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CONTEXTUAL BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE
MALAYSIA CHAPTER

ACT For ADHD, Autism & AuDHD: Neurodiversity-affirming Therapy

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When I found out that Dr. Russ Harris would be organizing a workshop on Neuroaffirming ACT for ADHD and Autism, honestly, I had no second thoughts. I knew I wanted to attend. The only concerns that crossed my mind were financial and safety-related, as it was a physical workshop in Australia. I knew it would cost a lot: the workshop fee, transportation, accommodation, and other ground expenses. And since I would be traveling alone, I also had to consider my own safety.

But there is one principle I live by: *if you don't ask, the answer is always no—but if you do, there's always a chance.*

So, I asked directly to the organizer, and thankfully, Dr. Russ himself was very kind to offer me a discounted fee, and ACBS Malaysia agreed to sponsor the cost of the workshop. Michelle, who also works extensively with neurodivergent clients as I do, decided to join, and together we embarked on this learning journey to Perth.

The two-day workshop was held on 10–11 November 2025, right in the heart of Perth City. If I were to describe the experience in one word—it would be “**next level**”. At least for me, as someone still relatively new in the mental health field and as an ACT practitioner. However, I am deeply grateful for all the learning opportunities I've had over the past two years, especially through my involvement with the ACBS Malaysia team. They have taught me so much, not only during last year's workshop but also through my ongoing work as a committee member. Each event I joined or assisted in offered me a deeper understanding of ACT. Every casual conversation I had, allowed me to have better insights at how ACT can be practiced.

I also feel truly blessed to be working with the community I care most about. Since graduating, I've been passionate about supporting neurodivergent adults—driven partly by my own journey in understanding and embracing my neurodivergent identity, but also by the awareness that this group is often marginalized, especially those labeled as “high functioning.” I dislike that term, but it reflects a societal assumption: that as long as a neurodivergent “appears” to function well, their struggles are dismissed. I can vouch on that from personal experience. I believe everyone deserves a meaningful life, beyond merely functioning within societal norms. So much of my work focuses on helping neurominorities thrive in systems that were never designed for them.

This timeline for me felt just right. Having a bit of the knowledge and experience from the past several years, I found the workshop both rich and relevant. The two days were filled with insights on integrating neuroaffirming practices into ACT and shifting

perspectives to truly understand ADHDers and Autistics. Dr. Russ Harris paced the content thoughtfully, allowing enough time for reflection and integration. He also shared four video demonstrations of his sessions, with one Autistic client, two ADHD clients, and one AuDHD client. Through these, he illustrated how the six ACT processes unfold in therapy and how self-compassion and strengths identification can powerfully support clients.

What I appreciated most about the training was understanding the purpose behind introducing each process. The method may remain the same, but the function varies depending on context. To use an analogy: if you're given a hammer, you know when and why to use it. It's the same tool, yet it serves different purposes depending on the situation. I used to think I needed to master countless techniques to apply ACT flexibly in sessions. But I learned that even with limited tools, what matters is understanding the underlying processes. Dr. Russ repeatedly demonstrated how the same principles can be adapted across diverse contexts, particularly those relevant to neurodivergent experiences.

“Remember, context and function. Context and function.”

This phrase echoed throughout the workshop, and for the first time, its meaning truly clicked to me. Although I had encountered these concepts before, seeing them applied to neurodivergent experiences made so many of my clients' struggles make sense.

Another line that resonated deeply was:

“A strength in one context is a vulnerability in another.”

This phrase perfectly captures the essence of flexible perspective-taking in therapeutic sessions. Not just to have the client understand the concept, but also as a therapist, I'm learning how vital this skill is for me. In fact, Dr. Russ made me realize that the six ACT processes aren't just skills to be taught — they're processes that the therapist must also embody throughout the session. Watching how Dr. Russ Harris engaged with these processes himself while guiding his clients was remarkable. This is also the part I like about the workshop.

The workshop concluded with a powerful practice on self-compassion and self-soothing. Russ reminded us that we cannot help everyone—and that it's okay. Sometimes, our clients are deeply stuck or overwhelmed, and our capacity to help may be limited. In those moments, we must also extend compassion to ourselves. I almost cried during the exercise, realizing how often I carry guilt for not being able to do enough for my clients, especially when I, too, am running low on “spoons.” I appreciate Dr. Russ validating the experience and teaching us to be kind to ourselves too.

Overall, it was an incredibly meaningful two days of learning. With these new insights, I feel even more equipped and inspired to serve the neurodivergent community in Malaysia. My hope is to see more neuroaffirming practitioners in our country—so that together, we can build a more inclusive and compassionate mental health landscape, especially for the neurominorities.