

Module 6: Taking Meaningful Action (Committed Action)

You've clarified what's important to you – now it's time to start **living it**. In this final module, we focus on turning values into reality through **committed action**. “Committed” means you pledge to carry out these actions guided by your values, even when it's hard. This is where the rubber meets the road. Up until now, we've largely worked on your inner world (thoughts, feelings, perspective). Now we're going to work on the *outer* world – your behaviors and life choices – which is ultimately how you build a fulfilling life.

From Intention to Action

It's common with anxiety or depression to get stuck in inaction. You might *intend* to do a lot of things, but never quite get to them because of fear, low energy, or lack of motivation. Committed action means **taking initiative** to do what matters, *despite* those internal obstacles. It's about making your values manifest in concrete ways. Another way to think of it is “values in motion.” For example, if one of your values is **learning**, a committed action might be enrolling in a course or reading a book for 30 minutes each evening. If a value is **friendship**, a committed action might be calling one friend every weekend to catch up. These are actions you can choose and commit to.

When we say “commit,” don't worry – it's not a contract that you'll never break. It's more like a sincere intention that you keep working at, even if you slip up. Committed action is flexible, not rigid. If one approach doesn't work, or life throws you a curveball, you *adjust* and continue, rather than giving up entirely. Think of a committed relationship – it doesn't mean things are always perfect, it means you keep working on it. Similarly, you're committing to your path forward.

Taking action has a remarkable effect: it creates momentum. In depression, especially, doing anything can feel daunting. But when you take even a tiny step, you often start to feel a bit more alive or purposeful, which then fuels more action. This is similar to a concept in behavioral activation therapy (for depression) – that **action precedes motivation**. We often wait to feel motivated or confident before we do something. But many times, especially in recovery, you have to *do first*, and then the motivation and confidence will gradually follow as a result of your action. Keep that in mind if you find yourself thinking, “I just don't feel like doing anything.” That feeling is a real part of your experience, but you now have the tools to make room for it (acceptance) and not let it dictate your choices (defusion from the thought “why bother,” etc.).

Making a Plan and Overcoming Barriers

To increase your chances of success, it helps to have a clear plan. Vague intentions like “I'll try to be healthier” often fall flat. A concrete plan would be “I will go for a 15-minute walk after dinner on

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday this week.” Specific plans can be tracked and more easily executed. We will go through a step-by-step exercise to create a *commitment plan* for one of your values. You can repeat this process for multiple values or goals later, but let’s start with one to keep it manageable.

Before we dive into the exercise, let’s talk about obstacles. It’s almost guaranteed that when you try to change your behavior, you’ll encounter some challenges. There are **external barriers** (like lack of time, money, resources, or other responsibilities) and **internal barriers** (like fear, self-doubt, lack of confidence, inertia). Part of committed action is being **prepared to handle these obstacles**, using both problem-solving and the ACT skills you’ve learned. If an external barrier is “I’m too busy,” maybe the solution is to schedule the activity in your calendar or wake up 20 minutes earlier for it. If an internal barrier is “I’m anxious about doing it,” the solution might be to practice acceptance of that anxiety (like letting your heart race but doing it anyway) or defusion from thoughts like “I can’t do it” (acknowledge the thought and still take action). We don’t have to eliminate obstacles; we just need strategies to not let them stop us.

Exercise: Committed Action Plan

Let’s create a simple action plan step by step. Take out a notebook or a document to write this down if possible.

1. Choose a Value to Focus On: Look at the values you identified in Module 5. Pick **one** value that you want to work on first. Ideally, choose something that feels important and also has some area of your life you’d like to improve. For example, maybe you chose “Health” as a value and you know you’ve been neglecting exercise, or “Connection” as a value and you’ve been isolated. Selecting one value helps focus your efforts.

2. Pick a Specific Action (Goal): Now think of a **concrete action** that represents a small step toward living that value. It should be something you can realistically do in the next week or two. Use the SMART idea – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant (to your value), Time-bound. For instance, if your value is Health, your action might be “Go for a 20-minute jog on Tuesday morning.” If your value is Connection/friendship, your action could be “Call my friend Alex on Saturday afternoon to catch up.” If your value is Learning, maybe “Spend 15 minutes tonight learning Spanish on a language app.” Make sure it’s specific (who/what/when/where) and not too huge. We’re aiming for a **baby step** that is challenging but doable. You can build up later.

