



What is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and how can it help me??

There are many different types of psychological therapy and it can be confusing to know how they are all different. Acceptance and commitment therapy (known as ACT for short and pronounced as 'act') is a type of talking therapy that has been shown to be helpful for a great number of people. It is 'evidence based' which means that many comprehensive research trials have shown that it can be effective for helping many things including anxiety, depression, trauma, grief, loss, physical health conditions amongst many other presentations.

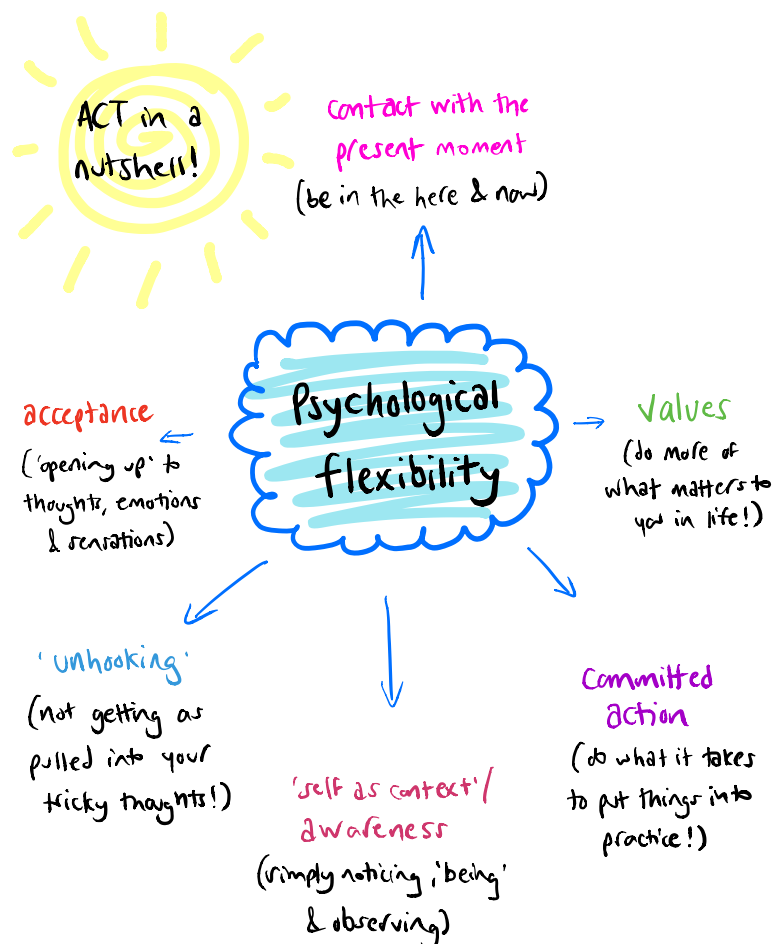


So what ACTually is ACT?!

In a nutshell, ACT helps us learn more effective ways to deal with our thoughts, emotions and sensations. It can help us to learn how to stop getting pulled into or 'hooked' by our thoughts. It is a very validating therapy as it helps us recognise that it's very normal and natural to have all sorts of worries (after all that's what our minds do) and instead of struggling with thoughts

or pushing them away, it helps us instead to 'unhook', notice and 'open up' to such thoughts. Many clients who we do this work with have commented that this new way of dealing with thoughts can be very liberating and they then notice that their struggles then naturally start to reduce.

There are various strategies that can help us learn to unhook from our thoughts. ACT uses a lot of metaphors to help put theory into practice and these are often demonstrated and discussed within sessions. For example, a useful metaphor for unhooking from our busy thoughts is to liken them to passing traffic. We can notice the passing traffic but we usually don't focus on it or sit and worry about it, we just let the noise come and go. We know it's always there but we can learn to just let the passing cars be there without thinking about them. ACT helps us to relate to our thoughts in a similar way by simply noticing the thoughts but not paying them specific attention. This doesn't mean that we have to 'unhook' from every single thought though as there are some thoughts we can and should do something about (e.g., meeting a deadline for work!). It's the thoughts that we CAN'T do anything about that can be helpful to try to unhook from. Such as those upsetting and unhelpful thoughts like 'I'm such an idiot!' or 'I'm so useless!'. These types of thoughts tend not to be helpful to listen to at all and they often only make us feel worse when we do listen to them! ACT can help us take a step back from these types of thoughts. A good question to always ask yourself is 'Is listening to this thought helpful or unhelpful?'. If it's helpful then great! But if it's not helpful... that's when to try to unhook from the thoughts.



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Another major part of ACT is learning how to be in, and connect with, the present moment with this often being called 'mindfulness'. So many of us spend all our time either thinking of the past or worrying about the future and we barely spend any time in the present. When did you last (or ever!!) REALLY focus on and appreciate the moment? In our modern world it's so easy to get carried away with the never ending 'to do list' that we don't stop to take a moment just 'to be'. Sometimes people think that mindfulness involves long periods of meditation but it doesn't have to at all, we can learn to have little mindful moments within the day which can just 'anchor' or ground us to the present moment when we are feeling overwhelmed or are getting pulled into worries which we can't do anything about. We can often get tangled up in our thoughts but ACT can help us learn how to tune into the part of us that can just simply notice, open up to and observe our thoughts instead of trying to always analyse and solve them.

Another significant part of ACT is about focusing on our values. This essentially means living our life in a way that makes it more meaningful, rich and value based. Our values are our hearts deepest desires, the things that bring us meaning, the reasons why we want to do things in life. Many other therapies don't focus on values as explicitly, so we really like how ACT specifically helps clients to think about and learn how their life currently is and how they can bring more meaning into their life. If you are finding that your life is passing you by and is lacking real meaning and value then perhaps exploring this with an ACT therapist may be helpful.



Sometimes in life it's very easy to avoid doing things so another focus of ACT is around 'committed action' which is about encouraging ourselves to not only to think about change but to actually then commit to change. Tuning into our values can be really important and helpful when we are trying to do things that are more challenging for us and ACT can help with this.

The key to all of the above (and often the key to good mental health) is what is called 'psychological flexibility'. Many of us can be quite rigid in our thinking and can get quite stuck on worries whirring about in our head, have high expectations of ourselves, have 'rules' for living by, be quite critical of ourselves and so on. Psychological flexibility means that we can open ourselves up to the ups and downs of life, that we can recognise that we have ever changing emotions and that having a busy mind with all sorts of thoughts is very normal and natural. Instead of running away from these or trying to avoid them we can learn new strategies in ACT that can help us lead a life without as many struggles.

This is a very brief rundown of what ACT involves, it can be hard to capture it but we hope you've found it useful! There are many ACT therapists at The Wellbeing Rooms, please just get in touch if you'd be interested to find out more and explore this within therapy.

Thanks for reading!

Jo, Jan and Catherine @The Wellbeing Rooms

June 2022