



## Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) FAQ

### ***How will I know if ACT is for me?***

ACT believes that it is our psychological inflexibility that causes distress, making us avoid stressful situations, and distancing us further from our core values. It is because we try to change difficult thoughts and feelings as a means of coping, which becomes counter productive. Instead, it focuses on alternatives such as practising acceptance, Mindfulness, cognitive defusion, values, and committed action.

ACT may not be for you if you find it difficult to let go and also if you are looking at more short-term solutions.

### ***What can I expect on my first visit with an ACT therapist?***

At your first visit, you and the ACT therapist will discuss:

- Avoidance and negative thinking patterns as the basis of psychological suffering
- Acceptance and more purposive behaviour
- The need to let go in order to take a new direction
- Whether ACT is a suitable treatment approach for you

By the end of this first visit, you and the therapist will have developed a general understanding of your motivations to change and start treatment planning to address your difficulties.

### ***How can I get the most out of ACT between sessions?***

ACT is a compassionate, directive treatment approach that believes that two things are needed to transform the situation: acceptance of the current situation and commitment to valued action. Research has shown that through acceptance, one can become more hopeful and motivated to make more positive changes. It involves continual practice of Mindfulness and forming new habits to be completed as homework between sessions.

### ***How long does ACT last?***

ACT is a problem-focused, acceptance-based treatment approach. For problems such as anxiety and depression, ACT usually involves 12 to 20 sessions. However, the length of treatment can vary, depending on the severity and complexity of your problems—some clients improve significantly in four to six sessions, while others may need more than 20 sessions.



### ***How frequent are the sessions?***

ACT usually starts out with weekly sessions. As treatment progresses, sessions may be spaced further apart, such as every two weeks or month. Once clients have finished a course of ACT, it is common for them to return for occasional “booster” sessions to keep up their progress, deal with any setbacks and prevent relapse of problems.

### ***Do I need to prepare for ACT sessions?***

Preparing to discuss a specific problem at each session helps you to get the most out of ACT. Coming prepared also means considering what one continues to avoid and also the continual practice of acceptance. It also helps to build a therapeutic relationship between you and your therapist and to communicate well throughout the session.

### ***Will the ACT therapist be able to understand and appreciate my own unique background?***

ACT is a non-judgemental approach and is an effective treatment regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation or social economic status. ACT therapists are trained to recognise your cultural values and to adapt their treatments to meet culturally unique needs. They are trained, for example, to be aware of:

- their own personal values and biases and how these may influence their relationship with the client
- how certain cultural processes may influence the relationship between the therapist and client

As a client in ACT, you should feel that you can openly discuss, aspects of your culture or work for example, and that your treatment will be delivered in a manner that is consistent with these values.

### ***Is ACT an effective treatment for children and adolescents?***

ACT has been found to be particularly useful for use with children and adolescents, whom are more problem-focused and more creative in their daily life. The content and pacing of the therapy is adjusted to be appropriate for the child’s level of development.



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### ***What are the common barriers that come up in ACT?***

Barriers to treatment can include:

- perceived stigma associated with mental health treatment
- difficulty identifying and distinguishing emotions and their intensity
- excessive need to control any situation
- difficulty accepting negative thoughts
- not completing homework
- avoidance

The therapist will work with you to reduce these barriers and will also offer strategies that you can use to overcome barriers.

### ***How can I stay well after finishing ACT?***

A major goal of ACT is for you to become your own therapist and to continue to practise the skills even after you are feeling better. You may also wish to return for follow-up or “booster” sessions from time to time. ACT aims to help you become more consistently mindful and move in a valued direction. By doing so, clients will naturally move towards a more transcendent sense of self over time.