



Welcome to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy!

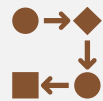
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By the end
of this 4-part
series
participants
will be able
to:



Describe ACT and its core processes.



Identify a strategy/intervention for each process.



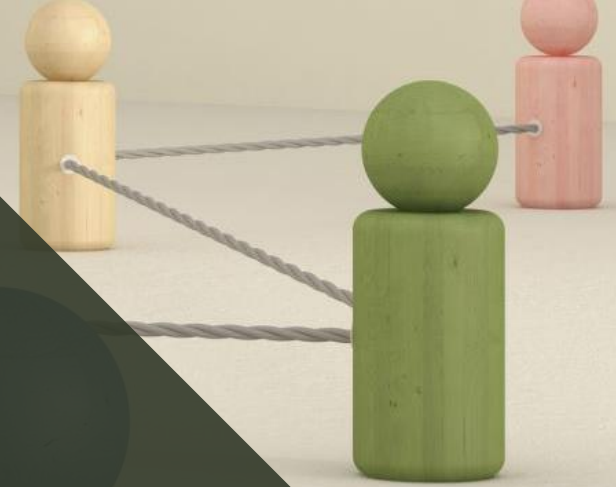
Think flexibility about how to use ACT
with different populations



Identify an opportunity for future learning
(readings, resources, trainings, etc.).

Session 1: Introduction to the ACT framework

1. Describe ACT and its core processes.
2. Discuss ACT in relation to other interventions.
3. Identify a strategy/intervention for Creative Hopelessness.
4. Understand features of initiating therapy with ACT and ACT case conceptualization.

