

## Using ACT to Work with Depressive Thoughts

Depression often comes with a flood of negative thoughts that can feel overwhelming. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) offers practical tools to help you relate to these thoughts differently, focus on what matters, and take meaningful steps forward. Here's how ACT can help, with examples and interventions you can try:

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### 1. Cognitive Defusion: Stepping Back from Unhelpful Thoughts

Cognitive defusion is about creating distance from your thoughts so they don't control you. Instead of seeing thoughts as facts, you learn to see them as just words or images.

#### Examples and Interventions:

- **Label Your Thoughts:** When a thought like “I’m worthless” arises, say, “I’m having the thought that I’m worthless.” This helps you see it as just a thought, not a truth.
  - **Thank Your Mind:** If your mind says, “You’ll never get better,” respond with, “Thanks, mind, for that thought.” This adds a bit of humour and reduces the thought’s power.
  - **Thoughts on Leaves:** Imagine your thoughts as leaves floating down a stream. Watch them drift by without grabbing onto them.
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### 2. Acceptance: Making Room for Difficult Feelings

Acceptance is about allowing your thoughts and feelings to be there without fighting them. It's not about liking them but about reducing the struggle.

#### Examples and Interventions:

- **Name the Feeling:** When you feel sad, say, “This is sadness.” Acknowledging it helps you accept it without judgment.
- **Breathe Into It:** When a difficult emotion arises, take a deep breath and imagine making space for it in your body. Say, “I’m feeling this, and it’s okay.”

- **Opposite Action:** If depression tells you to stay in bed, gently do the opposite—get up, even if it’s just to sit by the window.
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### 3. Values Clarification: Connecting with What Matters

Values are what truly matter to you—like kindness, creativity, or family. ACT helps you identify these values and take steps toward them, even when depression makes it hard.

#### Examples and Interventions:

- **Values Journal:** Write down your top values and why they matter to you. For example, if you value connection, you might write, “I want to be there for my friends.”
  - **Small Steps:** Choose one value and take a small action. If you value health, go for a short walk or drink a glass of water.
  - **Values Reminder:** When you’re stuck in negative thoughts, ask, “What would my values guide me to do right now?”
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### 4. Self-as-Context: Seeing Yourself Beyond Your Thoughts

Self-as-context is about recognising that you are more than your thoughts and feelings. You are the observer of your experiences, not defined by them.

#### Examples and Interventions:

- **The Sky and the Weather:** Imagine your thoughts and feelings as weather—sometimes stormy, sometimes calm. You are the sky, always there, unchanging, no matter the weather.
  - **Observer Exercise:** Close your eyes and notice your thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Say, “I am noticing my thoughts, but I am not my thoughts.”
  - **Past, Present, Future:** Reflect on how you’ve had difficult thoughts and feelings before, but they’ve passed. Remind yourself, “This too shall pass.”
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## Additional ACT Interventions for Depression

Here are a few more tools to help you work with depressive thoughts:

### 5. Committed Action: Taking Meaningful Steps

Even when you feel low, taking small actions aligned with your values can help.

**Example:** If you value creativity, spend 5 minutes doodling or writing, even if you don't feel like it.

### 6. Mindfulness: Staying Present

Mindfulness helps you focus on the here and now, rather than getting lost in negative thoughts.

**Example:** Practice a 5-minute mindfulness exercise, like focusing on your breath or noticing the sounds around you.

### 7. Metaphors: Gaining New Perspectives

ACT uses metaphors to help you see things differently.

**Example:** Imagine depression as a heavy backpack. You don't have to take it off, but you can learn to carry it more lightly.

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## Key Takeaway

Depression can make it feel like your thoughts and feelings are in control, but ACT teaches you to relate to them differently. By practicing defusion, acceptance, values-based action, and self-as-context, you can reduce the power of depressive thoughts and focus on living a meaningful life.