

WORKSHOP SYLLABUS

Neuroaffirming ACT for **ADHD & Autism**

Advanced-level training in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) delivered from a neurodiversity-affirming stance, led by **Dr Russ Harris**.

- Role plays & experiential exercises
- Neurodiversity-affirming approach
- Over 90,000 professionals trained
- Evidence-based interventions
- Live clinical demonstrations
- Clinical materials included
- WHO-endorsed ACT protocol
- Content adaptable to adolescents



TRAINER
**Dr Russ Harris,
MBBS**



DURATION
14h — 2 days



FORMAT
In-person

Problem Statement

Autism and ADHD are neurotypes that come with many strengths, but also with problems. At least 10% of the population meets criteria for ADHD, Autism, or both, and often there's co-occurrence with trauma, depression, anxiety disorders, or addiction. Many neurodivergent folk struggle greatly, as they grapple with the difficulties of life in a neurotypical world. Often, they have a long and painful history of trauma and rejection, and repeated subjection to prejudice, discrimination, or bullying. Hardly surprising then that mental health issues are pervasive in neurodivergent populations, and dual or triple diagnoses are common.

Need

With its flexible format, and easy-to-adapt core processes, ACT is ideally suited for making a difference – especially when delivered from a neurodiversity-affirming stance. Therapists need to learn how to modify, adapt and apply ACT flexibly and effectively with the full range of clinical issues commonly found in neurodivergent populations.

Target Audience

This advanced-level workshop is intended for any practitioner who has already completed basic introductory training in ACT (which needn't have been with Russ). The workshop is open to all health practitioners, including psychologists, social workers, counsellors, therapists, coaches, BCBAs, psychiatrists, mental health nurses, GPs, youth workers, OTs, physios, and dietitians. The focus is on adults, but everything is relevant and easily adaptable to adolescents.

Duration

14 hours over two days. This advanced-level workshop combines theoretical teaching, clinical demonstrations, role plays, and numerous experiential exercises.

Trainer

Dr Russ Harris, MBBS, is a physician, psychotherapist, internationally-renowned ACT trainer, and author of the world's best-selling book on ACT: *The Happiness Trap* (sold over one million copies, with translations into over thirty languages). His textbook for professionals, *ACT Made Simple*, is extremely popular. Russ has trained over 90,000 health professionals around the globe. In 2015, Russ created an ACT protocol for the World Health Organisation, for use in refugee camps around the globe. The WHO have published three RCTs based on this protocol, showing that it not only significantly reduces depression and PTSD, but also prevents the onset of mental health disorders in those at high risk. Russ himself is an ADHDer, and bases his training on three core values: **simplicity, clarity, and having fun.**

Objectives

- 1 Understand neurodivergent issues through a biopsychosocial lens.
- 2 Use neuroaffirming language (e.g. 'Autism' rather than 'ASD').
- 3 Adapt your communication style to better suit your clients.
- 4 Accommodate sensory and other needs of your clients.
- 5 Help clients harness their strengths to enable effective action, foster self-acceptance, and build a positive self-identity.
- 6 Do neuroaffirmative 'bodywork' to help clients develop somatosensory awareness, and build emotional literacy.
- 7 Scaffold executive functioning.
- 8 Break through task inertia.
- 9 Improve emotion regulation.

- 10 Foster cognitive flexibility.
- 11 Create all sorts of quick'n'easy attention-improving practices ideal for clients who 'hate mindfulness', can't sit still, or find meditation impossible.
- 12 Create and use flexible, compassionate therapeutic interventions that are applicable across the broadest possible range of neurodivergent issues.

Prerequisites

This is an advanced level course, which assumes at least a beginners-level knowledge of ACT. Before enrolling, we recommend you do at least one of the following:

- ▶ Attended an introductory level 2-day ACT workshop (with any ACT trainer), **OR**
- ▶ Complete Russ's 6-week online ACT for Beginners course, **OR**
- ▶ Worked your way through an introductory textbook, such as *ACT Made Simple* or *Learning ACT*

Please Note: We will not cover diagnosis or assessment. The workshop focuses purely on practical interventions: tools, techniques, principles and strategies that you can use effectively with any client – whether they have a formal diagnosis or not.

