

CFT and ACT - What's the difference?

While compassion-focused therapy (CFT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) are both forms of psychotherapy and share similarities, they have distinct theoretical frameworks and treatment approaches.

	CFT	ACT
Focus	Cultivating compassion (including helpful compassionate action) and reducing patterns of shame, self-criticism	Building psychological flexibility to live in alignment with values
Key concepts	Shifting from avoidance and/or self-attacking to self-compassion and compassionate/helpful action via engaging care-giving motives	Acceptance of difficult thoughts/feelings and commitment to meaningful actions.
Role of mindfulness	Supports compassionate awareness of inner experience and reduces reactivity to threat based emotions.	Central to acknowledging thoughts/feelings without being controlled by them.
Techniques	Facilitating compassionate realisations, Compassionate imagery, self-soothing exercises, compassionate dialogue, and working with the inner critic	Defusion strategies, acceptance skills values clarification, and committed action.
View of thoughts	Thoughts are seen as products of an evolved brain that can be both triggered by and fuel emotional states. e.g, self-critical thoughts are understood as threat system responses.	Thoughts are seen as experiences that can be observed rather than facts that must guide action
Goal	Nurturing a compassionate inner voice and sense of safety with oneself and others. Development of compassionate competencies (e.g. empathy, courage, capacity to engage in skillful compassionate action).	Helping people take meaningful action guided by values, even during difficult moments
Origins	Developed by Paul Gilbert, drawing upon evolutionary and social psychology, affective neuroscience, and attachment theory.	Developed by Steven Hayes and colleagues, grounded in behavioural science.

It's important to understand that CFT and ACT are not mutually exclusive, and therapists may integrate elements of both approaches based on the individual's needs and the nature of the presenting problems.