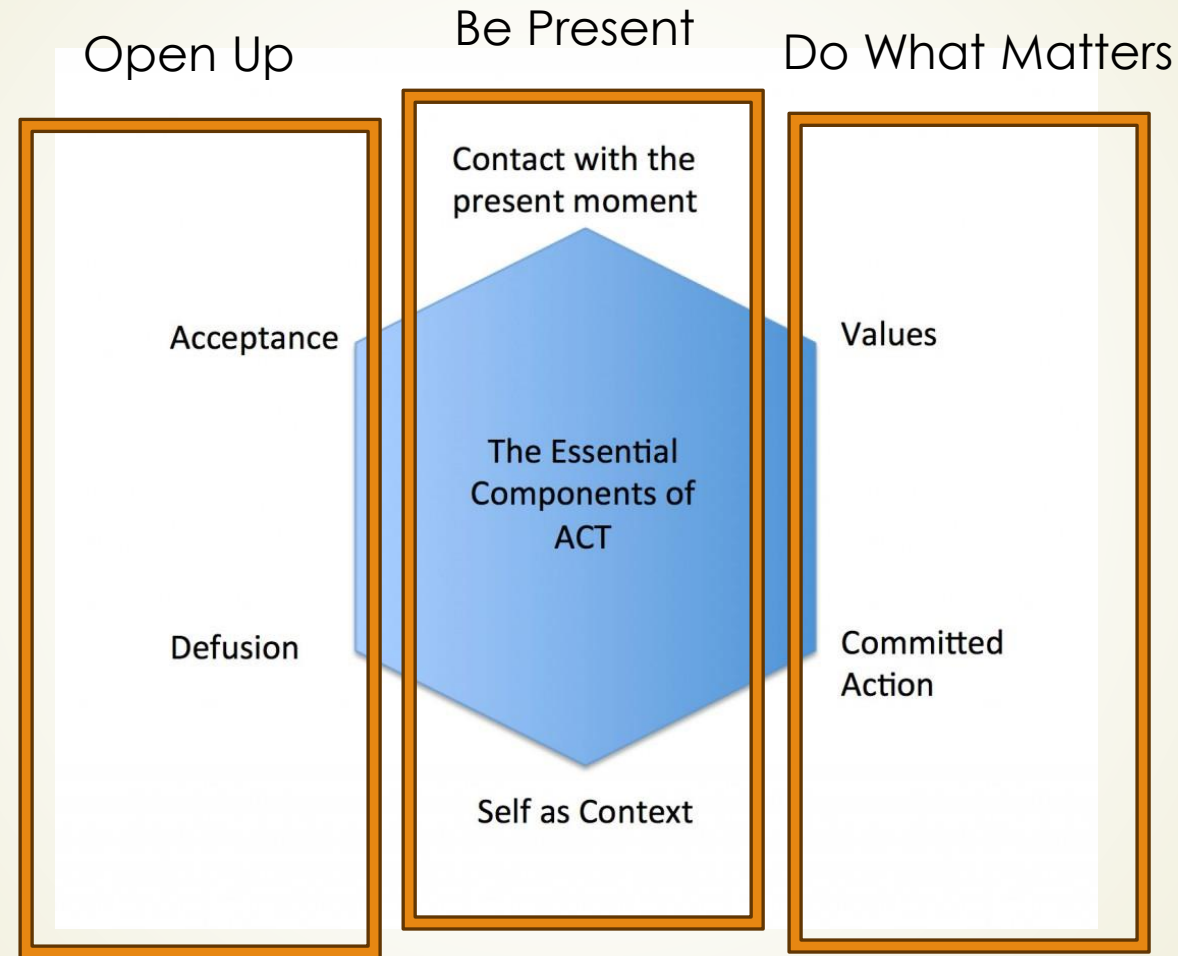




What is ACT?

- ▶ “Third Wave” psychotherapy approach along with DBT and other mindfulness-based approaches
- ▶ Overarching objective: **psychological flexibility**
- ▶ Two main goals:
 - ▶ Develop values-guided life
 - ▶ Learn how to *relate* to experiences, reactions, thoughts, reactions to reactions to create more opportunities meaning and joy

Psychological Flexibility: The Hexaflex



Be Present

Open Up

Psychological
Flexibility

Do What
Matters

Opening Up


- Separate, unhook, detach from thoughts and feelings?
- Make room for thoughts and feelings, and allow them to be there?

Being Present

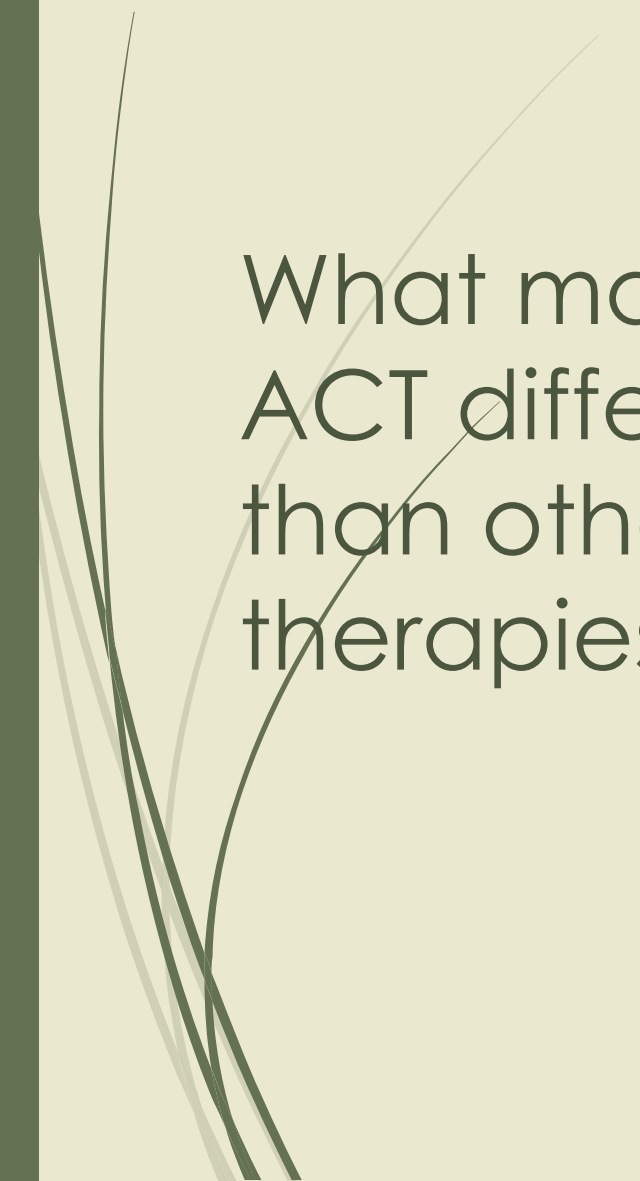
- Engage fully in here-and-now experience?
- Observe self and experience with curiosity?
- Empathize own thoughts and feelings?

Doing What Matters

- Clear about and connected with values?
- Take and sustain values-guided action?
- Set goals? Sufficient skills to achieve goals?



What makes ACT different than other therapies?



- ▶ SUFFERING happens
 - ▶ Goal is to “open up” to this notion, and the idea that we will experience distress, suffering, and negative thoughts over and over again...
- ▶ Focused on symptom *management* rather than *reduction*
- ▶ Formal non-judgmental approach
 - ▶ Curiosity
 - ▶ Move away from good/bad, right/wrong, true/false
- ▶ Freedom from "control agenda" and a focus on *choices*
- ▶ Experiential (less discussion, more doing):
 - ▶ Role play
 - ▶ Metaphors
 - ▶ Exposure
- ▶ “Learner” model



Initiating therapy with ACT

- ▶ Less focused on taking a history and more on the here and now
 - ▶ History shows up in the present
 - ▶ *“What is not working in your life right now? How would you like things to be different?”*
- ▶ More focused on behavior change
 - ▶ *“ACT is a behavior therapy. We are looking for an outcome of behavior change. When our work together ends I want to see you guided by and acting your values to live a better life, regardless of what is happening to you.”*
- ▶ Start experiential practice early
 - ▶ *Guitar metaphor*

Examples: Dissecting the Problem

What is the main problem?

What does it stop you from doing?

What is maintaining the problem?

Dissecting The Problem

This form is to help gather information about the nature of the main challenge, issue, or problem facing you. First, please summarize, in 1 or 2 sentences, what the main issue or problem is:

Second, please describe, in 1 or 2 sentences, how it affects your life, and what it stops you from doing or being:

Regardless of what your problem is – whether it is a physical illness, a difficult relationship, a work situation, a financial crisis, a performance issue, the loss of a loved one, a severe injury, or a clinical disorder such as depression - when we dissect the problem, we usually find four major elements that contribute significantly to the issue. These are represented in the boxes below. Please write as much as you can in each box, about the thoughts, feelings and actions that contribute to or worsen the challenge, problem or issue facing you.

Entanglement With Thoughts What memories, worries, fears, self-criticisms, or other unhelpful thoughts do you dwell on, or get "caught up" in, related to this issue? What thoughts do you allow to hold you back or push you around or bring you down?	Life-draining Actions: What are you currently doing that makes your life worse in the long term: keeps you stuck; wastes your time or money; drains your energy; restricts your life, impacts negatively on your health, work or relationships; maintains or worsens the problems you are dealing with?
Struggle With Feelings What emotions, feelings, urges, impulses, or sensations (associated with this issue) do you fight with, avoid, suppress, try to get rid of, or otherwise struggle with?	Avoiding Challenging Situations: What situations, activities, people or places are you avoiding or staying away from? What have you quit, withdrawn from, dropped out of? What do you keep "putting off" until later?

Creative Hopelessness

- ▶ AKA: “The control agenda”

“In order to have a good life, I need to control how I feel, get rid of unwanted thoughts and feelings, and replace them with more desirable ones.”

- ▶ Critical step for acceptance of the work and process
 - ▶ Akin to motivational interviewing
- ▶ Recognition and acceptance of what *hasn't* worked in the past
 - ▶ Step 1. What have you tried in the past?
 - ▶ Step 2. How has it helped?
 - ▶ **“Functional behavior”**
 - ▶ Step 3. What has it cost you?
 - ▶ **“Workability”**
 - ▶ Step 4. What's that like for you?
 - ▶ Step 5. Are you open to trying something different?

“You're here because you've been working really hard to resolve x, y, z issue, and whatever you've tried hasn't worked.”

Example: Join the D.O.T.S.

Join the D.O.T.S. - Part 1: What have you tried?

We all try to avoid or get rid of difficult thoughts & feelings. The aims of this exercise are a) to find out which methods you use, and b) how they work in the long term. NB: Please do not start judging these methods as 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', 'positive' or 'negative'. The aim is simply to find out if these methods are workable – i.e. do they work in the long term to give you a rich and meaningful life? (Obviously, if any of these methods *do* improve your life in the long term, keep doing them!)

