

ACT For Couples

information

Research-informed use. ACT concepts are presented as processes in a psychological-flexibility model. Values are directions for action rather than achievements; defusion changes the relationship to thoughts rather than proving them false.

COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT)? Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a popular approach to psychotherapy due to its strong research basis and clear treatment path. ACT is a semi-structured therapy approach which core focus is on the skills of mindfulness (the ability to stay present in the current moment) and acceptance around ones experiences, thoughts, emotions and feelings.

ACT is used to treat a wide range of conditions, such as anxiety, depression and substance use, but is also a great tool for managing stress and relationship difficulties. ACT is an action oriented approach, which works by focusing on accepting life experiences as they come, while not avoiding, denying, and struggling with inner emotions and, instead, accepting these deeper feelings.

The core skills of ACT are developed through mindfulness based exercises that encourage you to build a new and more compassionate relationship with difficult experiences. It also works on building the skills required to work with and through difficult emotions, feelings and sensations.

What stands out?

How might this inform one next step?

1. Keep in view
When going through ACT based therapy, the key stages you will encounter are:
ACCEPTANCE An open and non-judgemental acceptance of emotions and feelings.

2. Keep in view
DIRECTION Committing to a positive approach that will help move you forward.

3. Keep in view
ACTION Taking charge and making a conscious decision to stick with the positive direction you chose.

ACT for Couples

ACT for Couples · question bank

COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— MY RELATIONSHIP STORY

— WHAT ARE YOUR PARTNER'S GREATEST STRENGTHS AND BEST PERSONAL QUALITIES?

— HOW DID MY PARTNER AND I MEET?

— NOW THAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN OUT YOUR EARLY STAGES RELATIONSHIP STORY, TAKE A

— WHAT DID I FIND MOST ATTRACTIVE ABOUT MY PARTNER AT THAT TIME?

— MOMENT TO REFLECT ON THE FEELINGS YOU HAD TOWARDS YOUR PARTNER AT THAT TIME.

— WHAT ACTIVITIES DID WE MOST ENJOY TOGETHER AT THAT TIME OF OUR RELATIONSHIP?

— CAN YOU CONNECT WITH THE FEELINGS OF LOVE, CARE AND APPRECIATION?

— WHAT DO YOU MISS MOST ABOUT THE EARLY DAYS OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

MY RELATIONSHIP VALUES

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MY RELATIONSHIP VALUES Imagine that it's ten years from now, and you and your partner have gathered together your closest friends and relatives to celebrate the last ten years of your relationship. Take a moment to imagine the space you are in, who is there, and the feeling of the event. Now, imagine that your partner stands up to make a speech about the last ten years of your life together. About what you stand for, what you mean to them, and the role that you have played in their life. Imagine your partner saying whatever it is, deep in your heart, you would most like to hear. Imagine them describing your character, your strengths, and the ways in which you have contributed to the relationship. Close your eyes now and take a couple of minutes to imagine this as vividly as possible, then write answers to the questions below.

QUALITIES What sort of personal qualities do you want to bring into your relationship?

STRENGTHS What character strengths do you wish to employ or develop?

BEHAVIOR

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Use a recent, manageable example. Fragments are fine; skip any prompt that does not fit.

BEHAVIOR How do you want to behave or act in your relationship?

PRINCIPLES What do you want to stand for as a partner?

WORDS FROM YOUR PARTNER If we asked your partner to describe the ten things they most appreciate about your character or personality. In an ideal world, what would you most love your partner to say?

VALUES GAP IN RELATIONSHIPS

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Please take your time to seriously consider this and write your answers below.

VALUES GAP IN RELATIONSHIPS Imagine that you woke up tomorrow and a miracle had happened and your partner suddenly turned into your perfect “soul mate” with no faults at all, no annoying habits, always there for you, able to meet your every need, want, and desire. If that happened, then how would you change?

WHAT WOULD YOU STOP, START, DO MORE OF AND LESS OF?

WHAT SORT OF PARTNER WOULD YOU TRY TO BECOME?

WHAT ATTITUDE WOULD YOU CULTIVATE TOWARDS YOUR PARTNER?

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COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— HOW WOULD YOU SPEAK TO YOUR PARTNER WHEN YOU WANTED SOMETHING?

— IS THERE A GAP BETWEEN THE WAY YOU'D IDEALLY LIKE TO BEHAVE AS A PARTNER AND

— HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO YOUR PARTNER WHEN THEY WERE IN PAIN?

