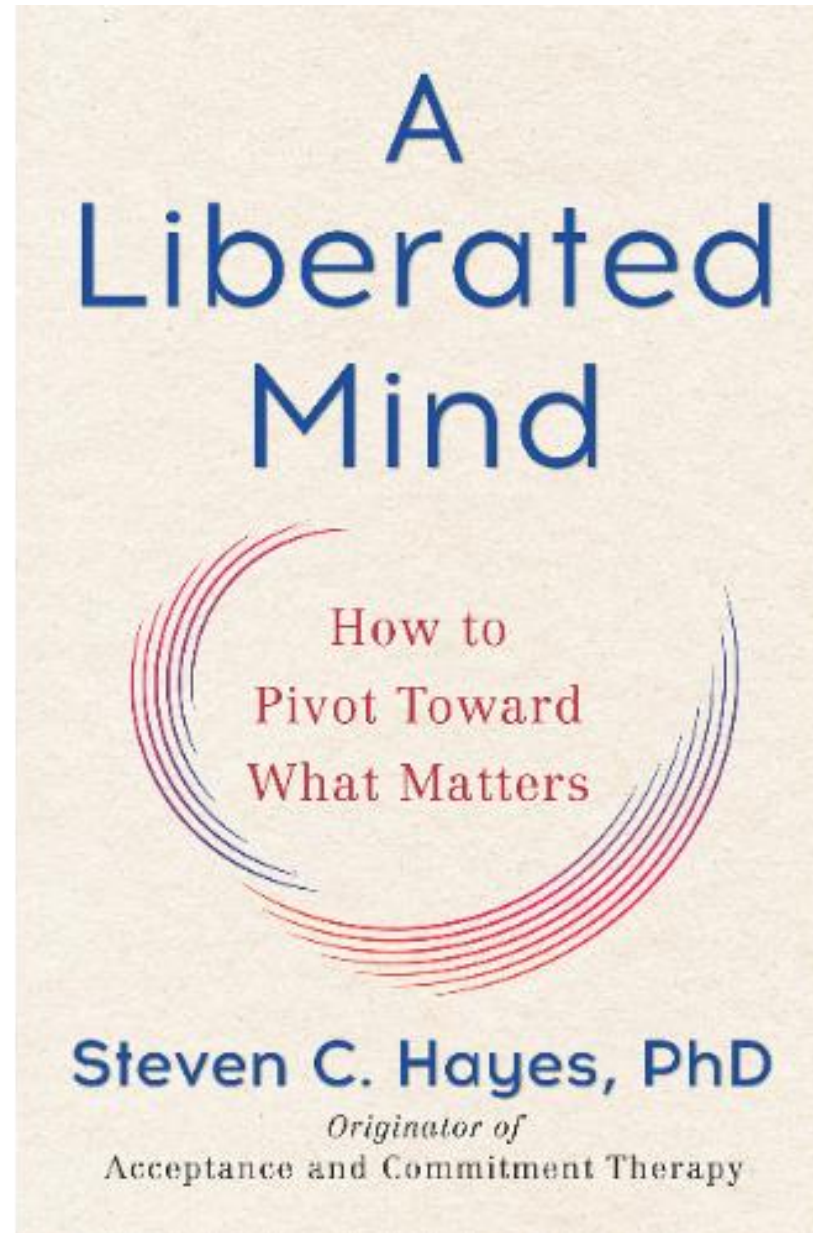


VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Major Depressive Disorder

#	Recommendation	Strength	Category
8.	<p>As first-line treatment for uncomplicated mild to moderate MDD (see Recommendation 17 for complex cases), we recommend offering one of the following treatments based on patient preference, safety/side effect profile, history of prior response to a specific medication, family history of response to a medication, concurrent medical illnesses, concurrently prescribed medications, cost of medication and provider training/competence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Evidence-based psychotherapy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)</li> <li>• Behavioral therapy/behavioral activation (BT/BA)</li> <li>• Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)</li> <li>• Interpersonal therapy (IPT)</li> <li>• Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT)</li> <li>• Problem-solving therapy (PST)</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Evidence-based pharmacotherapy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (except fluvoxamine) (SSRIs)</li> <li>• Serotonin–norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRIs)</li> <li>• Mirtazapine</li> <li>• Bupropion</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ The evidence does not support recommending a specific evidence-based psychotherapy or pharmacotherapy over another.</li> </ul>	Strong For	Reviewed, New-replaced



Pivot



# SOCIOEMOTIONAL SELECTIVITY THEORY

## DEFINITION

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST) posits that as people age, their motivational priorities shift. This change is driven by perceived limitations on time, leading individuals to prioritize immediate emotional needs over long-term objectives. As a result, older adults often focus on relationships and activities that enhance present emotional well-being.

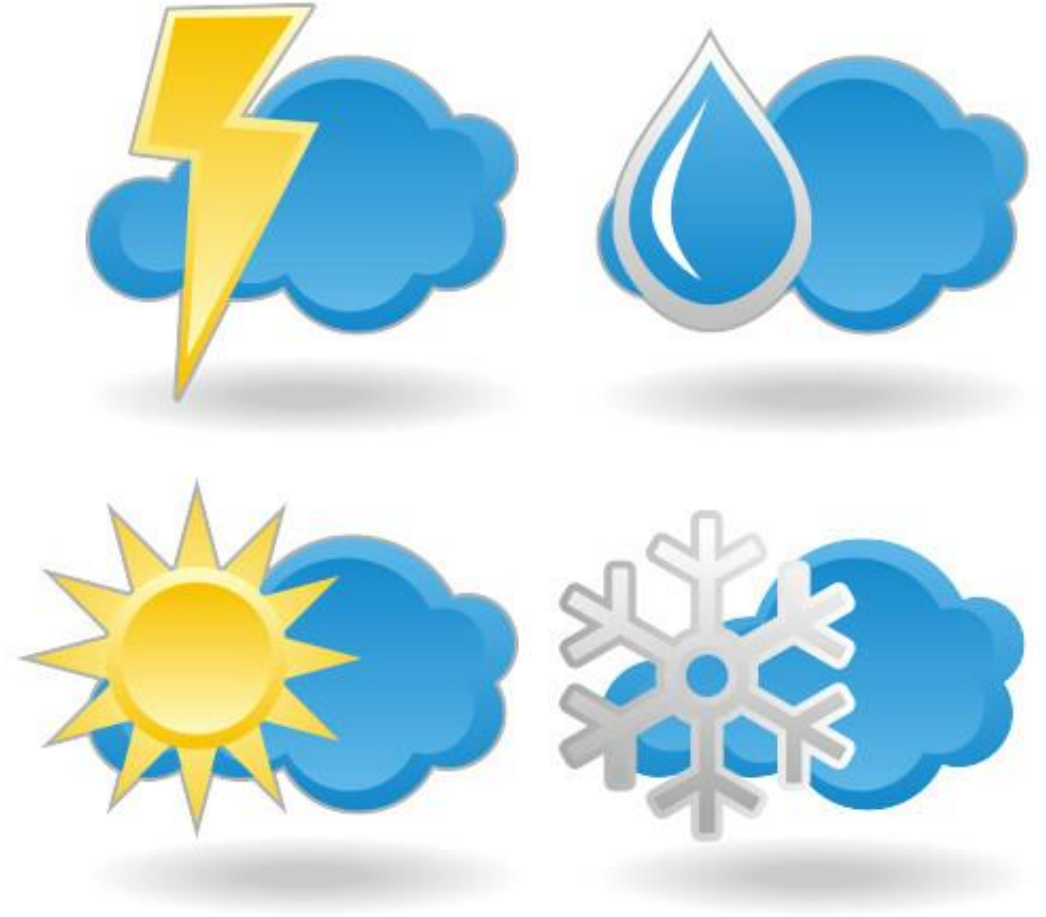
## EXAMPLES

- **In Choosing Friends:** According to SST, the older a person gets, the less likely they will be to tolerate people that annoy them.
- **Recreational Activities:** As people get closer to the end of their life, they may choose to spend more time enjoying recreational activities.

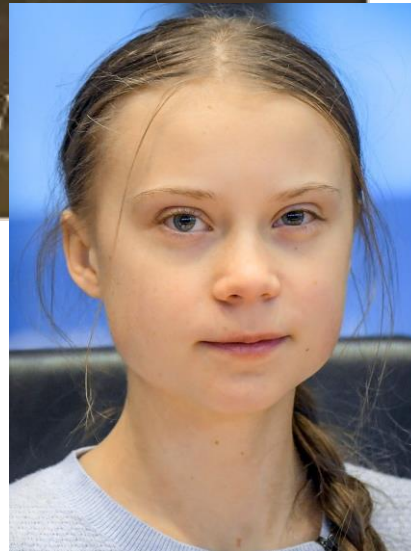
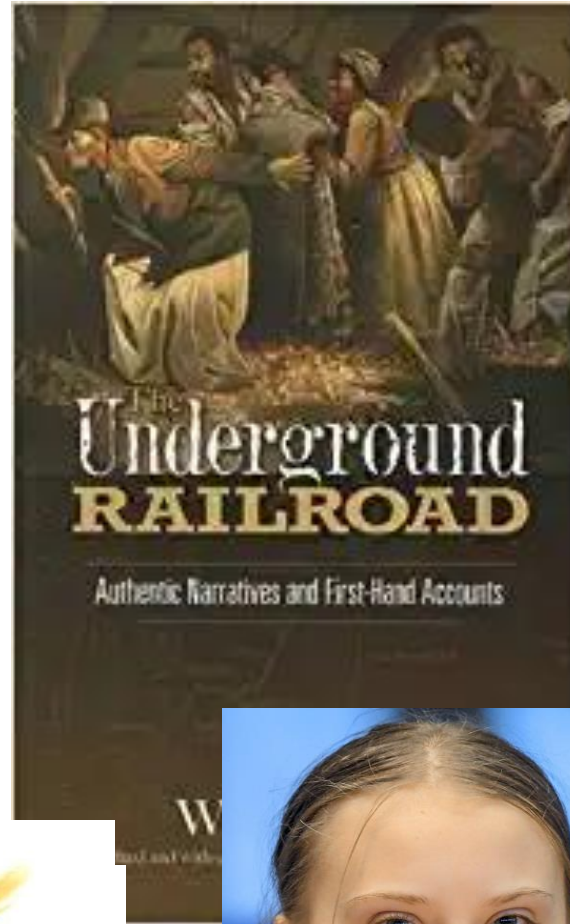
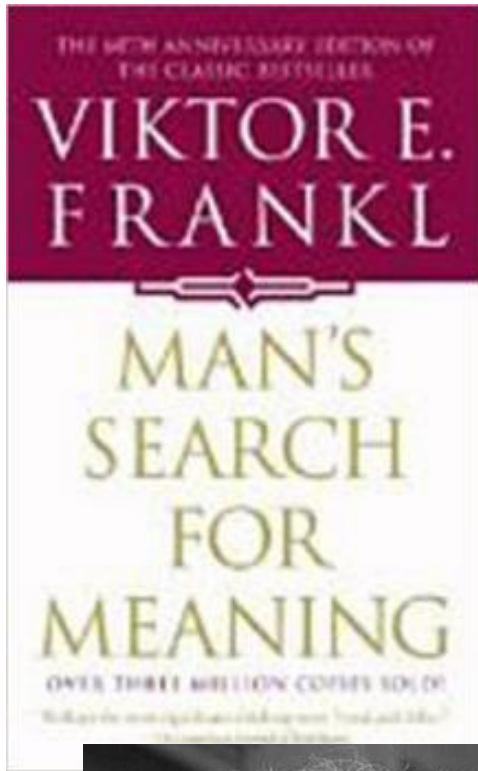
















