

An introduction to Acceptance and commitment therapy

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The 3 waves of behaviourism

- 1st wave (50s and 60s): focused primarily on overt behavioural change
- 2nd wave (70s): included cognitive interventions as a key strategy of behaviour change
- 3rd wave (90s onwards): places major emphasis on acceptance and mindfulness in addition to behavioural interventions

Overview of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)

‘Embrace your demons and follow your heart’

2 main aims:

- To help create a full, rich and meaningful life
- To teach skills that will allow more effective management of painful thoughts and feelings, thereby reducing their impact.

ACT in a nutshell

Section 1: cognitive fusion

Section 2: experiential avoidance

Section 3: acceptance, defusion and contacting the present moment

Section 4: ineffectiveness and costs of experiential avoidance

Section 5: link between mindfulness, values and committed action

Psychological suffering

ACT identifies 2 core processes,
responsible for most psychological
suffering

- Cognitive fusion
- Experiential avoidance

Control is the problem

- Why do we keep on doing things that aren't particularly helpful?
 - Control strategies can be useful (particularly in the external world)
 - Our society encourages emotional avoidance (key messages 'put on a brave face'; 'get over it')
 - Avoidance can be helpful in the short-term but not in the long-term

Creative hopelessness/ confronting the control agenda

- Takes place early in therapy
- Increases awareness of the emotional control agenda
 - What have you tried?
 - How has it worked?
 - What has it cost?
- Identifies how this is frequently unhelpful

Useful metaphors

city lit

The centre for adult learning

- Feeding the baby tiger
- Quicksand

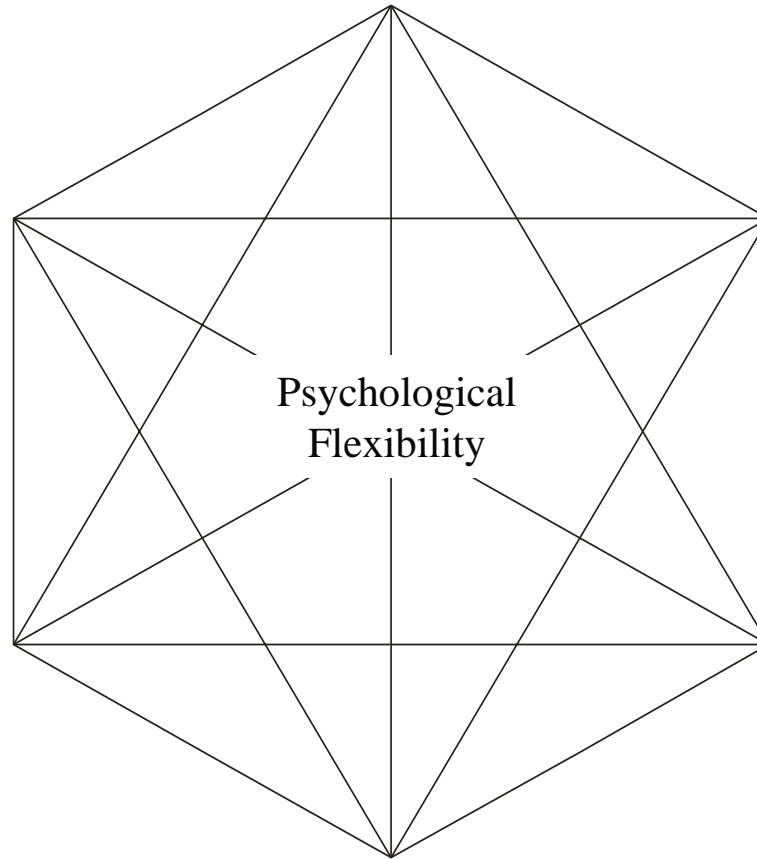


6 core principles of ACT

Contact with the Present Moment

Acceptance

Values



Self as Context/
Observing Self

Committed
Action

Defusion

Mindfulness and ACT

- Mindfulness skills relate to 4 of the 6 core principles – contact with the present moment, defusion, acceptance and self as context/observing self
- *‘Mindfulness means paying attention with flexibility, openness and curiosity’* (Harris, 2009)

Contact with the present moment (be here now)

- By becoming consciously aware of the present moment we're more able to perceive accurately what is happening
- This helps us decide whether to change or keep on going with a certain behaviour
- It helps us to catch ourselves when we're totally fused with a thought
- It allows us to engage fully in what we're doing

Defusion (watch your thinking)

- This is about looking **at** thoughts rather than **from** thoughts
- We start to notice thoughts rather than being caught up in them
- Aim of defusion is **NOT** about feeling better or getting rid of or changing unwanted thoughts
- It's about reducing their influence on us

Acceptance (open up) – what does it mean?

