

# Using ACT and DNA-V to support adolescents

## Case study: Jake - Social anxiety and fear of rejection

### Background and developmental context

Jake, 15, avoids social situations, including speaking in class or attending gatherings. He often ruminates about what others think of him and fears being judged. His avoidance has led to increasing loneliness and a lack of confidence.

### Process formulation and conceptualisation (DNA-V terms in brackets)

His self-judgement further fuels the cycle, leaving him isolated and stuck.

### Actions and Tracking (Discoverer)

Jake avoids taking risks in social situations, limiting his ability to experiment with new behaviours or test his fears.

Jake's anxiety is maintained by avoidance – he avoids social situations to reduce his immediate discomfort, but this prevents him from learning how to cope with rejection if it happens or even discovering that rejection may not always happen.

### Sensory Experiences (Noticer)

Jack is hyper-focused on his internal anxiety but struggles to see it as transient or manageable. It is likely that his body and posture reflect this anxiety, and he may be unintentionally sending anxious signals.

### Cognitions (Advisor)

Jack's self-talk is dominated by unhelpful rules, such as, "Everyone is watching me, and if I mess up, they'll think I'm weird."

### Values and Motivation

Jake values connection and belonging, but his actions are misaligned with these values due to his avoidance. His motivation to try is low and he's been staying home.

## **(continued) Jake - Social anxiety and fear of rejection**

### **Recommendations:**

Generic recommendations like "challenge your thoughts" can feel too cognitive and directive for adolescents like Jake. Instead, the focus should be on experiential learning:

#### **Normalising discomfort**

Use metaphors like "the anxiety wave" to help Jake discover that anxiety rises and falls naturally, and his goal is to "ride the wave" rather than avoid it.

#### **Behavioural activation**

In the Discoverer space, Jake can experiment with you, practice small, manageable social risks, such as making eye contact. Give him feedback on how this is working and help him practice how to do it peers or asking a simple question in class. The emphasis is on process rather than outcome – the act of trying is the success.

#### **Values-driven action**

Jake could clarify his value of connection by identifying specific ways to act on it, such as initiating a conversation with one trusted friend. It is not the friend's response that is important, but Jake's action of trying. Linking these actions to his values gives them deeper meaning.

#### **Compassionate advisor**

Help Jake reframe his Advisor from a harsh critic to a more supportive guide. For example, he might practise saying, "It's okay to feel nervous – it means I care about this moment."

#### **Self and social**

Through experiences, help Jake see that others also have anxiety, and that we share this common suffering. Help him discover that many of his fellow students hide anxiety too.