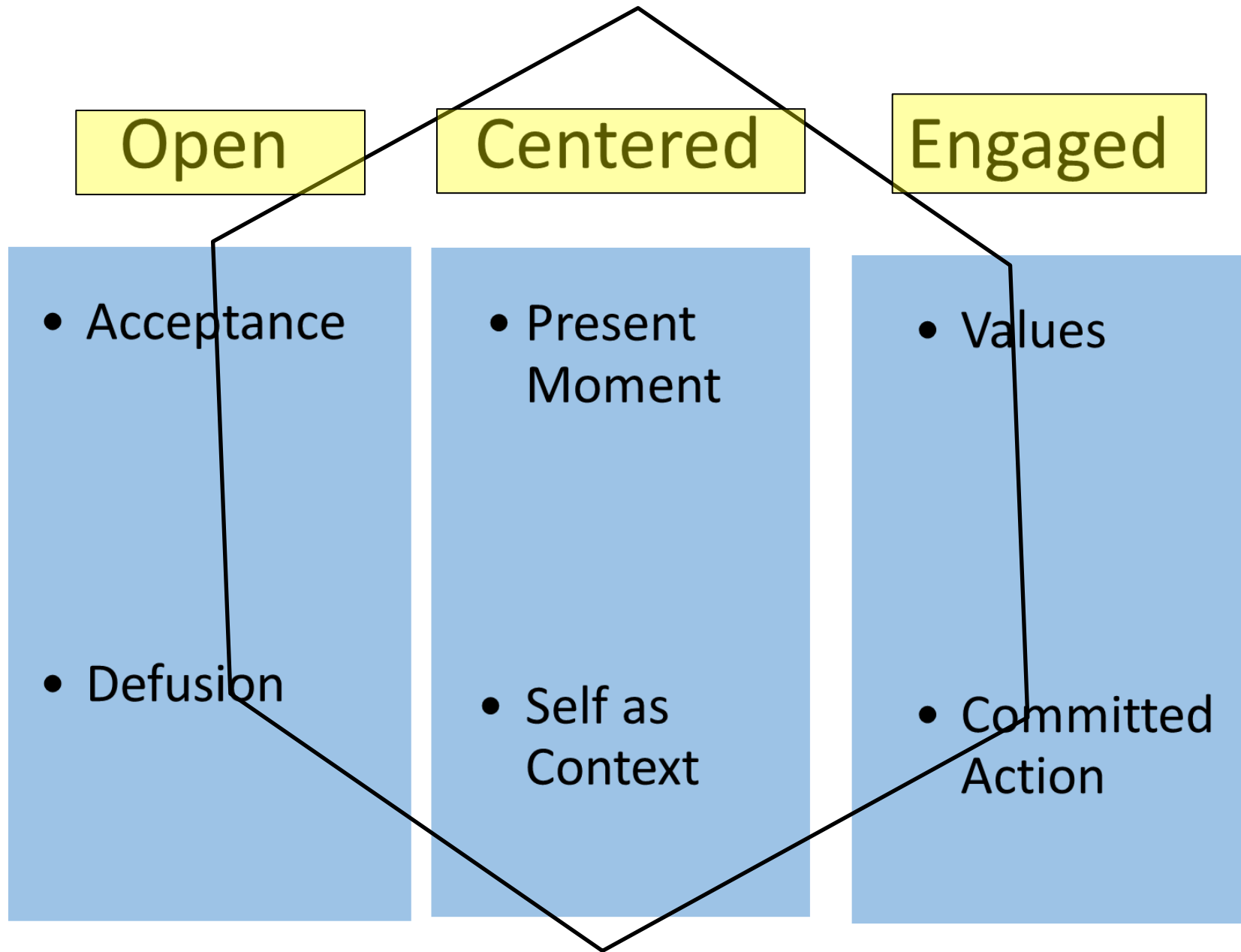




# 5 minute stretch break

# ACT's Three Major Goals

1. To foster acceptance of what *is* in the moment, including distressing thoughts, feelings, and evaluations
2. To take action toward valued goals, as opposed to trying to avoid or control unwanted inner experiences
3. To increase flexible responding to contextual cues and consequences that show up when we are living a values-based life



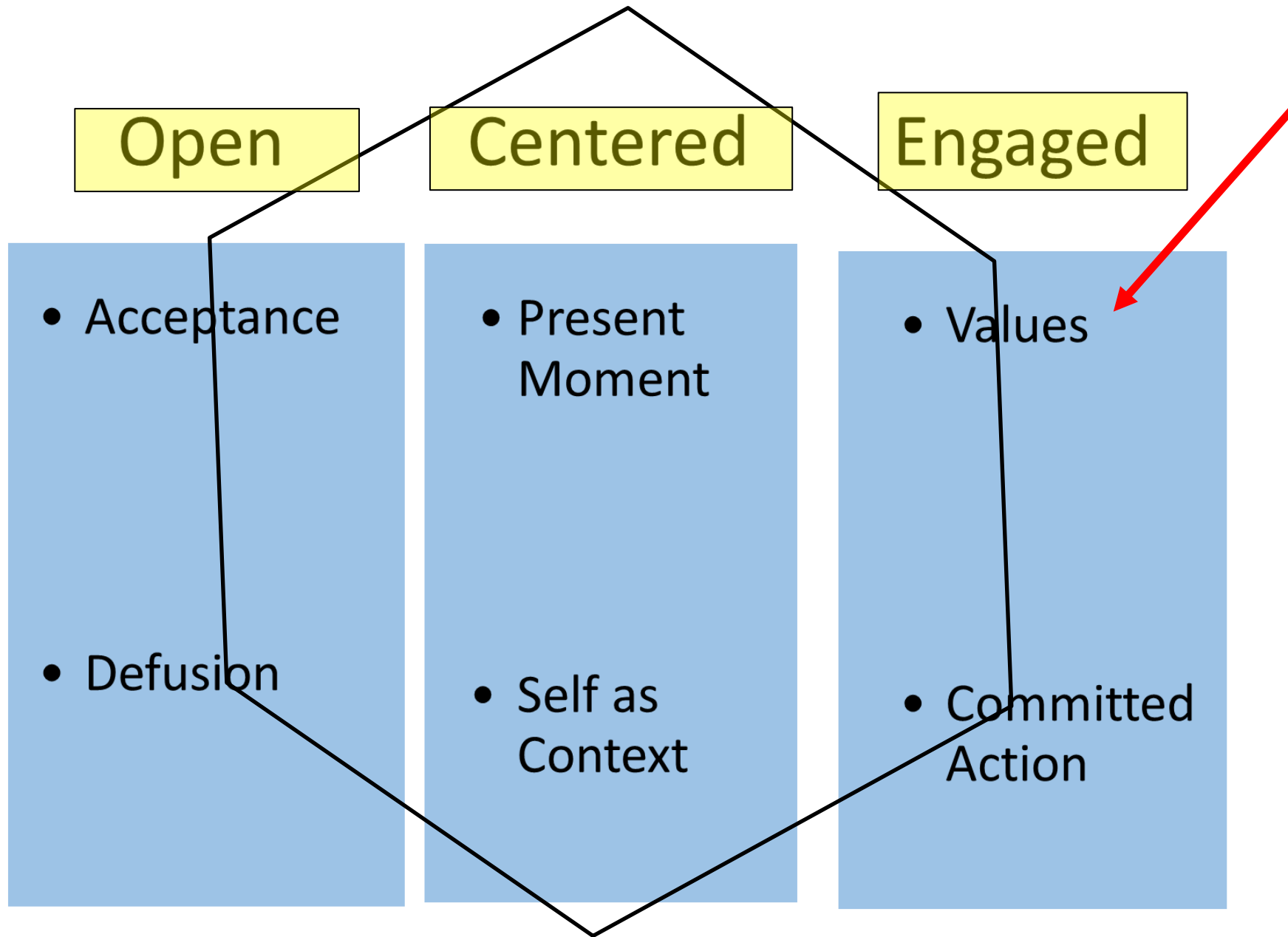
# Caregiving: A Universal Experience



***There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers; those who are currently caregivers; those who will be caregivers; and those who will need caregivers."***

