

ACT Behavioural Strategies for Anxiety

Anxiety often leads to avoidance, but ACT encourages you to face your fears and take action that aligns with your values, even when it feels uncomfortable. Here's how you can use ACT to manage anxiety and take meaningful steps:

1. Behavioural Activation: Engaging Despite Anxiety

Anxiety can make you avoid situations, but taking small steps toward meaningful activities can help you feel more in control.

Examples and Interventions:

- **Facing Fears:** If you're anxious about public speaking, practice in front of a mirror or with a trusted friend.
- **Daily Activities:** Do one thing each day that aligns with your values, even if it feels hard. For example, if you value connection, call a loved one.

2. Exposure: Staying Present with Discomfort

Avoiding anxiety-provoking situations can make them seem scarier. ACT encourages you to face them with openness.

Examples and Interventions:

- **Gradual Exposure:** If you're anxious about driving, start by sitting in the car, then drive around the block, and gradually increase your distance.
- **Mindful Exposure:** When anxiety arises, notice it without judgment. Say, "This is anxiety, and it's okay to feel this way."

3. Committed Action: Taking Value-Driven Steps

Set specific goals that align with your values and take action, even when anxiety tries to hold you back.

Examples and Interventions:

- **Value-Based Goals:** If you value growth, take a small step toward learning something new, like signing up for a class or reading an article.
- **Action Plan:** Write down one small action you'll take each day, like speaking up in a meeting or trying a new recipe.

4. Mindfulness Practices: Staying Present

Mindfulness helps you observe anxious thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in them.

Examples and Interventions:

- **Grounding Exercise:** Focus on your senses—notice 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.
- **Breathing Space:** Take 3 deep breaths, noticing the sensation of air entering and leaving your body.

Key Takeaway for Anxiety

Anxiety can make it feel like your worries are in control, but ACT's behavioural strategies help you take action despite the discomfort. By engaging in value-driven activities, facing your fears, and practicing mindfulness, you can reduce the power of anxious thoughts and build a richer, more fulfilling life.