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Embracing Neurodivergence

Emma Holmes



Agenda

- Introduction and 'about me'
- Neuro-affirming and the power of role models
- Thank you
- Language matters
- The Profile Wheel & Presentations
- Tools to help
- Key message
- Questions



Introduction

- Ex-Education
- Co-ordinated ND and Mental Health Programmes for the NHS
- Participation with CAMHS
- IASSN
- Trainer/Facilitator of Parenting programmes - ASC/ADHD
- Lived experience
- Passionate advocate



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Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child

FAKE NEURO-AFFIRMING

OH NO, WE DON'T TARGET THINGS LIKE EYE CONTACT AND HAND FLAPPING ANYMORE. WE KNOW HOW HARMFUL THAT CAN BE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH NEURODIVERSITY. WE EVEN GOT RID OF OUR PUZZLE PIECE STUFF!

BUT WE STILL FOCUS ON *OTHER* STIMS, AND SOCIAL SKILLS, AND TOLERATING DISTRESS, AND SENSORY DESENSITIZATION, AND...

Whole Body Listening

- Open Eyes
- Open Ears
- Closed Mouth
- Quiet Hands
- Calm Feet

They say I'm **NEURODIVERSE**

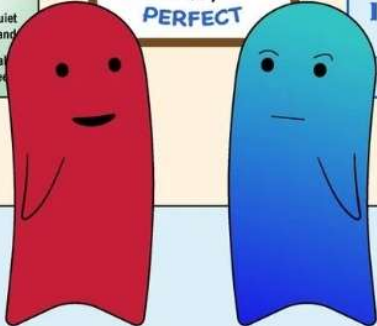
But I say I'm **PERFECT**

The **ABC's** of Behavior

Antecedent

Behavior

Consequence



REAL NEURO-AFFIRMING

WE AIM TO HELP A PERSON UNDERSTAND HOW THEIR PARTICULAR BRAIN AND BODY WORK, AND HOW TO WORK *WITH* THAT INSTEAD OF AGAINST IT, AND HOW TO ACCOMMODATE THEMSELVES AND ADVOCATE FOR THEIR NEEDS IN A WORLD NOT BUILT FOR THEM, AND BASICALLY JUST MAKE SURE THEY KNOW THAT IT'S OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT.

Meet **BUMPER**:
A Whole Body Learner

1. Tactile Memory (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
2. Visual Memory (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
3. Auditory Memory (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
4. Kinesthetic Memory (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
5. Vestibular Memory (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
6. Proprioceptive Memory (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
7. Interoception (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
8. Emotions (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
9. Social Skills (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)
10. Self-Regulation (Colors, Shapes, Textures, Sounds)

What do you look like when you are learning?

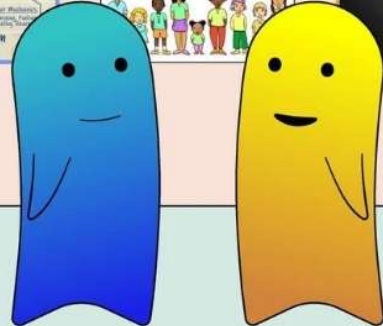
BEAUTY in DIVERSITY

ALL BRAINS, ALL BODIES, ALL HUMANS.

THE FOUR A's OF THE **Advoc8** FRAMEWORK

- Agency
- Autonomy
- Acceptance
- Authenticity

The Autistic Advocate





Credit: Autball



Role Models & Positive Messaging





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Supporting a Neurodivergent Child

“Every individual is part of a neurodiverse society regardless of differences of neurotype, disability, mental health, medical conditions, race, ethnicity, gender, or age”.

Neurodiversity
Includes Everyone

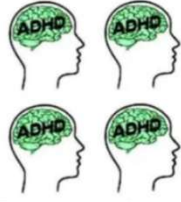
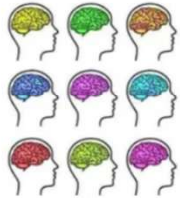


follow @autisticrealms



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Supporting a Neurodivergent Child

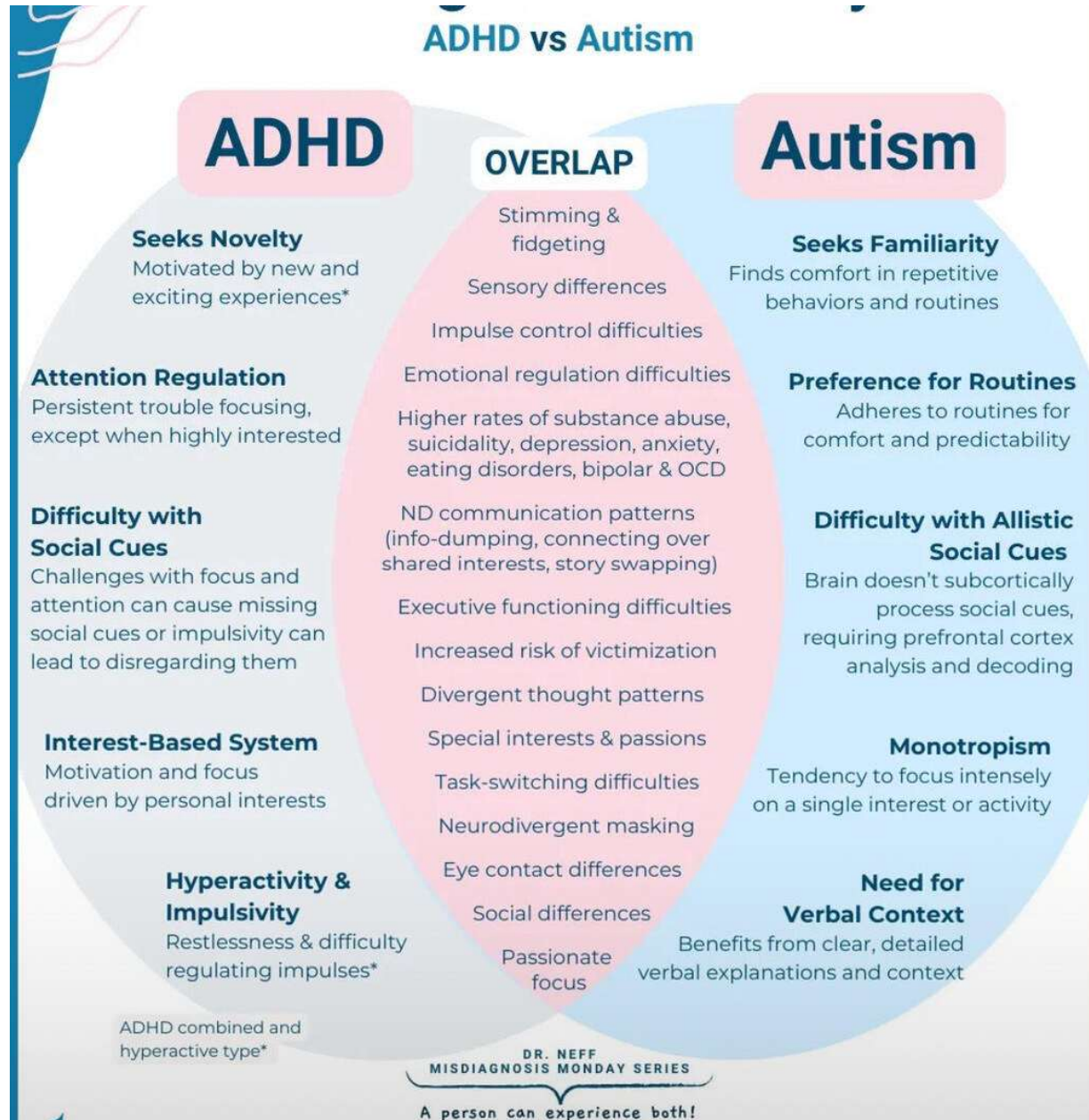
 Each of these people is NEURODIVERGENT (There are lots of ways to be neurodivergent)	 This person is NEUROTYPICAL
 These people are NEURODIVERGENT but the group itself is NOT NEURODIVERSE	 This is a NEURODIVERSE GROUP
 This person is MULTIPLY NEURODIVERGENT They are NOT NEURODIVERSE	Only a group can be NEURODIVERSE An individual can not.

