

Practical understanding of neurodivergence

Rhoda

We need to understand Autistic people better, not try to change who they are.

CHRIS PACKHAM



Because growing up can be hard

What we are talking about today

Neurodiverse – A range of brains which may all have different neurotypes. It is natural for human brains to have differences and be diverse.

Neurotype – The pattern or structure of a person's brain / how we can typify their functioning

Neurodivergent – A brain which has a specific neurotype, a specific structure or way of functioning. A brain which may develop at different rates in different ways.

Neurotypical / Allistic – A brain which we believe functions in a 'typical way,' within a range of typical functions or develops at a standard rate. Allistic means not autistic.

Have autism or are autistic? ADHD'er? AuDHD?

Person first language is important to the community



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Autistic Person



Person With Autism

More important language considerations-

- Is it a condition or disorder?
- Is it a mental health problem?
- Is it a disability?

<https://vimeo.com/755133175/00ad486573>



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Which neurodivergences are you aware of?

"In my opinion, labels are important. They help you to understand yourself and explain your strengths and weaknesses to others, along with providing some amazing opportunities along the way."

THEBLOGWITHONEPOST.WORDPRESS.COM

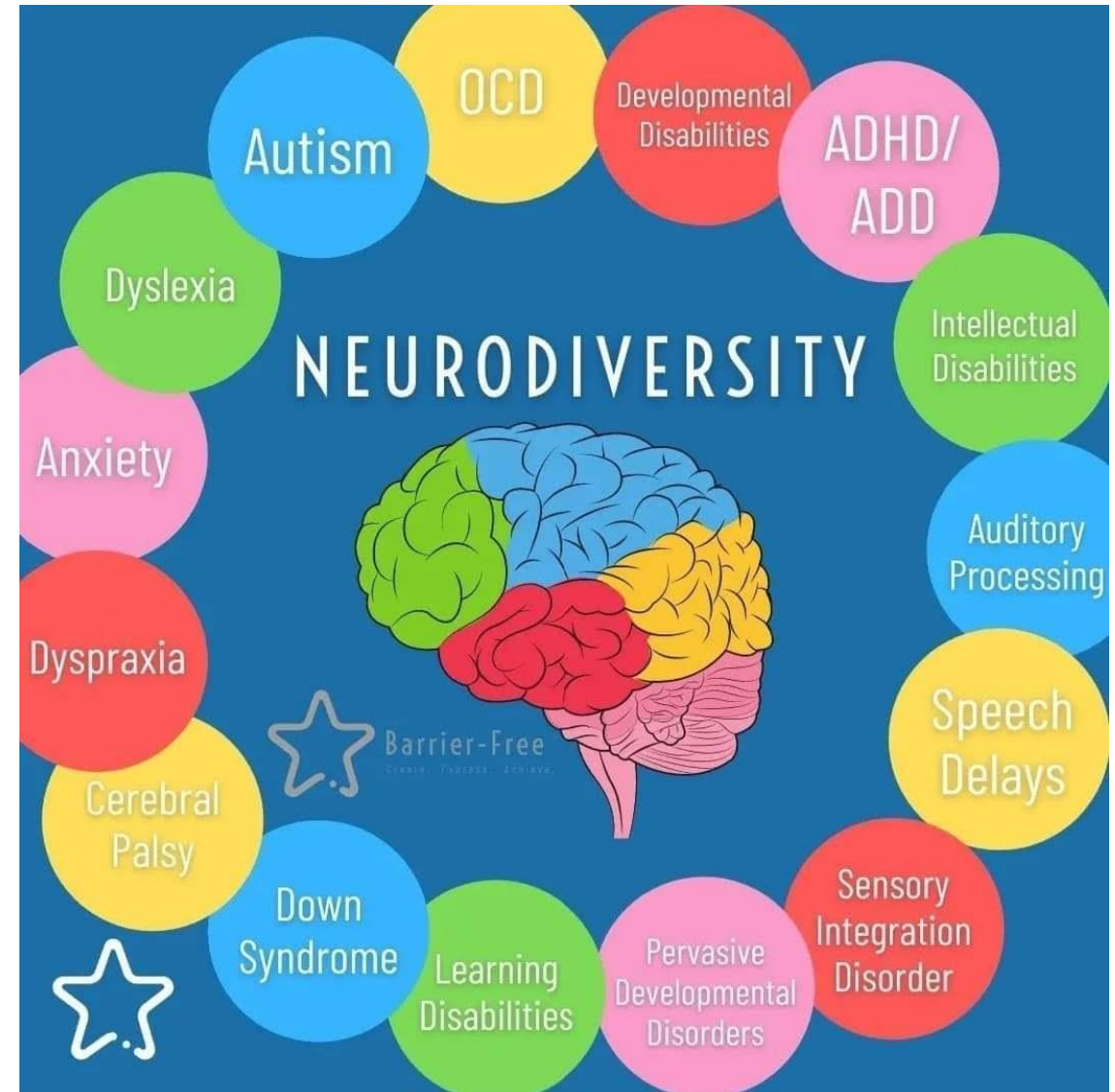
Neurodivergence

Dyspraxia

Autism

ADHD

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Neurodivergent Umbrella

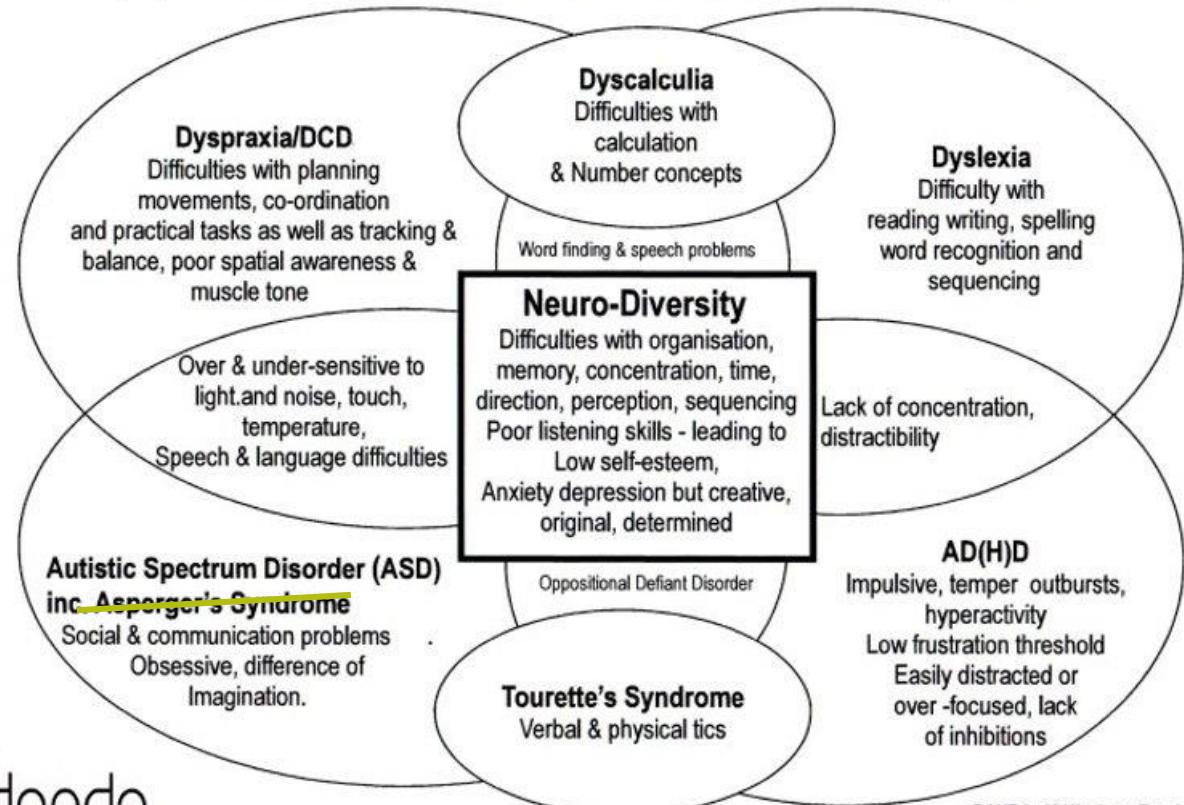
What do you notice about this diagram?



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The Make-up of Neuro-Diversity

This is a document for discussion. Concentrating mainly on the difficulties of those with neuro-diversity. It must however, be pointed out that many people with neuro-diversity are excellent at maths, co-ordination, reading etc . We are people of extremes.

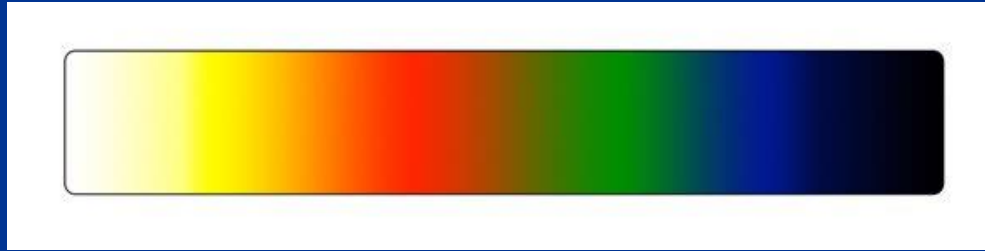


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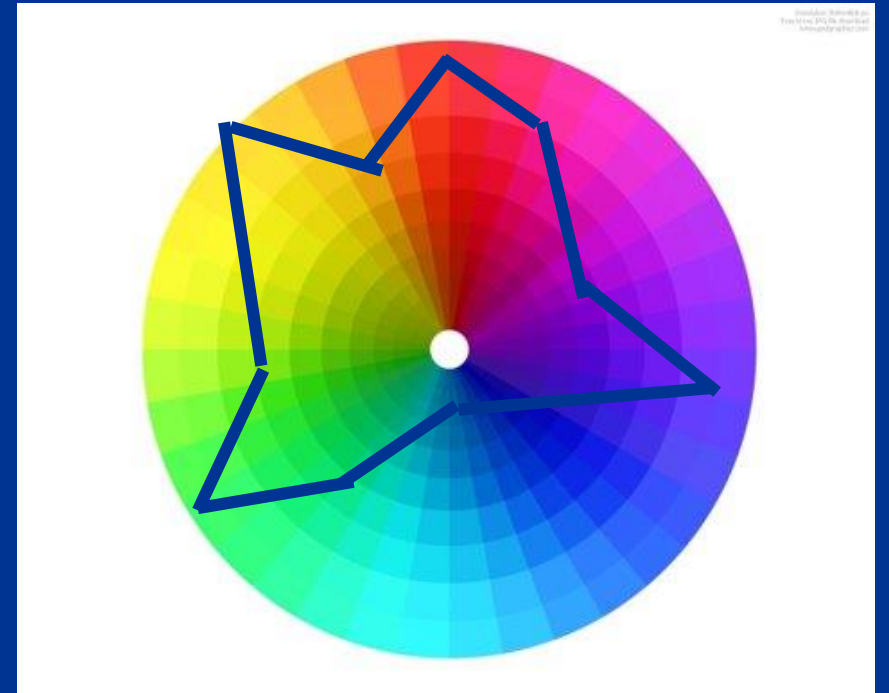
Is it a spectrum?

