

*What is ACT?*

A Brief Introduction to  
Acceptance & Commitment Therapy

Joel Guarna, PhD

Elizabeth Kubik, PhD

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*What is ACT?*

What do you already know?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT in Context**

What is ACT?

“BF Skinner meets Carl Rogers”

Behavioral Activation +  
Motivational Interviewing +  
Mindfulness

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ACT in Context

### What is ACT?

ACT is a comprehensive model of therapy  
...not a set of techniques

(though includes many techniques,  
some unique, but many found elsewhere)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ACT in Context

### What is ACT?

Larger effectiveness & efficacy trials, large RCTs

Small studies on ACT for wide range of problems

Research on Therapeutic Processes

Basic Science of Language & Cognition  
(Relational Frame Theory)

Underlying Philosophy & Assumptions

---

---

---

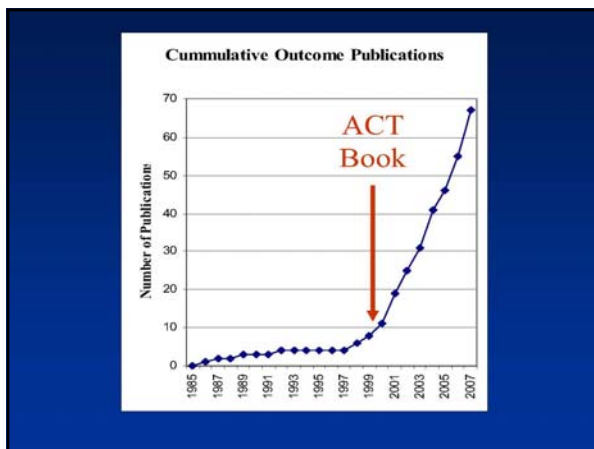
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT in Context**

Comparison to learning  
Motivational Interviewing

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT in Context**

ACT as a...

- Mindfulness-Based Therapy
- Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)  
*Contextual Behavioral Therapy*
- Clinical Behavior Analysis

*Part of larger trends in the field.*

---

---

---

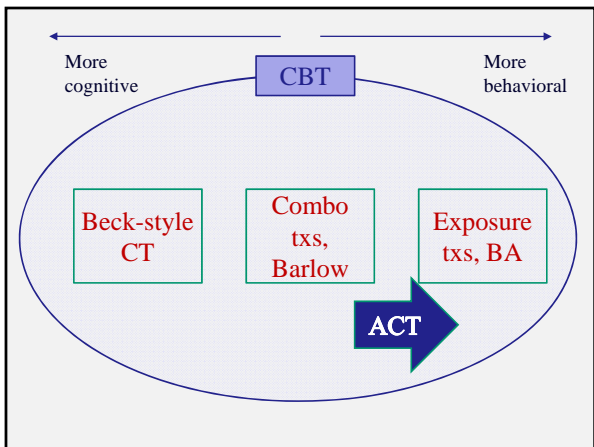
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

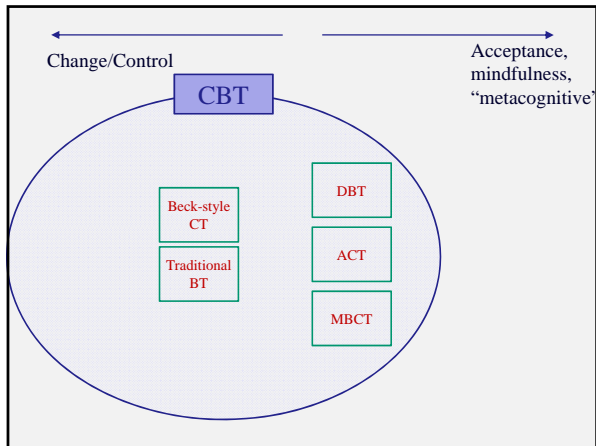
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Today's Workshop**  
*What we will cover...  
...and what we will not cover*

*Difficult choices*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Today's Workshop**  
*What we will cover...  
...and what we will not cover*

*We will be running this like a  
workshop, not a lecture.*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Today's Workshop**  
*What we will cover...*

- Introduction to ACT
- Focus on clinical application
- "How to"
- Theory and model (cursory)
- Case examples
- Experiential exercises  
(Do as you are willing....)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Today's Workshop**  
*...and what we will not cover*

- Theory and model (*in depth*)
- Philosophy & Assumptions
- Research
- ACT vs. CBT

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Resources**  
*All available to you...*

- Powerpoint slides
- Handouts
- *Embrace Your Demons* by Russ Harris
- Links to much more

[www.whitepineinstitute.com/mepa.htm](http://www.whitepineinstitute.com/mepa.htm)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Today's Workshop**

One major distinction between learning ACT in a workshop and doing ACT: *Here we will explain what we are doing and why.*

**Doing ACT in therapy:**

- You lead the client through an experience of each process *not* toward an intellectual understanding of that process.
- Model each process within your relationship with the client.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**A (relatively) benign example**

The Lemon &  
The Glass

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Normal Cognitive Processes**

- Fusion
- Avoidance

Rigidity vs.  
*Psychological Flexibility*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Less benign examples**

What if we replace the lemon?