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Neurodivergent
v
Neurodiverse



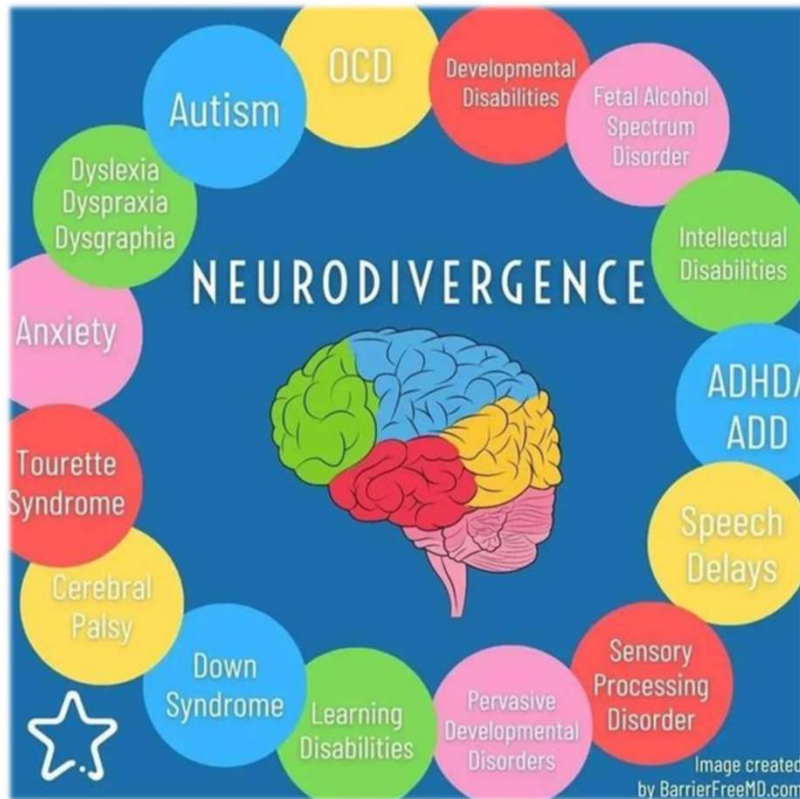
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Supporting a Neurodivergent Child - Universal Provision

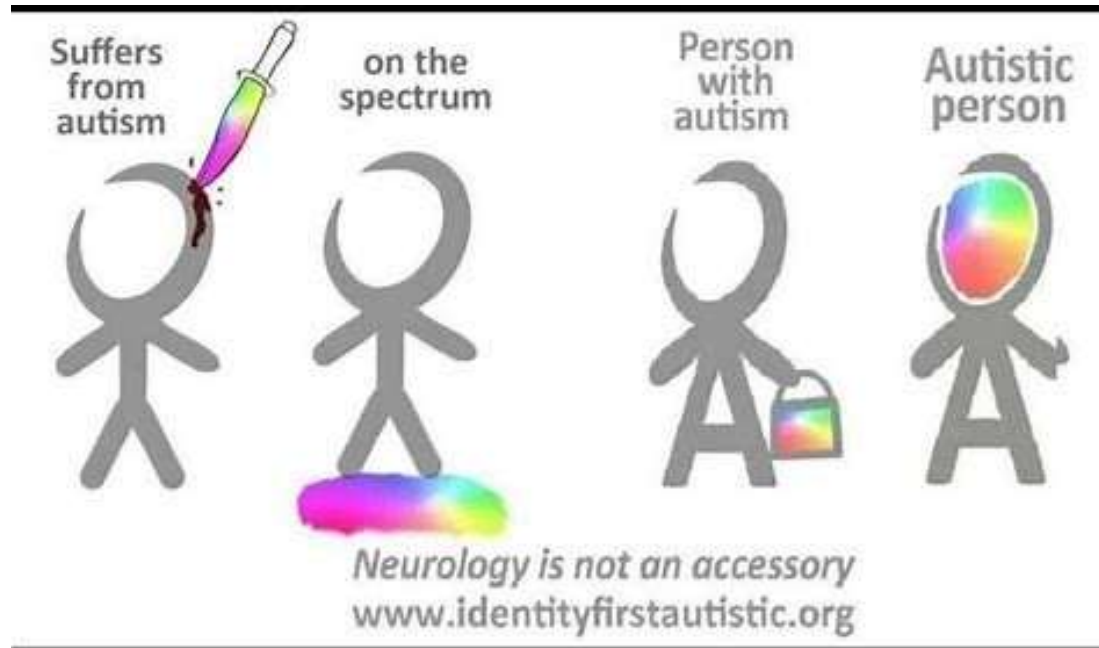


“Having the right vocabulary is a path to getting your needs met and self-advocacy”.



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“I respect and honour every individual's right to self-identify in the way that feels most authentic to them”.



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Supporting a Neurodivergent Child - Universal Provision

“The label high-functioning and low-functioning could cause harm...”

AUTISM SPECTRUM

The Autism Spectrum is NOT linear



Less autistic

Very autistic

The Autism Spectrum
looks more like:

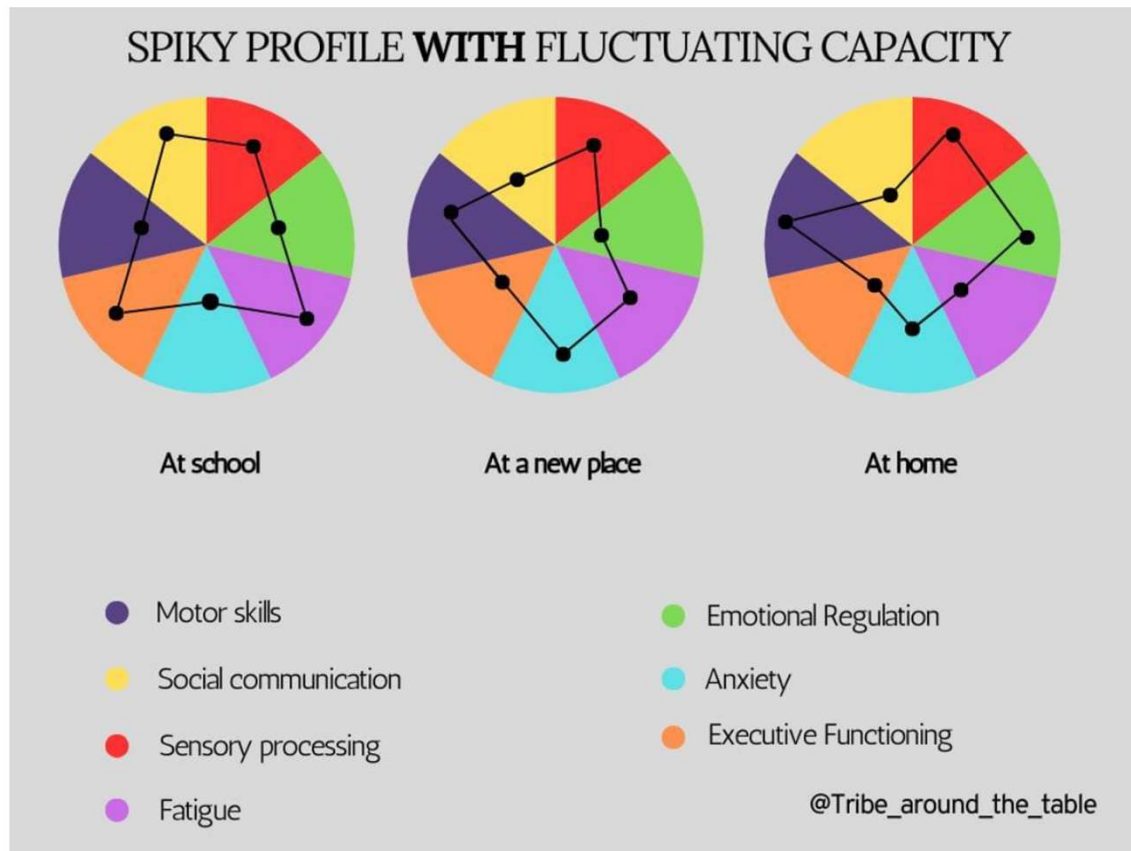


Terms like “high functioning” & “low functioning” are harmful and outdated



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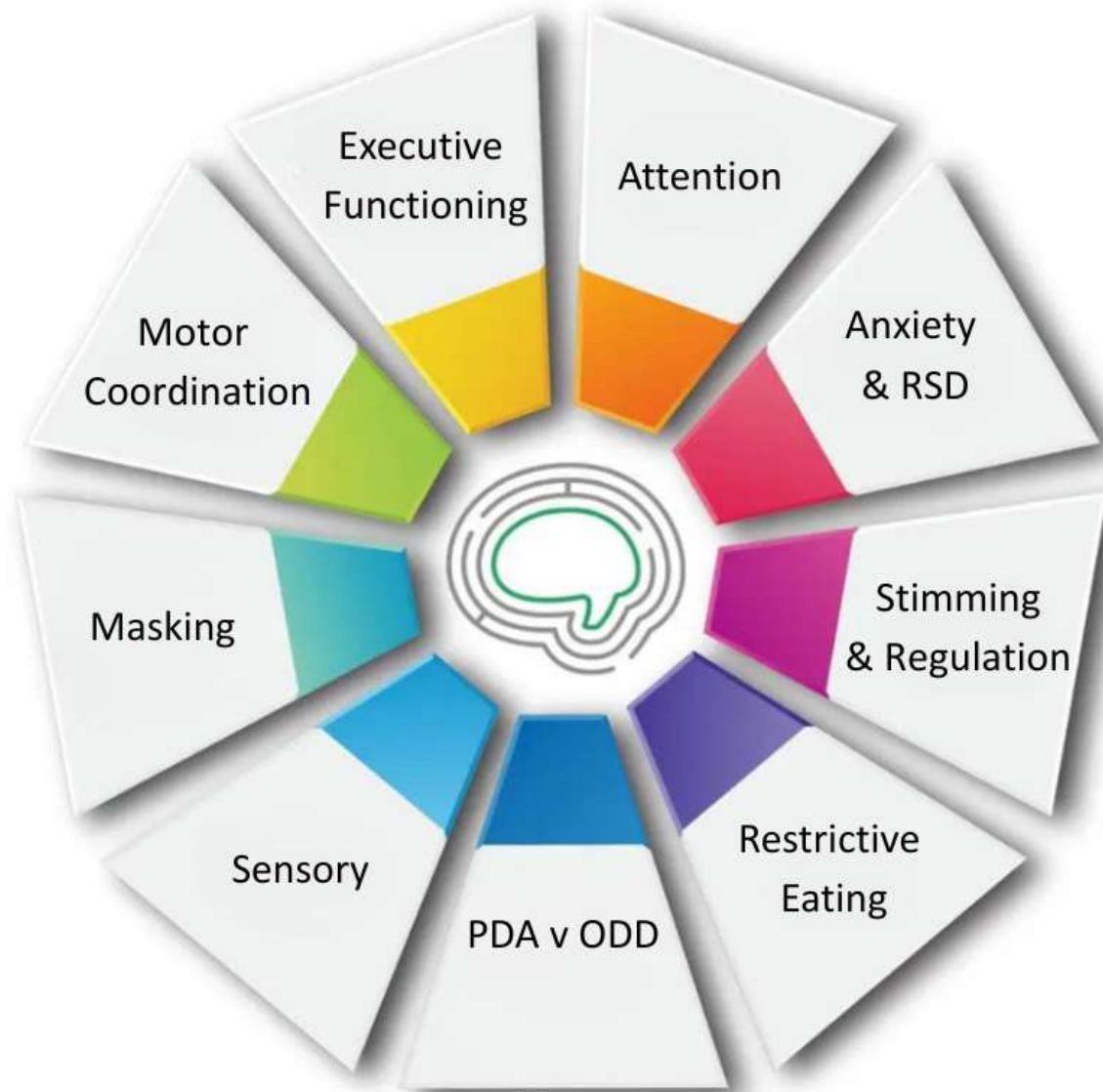


- Environment
- Situational
- Expectation
- Demand



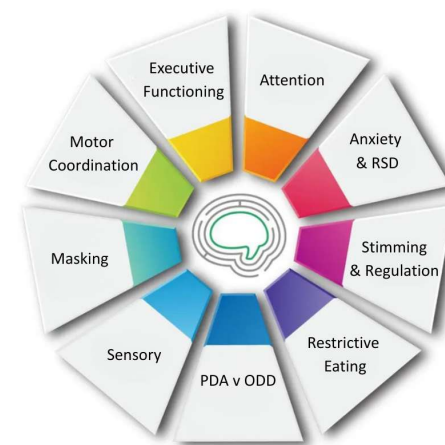
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Supporting a Neurodivergent Child - Universal & Ordinarily Available Provision



Executive Function

- Struggling to pack their bag or remember what is needed
- Difficulty transitioning between activities
- Losing track of time or forgetting routines (e.g. brushing teeth, getting dressed)
- Avoiding chores or homework
- Needing frequent prompts to stay on track





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Executive Function

Visuals are your friend!

