



Act on ACT: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in Counseling

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Why Act on ACT?

- **The world we're swimming in**
 - Anxiety, comparisons, rankings, information overload
- **Well suited for law students, lawyers and those who work with them**
 - Stuck, anxious, depressed, overwhelmed, scared
- **Model that considers**
 - **Values and self compassion**
 - **Living with, rather than fixing, our anxiety and pain**

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How We Came to ACT

- **Values** driven
 - Interested in ways **to be healthier**
 - Commitment to **life long learning**
- **Colleagues**, not experts
- **Practical tool** to add to your kit
- **Personal and professional** applications
- Goal:
 - **Resources** and exploration

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What is ACT? History

- Pronounced as the word “act”
- A type of **behavioral therapy** based on Relational Frame Theory (**RFT**)
- Developed by **Steven C. Hayes**, Ph.D., University of Nevada, early 2000s
- **Russ Harris**, M.D., author ***The Happiness Trap***

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What is ACT? Focus

- Focuses on **mindfulness skills and values guided action**
- Handling our **uncomfortable thoughts/feelings**
- **Accepting what is out of our control**
- Commitment to taking **action in the direction of a rich and full life**

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We're Hard Wired to be Anxious

- **Anxiety and self comparison are normal**
- **Necessary** for human survival
- **Problem solving machine = mind**
- **Unable to eliminate psychological pain**



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Goal of ACT: Psychological Flexibility

Mindfulness + Values + Action =
Psychological Flexibility

- The ability to **respond and to adapt** to a situation with awareness and openness and then to take **values guided action**
- **Mindfulness in ACT:** awareness with **openness, curiosity, and flexibility**

ACT Has Six Core Principles

- All six **work together**
- Principles can be used in **any order**
- Can **use one or more or all** of them
- The **first four are mindfulness** based

The Six Core Principles of ACT

1. Defusion
2. Expansion or Acceptance
3. Connection
4. The Observing Self
5. Values
6. Action

**Mindfulness + Values + Action =
Psychological Flexibility**

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1. Defusion

- **Step back, detach** from thoughts and feelings
- **Hold thoughts** and feelings **lightly**
- Let thoughts and feelings **come and go**

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2. Expansion

- **Open up, make room** for painful thoughts and feelings
- **Expand and accept them** instead of
 - running
 - avoiding
 - fighting
 - getting overwhelmed

3. Connection

- Being with the **present moment**
- Contacting the **here and now**
- **Awareness** of the **outside world** and our own **internal world**

4. The Observing Self

- The part of ourselves that is **aware of whatever we are thinking, feeling or doing** at a particular moment
- “Self-context”

5. Values

- What do we want our **life to stand for**?
- What gives our life **meaning**?
- What **kind of person** do we want to be?
- Provide **direction and motivation**
- **Encourage us to make changes** and take action

6. Action

- A **full and meaningful life** results from
 - **Making choices and taking actions**
 - **Consistent** with our **values**

Mindfulness + Values + Action =
Psychological Flexibility

Self-Compassion with ACT

1. Acknowledging **pain**
2. Defusion/releasing from **self-judgment**
3. Acting with **kindness**
4. Acceptance (**expansion**)
5. Validation: **humanity**
6. Connectedness: **community**

**Self-Compassion = Acknowledging Pain +
Responding with Kindness**

Experiential Avoidance

- Ongoing **attempt to get rid of unwanted thoughts and feelings. . .**
- Even when it's **harmful, useless and costly**
- **Cause of depression and anxiety**

Exercise: Part I

Experiential Avoidance

- **A painful thought or feeling I would like to get rid of is. . . .**



Exercise Part I, cont'd.

- ***My avoidance strategies* for escaping this thought or feeling**

- **Distraction** from the thought or feeling
 - » Zoning out, busyness, organizing, etc.
- **Opting out** from the thought or feeling
 - » Withdrawing from events, people, places, meetings. . .
 - » Avoiding people, places, etc.

Exercise Part I, cont'd.

- **Thinking strategies you've used to avoid the thought or feeling**

- » Worrying
- » Dwelling on the past
- » Fantasizing about the future
- » Imagining escape
- » Thinking "it's not fair"
- » Thinking "if only"
- » Blaming others
- » Blaming yourself
- » Blaming the world

Exercise Part I, cont'd.

- » Talking logically to yourself
- » Talking positively to yourself
- » Talking negatively to yourself
- » Analyzing yourself (why am I like this?)
- » Analyzing the situation (why did this happen?)
- » Analyzing others (why do they act like this?)

- **Substances and other comforts** you've used

- » Food or alcohol
- » Screen time
- » Shopping

Exercise Part I, cont'd.

- **What is the cost of avoidance?**

- Did these methods work in the *long term*?
- Did they move you toward a **more meaningful life**?
- Cost in terms of
 - » **Time**
 - » **Energy**
 - » **Money**
 - » **Health**
 - » **Relationships**

Avoidance Doesn't Work

- May work **short term, but not long term**
- It **doesn't resolve** the thought or feeling
- The harder we try to avoid the feeling and thoughts, the **more bad feelings** we create

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Practical Application: Defusion and Expansion

1. Defusion
2. Expansion or Acceptance
3. Connection
4. The Observing Self
5. Values
6. Action

**Mindfulness + Values + Action =
Psychological Flexibility**

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Defusion:

Detaching from thoughts and feelings



Holding them lightly



dreamstime.com

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Defusion Strategies

- Notice:

- I notice I'm having the thought that. . .



- Thank your mind:

- "Thank you, mind, for so helpfully pointing that out!"
 - Mentally jot a thank you note to your mind



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Defusion Strategies, cont'd.

- Name the story:

- The “I can’t handle this” story
- The “I’m not good enough” story



- Let it go:

- Let the thought come and go
- Picture leaves floating on a stream, clouds in the sky



- Distort it:

- Sing it; say it loudly or slowly
- Create a horror movie title



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Defusion Strategies, cont'd.

- Recognize your mind’s talents and disguises

- Radio Doom and Gloom



- Caveperson thinking
Don’t get killed!!
Throw a rock at it!!



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Defusion Strategies, cont'd.

- A factory spewing endless criticism and judgment



- A bully



- A relentless salesperson



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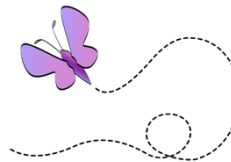
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Expansion and Acceptance Strategies and Metaphors

- **Curiosity:** Observe as a scientist



- **Hold on gently:** Hold your thoughts with compassion

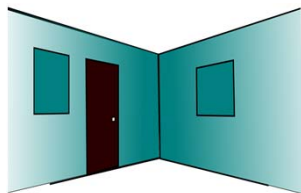


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More Expansion Strategies

- **Let it in the room:** Allow the thought or feeling to exist, without engaging it



- **Expand:** Visualize inner expansion

Stage Show Metaphor

- **Life is like a stage show**



- Bring up the **lights**
- **Back up;** change perspective

Struggle Switch Metaphor

- Switch set by your **childhood programming**

- I can't handle this
- I don't deserve to feel this way
- How can I get rid of this feeling?



- **Turn off** your struggle switch!

- Or **turn it down** a notch



Monsters in the Boat Metaphor

- Because **you're human**, you likely have **monsters** in your boat
- They **prevent you** from pursuing your valued direction
- **Bring them into the daylight**



Exercise Part II: Defusion and Expansion Strategy

- Which **defusion or expansion strategy/strategies** might **you try**?
- What's an **action step** you could take to implement one of the strategies?

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