- Images and memories of a rape
- Harsh judgments about one's self
- Certainties about one's future
- An imagined future with all its problems
- Stories about past mistakes and "what ifs?"

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

According to ACT (RFT):

*Normal* language & cognitive processes are at the heart of most suffering.

**Question:**

If that is true, why don't we *all* struggle with anxiety, depressed moods, insecurities, fears, etc....?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Answer:**

Oh, wait...we do.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### How is ACT different?

**Question:** But if normal language and cognitive processes are part of the problem, how do you use “talk therapy” (more language and cognition) to help?

**The Short Answer:** Very carefully!

- *Talking, yes, but differently.*
- *Deliberate and skillful use of a range of experiential techniques.*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Implications of the ACT Stance

Our clients are stuck, not broken or sick.

The processes that get them stuck are normal, expected “side effects” of language.

You have these processes too. If you haven’t been entangled in them yet (unlikely), you probably will be at some point.

Even knowing this, you will hand them to your children and your grandchildren.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Therapeutic Posture

- Whatever the client is experiencing is not the enemy – it’s the struggle against it that’s harmful
- You can’t rescue clients from the difficulty and challenge of growth
- Radical respect for clients’ values – the issue is the workability of their lives, not your opinions
- Never forget that you are in the same boat

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### The Targets of ACT

- Ineffective change agenda
- Experiential avoidance
- Inability to differentiate self and behavior from private events
- Inability to make and keep a commitment to actions consistent with valued life directions

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### A Simpler Version of the Barriers /ACT Targets

#### FEAR:

- Fusion
- Evaluation
- Avoidance
- Reason-Giving

---

---

---

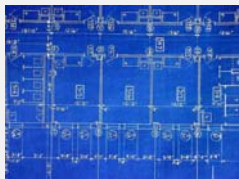
---

---

---

---

---



Vs.



---

---

---

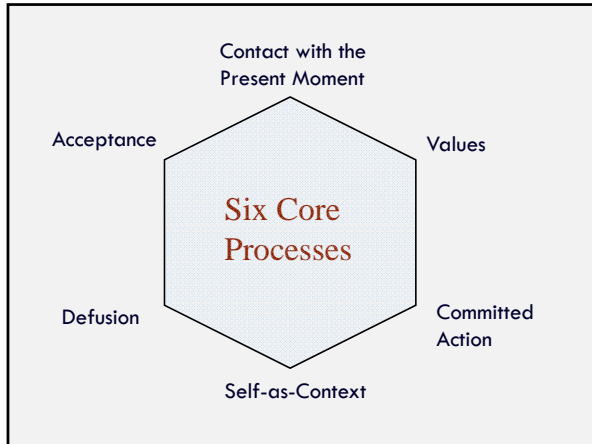
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

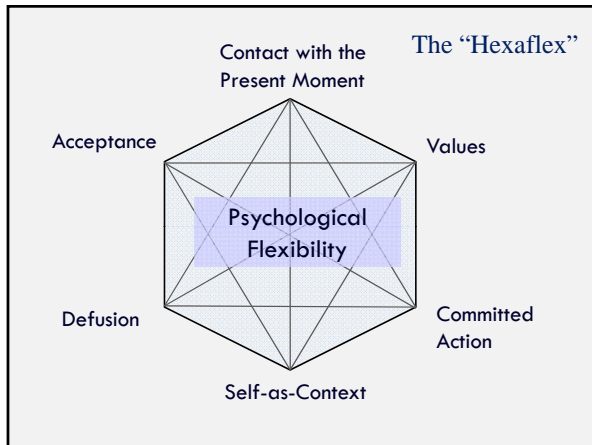
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

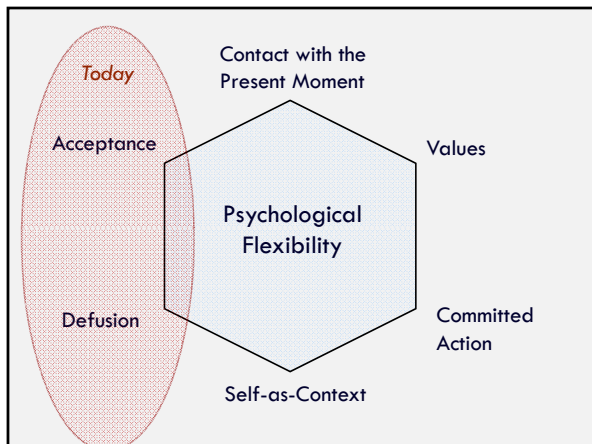
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT Processes & Interventions**

**Acceptance**

What comes to mind?

