



# The ACT Practitioner's Guide to the Science of Compassion: Tools for Fostering Psychological Flexibility

By Dennis Tirsch PhD, Benjamin Schoendorff MA MSc, Laura R. Silberstein PsyD

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Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is proven effective in the treatment of an array of disorders, including addiction, depression, anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders, and more. Evidence shows that mindfulness and acceptance exercises help clients connect with the moment, uncover their true values, and commit to positive change. But did you know that compassion focused exercises can also greatly increase clients' psychological flexibility?

More and more, therapists are finding that the act of compassion—both towards oneself and towards others—can lead to greater emotional and physical well-being, increased distress tolerance, and a broader range of effective responses to stressful situations. One of the best advantages of compassion focused methods is how easily they can be integrated into an ACT approach.

An important addition to any ACT professional's library, *The ACT Practitioner's Guide to the Science of Compassion* explores the emotionally healing benefits of compassion focused practices when applied to traditional acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). This book offers case conceptualization, assessments, and direct clinical applications that integrate ACT, functional analytic psychotherapy, and compassion focused therapy to enhance your clinical practice.

This is the first book on the market to provide an in-depth discussion of compassion in the context of ACT and other behavioral sciences. The integrative treatment model in this book provides powerful transdiagnostic tools and processes that will essentially build bridges across therapies. If you are ready for a new, easily integrated range of techniques that can be used for a variety of treatment applications, this guide will prove highly useful. And if you are looking to build on your previous experience with cognitive and behavioral therapies, this book will help to enhance your treatment sessions with clients and increase their

psychological flexibility.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

“An elegant synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern science. Packed full of powerful insights and practical tools, this book is an incredibly useful resource not just for acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) practitioners, but for anyone with an interest in compassion. Highly recommended!”

—**Russ Harris**, author of *The Happiness Trap* and *ACT Made Simple*

“*The ACT Practitioner’s Guide to the Science of Compassion* by Tirch, Schoendorff, and Silberstein is an excellent integration of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and compassion-focused therapy (CFT). User-friendly and filled with insights and clinical examples, this book will open new possibilities in therapy. Highly recommended.”

—**Robert Leahy, PhD**, director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy

“This is a truly unique book that examines the points of intersection between acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and other approaches to mindfulness and self-compassion. While having a remarkable level of detail and theoretical sophistication, the book also provides case examples and easy, practical techniques to help therapists integrate compassion practice into their work with clients in a meaningful way.”

—**Kristin Neff, PhD**, associate professor in educational psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, TX, pioneering researcher into the mental health benefits of self-compassion, and author of *Self-Compassion*

“Compassion is a defining aspect of humanity that contributed to the survival of our species. In addition, compassion is one of the common elements of all world religions and at the heart of clinical practice. In this remarkable volume, Tirch, Schoendorff, and Silberstein examine the many aspects of compassion within the context of modern cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Highly accessible, this remarkable book provides clinicians with concrete recommendations to cultivate compassion and implement it into clinical practice. This book is a must-read.”

—**Stefan G. Hofmann, PhD**, professor of psychology at Boston University, MA, and author of *An Introduction to Modern CBT: Psychological Solutions to Mental Health Problems*

“Evolutionary science is providing us with a deeper understanding of the centrality of connection in human well-being. As result, the science of compassion is growing dramatically and compassion is taking a critical place in the study and practice of empirical clinical psychology. Tirch, Schoendorff, and Silberstein provide welcome guidance for clinicians interested in a more explicit focus on compassion in their work.”

—**Kelly G. Wilson, PhD**, associate professor of psychology at the University of Mississippi, MS, and coauthor of *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*

“This comprehensive compendium on compassion will satisfy practitioners who hunger for theory and conceptual analysis, as well as those who want innovative and step-by-step treatment tools. This book

belongs in the library of any clinician who wants to deepen the impact of their therapeutic relationships using not only their intellect, but their heart.”