***- Rosalynn Carter***







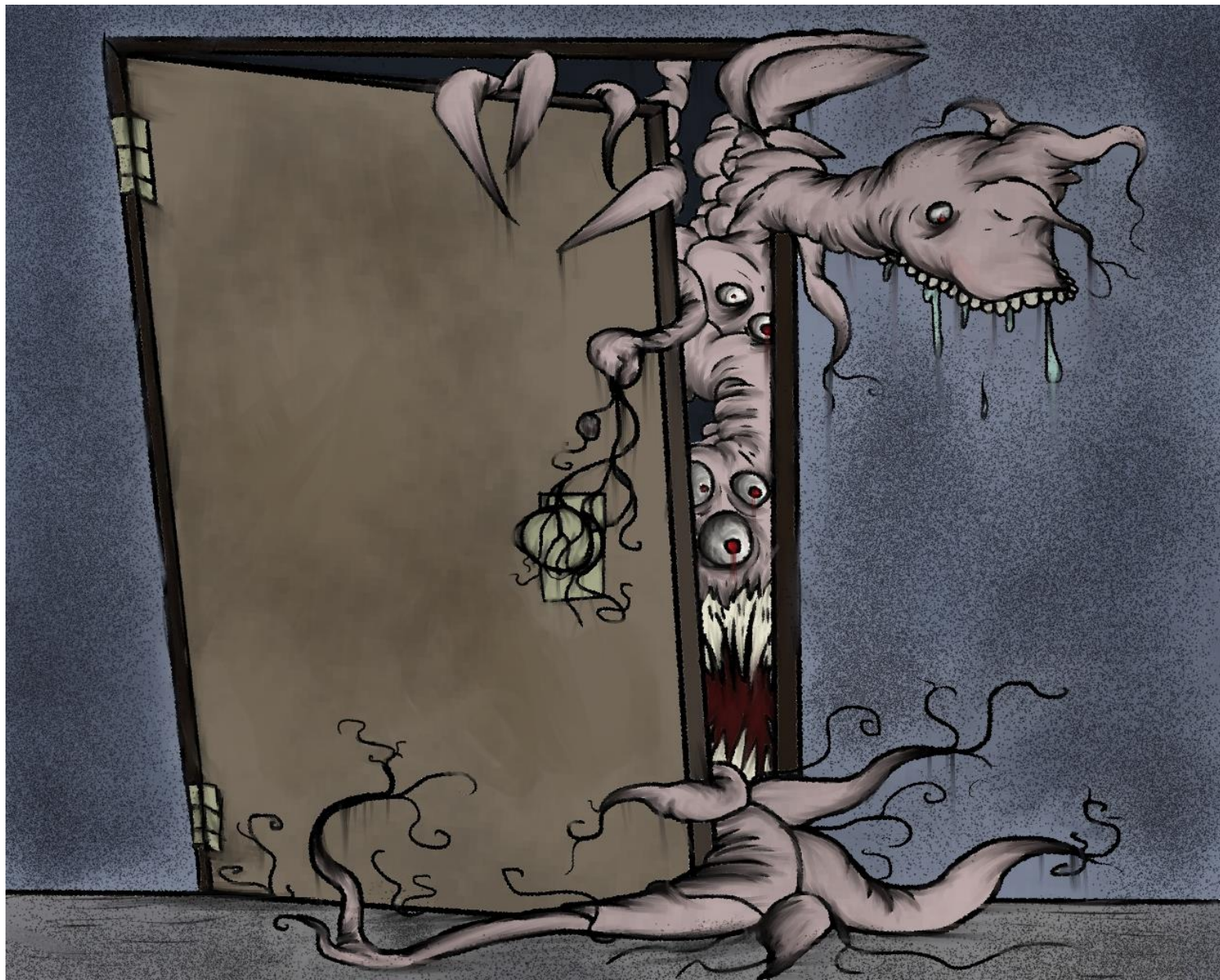
# Jose's Values Relating To Caregiving

- “For better or worse”
- Giving back to someone who gave him so much (life review)
- Supporting the family community
- Promoting his wife's physical and psychological healing
- Keep her at home as long as possible
- Opportunity for his own personal growth

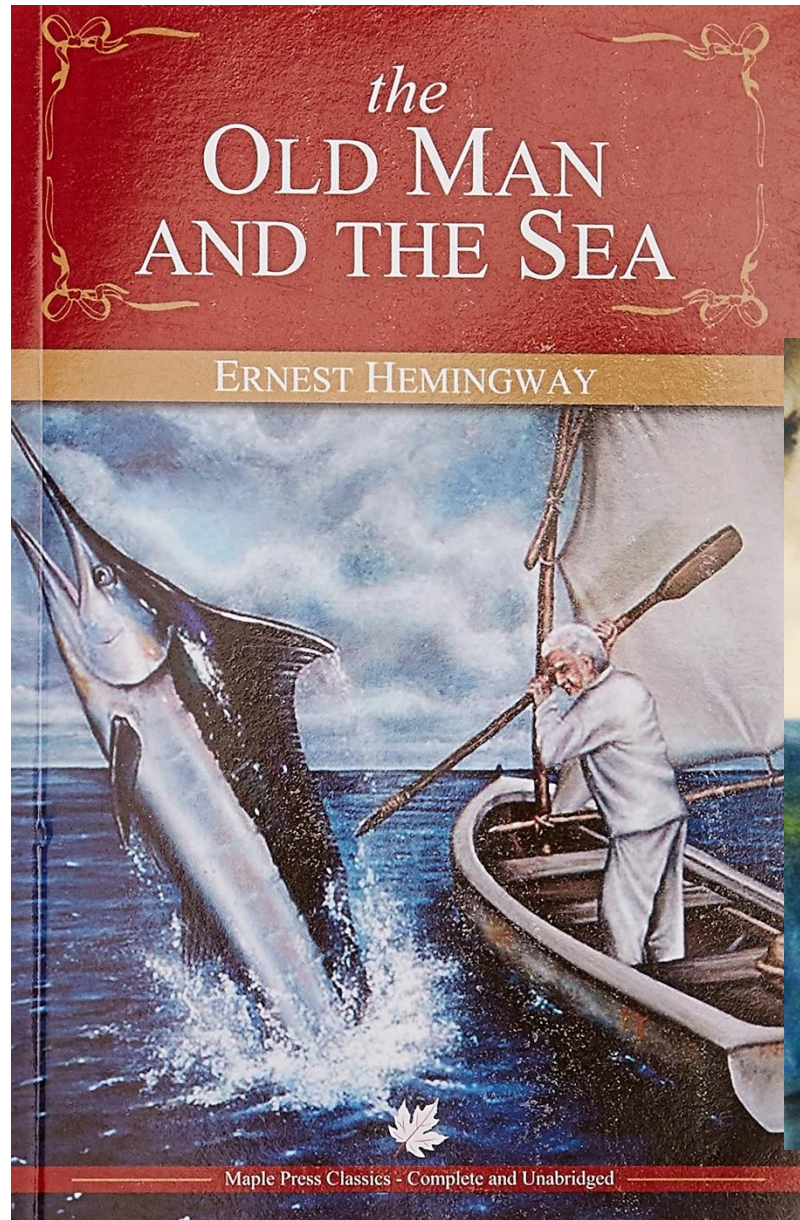




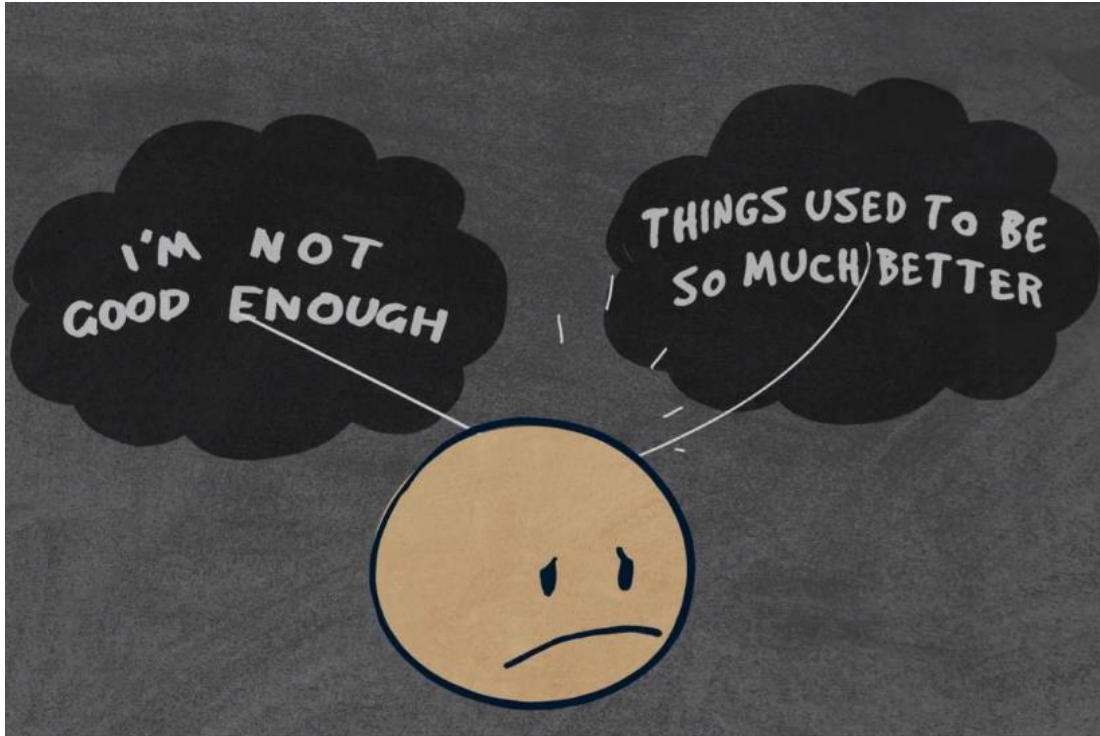








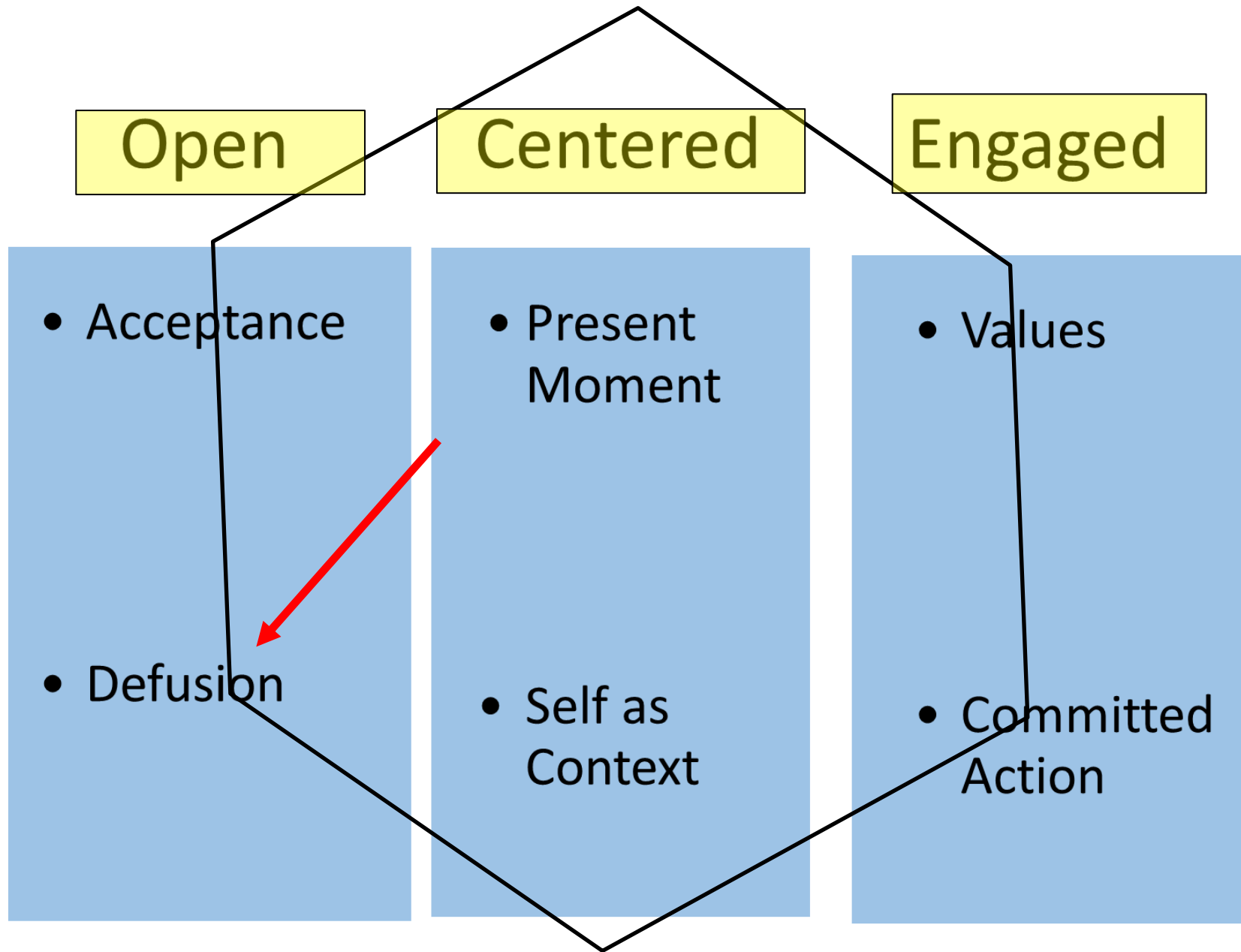




## “Fusion” (noun)

The process or result of joining two or more things together to form a single entity.