What it is *not*:

- Tolerating, putting up with
- Resignation
- Defeat, a “less than” alternative

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT Processes & Interventions**

**Acceptance**

What it *is*:

- An act, a behavior, a move
- Openness, without defense
- Dropping judgment

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT Processes & Interventions**

**Acceptance**

*Inside Willingness (vs. Outside Willingness of Commitment)*

Commitment: Be willing to do what you need to do (actual forward movement now) to live a rich full life...

Acceptance: Be willing to experience whatever shows up (privately) as you take those steps forward.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT Processes & Interventions**

**Acceptance**

(Joel's examples)

- "Sitting with" the feeling
- Exposure
- Quicksand Metaphor

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT Processes & Interventions**

**Acceptance**

(Beth's examples)

- Thought Card
- Ball and Chain
- Chinese Handcuffs

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**ACT Processes & Interventions**

**Cognitive Defusion**

Emo Philips:

*I used to think that the brain was the most wonderful organ in my body....*

*Then I realized who was telling me this.*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ACT Processes & Interventions

### Cognitive Defusion

(Beth's examples)

- Learning to watch what our mind tells us
- See thoughts as what they are – images, bits of language
- Falling Leaves
- Voices (singing, caricature)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ACT Processes & Interventions

### Cognitive Defusion

(Joel's examples)

- Hand exercise
- Fish in water
- Identify the forms of private experience

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Cognitive Defusion

More simple techniques:

- Just notice what your mind is telling you right now  
*Is this a helpful thought? Is this a good use of my time?*
- Notice the form of the thought by describing it  
*Is it words, sounds or pictures? What does it sound like?*
- "That is an interesting thought"
- Label your thoughts ("I am having the thought that . . .")
- Thank your mind
- Mind vs Experience ("workability" not "truth")

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



### ACT

In ACT we attempt to *diminish* unhelpful control

Thought card exercise. Thank your mind for that thought If that thought was an object, what would it look like?

I will always be a failure

Can we say "I'm having the thought that I will always be a failure?"

It is OK to have that thought? Let's say "failure" 100 times If that thought were in the room, where would it be?

Control is NOT the solution, in fact, it is a large part of the problem.

---

---

---

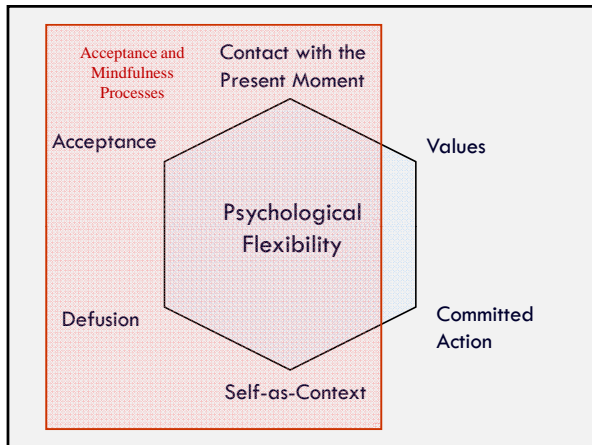
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

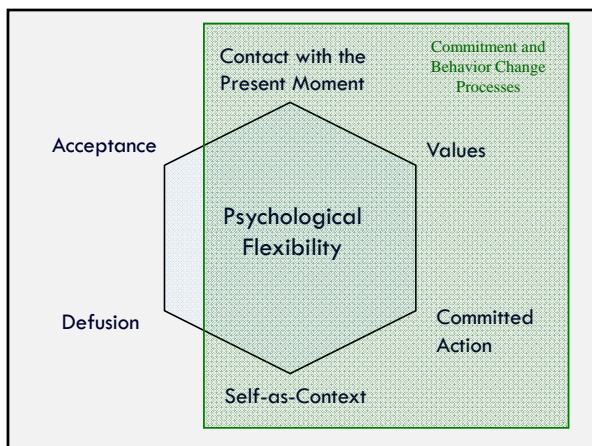
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### What is ACT?

#### *ACT Said Simply:*

ACT uses acceptance and mindfulness processes, and commitment and behavior change processes, to produce greater psychological flexibility.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### What is ACT?

