Passengers on the Bus

ACT: Moving Forward With Difficult Thoughts on Board

Passengers on the bus is a metaphor from acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) about living by your values while hard thoughts and feelings come along for the ride. Psychologist Steven Hayes and his colleagues, who developed ACT, described it in their 1999 book on the therapy. In the metaphor, you are the driver of a bus, and your thoughts, feelings, and memories are the passengers. This worksheet helps you get to know your passengers and keep steering where you want to go.

1 The metaphor

Imagine you are driving a bus called My Life. Over the years, passengers get on. Some are friendly. Others are loud and scary, like a worry that says you will fail, a memory of being hurt, or a voice that says you are not good enough.

Some passengers come to the front and tell you where to turn. To keep them quiet, you make a deal: you drive where they say, and they go back to their seats. It works for a while, but the bus ends up far from where you wanted to go.

The passengers can shout and look frightening, but they cannot take the wheel. You can let them ride along and keep driving toward what matters to you.

Why does this work? *Trying to throw difficult thoughts off the bus usually means stopping the bus, and the thoughts often come back louder. ACT teaches you to make room for them and still act on your values. Studies of ACT have found that it can help with anxiety, depression, and chronic pain.*

2 Where is your bus heading?

Your direction is your values: what you want your life to be about. It might be caring for your family, learning new things, being a good friend, or looking after your health.

The direction I want to drive in:

Example: Being a good friend and showing up for the people I care about

Times my passengers have steered me away from it:

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

© 2026 Choosing Therapy, Inc. All rights reserved.

Scan or click here to learn more about acceptance and commitment therapy:

Passengers on the Bus

ACT: Moving Forward With Difficult Thoughts on Board

3 Meet your passengers

Write down the passengers that shout the loudest. A passenger can be a thought, a feeling, a memory, or an urge. Giving each one a name can make it easier to notice when it starts shouting.

Passenger	What it shouts at me	Where I turn if I obey it
The Rejection Fear	*"They don't really want you there. Stay home."*	*I cancel plans and stay in.*

4 Driving with passengers on board

A passenger I am willing to let ride along this week:

One step I will take toward my direction, even if the passengers shout:

Example: Go to the dinner on Saturday, even if the Rejection Fear comes too.

Afterward: what did you notice when you kept driving?

If your passengers feel overwhelming, a therapist trained in ACT can help you practice this skill and others like it.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

© 2026 Choosing Therapy, Inc. All rights reserved.

Scan or click here to learn more about acceptance and commitment therapy: