

# LEARNING TOGETHER



## Specialized Services at Your Fingertips

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### Introduction & Webinar

In this edition we are reviewing a therapeutic model based on the principles of behaviour analysis called Acceptance & Commitment Therapy also known as ACT.

We are now 9 months into the pandemic and about to enter a long winter. This results in us spending even more time inside and even less time with family and friends. Under these conditions we spend a great deal of time with our thoughts and feelings which can become quite loud and negative towards ourselves.

While ACT is a form of therapy only practiced by those accredited in the field, we are going to provide you with some basic tools to manage these thoughts when you have them.

We will also be hosting a webinar on January 6th at 12pm which you can access at this



### What is ACT?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a set of tools and strategies that can be used to help people to accept and make peace with events that happen day to day that are out of their control or cause negative feelings. ACT is aimed at helping people to commit to behaviours (actions) that bring them closer to the things that are important to them. ACT utilizes a variety of exercises to help people experience the 6 core processes and to develop psychological flexibility. See 'The Hexaflex' diagram.

**“Psychological Flexibility is the ability to stay in contact with the present moment regardless of unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, while choosing one’s behaviour based on the situation and personal values.”** (Hoffmann D., Frostholm L., 2019)

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We also Invite you to watch a terrific Interview that we did with Kerry-Anne Robinson, a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst who finds these tools so useful she even uses them with her young children.

[Click here to view the interview.](#)

## The Hexaflex



## What is the ACT Matrix?

The ACT Matrix is a simple exercise designed to learn how to discriminate between our internal and external experiences. It also helps us identify behaviours that we may engage in that are unhelpful resulting in moving further away from the things we care about (values). Additionally, the Matrix helps us to identify actions that we can take to be more aligned with our values. In a nutshell, the ACT Matrix is an exercise to teach you psychological flexibility using real life scenarios.

- The inner circle represents you as an observer, noticing what is going on in the quadrants without making judgements (self as context)

The Matrix outlines how the 6 core processes of ACT work at any given time. Please refer to the hexaflex infographic on the first page for a brief description of the 6 core processes.

Do not worry too much about understanding the hexaflex and core processes, for now we want you to become familiar with what ACT is and how to use the ACT Matrix. Click below for a brief video.

<https://neshnikolic.com/hexaflex>

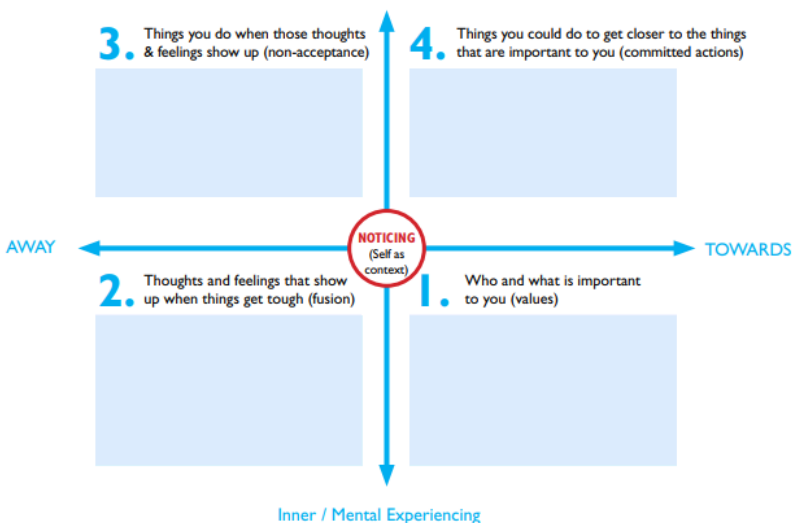
The main goal of the ACT Matrix is to learn how to take notice of our thoughts and behaviours, and to align that with what is important.

This means that we can choose to engage in the actions that move us closer to what we care about despite the negative uncomfortable thoughts or feelings that we have. Filling out the Matrix allows us to identify and sort through our thoughts, behaviours, and experiences. It is a tool to help build mindfulness, self-awareness, and valued living.

This may sound overwhelming and that is okay! This is a new skill that needs to be learned and requires practice. We will walk you through a case study and show you how to fill out the Matrix step by step.

