



## “Integrating Self-Compassion and Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) for Children and Teens”

Day: Wednesday 11th July 2018      Time: 3.30 – 4.45 pm      Track: Various

The concept of mindfulness has moved from philosophy to the therapy room to the classroom, becoming a core component of approaches to working with children and teens. In this symposium, the creation and adaptation of mindfulness and compassion interventions for children and teens will be explored.

The first presenter will give an overview of the mindfulness curriculum and the learning goals of a mindfulness programme for teens, as well as the creative process involved in designing a mindfulness intervention for children.

The second presenter will also highlight the creative process used to bring mindfulness into the lives of children in a fun and engaging way, based on the ‘Action Heroes Toolkit’. In addition, the feasibility of teaching mindfulness and ACT to children of different ages will be discussed.

### Symposium overview

**Presenter 1**      **David Dewulf** - Mindfulness and self-compassion for teens and kids

**Presenter 2**      **Sacha Rombouts** - The Action Heroes: A Resource for Teaching Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) to Children

**Chair:**              ***David Dewulf***



## **Mindfulness and self-compassion for teens and kids**

David Dewulf<sup>1</sup>, Filip Raes<sup>2</sup>, et al.

<sup>1</sup>*Institute for Attention and Mindfulness (IAM), Belgium;* <sup>2</sup>*University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium*

An RCT conducted at the University of Leuven, Belgium, with 400 teens has shown this 8-week course (MBSR-MBCT) to be effective in reducing stress-related symptoms, anxiety, and depression. The research also found significant increases in self-esteem and self-compassion. The program combining MBSR and MBCT has been thought in the last 15 years to more than 15,000 adults and has been shown to be very effective in an RCT (University Ghent, Belgium).

David will give an overview of the mindfulness curriculum and the underlying learning goals of the exercises and the structure of the program. Scientific research also shows the importance of self-compassion in mental health intervention and therefore more explicit self-compassion elements and exercises have been added to the training just 2 years ago.

Dr David Dewulf, founder of the Institute for Attention and Mindfulness (IAM), is the author of Mindfulness Training for Teens: A roadmap for health care professionals (currently only available in Dutch) and Mindfulness for Teens (available in Dutch and French). In the book for health care professionals the 8-week program adapted for teenagers is described in which MBCT and MBSR are combined, and more recently the self-compassion component was added.

Based on 8 years of clinical work with children, David will also describe the creative process involved in developing an 8-week Mindful & Happy Kids program making use of Grommy (the inner critic), Harty (the compassionate presence) and Paul de dwarf (the wise voice).



## **The Action Heroes: A Resource for Teaching Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) to Children**

Sacha Rombouts

*Happy Minds Australia, Brisbane, Australia*

The concept of mindfulness has moved from ancient philosophy to the therapy room to the classroom, becoming a core component of approaches to working with children and teens. However, it is rarely presented to non-clinical populations as part of a broader therapeutic model, specifically within the context of the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) model. To address this gap, Sacha created the Action Heroes ([actionheroes.com.au](http://actionheroes.com.au)) – a group of six superheroes representing the six core powers of the ACT model. The objective of this presentation is to describe the creative process used to bring mindfulness into the lives of children in a fun and engaging way. It is hoped that participants are inspired to be more mindfully creative in their work with children.

The presentation will use clinical case studies drawn from years of experience working with children and families. The feasibility of teaching mindfulness and ACT to children of different ages will be discussed. Sacha will present ways in which mindfulness tools are embedded within the ACT framework. Further, he will demonstrate that within this framework mindfulness is used to develop the therapeutic relationship, teach psychological skills, and promote values-driven living.

Participants will learn how the Action Heroes can be used with children to engage them in therapy sessions in innovative ways. Children inherently connect with superhero characters and it will be shown that even young children can learn mindfulness strategies in fun and simple ways using The Bugg character. The Action Heroes toolkit provides a way to ‘transport’ mindfulness skills across various domains in a child’s life.

It can be difficult to balance being evidence-based with being innovative and client-focused, and this is perhaps more true in the child psychology domain. Mindfulness, when embodied by the professional, can effectively grow the therapeutic relationship and open new perspectives, ideas and therapist actions. When taught creatively, mindfulness can help to transform the lives of children, their families, and school systems. The Action Heroes demonstrate just one possible metaphor for engaging children in mindfulness training in fun ways. There is enormous potential for child-related professionals to learn ways to creatively practice mindfulness with children within an ACT context.