



# Acceptance and Commitment Theory

## Enhancing Psychological Flexibility for Work-Parenting Success

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(University of Namibia), March 2025



*“The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice.” — Peggy O’Mara*



# Week 1- Talking Points

- What is Acceptance and Commitment Theory
- Philosophical & Theoretical Foundations of ACT
- Why the Empowerment Intervention matters
- Why ACT for Working Parents and how ACT Works?
- The Six Core Principles of ACT
- Psychological Flexibility and Inflexibility

The background of the slide features a corkboard on the left with several sticky notes. One note says 'TAKE A BREAK', another says 'DESCANSAR', and others have checkmarks and the word 'WORK'. To the right of the corkboard is a large teal circle. The title 'What is Acceptance and Commitment Theory' is written in a yellow, sans-serif font across the top of the image.

# What is Acceptance and Commitment Theory

- ACT is a modern, evidence-based theory
- Helps respond optimally and effectively to unwanted thoughts and emotions.
- **Enhance ability to handle emotional challenges** without getting stuck.
- **The goal is to** learn to respond optimally rather than eliminate difficult emotions
- **Teaches how to** pause, reflect, and choose a response that fosters connection.
- Developing **psychological flexibility skills** – not symptom reduction



# Understanding Functional Contextualism

- Response to our children depends on context, not just the rules we believe in.

Your child rolls their eyes when you ask them to do something.

- When relaxed, you might laugh it off.
- When stressed, you might snap at them.
- Same behaviour, different reactions based on context.

ACT teaches us to notice the context, and respond in ways that support long-term parenting values instead of reacting automatically.



# Understanding Relational Frame Theory (RFT)

Humans connect ideas, words, memories, and emotions - might make parenting challenging and painful.

If your child talks back:

Might connect to “disrespect” - leads to reacting out of frustration instead of connection.

ACT teaches - notice these thought patterns and choose responses that align with your parenting values rather than reacting impulsively.

A corkboard with several sticky notes. One note says 'TAKE A BREAK', another says 'DESCANSAR', and others have partial words like 'CANA', 'MAYO', 'MAYO', 'MAYO'. A teal circular graphic is on the right side of the board.

# Functional Contextualism & Relational Frame Theory

- Functional Contextualism: Parenting isn't about reacting the same way every time - it's about choosing responses in context.
- Relational Frame Theory: Humans connects past experiences and emotions in ways that may not be helpful. ACT helps to step back.



# Why ACT for Working Parents?

- Not getting stuck in negative thought patterns (e.g., “I’m failing as a parent”).
- Encourages mindful presence - reduce distractions and fully engage children.
- Supports value-driven parenting rather than reacting out of frustration or exhaustion.



The image shows a bulletin board with several sticky notes. One prominent note says "TAKE A BREAK". Other notes have words like "DESCANSO", "CAMA", "MAY", "MAY", "MAY", "MAY", "MAY". The background is a teal color with the title "How ACT Works?" in a light yellow font.

# How ACT Works?

ACT teaches working parents to:

1. **(A) Accept** difficult parenting emotions and to remain flexible
2. **(C) Commit** to valued direction
3. **(T) Take Action** – take steps and act on what truly matters even when parenting gets tough!

Develop **psychological flexibility skills** - stay adaptable/flexible.



# The Six Core Principles of ACT

- **Acceptance** - Allow emotions to pass rather than resist
- **Cognitive Defusion** - Distancing from unhelpful thoughts
- **Self-as-Context** - See oneself beyond thoughts and feelings
- **Values Clarification** - Identify what truly matters to parenting
- **Committed Action** - Take meaningful actions aligned with values
- **Mindfulness** - Stay present



# Psychological Flexibility – The Core Aim of ACT

- The **ability** to remain open to emotional experiences, stay present in the moment, and take actions that align with personal values, even in the presence of difficult thoughts and emotions
- To **respond** effectively to demands rather than impulsive **reactions**

The background features a corkboard with several sticky notes. One prominent note says "TAKE A BREAK". Other notes have words like "WANT", "CANVA", and "WANT". A teal circular graphic is on the right side of the top section.

# Psychological Inflexibility – The Root of Suffering

- Rigid, avoidant, and overly reactive to thoughts and emotions -  
Leading to behaviour patterns that are ineffective and disconnected from values.
- May lead to distress, depressed mood, and poor interpersonal relationships.

A corkboard with several sticky notes. One note says "TAKE A BREAK", another says "DESCANSAR", and others have checkmarks and the word "WORK". A teal circular graphic is on the right.

# Waiting for the Wrong Train

- Have you ever waited for the "perfect moment" to start doing something important?
- Have you ever told yourself, "Once work settles down," "Once I have more energy," or "Once I feel more confident, then I'll focus on my child's needs?"



# Summary and Takeaways

- ACT is about increasing psychological flexibility.
- It is about changing one's relationship with unwanted thoughts.
- Functional contextualism and RFT help explain how we interpret experiences.
- Practicing ACT leads to greater interpersonal interactions and resilience.

The image shows a bulletin board with several sticky notes. One prominent note says "TAKE A BREAK". Other notes include "DESCANSAR", "CANVA", "WANT", and "WANT". There is also a checklist with three items, each with a checkmark and the word "WANT". The background is a teal color with the word "Homework" written in yellow.

# Homework

Commit to one small action **this week** - no matter how imperfect or uncomfortable - to strengthen your relationship with your adolescent. (i.e., “Spend 10 minutes of undistracted time with your child this week”).