#### *ACT Said Even More Simply:*

- Show Up
- Let Go
- Get Moving

---

---

---

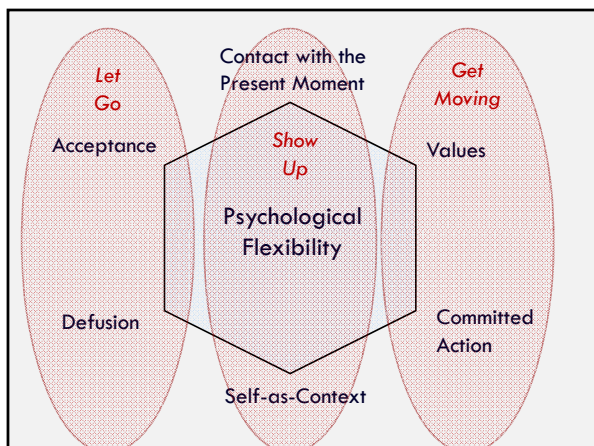
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*One more time:  
What is ACT?*

*Summarized in one sentence:*

*Living a rich, full life  
with less struggle.*

---

---

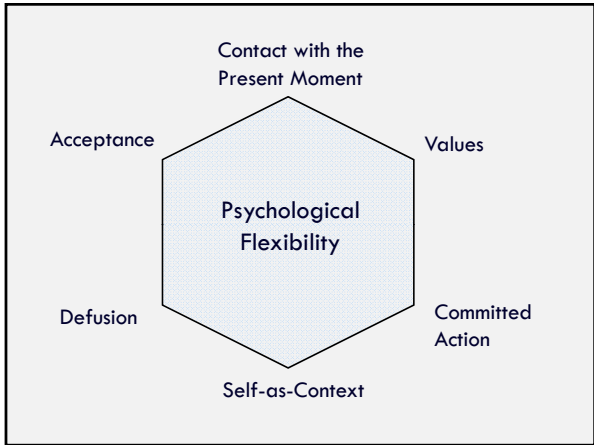
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*Case Study #1*

- *Presentation*
- *Client's goals*
- *ACT conceptualization*
- *ACT goals*
- *Interventions*
- *Discussion*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*Case Study #2*

- *Presentation*
- *Client's goals*
- *ACT conceptualization*
- *ACT goals*
- *Interventions*
- *Discussion*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*Values  
Exercise*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*Questions?*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Additional Resources

- Materials from today’s workshop:  
[www.whitepineinstitute.com/mepa.htm](http://www.whitepineinstitute.com/mepa.htm)
- ACT is non-proprietary and “open source”
- [www.contextualpsychology.org](http://www.contextualpsychology.org)
- Join ACBS! *Values-Based Dues*
- Listserv for professionals and public
- [www.ACTinNewEngland.com](http://www.ACTinNewEngland.com)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Additional Resources

Books!

- Your local bookstore!
- Context Press ([www.contextpress.com](http://www.contextpress.com))
- New Harbinger ([www.newharbinger.com](http://www.newharbinger.com))
- Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))

---

---

---

---

---

---

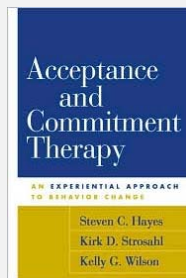
---

---

Additional Resources

*Acceptance & Commitment Therapy:  
An Experiential Approach to  
Behavior Change*

Steven Hayes, Kelly Wilson,  
Kirk Strosahl



---

---

---

---

---

---

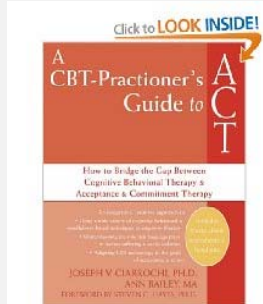
---

---

Additional Resources

*A CBT-Practitioner's Guide to ACT*

*Joseph Ciarrochi & Ann Bailey*



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Additional Resources

*Learning ACT*

*Jason B. Luoma, Steven C. Hayes, Robyn D. Walser*



---

---

---

---

---

---

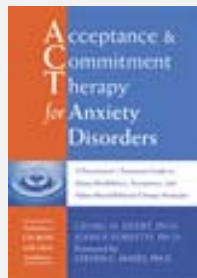
---

---

Additional Resources

*Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Anxiety Disorders*

*Georg H. Eifert, John P. Forsyth*



---

---

---

---

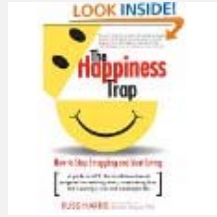
---

---

---

---

Additional Resources



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---