— THE WAY THAT YOU ACTUALLY ARE BEHAVING NOW? WHAT IS STOPPING YOU FROM

— HOW WOULD YOU TREAT YOUR PARTNER WHEN THEY MADE A MISTAKE OR SCREWED UP?

— LIVING BY YOUR VALUES RIGHT NOW?

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COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— IDENTIFYING RELATIONSHIP D.R.A.I.N

— IN ANY RELATIONSHIP WE RUN THE RISK OF ACTING AND THINKING IN WAYS THAT ARE INCONSISTENT

— WITH WHO WE WANT TO BE AS A PARTNER. WE MAY START CONFLICTS, RUN AWAY FROM SITUATIONS,

— OR GET STUCK IN STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP. THESE ACTIONS DRAIN OUR

— RELATIONSHIP AND CAUSE US TO MOVE FURTHER AWAY FROM A HAPPY AND LOVING RELATIONSHIP.

— TAKE A MOMENT TO WORK THROUGH THE EXERCISE TO IDENTIFY WHAT YOU AND YOUR PARTNER DO

— THAT CAUSES DRAIN IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP.

— DRAIN

— DISCONNECTION

— HOW DO I DISCONNECT FROM

— MY PARTNER?

— REACTIVITY

— HOW DO I REACT IMPULSIVELY

— OR AUTOMATICALLY, WITHOUT

— STOPPING TO CONSIDER WHAT I

— AM DOING?

— AVOIDANCE

— HOW DO I TRY TO AVOID

— PAINFUL FEELINGS THAT ARE

— RELATED TO THE ISSUES IN THIS

— RELATIONSHIP?

— INSIDE MY MIND

— HOW DO I GET TRAPPED INSIDE

— MY MIND?

— NEGLECTING VALUES

— WHAT CORE VALUES DO I

— NEGLECT, FORGET ABOUT, OR

— ACT INCONSISTENTLY WITH?

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COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— DRAIN

— DISCONNECTION

— HOW DOES MY PARTNER

— DISCONNECT FROM ME?

— REACTIVITY

— HOW DOES MY PARTNER REACT

— IMPULSIVELY OR

— AUTOMATICALLY?

— AVOIDANCE

— HOW DOES MY PARTNER

— APPEAR TO AVOID OR GET RID

— OF THEIR PAINFUL FEELINGS?

— INSIDE THEIR MIND

— HOW DOES MY PARTNER SEEM

— TO GET TRAPPED INSIDE THEIR

— MIND?

— NEGLECTING VALUES

— WHAT CORE VALUES DOES MY

— PARTNER SEEM TO NEGLECT,

— FORGET ABOUT, OR ACT

— INCONSISTENTLY WITH?

— COMMON EXAMPLES OF DRAIN

— DISCONNECTION: GETTING BORED OR IRRITABLE, STOP LISTENING, GOING COLD, SHUT DOWN, WALK AWAY.

— REACTIVITY: YELLING OR SNAPPING, SWEAR, STORM OFF, SAY HURTFUL THINGS, CRITICIZE, BLAME, ACCUSE.

— AVOIDANCE: AVOID TALKING ABOUT ISSUES, TURN TO DISTRACTIONS, USE ALCOHOL OR SUBSTANCES.

— INSIDE THE MIND: WORRY, DWELL, RE-LIEVE HURTS, STEW OVER EVERYTHING THAT'S WRONG WITH MY PARTNER.

— NEGLECTING VALUES: LOSE TOUCH WITH VALUES SUCH AS BEING LOVING, KIND, CARING, COMPASSIONATE.

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COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— IDENTIFYING CONTROLLING ACTIONS

— IT IS EASY TO FALL IN TO THE TRAP OF SEEING YOUR PARTNER AS A PROJECT AND TO SEE IT AS YOUR

— ROLE TO “CHANGE” THEM. THIS CAN HOWEVER LEAD TO MUCH MORE HURT, FRUSTRATION AND

— DISCONNECT THEN IT TENDS TO LEAD TO POSITIVE EXPERIENCES AND CONNECTION. SPEND SOME

— TIME REFLECTING ON EVERYTHING YOU HAVE EVER TRIED DOING TO CONTROL YOUR PARTNER, AND THEN

— ASSESS HOW EFFECTIVE IT WAS IN THE SHORT TERM AND WHAT IT COST YOU IN THE LONG TERM.

— WHAT DOES MY PARTNER

— SAY OR DO THAT I DON'T

— LIKE?

