Presentation Goals

- Identify some of the defining characteristics of ACT.
- Define some of the key terms unique to ACT.
- Introduce the ACT model’s conceptualization of wellness and dysfunction.
- Provide examples of common ACT interventions.

This presentation is designed to introduce clinicians to ACT so that they are:
- Better able to understand writings about ACT that they encounter.
- Better able to interpret clinical notes from clinicians using the ACT model.
- More comfortable pursuing training in ACT.
- Aware of how ACT differs from traditional CBT.

ACT is an acronym, Not an initialism.

Not only is it faster and easier, it emphasizes the active, behavior-focused nature of the therapy.
**Brief History**

- Created by Steven C. Hayes, PhD.
- Further developed with the help of Kelly Wilson, PhD. and Kirk Strosahl, PhD.
- Stephen C. Hayes began developing ACT as methods to help his own difficulties with Panic Disorder.

**Behavioral Therapy**
- Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)
- Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)
- Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT)
- Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (FAP)

**Relational Frame Theory (RFT)**
- RFT is the model of learning and cognition that ACT is built on.
- RFT emphasizes the way the mind uses language to form complex networks of relationships between everything we experience and learn.
- Humans can derive secondary relationships between things without being taught them directly.

**MOO!**

"ANIMAL"
**Functional Contextualism**

- Everything exists in context.
- No “good” or “bad” emotions or thoughts.
- A specific behavior may be functional in some contexts and dysfunctional in others.
- The function and effects of a behavior are the target of change.
- Behaviors are examined in context and considered in terms of “workability.”
- In this situation...
  - Is this behavior in alignment with my values?
  - In the long-term, does this behavior bring me towards the life I want to be living?

**Evidence-Based**

- “As evidenced across 20 meta-analyses, 133 studies, and 12,477 participants, ACT is efficacious.”
- Effective for treatment of a broad variety of mental disorders and has shown to be highly effective for managing chronic pain.
- “Transdiagnostic”
- “ACT was generally not statistically different from CBT, although ACT was found to be more efficacious than CBT in a minority of meta-analyses.”


**What about those 6 core processes that you promised?**

**The Core**

Six aspects of one skill.
Psychological Flexibility

“Psychological flexibility is the ability to feel and think with openness, to attend voluntarily to your experience of the present moment, and to move your life in directions that are important to you, building habits that allow you to live in accordance with your values and aspirations. It’s about learning not to turn away from what is painful, instead turning toward your suffering in order to live a life full of meaning and purpose.”

(Hayes, 2019, p. 5)

Hexaflex

⬢ A visual representation of the six core processes in ACT.
⬢ The six core processes can be addressed in any order and the client and counselor can move from process to process as needed to best fit the client's needs.
⬢ The six core processes interrelate and build on one another. Research has shown that addressing all the core processes is definitively more effective than incorporating only some of them in treatment.
⬢ Client’s may need more need more skill building in some of the processes more than others, but they should all be addressed.

The Hexaflex
Defusion

- Cognitive Defusion - stepping back and detaching from thoughts, images, and memories.
- Cognitive Fusion tends to lead to experiential avoidance including short-term solutions that do not work in the long run. ACT therapists sometimes refer to fusion as “getting hooked” by a thought.
- Creating distance from our thoughts and acknowledging them as separate from our self allows us to choose how we behave - even while having distressing thoughts, memories, images, and feelings.
- Fusion includes buying into what our thoughts say, rationalizing our thoughts, and trying to restructure, challenge, or silence our cognitions.

“Hands as thoughts” metaphor exercise.

Defining Feature: ACT focuses on changing our relationship with our thoughts, rather than focusing on challenging, controlling, or silencing our them.

Titchener’s Repeated Word Exercise

A word is repeated for 30 seconds at a rate of about once per second.

Defusion: Interventions

- “I am noticing...”
- Thanking the mind.
- Thought/feeling as an object.
- Naming stories
- Leaves on a stream
- Titchener’s Repeated Word Exercise

Defining Feature: ACT is compatible with many aspects of traditional CBT with the exception of cognitive restructuring which directly conflicts with the theoretical underpinning of ACT.
Acceptance

• Acceptance involves turning towards pain in an intentional effort to live the way we want to live.
• ACT is active. It is not “Passive Acceptance Therapy.” Acceptance is not an act of surrender or “giving in.”
• Acceptance is the willingness to experience distress and discomfort as a necessary part of pursuing what is important to us. It is not turning towards pain for the sake of pain. It is being willing to experience discomfort for a meaningful purpose.

Defining Feature: Life inevitably involves pain.

Physicalizing Feelings

A visualization exercise for defusion and acceptance.

Acceptance: Interventions

• Flexible exposure
• Physicalizing Feelings
• Magic Button Metaphor Exercise
• Carrying Your Thoughts
• Self-compassion Work
• Kind Hand Exercise
Present Moment

* "[Engaging in the present moment] means choosing to pay attention to experiences here and now that are helpful or meaningful—and if they are not, then choosing to move on to other useful events in the now, rather than being caught in mindless attraction or revulsion.” (Hayes, 2019)
* This is the mindfulness component of ACT.
* Engaging in the present moment is not done to avoid distressing internal experiences, but to focus on the here and now to allow you to take actions consistent with your values.

Defining Feature: ACT emphasizes mindfully engaging in the present moment.

Noticing the soles of your feet

A simple mindfulness exercise that works to develop the ability to expand awareness to a larger context.

