

CBT West™ Pukekohe

Contextual Behavioural Therapies

ACT for the management of chronic pain

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), is often associated with treatment for anxiety and depression. However, it has a much broader relevance and is particularly useful for those suffering from chronic pain.

ACT is a contextual behavioural therapy, which places psychological flexibility at the core of healthy emotional functioning. It does this by encouraging clients to take values-guided action, grounded in actual experience, to inspire behavioural change.

ACT teaches ways to stop paying attention to troubling thoughts, so that a person can create and live a rich, full and meaningful life guided by values, while also accepting the pain that is inevitably part of life. It recognises that we all experience illness, physical pain, frustrations, loss and failure, no matter how good our life may be. Using ACT principles and tools, enables a person to realise that they can let go of troubling thoughts and emotions, rather than hold on so tightly that they give up.

The basic premise of ACT, as it relates to chronic pain, is that while pain hurts, it is the struggle with pain that causes suffering. ACT encourages a values-based change in perspective and promotes a more flexible approach to life. While a person may not be able to remove the pain, they can think and act differently to enable them to live a richer and more meaningful life, while accepting that pain is part of their life.

An ACT therapist uses a number of techniques when working with a person suffering from chronic pain. These include:

- Encouraging the client to accept that while pain is part of their life, it does not define it. This involves the client taking a step back and looking at their life and thoughts from a different perspective. By simply observing their life and the way their mind interprets it, they give themselves the space and opportunity to think about it in a different way. Acceptance of pain also reduces its intensity.
- Understanding and changing the underlying rules that the client lives by. Often we impose rules on ourselves which cause us to become stuck in the struggle of constant negative thinking and action. If a client can identify the unhelpful rules which govern their thinking and belief systems, they can find ways to change them. This is particularly helpful for people suffering with chronic pain who may believe for example, that they need to overcome or work through their pain, when instead they could give themselves permission to rest or do less.
- Working with the client to identify their values, which provide the direction or compass for daily life. By understanding and living each day according to clear values, the client is able to live a life beyond a narrow focus on symptom management.
- Developing present-moment awareness by the practice of mindfulness. This encourages the client to consciously focus on each moment in an expansive way, while gently letting go of judgement and negative thoughts or worries. For those suffering with pain, present-moment awareness encourages a broadening beyond a narrow focus on pain, to include an awareness of the wider world around them in each current moment.
- Encouraging committed action by finding the actions and activities that work for the client and that are in accordance with the client's values. For example, taking medication or having a day in bed may sometimes be the best thing a client can do.

While chronic pain can be debilitating, ACT based therapy can relieve some of the suffering. This enables a person to live a richer, more meaningful and value-based life.

¹ Dahl & Lundgren. *Acceptance and commitment therapy in the treatment of chronic pain*. University of Uppsala, Sweden

² Harris, R. (2009). *ACT made simple*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Stoddard, J.A., & Afari, N. (2014) *The big book of ACT*



Caroline Hurst

I am a registered mental health nurse and a qualified CBT, DBT and ACT therapist. I qualified as a nurse in the UK, where I worked predominately in Community Mental Health Services. I emigrated to New Zealand 16 years ago and worked at WDH B for 4 years, before moving into my own private practice. I have over 30 years experience working with people in both public and private mental health care.

I have worked with many clients over the years. I focus on teaching skills, rather than just talking. I am keen to get people into action, and in doing so, to reinforce changes in their mindsets, enabling them to live life to the full.

I have a wealth of experience and am able to work with a wide variety of clients. In addition to having a large tool box of therapy skills. I am also able to offer mixed media workshops, that will assist clients on their journeys into recovery and beyond.

More news from CBT West Pukekohe

The office is now open. Referrals can be directed to my email or mobile phone. Sessions cost \$135 per hour. Following an initial assessment every client will have an individualised skills based programme which will be completed over 6 to 8 weeks either weekly or fortnightly. The last session will focus on relapse prevention and a summary letter written, if appropriate, for the referring doctor.

I will also be offering small groups to teach skills to clients who perhaps cannot afford individual therapy. My next newsletter will have some more information about these groups.

Crafting for better mental health

I am now running a regular craft group every second Sunday of each month. The classes are being held at the Te Kohanga Community Hall from 1pm till 4pm. The group dates are: 12th August, 9th September, 14th October, 11th November and 9th December 2018.

With our ever increasing busy and stressful lives, we need to find different ways to relax. Crafting with other like minded people could be one of those ways. I particularly like the mindfulness elements in a craft experience.

New offices

The offices are located upstairs between the Tiny Turtle Children's Clothing shop and Mike Pero Real Estate

At 22a King Street, Pukekohe

How to refer

I offer individual, couples and family sessions for people 15 years and over. Referral can be done by a GP or by self referral.

Contact Information for Caroline Hurst

Address: 22a King St, Pukekohe

Mobile: 027 407 7165

Email: caroline.hurst@cbtwest.com

Website: www.cbtwest.com