— WHAT I HAVE SAID OR

— DONE TO STOP OR CHANGE

— MY PARTNER'S BEHAVIOR?

— DID MY ACTIONS CHANGE

— MY PARTNER'S BEHAVIOR

— IN THE LONG TERM?

— DID MY ACTIONS

— ENHANCE AND ENRICH OUR

— RELATIONSHIP IN THE LONG

— TERM? IF NOT, WHAT HAS

— THIS COST ME/US?

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COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— WHAT IS WRONG IN MY RELATIONSHIP?

— OUR RELATIONSHIP?

— WHEN WE ARE EXPERIENCING TENSION IN OUR RELATIONSHIP IT IS VERY EASY TO GET CAUGHT UP IN

— HOW DOES MY MOOD CHANGE

— JUDGEMENT AND CRITICISMS ABOUT OUR PARTNER OR THE RELATIONSHIP. HAVE YOU EVER STOPPED AND

— WHEN I GET CAUGHT UP IN OR DWELL

— REFLECTED ON WHAT JUDGEMENTS YOU MAKE AND HOW THEY AFFECT YOU AND YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

— ON THESE THOUGHTS?

— TAKE A MOMENT TO GO THROUGH THE EXERCISE BELOW AND NOTE DOWN ANY OF THESE THOUGHTS OVER

— WHEN I DWELL ON OR BUY INTO THESE

— THE COMING FEW DAYS, AND TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT ON THE EFFECT THEY HAVE.

— THOUGHTS, HOW DOES IT EFFECT MY

— WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY PARTNER/

— RELATIONSHIP?

VALUES- GUIDED ACTIONS

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QUICK-REFERENCE LIBRARY

● VALUES- GUIDED ACTIONS

- Values-guided actions are an important part of any healthy relationship. Sometimes we forget about the little things we can say and do to make our partner feel loved, heard and valued. Struggling with ideas?

- Read on for some suggestions below.

● WORDS

● GESTURES

● PHYSICAL

- “I love you”

- Cooking dinner

- Giving your partner a

- hug or kiss

- “I’m here for you”

- Organizing a date

- night out

- Holding hands when

- out in public

- “Let me know how I

- can be of support”

- Sharing the burden of

- chores at home

- Stroking their hair

- “I appreciate you”

- Bringing home a treat

- or small gift

- Offering a back rub

- “Thank you for what

- you do for us”

- Make a cup of coffee

- or tea for your partner

- Sitting together on

- the couch

- “I’m grateful for all

- you do”

- Take part in their

- hobbies/interests

- Maintaining open

- body language

- “I’m sorry”

- Organizing/planning

- the day ahead

- Show active listening

- through eye contact

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THURSDAY A way they contributed to my today life was...
A positive thing they said/did today was... Something I
appreciate about them is... FRIDAY A way they contributed
to my today life was... A positive thing they said/did today
was... Something I appreciate about them is... SATURDAY
A way they contributed to my today life was... A positive
thing they said/did today was... Something I appreciate
about them is...

How might this inform one next step?

[illegible]

3. Keep in view

YOUR REFLECTION

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

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● ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

- **WHAT IT IS** Assertive communication is a communication style in which a person clearly stands for what they want and need, while also taking other people's needs and wants into

- consideration. This is done without being aggressive, or passive in nature. **TRAITS OF ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATORS**

- Clearly states their needs and wants.

- Speak with a balanced tone of voice.

- Confident use of eye contact.

- Has a strong and open body language.

- Listens to others without interrupting.

- Is clear in the message they are relaying.

● ASSERTIVENESS TIPS

- **RESPECT YOURSELF** Know what you want and need. It is healthy and okay to express clearly what you

- need and want, just make sure to also hear the other person while you do it.

- **STAY CALM** Avoid raising your voice, yelling, name calling, or storming off. Your best tool is

- staying calm and remaining collected in the conversation.

- **PLAN AHEAD** Come prepared with a plan. Think about what it is you want and need, and be

- clear ahead of time about what you are asking of the other person.

- **SAY "NO" WHEN NEEDED** Boundaries are important, and at times we will simply need to say "no". Saying

- no does not make you a bad person.

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Invalidation is hurtful and harmful to our relationships.
IMPORTANT THINGS TO VALIDATE The facts of a situation. The experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and opinions of the other person. Suffering and difficulties encountered by the other person. **REMEMBER...**

What stands out?

[illegible]

How might this inform one next step?

[illegible]

1. Keep in view

Validating does not necessarily mean you agree.

