

Act on ACT: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Resources

Books

Eifert, Georg H., Ph.D., and Forsyth, John P., **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Anxiety Disorders: A Practitioner's Treatment Guide to Using Mindfulness, Acceptance, and Values-Based Behavior Change Strategies**, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., Oakland, CA, 2013.

Harris, Russ, M.D., **ACT Made Simple: An Easy to Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy**, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., Oakland, CA, 2009.

Harris, Russ, M.D., **The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living (A guide to ACT: the mindfulness based program for reducing stress, overcoming fear, and creating a rich and meaningful life)**, Trumpeter Books, Boston, 2008.

Harris, Russ, M.D., and Aisbett, Bev, **The Illustrated Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living: A User Friendly Guide to ACT**, Shambhala Publications Inc., Boston, MA, 2013.

Hayes, Steven C., Ph.D., with Smith, Spencer, **Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life: The New Acceptance and Commitment Therapy** (a self-help workbook), New Harbinger Publications, Inc., Oakland, CA, 2005.

Zettle, Robert D., Ph.D., **ACT for Depression: A Clinician's Guide to Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in Treating Depression**, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., Oakland, CA, 2007.

Handouts/Worksheets (free from Russ Harris, coordinated for use with Harris's book *The Happiness Trap*)

http://thehappinesstrap.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/The_Complete_Happiness_Trap_Worksheets.pdf

App

ACTCompanion: Happiness Trap (Berrick Psychology) Exercises and tools to practice being present, opening up, and doing what matters. Includes guided mindfulness meditations. App is free; full access requires subscription fee (\$1.99/month; \$9.99 unlimited).

Classes

www.imlearningact.com

Online courses offered by Dr. Russ Harris include ACT for Beginners and ACT for Depression and Anxiety Disorders.

www.thehappinesstrap.com

Dr. Russ Harris's eight week online course; fee is \$190.00. Register to receive newsletters and free resources. Several free ACT related videos are available.

You Tube

Steven C. Hayes, "Mental Breaks to Avoid Mental Breaks," TedX Davidson Academy, July 8, 2016

Steven C. Hayes, "Psychological Flexibility: How Love Turns Pain into Purpose," TedX University of Nevada, Feb. 22, 2016

Steven C. Hayes, "Big Think Interview with Steven Hayes," April 12, 2012

ACT: Overview and Principles

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy or ACT (pronounced as the word “act”) is a **behavioral therapy focusing on mindfulness skills and values guided action**. It focuses on strategies for handling our uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, acceptance of what is out of our personal control and commitment to taking action to lead a rich and full life consistent with our values.

Psychological flexibility is the ability to respond to adapt to a situation with awareness and openness and then to take values guided action.

Mindfulness + Values + Action = Psychological Flexibility

Mindfulness is defined in ACT as an awareness practice that involves paying attention with openness, curiosity and flexibility.

Six Core Principles of ACT

ACT has six core principles (sometimes referred to as the ACT Hexaflex), all of them working together to develop psychological flexibility.

1. **Defusion:** The ability to step back and detach from our thoughts, feelings and images, holding our thoughts lightly, letting them come and go.
2. **Expansion or Acceptance:** Opening up and making room for our painful thoughts and emotions, instead of running from them, fighting them, or getting overwhelmed by them.
3. **Connection:** Being with the present moment, here and now, aware of both the physical world around us and the psychological world within us.
4. **The Observing Self:** This is the aspect of ourselves that is aware of whatever we are thinking, feeling or doing at a particular moment. In ACT, it is often referred to “self-as-context.”
5. **Values:** What are the values that give meaning to our lives? What do we want our life to stand for? What kind of person do we want to be? Clarifying your values provides direction and motivation for you to make changes and move forward.
6. **Action:** A full and meaningful life results from making choices and taking actions that are consistent with our values.

Adapted from *The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living*, by Dr. Russ Harris, Trumpeter Books, Boston, 2009, Chapter 3, pp. 33-35. See www.thehappinesstrap.com and www.imlearningact.com for detailed information about courses by Dr. Russ Harris.

“Act on ACT,” NALP AEC 2018

Developing Self-Compassion with ACT

Self-Compassion: Acknowledging Pain and Responding with Kindness

Self-compassion is part of every aspect of the ACT model. It's useful in helping our students/lawyers through depression and anxiety, and certainly worth developing in ourselves.

Explains Dr. Russ Harris, "Life dishes up pain for all of us. We all get to repeatedly experience disappointment, frustration, failure, rejection, illness, injury, conflict, hostility, grief, fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, guilt, loneliness, health issues, financial issues, relationship issues, work issues, and so on. Unfortunately, when we experience great pain, we often don't treat ourselves very well. Self-compassion involves acknowledging your own suffering and responding kindly. In other words, treating yourself with the same warmth, caring and kindness that you'd extend to someone you love if they were in similar pain."

Six Elements of Self-Compassion

Dr. Russ Harris suggests teaching self compassion with a six step model, beginning with any one of six building blocks.

Element #1: Acknowledging Pain

Consciously and intentionally noticing and acknowledging our own pain and the thoughts, feelings and emotions associated with it--and not suppressing or avoiding it. Find words to describe the pain: "I'm noticing painful thoughts of rejection," or "I notice I'm feeling like a failure."

Element #2: Defusion from Self-Judgment

In ACT, defusion means learning to separate or detach from our thoughts and beliefs and see them for what they are: strings of words or images. Harris encourages to defuse from harsh, critical self-talk. "You can learn to think more positively . . . but that won't stop your mind from judging you and criticizing you. We can learn to defuse from those harsh self-judgments and notice, name and unhook from these cognitions and let them come and stay and go in their own good time, without getting caught up in them or pushed around by them."

Element #3: Acting with Kindness

ACT focuses on values: how we want to treat ourselves and others, and what is important to giving our lives meaning. Says Harris, "The value that forms the foundation of self-compassion is kindness. When we acknowledge our pain, this is an act of kindness. And when we defuse

from harsh self-criticism, this too is an act of kindness.” He adds, “There are many, many ways in which we can act kindly toward ourselves and others. We can use kind self-talk, we can talk to ourselves in a caring and gentle and understanding way, we can do kind deeds, engage self-care activities, or spend quality time with people who treat us well.”

Element #4: Acceptance

Acceptance in ACT means opening up and making room for our thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories. Harris advises us to allow them to flow through us without fighting them or running from them or being controlled by them. Practicing accepting our thoughts is an act of kindness in itself. Acceptance reduces our need to escape our painful thoughts through alcohol, food, drugs, tobacco, mindless TV time, etc.

Element #5: Validation

“We tend to invalidate our emotional pain, belittling ourselves, telling ourselves that we’re overreacting, and that we should toughen up,” explains Harris. He encourages us to validate our experience through defusion, freeing ourselves from harsh judgments, unrealistic expectations, and unkind comparisons of ourselves to others, and to practice talking to ourselves with kindness.

Element #6: Connectedness

When in pain, we tend to isolate ourselves feeling that no one cares, that no one else knows what we’re going through, and/or telling ourselves that everyone else is happier or better off than we are.

We need to consciously defuse from these thoughts and actively spend time with people who care about us and treat us kindly. Says Harris, “We also need to remember that our pain is something we share with all human beings. Pain reminds us that we care deeply, and that we’re facing a reality gap---a gap between what we want and the reality we have. Pain is a sign we are a living, caring human being.”