- Use picture-based checklists for routines
- Keep steps short and specific: 'put socks on' vs 'get dressed'

Validate and Reframe

- Celebrate effort, not perfection
- 'It's okay, this can feel hard'
- Your brain works differently, and that is okay'

Countdowns and Timers

- Help with transitions and task duration
- Pair with gentle verbal cues: 'five minutes left then we...'
- Avoid surprise transitions – give warnings and choices

Repetitive instructional phrases

- Key phrases used consistently by all, particularly when giving instructions.
- Use first/then language

Model planning and organisation

- 'Let's pack your bag. What do we need?'
- Use organisational tools, folder, baskets, labels

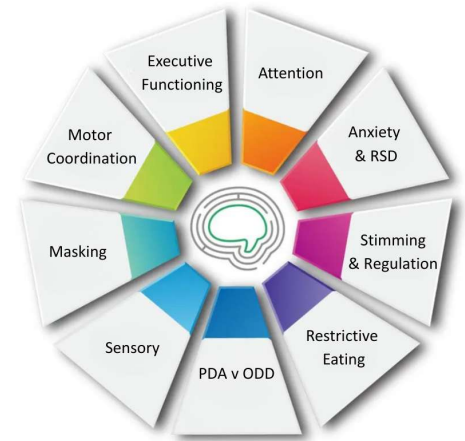


Attention & Concentration

Fact

It is estimated those with ADHD receive approx 20,000 corrective/negative messages by the age of 10.

- Easily distracted
- Feeling restless, fidgety and struggling to sit still
- Forgetfulness, easily losing things
- Difficulty concentrating (unless very interested)
- Appears tired or overwhelmed after periods of concentration





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Attention & Concentration

Change the script

“Why are you taking so long?”
vs “Can I help with that?”

“Why are you always
unprepared?” vs “Shall we
make a checklist to help?”

Monotropism, a
flow state or
attention tunnel.
(Look at Autistic Realms)

Recovery time

Honour their need to
pause and reset.
Reduce demands
during fatigue.

Now and next board

A visual indicator of the
current focus – can be as
simple as stick men on a
piece of paper. **Timers**,
Alexa, sand timers, etc

Fidget aids

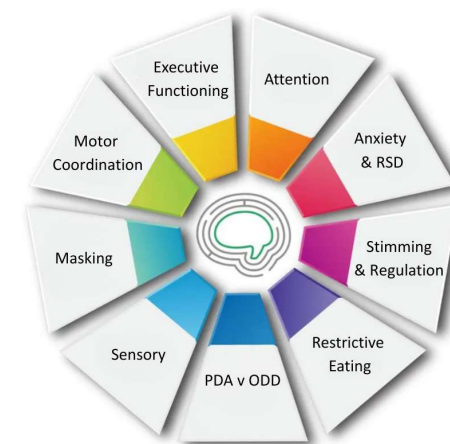
These do not need to be
noisy. Fidgeting aids
regulation, helps with
concentration, relieves
tension and restlessness.

Auditory/Visual

Noise-cancelling aids
Such as ear defenders
or loops.

Anxiety & RSD

- Extreme emotional response to criticism (RSD)
- People pleasing, fawning
- Focusing on familiarity (an attachment to a person/object/home)
- Situational mutism
- Stimming (can be associated with joy)





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Anxiety & RSD

Alternative communication

Encourage drawing, writing, gestures.
Indirect interaction, reduce the pressure, minimise questions, provide comfort items.

Alexithymia

Difficulty in recognising and describing emotions so can increase anxiety and misinterpreting emotions.

Changes and transitions

The power of a social story, timetable, visual clues, preparation and time.

Consistent and explicit boundaries

Creates a sense of reassuring predictability and routine.

Sense of belonging

A genuine relational approach will create a feeling of safety and connection – not because they have conformed, but because they feel accepted for who they are.



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Anxiety & RSD

Myth vs Reality PUSHING THROUGH WORRIES

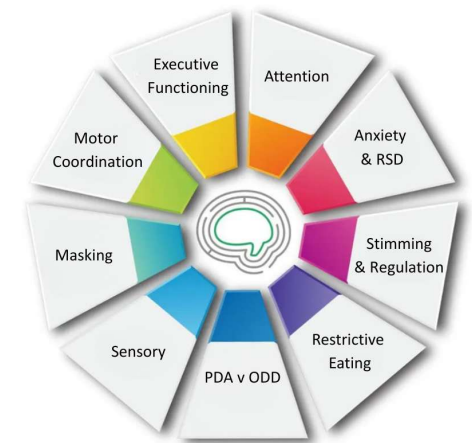
Myth

- Children just need to push through their fears.
- Avoiding worries makes them worse, so we should stop avoidance straight away.
- Bravery means doing it even when you're terrified.
- Talking about worries makes them bigger.
- Once they face the fear, the worry disappears.

Reality

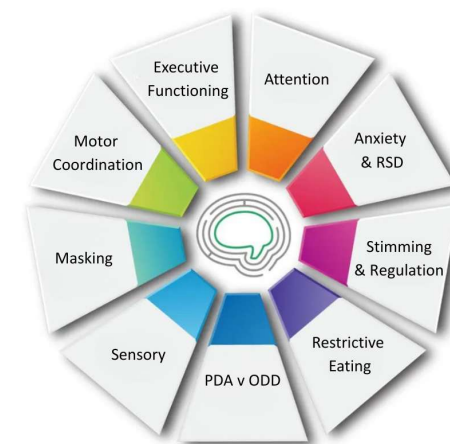
- Forcing them too soon can overwhelm their nervous system and increase anxiety.
- Gentle, supported steps — not pressure — help a child feel safe enough to try again.
- Real bravery is learning to calm the body and mind while feeling afraid.
- Naming fears helps to shrink them. When we listen calmly, children learn it's safe to share.
- Anxiety softens gradually with repeated safety, connection and practice — not overnight.

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Stimming & Regulation

- Hand flapping or tapping of fingers, rocking, spinning, jumping or pacing
- May not be obvious, e.g. hair twiddling, bouncing leg
- Can be self-injurious, skin picking, head butting
- Repeatedly touching a texture
- Verbal stimming e.g. humming, repeating words or phrases





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Stimming & Regulation

Stimming...do they need to stop?

Helps regulate difficult emotions, sooth and self regulate or even express joy.

Redirection

If stims are disruptive, self injurious can the feeling be replicated somehow? Or can they be given dedicated time and space to stim?

Scheduling recharge time

Does the child need scheduled movement, recharge time, battery replenishing opportunities.

Key insight

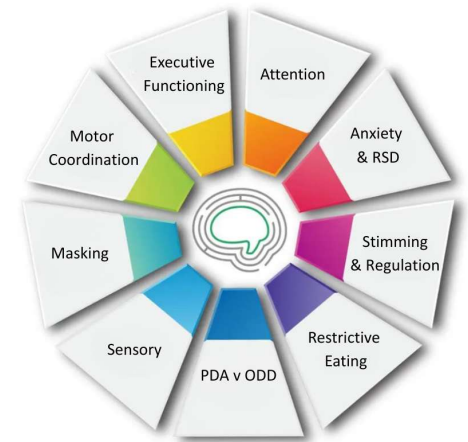
ADHD stimming is more about focus and energy release. Autistic stimming is about regulation and sensory balance. Both are valid.

Regulation resource

Ordinarily available tangle toys, wobble cushions, chair bands, all can create independence in regulation.

Restrictive Eating

- Avoidance of certain foods often linked to the sensory aspect
- May prefer predictable 'safe' foods - a repetitive diet
- Location?
- Interoceptive difficulties
- Associated with uncomfortable feelings





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Restrictive Eating

Who are we to judge?

If child is developing, well nourished and living off a beige diet - feeling of safety.
(Always seek advice from a medical professional if concerned)

Remove demand/pressure

Well meaning 'one more bite' or 'finish your veg before your pudding' could create a bigger problem further down the line. Use [ARFID Awareness UK](#) for information

Reduced interoceptive awareness

Difficulty recognising hunger, fullness, or thirst signals, leading to irregular eating patterns or food avoidance (Kelly Mahler)

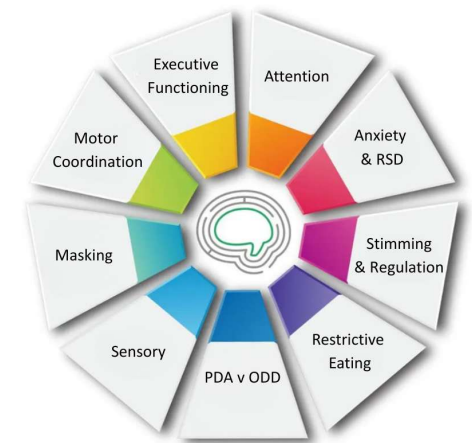
Location, Location, Location

Can a smaller, quieter less chaotic location away from smells, noise, people perhaps be found?



PDA v ODD

- Pervasive Drive for Autonomy (PDA)
- Demand Avoidance





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PDA v ODD

PDA

Reduce the perception of demands and provide a sense of control and autonomy

PANDA Framework

- **P**ick your battles – focus on essentials, let go of non-urgent demands.
- **A**nxiety management – create calm, predictable environments.
- **N**egotiation – co-create plans, offer choices.
- **D**isguise demands – embed instructions in play or curiosity.
- **A**daptation – meet the child where they are, not where you expect them to be

Investigate

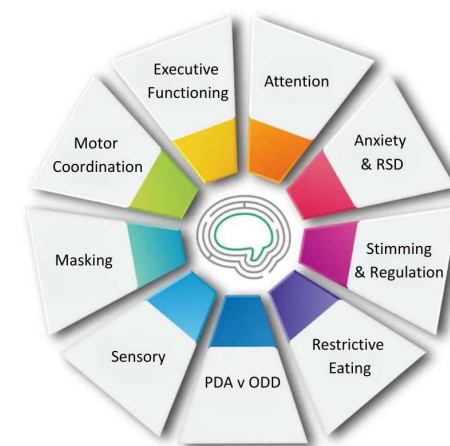
What supports or resources might make the demand more tolerable? E.g. no tie laces, special cutlery, go in on PE day in kit already?

Demand Avoidance

- Honour as a protective strategy
- Be curious why the demand is being avoided, whether the demand is truly necessary?

Sensory

- Seeking touch/feedback - hitting off people, the tables and the walls
- Struggles with bright lights
- Unsettled in crowds
- Reluctance to wear certain clothing items
- Interoception - the 8th sense





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Sensory

Lighting, can the use of lower level lamps be used at certain times of the day? Or are there tinted glasses they can wear?

Seeker, can multi-sensory learning supports be introduced – stimulation
Chair bands/
fidgets/trampoline/wall push-ups/movement breaks could we feed the need?

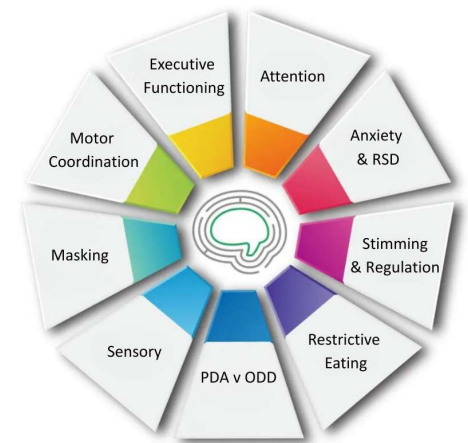
Clothing, be curious - what alternatives could be to make it more tolerable? A great way to embed a sense of safety and belonging they feel heard & valued.

Busy spaces, access to quiet zones readily available, talk about placement in the classroom. Will a social story help? Can routines be adjusted?

Interoception, visual reminders, verbal prompts, role modelling – narrate your own body sensations, notice it, name it and link it.
Look up Kelly Mahler

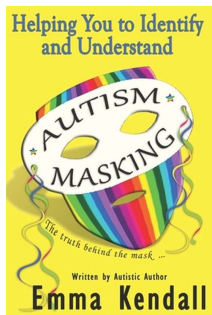
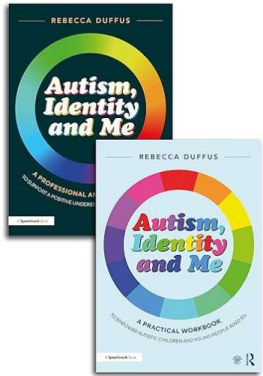
Masking

“But they are ‘*fine*’ here”





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Masking

“Make it safe to be real.” Ensure every child knows they don’t have to perform or pretend to fit in.

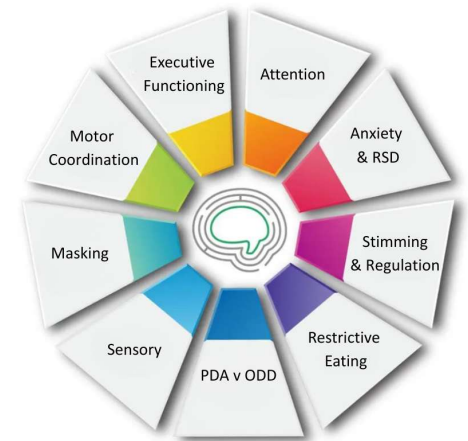
Avoid praising ‘quiet’ or ‘compliant’ behaviour as inherently good—focus instead on celebrating curiosity, creativity, and self-advocacy.

Offer non-judgmental check-ins using visuals or private communication tools (e.g., emotion cards, Zones of Regulation) so children can express themselves without fear of consequence.

Model and validate emotional honesty: say things like “It’s okay to feel overwhelmed sometimes” or “Thanks for telling me how you really feel.”

Motor Coordination

- Handwriting
- Cutting and crafting
- Self-care
- Postural control
- Navigating space





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Motor Coordination

Alternative media,
ensure universal access to
ICT (e.g., Chromebooks,
dictation software) for
children who need
alternative recording.

Don't underestimate the
power of a **well-being**
check in.

Supportive equipment,
pens, pencils, scissors,
cutlery, clothing options.

Time, allowing extra
time for writing tasks,
getting ready for PE,
lunch time in the dining
hall etc.

