

# Does Training Improve Therapist Confidence and Practice in Adapting Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) to Meet the Needs of Autistic Adults?

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## BACKGROUND

- Autistic adults report barriers to accessing mental health support that is adapted to meet their needs and describe psychological therapists as unable to tailor their approach<sup>1</sup>.
- Therapists do not routinely receive training in autism adaptations and report a lack of knowledge, skills, and confidence to adapt their practice<sup>2,3</sup>.
- Brief, accessible training may support clinicians in improving their confidence and practice when working with autistic individuals<sup>3</sup>.

## METHOD

- This study was hosted as a study within a trial (SWAT 213)<sup>4</sup>.
- Training materials comprising 4 x 20-minute videos hosted online were made available to CBT therapists. Videos included informational content and filmed role plays to illustrate practice points.
- Participants were CBT therapists who completed an online survey, pre (n=109), post (n=66), and 5 months (n=26) following review of the training materials.
- The survey asked about therapists' experiences working with autistic people, novelty and clarity of the training, key learning and practice points.
- Participants also completed the Therapist Confidence Scale<sup>5</sup> (TCS) adapted for autism.
- Pre & follow up TCS scores were analysed using a paired sample t-test.
- Open text survey questions were analysed using content analysis.
- A focus group to further understand therapist experiences of the training materials was thematically analysed.

**Table 1. Job titles of therapists responding to pre training survey**

Job Title	No. of Respondents
High Intensity CBT Therapist	55 (50.45%)
Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner	36 (33.02%)
Trainee CBT Therapist	7 (6.42%)
Clinical Psychologist	7 (6.42%)
Trainee Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner	3 (2.75%)
Locality lead	1 (.91%)

## RESULTS

### Evaluation of training materials:

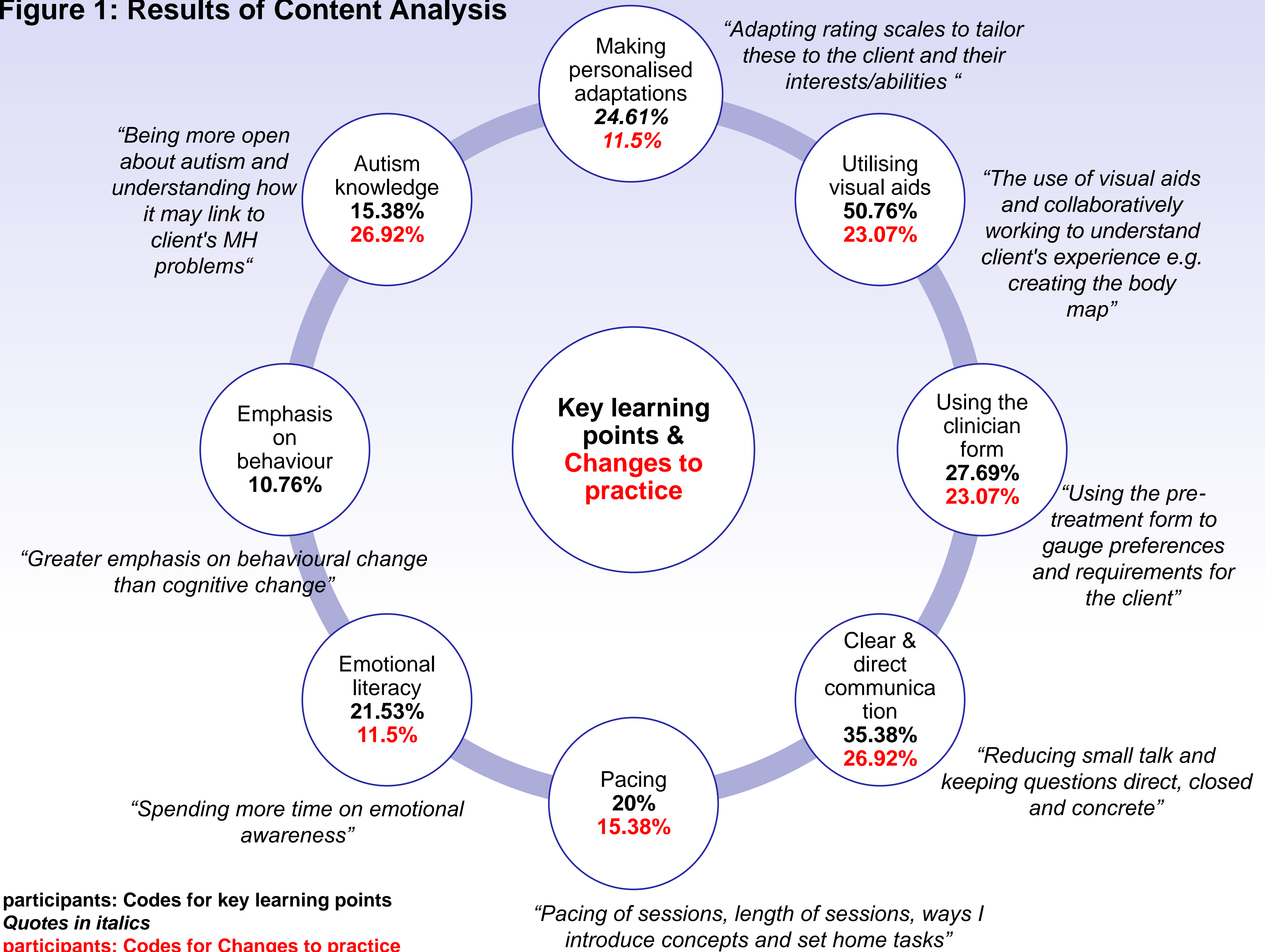
- Of the 66 participants that completed the post training survey, most described the training materials as clear and understandable, with 66% (N=44) finding the content novel.
- The majority 95% (N=63) reported the training to be useful for CBT practice, and 56.06% (N=37) reported improved knowledge.
- Of the 29 participants who completed the follow-up survey, 51.72% (N=15) felt their practice had changed since accessing the training materials.

### Therapist Confidence:

- TCS scores increased significantly at 5-month follow-up (mean pre-training TCS= 42.76 (SD=12.15); mean follow-up TCS=50.98 (SD=10.56); t=4.023 (df=25), 95% C.I. lower 8.11 – upper 12.26) mean difference in scores 8.118 (SD=10.28), representing an average increase in TCS scores of 24.96%.

- Analysis of focus groups (n = 5 participants) resulted in two main themes: **'Feedback on Training Materials'** and **'Evolution of Therapeutic Practice'**
- Sub-themes provided deeper insights into the content analysis codes.
  - 'Clinical Impact' - Therapists applied tools across a range of client groups, enhancing overall practice.
  - 'Barriers' - Implementation was limited by systemic constraints, time pressures, and inflexible therapy models.
  - 'Suggestions' – to improve the training included addition of real-life case studies, varied autism presentations, and increase interactivity.

**Figure 1: Results of Content Analysis**



% participants: Codes for key learning points  
 Quotes in italics  
 % participants: Codes for Changes to practice

## CONCLUSION

- Brief, self-directed autism training significantly improved therapists' confidence and use of adapted CBT techniques 5 months after training.
- Qualitative data indicated gains in clinical insight and personalised tailoring of CBT.
- However, systemic barriers and inconsistencies in training application highlight the need for organisational support and more interactive, practice-focused training.

## REFERENCES

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