—**Mavis Tsai, PhD**, coauthor of *Functional Analytic Psychotherapy: Creating Intensive and Curative Therapeutic Relationships* and senior research scientist and director of the FAP Specialty Clinic in the Psychological Services and Training Center at the University of Washington, WA

“Compassion is one of—if not the most—powerful antidotes to human suffering. More than 2,600 years of collective wisdom and a decade of psychological research teaches us why that is so. But why is compassion so elusive? How do we harness the power of compassion to alleviate forms of human suffering and to promote psychological health? This intriguing, insightful, and immensely practical book offers answers to these and other questions, and will show you how to put compassion into action. Though written with acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) practitioners in mind, this book goes into territory that can be readily adapted within any form of mental health practice. I am grateful to the authors for giving us this clinically rich book. It is a gift and a must-read for all mental health professionals.”

—**John P. Forsyth, PhD**, professor of psychology and director of the Anxiety Disorders Research Program at the University at Albany, NY, and coauthor of *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Anxiety Disorders*, *The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety*, *ACT on Life Not on Anger*, and *Your Life on Purpose*

“From my first encounter with acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) to my romps with functional analytic psychotherapy (FAP) and compassion-focused therapy (CFT), I have felt an inherent pulse of compassion in the processes and interventions that are built into these psychotherapeutic approaches. In *The ACT Practitioner's Guide to the Science of Compassion*, the authors bring together theory, science, and application in a way that easily guides the clinician to understanding compassion and its place in the contextual behavioral therapies, while also weaving the cloth of engagement and flexibility into deepening the sense of connection to others and what it means to be human. An essential read for all those determined to create a more compassionate world!”

—**Robyn D. Walser, PhD**, associate clinical professor at the University of California, Berkeley, CA, and associate director for the National Center for PTSD, Dissemination and Training Division

“This is the book I’ve waited for—a guide that melds acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) processes with the transformative power of compassion. Values, defusion, committed action, self-as-context—every component of ACT is strengthened as we learn to access and use compassion.”

—**Matthew McKay, PhD**, coauthor of *Your Life on Purpose*

#### About the Author

**Dennis Tirsch, PhD**, is founder and director of The Center for Mindfulness and Compassion Focused Therapy in New York and the Compassionate Mind Foundation USA. An internationally-known expert on compassion-focused psychology, Tirsch is the author of several books, including *The Compassionate-Mind Guide to Overcoming Anxiety*. Tirsch is assistant clinical professor at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York, NY, and trains psychotherapists throughout the world in applied mindfulness, acceptance, and compassion.

**Benjamin Schoendorff, MA, MSc**, is a licensed psychologist in Quebec, Canada, and founder of the Contextual Psychology Institute. An acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) pioneer in the French-speaking world, he has authored, coauthored, and coedited several books about ACT and functional analytic

psychotherapy (FAP), including *The ACT Matrix* with coeditor Kevin Polk. A peer-reviewed ACT trainer and certified FAP trainer, Schoendorff gives training workshops across the world. He lives near Montreal in Quebec, Canada, where he works as a researcher at the Montreal Mental Health University Institute.

**Laura R. Silberstein, PsyD**, is a licensed psychologist in New York and New Jersey. Silberstein is the director of The Center for Mindfulness and Compassion Focused Therapy in New York and has advanced training in evidence-based therapies such as compassion-focused therapy (CFT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for adults and adolescents. Silberstein is also a clinical supervisor, CFT trainer, and coauthor of *Buddhist Psychology and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*.

Foreword writer **Paul Gilbert, PhD**, is world-renowned for his work on depression, shame, and self-criticism. He is head of the mental health research unit at the University of Derby in the United Kingdom, founder of compassion-focused therapy (CFT), and author of several books, including *The Compassionate Mind* and *Overcoming Depression*.

Foreword writer **Steven C. Hayes, PhD**, is Nevada Foundation Professor in the department of psychology at the University of Nevada, NV. An author of thirty-four books and more than 470 scientific articles, his research focuses on how language and thought lead to human suffering. Hayes is cofounder of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)—a powerful therapy method that is useful in a wide variety of areas—and has served as president of several scientific societies. He has received several national awards, including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

## Users Review

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**James Bassler:**

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**Shawn Hoffman:**

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