

Acceptance & Commitment Therapy with YouTube Video Links



Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing that believes having negative thoughts and feelings from time to time is an unavoidable part of human life. There is nothing much we can do about negative thoughts and feelings once they have shown up internally except get on with our day. Trying to get rid of them is like trying to force rain drops back into the clouds, it just can't be done. All the same, we often do try to get rid of them and enter into an inner battle with ourselves, which only makes our situation worse due to the paradoxical effect that the more we try *not* to think or feel a certain way, the more it consumes our attention causing the very thoughts and feelings we don't want to be magnified and become even more intense and unpleasant.

Instead of trying to get rid of negative thoughts and feelings, ACT proposes two main strategies to do simultaneously:



1) Continuing (or starting) to take constructive action to move your life in the direction you want it to go in according to your values *in spite* of how you may be feeling. When we feel bad, the temptation is to avoid things or to try and 'think' our way out of it but the only way to change negative emotional states to more positive ones is through goal-directed constructive activity. This 'taking action' principle is very important in ACT.



2) Learning to tolerate and accept negative thoughts and feelings, instead of adding another layer of suffering to existing suffering by fighting with them. By being tolerant and accepting we stop magnifying the negativity and stop making things worse.



By letting thoughts and feelings come and go, by not getting consumed with and preoccupied with them by trying to get rid of them, we no longer waste valuable energy in fruitless and self-defeating inner mental battles. Instead, if we are just patient, tolerant and accepting of whatever thoughts and feelings show up, with the proviso that we must keep taking constructive action aligned with our values and goals, regardless of any negative thoughts and feelings, then those very negative thoughts and feelings we don't want will naturally fade away. Like the rain drops with can't push back into the clouds, if we are patient, tolerant and accepting, the rain will stop falling and the drops will evaporate.



When we realise that thoughts and feelings are not *facts* but are just transitory phenomena that come and go, like trains coming in out of a station, this can be very liberating. Why bother fighting to get rid of what is going to fade away naturally with time anyway!



In contrast to other therapies, like CBT, the goal of ACT is not to deliberately try to reduce the frequency, intensity or severity of negative thoughts and feelings but to a) reduce the pointless and self-defeating inner battles to try to control or get rid of unwanted thoughts and emotions and at the same time b) increase your values-based and goal-directed activity so you can get the most out of your life and this is especially important when experiencing negative thought and feelings. Meaningful activity is really the most effective way to improve psychological and emotional wellbeing.

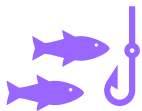
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There are 6 other things ACT teaches us that are all related and have some overlap:



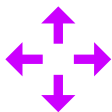
1. Acceptance: This means allowing your inner thoughts and feelings to occur without trying to change them, ignore them or get rid of them. In the same way that we don't try to change the weather by running around trying to stop the wind or, as mentioned before, push rain drops back into clouds, so with our thoughts and feelings, we just need to step back and let them be. This doesn't mean we have to like them or agree with them, we just need to be aware that once they have shown up, it is energy efficient and will feel far more relaxing if we just let them be what they are and take our attention elsewhere, specifically to some goal-directed, meaningful activity.



2. Cognitive Defusion: This is unhooking yourself from believing your moment-to-moment thoughts and feelings have something important to say about who you are. They do not! All thoughts are just neurobiological-electrical events in the brain that are purely products of your imagination. Feelings are just thoughts made manifest in the body. Cognitive defusion is becoming the observer of your thoughts and feelings, separating yourself from these inner experiences so you understand they are not facts, they don't represent who you are, they are just temporary phenomena that come and go like clouds in the sky. Not getting caught up in fighting a ruminative losing battle to get rid of thoughts and feelings you don't like, letting them go rather than being attached to them, this is cognitive defusion.



3. Self as context: This involves understanding that your thoughts and feelings are not facts and they should not be relied upon to define who you are. Taking yourself in context means being the observer and separating yourself your thoughts, feelings and actions.



4. Being present: ACT encourages you to stay aware and mindful of your surroundings and learn to shift your attention away from internal thoughts and feelings and towards what is going on around you.



5. Values: These are the areas of your life that are important enough to you to motivate you to take constructive action.



6. Commitment: This involves changing your behaviour based on your values and principles, so you move your life in the direction you want it to go in.

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Steven Hayes who developed the theory of ACT - Talk on Turning Toward: The Healing Power of Human Consciousness 76 mins https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3NmN1F_M1I (can be played at 1.25 or 1.5 speed as Steven speaks quite slowly).

Short (2-6 mins) ACT information videos for basic strategies and information for developing a different relationship with thoughts and feelings that is more accepting

– cherry-pick, some of the videos will contain information that will feel more meaningful to you and useful than others, so find the ones that work better for you and leave the others behind for now.

1. Struggle Switch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCp1l16GCXI>
2. 3 Happiness Myths <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93LFNtcR1Ok>
3. The Three Main Parts Of Your Brain <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CpRY9-MIHA>
4. Evolutionary Roots https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE6_V79i_Yw
5. The Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Nervous Systems <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2825kDSo4M>
6. Introducing Fusion - Evolution of the Human Mind <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WD6rjpeK0PQ>
7. Sushi Train Metaphor <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzUoXJVI0wo>
8. The Happiness Trap: Evolution of the Human Mind <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kv6HkipQcfA>
9. The Happiness Trap: Motivation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jN677MKo0EA>
10. Thanking Your Mind: Taking The Power Out of Difficult Thoughts <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=206WtwEyqzq>
11. Three Meanings of Freeze https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_iZOIn3itE
12. The Limbic Brain and Its Role in Trauma <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-ddSEHRWVg>
13. Radio Doom and Gloom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bu2k0EGXAVo>
14. Internal Struggles (The Chessboard Metaphor) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phbzSNsY8vc>
15. The Stageshow Metaphor <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBPPr1hsbMM>
16. Missing Out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQbx2haVfMU>

Longer and more in-depth ACT theory videos (approx. 30 mins or longer)

- ACT Episode 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhAZviS2HDE>
ACT Episode 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vgCOKPMiW0>
ACT Episode 3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tc3H5_-wPkg
ACT Episode 4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBT5ExDDwOg&t=166s>
ACT Episode 5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8A0Dj-TAxg>
ACT Episode 6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4YuNSwEL4w>
ACT Episode 7 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5FZeP8_Nac
ACT Episode 8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMAtYBWkw_Q