2. Keep in view

Validating does not mean you like it.

3. Keep in view

Only validate the valid.

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.. because ..

How might this inform one next step?

REACTING VS RESPONDING

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● REACTING VS RESPONDING Reacting and responding can on the surface level appear to be the same thing,	● the consequences Falls in line with the core values of the individual
● however the underlying functions and actions between reacting and responding are	● May have a positive or
● very different, and often lead to widely different outcomes.	● negative impact based
● REACTING	● on the situation Weighs the pros and cons of the affect on the other
● RESPONDING	● person/persons Impulsive and aggressive
● Instant and emotion	● in nature
● driven	● Has a positive impact
● Has to be learnt and	● Leads to poor
● purposefully practised	● communication
● Based on prejudices, stereotypes and personal	● Calm and well thought
● past experiences Requires self-awareness, self-regulation, mindfulness	● through in nature
● and empathy Done without thinking of	

RESPONDING

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RESPONDING Learning to respond rather than simply react is a valuable skill that will help you build more flexible and positive communication, while regulating and validating your emotions. Proceed mindfully with a response Pause and take a moment to check in with yourself Situation occurs that requires you to respond Proceed mindfully with a response that reflects your values, while taking in to consideration yours and the other person/persons feelings and needs.

When a situation occurs, take a moment to think about if this situation requires an immediate response or action. If you need to, take a moment to step back and give yourself space.

Before responding stop what you are doing, take a second to identify what is happening internally and around you, validate your thoughts and feelings, check the facts of the situation (e.g. Is the situation what you think?

☐ Not yet ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Maybe you are catastrophizing?

Or over-emphasizing the negative?). Finally, consider your options and what will be the most helpful approach in this situation.

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COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— CHECK IN BEFORE RESPONDING

— BEFORE RESPONDING TAKE A MOMENT TO CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF AND CONSIDER YOUR

— EMOTIONS, NEEDS AND TRIGGERS. THE QUESTIONS BELOW ARE A HELPFUL GUIDE TO START WITH

— WHEN YOU ARE UNSURE HOW TO PROCEED WITH RESPONDING.

— WHAT IS HAPPENING RIGHT NOW? WHAT ARE THE ACTUAL FACTS OF WHAT IS HAPPENING?

— WHAT EMOTIONS AM I FEELING RIGHT NOW?

— IS THERE SOMETHING THAT IS IMPACTING MY EMOTIONS OTHER THAN THE SITUATION?

— DO MY EMOTIONS FIT WITH THE FACTS? OR ARE MY EMOTIONS BIGGER THAN THE SITUATION?

— HOW INTENSE ARE MY EMOTIONS RIGHT NOW? DO I NEED TO TAKE A MOMENT TO REGULATE?

— WILL I BE ABLE TO RESPOND IN ALIGNMENT WITH MY VALUES THE WAY I AM CURRENTLY FEELING?

— WHAT ADVISE WOULD I GIVE TO A FRIEND IF THEY WERE IN THIS TYPE OF SITUATION?

— WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO RESPOND TO THIS SITUATION?

— WHAT IS MY IDEAL OUTCOME IN THIS SITUATION?

— HOW WILL MY RESPONSE/ACTIONS AFFECT OTHERS?

REFLECTING ON REACTIONS

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Use a recent, manageable example. Fragments are fine; skip any prompt that does not fit.

REFLECTING ON REACTIONS BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE SITUATION WHERE YOU REACTED

WHAT WERE THE EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS YOU EXPERIENCED AT THE TIME?

WHAT TRIGGERED YOUR REACTION (E.G. FEELING CORNERED, PAST EXPERIENCES)?

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR REACTION?

IF ENCOUNTERING THE SITUATION AGAIN, HOW DO YOU WANT TO RESPOND?

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CURRENT FIGHTING TACTICS When you want to win a fight, what do you do/say?

When your partner wants to win a fight, what do they do/say?

FAIR FIGHTING RULES

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QUICK-REFERENCE LIBRARY

- FAIR FIGHTING RULES
- ...I'm willing to accept my partner doing this:
- Take a moment to complete the below sentences.
- ...I want my partner to stop doing this: Once you have completed the sentences above, when you're ready, take these answers
- When we're having a fight...
- to your partner to discuss and agree on "fair fighting rules" you can both agree on adopting in any future conflict. Make sure you also hear your partner out about any
- ...I'd like my partner to accept me doing this:
- ideas/rules they would like to add or work on together.
- ...I want to stop myself from doing this: