

What Does the Client Describe as Their Main Problem(s)?

What Does the Client Want From Therapy/Coaching/Counselling?

Emotional Goals (How they want to feel differently):

What cognitions, emotions, sensations, memories, would they like to avoid or get rid of? *(Note: We can convert these to behavioral goals, by saying: “Part of our work here is learning new skills to handle these difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively; how to take the power out of them, so they can’t jerk you around, run your life.”)*

Behavioral Goals (What they want to do differently):

What would the client like to stop/start; do more/less? How would they like to treat themselves, others, the world around them, differently? What skills would they like to develop? What people, places, situations, activities would they like to approach rather than avoid? How do they want to behave differently in important relationships?

Outcome Goals (What they want to have, get or achieve):

What outcomes would the client like to achieve - e.g. get a job, find a partner, buy a house, heal an injury, make friends? *(We can convert these to behavioral goals by saying: “Part of our work here is to explore what you can start doing differently, to increase your chances of achieving these things.”)*

Relevant Past History

Was there any trauma, neglect, attachment issue, or other childhood problem? What major life events—traumatic, disruptive, or stressful—are factors in the current presentation?

Non-Psychological Barriers to Quality of Life: External, Biological, Social

Legal, social, financial, domestic problems? Systemic problems: prejudice, discrimination, poverty? Occupational problems, e.g. exposure to trauma? Biological factors, e.g. injury, disease, genetic or neurodevelopmental factors? Drugs, alcohol, medication. side-effects?

Reexperiencing Trauma, Abnormal Arousal, Sensory Disturbance

If relevant: Is the client reexperiencing traumatic events (e.g. flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts)? Are there symptoms of extreme hyperarousal or hypoarousal, dissociation, numbness, etc.? Sensory disturbance?

Unworkable Action

What is the client saying or doing that makes life worse, holds them back, worsens problems, impairs health, strains relationships etc.? Are there difficulties initiating or completing tasks? What important people, places, events, activities, and challenges is the client avoiding/escaping? What are they procrastinating on or withdrawing from?

Experiential Avoidance

What private experiences is the client trying to avoid, escape or get rid of? This may include thoughts, images, memories, emotions, feelings, sensations, urges, cravings, schemas, withdrawal symptoms, chronic pain, etc.

Fusion

(Include specific thoughts – e.g. *I'm a loser* – as well as cognitive processes such as worrying or ruminating.)

Past & Future: (Rumination, worrying, blaming, predicting the worst, reliving old hurts, idealising the past, flashbacks, *'If only ...'*, *'Why did it happen?'*, catastrophising, resentment, regrets etc.)

Self-Description: (Self-judgments, self-limiting ideas about 'who I am' or 'what I can and can't do', self-labels)

Reasons: (Reasons the client gives for why they can't, won't or shouldn't change, or why their life can't be improved)

Rules: (Rules about how I, others, or life *should* be. Look for key words like: *should, have to, must, ought, right/wrong, always/never, can't because, won't until, shouldn't unless*. Especially note perfectionism, and rules about pleasing others.)

Judgments: (Mostly these are negative, but sometimes positive. May be about anyone or anything: other people, oneself, one's job, one's body, one's thoughts and feelings, the past, the future, or even life itself)

Other – e.g. Narratives, Schemas, Core Beliefs, Emotional Reasoning, Black-or-white Thinking

Inflexible Attention

Consider the “3 Ds” – **D**istractibility, **D**isengagement, **D**isconnection from inner world (i.e. difficulty noticing thoughts or feelings). Are there difficulties in flexibly shifting attention, or problems with hyperfocus?

Values

What life domains does the client care about: e.g. work, study, health, parenting, marriage, friends, family, spirituality, community, environment? Are they in touch with their values in any of these domains?

What values does the client seem to have lost touch with, or turned into rigid rules?

What values-congruent goals do they already have? What values-congruent activities are they already doing?

Skills: Development & Application

What important life skills are missing, underdeveloped or ineffectively used - e.g. problem-solving, planning, self-soothing, assertiveness, communication, setting boundaries, emotional literacy, empathy, self-advocacy?

Client Resources

Strengths & Skills: What useful strengths, skills and other internal resources does the client have? What about external resources - e.g., who can they ask for help and support?

My Personal Barriers

What difficult thoughts & feelings show up for me, with regard to this client? How can I apply ACT to myself, to help?

*Complete this section on a separate sheet that **doesn't** go into the notes.*

Brainstorm

What core ACT processes may help? What questions, exercises, worksheets, metaphors, tools, techniques and strategies might be useful? What skills-training may be required?