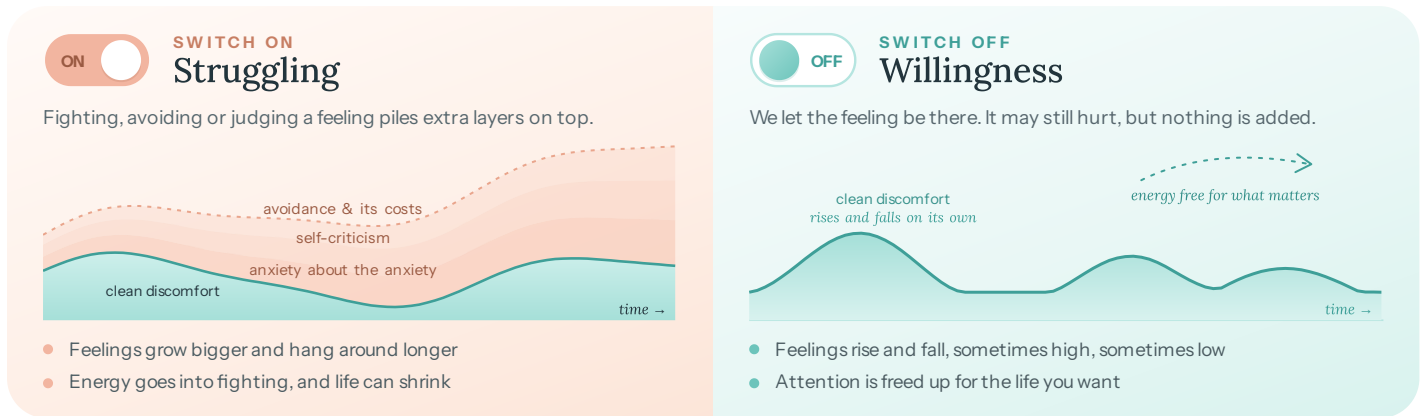


The Struggle Switch

Willingness and avoidance in Acceptance & Commitment Therapy

Painful feelings are part of being human, but how much we suffer depends partly on what we do with them. Russ Harris describes a **struggle switch** in the mind: when it's on, we fight our feelings; when it's off, we make room for them.



Clean and dirty discomfort

The pain we can't avoid, and the pain we add

CLEAN DISCOMFORT

The natural response

The pain that fits the situation: grief after a loss, nerves before something that matters. Unavoidable, and often a sign you care.

THE STRUGGLE

Fighting it

Pushing the feeling away, arguing with it, avoiding what triggers it, or judging yourself for having it.

DIRTY DISCOMFORT

The extra layer

Anxiety about anxiety, shame about sadness, and the lost time and opportunities that avoidance costs.

For example Nerves before a job interview.

+ "I can't look nervous." Rehearsing past midnight, then thinking about cancelling.

= Exhaustion, anxiety about the anxiety, and possibly a missed opportunity.

What struggling can look like

- Pushing feelings away
- Arguing with thoughts
- Constant distraction
- Avoiding people or places
- Seeking reassurance
- Numbing with food, alcohol or scrolling
- Ruminating
- Judging yourself for feeling it

These often bring quick relief. The ACT question is **workability**: in the long run, does it move you toward the life you want?

Willingness is... and isn't

IT IS

- ✓ Making room for a feeling
- ✓ A choice, moment to moment
- ✓ Possible while disliking it
- ✓ In service of what matters

IT ISN'T

- ✗ Wanting or liking the pain
- ✗ Giving up or resigning yourself
- ✗ Gritting your teeth until it passes
- ✗ Tolerating harmful situations

Willingness applies to inner experiences: thoughts, feelings and urges. If a situation can and should be changed, changing it may be the valued step.

Turning the switch off

A short practice for a difficult moment

01 Notice

Where is it in your body? Observe it with curiosity.

02 Name

"Here is anxiety." Naming it creates a little space.

03 Breathe

Breathe slowly, as if breathing into and around the feeling.

04 Make room

Loosen around it. Let it be there, even unwanted.

05 Return

What matters right now? Take one small step toward it.

Noticing your own switch

A few minutes of reflection

A feeling I often struggle with...

How I usually struggle with it... what I think, say or do

What the struggle costs me... short term and long term

If my switch were off, I would...

My willingness right now *fully struggling* 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *fully willing*

You can't always switch off the pain. You can often switch off the struggle with it.

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