

How ACT Therapy Can Help with Self-Esteem

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a practical approach that can help you build healthier self-esteem by teaching you to accept yourself, let go of unhelpful thoughts, and take meaningful steps toward what matters to you. Here's how ACT can help:

1. Stepping Back from Unhelpful Self-Talk

We all have that inner voice that says things like, “I’m not good enough” or “I always mess up.” ACT teaches you to notice these thoughts without getting caught up in them. For example, instead of believing, “I’m a failure,” you might say, “I’m having the thought that I’m a failure.” This small shift helps you see thoughts as just words, not facts.

2. Connecting with Your Values

Your values are what truly matter to you—like kindness, creativity, or family. ACT helps you identify these values and take actions that align with them. For example, if you value kindness, you might volunteer or help a friend. When you live by your values, you feel more fulfilled and confident in who you are.

3. Practicing Mindfulness and Self-Acceptance

Mindfulness is about being present in the moment without judgment. ACT teaches you to notice your thoughts and feelings with kindness, rather than beating yourself up. For instance, if you feel anxious, instead of thinking, “I’m weak for feeling this way,” you might say, “It’s okay to feel this way. I’m human.” This helps you develop a kinder relationship with yourself.

4. Taking Small, Meaningful Steps

ACT encourages you to take action, even when you feel unsure or scared. For example, if you’re afraid of public speaking but value growth, you might start by speaking up in a small group. Each step you take builds confidence and shows you that you’re capable of more than you think.

5. Exploring New Perspectives

ACT uses creative exercises to help you see yourself in a new light. For example, you might imagine yourself as a tree with deep roots (your values) and flexible branches (your ability to adapt). This can help you let go of rigid self-beliefs and see yourself as someone who can grow and change.

Example: Putting It into Practice

Let’s say you’re struggling with thoughts like, “I’m not smart enough.” Using ACT, you might:

1. Notice the thought and say, “I’m having the thought that I’m not smart enough.”

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2. Connect with your value of learning by signing up for a short course.
3. Practice mindfulness by focusing on your breath when self-doubt arises.
4. Take small steps, like reading an article or asking a question in class.
5. Use a metaphor, like seeing yourself as a student who's always growing.

ACT isn't about fixing yourself—it's about learning to live a rich and meaningful life, even with imperfections. By practicing these skills, you can build a stronger, more compassionate sense of self.