



FLOURISH HORIZON
PSYCHOLOGY & COUNSELLING

A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

ACT for Children and Adolescents

Helping young people build psychological flexibility

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) teaches children to handle difficult thoughts and feelings while taking steps towards what matters to them. The aim is not to eliminate every uncomfortable feeling, but to help young people respond more flexibly.

The big idea

A child can feel worried, frustrated or uncertain and still make a small, meaningful choice. Skills are introduced with simple words, relatable examples and practice.

ACT can be adapted for different ages

Younger children often benefit from stories, playful metaphors and short activities. Adolescents may prefer real-life examples involving friendships, study, family or identity.

FOR PARENTS, CARERS & EDUCATORS

You do not need to “fix” every feeling. Help children notice it, make room for it and choose a useful next step.

The ACT Kidflex approach

The Kidflex model presents six ways to strengthen psychological flexibility. These short phrases can become everyday prompts.

LET IT BE

Allow uncomfortable feelings to be present without needing to push them away.

TRY SAYING

"I can feel nervous and still try."

LET IT GO

Step back from thoughts instead of treating each thought as a fact.

TRY SAYING

"My mind is telling me I will fail."

STAY HERE

Notice what is happening right now using your senses and attention.

TRY SAYING

"What can I see, hear and feel?"

NOTICE YOURSELF

Observe thoughts and feelings from a wider perspective.

TRY SAYING

"I notice I am having a worried thought."

CHOOSE WHAT MATTERS

Identify the people, qualities and activities that are important.

TRY SAYING

"I want to be a caring friend."

DO WHAT MATTERS

Take manageable actions guided by values, even when it is hard.

TRY SAYING

"I will say hello even though I am shy."

These skills work together rather than in a fixed sequence. Practise them in ordinary moments, not only when a child is distressed.

Everyday ACT exercises

Keep practice brief, playful and age-appropriate. Start with manageable situations and adjust activities to the child's developmental needs.

1 Name the thought

When your child says "Nobody likes me," try: "Your mind is telling you nobody likes you right now." This makes space to notice the thought without arguing about it.

2 Make room for the feeling

Invite your child to describe where worry lives in their body. Ask: "Can we give this feeling a little space while we take one small step?"

3 Anchor in the present

Together, feel feet on the floor, name three things you can see and listen for two sounds. The goal is to practise noticing, not to force calm.

4 Use a values compass

Ask: "What kind of friend, student, sibling or teammate do you want to be?" Choose one small action that reflects the answer.

EXAMPLE: BEFORE SCHOOL

"You can bring the worried feeling with you. What would one brave, kind or helpful step look like?" Work together on a realistic plan rather than demanding that anxiety disappear first.

Parent and school support

Adults strengthen ACT skills by modelling flexibility and supporting meaningful participation, rather than relying entirely on reassurance or avoidance.

For parents and carers

Validate: "That sounds difficult." Model: "I notice I am getting frustrated, so I will slow down." Coach: Use one short Kidflex prompt during a daily routine. Practise: Praise effort and values-based choices, not only outcomes.

For teachers and schools

Use clear, brief language and model noticing and acceptance. Reinforce achievable classroom participation and helpful choices. Plan breaks and accommodations individually: support regulation without automatically making avoidance the only option.

Three questions for a family check-in

- What difficult thought or feeling showed up today?
- Which Kidflex skill could help us respond?
- What is one small step toward something important?

Flourish Horizon Psychology & Counselling

Child & adolescent psychology | Parent guidance

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Adapted for psychoeducation from Tamar Black (2026), "Keeping It Simple: Using the ACT Kidflex with Children & Adolescents"; Kidflex model: Black (2022). Educational information only.