

# **A Practical Introduction to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in Clinical Practice: A 1-Day Professional Workshop**

with John P. Forsyth, Ph.D.

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Registration: Solutions On Site (<http://www.sosworkshops.ca/index.php>)

## **Workshop Overview**

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (or ACT, said as one word) is a newer third-generation evidence-based behavior therapy that balances mindfulness and acceptance processes with commitment and behavior change processes to (a) weaken the unhelpful influence of thoughts and emotional avoidance in guiding actions, while (b) promoting greater experiential and psychological flexibility in the service of valued ends. In short, ACT teaches clients how to be with their hurts and do what works – to live well, richly, and meaningfully, without first having to defeat sources of emotional and psychological pain.

ACT is a broadly applicable process-guided approach to human suffering and its alleviation, not simply a set of intervention technologies for specific psychological disorders. Thus, this 1-day workshop will introduce ACT, both as a model and intervention technology, and illustrate its application across a broad set of problem areas that are commonly seen in mental health settings (e.g., anxiety, depression, anger). This work can be challenging for both therapists and clients alike, for much of ACT work involves contacting difficult and painful psychological content without defense and for a purpose other than psychological relief. Thus, understanding the application and integration of the ACT model of psychological health and suffering is essential for effective ACT work.

Our time together will be filled with didactic teachings, live and video demonstrations, and practical experiential exercises that will be done individually, in dyads, and small groups. The exercises will highlight the integration of mindfulness and acceptance strategies (along with kindness and compassion exercises) to disarm forms of human suffering and also to promote greater clarity of values and action in the service of living well. Participants will be encouraged (but never forced or coerced) to engage the material at a personal level, as it applies to their own lives, and then also in the context of their clinical work. All I ask is that participants are willing to get inside the ACT model and approach, if only for just 1-day. Clinical worksheets and other practical tools will be provided.

## Learning Objectives

During our day together several core ACT themes will be cultivated and participants will have an opportunity to learn how to:

- Develop an understanding of the ACT model of human suffering and its alleviation, with emphasis on the conceptualization of anxiety and related clinical concerns within an ACT framework;
- identify and weaken excessive struggle and avoidance (i.e., experiential avoidance) while promoting more defused and mindful actions in the service of valued living;
- integrate experiential exercises, metaphors, and mindfulness (defusion) techniques into their clinical work;
- develop and apply metaphors and mindfulness exercises to foster compassion, kindness, and greater experiential and psychological flexibility;
- help clients balance acceptance and change while moving in the direction of their chosen values and life goals;
- use exposure-like exercises in an ACT consistent fashion; and
- to apply ACT flexibly and appropriately while also gaining insight into the ACT therapeutic stance and how not to do ACT.

## Who Should Attend

Psychologists, social workers, nurses, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals, including graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. Some general familiarity with ACT will be helpful, but is not required.

## About the Presenter

John P. Forsyth, Ph.D. is a Professor of Psychology and Director of the Anxiety Disorders Research Program at the University at Albany, SUNY in Upstate New York. For over 20 years, his work has focused on advancing contextual behavioral science and the practical application of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). John maintains an active research program focused on ACT and the anxiety disorders, and increasingly the utility and transportability of ACT in tele-health and self-help contexts. He has numerous publications, spanning basic experimental and applied work in ACT and behaviour therapy, and has received several awards for his research and teaching.

John is also an internationally recognized ACT trainer and a senior editor of the ACT book series with New Harbinger. He has written several popular ACT books, including *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Anxiety Disorders*, *The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety*, and *ACT on Life, Not on Anger*, and *Your Life on Purpose*.

John also regularly gives talks and ACT workshops to the public and professionals, and offers regular trainings at the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies in Rhinebeck, NY, where he serves as a member of the teaching faculty. He infuses his trainings with energy, humility and

compassion, and his down-to earth workshops are consistently praised for their clarity, depth and utility.

Collectively, his work has helped foster growing interest in acceptance and mindfulness in psychology, mental health, medicine, and society.

### **Recommended Readings (\* will likely be available for purchase at the workshop)**

\* Eifert, G. H., & Forsyth, J. P. (2005). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for anxiety disorders: A practitioner's treatment guide to using mindfulness, acceptance, and values-based behavior change strategies*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger. [This is a professional/therapist guide and provides an overview of ACT and a session-by-session protocol for its application. Also includes a CD with forms and worksheets. This efficacy of this protocol has been evaluated in a randomized clinical trial with good outcomes]

\* Eifert, G. H., McKay, M., & Forsyth, J. P. (2006). *Act on life not on anger: The new Acceptance and Commitment Therapy guide to problem anger*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger. [This book adapts ACT principles to dealing with problem anger. It teaches readers how to change their relationship to anger by accepting rather than resisting angry feelings and learning to make values-based responses to provocation. It has been tested successfully in a small randomized trial.]

\* Forsyth, J. P., & Eifert, G. H. (2008). *The mindfulness and acceptance workbook for anxiety: A guide to breaking free from anxiety, phobias, and worry using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger. [This is a client/self-paced workbook, and includes significantly expanded content from the earlier professional guide. The workbook also includes a CD with printable forms and worksheets AND audio of mindfulness and acceptance exercises found in the workbook. The effectiveness of this workbook has been evaluated by Dr. Forsyth in two randomized clinical trials, both showing moderate-to-large effect sizes and sustainable clinical gains].

\* McKay, M., Forsyth, J. P., & Eifert, G. H. (2010). *Your life on purpose: How to find what matters and create the life you want*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, Inc. [This is a general ACT-infused trade book for the public and professionals outlining values work and strategies to address barriers to valued action].

Harris, R. (2008). *The Happiness Trap: How to stop struggling and start living*. Boston, MA: Trumpeter. [The second general purpose ACT self-help book, and quite simple to understand. Great for anyone just getting started applying ACT techniques to their lives and for professionals as an aid for therapy – see [www.thehappinesstrap.com](http://www.thehappinesstrap.com) ]

Harris, R. (2009). *ACT made simple: An easy-to-read primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger. [Simple introduction for professionals interested in ACT]

Hayes, S. C., & Smith, S. (2005). *Get out of your mind and into your life*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger. [The first self-help book, often an entrance into the ACT work. This book is readily available, and was designed to be useful for both the general public and can also be used as a treatment guide for beginning ACT clinicians. It has been tested successfully in large randomized trials, both alone or within ACT treatment protocols.]

Luoma, J. B., Hayes, S. C., & Walser, R. D. (2007). *Learning ACT: An Acceptance & Commitment Therapy Skills-Training Manual for Therapists*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger & Reno, NV: Context Press. [This is a step by step skills-training manual organized around key ACT processes and the same core skills and competencies developed as part of the trainer's list. Very practical, with a lot of transcript materials and self-assessment exercises. It comes with an included instructional DVD.]

Zettle, R. (2007). *ACT for Depression: A Clinician's Guide to Using Acceptance & Commitment Therapy in Treating Depression*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger. [An excellent book from one of the founders of ACT on one of the most pervasive problems human beings face.]