STRESS AND EMOTION · ONE PAGE EXPLAINER

Radical acceptance

Stopping the second arrow of fighting reality, so the first one hurts less.

Radical acceptance is a skill from dialectical behavior therapy. The idea is simple and hard: pain is what happens. Suffering is what happens when you fight the fact that pain is happening. Radical acceptance is the practice of dropping the fight, without approving of the pain, so the energy that went into fighting is available for what you can actually do.

WHAT IT IS AND IS NOT

It is not agreeing
You are not saying what happened is fine, fair, or deserved. You are saying it is real. Real is a description, not a verdict.

It is not giving up
Accepting something is the case is often the first move that makes real change possible. Denying reality keeps you stuck in the position that made the pain worse.

It is a choice, not a feeling
You do not have to feel accepting. You have to act as if what is true is true. The feeling can lag by months. That is fine.

It works in layers
You accept a fact. You accept the pain the fact brought. You accept that today the pain is present. You do not accept the whole loss forever in one moment.

The second arrow
The first arrow is the pain of what happened. The second arrow is the fight with the fact that it happened. Radical acceptance is the practice of not shooting the second arrow.

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

- When you catch the fight (this should not be happening, this is not fair, this is not how it was supposed to go), name it, and drop into the fact that it is happening.
- Repeat when needed. Radical acceptance is not a moment. It is a daily return.
- Once you are in it, ask what is one thing you can do right now given what is actually true, however small.

Introduced by Marsha Linehan in dialectical behavior therapy in the 1990s. Drawn from Zen and cognitive traditions.

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