

# Butler Hospital Occupational Therapy and Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) Practical Strategies for Mental Health Intervention

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#### What is ACT?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a third generation Cognitive Behavioral Therapy that uses mindfulness and acceptance to help people take actions consistent with their values. ACT assumes that quality of life is primarily dependent upon mindful, values-guided action and that this is possible regardless of how many symptoms you have. Symptom management is not a goal of ACT as ongoing attempts to get rid of "symptoms" can increase feelings of stress and anxiety. The goal of ACT is to help people create a meaningful life while accepting that negative thoughts and feelings are part of life.

There are six core principles of ACT that are the foundation for developing psychological flexibility: defusion, acceptance, contact with the present moment, the observing self, values, and committed action.

### Relationship to Practice Framework

ACT is consistent with OT practice as it is client centered with a focus on personal values that lead to engagement in meaningful occupations. By integrating occupation-based OT practice into an ACT treatment program we are able to provide a context for application of skills, leading to greater success in life roles.

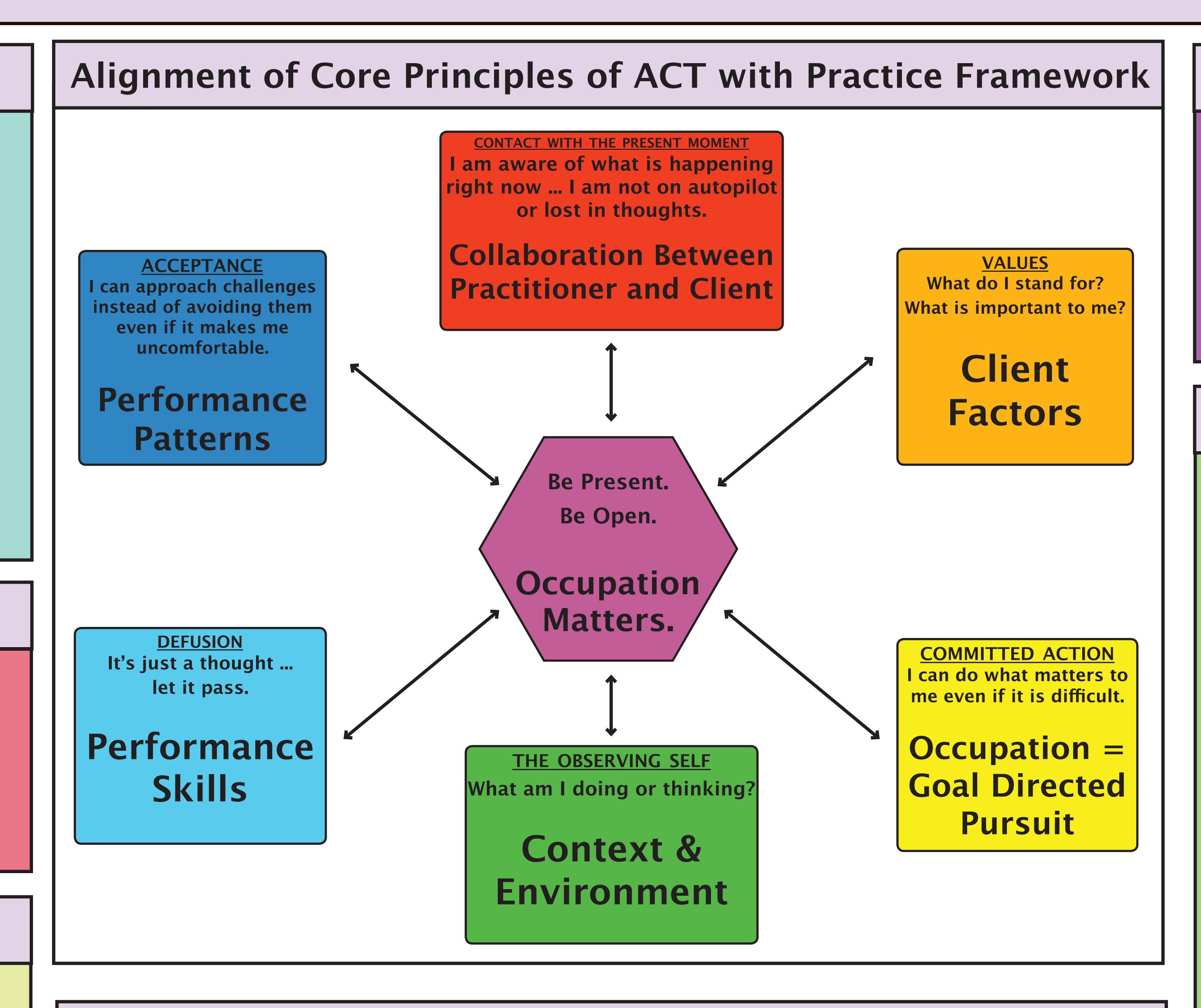
## Objective

Butler Hospital is a private acute care psychiatric facility treating adolescent through geriatric populations in both inpatient and partial hospital settings. The setting of an NIH funded grant to determine the effectiveness of ACT in group format, the OT Department collaborated with researchers to infuse the ACT philosophy into the milieu. The objective of this project was to demonstrate the effectiveness of occupation-based groups in the presentation of ACT material and to compare these groups to those presented in traditional didactic format.

