**ACT Worksheet: “Living Your Values, Not Your Thoughts”**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this worksheet is to introduce you to **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**, a therapeutic approach designed to help individuals develop psychological flexibility. At its core, ACT teaches that psychological pain, such as difficult emotions, thoughts, and experiences, is a normal part of life. Rather than trying to avoid or eliminate these painful experiences, ACT focuses on **accepting** them and committing to actions that align with one’s deeper values.

ACT works by helping individuals **be present** in the moment, allowing them to experience their thoughts and feelings without getting overwhelmed or controlled by them. By recognizing that thoughts are not facts, and that we can **choose our behaviors** regardless of our emotional state, ACT encourages people to break free from the patterns of avoidance, self-judgment, and fear that often prevent growth. It emphasizes **mindfulness**, which involves being aware of our thoughts and feelings without trying to change or control them, and **defusion**, which is the process of distancing oneself from harmful or unhelpful thoughts.

A key aspect of ACT is **values-based living**. This approach asks you to reflect on what truly matters to you—the things that give your life meaning—and then take actions that align with these values, even when difficult or uncomfortable thoughts and feelings arise. In ACT, it’s not about eradicating distress or avoiding discomfort, but learning how to live in a way that’s authentic and fulfilling, regardless of emotional turbulence. This worksheet will guide you in identifying your core values, accepting difficult emotions, and committing to meaningful actions that will help you live in a way that’s true to who you are, not just dictated by the ever-changing flow of thoughts and feelings.

By working through this worksheet, you’ll begin to understand how your emotions and thoughts impact your actions, and how you can make more mindful, intentional choices based on your values. This is a lifelong process, one that encourages self-compassion, patience, and courage to face discomfort in order to create a life full of meaning and purpose. Through these exercises, you’ll start to see that your internal experiences, though sometimes difficult, do not have to control your actions. Instead, you have the power to choose a different path, one that leads to a life you find truly fulfilling.

**1. Understanding Your Values: What Truly Matters to You?**

ACT teaches that the key to a meaningful life is living according to your values. Values are like the compass that guides your actions, even in difficult times. To get started, think about the things that matter most to you in life. These could be relationships, personal growth, career, hobbies, or any other aspect of life that you deeply care about.

**What are the top 3 values that are most important to you right now?**

**What do these values mean to you? Why are they important?**

**2. Defining “Acceptance” in Your Life**

ACT encourages acceptance of both our thoughts and feelings, even when they are uncomfortable. The more we try to fight against unpleasant feelings, the more power they have over us. Instead of avoiding or suppressing emotions, we learn to accept them as part of our human experience, which allows us to move forward toward our values.

**Think of a recent situation where you tried to avoid a difficult emotion (e.g., fear, sadness, anger). What happened when you tried to avoid it?**

**What would it have been like if you had accepted that emotion, instead of trying to push it away?**

**3. Identifying Your Unhelpful Thoughts**

Sometimes, we get caught up in thoughts that prevent us from taking action toward our values. These thoughts may feel true, but they aren’t always helpful or accurate. ACT encourages us to observe our thoughts without getting caught in them. We can practice distancing ourselves from thoughts and choosing to act based on our values, not our thinking.

**Write down some unhelpful or distressing thoughts you’ve had recently.**

**How did these thoughts affect your emotions and behaviors?**

**What would be a more helpful way to think about this situation, based on your values?**

**4. Committing to Action: Values-Based Goals**

Now that you’ve identified your values and learned about the importance of accepting your thoughts and feelings, it’s time to take action! In ACT, we focus on setting goals and taking steps toward our values, even when it’s hard. Small, consistent actions are the key to long-term success.

**Choose one value from your list in Section 1. Now, write down a specific action you can take in the next week to move toward that value.**  
**Value:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
**Action:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
**When will you take this action? (e.g., by the end of the week, tomorrow morning, etc.)**

**5. Mindfulness Practice: Observing Your Thoughts Without Judgment**

ACT uses mindfulness to help us observe our thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in them. Being mindful means being present in the moment and observing without judgment. This practice allows us to recognize our thoughts and feelings as temporary and changeable, instead of identifying with them.

**For the next 5 minutes, try the following mindfulness exercise:**

* Sit comfortably in a quiet space.
* Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
* Notice any thoughts that come up. Do not try to change or judge them; simply observe them as they come and go.
* Notice any physical sensations or emotions that arise as well.
* Allow these thoughts and feelings to pass by, like clouds in the sky.
* If your mind starts to wander, gently bring your attention back to your breath.

**How did this mindfulness exercise feel for you?**

**What thoughts or feelings came up during the exercise?**

**Did you notice any change in your ability to accept them without judgment?**

**6. Defusion: Separating from Your Thoughts**

In ACT, we practice “defusion,” which is a technique that helps us distance ourselves from our thoughts so they don’t control our actions. Instead of saying, “I am an anxious person,” we learn to say, “I am having the thought that I am an anxious person.” This creates a mental space between us and our thoughts, making it easier to choose how we want to respond.

**Pick a distressing thought that you have often (e.g., “I’m not good enough,” “I will never succeed”).**  
**How can you “defuse” from this thought by changing the way you say it?**

**For example, instead of saying, “I’m so stressed,” you could say, “I’m having the thought that I’m stressed.”**

**How does this change the way you feel about the thought?**

**7. Expanding Your Comfort Zone: Moving Toward Your Values Despite Fear**

Sometimes, living according to your values requires stepping outside of your comfort zone. Fear and discomfort are normal, but they don’t have to control your actions. The goal is to commit to values-based actions, even when they’re difficult or uncomfortable.

**What’s one area of your life where you’ve been avoiding action because of fear or discomfort?**

**What would it look like to take a small step toward this value, despite your fears?**

**What is one thing you can do today to take that first step?**

**Summary:**

In ACT, we learn that life isn’t about eliminating pain or avoiding uncomfortable feelings. It’s about accepting those feelings, distancing ourselves from unhelpful thoughts, and committing to actions that align with our deepest values. The more we practice, the easier it becomes to live a life that’s true to who we are, no matter what difficult thoughts or feelings arise. Remember, the goal is progress, not perfection—and every step you take toward living according to your values is a victory!