

THE JOY OF PARENTING

An Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Guide to Effective Parenting in the Early Years

LISA W. COYNE, PH.D., AND AMY R. MURRELL, PH.D.

What is ACT?

“Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is a therapeutic approach that emphasizes compassionate acknowledgment and acceptance of our own experiences, in the service of effectively pursuing those things in life that matter most to us.”

How Can ACT Help Parents?

“We believe that how you approach your thoughts and feelings, especially in the context of your relationships with your child, is a key ingredient of effective parenting. Your values and vulnerabilities serve as lenses through which you view your child and focus your choices in how to nurture him, provide guidance, and set limits. ACT-based parenting will help you compassionately acknowledge and accept your feelings, worries, or perceived inadequacies.”

—from The Joy of Parenting

“Parenting is a difficult task, and we’re often our own worst critics. Sometimes that makes the task of parenting all the more difficult.”

—from The Joy of Parenting

When you’re a parent one of the hardest things to accept is that you don’t have to be perfect, and neither does your child. In *The Joy of Parenting* psychologists Lisa Coyne and Amy Murrell use acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) to help parents embrace imperfection.

Ideally, parents are supposed to be at their best when their children are at their worst. But the reality is that parents are people, too, and are susceptible to feelings, fears, and knee-jerk reactions that make perfect parenting impossible. Due to fears of evaluation from others parents may choose to look like good parents instead of being good parents. The result can be stress and feelings of ineffectiveness.

The Joy of Parenting is a compassionate guide for parents who sometimes feel overwhelmed by the process of raising a young child; in other words, for all parents. Readers will learn how to be flexible as their children make critical transitions, gracefully deal with behavioral issues such as tantrums and defiance, and give their children—and themselves—credit for what they are doing right. The book teaches ACT strategies to help parents refrain from falling back on automatic parenting behaviors and responses that do not necessarily work or fit well with their child’s level of development. Instead, parents will determine their values, set goals for their family, and mindfully work toward them each and every day.

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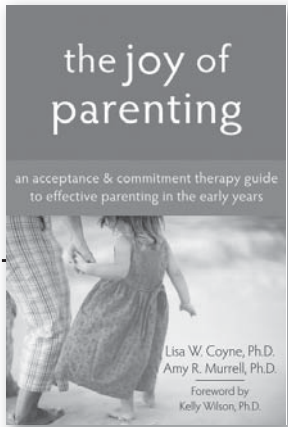
by Lisa W. Coyne, Ph.D. & Amy R. Murrell, Ph.D.

Foreword by Kelly G. Wilson, Ph.D. / October 2009 / 978-1-57224-5938

\$17.95 / 6 x 9 / 216 pages



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About the Authors

LISA W. COYNE, PH.D., is an assistant professor of psychology and director of the Early Childhood Research Clinic at Suffolk University in Boston, MA. She has adapted and used acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) for families of young children struggling with emotional and behavioral problems, and applies her research to clinical work with young children living in poverty.

AMY R. MURRELL, PH.D., is an assistant professor of psychology at the University of North Texas. She has been actively developing and conducting ACT programs for children and parents since 2000 and is a recognized leader in the field.

Praise

"This book will help you become a better parent by helping you to more effectively deal with parenting situations and to deepen your understanding of your own values, thoughts, and feelings. Take some time to read this work, let go of the past, and take your child's hand to move more mindfully into the future."

— Thomas J. Dishion, Ph.D., codirector of the Child and Family Center, professor of psychology at the University of Oregon

"Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is one of the newest, most influential, and most powerful forms of therapy to be developed by psychologists in a long, long time. As scientific support for ACT grows, so too has the breadth of its application. This book is an example of a new frontier for that growth—parenting. By reading and carefully following the advice this book contains, you can not only become a more effective parent, but also a more effective and happier person."

— Patrick C. Friman, Ph.D., ABPP, director of clinical services at Boys Town, clinical professor of pediatrics at University of Nebraska School of Medicine

"For many, the joys of parenting are lost, hidden by the mind's chatter to 'parent the right way' or by the heart's desire to escape the emotional pitfalls of parenting. But the joys of parenting are found in the space that lies between parent and child—in a relationship where parents know the value of simply being with their child. Lisa Coyne and Amy Murrell wisely and gently guide readers to that space."

— Timothy A. Cavell, Ph.D., author of *Working with Parents of Aggressive Children* and *You're Not the Worst Parent in the World*

"Parenting is always challenging, no matter how much we love our children. This book offers practical ways to accept the challenge, choose what matters most in our relationship with our children, and take action to build this relationship one day at a time."

—Jean E. Dumas, Ph.D.

"Most people know that parenting is a supremely difficult job and no one ever gets it right all the time. This book is filled with examples, questions, exercises, and strategies to help you look at who you are as a parent: your values, your limits, and your fears, and thus enable you to do what's right (for you and your child), not what's easy."

—Carolyn Boehne, LICSW.

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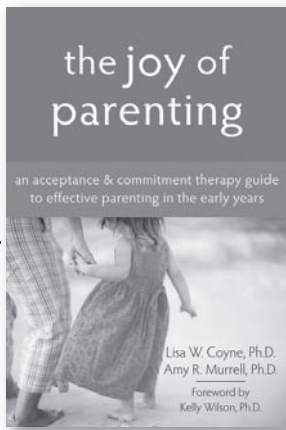
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Exercise

Exercise: How Do You Want to Be Remembered?

We all get caught up in our lives and often feel we're carried along by a current independent of our wants and desires. Here's an opportunity to experience how you might choose to live in a different way. It may seem a bit dark, but bear with us for a few moments and its purpose will become clear.

Imagine that you've died, and, for some reason, you are able to attend your own funeral as a spirit. No one can see you or hear you, but you can hear everything that people say. Imagine that someone important to you steps up to the front of the room and delivers your eulogy. If this was happening today, how do you think this person would describe you? What would he or she say your life was about, without exaggerating things or trying to make you sound good? Is this eulogy how you would want to be remembered?

Take a few moments to think about that and write your thoughts and responses to each of these items in your journal. Please try not to screen or change them; simply write your thoughts down as they are.

What showed up in your mind when you completed this part of the exercise? If you're like most people, you might have felt some hesitation or even a hint of regret or embarrassment, or you might have experienced some fleeting thoughts like I'm not sure there are many nice things to say about me.

Now take a few moments to consider the following questions. When you write your answers in your journal, assume that you're fully able to choose the life you want. Your mind will tell you that you can't, and you should notice that and then put those thoughts aside for a moment. Right now, write about what, deep in your heart, you care about most deeply: (1) If you could choose one thing to make your life be about, what would that one thing be? (2) If you could choose to make your life and how you lived it be about the things that were most important to you, how would you want to be remembered?

Interview Questions

1. Your book is based on acceptance and commitment therapy, a fairly new form of therapy that's becoming very popular. Can you tell us a little about ACT and why it's unique? How is ACT especially useful in parenting?
2. How can mindfulness help parents who are feeling busy and distracted?
3. How will your book help parents to assess their values? Why is it important as a parent to know your values?
4. The headline on the back cover reads, "Do what works, not what's easy." Can you elaborate on this concept?
5. This book is specifically designed for parents of younger children. Are these tools still useful once children become tweens and teens?
6. Can you discuss what the acronym FEAR stands for in your book?
7. How do ACT skills come in handy when a child is having a tantrum or acting out?
8. In what ways do children benefit from parents who use mindfulness and acceptance techniques?

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