



Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) with Adolescents with Medical Conditions: An Advanced Skill-Building Workshop

SPPAC 2017 Preconference Workshop (3 CEs)

Over the past decade, research investigating the use of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) within the field of behavioral medicine has increased substantially (McCracken, 2011). ACT targets the problematic processes of cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance through the use of mindfulness, acceptance, and perspective-taking; this, in turn, increases psychological flexibility, a trait repeatedly linked to positive outcomes (Scott, Hann & McCracken, 2016). The underlying premise is that when individuals learn to stop struggling against their physical or emotional pain, they can re-focus their energy towards engaging in valued activities, thus improving quality of life. While the majority of research on ACT for chronic illness has been with adults, several studies have indicated ACT's effectiveness with adolescents with chronic pain in terms of reducing anxiety, pain interference, and catastrophizing, and increasing school attendance and quality of life (Gauntlett-Gilbert et al., 2013; Wicksell et al., 2011). Although research in this area is still in its infancy, ACT can be applied to any adolescent with a medical illness who feels as if they are "stuck" in a battle against their illness, missing out on meaningful activities, and/or has not responded well to traditional CBT. In 2014, Weiss, Wallace, and Masuda conducted a SPPAC pre-conference workshop on using ACT with adolescents with chronic illness. In response to this well-received introductory workshop, many attendees indicated a desire for more advanced, applied skills-building training.

This workshop is designed for practitioners who already are familiar with the basic tenets of ACT and research supporting this mode of therapy for adolescents and people with medical conditions. The purpose is to deliver hands-on skills-building training so that learners can apply advanced ACT techniques in their clinical practice. Skills-building for ACT case conceptualization and treatment approaches will be incorporated via experiential and role-playing exercises and case presentations. Drs. Martin and Weiss will demonstrate clinical techniques to enhance mindfulness, acceptance, defusion, and commitment to valued activities. We will review strategies for employing mindfulness, ACT metaphors, compassion, and perspective-taking. Attendees will be given opportunities to practice some of these techniques during the workshop. We then will discuss how the use of these techniques ultimately aims to target health behavior change such as increasing daily functioning (e.g., attending school, sports, and social activities) and health-promoting behaviors (e.g., medication taking, nutrition, exercise).

Based on the content of this talk, participants will be able to:

1. Identify appropriate ACT therapeutic targets (e.g., cognitive fusion).
2. Discuss various ways to use ACT-consistent techniques to increase psychological flexibility.
3. Demonstrate at least three ACT techniques that can be applied to adolescents with medical conditions.
4. Discuss ways in which ACT processes can lead to health-promoting behavior change.
5. Integrate ACT-consistent techniques into clinical work.

Target Learner Level: Intermediate

Registration cap: 50

Presenters: Karen E. Weiss, PhD, LP, ABPP, & Staci Martin, PhD, LP

Dr. Staci Martin and Dr. Karen Weiss have attended numerous ACT trainings with leaders in the field, including Drs. Steve Hayes, Louise Hayes, and Kirk Strosahl. Dr. Martin is President of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the Association of Contextual Behavioral Science (ACBS), the organization that promotes research and clinical applications of ACT. She also is the President-elect of the ACBS Pain SIG and co-chairs the SPP Pain SIG. She routinely conducts ACT trainings for mental health professionals in her local area. Moreover, she currently is the Principal Investigator of a randomized controlled trial investigating the effects of an ACT intervention for adolescents and young adults with chronic pain at the National Cancer Institute, and published results of a pilot

ACT study (Martin et al., 2015). Dr. Weiss uses ACT regularly in her clinical work with adolescents with various medical conditions including cancer, sickle cell disease, and juvenile idiopathic arthritis. She is engaged in ongoing research and has published on acceptance-based concepts in adolescents with pain (Wallace et al., 2011; Weiss et al., 2013). She has taught on the topic of acceptance-based treatments in various formats including traditional lectures, skills-based presentations, and clinical supervision.

COI Statement: The speakers have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Session Date/Time: Thursday, March 30th, 2017; 8:30-11:30 am



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