3. Identify Potential Obstacles: Ask yourself: “What might prevent me from doing this action?” List both external and internal obstacles. External might be things like “It might rain during my jogging time” or “What if my friend is busy when I call?” Internal obstacles might be “I’ll probably feel too tired” or “I’m anxious I’ll be awkward on the phone.” It’s important to anticipate these, because then you can plan for them.

4. Plan Solutions for Each Obstacle: Next to each obstacle you listed, write a possible solution or workaround. External obstacle examples:

- If it rains, I will do an indoor workout video for 20 minutes instead.
- If my friend is busy, I will send a text suggesting a few alternate times to talk, so we can reschedule.

Internal obstacle examples:

- If I feel too tired after work to jog, I will still put on my running shoes and commit to at least 5 minutes. (Often starting is the hardest part, and I might continue once I start.)
- If I feel anxious about calling, I'll acknowledge "I'm having the thought that this will be awkward," remind myself of the value (why this call matters to me), maybe do a 5-minute breathing exercise beforehand, and make the call anyway. I can even jot down a couple of talking points to feel more at ease.

These solutions are essentially **if-then plans**: "*If X happens, then I will do Y.*" This way, when the moment comes, you're not derailed, because you've already decided how to handle it.

5. Commit in Writing (and/or Share): Now write down your final action plan as a clear statement. For example: "*I commit to walking for 20 minutes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7am before work. If I feel like snoozing my alarm, I will remind myself I just need to do 5 minutes to start; if the weather is bad, I'll do a yoga video instead.*" That's a solid committed action plan. Sign it or mark it somehow as your commitment. If possible, tell someone about your plan – someone supportive. For instance, you might mention to your partner or a friend, "Hey, I'm trying to exercise three times this week. Can you give me a nudge or ask me about it to keep me accountable?" Sometimes sharing a goal increases our sense of accountability. If you prefer not to share, that's okay – you can still hold yourself accountable by tracking it (e.g., ticking off each day you do it on a calendar).

6. Follow Through and Evaluate: When the planned time comes, treat this action as an appointment with yourself. Use your mindfulness skills to show up for it – you might not *feel* like it, but recall your commitment. After you complete the action (or at the end of the week), take a moment to reflect: How did it go? If you succeeded, congratulate yourself! Notice how it felt to do something aligned with your value – perhaps you felt a sense of accomplishment, or maybe it was hard but you're glad you did it. If you didn't fully succeed, avoid harsh judgment. Instead, get curious: What got in the way? Did an obstacle arise that you weren't prepared for? Use that information to adjust your plan and try again. Committed action is about learning from experience and iterating, not expecting perfection.

To illustrate, let's walk through a quick example. **Value:** Creativity. **Chosen action:** "This Sunday at 3 PM, I will spend one hour painting a canvas." **Obstacles:** "I might procrastinate or say I'm not in the

mood; I might judge my art as not good.” **Solutions:** “If I start procrastinating, I’ll set a 10-minute timer just to set up my paints and tell myself I can stop after that if I want. Once I start, I’ll likely continue. If I have self-critical thoughts, I’ll practice defusion (like noticing ‘here’s my perfectionist mind acting up’) and focus on the process rather than the result. I’ll remind myself this is about enjoyment and self-expression, not creating a masterpiece.” **Commitment:** The person writes this plan down and maybe tells their partner, “Don’t let me make excuses on Sunday afternoon – I really want to do this.” When Sunday 3 PM arrives, they feel a bit lazy, but they recall their commitment, set up the paints for 10 minutes, and end up painting for an hour. Afterward, they feel calmer and proud that they followed through, and they have a painting to show for it (regardless of whether it’s great art or not!).

Staying on Track and Moving Forward

Once you achieve one small goal, it’s time to set the next one. Committed action is an ongoing practice. Over time, these small steps add up to significant life changes. There will be victories and setbacks. Expect that. The key is to **stay in touch with your values** and keep resetting your compass toward them, even if you wander off course now and then (which we all do).