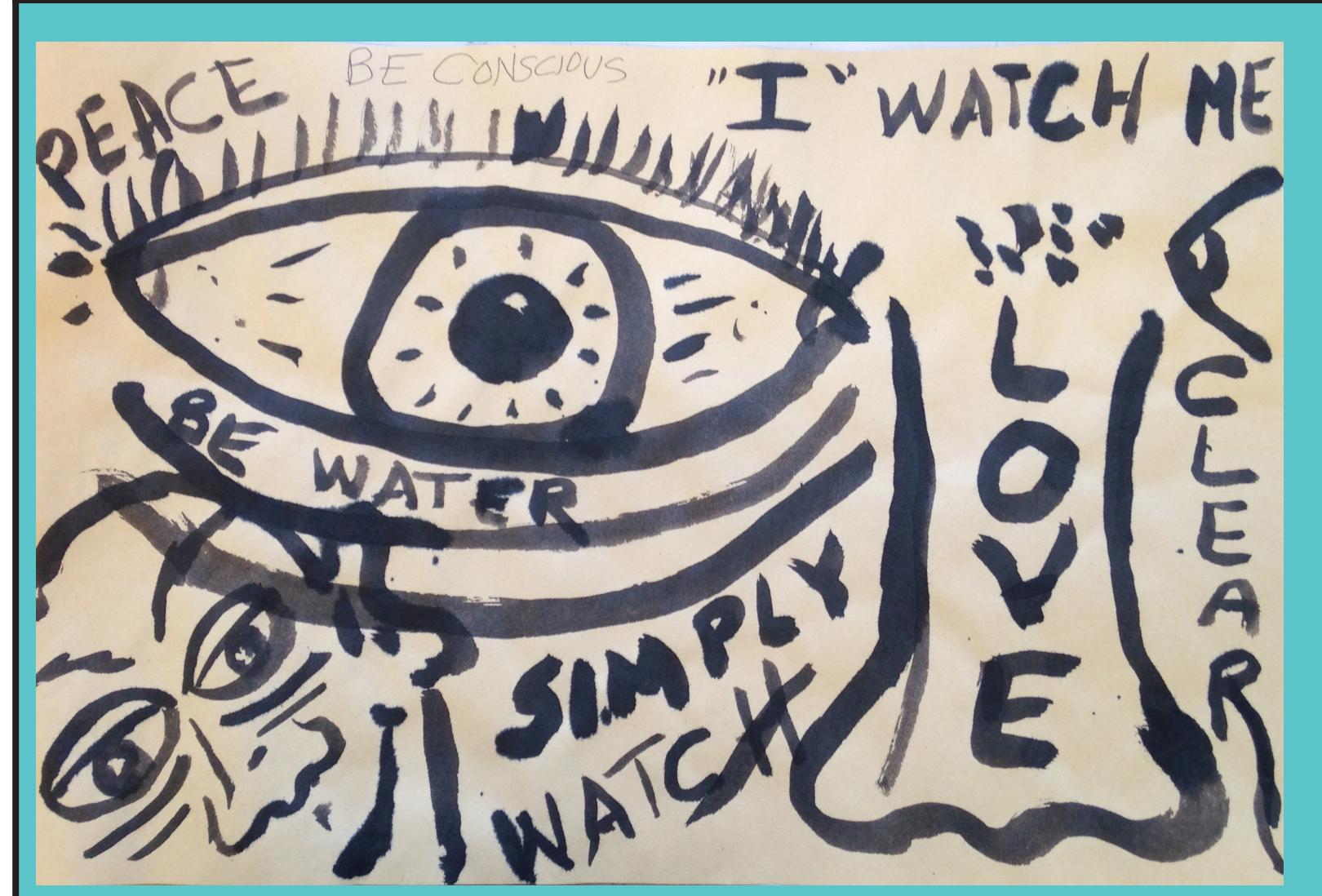
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## **Example of Artwork from ACT Group**