What are the main thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, emotions, urges that you do not want?

D - Distraction: what do you do to distract yourself from, or 'take your mind off' painful thoughts & feelings? (e.g. movies, TV, internet, books, computer games, exercise, gardening, gambling, food, drugs, alcohol)

O - Opting out: what *important, meaningful or life-enhancing* activities, events, tasks, challenges, or people, do you avoid, quit, escape, procrastinate, or withdraw from? (If they're not *important, meaningful or life-enhancing*, then opting out is no problem!)

T - Thinking strategies: how do you try (consciously or not) to think your way out of pain? Tick any of the following that you have ever done, and write in any others that aren't included:

Worrying; Dwelling on the past; Fantasizing about the future; Imagining escape scenarios (e.g. leaving your job or your partner) or revenge scenarios; Thinking to yourself 'It's not fair ...' or 'If only ...'; Blaming yourself, others, or the world; Talking logically and rationally to yourself; Positive thinking; Positive affirmations; Judging or criticizing yourself; Giving yourself a hard time; Analyzing yourself (trying to figure out 'Why am I like this?'); Analyzing the situation (trying to figure out why this happened); Analyzing others (trying to figure out why they are like this); Planning; Strategizing; Constructive problem-solving; Making To Do lists; Repeating inspirational sayings or proverbs; Challenging or disputing negative thoughts; Telling yourself 'This too shall pass' or 'It may never happen'.

Other thinking strategies:

S – Substances & other Strategies: what Substances do you use put into your body to avoid or get rid of pain: foods, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, naturopathic & herbal remedies, over-the-counter & prescription medications?

Any other Strategies you ever use in response to unwanted thoughts and feelings? For example, have you tried yoga, meditation, having affairs, aggressiveness, Tai Chi, massage, exercise, picking fights, dancing, music, suicide attempts, self-harming, prayer, smashing things, staying in bed, self-help books, seeing a therapist or doctor or other health professional, getting angry at life or other people? Ever tried 'tolerating it', 'putting up with it' or 'sucking it up and getting on with it'? Ever tried giving up?

Join the D.O.T.S. - Part 2: How has it worked? What has it cost?

Most of these strategies give you short term relief from painful thoughts and feelings. But do they *permanently* get rid of those unwanted thoughts and feelings, so they *never come back*?

Most of the time, with most of these strategies, how long does your pain go away for before it returns?

Now clearly, some of these methods are helpful, if you use them flexibly, moderately, sensibly – in which case, keep using them!

However, when we *over-use* or *over-rely* on these methods – when we use them excessively, rigidly or inappropriately – they have significant costs. When you have over-used them, what have these methods cost you in terms of health, money, wasted time, relationships, missed opportunities, work, increased pain, tiredness, wasted energy, frustration, disappointment, etc?

How many of these methods give you relief from pain *in the short term*, but keep you stuck or make your life worse or have significant costs *in the long term*?

'none' 'a few' 'about half' 'most' 'all'

You're Not Lazy or Stupid

You've tried very hard for a long time to get rid of these thoughts & feelings. No one can call you lazy! And you're not stupid! These are methods that everyone uses to some extent, to avoid or get rid of pain. We all try to distract ourselves; we all opt out of things that are difficult; we all try to think our way out of our pain; and we all put substances of one form or another into our bodies. And our friends, family, and health professionals often actively encourage us to do all these things!

However ... no matter how hard we try to avoid or get rid of these thoughts and feelings in the long term, they keep coming back!

Are You Stuck In A Vicious Cycle?

Unfortunately, often what we do to get short term relief from painful thoughts and feelings, tends to make our life worse in the long term. In other words, we get stuck in a vicious cycle. And most people find it painful when they realise this. What difficult thoughts and feelings does this bring up for you?

Can you take a moment to acknowledge just how painful and difficult it is to be caught in this vicious cycle? (Is there something kind you can say to yourself or do for yourself?)

Given that:

- no matter what you do, your painful thoughts and feelings *keep coming back*, and
- many of the ways you respond to them are making your life worse *in the long term* would you be open to something new? Would you be interested in learning a brand new way of responding to them; a method that is radically different to everything else you've tried?

