

ACT Worksheet

Making space for difficult thoughts and feelings

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) helps us change our relationship with difficult thoughts and feelings. The aim is not to erase discomfort or force positive thinking. It is to notice what is happening, make room for what cannot be immediately changed, reconnect with what matters, and choose a workable next step.

How to use this worksheet

Work at your own pace. Write a few words or a full reflection, draw, use bullet points, or complete the pages with someone you trust. You do not have to finish everything at once. If a question feels too much today, leave it and return when you feel steadier.

ACT develops **psychological flexibility**: being able to stay in contact with the present moment and choose actions that reflect your values, even when uncomfortable inner experiences are present.

What has brought me to this worksheet today?

1. Notice what is here

Start with observation rather than judgement. Thoughts, emotions, body sensations and urges can all be present at the same time. You do not have to decide whether they are reasonable before noticing them.

The thoughts showing up are...

The emotions or feelings I notice are...

In my body I notice...

When this happens, I tend to...

Try this language: instead of “I am anxious”, try “I notice anxiety is here.” Instead of “I cannot cope”, try “I am having the thought that I cannot cope.” The experience is still real, but you are creating a little space around it.

2. Making room instead of fighting

Acceptance in ACT does not mean liking what has happened, agreeing with it, tolerating harm, or giving up. It means acknowledging an inner experience that is already present so that all of your energy is not spent fighting it.

What feeling, memory or experience am I trying hardest to push away?

What do I usually do to avoid, control or escape it?

How does that help me in the short term?

What can that strategy cost me in the longer term?

A permission statement: "For this moment, I can allow this feeling to be here without having to solve it immediately. I can make room for discomfort and still choose what I do next."

3. Unhooking from difficult thoughts

ACT uses **cognitive defusion** to help us step back from thoughts. A thought can feel like a fact, warning or command. Defusion does not ask you to prove it wrong; it helps you notice that your mind is producing a thought.

A thought I keep getting caught by is...

Experiment with:

- I am having the thought that...
- My mind is telling me the story that...
- I notice my mind is predicting...
- Thank you, mind. I know you are trying to protect me.

Rewrite the thought using one of these phrases. What changes, even slightly?

If I did not have to obey this thought, what might I choose to do?

4. Come back to the present

When distress pulls attention into the past or future, grounding can help reconnect you with what is happening here and now. You are not trying to make the emotion disappear; you are widening your attention.

5 things I can see

4 things I can physically feel

3 things I can hear

2 things I can smell or notice in the air

1 thing I can taste - or one slow breath I can follow

Now ask: Where am I? What am I doing? What needs my attention in the next few minutes - not the whole day?

5. What matters to me?

Values are qualities you want to bring into your life. They are directions rather than achievements. Examples might include kindness, honesty, courage, connection, creativity, learning, fairness, care, independence, curiosity or playfulness.

The kind of person I want to be, even on difficult days, is...

In my relationships, what matters to me?

In how I care for myself, what matters to me?

In work, learning, family, community or creativity, what matters to me?

Three values I want to keep close today: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

6. The ACT choice point

A choice point is a moment when you notice whether an action takes you **towards** what matters or **away** from it. Away moves are not failures; they are often attempts to protect ourselves. Noticing them without judgement gives us more choice.

The difficult situation or trigger is...

My usual away moves - what I do when I feel hooked, threatened or overwhelmed...

Possible towards moves - actions that bring me closer to what matters...

What thoughts, feelings or sensations might come with me if I choose a towards move?

Choice point question: Given what matters to me, what is one workable thing I can do next?

7. What is within my control?

It is exhausting to keep trying to control the past, uncertainty, other people's reactions, or every thought that enters the mind. This page helps you redirect energy towards what you can influence.

Outside my direct control

Within my influence or choice

One thing I am willing to stop wrestling with for today is...

One thing I can gently influence today is...

8. Small committed action

Committed action means doing something practical in the direction of your values. It does not need to be dramatic. A five-minute action can count. The aim is to make the step realistic enough to begin.

The value I want to move towards is...

One small action I can take is...

When and where will I do it?

What might my mind say to discourage me?

How can I make room for that thought or feeling and continue gently?

Make it smaller if necessary. If the action still feels impossible, reduce it until it becomes a step you could realistically attempt.

9. My ACT plan for a difficult moment

Use this page as a short plan you can return to when emotions feel intense.

NOTICE - What am I thinking, feeling and sensing?

UNHOOK - What can I say to remind myself that a thought is a thought?

ALLOW - What am I willing to make a little room for?

CONNECT - What matters to me in this moment?

CHOOSE - What is my next small towards move?

You do not need to feel completely calm before taking a caring or value-led action. Sometimes the feeling comes with you while you take the next step.

10. Reflection and compassionate check-in

What did I notice about the way my mind responds to difficulty?

What helped me create even a little space?

What do I want to remember the next time this feeling appears?

A message from Space to Breathe Therapy

You do not have to win an argument with every thought or get rid of every difficult feeling before you can move forward. Some days the most meaningful step may be very small: noticing, breathing, asking for support, resting, setting a boundary, or doing one thing that reflects the person you want to be. The aim is not perfection. It is greater freedom to choose how you respond.

Important: This worksheet is for reflection and wellbeing support and is not a substitute for individual mental-health assessment or treatment. If completing it brings up overwhelming distress or you feel unsafe, stop and seek appropriate professional or urgent support.

Further reading: Russ Harris, *The Happiness Trap*; Steven C. Hayes, *A Liberated Mind*. ACT was developed from behavioural and contextual psychological science.