## ACT MATRIX

5 Senses – Experiencing



### Components:

- The vertical line pointing up represents experiencing with the senses, also referred to as the present moment, and pointing down which represents our inner experiences, such as thoughts and feelings.
- A horizontal line intersects with the vertical line at 90 degrees to create four quadrants. The horizontal line represents our behaviour which either moves us **toward** our values (the right side) or **away** from our values (the left side).
- The lower right quadrant is for identifying who and what is important (your values)
- The lower left quadrant is for identifying unwanted internal thoughts or feelings that show up when things get hard (fusion)
- The top left quadrant is for identifying the specific behaviours that you do to avoid the unwanted internal thoughts and feelings (non-acceptance)
- And the top right quadrant is for identifying the specific behaviours that you can do to move towards what is important to you (committed action)

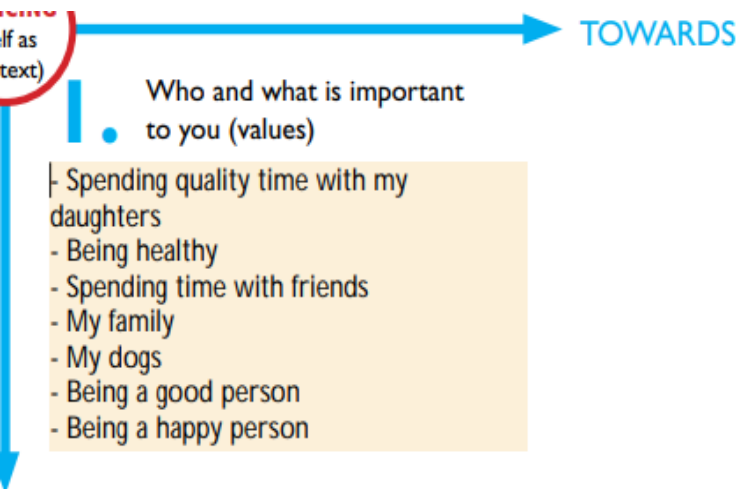


## ACT Matrix Case Study

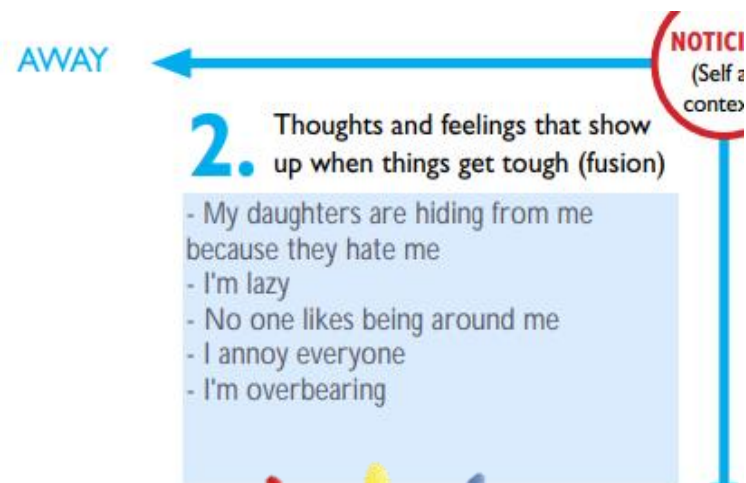
Trudy is a 36-year-old single mom with two children. She works shifts in a long-term care facility as a nurse and then comes home to take care of her 14 and 15-year-old girls along with all the household chores that need to be done daily.

She finds herself to be over tired, endlessly agitated with her daughters, and just fed up with the constant cleaning at home. She dreads getting home at the end of her shift and recognizes that this is something that she needs to work on.

Through work she has learned about ACT and decides to complete the ACT Matrix to get a better understanding of what she is feeling and how to move in the right direction.



Now that Trudy has identified her values, she is now considering what thoughts and feelings she has when the going gets rough. This has been occurring a lot of late and so she quickly notes all the negative thoughts she has been having.



Now Trudy focuses on what actions she takes when she feels these thoughts. What are the actual behaviours she exhibits when these thoughts take over her brain. She finds these actions difficult to write down. It is quite an emotional experience.

### 3. Things you do when those thoughts & feelings show up (non-acceptance)

- Go to bed
  - Watch a lot of t.v.
  - Stay home instead of going out
  - Don't talk to my daughters or
  - Get frustrated with my daughters
  - Cry
- Diagram labels: **NOTICING** (Self as context) at the top right, **AWAY** at the bottom left.