Examples: Case Conceptualization

What does the client want from therapy/coaching? What does he/she describe as the main problem(s)?

Are there any external barriers (as opposed to psychological barriers) to a rich and full life - e.g. legal, social, medical, financial, occupational problems that will require active problem solving and/or skills training?

UNWORKABLE ACTION
What is the client doing that makes his life worse, or keeps her stuck, or worsens his problems, or inhibits her growth, or prevents healthy solutions, or worsens health, or damages relationships etc?

What people, places, events, activities, situations and challenges is the client avoiding or escaping (e.g. withdrawing from, quitting, procrastinating, or staying away from)?

FUSION: (Include examples of specific thoughts, as well as of processes such as worrying, etc.)
PAST & FUTURE: (rumination, worrying, fantasizing, blaming, predicting the worst, reliving old hurts, idealizing the past or the future, flashbacks, 'if only ...', why did it happen? etc.)

SELF-DESCRIPTION: (self-judgments, self-limiting ideas about 'who I am' or 'what I can and can't do')

REASONS: (reasons the client gives for why she can't, won't or shouldn't change, or why his life can't be improved)

RULES: (about how myself, others, life should be: look for key words such as: 'should', 'have to', 'must', 'ought', 'right', 'wrong', 'always', 'never', 'can't because', 'won't until', 'shouldn't unless' etc)

JUDGMENTS: (mostly these will be negative, but sometimes positive; may be about anyone or anything: other people, oneself, one's job, one's body, one's thoughts and feelings, the past, the future, or even life itself)

OTHER: (any other unhelpful cognitions: beliefs, ideas, attitudes, assumptions, etc. Include anything the client says that upsets, annoys, confuses or scares you, or makes you feel stuck.)

EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE: (Private experiences the client is trying to avoid, get rid of, or is unwilling to have)

THOUGHTS/IMAGES/MEMORIES: _____
FEELINGS/ SENSATIONS/URGES: _____

VALUES & COMMITTED ACTION
IMPORTANT LIFE DOMAINS: (What domains of life seem most important to this client - e.g. work, study, health, parenting, intimate relationship, friends, family, spirituality, community, environment)?

VALUES: (What values seem important within those domains?)

GOALS & ACTIONS: (What values-congruent goals and activities does the client: a) already have; and b) want to pursue?)

NEED FOR SKILLS-TRAINING: (What important skills does the client lack or fail to use e.g. problem solving, goal setting, self-soothing, assertiveness, communication, conflict resolution, time management, relaxation, empathy?)

NEED FOR TRAINING ATTENTION SKILLS: Does the client have the ability for 'task-focused attention': to maintain, shift, broaden, or narrow the focus of attention as required for the task at hand?

RESOURCES: (What strengths, skills and personal resources does the client already have, that could be utilized? What external resources could potentially be accessed?)

MY PERSONAL BARRIERS: (What difficult thoughts and feelings show up for me?)

BRAINSTORM: What questions, exercises, worksheets, metaphors, tools, techniques and strategies can I use in the next session? What sort of skills-training may be required? Is practical problem-solving required for external barriers?



Considerations



- ▶ Evidence for most presenting issues, populations, and diagnoses
- ▶ Evidence of multiple settings including group, inpatient, school, and individual therapy
- ▶ Can use the processes and strategies in isolation (e.g., values exercises, metaphors, role play, present moment awareness practice)
- ▶ Not recommended for acute, severe episodes
- ▶ Some processes may be less effective for certain populations (e.g., metaphors)



For your review

Favorite Resources

- ▶ [Act Mindfully](#)
- ▶ ACT Made Simple- Russ Harris
- ▶ The Happiness Trap (text and illustrated versions) – Russ Harris
- ▶ ACT with Love – Russ Harris
- ▶ Get Out of Your Mind and into Your Life – Steven Hayes
- ▶ Big Book of Metaphors – Stoddard, Afari, & Hayes
- ▶ [Association for Contextual and Behavioral Science](#)

Today's References

- ▶ Harris, R. (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- ▶ Strosahl, K., Robinson, P., & Gustavsson, T. (2012). Brief Interventions for Radical Change



Questions?

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