Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
Creative Hopelessness therapist script

• Start by guiding the client through the process of filling out the creative hopelessness worksheet. In a group, split a whiteboard down the middle to simulate the two boxes on the client worksheet.
• Encourage the client(s) to fill the left box with as many common or unusual problems they have faced- have them cram answers into any open spaces they can find. They can be both common or unique/embarrassing problems.
• Have the client(s) to fill the right boxes with any solutions they have tried to fix problems. Again, have them cram answers into any open spaces they can find. They can be adaptive solutions (assertiveness) or maladaptive solutions (drinking).
• These two columns don't have to relate. In other words, the solutions in the right hand box don’t have to be specific to the problems in the left-hand box.

• Ask: “so, look at all of these problems you have dealt with and all the solutions you have tried. Now, individual solutions have sometimes fixed individual problems. For example, going to the dentist can fix a cavity. But, have all of these solutions been able to help you stop the basic process of having problems? Is there any chance that you could ever line up the perfect set of solutions and thereafter have no more problems, ever?”
• Clients will try to argue various things about this and may try to say that it is possible to line things up in such a way that you will never have a problem again. Remember that your goal is not to prove your point, but to let them wrestle with the question. Ask them to explore their own experience more deeply. An example of a gentle way to do this is to say, “so, suppose you have conquered your problems and then to celebrate you plan a picnic. You have this perfect picnic all lined up. And it rains. Aren’t there perhaps certain kind of problems that will always be possible- ones that are out of our control?” If they continue to argue, gently say something like. “I understand that this is how you feel about this. I want you to continue checking this idea against your experience.”
• If you get a general agreement, you can say something like “so this idea of lining things up so you never have another problem doesn’t seem possible, does it? The agenda of no longer having problems is hopeless, isn’t it?
• Allow the client(s) to sit with that gravity of that. This is a major revelation for many people in a way. Let it sink in.
• Then follow that up saying something like “this isn’t to say that your life is hopeless or that you are hopeless. It’s just that this idea of trying to control problems that is hopeless. So if you can’t organize things in such a way that you no longer have problems, then does it make sense to organize life around attempting to have no more problems? Probably not, huh? Then the question is, what is the alternative?”
• Allow clients to grapple with that. They will often come up with new, clever ways of trying to control, which you can point out are still attempts at control. If they don’t start to pick up on it on their own, you can introduce the idea of willingness.
• One way to do that is to tell a story. This is a true story. Feel free to borrow it or use your own:
  My 11 year-old son Eli and I are crazy birdwatchers. Every Saturday morning we go out looking for birds. One morning, I go to wake him up for birding. He says to me, “Dad, I don't feel like going birding today. I feel too depressed.” I reply to him, “well, you’ve basically got two choices. You can feel depressed and see some birds you want to see or you can feel depressed and not see some birds you like seeing. Which do you want to do?” He reflects on this and says, “I guess I’d rather feel depressed and see some birds I want to see.”
• Notice how it doesn’t have to be:
  o I have to control my depressed mood, or
  o I have to fix my depression before I do what I want, or
  o Maybe if I go out and enjoy myself, then I won’t feel depressed anymore.
• This is a key aspect of ACT. You don't have to control what you think or feel. You just do things that are meaningful to you.