<https://thehappinesstrap.com/unhooking-from-difficult-thoughts-or-feelings/>



**Frequent  
comparisons and  
evaluations**

**RULES**

**Conflict, an  
adversarial tone**

**Exclusive focus on past  
or future**



**Complex  
analyses,  
confusing  
explanations**

**Generalizations vs.  
specifics**

**Rigid, endless problem-  
solving**







# Sample Fused “Stories” About Aging

- Older adults are lonely, weak, and forgetful
- I don't have to worry: mom lived to 100 so I will too
- I will never go to an “old folks” home
- I don't have to worry: I am a vegan and exercise and won't get dementia
- I'll think about advance directives when I'm older
- All old folks do is complain
- No one will ever take away my car or my gun!
- My memory is slipping; I probably have Alzheimer's
- My parents don't do anything except watch TV and nap







# Questions/Comments



# Practice Guidelines: the DANCE

## Don't argue

- Verbal and nonverbal communication

## Acceptance

- Realistic limitations

## Nurture yourself

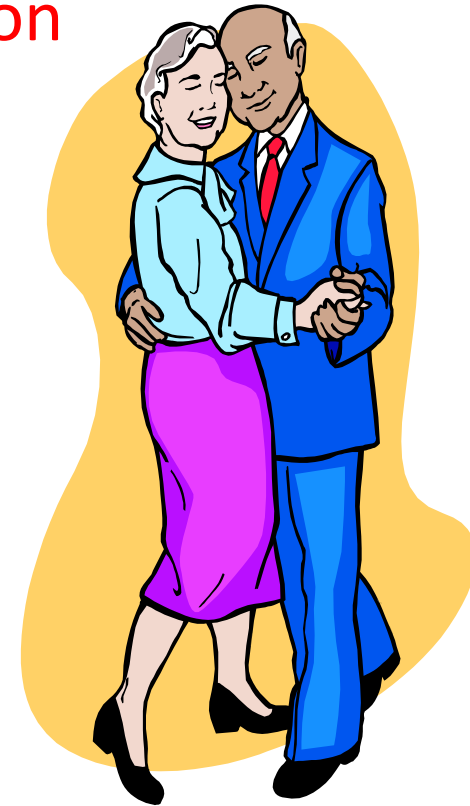
- Respite and asking for help

## Creative problem-solving

- ABCs of behavior change

## Enjoy the moment

- Pleasant/meaningful events, laughter & uplifts





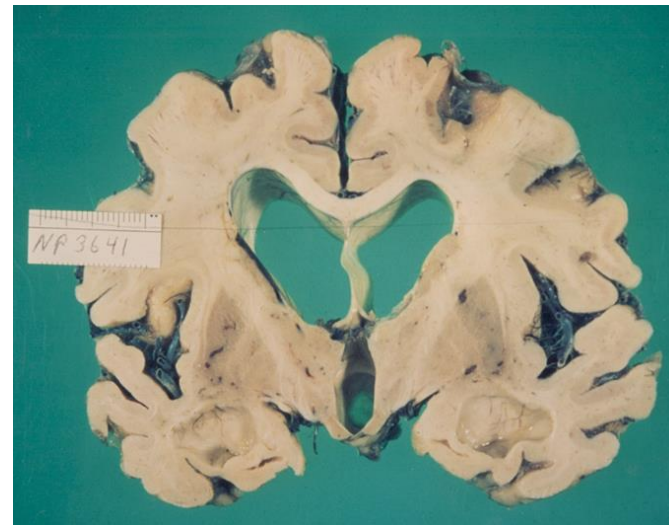
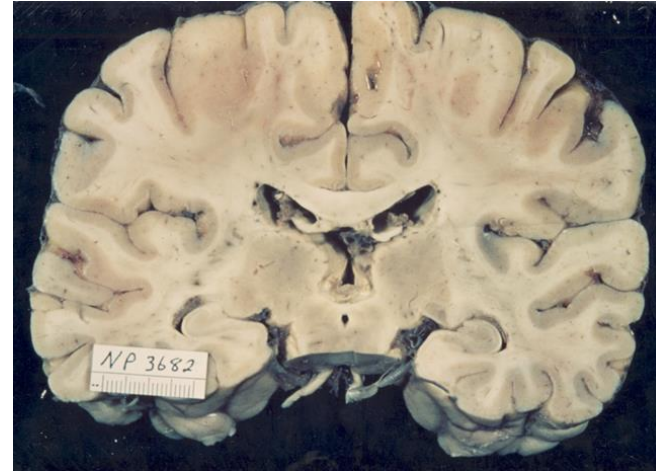
# Communication: Don't Argue!!!

- Good communication skills
  - Be polite – don't rush, be warm and respectful, ignore what you can
  - As dementia progresses, nonverbal communication becomes more important
  - Being in a good relationship matters more than being “right”
  - Would YOU want to be talked to this way?

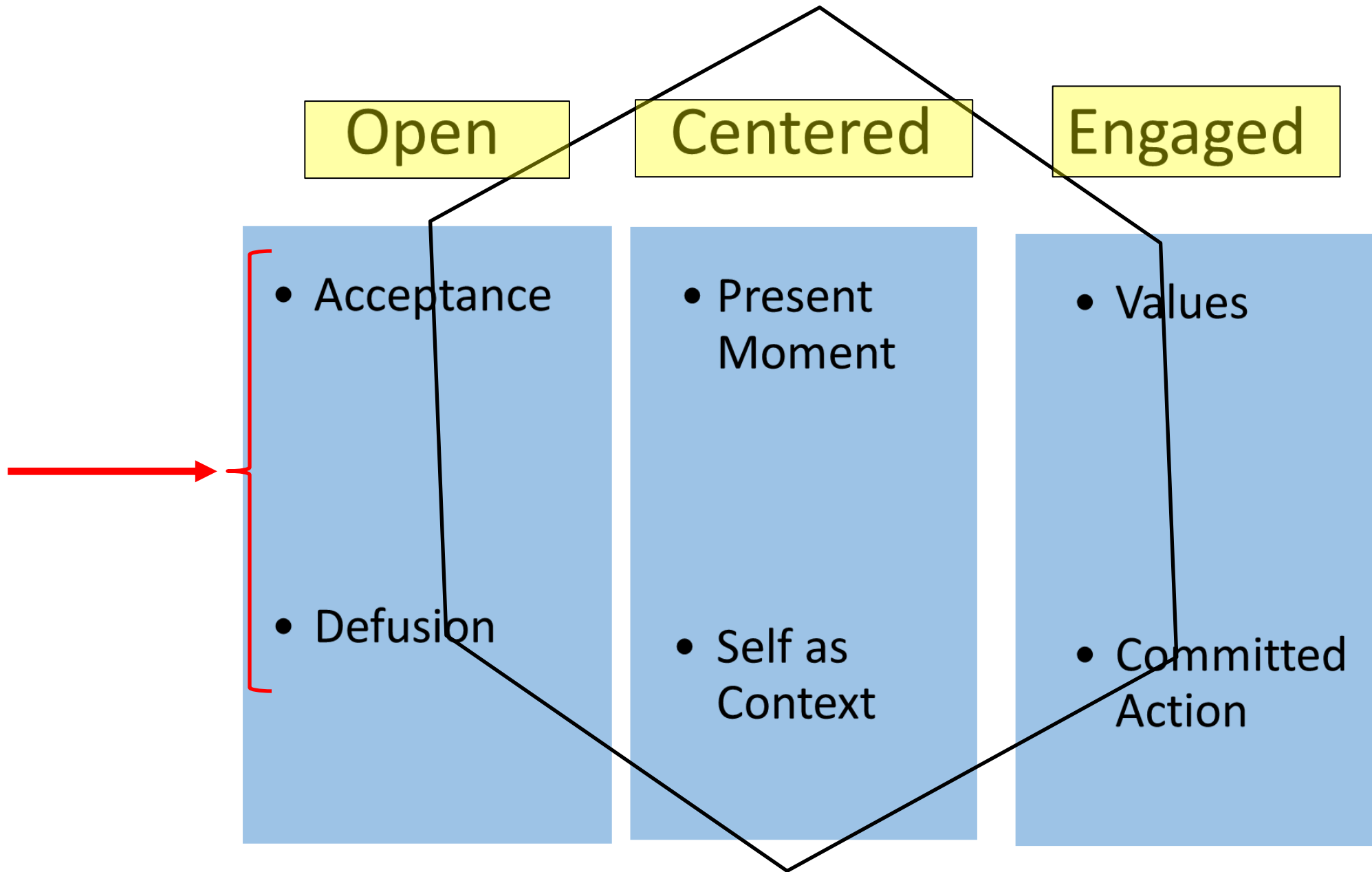


# Aceptance

- Psychoeducation about dementia diagnosis and progression
  - Realistic expectations – Will she get better? Why isn't she trying harder?
  - Creating safe, reassuring environment (vs. reality orientation)
  - Caregiver anxiety, sadness, irritation, disbelief, grief is normal



Photographs courtesy of Dr. Thomas Bird, Seattle VAMC





*“This being human is a guest house.*

*Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,*

*some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!*

*Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably...”*

- Rumi



God grant me  
the serenity to  
accept the things I  
cannot change;

courage to change the  
things I can;

and  
wisdom to know the  
difference.

# Nurture the Self

- Mindfulness practices
  - Daily sitting with non-judgmental awareness of internal events
  - Staying in the present moment rather than time travelling to the past and future
  - Driving on winding road at night (you can't see too far in the distance)
  - “Blind spots” not denial
  - Trading eyeglasses (perspective)

c.f., Jurado MMM, et al. 2020. Mindfulness in family caregivers of persons with dementia: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *Healthcare (Basel)* 8(3): 193.





