

## Introducing Acceptance & Commitment Therapy

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is a powerful new psychotherapy based on cutting-edge research into how the human mind works. It has been clinically proven to be successful in a wide range of psychological problems. (The unusual name of this therapy comes from one of its key themes: Learn how to accept those things that are out of your control, and commit to changing those things that can be changed to make your life better.) This is a very active therapy. It's not one of those therapies where we just *talk* about your problems. It's a therapy in which you actively learn new skills to improve your quality of life.

We have two basic aims in this therapy:

One aim is to help you create a rich, full and meaningful life. To do that, we'll need to spend some time talking about what you really want out of life; what's important and meaningful to you, deep in your heart. We call this 'clarifying your values'. Values are your heart's deepest desires for what you want to do and how you want to be during your short time on this planet. Then, using that information as a guide, we'll look at how you can set goals and take action to change your life for the better - and in the process, develop a sense of meaning, purpose and vitality.

Our other aim is to teach you a set of skills that will allow you to handle painful thoughts and feelings far more effectively, in such a way that they have much less impact and influence over you. We call these skills 'mindfulness skills'. Mindfulness is a mental state of awareness, openness, and focus. In a state of mindfulness, painful thoughts and feelings have much less impact on us. In a state of mindfulness, we can effectively handle even the most difficult feelings, urges, memories, thoughts and sensations - and as we learn to do so, we can break self-defeating habits or destructive patterns of behavior; let go of self-defeating beliefs; rise beyond our fears, and change our attitude in life-enhancing ways.

A key part of this therapy will involve you learning those mindfulness skills in the session, and then taking them home and practicing them in between sessions. The more you practice, the more benefits you'll get - and vice-versa. What this means is, that in some sessions we will actually need to bring up some of those painful thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations and urges during the session - so you can practice using these new skills to handle them better. Because of this, at times this therapy may be very challenging. However at all times we will be working collaboratively, as equal team-players - so you will never be pushed or coerced into anything you are unwilling to do.

It's always hard to know how many sessions this will take. A good rule of thumb is to commit to six sessions, and then on session six, we'll take stock, see how you're going, and see if you need any more. If you find that you don't need that many sessions, that's fine too. Also, we have to be realistic; no therapy works for everyone, so if this approach doesn't seem right for you, or you're not happy with the way it's progressing, it is easy to refer you on to colleagues who have different approaches.