

Summary of Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)

[Summary put together by Prairie Girl Group](#) – 2024

Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) promotes psychological flexibility. Think of this flexibility like your ability to bend and stretch your mind to handle different and even unwanted thoughts, feelings and situations. Just like your body and can stretch and move – psychological flexibility promotes the idea that your mind can do the same thing...even when things get tricky or gross in our lives.

Said another way, our problems don't make us broken. This just means we are human and that we can view/reframe our problems to free us up to live.

Psychological flexibility is our ability to adapt and respond to the things that can change in our lives – this includes the things that are both in our control and out of our control. Psychological flexibility is the ability to be present, open up, and do what matters, even in the presence of difficult thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

These are the components of ACT – this model is not chronological

- **Acceptance:** The ability to allow thoughts and feelings to come and go without unnecessary defense.
- **Cognitive Defusion:** The ability to see thoughts for what they are (streams of words and images) rather than what they say they are (threats or truths).
- **Contact with the Present Moment:** The ability to be fully aware and engaged in the present moment.
- **Self-as-Context:** The ability to differentiate oneself from one's thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories.
- **Values:** The ability to clarify what is truly important and meaningful and to take action guided by those values.
- **Committed Action:** The ability to take effective action guided by one's values, even in the presence of difficult thoughts and feelings.

Some strategies to practice ACCEPTANCE

- Mindfulness: Mindfulness techniques are used to help individuals observe their thoughts and feelings without judgment or attachment. This allows them to accept these experiences as transient mental events rather than absolute truths.
- Expansion: Expansion involves expanding one's awareness to include all aspects of the present moment experience, including thoughts, feelings, sensations, and the environment. This expanded awareness can help individuals accept their experiences more fully.
- Acceptance Exercises: ACT often includes specific exercises designed to help individuals practice acceptance. For example, individuals may be asked to imagine their thoughts as leaves floating down a stream, or to hold a thought in their mind without trying to change it.
- Practicing acceptance in ACT does not mean passive resignation or giving up on goals. Instead, it involves acknowledging and making room for all thoughts and feelings, even the difficult ones, while taking action in alignment with one's values.

Some strategies to practice DEFUSION

- Metaphors and Imagery: Therapists often use metaphors and imagery to help clients see their thoughts in a different light. For example, thoughts might be compared to passing clouds, or clients might be asked to imagine their thoughts as leaves floating down a stream.
- Labeling Thoughts: Clients are encouraged to label their thoughts as just thoughts, rather than facts or truths. This helps create a sense of separation between the individual and their thoughts.
- Singing or Repeating: Clients may be asked to repeat a thought or belief aloud until it loses its meaning or emotional impact, demonstrating that thoughts are just words.
- Externalization: Clients can externalize their thoughts by giving them a name or character, which can make them seem less threatening or powerful.
- Mindfulness Techniques: Mindfulness practices, such as observing thoughts without judgment, can help individuals see their thoughts as passing mental events rather than solid truths.
- Absurdity: Clients may be asked to exaggerate or repeat a thought until it sounds silly or loses its power, helping them see the thought as less threatening or meaningful.
- Defusion techniques are designed to help individuals change their relationship with their thoughts, so they are less likely to be controlled or limited by them. By practicing defusion, individuals can become more flexible in how they respond to their thoughts and emotions, leading to greater psychological flexibility and well-being.

Strategies to practice BEING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

- Mindful Breathing: Take a few minutes to focus on your breath. Notice the sensation of breathing in and breathing out. When your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your breath.
- Body Scan: Lie down or sit comfortably and focus your attention on different parts of your body, starting from your toes and moving up to your head. Notice any sensations without judgment.
- Mindful Observation: Choose an object to focus on, such as a flower, a candle flame, or a piece of art. Spend a few minutes observing the object, noticing its colors, shapes, and textures.
- Mindful Walking: Take a walk and focus on each step you take. Notice the sensations in your feet and legs as they move. Pay attention to the sights, sounds, and smells around you.
- Mindful Eating: Eat a meal or snack slowly and attentively. Notice the flavors, textures, and sensations of each bite. Pay attention to how your body feels as you eat.
- Daily Activities: Practice being present during daily activities, such as washing dishes, brushing your teeth, or taking a shower. Focus on the sensations and movements involved in these activities.
- Thought Watching: Observe your thoughts as if they were clouds passing by in the sky. Notice them without getting caught up in them or judging them. Just let them come and go.

Some strategies to practice IDENTIFYING VALUES

- Reflect on What Matters to You: Think about the different areas of your life, such as relationships, work, health, and personal growth. Consider what is important to you in each of these areas.
- Identify Your Core Values: Core values are fundamental beliefs that guide your behavior and decisions. Examples of core values include honesty, compassion, creativity, and perseverance. Identify a few core values that resonate with you.
- Consider Your Ideal Life: Imagine your ideal life in the future. What kind of person do you want to be? What kind of relationships do you want to have? What kind of work do you want to do? Your answers can help you identify values that are important to you.
- Reflect on Your Past Experiences: Think about times in your life when you felt most fulfilled and satisfied. What values were you honoring during those times? This can give you clues about your core values.
- Use Values Cards or Worksheets: There are many resources available, such as values cards or worksheets, that can help you identify your values. These tools typically present a list of values for you to choose from or rank in order of importance.
- Seek Feedback from Others: Sometimes, those closest to us can provide valuable insights into our values. Ask friends, family members, or colleagues what they think your values are based on how you live your life.

- Identifying your values is an ongoing process that can evolve over time. It's important to regularly revisit and refine your values as your life circumstances and priorities change.

Some strategies to practice COMMITTING TO ACT

- Clarify Your Values: Identify what is important and meaningful to you in life. This will serve as a guide for setting meaningful goals and taking committed action.
- Set Meaningful Goals: Based on your values, set specific, achievable goals that are in line with what you truly want in life. Make sure your goals are clear, measurable, and have a timeline.
- Break Down Goals into Actionable Steps: Break down your goals into smaller, manageable steps. This can make them less overwhelming and easier to commit to.
- Create an Action Plan: Develop a plan for how you will achieve your goals. Identify potential obstacles and plan how you will overcome them. Set a schedule for when you will take each step.
- Practice Mindfulness and Acceptance: Use mindfulness techniques to stay present and accept difficult thoughts and emotions that may arise as you work towards your goals. Remember, discomfort is a natural part of growth.
- Take Consistent Action: Commit to taking small, consistent steps towards your goals, even when you don't feel like it. Focus on the process rather than the outcome.
- Monitor Your Progress: Regularly review your progress towards your goals. Celebrate your successes and adjust your approach if needed.
- Practice Self-Compassion: Be kind to yourself when things don't go as planned. Acknowledge your efforts and learn from any setbacks without harsh self-criticism.
- Reevaluate and Adjust: Periodically review your goals and values to ensure they still align with what is important to you. Adjust your goals and action plan as needed.

An interesting concept I didn't want to lose...

- Automaticity – some behaviors are repeated so many times in our lives that it is now a reflex or a hobby. Words and memories can be present, but they don't need to govern our lives.