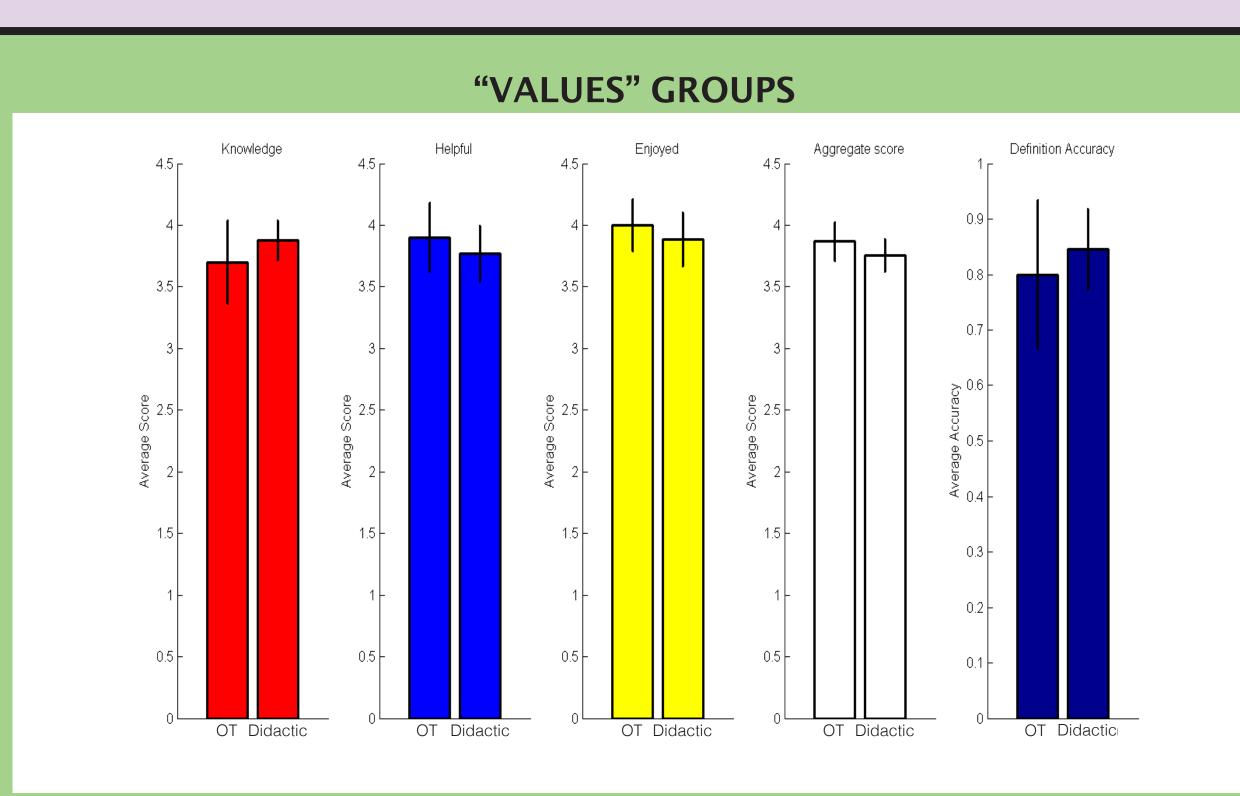


A patient attending an occupationbased ACT group beautifully illuminated the concept of "the observing self" through an ink painting. The facilitator led the group through a "painting meditation" in which participants were first asked to practice deep-breathing and were then given a series of prompts (such as "push," "dab," "lighten," etc.) to encourage a mindful, sensorybased approach to artistic expression. In this piece, the artist highlighted the importance of watching your thoughts (in ACT terms, self-as-context) versus attaching to them and letting them become a part of your self-image (selfas-content).

#### Process

Three ACT topics were selected for the comparison process: Mindfulness, Values, and Goals. Group content was presented in either a didactic format or in a format that included occupation-based activity. Using a 5-point Likert scale, patients rated the groups on helpfulness, knowledge gained, and enjoyment. They also answered a multiple choice definition question to assess if knowledge gained was accurate. Responses were compared using an independent samples t-test to determine the most effective format.

#### Results



Values: There was no significant difference between occupation-based and didactic groups.



Mindfulness: There was no difference in results between occupation-based and didactic groups for the areas of knowledge gained and helpfulness of group. An independent samples t-test showed a significantly higher rating of enjoyment for the occupation-based group (t(57=2.54, p = 0.0141).

Goals data not displayed secondary to insufficient numbers in the occupation-based track.

Summary: This study with inpatient psychiatric patients supports our belief that the use of occupation is a valid method of conveying ACT concepts and appears to be more useful for teaching mindfulness strategies.

#### References

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Harris, R. (2009). ACT made simple. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and process (3rd ed.). (2014). American Journal of Occupational Therapy, Vol. 68 Supplement 1