

Overview of ACT Processes

The skills taught in ACT comprise “[psychological flexibility](#)”, which is the ability to effectively coexist with internal experience while engaging in the world in ways that suit valued ends. Another way to say this is that we are working towards a **broader repertoire of responses** in the face of inevitable human difficulty.

There are six core processes that make up psychological flexibility, below. They each have an inverse, and the inverses together comprise “psychological inflexibility”.

Six Core Processes of Psychological Flexibility and Inflexibility

Psychological Flexibility	Psychological Inflexibility
(Cognitive) defusion Recognizing that thoughts are merely thoughts; that they may or may not be true, important or a good guide for behavior	(Cognitive) fusion Relating to thoughts as absolutely true and important; thoughts dominate attention and dictate behavior; you “forget” that you’re thinking
(Experiential) Acceptance Willingly coexisting with internal experiences; opening up and making room for them; letting thoughts and feelings come, stay and go in their own time	Experiential avoidance Unwilling and resistant toward current experience; Trying to escape, avoid, suppress or control unwanted internal experiences
Contact with the present moment Paying attention to the present with nonjudgmental curiosity, in ways that are useful (e.g. broadening, narrowing, shifting or sustaining focus, as needed)	Loss of contact with the present moment (or “inflexible attention”) Fusion with thoughts about the past or future; distractibility, disengagement, disconnection
Self-as-context (or “the noticing self” / “the observer self”) Identifying as the context in which experience arises; identifying as awareness; Recognizing that there are many parts of you; metaphorically , “Thoughts and feelings are the weather; I am the sky”	Self-as-content (or “Fusion with the conceptualized self”) Identifying as stories about yourself; e.g., “I can’t do X because I’m Y”; Zooming in on one part of your experience and saying, “That’s me.”
(Knowing your) Values Having clarity on values; examining choices through a lens of values	Remoteness from values e.g., not knowing what they are, losing touch with them, or not recognizing ways to be values-aligned
Committed Action Persisting in values-aligned behaviors	Unworkable action e.g., inaction, impulsivity, values-inconsistent action, persisting in avoidant actions