

## What is ACT?

*Developed within a scientific framework, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an evidence based approach that uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies, together with commitment and behavior change strategies, to increase our psychological flexibility.*

### **What is psychological flexibility?**

Psychological flexibility means contacting the present moment fully, and based on what the situation affords, and changing or persisting in behavior in the service of our chosen values.

### **How is ACT pronounced?**

It is pronounced as one word, like 'act' in the word 'action.'

### **Is there any evidence that ACT works?**

ACT has been evaluated in over 100 randomized-controlled clinical trials in a variety of settings ranging from reducing stress/increasing wellbeing, and strengthening relationships to anxiety, smoking cessation, treatment of chronic disease and pain, schizophrenia, depression, and more.

### **How does ACT work?**

The goal of ACT is not to eliminate certain parts of one's experience of life, but to learn how to experience life more fully, without as much struggle, and with vitality and commitment. ACT helps people learn ways to be more mindful and get clarity on what really matters to them. Through metaphor, paradox, and experiential exercises people learn how to make healthy contact with thoughts, feelings, memories, and physical sensations that have been feared and avoided. People also gain the skills to re-contextualize and accept these private events, develop greater clarity about personal values, and commit to needed behavior change.

### **How does ACT affect brain processes?**

Studies of brain processes associated with the mindfulness component of ACT shows reduced reactivity in the "fear center" of the brain (amygdala), and increased neuronal growth in networks that govern self-control, empathy and compassion. Behaviorally, people report significant reductions in stress, enhanced wellbeing and greater effectiveness in their work and in their relationships.

### **What does this imply for us as parents?**

When we can learn methods for letting go of our struggle with pain, get clarity on what we value, and commit to living full, meaningful lives, we can be more effective in our parenting and our adult relationships. Rather than reacting in stressful situations, we can find the space to get in touch with what is important to us and then behave in ways that move us in that direction. We can develop resources to help us appreciate what life has to offer and develop the capacity to not let thoughts and feelings get in the way of doing what is important to us.