Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in Career Conversations

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ACT can help with…

Identity – working out who you want to be

Values – working out what matters

Motivation – unsticking the stuckness

Anxiety – limiting the impact of negative thoughts
Today, we will cover...

• Introduction to ACT
• Underlying assumptions
• Some ACT-friendly techniques
Part 1:
Introduction to ACT
Negative thoughts and feelings

• What kinds of negative and unhelpful thoughts or feelings do you most often see in your clients?

• What behaviour does this lead to?

• Please post in the chat
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unhelpful thoughts</th>
<th>Resulting behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m not good enough</td>
<td>Stop trying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People like me don’t do jobs like that</td>
<td>Don’t apply for a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll never succeed</td>
<td>Don’t follow through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve never managed it in the past, why would I do it in the future?</td>
<td>Perform badly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s too hard</td>
<td>Do nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents don’t want me to</td>
<td></td>
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Behavioural analytic approaches

CBT encourages us to change the thoughts – replacing negative ones with positive ones.

ACT acknowledges that sometimes this is too hard, so encourages us to decrease the impact the negative thoughts have.
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Unhelpful thoughts or feelings can stop us from living the life we want to live

ACT suggests that we can learn to accept the negative thoughts and feelings and commit to living the life we want to
Acceptance of internal experiences

Committing to a values driven life
Part 2: Underpinning Concepts
ACT assumptions

‘Negative’ thoughts, emotions, sensations are not inherently toxic: it depends on how we respond to them

Two psychological contexts that can create toxicity:

• Cognitive fusion
• Experiential avoidance
Cognitive fusion

A ‘pouring together’ of the person and his or her thoughts

- Thoughts become reality
- Behaviour becomes identity
Experiential avoidance

Attempts to change, avoid, or remove undesirable thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations

- We want to avoid feeling bad
- We avoid situations or behaviour that might make us feel bad
Psychological Flexibility

- An increased willingness to experience undesirable thoughts and feelings

- *In the service of* deliberately and actively pursuing personally valued action (‘or moving towards what matters’)
Part 2:
ACT in Career Conversations
Using ACT in career conversations

• Underpinning understanding that psychological flexibility is often the key to unsticking the stuckness
• It should be used alongside other problem-solving approaches and techniques
• A range of ACT-friendly tools and techniques – for one to one and group contexts
• Can be useful to share explicitly with clients
Some ACT-friendly tools

1. Images of your future
2. Thinking about your thoughts
3. Seeing yourself through someone else’s eyes
4. Metaphors
5. The Retirement Party
Further Reading

• Contextual Science [https://contextualscience.org](https://contextualscience.org)
• The Career Psychologist [https://www.thecareerpsychologist.com](https://www.thecareerpsychologist.com)