



# Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in Grief Program for Students (GPS)

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**Abstract**— The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzes the grief experiences of people who lost their loved ones (death) and those who had difficulty adjusting to the new normal or a broken relationship (non-death). This research aims to determine the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in Grief Program for Students (GPS). Among the twelve participants who voluntarily agreed to be included in the study, nine student participants were able to meet the criteria: 18-26 years old with mild to moderate levels of depression, anxiety, and stress as reflected on the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS21) and high levels of psychological inflexibility based on Acceptance and Commitment Questionnaire (AAQ-II) and enrolled in the present school year from any levels and degrees. The researchers utilized the multiple case design to evaluate the GPS. DASS21 and AAQ-II were administered to the participants before and after the intervention to measure the effectiveness of ACT in GPS. An in-depth interview was conducted, and responses were transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes. Findings revealed that participants acquired lower degrees of depression, anxiety, and stress and lower levels of psychological inflexibility. Identified strengths are organization and structure of the sessions, psychological flexibility skills, counselor-counseee relationship, and overall experience and significant learning. The areas for improvement are additional activities and discussion during the intervention phase.

**Keywords**— acceptance and commitment therapy ACT, college students, death and non-death grief, grief program, Philippines, young adult.

## INTRODUCTION

Grief became a worldwide phenomenon during the COVID-19 pandemic (van Schaik, 2022; Ratcliffe, 2023). Social media often highlighted posts about loved ones, close relatives, and even acquaintances who had passed away. Grief is often associated with the death of a loved one, but it can also arise from non-death-related events, such as broken relationships, changes in routine, or moving away from a cherished home (Sweetman & O'Donnell, 2020; Kouriatis & Brown, 2011). The pandemic further highlighted grief related to the loss of normalcy, connection, and safety (Berinato, 2020). The cancellation of significant events like graduations and weddings contributed to a sense of irrevocable loss (Ellyatt, 2022).

Bristecian and Shea (2021) identified young people as a high-risk population during the post pandemic, with varying experiences in adapting to online and hybrid learning, navigating social life, and coping with disrupted routines, broken relationships, and grief. Mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, became prevalent among young people as they grappled with the challenges around them. The University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) reported a rise in suicidal ideation among youth, increasing from 3% (574,000 individuals) in 2013 to 7.5% (1.5 million) during the pandemic (UPPI, 2021).



This alarming trend highlights the deteriorating mental well-being of young people which underscores the urgent need for school-based interventions to support students in transitioning to the new normal (Rutkowska, 2022). Compared to programs targeting older adults and children, grief interventions for young people remain under-researched (Breen et al., 2022; Johanssen et al., 2019).

One promising intervention is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), developed by Steven Hayes (Chin & Hayes, 2017). ACT is based on the premise that certain aspects of life, such as pain, loss, illness, and disappointment, are inevitable. It aims to help individuals develop psychological flexibility to manage and cope with difficult situations (Dindo et al., 2017). ACT has shown effectiveness in treating anxiety, depression, substance use, chronic pain, and various psychological conditions (Gloster et al., 2020).

Psychological flexibility refers to the ability to remain focused on the present, be open to one's thoughts and feelings, and live in alignment with one's values (Gur & Reich, 2023). It involves six core processes: cognitive defusion, acceptance, contact with the present moment, self as context, values, and committed action (Hayes, 2022; Dindo et al., 2017). In contrast to experiential avoidance, which involves ignoring or suppressing thoughts and emotions, psychological flexibility encourages individuals to accept experiences, observe thoughts with curiosity, and respond appropriately to challenging situations (Berghoff et al., 2017; Chin & Hayes, 2017).

This study seeks to evaluate the impact of ACT on students' grieving processes and to enhance their psychological flexibility, preparing them to better handle unexpected challenges. The goal is to develop targeted intervention programs for young adults struggling with grief and loss.

### **Research Questions**

What is the level of depression, anxiety, and stress based on DASS 21 of the student participants experiencing grief before and after intervention?

What is the level of psychological flexibility using AAQ-II before and after intervention?

What are the strengths and areas for improvement of GPS using ACT?

### **METHODS**

The study utilized multiple case study research design to uncover causes, etiology, and the effect of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to help students with moderate levels of depression, anxiety, and stress because of their grief experiences. The case study design is "an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident" (Yin, 2017). The design also allows researchers to investigate in a structured way discoveries and phenomena that is thorough and in-depth (Adams et al., 2022), which is applicable in examining the effect of ACT on the grief experiences of college students and how psychological flexibility can address diverse issues for better mental health and coping.

Participants are nine students from a higher education institution who had experienced death and non-death grief and agreed to undergo five sessions of ACT. Purposive sampling was used in the study. The criteria for choosing the participants are 18-26 years old, presently enrolled in school year 2023-2024 in a higher education institution



in Manila, voluntarily agreed to be one of the study participants, and coming from any course and year level. The study did not include participants who may experience anxiety and depression on a severe level based on DASS21 and are presently under medication and the care of a psychiatrist.

The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale - 21 Items (DASS-21) was utilized during the pre-test and post-test phases of the study. Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) developed the scale as a 42-item test. Further development resulted in a 21-item, which is a set of three self-report scales designed to measure the emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress. Studies proved that the DASS21 score is valid in measuring the level of depression, anxiety, and stress of individuals. It can also be used in clinical and non-clinical sessions because of its high reliability. (Henry & Crawford, 2005).

Acceptance and Action Questionnaire Version 2 measures the level of psychological flexibility to assess a person's experiential avoidance, immobility, and acceptance. The 7-item test on the AAQ-2 is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true). Two thousand eight hundred sixteen participants across six samples indicate this measure's satisfactory structure, reliability, and validity. Results revealed that the mean alpha coefficient is .84 while the test-retest reliability is .81 and .79. This means that AAQ-II scores simultaneously, extensively and increasingly predict different results from cognitive needs to work related absence consistent with its underlying theory. The AAQ-II also demonstrates appropriate discriminant validity (Bond et al., 2011).

The data-gathering procedure was conducted in three phases – pre-implementation, implementation, and post-implementation. During the pre-implementation phase, the researchers requested the approval of the university's Ethics Review Committee.

They were chosen based on the referral of other guidance counselors using the pre-test results of DASS 21 and AAQ-II via Google Forms. Students who have severe levels of anxiety and depression were referred to the attending counselor, who referred them to a psychologist/psychiatrist. The attending counselor was doing monitoring and continuing counseling sessions.

The researchers discussed the informed consent to the participants before they signed and agreed to be part of the study. The participants who engaged in ACT were requested to attend the five grief sessions, which were scheduled every week for one hour. After the five sessions, the post-implementation phase followed, and participants were requested to answer the DASS-21 and AAQ Version 2 for the post-test. An individual interview was also conducted to get the participants' feedback in the GPS, focusing on the strengths and areas for program improvement.

The quantitative data was analyzed by comparing the participants' raw scores during the pre-test and post-test using DASS21 and AAQ-II. The qualitative data, on the other hand, was transcribed and analyzed using Braun and Clark's (2006) guidelines. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method is an iterative process consisting of six steps: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) generating themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) locating exemplars." Becoming familiar with data refers to data immersion and iterative cycles of reading, with each cycle generating further insight.



**Findings**

Nine participants voluntarily agreed to be included in the study and met the criteria. The participants experienced death and non-death grief and had trouble coping and managing their emotions. Six experienced non-death grief (broken relationship, change in routine, lost past), while three experienced deaths among loved ones; 7 of them are females and two males. The participants were anonymized using the nine fruits of the Spirit for confidentiality purposes.

**Table 1. Raw Score and Interpretation in Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS 21)**

Participants	Pre-Test						Post-Test					
	Depression		Anxiety		Stress		Depression		Anxiety		Stress	
	RS	INT	RS	INT	RS	INT	RS	INT	RS	INT	RS	INT
<b>Peace</b>	16	Moderate	12	Moderate	20	Moderate	1	Normal	1	Normal	12	Mild
<b>Joy</b>	24	Moderate	10	Moderate	20	Moderate	14	Mild	6	Normal	10	Mild
<b>Patience</b>	14	Mild	12	Moderate	16	Moderate	4	Normal	2	Normal	2	Normal
<b>Love</b>	22	Moderate	14	Moderate	20	Moderate	6	Normal	6	Normal	8	Normal
<b>Kindness</b>	18	Mild	12	Moderate	16	Moderate	12	Normal	10	Mild	6	Normal
<b>Gentle</b>	20	Moderate	6	Mild	10	Mild	12	Mild	2	Normal	4	Normal
<b>Wisdom</b>	20	Moderate	10	Moderate	18	Mild	6	Normal	2	Normal	8	Normal
<b>Goodness</b>	18	Moderate	14	Moderate	24	Moderate	12	Mild	14	Moderate	20	Moderate
<b>Faithful</b>	20	Moderate	0	Moderate	12	Mild	6	Normal	0	Normal	8	Normal

Note: DASS21 were administered in two phases: Pre-Test and Post-Test were conducted before and after the intervention.

Table 1 presents that most of the participants have moderate levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, while some have mild levels before the intervention. They have trouble sleeping, concentrating, and managing their thoughts and emotions. After participating in the five sessions of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, most of them experienced decreased levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Only one participant had the same level of anxiety and stress with decreased raw scores after the intervention but decreased level of depression. A relapse prevention mechanism was in place to further monitor the participants' improvements. Follow-up sessions will also be done after 6,9 and 12 months.

**Table 2. Raw Score and Interpretation in Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II)**

Participants	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	RS	INT	RS	INT
<b>Peace</b>	36	High	20	Low
<b>Joy</b>	41	High	26	Average
<b>Patience</b>	32	High	13	Low
<b>Love</b>	34	High	16	Low
<b>Kindness</b>	42	High	21	Low
<b>Gentle</b>	30	High	15	Low



<b>Wisdom</b>	34	High	14	Low
<b>Goodness</b>	36	High	21	Low
<b>Faithful</b>	36	High	25	Average

Note: AAQ-II was administered in two phases: Pre-Test and Post-Test were conducted before and after intervention

All the participants had high levels of psychological inflexibility at the start of the ACT sessions. These results mean they were having trouble with their thought patterns and were not conscious of their behavior. The grief experienced by participants made it hard for them to cope and move on with their lives. Most said they struggle to focus and concentrate on their everyday tasks. After the five sessions of ACT, most participants achieved lower levels of psychological inflexibility. Participants reported that they are more defused from their thoughts and are not overthinking; they know how to focus better by being present and are now motivated to pursue their goals guided by their values.

### ***Strengths of Using ACT in GPS***

After the intervention, an in-depth interview was conducted to elicit feedback from the nine participants. Using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, their responses were transcribed and coded, and themes were generated. The participants used English and the local language during the in-depth interview. The researchers paraphrased participants' responses and translated them into English for readers to comprehend better.

### ***Theme 1: Organization and Structure***

The structure of the counseling process plays a vital role in keeping the participants engaged during the sessions. Participants identified the following as strengths of the grief program for students (GPS) using acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT): the duration and sequencing of sessions, tools, presentations, and videos, and modality of sessions.

### ***Subtheme: Duration and Sequencing of Sessions***

Most participants identified the duration and sequencing of sessions as one of the program's strengths. The five sessions of ACT proved to be effective in the grief experience of students. Joy, who had trouble focusing on her academic tasks because of multiple deaths in the family during COVID-19, shared that "five sessions are enough to have an impact on my life; the sequence allowed me

to be prepared for the next session and to be engaged. On the other hand, Love thought the five sessions were insufficient since the breakup with her ex-boyfriend was just recent: "At first, since I am having difficulty with the breakup, I thought the five sessions were not enough. As weeks passed, I noticed gradual changes in myself. Now, I did not notice it was the fifth week already. I see significant improvement in myself, my values, and how I interact with other people."

The grief experience made the participants appreciate the sequence of the sessions, where they started focusing on their thoughts and how to be unhooked from them using one of the skills in the ACT process. The step-by-step process helped them to understand their experience and reactions better, thus providing guidance and Structure



to them as they engaged themselves in the process. Gentle admitted that the process helped her in her grief experience because of the death of her grandmother, "first of all, the one thing that I noticed is it is very organized and very relevant and aligned to grief. The step-by-step process - from Defusion to Acceptance to observing self. Every step is needed."

***Subtheme: Tools, Presentation Materials and Videos***

Another strength identified by the participants is the presentation and videos during the sessions. Love narrated, "The tools allowed me to visualize the concepts and understand the skills better." Kindness shared her difficulty in accepting that things will be different and not the same as they used to be. She appreciated the sessions and understood what was happening to her. "The presentations helped me to understand grief, and the videos helped me to understand what I was feeling." The lessons and psychoeducation during the sessions made the participants knowledgeable about the skills being introduced and how they can help them. Faithful identified the rollercoaster framework that best captured her grieving experience. She said she was active and in control of her life before the pandemic. However, when the pandemic hit, all her routine was gone. Faithful also experienced a recent break up with her boyfriend, which she felt was only a precipitant of her feelings of loss and sadness during the pandemic, "the lessons/lectures at the beginning, knowing the different theories/models of grief... I am a very technical person. I only knew the five stages of grief, and I think most people only know that, and you have to go through all the stages, which does not apply to me; I resonate more with the rollercoaster framework"

***Subtheme: Modality of Sessions***

Modality of sessions refers to how counseling and therapy are delivered to clients. Participants were free to choose whatever modality they wanted based on their resources. Kindness, who is grieving a lost past because of being a good athlete before the pandemic, expressed that face-to-face sessions are more effective even though the hybrid is okay for her for convenience. Patience also agreed that face-to-face communication is more effective since she wants to express herself more. She experienced being overwhelmed by life in the city since she came to the province where she excelled most of her life in academics, "I like the face-to-face sessions better since I get to express what I feel, how difficult it is to accept that I failed in one subject." Peace, who experienced a breakup with his girlfriend, said he liked the online better since he could attend sessions after his online class. The participants also preferred hybrid sessions. Gentle shared that she preferred both modalities, "it will depend on the schedule of my classes; when I am in school, I prefer face-to-face, but if my schedule is hectic, I like the online session." Joy appreciated that they were free to choose the best option for them. "I like that we can choose online or face to face, which I have both experienced. For me, the program is effective both online and face-to-face. I also attended the five sessions because of the flexibility of how they were conducted."

***Theme 2: Psychological Flexibility Skills***

Participants appreciated the skills during acceptance and commitment therapy, which focused on improving psychological flexibility. The six core skills were evaluated as the participants applied them to address their grief and cope with their everyday lives.



***Subtheme: Cognitive Defusion and Acceptance***

The nine participants unanimously agreed that Cognitive Defusion and Acceptance helped them the most during times of grieving. The skills aid them in making room for their thoughts, allowing them to come and go as they are and take a step back from their thoughts. Most clients come to counseling and therapy fused and hooked with many thoughts, particularly in the grieving experience. Love shared, "Defusion helped me to deal with the pain of a broken relationship." Cognitive defusion aids them in being unhooked from negative and self-judgmental thoughts so that they can focus on the things that matter to them. Joy narrated, "The skills that made a mark on me are the defusion and acceptance. I think I am defused from my thoughts in a way, and that is a big help for me". Love shared her experience with the technique: "Defusion helped me a lot, especially when my grief experience was still fresh, and I was having difficulty. Through defusion, I could regulate my thoughts and emotions and focus on my breathing."

The leaves-on-a-stream technique during the acceptance exercise was proven effective by the participants. During the Defusion and Acceptance exercise, Wisdom narrated his painful experience of breaking up with his girlfriend last year. The technique helped him, "putting my thought on a leaf...and just allowing myself to let it go allowed me to be in control of my thoughts". Kindness also shared that she resonated with the skill better, "The Leaves on a Stream activity - about letting negative thoughts and feelings pass through. I use that skill when I am doing chores, and when some negative thoughts pop up, I acknowledge them."

***Subtheme: Contacting the Present Moment and Self as Context***

Contacting the present moment is giving importance to the here-and-now experience. Mindfulness activities allowed the participants to practice mindful breathing and self-compassion. Patience appreciated the exercise, "I like the mindful check-in where we did mindful breathing...it helps me to focus on the present and to be ready with the sessions." The other skill, which is the observing self, allows the participants to make productive choices on how to deal with their experience without struggling with their thoughts. Patience shared, "I became more aware of my body sensations, how I am reacting to a certain situation, and being fully present when I am with my loved ones or friends." Kindness shared that the skill helped her cope with her failures after she was not able to make it in the varsity team: "I failed, so what will happen next? I just try to observe them and try to focus on my breathing so it will not affect my health. I learned to value my observing self."

The chessboard metaphor is another technique in the ACT process. Being the chessboard allows the participants to observe their thoughts and not involve themselves in the struggle. Goodness, who just recently experienced the death of her father, narrated that she has many thoughts about not doing enough to save his life. She often struggles because of negative thoughts and was able to resonate with the chessboard metaphor; when I am working with intense emotions, I try to notice them and not react immediately. I am the chessboard and just observing my thoughts."

***Subtheme: Values Clarification and Committed Action***

The grief experienced by participants unfolds many realities in terms of their focus and priorities. They were given the chance to choose their top 5 values and learn how these values can be realized by having goals, everyday



behaviors, and tasks they can do for a more lasting change. Using one's values gives direction and motivation in life. Joy agreed that enjoying every moment by having a value-focused life makes it more exciting and worthwhile, "I think one of my favorites is the process of values clarification. I thought about my life and realized that independence is important for me." Gentle resonated with the values clarification process, "through the practice and activities, I learned about myself and the values I hold. I realized that I am still a good person despite what happened to me. I can do better and improve myself." Kindness also appreciated the activity by focusing on her strengths using her values, "listing values made it clear to me what my goals are and the actions I need to take to achieve them."

### ***Theme 3: Counselor-Counselee Relationship***

The counselor-counselee relationship was another strength of the GPS program identified by the participants. Sub-themes include having a safe and confidential environment, professional relationships, and open communication.

#### ***Subtheme: Safe and Confidential Environment***

Students are more likely to seek help when they feel safe and secure. A safe and confidential environment includes looking forward to sessions and open communication. Peace, who admitted that he is a very private person, feels safe during the sessions, "I like the environment during the sessions. I feel safe. Most of the time I am alone; during sessions, I have somebody to talk to and allows me to see the situations objectively and helps me move on". Joy feels comfortable knowing that sessions are confidential, "One thing I appreciate is the privacy of the sessions. When we discuss my thoughts and feelings, it is only between the two of us - between the counselor and the student."

Open communication between the counselor and the counselee ensures a smooth flow of information that can help facilitate positive engagements. Love shared her feelings about why she agreed to participate in the study, "one of the reasons is to open up to someone without being judged and unload my burden. I can openly express my feelings, which I cannot do to others because my concerns might burden them." Patience shared that the sessions are something she looks forward to every week, "It is something I look forward to because this is where I can express my thoughts and feelings."

#### ***Subtheme: Professional Help***

Most of the participants appreciated the professional nature of the engagement. They viewed counselors as professionals who knew how to handle the intricacies of their grieving experiences. Gentle shared that she never imagined herself seeking professional help, "before the breakup, I never saw myself seeking professional help. Now I realize it is beneficial to talk to a professional counselor".

Faithful also admitted that she had many realizations when engaging in the sessions. "the counselor is a professional who helped me with what I am going through. I realized that someone is willing to help you and not judge you. Seeking professional help is okay."





***Theme 4: Overall Experience and Significant Learnings***

Another theme that emerged as the GPS's strength is the participants' overall experience and significant learnings. Participants expressed realizing their grief experience, dealing with the loss, and understanding and accepting oneself. Love expressed that she felt terrible about herself during her broken relationship. She thought she was to blame for what happened. However, after the five sessions of ACT in GPS, she shared, "The program helped me with the feelings of loss... accepting myself for who I am. Always ensuring that I am okay... and helping myself the way I helped others." Kindness was thankful that she joined the program, "the sessions helped me realize that I am grieving. I would not know what would help me if I did not participate in this program. I am thankful". Joy shared her difficulties before she joined the program and how it helped her, "when I am having difficulty with my studies, I often procrastinate, and I think something is wrong with me...I even took a LOA because I could not concentrate. I did not know it was grief. I am thankful I got help through counseling and am determined to change my ways."

***Areas for Improvement of ACT for GPS***

***Theme: Activities during ACT Intervention in GPS***

Most of the nine participants find Acceptance and Commitment Therapy effective in addressing difficulties during the grief experience. The majority did not find any areas to improve and were very content with the whole experience. Additional activities, discussions, and sharing of experiences are some areas identified by participants that can be improved. A review of the ACT process in the Grief Program for Students will be done to address the areas for improvement as expressed by the participants. Faithful, Joy, Patience, and Peace gave their thoughts on adding more activities to the sessions:

"I hope there is more time to discuss other areas of the experience of grief. Since it is structured, I was able to share my grief experience only during the first session."

"More interactive activities since not everyone will find it easy to share and talk. If they cannot share, at least they could express it through writing and place it somewhere else."

"More assignments in between sessions. More assignments and review them at the start of the next session and relate it to the next topic."

"I think more examples and more goals. I should set more goals for myself."

**DISCUSSION**

The study aimed to determine the efficacy of ACT in the Grief Program for Students by evaluating the participants' responses. Organization and Structure are among the strengths identified by the participants, including the duration and sequencing of sessions, the tools, presentation materials, videos, and the modality of sessions. Most of the participants responded positively to five sessions of ACT in GPS. Eddins (2022) in her article discussed the importance of the number of sessions in the therapeutic process. Adherence in actively participating and finishing the recommended sessions, including accomplishing the task assigned to address symptoms, leads to better outcomes. The results lend support to the study of Shafir (2023) that four to twelve sessions of ACT are practical



for anxiety, depression, and other mental conditions. Many studies support that a once-a-week session remains ideal for better therapy outcomes (Erekson et al., 2022). The participants also appreciated the once-a-week schedule of sessions. The schedule of sessions is just enough for them to remain engaged and active; regarding the modality of sessions, ACT in GPS combines face-to-face and online sessions. In the study of Wentzel et al. (2016), they call it blended care. These two treatment modalities are continuously being tested together with essential variables that may affect the prognosis of clients (Kip et al., 2020).

Psychological flexibility skills learned by the participants were another strength identified in the program. Most participants felt engaged during sessions because the activities highlighted the importance of the here-and-now experience, unhooking from self-judgmental thoughts, accepting one's thoughts as they are, and focusing on values-directed life by doing committed actions (Hayes, 2022; Gur & Reich, 2023). The present moment plays a crucial role in making the client aware of the here-and-now experience and will not ruminate on a particular thought that might result in getting stuck with it (Zhang et al., 2018). This evidence-based approach promotes high levels of psychological flexibility to address daily stress, stressful life events, and lack of support systems (Gloster et al., 2020).

Participants identified the counselor-counsee relationship as another strength of ACT in GPS. This strength includes a safe and confidential environment, open communication, and professional help. The safe and confidential relationship fosters nurturing in counseling engagements among participants and counselors. Osland et al. (2022) revealed that good relationships and therapeutic alliances must be achieved in the early part of the sessions, which includes the practitioners' characteristics and the client's willingness to respond. A solid therapeutic alliance is associated with better treatment outcomes—fostering collaboration and engagement, emotional connection, and establishing shared goals (Stubble, 2018).

Overall experience and significant learning were also considered strengths of the program. Sackett and Cook (2021) discussed that young clients value the understanding and skills they acquire in counseling, which they attribute to their experience and the therapeutic process. Participants also perceive counseling as a journey of personal development. They expressed that their understanding of grief led to significant personal growth. Based on studies people who had painful experiences can develop resilience, gain new perspectives in life, and may appreciate their relationships more (Tan & Andriessen, 2021).

Regarding the areas for improvement, the participants identified additional activities during the intervention phase. During the sessions, they wanted more goals, assignments, tasks, and discussions. ACT interventions have a lot to offer in addressing the needs of clients with different mental health conditions (Hayes, 2022). A review of the ACT process in the Grief Program for Students will be done to address the areas for improvement as expressed by the participants.

Congruence and genuineness of clients in the therapeutic setting require openness and trust from both the counselor and the counsee (Kolden, 2018). During the intervention phase, as the client opens up and reveals thoughts and feelings, the practitioner will thoroughly understand what the client is going through, thus facilitating help and support in the process (Peluso, 2018).



## Conclusion

The Grief Program for Students (GPS) using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) was proven effective based on the nine participants of the study. Pre-test and post-test scores using DASS21 revealed that most of the participants achieved lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. High psychological inflexibility before the intervention decreased to average and low levels based on the results of AAQ II. In-depth interviews with the nine participants identified the strengths of the GPS using ACT. Strengths identified were organization and structure of the sessions (duration and sequence of sessions; tools, presentation materials, and videos; modality of sessions), psychological flexibility skills (cognitive defusion and acceptance; contacting the present moment and self as context; and values clarification and committed action); counselor and counselee relationship (safe and confidential environment, open communication and professional help) and overall experience and significant learnings. Areas for improvement are additional activities, discussion, and examples on the ACT intervention phase.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers will further review the ACT process to include additional activities during the sessions. Use additional illustrations and examples to explain further how the skill is being used and applied in the grief experience of students. More room for discussion will be added on the assigned topic in the counseling process so that students can share and express their thoughts and feelings, which can help them cope with grief. It is also one way to monitor students' progress in using the skills. Utilizing ACT not only with students with mild to moderate symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress but also with students who have severe symptoms and are taking medications is also being recommended. ACT can help them develop skills that they can use to manage their symptoms. Larger sample size can be done in future studies to enhance the efficacy of ACT in helping students who are grieving.

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