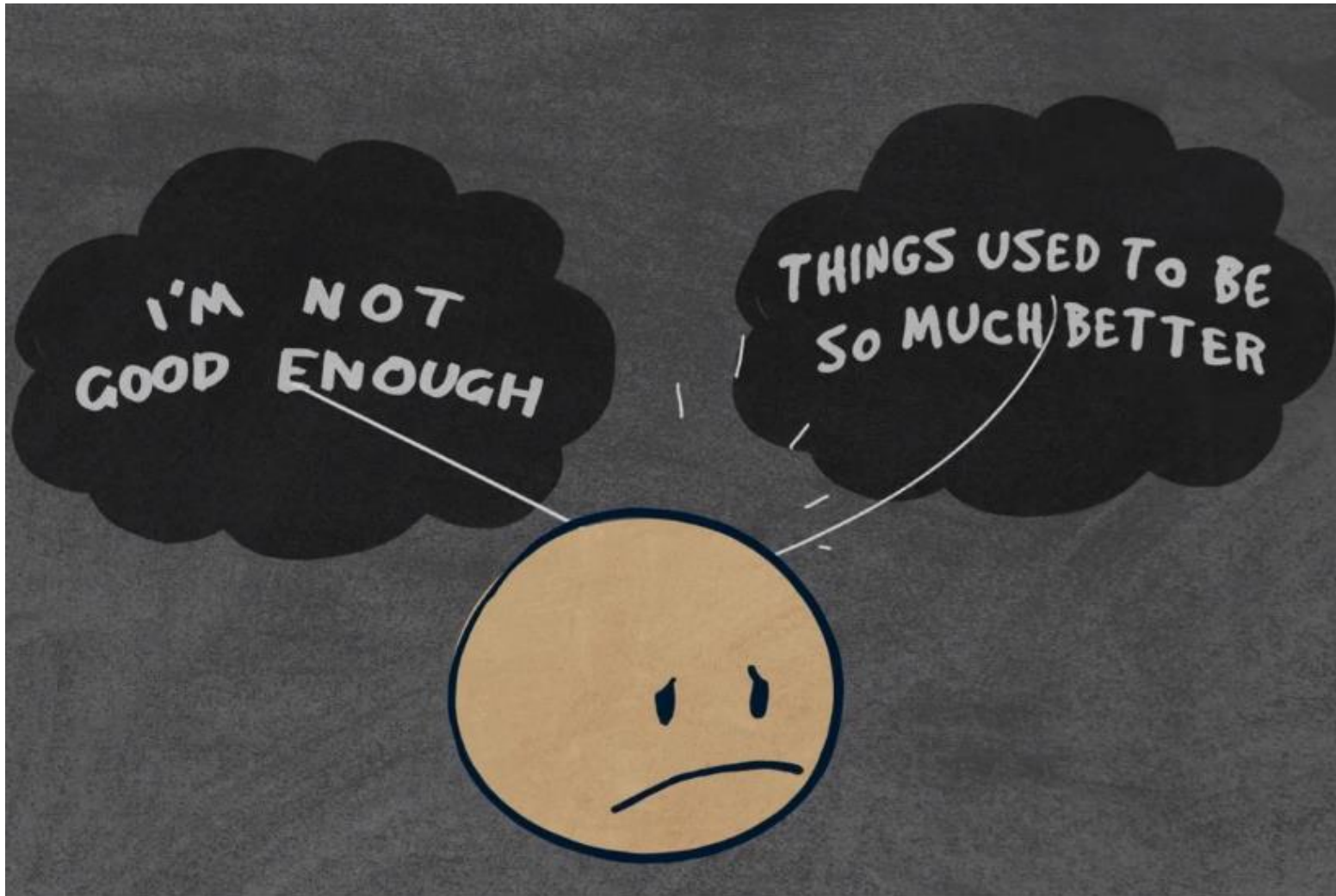
# Respite is Essential

- Respite
  - Put on your own oxygen mask first
  - Water stations along the ultramarathon route
  - “If you need help, she needs help”
  - Mitzvah – when you let someone help you, you are giving them a gift as well