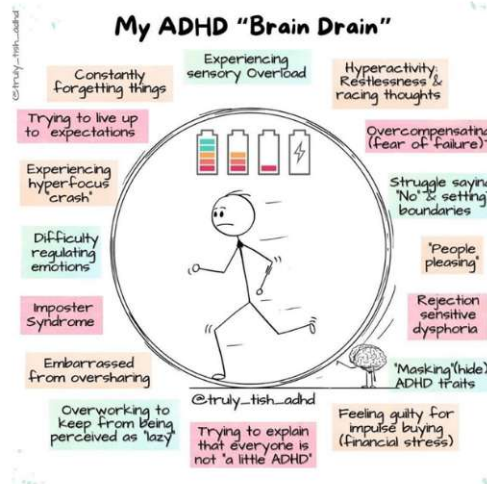
Compassionate approach,
they will develop a lot of these
skills but it will take longer to get
there.

Resources: Tools to collaborate with

Zoning plan

	How I am	What I can do	What others can do
Red zone	"Crash. Things are tough"		
Orange zone	"Struggling to struggle. 'Mistake'. Feeling funny"		
Green zone	"OK. Just right"		

Shut down **High speed** **Just right**



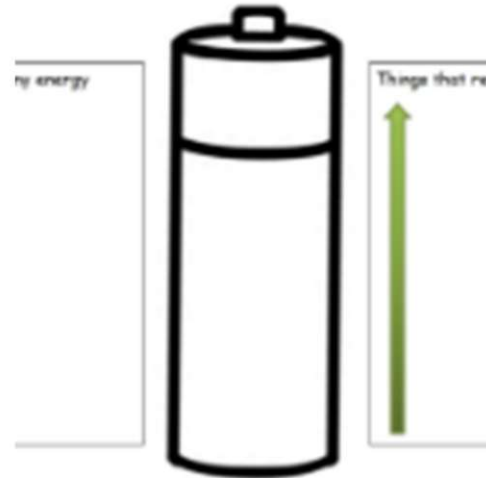
Mapping the Landscape of Your School

1. The Physical Environment

Instructions

- Look carefully at the map of your school
- Use the highlighter pens to mark how the areas on the map make you feel.
 - Green = I feel calm and relaxed in this space
 - Yellow = I feel anxious/uncomfortable in this space
 - Red = I would like to avoid this space as it makes me very anxious
- For the areas that you have coloured red, what makes you feel unsafe?

- What might the school do to help you feel safer in your 'red' areas?



Sensory Profile

Name: _____

Visual: _____

Sound: _____

Balance & Coordination: _____

Other Needs: _____

Smell and Taste: _____

Touch: _____

Other Sensory Needs: _____

Other Needs: _____

Spoon Theory

If you had 12 spoons today how would you use them?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Get out of bed | ☐ Take a shower |
| ☐ Make a phone call | ☐ Manage meds |
| ☐ Get dressed | ☐ Walk the dog |
| ☐ Cook a meal | ☐ Go to work/school |
| ☐ Doctors appointment | ☐ Grocery shopping |
| ☐ Socialize | ☐ Exercise |

Stuff
That
Works.





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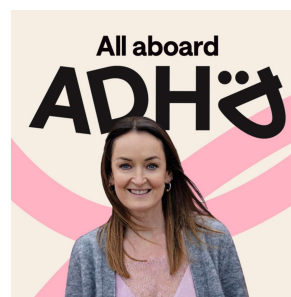
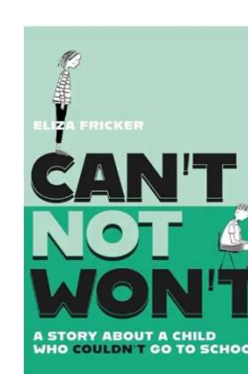
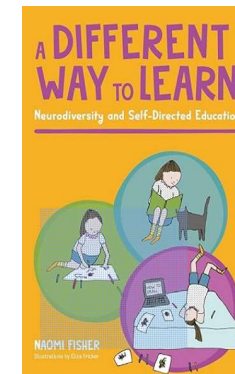
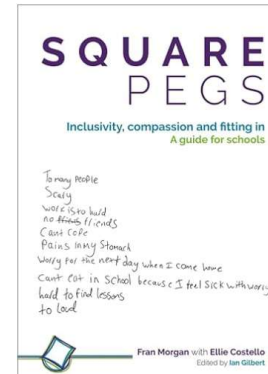
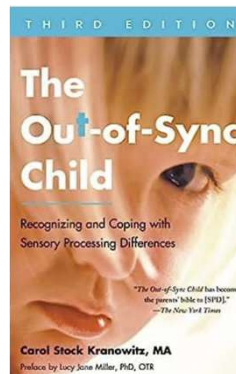
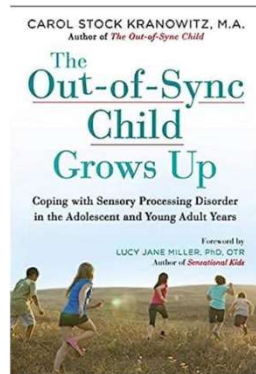
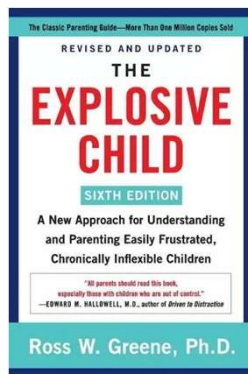
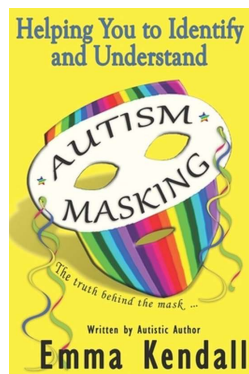
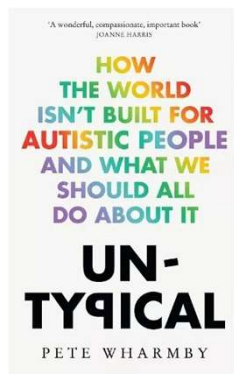
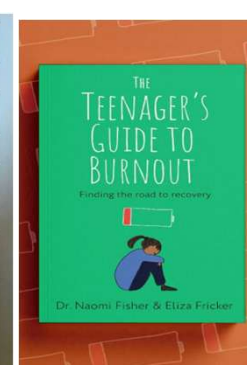
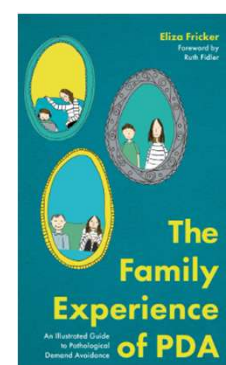
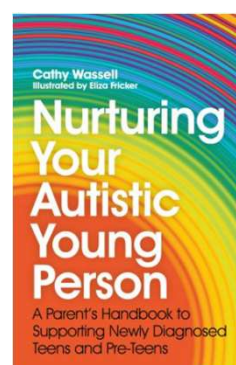
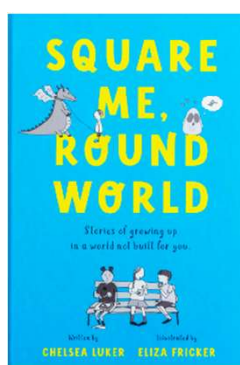
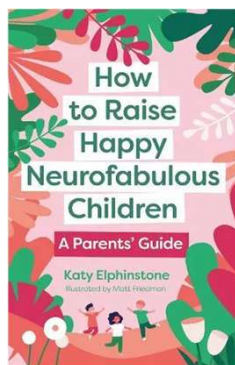
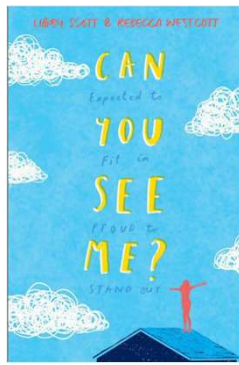
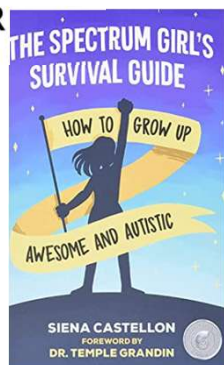
Key message





