



TRAUMA THERAPIES

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY

OVERVIEW

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) was developed in the 1980s by Dr. Steven Hayes. It belongs to the 'third wave' of cognitive-behavioral therapies, integrating mindfulness and behavioral strategies.

ACT is built on the idea that we cannot always eliminate pain, but we can change how we relate to it. Instead of fighting difficult experiences, ACT teaches acceptance, mindfulness, and a focus on personal values.

For example, a trauma survivor may struggle with intrusive thoughts of blame. In ACT, instead of challenging the thought, they learn to notice it, label it as 'just a thought,' and redirect focus toward meaningful action aligned with their values.



HOW IT WORKS

ACT focuses on six core processes: Acceptance, Cognitive Defusion, Being Present, Self-as-Context, Values, and Committed Action. Together, these help clients build psychological flexibility — the ability to live well despite challenges.

1. ACCEPTANCE

Allowing difficult thoughts and emotions without judgment.

2. COGNITIVE DEFUSION

Learning to see thoughts as separate from the self.

3. BEING PRESENT

Practicing mindfulness in daily life.

4. SELF-AS-CONTEXT

Recognizing the observing self beyond experiences.

HOW IT WORKS

5. VALUES

Identifying what truly matters.

6. COMMITTED ACTION

Taking steps toward a meaningful life, guided by values.

USEFUL TOOLS

LEAVES ON A STREAM

A mindfulness exercise where clients visualize thoughts floating away on leaves.

VALUES CLARIFICATION

Exercises to help clients define core life values.

MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

Breathing, grounding, and body awareness.

DEFUSION TECHNIQUES

Repeating a distressing thought until it loses intensity.

INTERESTING FACTS

- ACT does not try to eliminate symptoms but focuses on building resilience and flexibility.
- Research shows ACT is effective across many conditions, including PTSD, chronic pain, depression, and anxiety.
- ACT is used in over 30 countries and has inspired numerous self-help books and practices.

CONCLUSION

ACT has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. It empowers clients to move beyond 'the struggle' with their pain and instead invest energy into living a fulfilling life.

By connecting with values and taking committed action, clients can build resilience and purpose.