

IFS and ACT - What's the difference?

While internal family systems (IFS) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) are both forms of psychotherapy and share similarities, they have distinct theoretical frameworks and treatment approaches.

	IFS	ACT
Focus	Understanding and harmonising internal "parts" or subpersonalities within the self.	Building psychological flexibility to live in alignment with values
Key concepts	The "Self" is a core, compassionate leader, and parts (e.g., exiles, managers) need care.	Acceptance of difficult thoughts/feelings and commitment to meaningful actions.
Role of mindfulness	Mindful attention to parts, their feelings and their interactions with each other.	Central to acknowledging thoughts/feelings without being controlled by them.
Techniques	Dialoguing with parts, identifying their roles, and helping them to release burden from past pain or trauma.	Defusion strategies, acceptance skills values clarification, and committed action.
View of thoughts	Distressing or persistent thoughts are usually linked to parts trying to protect from vulnerability or threat.	Thoughts are seen as experiences that can be observed rather than facts that must guide action
Goal	Achieving balance and harmony between internal parts and accessing the compassionate Self.	Helping to take meaningful action guided by values, even during difficult moments
Origins	Developed by Richard Schwartz, rooted in systems theory and psychotherapy.	Developed by Steven Hayes and colleagues, grounded in behavioural science.