Next Trudy identifies the behaviours that will bring her towards her values. She thinks about those things that she wishes would happen naturally. How it would feel to be relaxed coming home? What would make her more relaxed? What would be an ideal day? Week? This really helps her to identify how to fill in the next quadrant.

### 4. Things you could do to get closer to the things that are important to you (committed actions)

- Ask my daughters for help with chores
  - Do fun activities with my daughters
  - Eat a meal with my daughters
  - Go for walks with the dogs
  - Get enough sleep
  - Set time aside to see friends each week
  - Enjoy moments of peacefulness
- Diagram labels: **NOTICING** (Self as context) at the top left, **TOWARDS** at the bottom right.



## Integrating ACT and the Matrix into Everyday Life

Now you may be wondering, what do I do with all this information?

Trudy takes a picture of the matrix so that she can view it on her phone at any time. Even if she is having a good day, she looks at it to confirm for herself that she is committing to the actions she made to move towards her values. There is much more to learn but this has been a great start to improving her quality of life.

We suggest that you practice filling out the ACT Matrix for yourself. [Click here](#) to download a fillable PDF version that you can save and print.

- Step 1: Fill out the ACT Matrix
- Step 2: Post it
- Step 3: Notice your thoughts and behaviours
- Step 4: Refer to the posted Matrix
- Step 5: Choose to pivot towards what matters

Once you have filled it out, you can post it in an accessible location at your office or home. Whenever you notice that you are having unwanted thoughts or feelings or engaging in a behaviour that is moving you away from your values, refer to your posted Matrix to help you pivot towards what matters to you.

This is also a great time to start practicing mindfulness, which is an exercise widely used in ACT. Mindfulness is the act of purposefully observing, without judgment or struggle, your life as it is happening in the present moment.

We have included some resources below for you to access more information about ACT and mindfulness. We also encourage you to attend the Webinar taking place on Jan 6th, 12pm to delve a little deeper into this terrific tool.

## ACT Resources

### Webinars:

- o <https://www.theactmatrixacademy.com>
- o <https://www.crowdcast.io/tinalong>

### Books:

- o [A Liberated Mind: How to Pivot Toward What Matters](#) by Steven C. Hayes PhD
- o [The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living: A Guide to ACT](#) by Russ Harris, Steven C. Hayes PhD
- o [Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Second Edition: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change](#) by Steven C. Hayes, Kirk D. Strosahl
- o [Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life: The New Acceptance and Commitment Therapy](#) by Steven C. Hayes PhD, Spencer Smith
- o [ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy](#) by Russ Harris, Steven C. Hayes PhD
- o [The Joy of Parenting: An Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Guide to Effective Parenting in the Early Years](#) by Dr Amy Murrell and Dr Lisa Coyne

### Training:

- o <https://www.praxiscet.com/live-online-courses/>

### Curriculum/Exercises

- o [ACT for kids with ASD and emotional challenges](#) by Mark Dixon
- o AIM curriculum: <https://www.acceptidentifymove.com>
- o DNA-V model <https://thrivingadolescent.com>

## HOW TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS (WHEREVER YOU ARE!)

1 PAUSE WHATEVER YOU ARE DOING AND BRING YOUR FOCUS TO THE HERE AND NOW



2 KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN OR CLOSED, FIND A COMFORTABLE POSITION (STANDING OR SITTING)

3 BRING AWARENESS TO THE 5 SENSATIONS: WHAT DO YOU SMELL? WHAT NOISES CAN YOU HEAR?



4 DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CHANGE ANYTHING IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT, SIMPLY NOTICE

5 TAKE A BREATH IN THROUGH YOUR NOSE, NOTICE IT EXPANDING YOUR CHEST, AND BREATHE OUT (REPEAT THREE TIMES)



6 IF THOUGHTS SHOW UP THAT DISTRACT YOU, GENTLY PULL YOURSELF BACK TO THE PRESENT MOMENT



7 DO NOT RESIST OR TRY TO CHANGE YOUR THOUGHTS. SIMPLY NOTICE THEM AND BRING YOUR ATTENTION BACK TO THE PRESENT MOMENT.



For feedback or questions please email us at: [specservicesnews@cltoronto.ca](mailto:specservicesnews@cltoronto.ca)



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