



The Healing Collective
Therapy & Wellness

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT)



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Essentials of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Psychological flexibility:



ACT's main goal is to help you become more flexible in how you think and respond. Instead of getting stuck in worries or sadness, you learn to bend without breaking – kind of like a tree in the wind.

Acceptance, not avoidance:



In ACT, you practice accepting difficult feelings instead of constantly fighting them. It might sound strange, but by saying “It’s okay, I feel anxious right now” and letting that feeling be, it often loses some power. You learn that you don’t have to love the anxiety; you just don’t let it drive the bus.

Mindfulness and values:



ACT brings in a lot of mindfulness - focusing on the present moment. You might do exercises like noticing your breath or observing your thoughts as if they were clouds. At the same time, you clarify your values: the things that really matter to you (like friendship, creativity, helping others). These become your compass.

Committed action:



This means taking steps toward your goals and values even if you’re feeling anxious, sad, or whatever. ACT is big on the idea that you can carry your feelings with you and still do what’s important. For example, if performing in the school play matters to you, ACT helps you go for it with your stage fright, rather than waiting until you have zero fear.

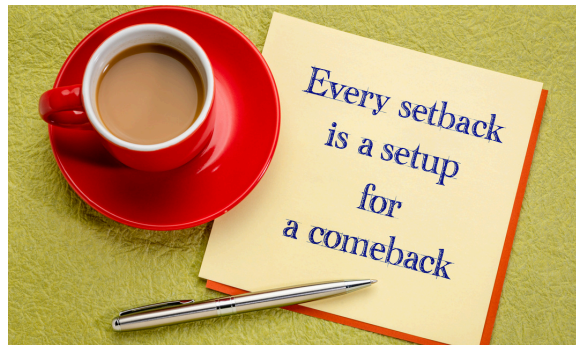


What will I do in ACT?

In ACT sessions, expect a lot of experiential exercises. You'll practice mindfulness - often simple activities like closing your eyes and focusing on sounds, or observing your thoughts without judgment (e.g. imagining your thoughts are leaves floating down a stream). Don't worry, there's no pressure to "clear your mind" - it's more about noticing whatever your mind does.

You'll also spend time identifying your values. For instance, a therapist might ask, "What matters to you deep down? Family? Honesty? Learning?" There are fun exercises for this, like picking your top values from a list or imagining your future self. Once you know your values, you'll set goals or actions that align with them – and start taking small steps. For example, if one of your values is friendship and you've been isolated due to social anxiety, a goal might be texting one friend to hang out, even if you feel nervous.

ACT often uses metaphors and creative techniques (like the "passengers on the bus" story, where you're the bus driver and your thoughts are noisy passengers – you learn to keep driving towards your destination/values even if the passengers are loud). The tone in ACT is usually very compassionate and sometimes even playful. You might find yourself doing things like thanking your mind for an unhelpful thought ("Thanks mind, you're telling me I'm going to embarrass myself - noted.") or carrying your worry around in your pocket as a metaphor. These activities can feel strange at first, but they're surprisingly powerful at helping you not get bossed around by painful thoughts and feelings.



What can I expect from my ACT therapist?

Your ACT therapist will:

- **Teach by doing:** They often guide you through mindfulness exercises in session (e.g. a short meditation or breathing drill) and encourage you to practice these skills outside of therapy. They're like a coach helping you build mindfulness and acceptance muscles.
- **Normalize your feelings:** Don't expect them to say "Let's get rid of that bad feeling." Instead, they'll acknowledge that feelings like anxiety or sadness are a normal part of life. An ACT therapist might say things like, "It makes sense you feel scared - let's see how you can carry that fear and still do what you care about."
- **Use metaphors and creativity:** ACT therapists love stories and metaphors (because sometimes a story explains things better than dry facts). They might share analogies - like the idea of quicksand (fighting it makes you sink more, like fighting anxiety can make it worse) - to help concepts click. If one metaphor doesn't resonate, they'll try another.
- **Focus on your values:** A big part of their job is to help you clarify what you find meaningful. They will frequently steer conversations toward "What do you want your life to be about?" and "What small step can we take toward that?" They'll also celebrate when you make value-driven choices, even small ones.
- **Be patient and non-judgmental:** ACT therapists embody acceptance themselves. You should feel a no-judgment vibe - you can tell them about that "weird" thought or how you avoided something, and they won't scold. They'll likely remind you to be kind to yourself and highlight any progress (like "Hey, you stuck it out at the party for 30 minutes - that's a win!"). They understand this is hard work and will support you if you stumble, encouraging you to just notice that and learn from it.