A few tips for staying on track:

- **Regularly revisit your values:** Maybe each week, reflect on your core values and ask “What’s one thing I can do in the coming days that would express this value?” This keeps your actions aligned with what matters.
- **Use your ACT skills when facing challenges:** All the previous modules come into play here. Anxiety before a new action? Use defusion to unhook from the anxious thoughts (“I can’t do this”). Fear of failure? Use acceptance to allow that fear to be present without quitting. Feeling lazy or unmotivated? Use mindfulness to focus on the present action one step at a time, rather than getting lost in thoughts about it. Remember self-as-context – you are not your fear or fatigue, you are the one carrying them *and* you can still move forward.
- **Reward and celebrate successes:** Even small wins deserve acknowledgment. Did you accomplish your action for the week? Give yourself credit! Perhaps treat yourself to something enjoyable (preferably something aligned with your values, like relaxing with a good book if you value learning, or taking a bath for self-care). Positive reinforcement helps solidify new habits.
- **Adjust goals to be realistic:** If you find you consistently can’t meet a goal, don’t beat yourself up – instead, *adapt*. Maybe the goal was too ambitious or not specific enough. It’s perfectly fine to scale back. A 5-minute walk is infinitely better than a 0-minute walk. Consistency is more important than intensity at first. You can gradually increase challenges as your confidence builds.
- **Stay kind to yourself:** This is a journey, and you’re human. Life will sometimes interfere – illness, emergencies, or just bad days. If you lapse for a while (stop doing the exercises, abandon goals for a week), resist the urge to call yourself a failure. That’s a perfect moment to practice

compassion: “I had a rough week and got off track. It’s okay. What’s one small step I can take to get back toward my values now?” The door is always open to recommit.

Key Takeaways from Module 6

- **Committed action = doing what matters, even when it’s hard:** It’s about taking concrete steps guided by your values. You won’t always feel like it – but you’ve learned that you can make room for those uncomfortable feelings and still act.
- **Start small and specific:** Break your value into a doable goal for the short term. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Small successes build momentum and confidence for bigger challenges ahead.
- **Anticipate obstacles:** By planning for things that might go wrong or inner doubts that might arise, you won’t be caught off guard. Use if-then strategies and your ACT techniques (defusion, acceptance) to handle obstacles rather than avoid them.
- **Consistency and flexibility over perfection:** It’s better to do a little consistently than to overdo it once and burn out. Also, if something isn’t working, you can change your approach – find what works for you while staying true to the value behind it.
- **Action brings change:** As you take more and more value-driven actions, your life story starts to shift. You might find your mood improving, your confidence growing, and your sense of self becoming more positive. But even when external results are slow, you can feel internally satisfied that “Today I lived according to my values,” and that is a win in itself.

Conclusion and Moving Ahead

Congratulations on completing this self-help program based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy! Over six modules, you’ve learned to **be present, unhook from unhelpful thoughts, open up to feelings, discover the observing self, clarify your values, and take committed action**. These six core processes of ACT work together to build what we call *psychological flexibility* – the ability to handle life’s challenges while staying true to what matters to you. Remember that these skills are like muscles that strengthen with practice. You might revisit certain exercises or modules over time, and that’s great. Each time you practice, you reinforce these healthy habits of mind and behavior.

Life will inevitably have ups and downs. Having anxiety or depression doesn’t completely vanish overnight. But you now have a toolkit to respond differently. Instead of getting tangled in a web of suffering, you can notice “Ah, my mind is telling that old story” or “I feel that wave of sadness” and respond with mindfulness, acceptance, and action, rather than avoidance or struggle. Over time, those waves and stories lose their hold, and you’ll find yourself more focused on living your life than fighting your mind.

As you move forward, keep in mind:

- **Be patient and persistent:** Change takes time. You might see some quick improvements, or it might be gradual. Both are okay. Stick with the practices, and don't be discouraged by setbacks.
- **Seek support when needed:** You don't have to do this all alone. Share your journey with supportive friends or family. If you find that you're very stuck or things feel overwhelming, consider reaching out to a therapist for additional guidance – ACT is something many professionals can help you with. There's no shame in getting help.
- **Adapt ACT to your life:** Ultimately, these techniques are tools to serve you. Feel free to modify exercises to fit your style, mix and match what you need in the moment. ACT is a flexible model; it's all about what helps you be the person you want to be.

Thank you for dedicating time and effort to work on yourself through these modules. That in itself is an act of courage and self-care. Keep honoring your values, one step at a time. With awareness, acceptance, and committed action, you are on the path to a richer, more meaningful life – a life *you* choose, rather than one dictated by fear or sadness. **You've got this!**