High Functioning



Low Functioning

OR



This question would be better phrased as “what is a spectrum?”
There is nothing linear about people’s individual autism profiles.

- Autism and ADHD don’t change with age. There is no “adult ADHD.”
- You don’t become “more” or “less” autistic because you get a diagnosis.
- We need to consider why we would use these terms and what bias we are implying
- Some adults are reporting that their experience can change due to menopause, natural brain changes with aging or sensory deterioration.
- The developmental differences may mean some autistics ‘catch up’ with certain stages in later life.

Language

Social Skills

Theory of mind

Perception

So what are the Neurodivergent diagnostic criteria?

Executive Dysfunction

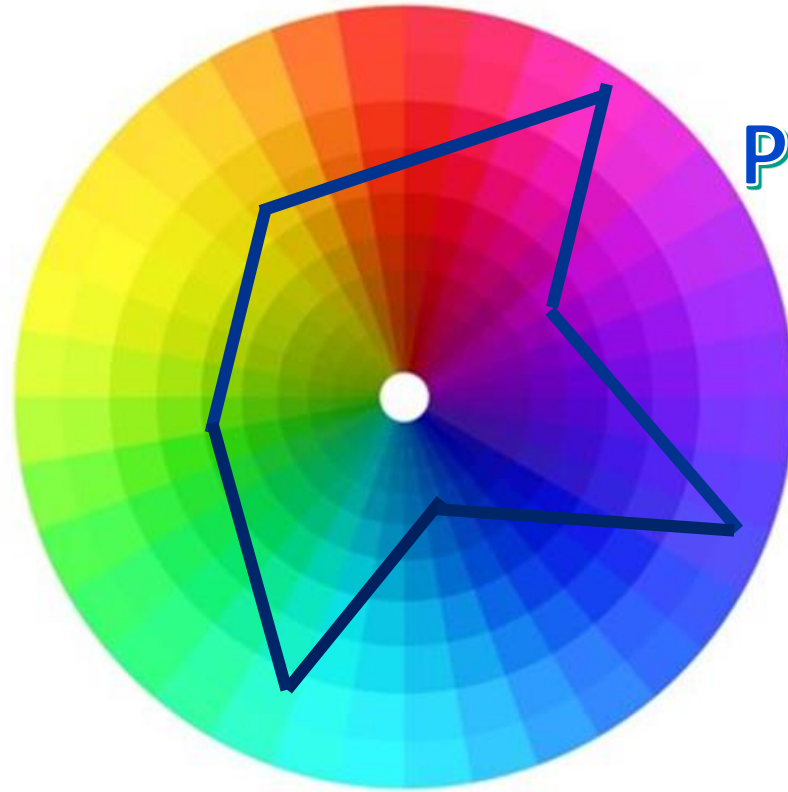
Anxiety

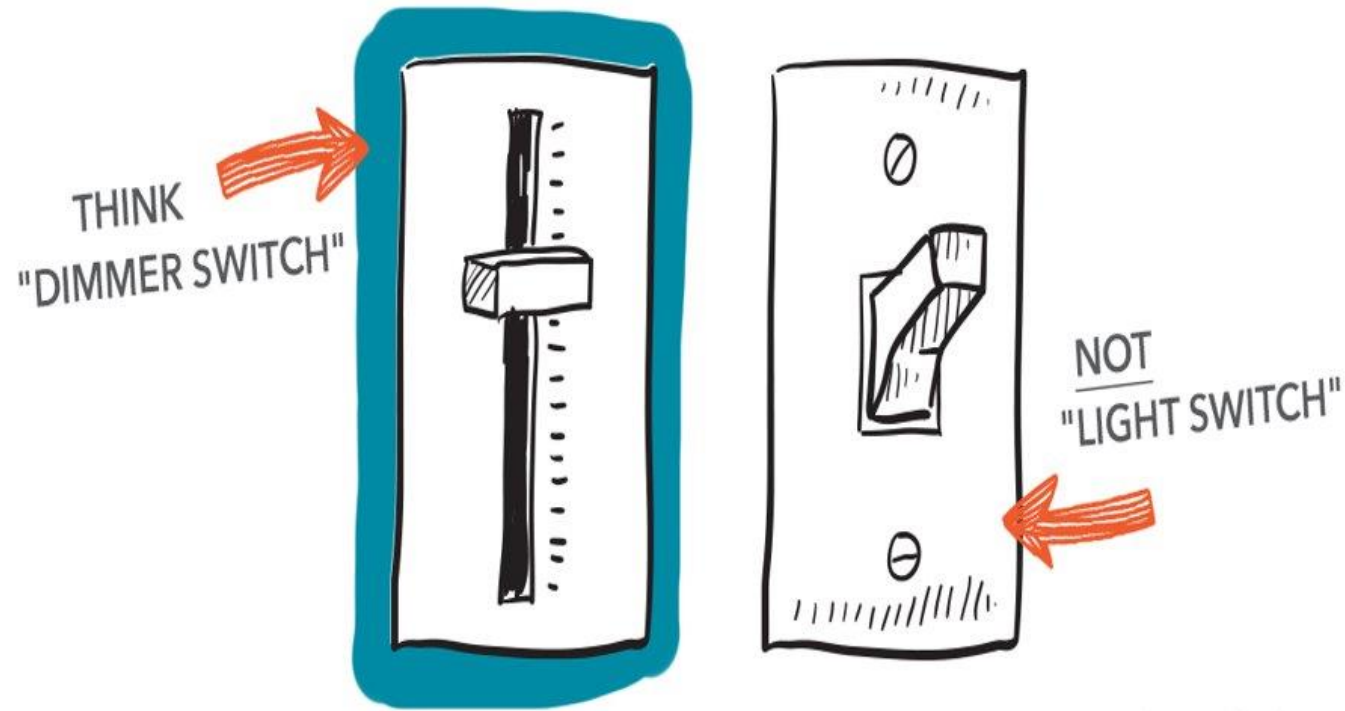
Processing Differences

Sensory

Motor Skills

Motor skills Disrupted by senses





Variable functioning terms help us remove ableist language or presume we know what a person can manage.



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Are the NT's ok?



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Individuals plans for individual brains

My autistic ass when given verbal instructions



@lifeinautismworld



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Non-Verbal?

Autistic or ADHD person's can become non-verbal under times of stress or over-load. It is more common in autistics.

This does not mean they are not capable of speech, their intelligence changes or their wishes should not be asked for. Consent is often ignored in the case of someone being non-verbal rather than alternative communication methods being offered.

The developmental differences for autistic people may mean that some learn to speak very quickly and others take longer. This is an early diagnosis sign in young children. Many young people report knowing language when they were very young but having different interest levels in speaking.

The processing differences of an autistic brain may mean that the person places less significance on speaking as the main method of communication



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Sensory difference

To understand the ND experience, we must centre the sensory experience.

Anxiety...

Is sometimes
the result of
sensory
overload...

