

Acceptance and Commitment Coaching Technique: Sky & Weather



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Abstract

This short ‘techniques’ paper features the second in a series of Acceptance and Commitment Coaching (ACC) tools. This article builds on last issue’s introduction to ACC and is, therefore, best read in conjunction with that paper. ‘Sky and weather’ aims to help clients differentiate between their core, unchanging self and any more transient thoughts or emotions that they may bring to their coaching session.

Keywords: Acceptance; Commitment; Coaching: ACC; ACT; Coaching techniques.

Introduction

In the previous issue I set out a brief introduction of Acceptance and Commitment Coaching (ACC) as an approach for coaching psychologists (Passmore, 2025a). I also shared the first of five technique papers: ‘Passengers on the bus’ (Passmore, 2025b). In this issue, I describe a second ACC technique: ‘Sky and Weather’. Further ACC technique papers follow in subsequent issues of this journal.

Sky and Weather

The Sky and Weather technique is a useful tool for coaching psychologists and is derived from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Anstiss, 2022). ACT, and its coaching cousin, ACC, are part of the broader third-wave cognitive behavioural approaches (Passmore & Leach, 2022). This technique was inspired by a Buddhist metaphor (Chodron, 1997) and has been adapted to a coaching context to help clients differentiate between their transient thoughts and their deeper, unchanging self. The metaphor draws parallels between the weather and the sky to highlight the impermanence of emotions and thoughts, in contrast to the more constant aspects of one’s self, much like how the weather fluctuates while the sky remains relatively stable. At the core of this tool is the idea that clients often conflate their thoughts and feelings with their identity, assuming that if they feel overwhelmed, anxious or stressed, those emotions define who they are. The Sky and Weather technique invites clients to challenge this assumption and to focus on the stable, core aspect of who they are.

The tool also shares similarities with the ‘Leaves on a Stream’ technique, where clients observe thoughts as if they were leaves floating down a stream (Passmore et al., 2021).

However, Sky and Weather adds a broader context by introducing the imagery of the vast, unchanging sky, giving clients a sense of stability amidst the flux of daily experiences. Both work well when working with clients in outdoor coaching conversations.

The process starts with observing a client's presentation of unhelpful or negative thoughts, such as *'This has been a dreadful week. I get so stressed, I can't cope with this job'*. The coach introduces the metaphor of Sky and Weather and invites the client to consider their thinking pattern. The coach might say, *'Think of your thoughts and feelings as weather patterns. Just like the sky, which remains stable as clouds, rain and storms pass through, your core self stays constant even as these emotional storms arise. Today, it might be stormy in your mind but, like the weather, events can change'*.

The coach then guides the client in exploring how their current emotions – such as anxiety, stress or overwhelm – are temporary states, much like weather conditions. These thoughts do not define who the client is but are simply passing experiences. By helping the client separate their identity from these fleeting emotions, the coach encourages a deeper understanding of emotional impermanence.

Next, the coach facilitates a dialogue in which the client identifies their own emotional 'umbrella' for rainy days, their 'coat' for cold times, or 'sun cream' depending on the season. This process gives the client a toolkit for managing emotional turbulence in a proactive, reflective manner. It encourages the client to adopt a compassionate stance toward themselves, acknowledging that emotions, like weather, change and that it is possible to adapt to them without letting them dictate one's sense of self.

Conclusion

This technique is most effective within coaching frameworks that incorporate cognitive-behavioural principles, particularly when clients are struggling with managing negative or irrational thoughts. By fostering emotional resilience and psychological flexibility, this technique can help clients cultivate the self-awareness and self-compassion necessary to manage difficult thoughts without being overwhelmed by them.

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