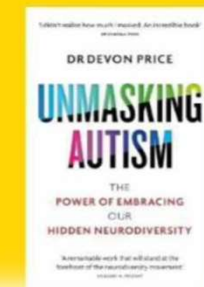
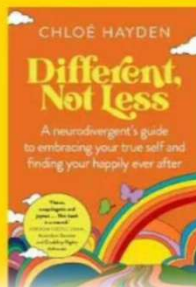
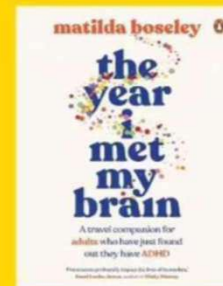
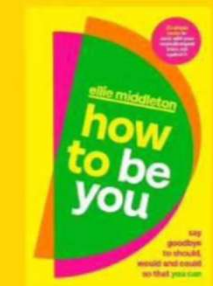
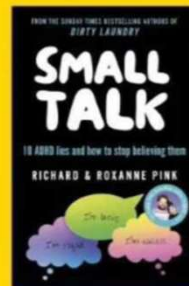
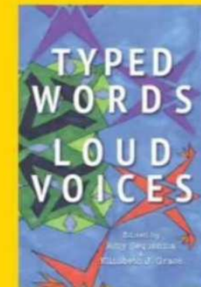
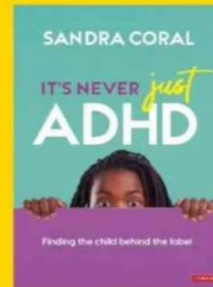
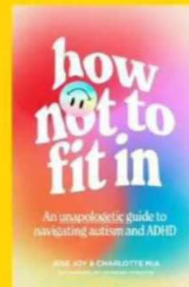
EMPOWER
YOU

Resources: My personal bookshelf and audio library



Resources

must read books to reframe the narrative around Autism & ADHD



<https://www.empoweryou.com/resources/for-you>

<https://www.empoweryou.com/resources/for-you>



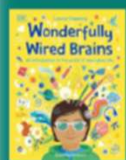
EMPOWER
YOU

CHILDREN NEURODIVERSITY

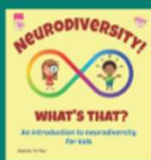
Resources: Books to read with your child

CHILDREN AUTISM

CHILDREN ADHD



Wonderfully
Wired Brains



Neurodiversity!
What's that?



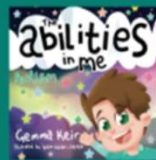
Perfectly Norman



Dexter! The
amazing school dog



Being Autistic
(and what that
actually means)



The Abilities in
Me - Autism



My Awesome
Autism



Leo and the
Octopus



Loud!



The Fizzy Brain



The Abilities in
Me - ADHD



Cloud Boy



Amazing Me,
Amazing You



The Same but
Different



Invisible Isabel



Too Much! An
overwhelming day



When Things Get
Too Loud



I Am Bloc



A Day With
No Words



My Mummy is
Autistic



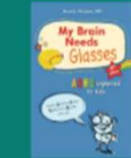
My Amazing
ADHD Brain



The Girl Who
Always Could



My Brain is a
Race Car



My Brain Needs
Glasses



Meesha Makes
Friends



Every Brain is
Beautiful



Neurodivergent
Ninja



Your Beautiful
Brain and Anxiety



The Secret Life
of Rose



Bear, Bobbin and
The Winter Festival



The Panda
on PDA



Ready Eddie
Go!



A Dragon With
ADHD



My Unique ADHD
World



Cally & Jimmy:
Twins Together



ADHD, Tics &
Me!



EMPOWER
YOU

Resources: Books your child can read

NON-FICTION AUTISTIC/ADHD TWEENS



A Different Sort of Normal



Autism, Identity and Me



Autism, Bullying and Me



Wired Differently



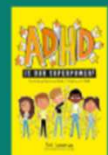
The Autism-Friendly Guide to Periods



Perfectly Weird, Perfectly You



The Awesome Autistic Go-To Guide



ADHD Is Our Superpower!



The Autistic Guide to Adventure



Growing Up Autistic and Happy



The Awesome Autistic Guide To Feelings & Emotions



Can I Tell You About ADHD?

FICTION AUTISTIC TWEENS



A Kind of Spark



Keedie



Vivi Conway and the Sword of Legends



Paws



Good Different



Frankie's World



Speak Up!



Boy Underground



Ellen Outside the Lines



Can You See Me?



Do You Know Me?



Moojag and the Auticode Secret

FICTION ADHD TWEENS



The Boy with the Butterfly Mind



Reggie Houser Has the Power



Tornado Brain



The Girl Who Broke the Sea



Check Mates



Percy Jackson



Show Us Who You Are



Focused



The Love Letters of Abelard and Lily



The Extraordinaries



Fifty-Four Things Wrong With Gwendolyn Rogers



It's the End of the World and I'm in My Bathing Suit



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Resources: Books your child can read