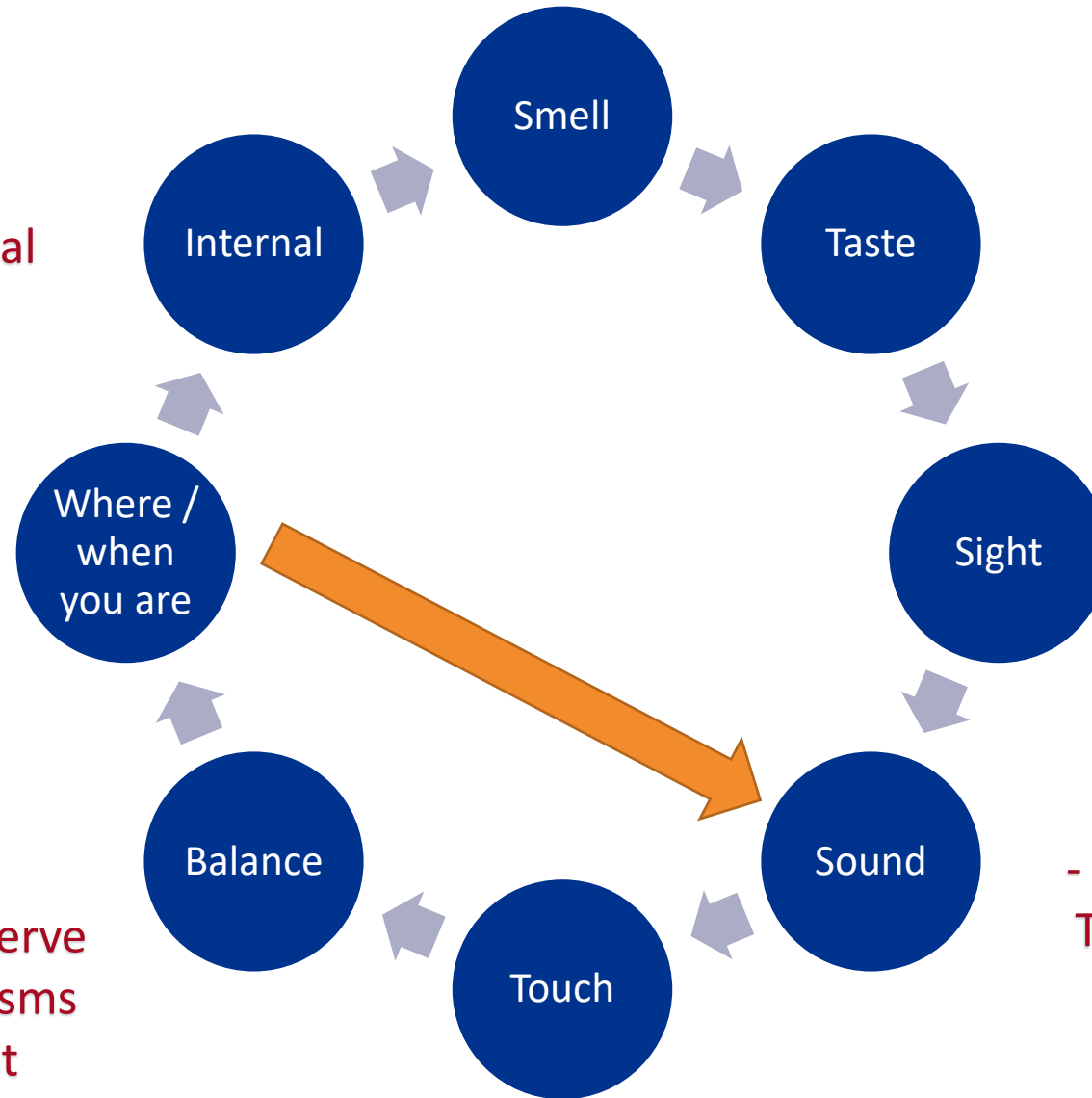
It's called
Sensory Anxiety

sensory stories



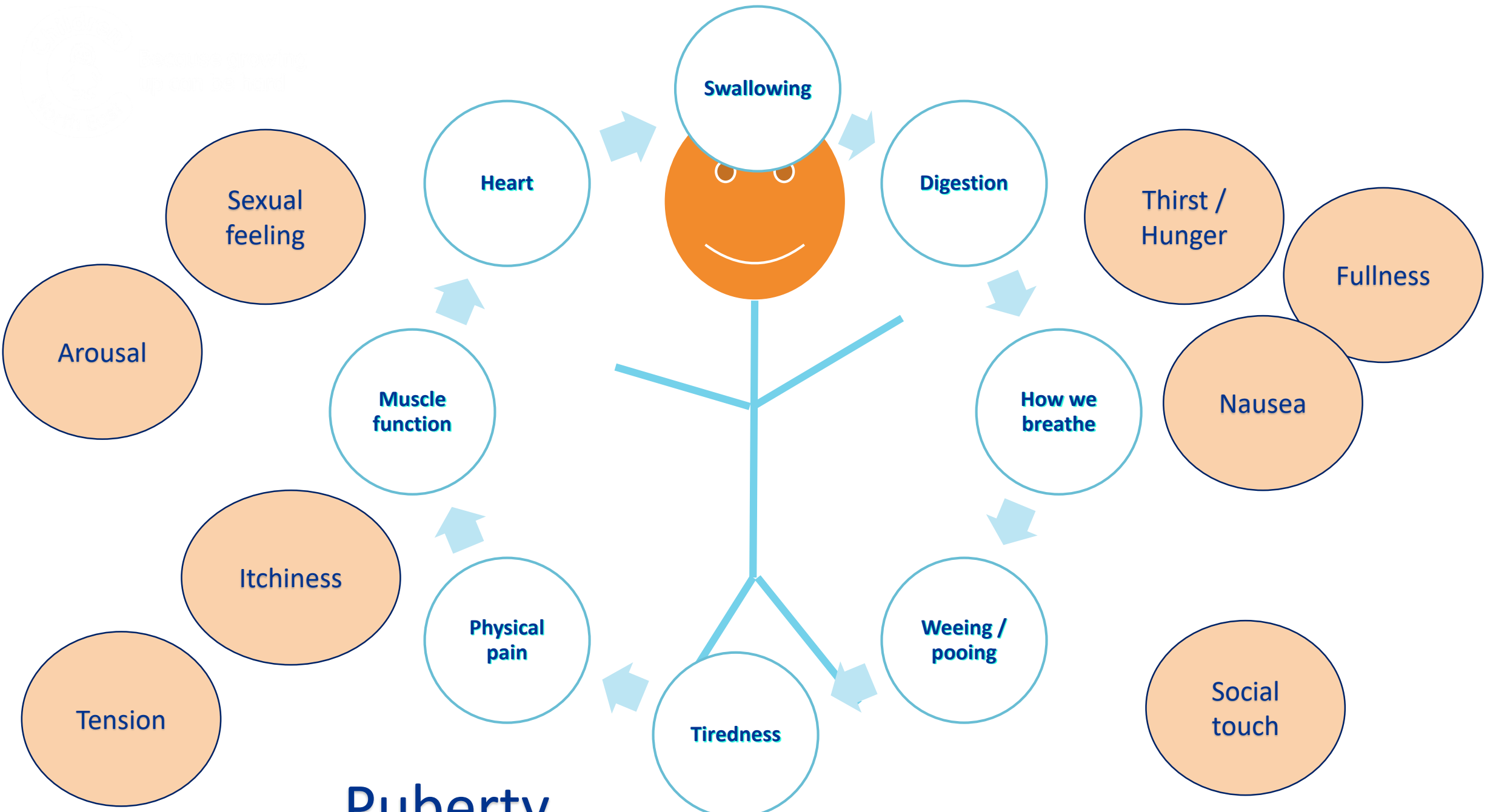
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Interoception –
How we perceive all internal
Functions.



