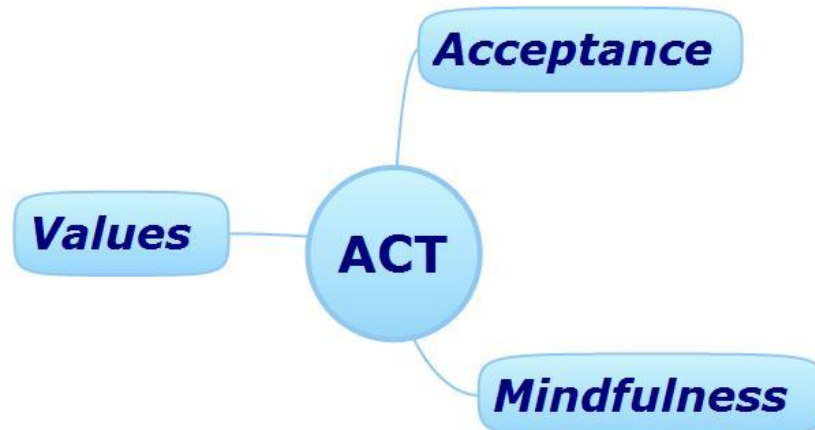


Acceptance & Commitment Therapy

ACT differs from CBT in that instead of challenging distressing thoughts by looking for evidence and coming up with a more rational response (CBT), in ACT, the thought is accepted as a thought, e.g. "I'm having the thought that this boat is going to sink", and then defused using a variety of techniques, which may include mindfulness, metaphors and language.

ACT uses three broad categories of techniques: mindfulness, including being present in the moment and [defusion techniques](#); acceptance; and commitment to values-based living.



Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a way of observing our experience, in the present moment, without judgement. Mindfulness helps us 'defuse' - to distance ourselves from unhelpful thoughts, reactions and sensations.

- [More about mindfulness](#)
- [Mindfulness exercise: The Visitor](#)
- [Mindfulness of Thoughts - Leaves in the Stream animation](#)



"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf"

(Kabat-Zinn 2004)

Acceptance

ACT is based on the idea that, generally, trying to rid ourselves of pain and distress only increases it, and turns it into something traumatic. The alternative is to accept it - but that doesn't mean being defeated or tolerating suffering. We learn to make room for painful feelings, thoughts, and sensations - allowing them to be there, coming and going without us struggling against the



Commitment and Values-based Living

You can learn to free yourself from the traps and barriers of life, and see what you really want your life to be. Think about what's really important in your life, what do you want to live by or remembered by... e.g. being a kind loving mum etc... or something to do with work... What qualities do you want to have in this area in your life. What small committed action could you do regularly to move towards that direction in your life?

e.g. for kind mum: being patient with kids, good listener, calm in response

The Quicksand



Suppose you come across someone standing in the middle of a pool of quicksand - there are no ropes or tree branches available. The only way you can help is by talking to them. The person shouts "HELP! GET ME OUT!", and is beginning to do what people do - struggling to get out.

99.9% of the time, the effective action to take is to walk, run, step, hop, or jump out of trouble. Not with quicksand. Normally, to step out of something, you need one foot and move the other forward. With quicksand, that's a bad idea. Once one foot is lifted, the person's weight rests on only the other foot (half the previous surface area), and the downward pressure doubles. The person sinks deeper.



As you watch, you see them starting to sink deeper. If you understand how quicksand works, you might shout at them to lie flat, spread-eagled, to maximise contact with the surface. The person therefore probably won't sink, and might be able to roll to safety.

Since the person is trying to get out of the quicksand, it goes against all their natural instincts to maximise body contact with it. Someone struggling to get *out* of the mud, may never realise that the wise and safer action is to get *with* the mud.

Our own lives can be very much like this. The normal problem-solving methods that we use (sometimes repeatedly for years) to try to deal with the struggles we face, may themselves be part of the problem, just like someone trying to get free of the quicksand.

ACT offers something very different, to help us free ourselves from the quicksand we find ourselves in, but to get with it. This is to learn to accept the situation we find ourselves in or who we are rather than constantly trying to change ourselves or struggling with how we are judging ourselves. By doing so, we can relieve our suffering and become empowered to lead valued, meaningful, dignified human lives.



Steven C Hayes (2005). [*'Get Out of Your Mind and into Your Life'*](#). New Harbinger. Oakland

ACT worksheet (CBT style)

Defusing Exercises

The Visitor - Mindfulness Exercise