NON-FICTION AUTISTIC TEENS



Queerly Autistic



The Spectrum Girl's
Survival Guide



The Autistic Teen's
Avoidant Eating
Workbook



The Teen's Guide to
PDA



Different Not Less



Young, Autistic
and ADHD



My Autism Journal



The Teenager's
Guide to Burnout



Unmasked



How Not to Fit In

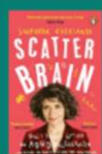


So, I'm Autistic

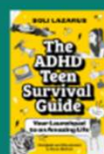


How To Be You

NON-FICTION ADHD TEENS



Scatter Brain



The ADHD Teen
Survival Guide



ADHD is Awesome



The Teenager's
Guide to Burnout



ADHD: An A to Z



The ADHD
Focus Friend



The ADHD Work-
book for Teen Girls



How Not to Fit In



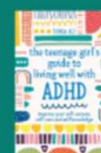
Me, Myself
and ADHD



Now It All
Makes Sense



Small Talk



The Teenage Girl's
Guide to Living
Well with ADHD

FICTION AUTISTIC TEENS



Something to
be Proud Of



Geek Girl



AfroTistic



The State of Grace



Finding Phoebe



Underdogs



Some Like it Cold



Tilly in Technicolor



The Boy Who
Steals Houses



About the Boy



The Many Half-
Lived Lives of
Sam Sylvester



On the Edge
of Gone



EMPOWER
YOU

Resources: Books your child can read and you can read

FICTION ADHD TEENS



A List Of Cages



Lake Lore



Playing Tyler



The Byways



Only Here,
Only Now



Underdogs



Above All Else



Tilly in Technicolor



The Love Letters of
Abelard and Lily



Lover Birds



Motorcycles,
Sushi & One
Strange Book



Six of Crows

PARENTS NEURODIVERGENCE



Your Child is
Not Broken



Nurturing Your
Autistic Young Person



Sincerely, Your
Autistic Child



Girl Unmasked



PDA in the Family



A Different Kind
of Parenting



Black Rainbow



Can't Not Won't



When the Naughty
Step Makes Things
Worse



A Different
Way to Learn



Parenting When
You're Autistic



How to Raise
Happy Neuro-
fabulous Children

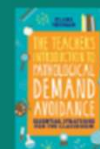
PROFESSIONALS NEURODIVERGENCE



Supporting
Spectacular Girls



The Educator's
Experience of PDA



The Teacher's
Introduction to PDA



Girl Unmasked



Autism, Identity
and Me



The Emotional Literacy
Toolkit for ADHD



Safeguarding
Autistic Girls



Can't Not Won't



Square Pegs: a
guide for schools



Teachers! How Not
to Kill the Spirit in
Your ADHD Kids



Autism and
Masking



Un-typical



Resources: Embracing your ND identity

Having a positive autistic social identity offers a protective mechanism against poor mental health (Cooper, Smith & Russell (2017) Social identity, self-esteem and mental health in autism).

- **Chloe Hayden** - Australian actress, author and advocate 'Different Not Less: A neurodivergent guide to embracing your true self and finding your happily ever after.
- **Authentically Emily** - a 21-year-old autistic student, mental health activist and autism advocate.
- **Chris Bonello** - Author, advocate, ex teacher and renowned speaker. Austistic Not Weird and Under Dogs
- **Kind of Spark** - CBBC representing traits of ND on mainstream young peoples UK media.
- **Jess Garner, gr0ve.org** - Being Me, online groups for young people to learn to know, value and be themselves.



BBC Bitesize Suggested for you · 1 d ·

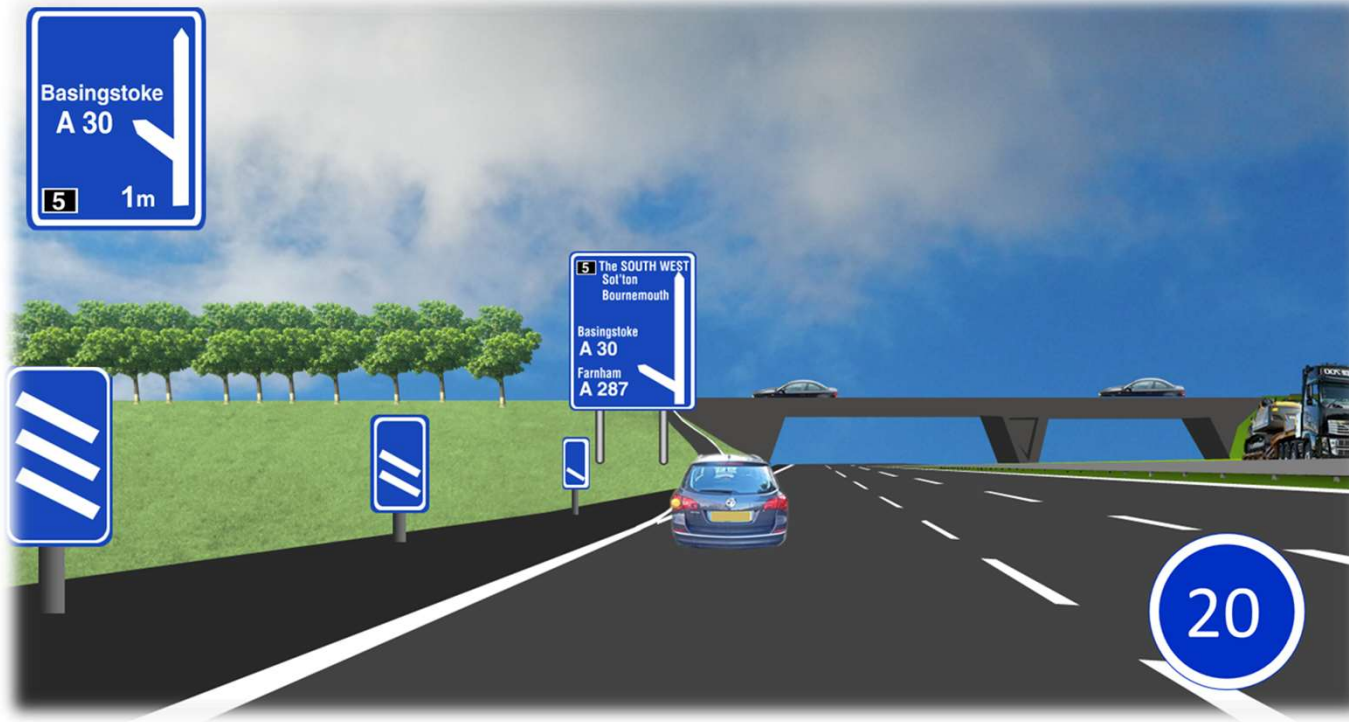
CBBC's 'A Kind of Spark' reminds young people that they have the power to make amazing change, just the way they are! Episodes are on [BBC iPlayer](#)... See more





EMPOWER
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Resources: Great author and transition analogy



HOW
THE WORLD
ISN'T BUILT FOR
AUTISTIC PEOPLE
AND WHAT WE
SHOULD ALL
DO ABOUT IT

**UN-
TYPICAL**

PETE WHARMBY



EMPOWER
YOU

‘Real life’

“How best to bring up a child so that the potential for a mental problem developing in later years is minimised as much as possible”.

“Coping with ADHD in school”

“Regulation of post school emotions”

“Managing own ND needs”

“Child’s unexpected behaviours - not listening, refusal, bullying-type behaviours”

“Support for screentime”

“Being unkind to siblings/friends”



Resources: Websites

- ADHD Wise www.adhdwise.uk
- Autistic Girls Network www.autisticgirlsnetwork.org
- Autistic Realms www.autisticrealms.com
- BRAAIN www.braain.co.uk
- Dr Naomi Fisher www.naomifisher.co.uk
- Grove Neurodivergent Mentoring and Education www.gr0ve.org
- Missing The Mark www.missingthemark.blog
- Neuroqueer.com <https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions>
- NT in a ND World www.nt-in-a-nd-world.com
- Spectrum Gaming www.spectrumgaming.net
- Stimpunks www.stimpunks.org
- Studio 3 www.studio3.org/post/what-is-the-low-arousal-approach
- Sensory Profile sheet www.happylearnersinfo/management/sensory-diet
- How to create a neurodiversity affirming classroom www.thinkingautismguide.com/2025/01
- Situational Mutism, Anxiety, Sleep, Food and Eating and many more topics www.laurahellfeld.co.uk
- Interoception www.Kelly-Mahler.com
- Barriers to Education www.barrierstoeducation.co.uk
- Hampshire County Council [Family Information and Services Hub | Ordinarily Available Provision and SEND Support](#)



EMPOWER
YOU

Thank you for listening.

Any questions?

Have we got time?

Inspiring positive account of being ADHD Dr Edward Hallowell Ferrari Brain, Bicycle Brakes

<https://youtu.be/i5D56Cg7y4I>

Kirsty Forbes – Autism & ND Support – ‘I am a proud autistic person’

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=305574595485626>