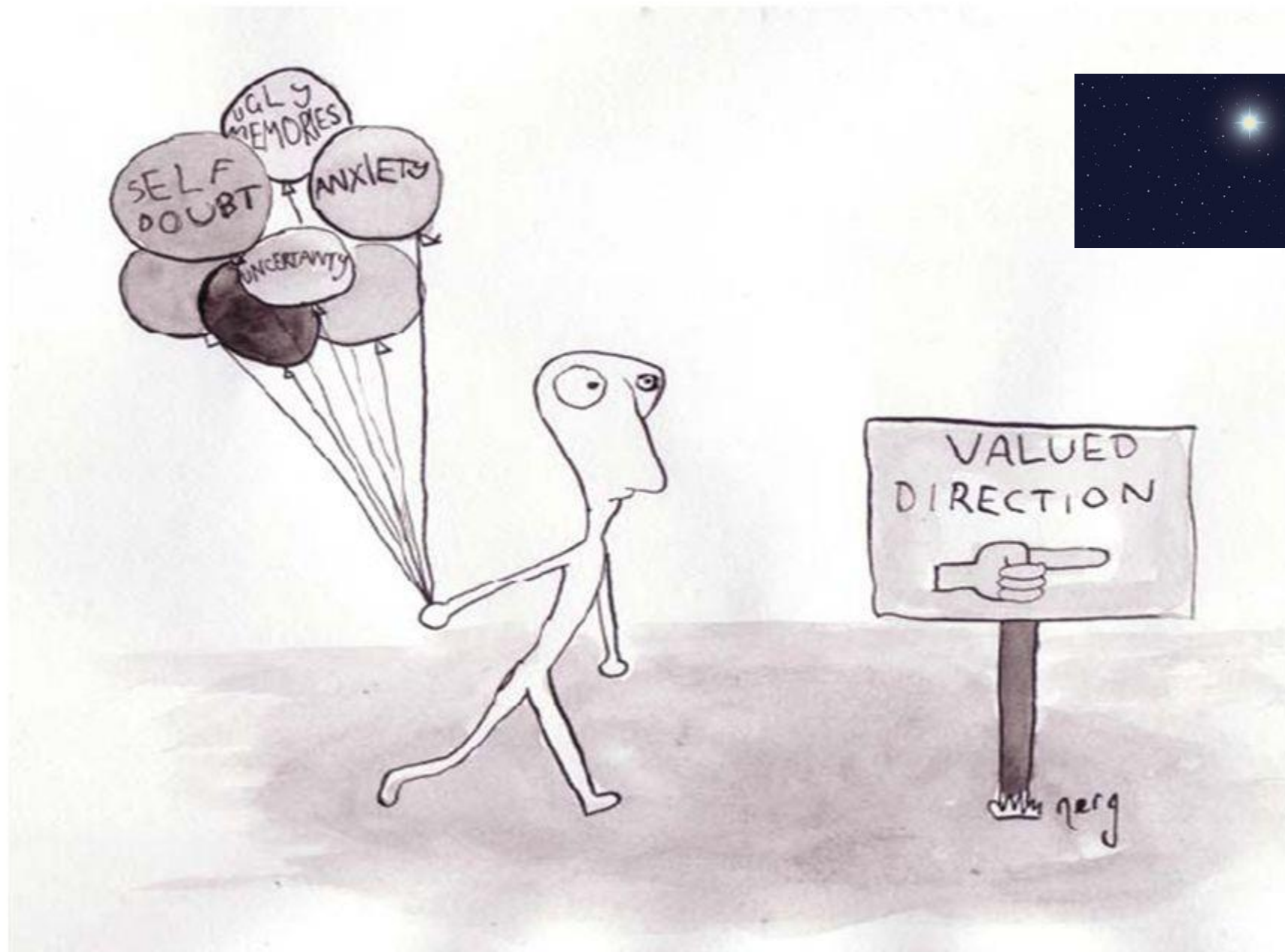
## When Values Conflict

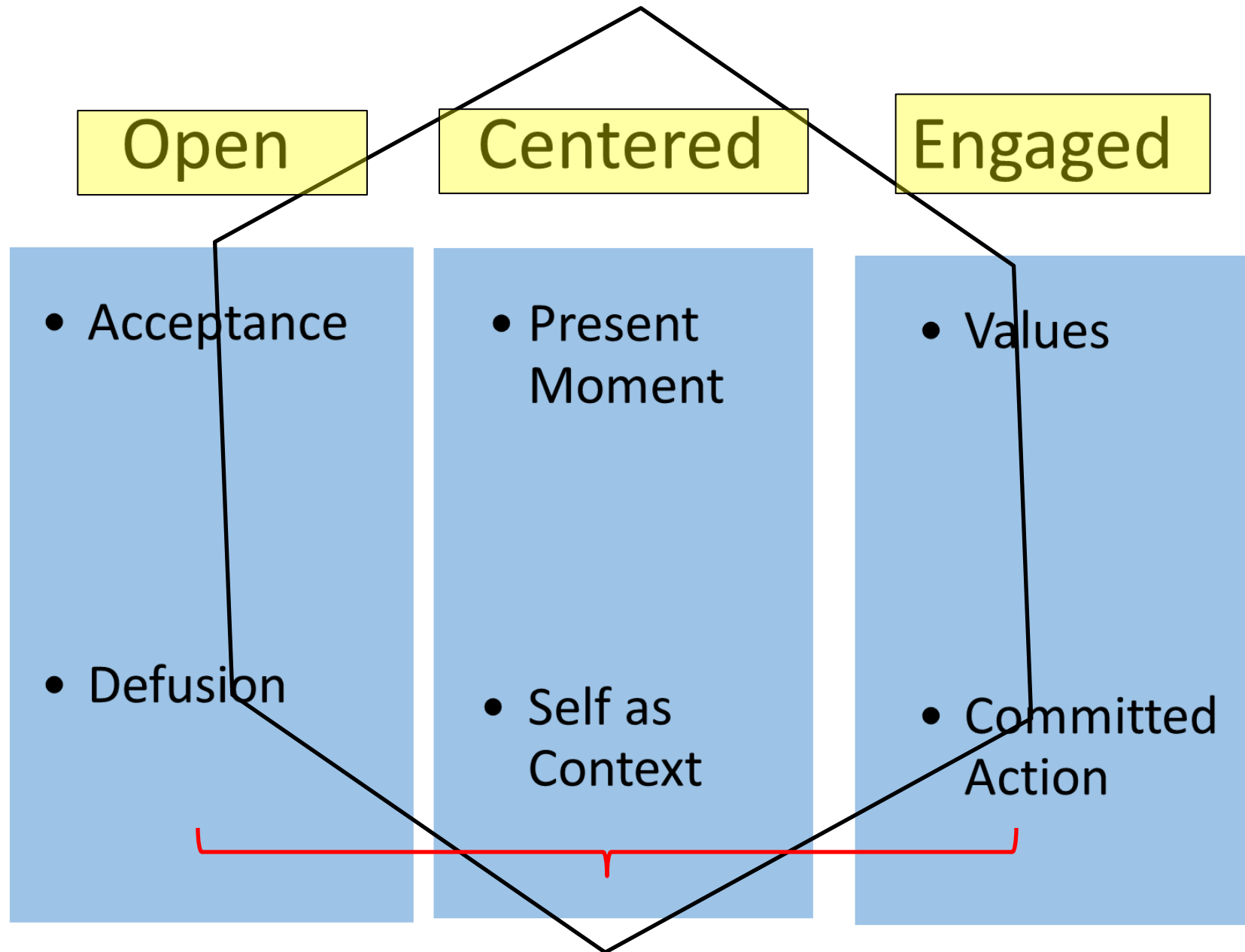




# Is There Another Way To See It?

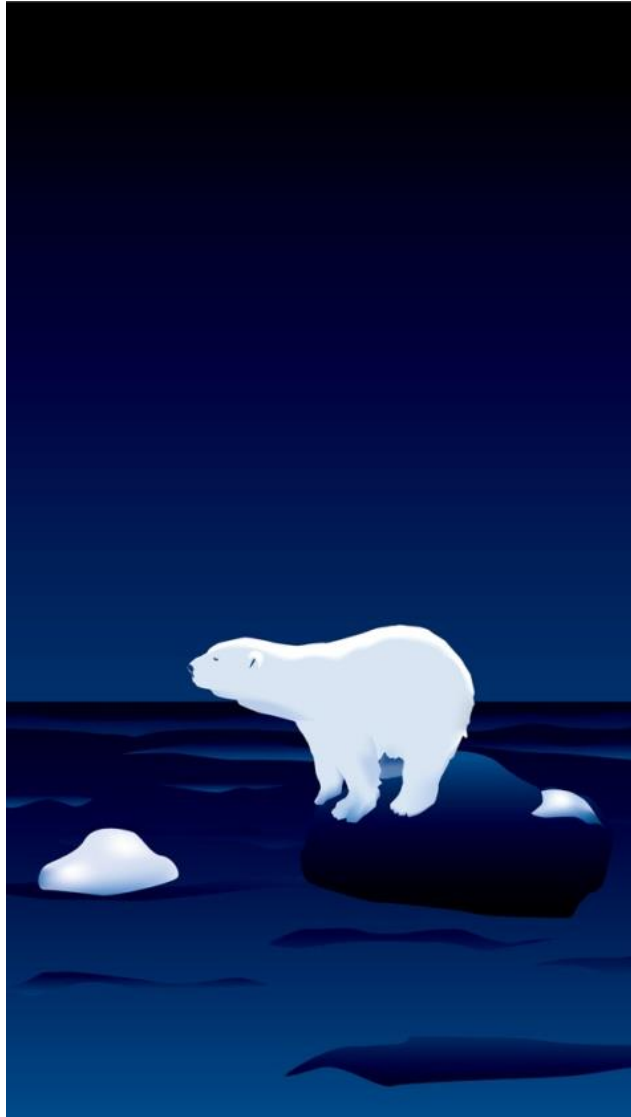












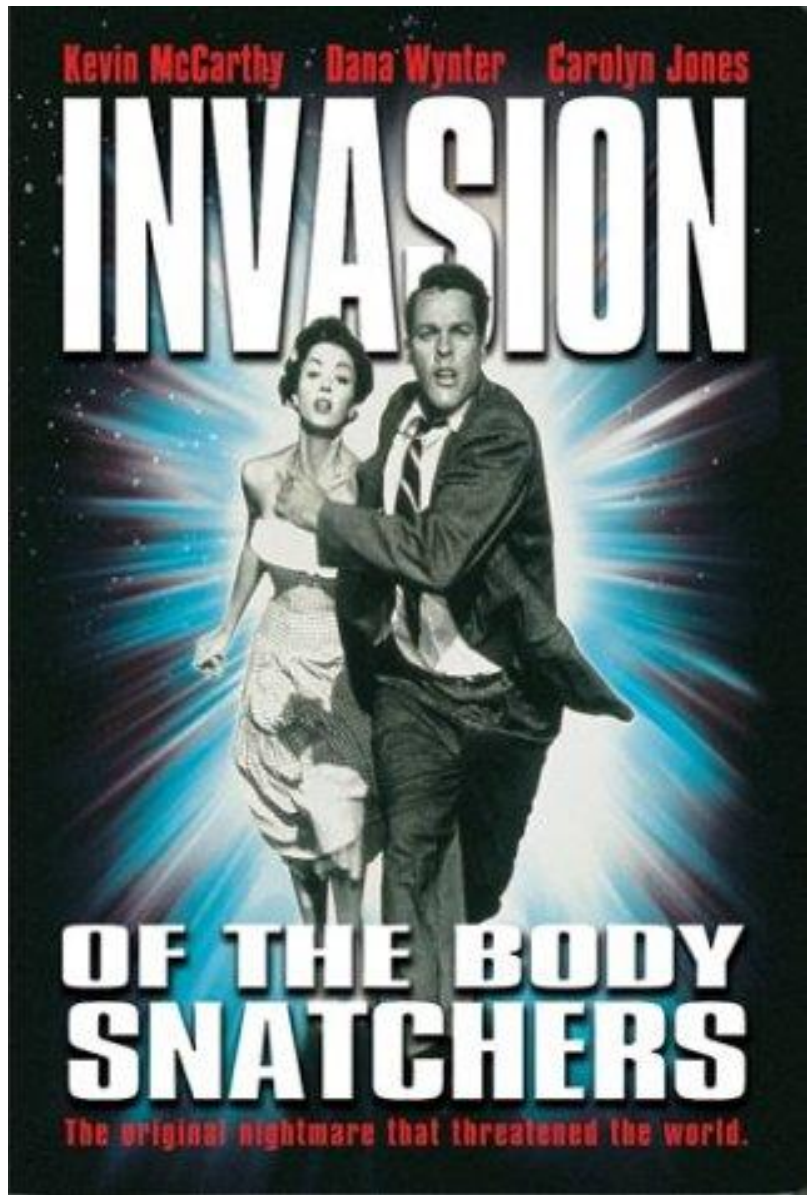
**“When we are no longer able to change a situation ... We are challenged to change ourselves.”**

- Viktor Frankl

# Creative Problem Solving

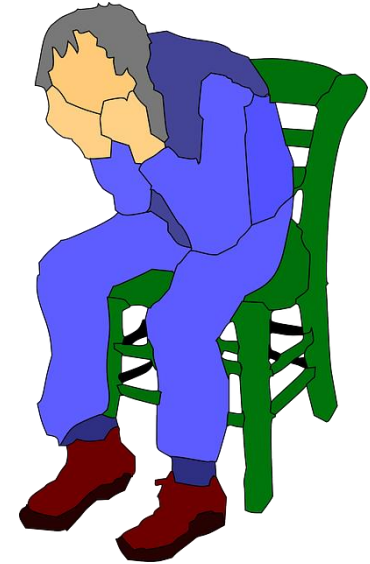




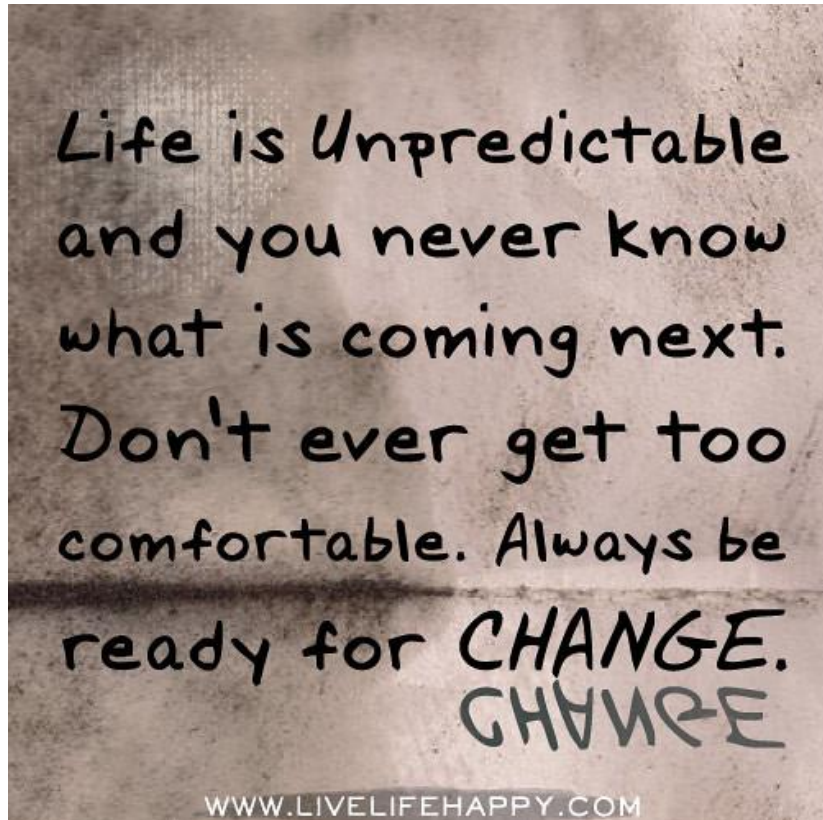


# Dementia Neuropsychiatric Behaviors

- 70-90% of individuals at some point
- Increase as disease progresses
- Primary source of stress & burden to caregivers
- Common cause of institutionalization
- May be difficult to treat, and require more than one intervention



# Dementia Symptoms Are Variable



- No two people are alike
- It is typical for symptoms to wax and wane
- This unpredictability and inconsistency is often what is most difficult for everyone to accept



# My Underlying Assumptions

- All behavior has a cause or serves a function, often reflecting an underlying need
- This is as true for people with dementia as it is for you and I
- The more we understand the context (situation) in which behaviors occur, the more we can do to help

# ABCs: *Creative Problem Solving*



## **Antecedent (Activator):**

What happened before the behavior?



## **Behavior:**

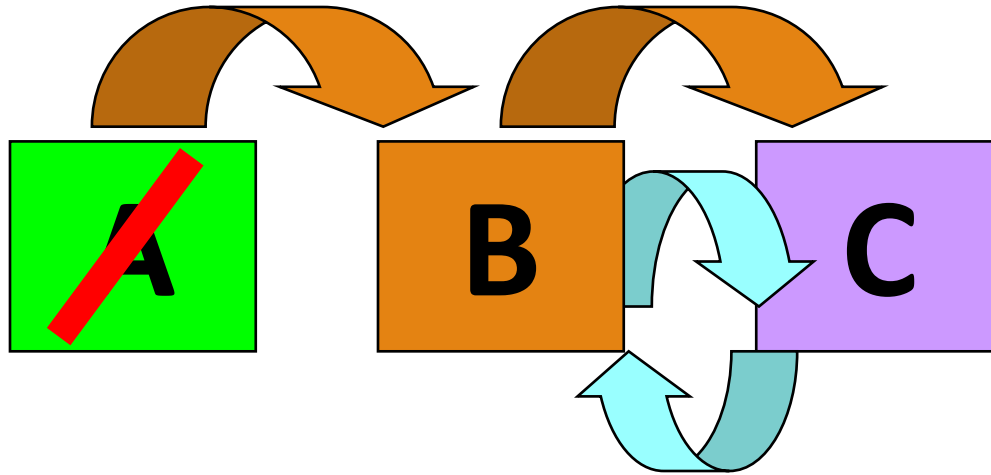
What exactly was the person with dementia doing? Paint a verbal picture!



