



open up, be present, and do what matters

When we're feeling overwhelmed, whatever the cause, it can be really hard to take effective action to support ourselves. We often end up getting caught up in unhelpful cycles of avoidance, that in the long run make things worse. Or we get so hooked up in battling difficult thoughts and feelings that we just feel stuck. But there are some proven strategies for overcoming overwhelm.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT for short) offers really helpful ways of responding to overwhelm. They're not easy, and require practice – but they can be boiled down into 3 core processes: get present, open up and do what matters.

When you notice yourself caught in the midst of an emotional storm (this could be anxiety, avoidance, anger, overwhelm – anything that means you feel caught up, and disconnected from living the life you want) follow these three steps:

Open up

Opening up to difficult thoughts and feelings allows you to reduce the struggle with them, and have greater freedom in how you respond. Be willing to experience uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or sensations instead of fighting or avoiding them. It's about accepting what you can't control.

Strategies to Help:

- **Name the Feeling:** When you're struggling, say to yourself, "I'm feeling anxious right now." Naming emotions helps create distance and reduces their intensity.
- **Breathe Through It:** Use slow, deep breathing to calm your body while letting the feeling come and go, like watching a wave rise and fall.

Be present

This will help you to “drop anchor” to keep you steady in the midst of an emotional storm. Getting present can help you make mindful choices about how to respond to the situation and the difficult thoughts or feelings that show up. Focus on the here and now instead of getting stuck in regrets about the past or worries about the future. It's about engaging fully in what's happening right now.

There are 3 steps: Acknowledge, Connect and Engage.

- Acknowledge your experience
 - Notice what thoughts, feelings, memories are present for you right now. Try to name them if you can.
- Connect with your body
 - Push your feet into the ground or intentionally move your body, noticing that it is containing all your thoughts and feelings.
- Engage with the world around you
 - Notice the room around you and engage your senses. What can you see, hear, smell and taste?

Do what matters

Our lives are enriched when we take actions that are in line with our values. Take action based on your values—the things that are most important to you—even if it's challenging. It's about building a meaningful life.

Ask yourself these questions to help clarify your values:

- What do you want to stand for in the face of your current struggles?
- How do you want to treat yourself and family members?
- When it comes to family what sort of person do you want to be? What strengths and qualities do you want to develop?

Then decide what action to take – pick one or two of the values you identified above and look for opportunities to sprinkle these into your day.

To be open, present, and focused on what matters most helps us as parents flourish, even in the midst of the challenges and struggles of raising a family. It allows us to navigate tough moments with resilience, stay connected to our children in the here and now, and focus on what's truly important for our family. By embracing the hard emotions that come with parenting, staying grounded in the present, and aligning our actions with the values we want to teach our kids, we can grow as parents, find purpose in the chaos, and create a meaningful and loving family life.

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Romans 5:3-5.