Proprioception
- This is why we may observe
different physical mannerisms
or delayed development

Vestibular system
- Connected sensory systems
That could impact movement,
reactions to sound and
planning action



Puberty....

SENSORY SEEKING AS AN ADULT

smoking cigarettes

eating crunchy foods

listening to music
really loudly

tight hugs

enjoying fizzy soft drinks

eating salt and
vinegar chips

repetitive movements like
rocking back and forth

making noises

seeking specific scents

enjoying dancing
at clubs & pubs

needing
background noise

scrolling on
your phone

lots of heavy
blankets



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@livedexperienceeducator

Vestibular regulation – movement to process



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Sensory differences about food

- Sensory differences can make food taste stronger, taste less, feel more or less texture.
- Avoiding foods or only having a limited diet is not “fussiness.” This is a way to cope with the overwhelm these sensations may cause.
- ARFID needs to be taken seriously. It is not “fussiness.” It can lead to malnourishment and death. Traditional eating disorder treatment may be traumatic to neurodivergent people.

“The pasta makes me feel angry when it’s made wrong. My mam’s always arguing with me when I leave it. I just cook for myself now”

“I have to eat really slowly and can only take really small bites. It’s always in my head that I’m going to choke. This means I can feel full and leave most of it. If I do something at the same time I’m more likely to finish it.”

Food and Eating

Common issues to watch for in schools –

- Avoiding eating in front of others – not wanting to be perceived / not wanting to hear others eating / fearful of judgement for what is eaten.
- Avoiding the lunch halls – can be due to multiple sensory issues in this environment
- Regular stomach problems – up to 80% of neurodivergents will have gastrointestinal issues, food intolerances or allergies. This may be increased by greater sensory awareness of how the body functions.
 - Not eating and drinking to avoid using the toilet in schools
 - Not eating and drinking because they don't register hunger/thirst
 - Attention focus – struggling to shift task to go eat



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A lower or different perception of emotions.

Can be the result of depression...

Can be the result of trauma...



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theexpertally

Following



ALEXITHYMIA

A "general deficit of interoception."

50-85%
of autistic
people



experience
alexithymia

10%
of NT
population



Either the body does not produce a physical response sufficient for experiencing an emotion; or a person cannot interpret their own response.

Possible responses to experiencing emotions: panic, confusion, anger, anxiety due to inability to read own body.



Yulika Forman, PhD, LMH
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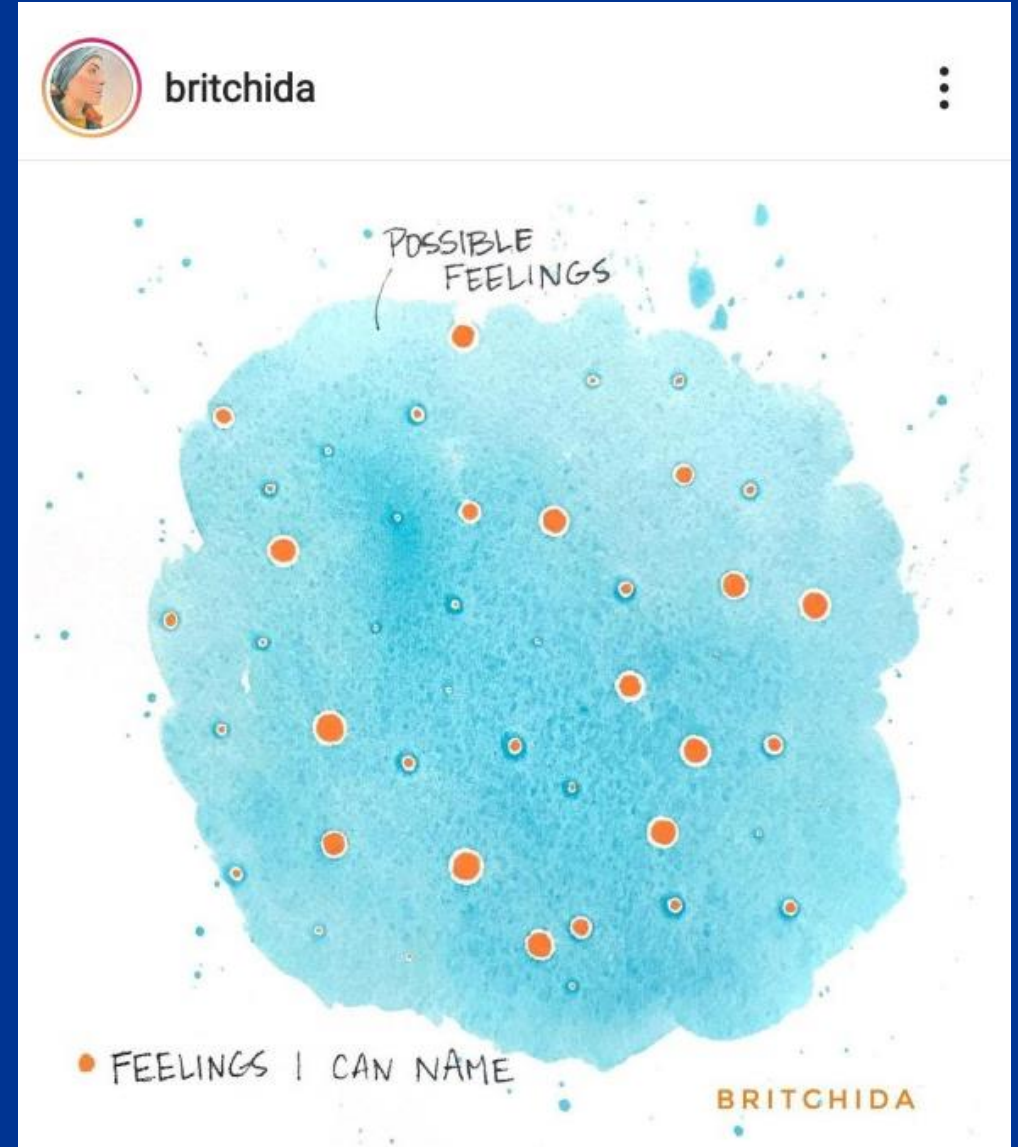
Emotions