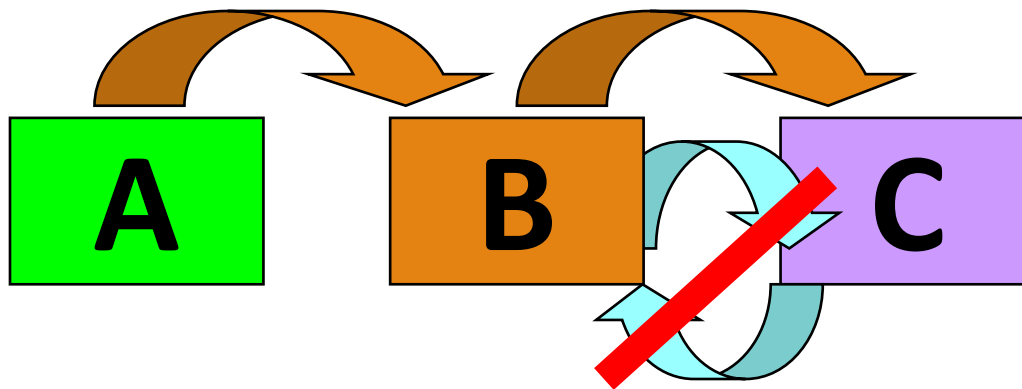
## **Consequence:**

What happened after the behavior?

# Why Use the ABCs?



*Changing “A” may prevent a behavior from happening*



*Changing “C” can alter behavior duration, severity, and probability of occurring in the future*



# Observation is How We Find Patterns



- Are there days or times that the behavior does not occur?
- Does it only happen around certain people?
- Is it more likely under certain conditions?



# 5-minute stretch break



Jose Problem #1:  
Hallucinations

# ABCs: Example #1



## **Antecedent (Activator):**

Jose made dinner while Maria sat at the table and watched him.



## **Behavior:**

Maria is seeing bugs on the kitchen table. It happened at dinner last night. Jose was there.



## **Consequence:**

Jose told Maria there are no bugs there. They both got upset with one another.

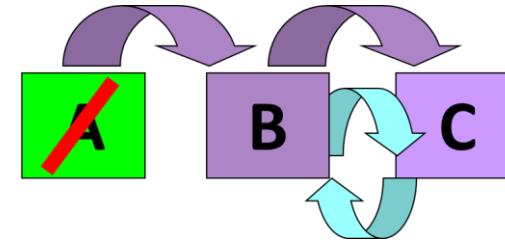




# Jose's Creative Problem-Solving Plan #1

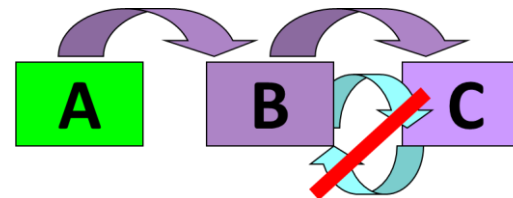
- Increase lighting in the living areas in the afternoon/early evening

- Take the woven tablecloth off the dining room table



- Engage Maria in more activities later in the day or ask family to come over to visit when Jose is cooking

- Don't argue! ("Listen with respect, comfort redirect")



*Ask for help  
brainstorming  
antecedents and  
consequences*

*“The best way to get a  
good idea is to get lots  
of ideas.”*

*Linus Pauling*







Jose Problem  
#2:

Maria's crying  
episodes



# ABCs: Example #2



## **Antecedent (Activator):**

She had been sitting quietly outside on the patio while Jose was playing his guitar in the house



## **Behavior:**

Maria crying and saying life wasn't worth living, that she was a burden to Jose

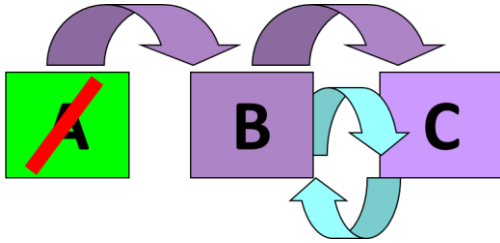


## **Consequence:**

Jose told her they all loved her very much and she wasn't a burden but she didn't stop crying

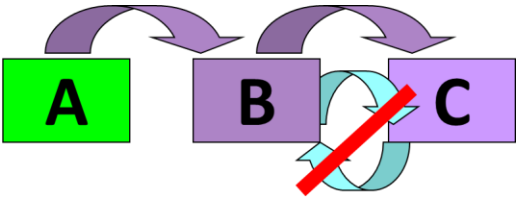
# Jose's Creative Problem-Solving Plan #2

- Arrange for friends and family to visit every day who can do things with Maria she enjoys like coloring and looking at pictures



- Jose will take his respite breaks when the visitors are with Maria so she isn't alone

- Don't argue!



# *Enjoy the Moment:* Pleasant Events

- Finding the Gifts of Dementia Care
  - The person that friends and family members once knew is still there.
  - Laughter and love are good medicine.
  - Mindfulness: people with dementia remind us that “NOW” is all that matters.
  - Values – why are you a caregiver???





# Importance of Meaningful Activities

- Individuals with dementia retain many skills despite cognitive impairments
- Everyone needs to feel valued and to have purpose in life
- Interpersonal relationships are important, and fostered by shared activities
- Pleasant activities improve mood and behavior in both caregivers and care-receivers



# Increasing Pleasant/Meaningful Activity



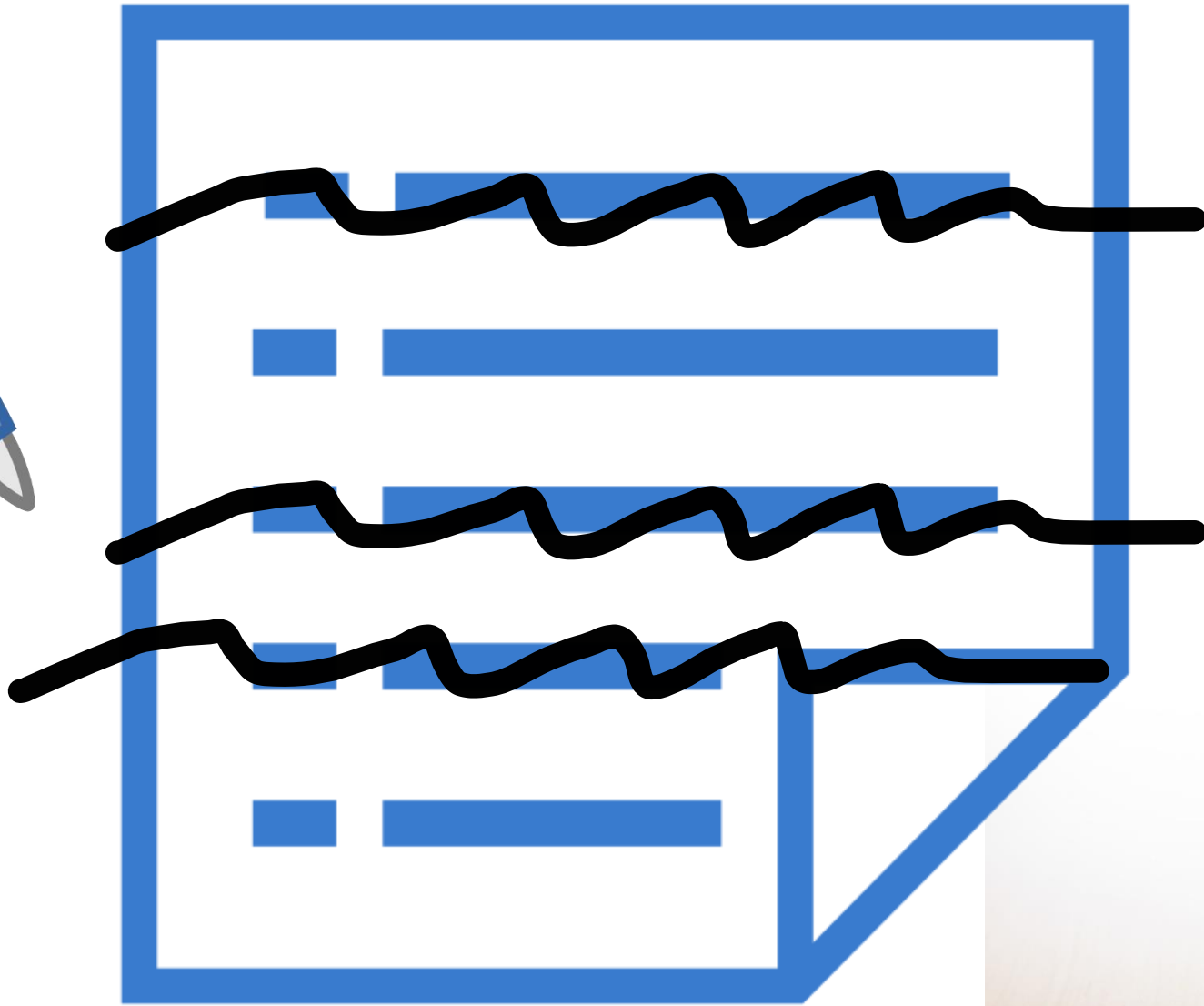
- What did the person enjoy in the past?
- What does he/she enjoy now?
- How can activities be modified to accommodate current abilities?
- Who is available to help?

# Look for “Safety Bubbles”

*Situations where the person’s dementia is not relevant*

- No pressure to remember people, places, events, or facts accurately
- Feelings of dignity and self-respect are maintained
- “Being with” is more important than “getting something done”