Content

1) Introduction: Neurobiology, neurodivergent culture, and neurodiversity-affirming therapy

- a) Quick look at neurobiology of ADHD and autism (Lerner et al., 2023):
 - i) Executive functioning and attention
 - ii) Sensory profiles and interoception
 - iii) Emotion regulation
- b) Neurodivergent culture and key concepts:
 - i) Masking and burnout
 - ii) Internalized ableism and self-advocacy
- c) Neurodiversity-affirming therapy principles.

2) Practical skills to help your neurodivergent clients

- a) Scaffold executive functioning (Hayes et al., 2006; Luoma et al., 2007):
 - i) Scaffolding and organizational strategies
 - ii) Breaking through task inertia
- b) Build emotion regulation skills (Pahnke et al., 2023):
 - i) Neuroaffirmative bodywork
 - ii) Developing somatosensory and interoceptive awareness
 - iii) Healthy self-soothing
- c) Develop flexible attention skills (Sadeghi et al., 2021):
 - i) Quick and accessible mindfulness practices
 - ii) Sustaining focus or shifting focus, as needed
- d) Identify and harness neurodivergent strengths (Harris, 2009):
 - i) Strengths-based approach
 - ii) Using hyperfocus as a resource
- e) Overcome impulsivity and develop cognitive flexibility:
 - i) Space between stimulus and response
 - ii) Conscious choice and behavioral flexibility
- f) Foster self-acceptance and self-compassion (Hayes et al., 2006):
 - i) Self-compassion and building a positive self-identity
 - ii) Defusing from rigid rules and harsh self-judgment
 - iii) Defusing from internalized ableism
- g) Improve interoceptive awareness and ability to notice and name emotions (Luoma et al., 2007).
- h) Build caring, supportive relationships and practice effective self-advocacy.
- i) Recognise, reduce and recover from neurodivergent burnout:
 - i) Signs and risk factors
 - ii) Energy management and recovery strategies
- j) Increase psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 1999):
 - i) The six ACT processes adapted for neurodivergence
 - ii) Flexible and individualized interventions
- k) Practice safe, flexible unmasking:
 - i) Understanding autistic masking and its consequences
 - ii) Strategies for adaptive unmasking
- l) Use pacing and resting strategies for fatigue management.
- m) Overcome rejection sensitivity.

3) Adapting ACT interventions for neurodivergent needs

- a) Use neuroaffirming language and adapt communication (Lerner et al., 2023).

- b) Accommodate sensory and other specific needs.
- c) Create flexible and compassionate interventions adapted to different issues:
 - i) Distractibility and attention
 - ii) Impulsivity and hyperfocus
 - iii) Sensory overload and burnout
 - iv) Masking and unmasking
- d) Functional analysis of problematic behaviors (Harris, 2009):
 - i) Meltdowns, doom-scrolling, self-harming, substance abuse
 - ii) Targeted and precise intervention based on behavior function
- e) Ensuring you do NOT use a 'one size fits all' approach:
 - i) Every neurodivergent client has their own unique set of problems, strengths, and needs
 - ii) Tailoring interventions to suit each unique individual

Teaching Method

We'll kick off with a quick look at neurobiology, neurodivergent culture, and neurodiversity-affirming therapy. Then through role plays, videos of therapy sessions, live demonstrations, and many experiential exercises, you'll develop practical skills. Russ proudly proclaims each workshop a 'jargon-free zone' – and bases his training on three core values: **simplicity, clarity, and having fun**. His highly-acclaimed in person workshops are brief, powerful, cost-effective and life-enhancing. Participants regularly report not only major improvements in their therapy or coaching, but also in their personal lives.

Certification

A certificate of attendance will be provided to participants. The certificate will mention the number of hours of actual participation.

Materials included: articles & research on ACT with Autism and ADHD, client worksheets and handouts, scripts for experiential exercises, e-books on important topics, professionally recorded audios of key exercises.

References

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