

## **Personal Reflection of the 2-day ACT for Neurodivergence: ADHD & Autism workshop in Perth (10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> November)**

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Attending the ACT for Neurodivergence workshop in Perth was an experience that left me feeling both grounded and energized. Being someone who works closely with neurodivergent individuals of varying ages and being a neurotypical individual, I arrived with a blend of curiosity, humility and excitement. While having been working with neurodivergent individuals for more than 9 years now, I constantly find myself constantly unlearning, updating and widening my therapeutic stance. What I did not expect however, was how personally meaningful the learning process would feel in this workshop.

One of the most valuable takeaways for me was how as a neurotypical therapist, I can still do effective work with neurodivergent clients. For a long time now, I struggled with the concept of the double empathy problem and leading to a belief that I can never fully comprehend the experience of neurodivergent clients, thus making me a less effective therapist. I've noticed how I have avoided the discussion and thought of the double empathy problem, and choosing to believe that I am doing the best I can. Working with neurodivergent clients can evoke uncertainty especially when they experience the world differently from how I have experienced and what the training has prepared us for. During the exercises in the workshop and in his own way, Dr. Russ Harris normalized this and reminded me that each person's experience is unique and as therapists, we remain present and validating of all they have went through. ACT is not only something that we teach but something that we practice on our own selves as well. I needed to make room for my own discomfort that I will not fully comprehend the experiences of others, stay in contact with the present moment, and anchor myself to my professional and personal values as they are essential parts of delivering ACT with integrity to my clients.

This workshop also helped me appreciate the importance of being fully present with clients in their own stories. Through emotional reflection work, I learned to take a step back and lean into curiosity rather than assume shared experiences. When bringing in self-disclosure, I was reminded to check its relevance and consider how it may affect clients, especially if it risks overshadowing or invalidating their unique experiences.

A theme that repeatedly resonated within me was the idea of adjusting the therapeutic process so clients do not have to work harder simply to access the intervention. Rather than "translating" ACT concepts for neurodivergent clients, the workshop invited us to start from their lived reality, their sensory profiles, executive functioning patterns, and communication preferences. This affirmed something I have felt in practice but sometimes struggled to articulate: therapy is not about helping clients fit the model but helping the model fit the client. These small shifts felt subtle but profound in my work with my clients.

Another significant learning involved the exploration of values. Although some have described Dr Russ Harris's workshops as prescriptive, I appreciated the structure he provided. It helped me learn the techniques while staying present with clients during their challenges. Still, I noticed that I needed to intentionally realign all techniques back to values. Without this, the workshop content might feel prescriptive to those less familiar with ACT's

values-driven foundation. When I connected the content back to what I already knew, the workshop strengthened my existing practice. Values work can be empowering for neurodivergent clients, many of whom have had their autonomy questioned or overridden from a young age. Exploring values is not simply a clinical exercise; it can be an act of reclaiming agency. The workshop reminded me to approach this process with patience and respect, especially when clients are discovering their authentic values after years of masking or external pressure.

Perhaps the deepest lesson for me was around compassion, not in the superficial sense of simply being kind, but in the ACT-consistent sense of opening up to the full human experience, including the parts clients often feel ashamed of. Many neurodivergent individuals carry layers of self-doubt shaped by years of being misunderstood or told they are “too much” or “not enough.” Offering ACT through a neuro-affirming lens means creating space where their experiences are not only valid but deeply respected. The workshop reinforced how compassion and acceptance are not passive; they are active choices we make repeatedly in session.

I also left with a renewed sense of community. The conversations with fellow practitioners reminded me that we are collectively trying to move toward more inclusive, flexible, and respectful ways of working. Hearing others share similar challenges and similar hopes helped me feel less alone in my own learning curve. It strengthened my commitment to ongoing reflection, consultation, and practice.

Overall, this workshop was more than a professional development. It was an invitation to slow down, unlearn, and connect with openness and curiosity. I walked away with practical strategies, yes, but I also walked away with a clearer sense of the therapist I want to be. I want to be one who honours the lived experiences of neurodivergent clients, one who adapts flexibly, and one who stays grounded in values even when the path feels complex.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have attended and look forward to integrating these insights into my ongoing work. In supporting neurodivergent individuals, my aim is not to “fix” or normalise them, but to walk alongside them as they navigate their lives with courage, authenticity, and self-compassion. This workshop has strengthened that intention in ways I will carry with me for a long time.