DSH and Adolescents

What does ACT offer?

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ACT

• A contextual behaviour therapy

• Derived from Relational Frame Theory (RFT)
  • Behavioural theory of how language and cognition develop and function

• Based in Functional Contextualism
  • Can’t separate behaviour from its context
“ACT is a name for treatments that deliberately target psychological flexibility” (Hayes, 2015)

- Being aware of thoughts and feelings that unfold in the present moment and, depending on what the situation affords, persisting or changing behaviour to pursue central interests and goals

- Psychological *inflexibility* – behaviour is excessively controlled by one’s thoughts, feelings and other internal experiences at the expense of more effective and meaningful actions

- an over-reliance on rule governed behaviour
Psychological Flexibility


- more severe PTSD
- higher levels of depression
- more anxiety
- slower improvements in BPD symptoms
- substance use disorders
- eating disorders
Psychological Flexibility

- Increasing psychological flexibility includes...
  - Decreasing experiential avoidance
  - Improving discrimination skills
  - Decreasing unhelpful pliance
  - Decreasing cognitive fusion
  - Weakening attachments to conceptualised self
Experiential Avoidance

- Efforts to control or avoid
  - unpleasant emotions,
  - upsetting memories,
  - troubling thoughts,
  - sensations or physical pain

- and the contexts that elicit them, even when doing so creates problems over the long run
High experiential avoidance correlates with:

- **DSH** (Venta, 2013)
- depression
- substance abuse
- addiction severity
- rumination
- GAD, PA, and social anxiety
- PTSD
- BPD symptoms
- eating disorders
I’ll say a word...
The Hexaflex

Contact with the Present Moment

Be here now

Acceptance
Open Up

Values
Notice what matters

Defusion
Watch your thinking

Committed Action
Do what it takes

Psychological Flexibility

Self as Context
Observing Self
Acceptance and Mindfulness Processes

- Contact with the Present Moment
- Acceptance
- Defusion
- Values
- Committed Action
- Self as Context
Self as Context

Contact with the Present Moment

Defusion

Acceptance

Values

Committed Action

Commitment and Behavior Change Processes

Self as Context
DSH on the Hexaflex

Ruminate about past, worry about future, weak awareness of (aversive) present moment

Escape from painful internal experiences: unpleasant memories, 
*I have to make this stop*

Fusion with thoughts: 
*It’ll never get better, I can’t tolerate this*

No distinction between self and experience; seeing self as broken, damaged hopeless

Unclear values, absence of connection to values

Immediate, avoidance oriented goals, impulsivity, persistent inaction

Dominance of the Conceptualized Past and Future: Limited Self-Knowledge

Experiential Avoidance

Cognitive Fusion

Attachment to the Conceptualized Self

Psychological Inflexibility

Lack of Values Clarity/Contact

Unworkable Action
ACT, DSH and Adolescents

• Although no specific RCTs combining ACT, DSH and adolescents…

• Support in principle:
  • More EA (thought suppression and alexithymia) correlated with more DSH (Howe-Martin et al, 2012)
  • Increased psychological flexibility in college students leads to fewer suicide attempts later (Barnes et al 2016)
ACT Evidence

- First paper published in 1984;
  - first RCT 1986;
  - the long silence;
  - now 136 RCTs

- Strong support for chronic pain, modest support for depression, anxiety, substance abuse, OCD, psychosis, smoking cessation and weight loss

- Evidence that ACT has superior effect at follow up than at completion (Luoma, 2012; Arch et al, 2012)

- Evidence that ACT works how we expect it to work (Villatte, J. et al, 2016)
ACT and Adolescents

• ACT used successfully with adolescents for OCD, depression, pain, anxiety, risky sexual behaviour (Halliburton & Cooper, 2015; Livheim et al, 2015; Swain et al, 2014)

• Increased parental psychological flexibility correlated with lower levels of adolescent distress (Brassell et al, 2015)

• New models such as DNA-V (Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2016)

• *Stuff That Sucks: Accepting what you can't change and Committing to what you can* by Ben Sedley
ACT and DSH

- **Wise Choices - ACT groups for BPD** (Morton et al, 2012)
  - Melbourne, Wellington

- **Acceptance-Based Emotion Regulation Group Therapy** – informed by ACT, DBT and MCBT (Gratz & Gunderson, 2006)
  - DSH and Experiential Avoidance improved, especially at follow up

- **ACT versus Matrix** (Ortega et al, 2016)
  - Mexico
But there’s more

- Focused ACT (Strosahl and Robinson)
- Clinical RFT (Törneke; Cairns; Villatte, Villatte & Hayes)
- The Matrix (Polk)
- Wise Choices (Morton & Shaw)
- DNA-V (Hayes & Ciarrochi)
And there’s cross fertilisation

- with CFT – Compassion Focused ACT (Tirch)
- with DBT – ERGT (Gratz & Gunderson)
- with EMDR – Veterans Affairs brief intervention