If your body gives you less information about what you feel, how would you learn what they are?

Relating and learning about emotions often happens through special interests



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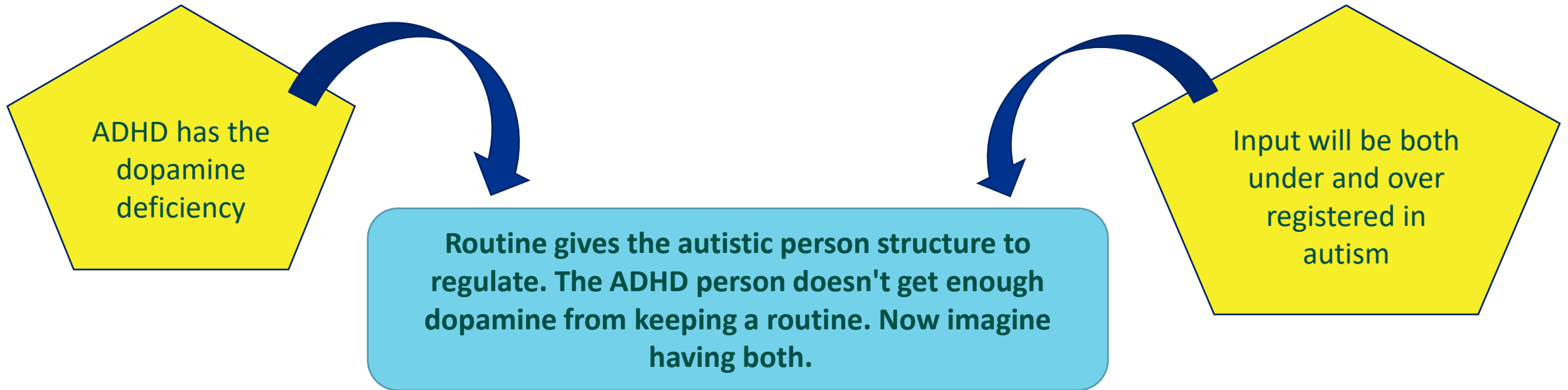


What could be the social implications of alexithymia?

- This is where theory of mind comes in.
- To understand this, image your most strongly held belief. What do you imagine other people think of this issue? How does it impact you for another person to disagree with it?
- If your brain doesn't present you with an emotional language or experience, what would you believe other people's experiences to be?
- If your body doesn't communicate what you feel to your brain, this might be true the other way – it doesn't show as well on the outside when you feel happy or sad.
- What would you think if you saw other people knowing how to react to a statement like- "I had a really annoying journey to school today."
- If you have an overly strong sense of emotions and your internal experience, you may perceive other people's emotions more strongly and become dysregulated from so much input. This might make you appear to want no social contact, when you are seeking breaks.

Distracted or Stimulation difference?

Autism and ADHD will give lower capacity to regulate or differentiate stimulation



Brain Itch – The need for specific sensory input

ADHDer's particularly need to follow the dopamine.

Not being able to do what their brain needs for appropriate stimulation becomes uncomfortable and frustrating.

They often function better when tasks have rewards or feel like a game because this adds a dopamine hit.

However, the executives don't always function. So sometimes you need an input but your system can't tell you what it is.
AND IT ITCHES.



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callafraser borderedlines

bunalien Follow

LOVE the adhd thing where brain demands a very specific and simultaneously very vague type of stimulation and u can't figure out what it is

bunalien Follow

it's like it's defined only in negatives. NOT this. NOT that! and u have to play a not very fun game of elimination until u scratch the itch

Posted in r/adhdmeme by u/3702665s

Motivation is a key issue for all neurodivergent people. This has a lot to do with executive functioning and the need for appropriate stimulation. Boredom can feel physically painful/draining

Body doubling - This is a method of working alongside another person to provide a model for working.

Isolation – Putting people in isolation is potentially traumatic. Young people need to feel this is fair, they have something to do and be distracted from their thoughts. **Others when they ask for this need to be put in a space that will need their needs and provide a way for them to regulate.**



Stimming

When we talk about regulation for an autistic person, this is the additional effort that processing a feeling or event might take for them.

Stimming is a natural method of doing this.


Stim =

Self stimulation

This is normal for all people to some extent



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 cray0n-b0x



flappy hands are happy hands! happy autism acceptance month!!!

(inspired by Keith Haring :D!!)

