



## **Embracing Your Anxiety: Exploration of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Concepts**

Every person experiences feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. Anxiety is an emotion and there to send us a message. Anxiety can be uncomfortable to experience. It may cause us to have physical symptoms in our bodies, negative thoughts in our mind, and feelings of being trapped.

**Acceptance and Commitment Therapy or ACT-** ACT concepts are meant to help people stop avoidance, denial, and struggles with their inner emotions. The goal instead is to accept that these deeper feelings are appropriate responses to different situations that should not prevent us from moving forward in our lives. ACT concepts can help us to begin to evaluate ourselves and make behavioral changes in our lives to help us move forward.

**Fear-** present oriented moment. It signals an alarm response to protect yourself. Fear is there to tell us we must survive, or we are in a dangerous situation. Fear is there to protect us. Fear heightens our awareness of our surroundings. This helps us to stay focused on the present moment and take action to get ourselves to safety.

**Anxiety-** future oriented emotion. Anxiety can ebb and flow for days, weeks, months, or years. Anxiety is fueled by what our mind says rather than actual sources of danger and fear. Anxiety may be more intense at times and then manageable at others.

**Core Belief-** Unconditional beliefs that people hold. They serve as a basis for screening, categorizing, and interpreting our experiences. Are often outside of our awareness.

**Schema-** Often include core beliefs. A framework within our minds to help us organize and interpret information. Like a blueprint we use to navigate our own personal world.

- **Event schemas-** Used to describe behaviors and daily activities. Help us to anticipate things in the future, set goals, and make plans. Often routine.
- **Self-schemas-** Describe beliefs, experiences, and generalizations about the self. Influence our behavior towards others and impact our motivation. Continuously evolve throughout our lifetime.
- **Object schemas-** Informs what an inanimate object is, what its function is, and what we can expect from it.



- **Role schemas-** Inform us about how people are supposed to behave based on their roles in different situations.

Core beliefs and schemas often begin to develop in early childhood when we have unmet needs. This is often accompanied by uncomfortable emotions, which could very well be anxiety, worry, or fear. We view our world around us, others, and ourselves through our schemas.

Experts in the world of schemas and schema therapy share that schemas can be changed through a couple of processes: assimilation or accommodation.

- **Assimilation-** the adjustment of a schema by adding information similar to what is already known. This allows for us to avoid being short sighted based on what we may think we know about a situation.
- **Accommodation-** relates to our schemas being altered based on us gaining new information and knowledge about something in order to learn and grow.

**Values** help us to decide which actions are useful and which are not. Sometimes, when we are overwhelmed by our worries, fears, and anxieties, it can be difficult to identify what our values are.

Tactics to help you stay the course in managing anxiety and staying true to yourself.

- **Recommitment-** It can be easy to get off track and forget the importance of managing our emotions and staying true to ourselves. If this happens, recommit, even if you aren't feeling that you want to follow through. Your own choices and actions will be the things to determine what happens with the barriers and setbacks you face.
- **Move with barriers and setbacks-** Bring awareness to yourself and what you are experiencing. Accept the thoughts and emotions you may be having without judgement. Remember to treat yourself with kindness and compassion for what you are experiencing.
- **Don't let the mind machine trap you-** Your mind is not going to stop its chatter because you have decided to take action and control of a situation. Remember, you may have to take your worries, fears, and anxieties with you, but awareness of them can make this so much easier.
- **Watch for idleness-** When you do nothing, you create a big void in your mind. Your mind will do whatever it can to fill that void. This can be a high-risk situation



for getting stuck. You have two choices in this situation. You can welcome what your mind brings and do nothing with it, or you can welcome what shows up and get moving!

- **Practice Flexibility-** Things surely do not always go as planned. When you are feeling “stuck in a rut” take the time to get yourself out of it by doing something new. Feed your mind and experiences with vitality.

#### **Four questions to ask yourself when feeling “stuck in a rut”**

1. If the thought I am having could give advice, would the advice point me forward in my life or keep me stuck?
2. What would I advise my best friend or someone I truly care about to do?
3. If others could see what I am doing now, would they see me doing the things I value?
4. What does my experience tell me about the solution? What do I trust more, my mind and feelings or my experiences?

#### **Coping Skills reviewed:**

- Mind Watching
- Mindful Acceptance
- Evaluating your Values
- Mantras