When I let go of what  
am, I become what I  
might be."  
~ Lao Tzu



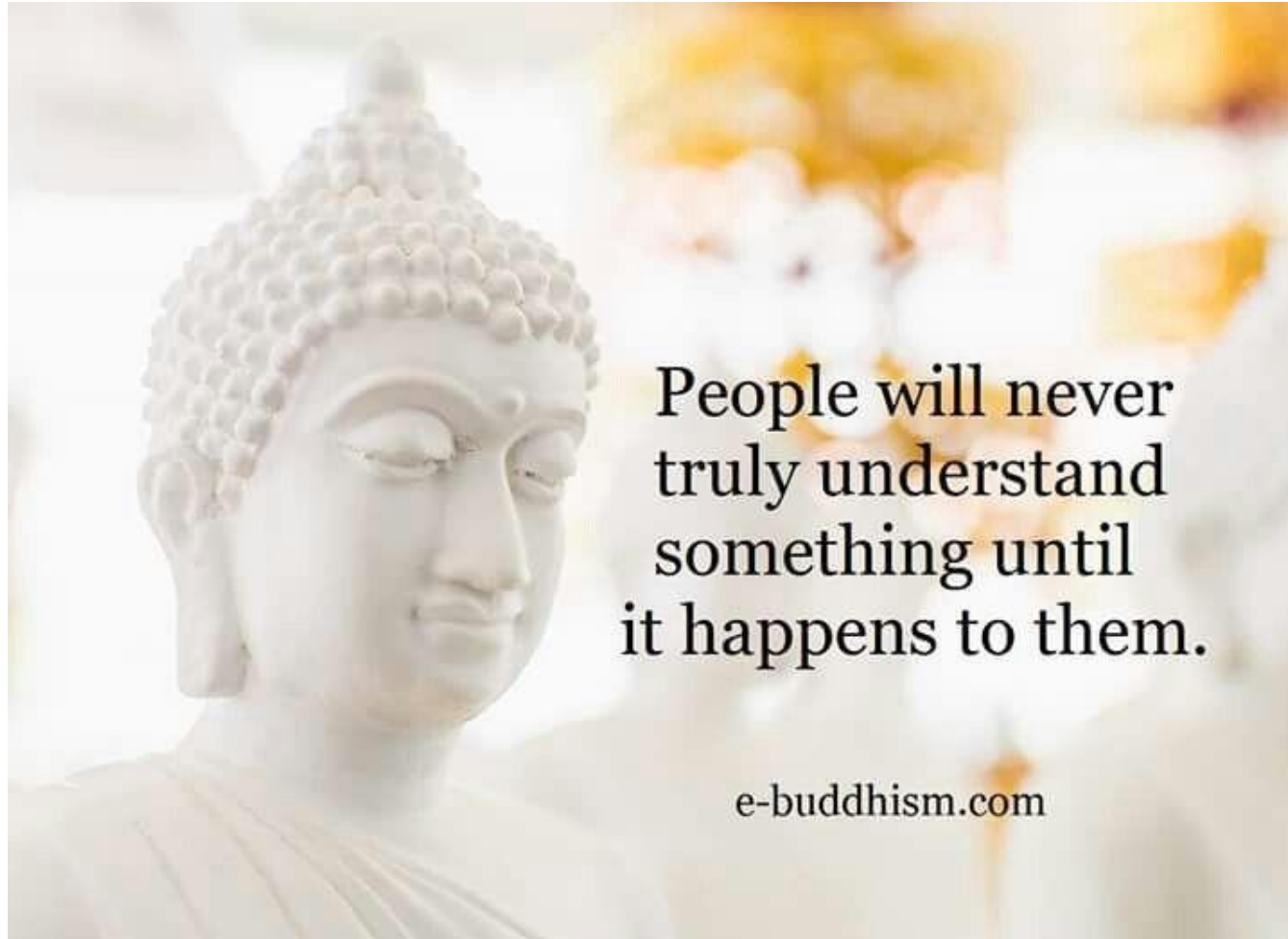
# What About Maria's Perspective???







# Self-As-Context: Who Am I Now?





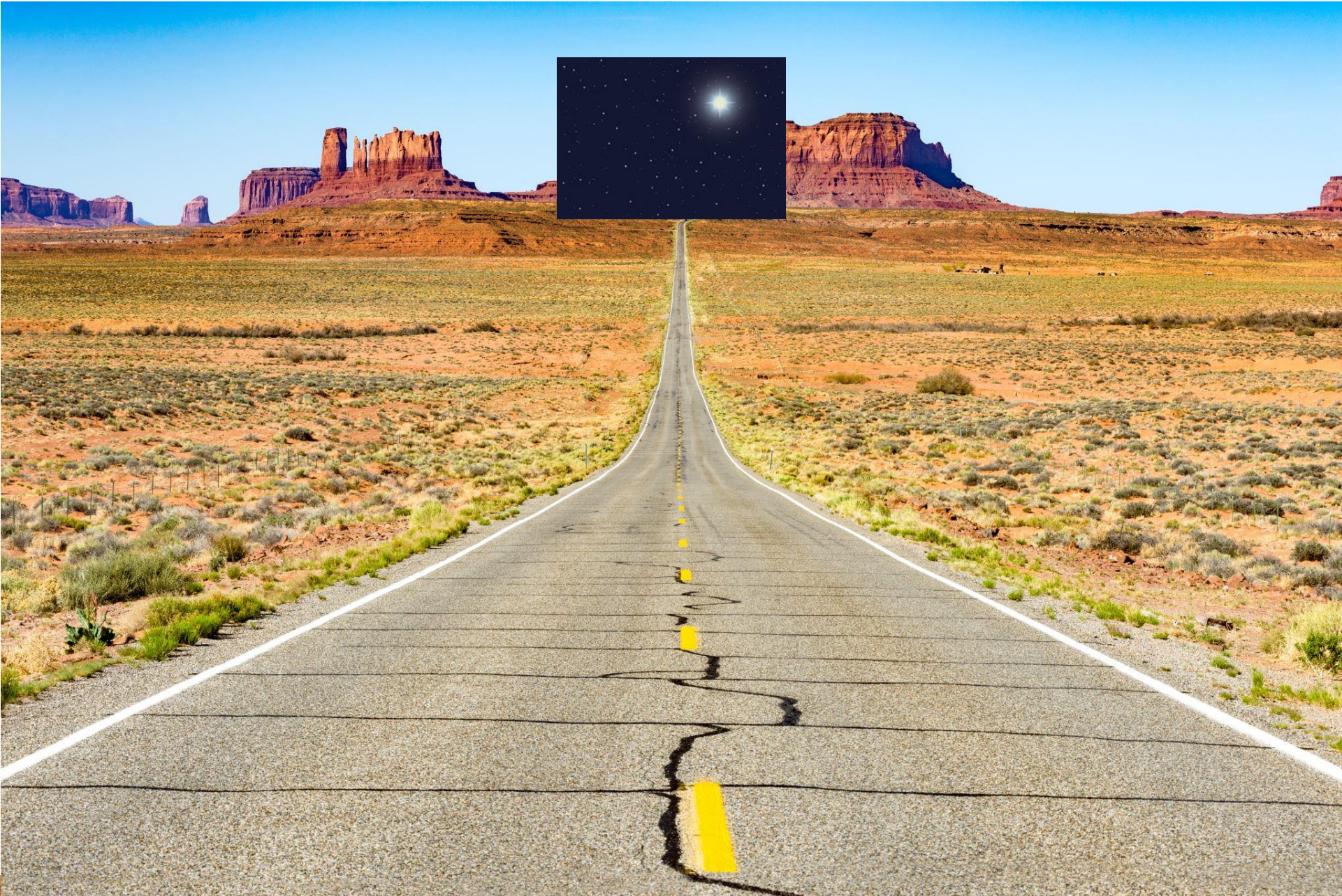
A lit candle in a dark holder is positioned on the right side of the image, casting a warm glow. To its left, several white flowers with many petals are visible, their details softened by a dark, semi-transparent overlay. The background is a deep, dark blue or black, creating a somber and contemplative atmosphere.

Love and loss is one thing, not two.

Love ... embraces impermanence and says aloud 'this matters, nevertheless'"

Steve Hayes









***“A question for us all ...***

---

***Is there a way to live a  
rich and valued  
existence in this world,  
in this moment, just the  
way it is?”***

***- Kelly Wilson, PhD***

# Committed Action: To Whatever Is Next





—♡—  
“Do not regret  
*growing older.*  
It's a privilege  
*denied to*  
*many.”*  
(Unknown)



Prince Siddarth







*“Aging is not a problem to be solved ... It is a meaning to be lived out.”*

Wilfred McClay, The Atlantic June 2023





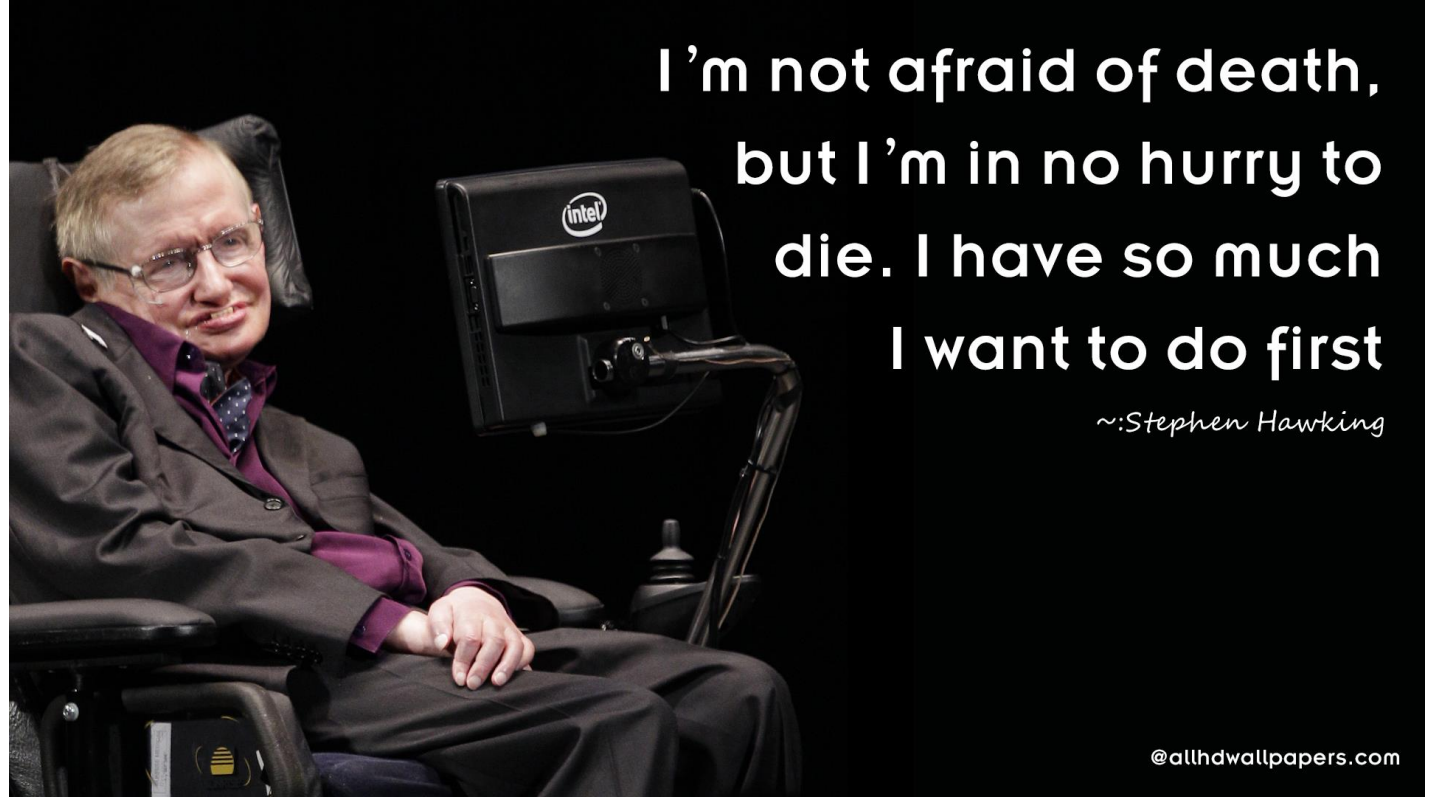


“*However difficult  
life may seem,  
there is **always**  
something you can  
**do** and **Succeed**  
at.*

~ Stephen Hawking



www.PrettyQuotes.com



I'm not afraid of death,  
but I'm in no hurry to  
die. I have so much  
I want to do first

~:Stephen Hawking

@alldwallpapers.com

спасибо 谢谢  
GRACIAS 谢谢  
THANK YOU  
ありがとうございました MERCI  
DANKE धन्यवाद  
شُكراً OBRIGADO