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How effective is ACT?

Many studies support the effectiveness of ACT with many different mental health problems.

There is a growing body of evidence showing that ACT is at least as effective as other therapies, such as CBT.

Other useful information

The Happiness Trap by Russ Harris. 2007, Robinson Press. ISBN 978-1-84529-825-8
www.thehappinesstrap.com

Get out of your mind and into your life: the new Acceptance and Commitment Therapy by Steven Hayes. 2005, New Harbinger Publications. ISBN 978-1-57224-425-2
www.contextulapsychology.org

Contact us

For more information about MBCT, please ask to speak to the psychological therapies manager in your area.

For information on Trust services visit www.awp.nhs.uk

PALS

To make a comment, raise a concern or make a complaint, please contact the Trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

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Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership
NHS Trust

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

This is one of a series of information leaflets on psychological therapies for service users. The therapy is described, what it involves, and the kinds of problem it may be helpful for.

What is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?

As the name suggests, acceptance and commitment Therapy (ACT) is about *accepting* what is out of your personal control, while *committing to* action that will improve your quality of life.

The aim is to help people create a full and meaningful life, while effectively handling the pain and distress that life can bring.

ACT does this by:

- teaching you psychological skills to deal with painful thoughts and feelings in a way that they have much less effect and influence over you. (These are known as mindfulness skills.)
- helping you work out what is truly important and meaningful to you, i.e. your values; then to use that knowledge to change your life for the better.

Rather than waiting to win the internal struggle with your own thoughts and feelings before your life can resume, ACT is about living now and living fully – with (not despite) your past, your memories, fears, and sadness.

Avoidance

ACT takes the view that most psychological suffering is caused by trying to avoid, escape, or get rid of unwanted private experiences (such as unpleasant thoughts, feelings, urges sensations and memories).

Our efforts at avoidance might work in the short term. But in the long term they often fail and can create even more distress.

So if we can use skills to help us give up the struggle with our inner experiences, we can then invest our energy on taking action to change our life for the better.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a mental state of awareness, and openness, which allows you to engage fully in what you are doing at any moment. ACT gives you a range of tools to learn mindfulness skills, many of which take only a few minutes to master.

ACT breaks mindfulness skills down into three categories:

1. Defusion - distancing from, and letting go of unhelpful thoughts, beliefs, images and memories

2. Acceptance - making room for painful feelings, bodily sensations, urges to act, and allowing them to come and go without a struggle
3. Contact - with the present moment: engaging fully with your here-and-now with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

These three skills require you to use a part of yourself which is capable of awareness and attention. In ACT, this is called the 'observing self'.

Who may benefit from ACT?

ACT has been shown to be effective for many problems such as:

- anxiety, depression
- panic, obsessive compulsive disorder
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- psychosis
- substance abuse
- eating disorders
- work-based stress
- chronic pain.

It may be of particular benefit to service users who have already tried other therapies focused on reducing symptoms, with little or no success.

ACT can be used with individuals, couples, and groups, as brief or long-term therapy.