- We don't have to like it, want it or approve of it – simply...
 - Make room for it
 - Make space for it
 - Allow it to be there (because it is)
 - Let go of fighting with it
 - Let it be
 - Soften up around it / breathe into it
 - Stop wasting your energy on pushing it away

Self as context/observing self (pure awareness)

- Observing self vs thinking self
- The observing self is there from birth to death and is unchanging
- It observes everything we do but never judges us
- It is always there, even if we forget about it or know nothing about it
- It is the source of true acceptance

Values (know what matters)

‘Your heart’s deepest desires for the sort of person you want to be and the things you want to do in your time on this planet; in other words, what you want to stand for in life.’ (Harris, 2008)

Values (continued)

- How we want to be, what we stand for and how we relate to the world
- A principle that guides and motivates us in life. If we identify our values, they can help us move in a desired direction even when things get difficult
- Different from goals

Committed action (do what it takes)

- Having identified values and goals, this is about taking action in the service of those values
- Committed action is values-guided, effective and mindful

Applying ACT to stammering therapy

- Integration of ACT into mainstream speech therapy programme
- Creation of specific ACT workshops for people who stammer
 - 3 day workshop
 - 10 x 2hr evening class programme
- Relevance to individual work

ACT – integration into work on avoidance reduction

- Encourage our clients to look at the broader picture; help them to explore in greater detail what brought them to therapy in the first place
- Explanation and identification of values
- How this work can apply to stammering therapy
- Client example

Outcome data for 3-day workshop

Measure	Pre		Post		F value	P value	Partial eta ²
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Freiburg	31.36	4.92	37.57	4.94	15.27	.002	.54
Acceptance	65.76	17.66	77.89	15.83	15.10	.002	.54
WASSP - behaviour	27.21	5.55	22.79	6.07	12.59	.004	.49
WASSP - thoughts	12.07	3.41	9.00	3.53	14.20	.002	.52
WASSP - feelings	19.00	7.52	14.29	6.13	16.24	.001	.56
WASSP - avoidance	10.67	4.21	7.78	3.96	19.45	.002	.71
WASSP - disadvantage	10.33	3.35	8.00	3.57	17.82	.003	.69

Client quote (Wileman and Holmes, 2015)

‘Do I still have negative thoughts, and frustrating days/moments where I struggle with my stammer and how I feel about it? Of course I do. But mindfulness and ACT have provided me with a new context in which to engage with it. I have learnt to embrace my stammer and work with it, rather than against it. I have learnt to positively reflect on the relationship that I have with my stammer and seek to nurture this relationship. Our interactions have moved from the battlefield to the debate table.’

Client quote (City Lit)

'I thought I was ready to accept my stammering on a theoretical level but my speaking was full of struggle. This course helped me realise that acceptance, and feeling free, is an ongoing process and gave me practical tools to achieve this. Linking with deep values really activated my motivation. I have felt excited at the end of a course before but this time I knew that

Client quote (City Lit - cont)

there wasn't the danger of losing that feeling in the 'real world'. The course is pretty deep and wide ranging – my speech feels better and I am also getting on better with my family and have got myself a job!' Katy

Client quote (City Lit)

'The course enabled me to feel much more empowered to handle difficult emotions and thoughts connected to my stammer in a positive way, to understand that I don't have to keep struggling and fighting against them all the time, but instead give them space to be. I have experienced anxiety, chronic worry and depression in the past and have always battled hard to overcome them.'

Client's quote (City Lit - cont)

I have fought and recovered, fought and recovered ... but only ever on a temporary basis. The underlying issues have always remained there, below the surface, and have merely been suppressed. This way they have continued to subtly damage my confidence and self-esteem. The idea that I no longer have to struggle all the time was something of a revelation to me and in

Client's quote (City Lit - cont)

learning to regard negative thoughts and feelings in a new way has robbed them of power and prevented them from becoming overwhelming. I am no longer so frustrated or self-critical and am learning to be kinder to myself. The resulting increase in self-confidence has in turn encouraged me to step forward in my life and take on new responsibilities and challenges which in the past I would have avoided.' Amanda

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