

# An Introduction to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for Psychosis Recovery

The experience of psychosis is almost always an incredibly disruptive event in a person's life. For the approximately 3 percent of us affected by psychosis, its impact extends to every area of life, including relationships, work, health, and overall well-being. Families and caregivers also experience this impact as they do their best to support their loved one on the path toward recovery. Heartbreakingly, recovery is not guaranteed, and even when there is success, interventions such as medications come with unpleasant side effects, and diagnostic labels are extraordinarily stigmatizing.

Psychological therapies offer hope and are often a crucial and important treatment option for individuals with psychosis. For clients in close contact with their families, treatment guidelines also recommend family interventions and caregiver support, to improve caregiver well-being and their interactions with clients. Individual psychological therapies can be complex and lengthy. In addition to training more mental health staff to deliver these therapies, briefer or group-based variants of therapy have been developed to improve both dissemination and access.

Targeting common processes that contribute to psychological well-being can increase therapy impact and access. A key component of mental well-being is psychological flexibility, which involves developing helpful responses to situations and experiences using mindful awareness and values-based choices and actions. The transdiagnostic approach of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) aims to increase psychological flexibility, and it has been used successfully with a wide range of mental and physical health problems in clinical and nonclinical groups.

ACT promotes social and functional recovery by shifting client focus from symptom control to connecting with personal values and participating in life more fully. In addition to enhancing values-based living, ACT may be particularly useful for symptoms of psychosis. The qualities of distressing voices and delusional beliefs can increase the likelihood that people respond either with

avoidance or engagement, both of which can have high personal cost in the long term. Similarly, for caregivers the worry and demands of caring responsibilities can be overwhelming, leading to unhelpful responses to distress. The aim of ACT is to change the relationship people have with their symptoms, worries, or distress, and how they respond to them, in order to reduce the impact of these difficulties and help people focus more on valued actions.

The group context provides a powerful setting within which ACT concepts and skills can be taught and modeled. In addition, aspects of the intervention lend themselves to a group setting, such as acting out ACT metaphors, observing other people being present and willing, and making commitments in a social context. For people with psychosis, and their caregivers, group interventions also offer opportunities for normalizing and accepting psychotic experiences, gaining peer support, reducing isolation, and developing self-compassion. Along with these benefits, there is the opportunity to validate the courage and commitment participants show in expanding their lives despite the personal and wider difficulties associated with psychosis.

During the last ten years, we progressively developed an ACT for recovery group intervention for people with psychosis (G-ACTp) and for their caregivers. This process has been gradual and iterative, as we've sought to create a successful, engaging, and effective group program for both individuals affected by distressing psychosis and caregivers and family members walking alongside them in the journey to recovery. We are incredibly grateful for all the feedback, suggestions, and ideas we've received over the course of this enormous project. Given the difficulties some people have accessing individual and family therapies, and the fact that there are benefits of group approaches, we believe that G-ACTp offers promise in expanding the choice and availability of high-quality psychological therapies, which can positively impact people on the pathway to recovery.

## Structure of the Book

This book details the various aspects of our ACT for recovery group intervention, describing adaptations we have made and providing the manualized session content. Chapter 1 introduces ACT and its application to psychosis and outlines the development of the group intervention. Chapters 2 and 3 describe adaptations to the protocol for use with caregivers and acute inpatients, respectively. Chapter 4 details the approach of training and supervising peer-support cofacilitators, including the practical considerations and the perspectives of peer-support facilitators who have been involved. Chapter 5

discusses skills and tips for running successful workshops, both in relation to your own practice and in training others to facilitate these workshops. Chapter 6 highlights the importance of ongoing supervision and using ratings to ensure adherence to the model, and in it we consider how to measure outcomes and processes of change in the workshops. Part 2 describes the protocol for running ACT for recovery group intervention workshops; we outline each session, including scripts for exercises and tips about how to present material and foster discussion. We also provide downloadable resources at the website for this book, <http://www.actforpsychosis.com>, as well as advice about how to produce your own resources that better fit your service setting.

We hope you find that the book and additional resources enrich your clinical practice as you walk together with your clients on the journey to recovery!