

# Face Your Fears with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

## **Objective**

To face and manage your fears instead of avoiding them.

## **You Should Know**

You might feel that paralyzing fear consumes and shapes your life, like a vicious circle or trap from which you can't escape. It's often the most difficult aspect of anxiety to overcome. You fear your own mind, which is filled with both unwelcome and disturbing thoughts. You fear losing control of yourself and saying or doing things that are totally against your values.

Imagine you did something different: something that on the surface seems ridiculous—crazy, even! What if instead of trying to control your reaction to a frightening image that you can't unsee or avoid a terrible thought, you become aware of your fears, face them, speak about them aloud, and accept them as something that makes you human? What if you acknowledge your difficulties and the role fear has played in your life? What if you embrace your perceived weaknesses, while also acknowledging your strength and resilience?

Your natural tendency when faced with overwhelming fear might be to fight it by trying to control it. However, this approach only serves to increase anxiety, as the fear only temporarily subsides.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) recognizes that suffering stems from the tendency to escape or avoid pain instead of facing it. You disconnect from the present and attach to negative thoughts that you mistakenly think define you. This dissatisfaction is intensified when you base your actions on those fears instead of acting based on your values.

One of the major principles of ACT is to accept your reactions and be present with them, no matter how disturbing they are. Practicing acceptance may at first make you feel very anxious, but being able to tolerate your anxious feelings by fully experiencing the sensations, thoughts, and emotions that accompany your fears is the first step toward decreasing the power your fears have over you.

## What to Do

Place a check by the fears in the list below that dominate your life, and add fears you have that are not listed here.

\_\_\_\_\_ being disappointed

\_\_\_\_\_ being hurt

\_\_\_\_\_ feeling embarrassed

\_\_\_\_\_ feeling like a failure

\_\_\_\_\_ feeling anxious

\_\_\_\_\_ becoming dependent

\_\_\_\_\_ being different

\_\_\_\_\_ appearing crazy

\_\_\_\_\_ being uncomfortable

\_\_\_\_\_ being lonely

\_\_\_\_\_ making a decision

\_\_\_\_\_ making a mistake

\_\_\_\_\_ being misunderstood

\_\_\_\_\_ hurting others

\_\_\_\_\_ losing control

\_\_\_\_\_ being imperfect

\_\_\_\_\_ experiencing pain

\_\_\_\_\_ feeling rejected

\_\_\_\_\_ seeming stupid

\_\_\_\_\_ facing the unknown

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Choose at least three fears from your list and, using the prompts that follow, write about how they have impacted your life. As you write, consider the following:

- Observe what you're experiencing without reacting.
- Let your emotions or thoughts happen without giving in to your fears.
- Recognize the difficulty that experiencing these fears has made in your life without judging or criticizing yourself.
- Give yourself permission to be fearful.

My fear of \_\_\_\_\_ has stopped me from going to the following places I would

like to go:

\_\_\_\_\_

My fear of \_\_\_\_\_ has made me afraid to try the following things:

\_\_\_\_\_

My fear of \_\_\_\_\_ has caused me so much anxiety that I have resorted to

the following activities in order to reduce my anxiety:

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My fear of \_\_\_\_\_ has impacted my relationships in the following ways:

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My fear of \_\_\_\_\_ has influenced my plans for the future in the following ways: \_\_\_\_\_

My fear of \_\_\_\_\_ has impacted my life by:

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How well were you able to observe and not react to fears and anxiety? Describe.

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How well were you able to allow your emotions or thoughts to happen without reacting?

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Explain how you avoided judging yourself when you realized how fear has affected your life.

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What do you think will happen if you give yourself permission to be fearful?

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How did it feel to acknowledge and accept your feelings of anxiety?

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**Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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