Present Moment: Interventions

* Informal mindfulness practices e.g., making tea/coffee, washing dishes, folding clothes.
* Dropping Anchor
* Counting or noticing breathing.
* Noticing the soles of your feet.
Values

- Values work is central to ACT.
- Some clients have a clear understanding of their personal values while others need the counselor’s assistance in identifying those values.
- In ACT, values are ways of describing the ways in which our deep down, true self wants to live.
- Values involve ongoing action. They describe how we want to behave on an ongoing basis.
- Values are chosen by the client.
- Goals are not values. Values are continuously pursued and never “completed.” Goals are what you want to achieve in the future and can be reached. Goals are made and pursued as a way to live our values.
- Goal: Getting Married, Value: Being loving.

Values: Interventions

- Bullseye
- Values Exploration Lists/Worksheets
- Values Card Sort
- Looking Back from the Future
- Video from your Mistaken Funeral
- Imagine Someone Making a Speech About You.

Committed Action

- Intentionally building habits that enable us to live in accordance with our values.
- Acting towards your values in a flexible way that responds to new obstacles and adapts.

- It includes “goal setting, action planning, problem solving, skills training, role-playing, exposure, behavioral activation, and other empirically supported behavioral interventions.” (Harris, 2019, p. 236)
- This is a core process in which many CBT behavior techniques can fit in.

Defining Feature: ACT involves changing behavior to be more pursuant of our values and befitting of the person we want to be.
Committed Action: Interventions

- Choice Point
- "Towards Moves" and "Away Moves"
- The Challenge Formula:
  - Leave.
  - Stay and live by your values.
  - Stay and give up acting effectively.
  - (Harris, 2019, p. 239)

Self-as-Context

- Also referred to as self, observing self, and transcendent self.
- The inverse is self-as-content.
- Self-as-content involves fusion with the stories we carry about ourselves. These stories generally develop from social/cultural expectations, lived experiences, and the personas we create and present.
- Self-as-context is the act of taking a flexible stance with the rules and expectations created by these stories and becoming aware that they are stories and not true definitions of our self.
- Self-as-context, or the transcendent self, is the part of us that does the noticing when we are practicing mindfulness or defusion.

Perspective Taking

A visualization exercise for developing self-as-context and compassion.
Self-as-Context: Interventions

- Sky and Weather Metaphor
- Stage Show Metaphor
- Notice the "You" that is Noticing.
- The Continuous You
- Perspective Taking Visualization Exercise.

Cultural Considerations

- ACT has key components that make it a good fit for practicing in a culturally competent manner.
- ACT encourages the client to define their own values and determine how they feel they can best pursue those values. Values are often influenced by culture and conversations between client and counselor about cultural influences can aid both in understanding the way that culture has influenced their lives.
- The therapeutic relationship in ACT is one of a team consisting of the clinician and the client. The client is encouraged to express concerns as they move through the process and this openness to addressing issues is modeled by the clinician.
- Interventions are presented as experiments for the client to try. The clinician gives the client "permission" to decide which skills work for them and which ones do not.

Cultural Considerations

- ACT clinicians bring knowledge of specific skill-building exercises, which may appeal to clients entering counseling with cultural expectations of the counselor as being an expert. However it is important that the counselor emphasizes the client's expertise on their own experiences and the team dynamic of the counselor/client relationship.
- ACT is behavior-focused and more directive than some other types of therapy. Counselors may have to assist clients in adjusting their expectations of counseling if they are expecting to just talk about their problems.
ACT as a Trauma-Informed Practice

- Trauma-Focused Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (TFACT) builds on the general ACT framework.
- Skills for psychological flexibility for the groundwork for the exposure practices designed to specifically address processing past trauma.
- This means that the clinician does not have to completely change their approach if the client discloses trauma in later sessions.
- ACT skills are helpful for clients with a history of trauma whether they ever disclose trauma or not. Trauma-focused work is helpful, but not necessary to provide positive change in clients with a trauma history.
- ACT skills can be developed in relation to thoughts and feelings that are not directly related to trauma experiences. Then these skills can be eventually used to work with trauma in a more direct way once the client has more fully developed the skills.

ACT and Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy

- ACT is one of the models being adapted for use with psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy in current studies.
- ACT’s emphasis on acceptance, defusion, self-as-context, and values, all make it a promising fit for preparation for and integration of psychedelic experiences.
- It is important that as psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy becomes legal and increasingly common, that researchers and clinicians incorporate evidence-based treatments like ACT into the ongoing development of this emerging treatment.

Process-Based Therapy

- Focusing on processes central to all psychological dysfunction, not on specific Dx or symptom presentation.
- Changing how we Dx clients.
- Deemphasizing categorical systems like the DSM.
- Emphasizes developing transdiagnostic ways of working.
Defining features of ACT

- Life inevitably involves pain.
- ACT focuses on changing our relationship with our thoughts, rather than focusing on challenging, controlling, or silencing our thoughts.
- ACT involves changing behavior to be more pursuant of our values and befitting of the person we want to be.
- ACT emphasizes mindfully engaging in the present moment.
- ACT is compatible with many aspects of traditional CBT with the exception of cognitive restructuring which directly conflicts with the theoretical underpinning of ACT.
Contact Me

If you have any questions, just want to talk about ACT, or for any other reason, please feel free to contact me at:

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Thank you so much for your time and participation.
References