4 694 notes



Neurodivergent Rebel  
@NeuroRebel

Verbal stimming is when an autistic person is soothing themselves by making different sounds, singing songs, or saying comforting words or phrases from scripts or potentially other things they've picked up that just are comforting to them.

[#ActuallyAutistic](#) [#stimming](#)

9:19 PM · 5/1/20 from Texas, USA · Twitter for

How can you incorporate stims into make it normal for everyone.

Stimming isn't "maladaptive" or a sign your child "lacks coping skills."

Stimming IS a coping skill!

Your child is independently noticing an emotional or physical need and tapping into their body's resources to fill it.
And that's amazing!

(Psst... Unconscious stims fill needs too!)

Everybody stims!

Stimming is short for "self stimulation".
It's the act of using a sensory experience—especially a repetitive one—to achieve a positive end, like stress relief, comfort, pain reduction, or joy!

Some common stims...



Listening to music to pump yourself up



Calming down with a hot bath



Tapping your toes to help you concentrate

@catladyjustice



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The executive functions of the brain control-

- Organisation
- Prioritisation
- Working Memory
- Emotional regulation
- Impulse control
- Task initiation (switching tasks)
- Self-monitoring



My executives need to function to run the organisation. I'm supposed to be in charge but I can't do anything without them.



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What does executive dysfunction mean?



dentalectomy Follow

by which i mean, like, here's how my brain parses the steps in making coffee

good day:

1. make coffee

regular day:

1. put water in coffee maker
2. put coffee in coffee maker
3. turn on coffee maker

bad day:

1. take pot from coffee maker
2. turn on sink
3. fill up coffee pot
4. turn off sink
5. pour water into coffee maker
6. put coffee pot in coffee maker
7. open cupboard
8. get coffee filter from cupboard
9. get coffee beans from cupboard
10. put filter in coffee pot
11. measure coffee
12. pour coffee into filter
13. close coffee maker
14. turn coffee maker on

anyway this is a "14 steps to make coffee" kind of day

What makes the mornings so challenging?

Morning transitions

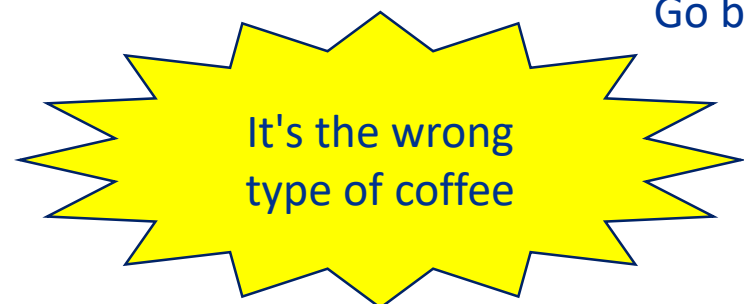
Register the thirst

Internal debate – do I deserve coffee, am I thirsty enough, could I be doing something more fun right now, I'm terrible for thinking any of this.

Someone asks me a question.
Something on my phone

Go back to the beginning

It's the wrong
type of coffee



Sleep

- Autism and Sleep - Attwood and Garnett Events



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Autism, neurodivergence and gender is more than a diagnosis issue

“This one will do”



Autigender describes the unique
experience of gender many will feel



ADHD is more likely to cause body dysmorphia.
It is possible that autism will have this too.



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Puberty and Bodies

Take everything we've been talking about – different senses, emotional understanding, different feelings about social norms – what would this be like in puberty?



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Sense of Justice

- Almost all neurodivergents have a very strong sense of justice.
- Perceiving things to be right or wrong can make a big difference to how they react to a situation.
- Being treated unfairly may cause significant distress and meltdowns.
- Viewing things as right or wrong makes executive functioning easier and it can help you plan an appropriate response.
- Being treated unfairly will often result in a situation where you don't know how to respond, so it will be avoided.
- Treat others as you'd like to be treated basically.



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What are appropriate consequences for ND young people?

Being in isolation can be a traumatic experience for some ND young people.

Young people have told us:

- It's too noisy there
- It's too quiet there
- I was put with people who had done something really bad, I just needed a place to calm down. It's like you're telling me I'm the same as them.
- What adjustments can be made to spaces like this?
- Can stim tools or headphones be used in this space?
- **"My teacher always says I've got to stop going there, but that's the only place I can do my work."** Why is there an emphasis on bringing people out of the support zones? Why are the young people expected to change or cope, when adjustments haven't been made to the classes.
- **Talk about what they were struggling with first and explore reasonable change.**



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PDA

Pathological Demand Avoidance VS Persistent Drive for Autonomy

This is not something that is formally diagnosed in the UK, though there is a move to recognise it as a set of characteristics.

Some degree of PDA may be present in all neurodivergents – although, are we just seeing this differing set of personalities through a neurotypical lens?

In the extremes we have also seen ‘Oppositional Defiance Disorder’ as a diagnosis. It can also be mistaken for a narcissistic personality disorder or EUPD/BPD.

It is like being persistently being told you're wrong and needing to know why but most people won't tell you; rejecting anyone you perceive doesn't respect you; constantly being told to do what other people want; building up guilt and stress because you really do want to help others and make them happy but it doesn't make sense to you to do it the way they want... and absorbing all the pain and hurt and frustration of everyone around you but you can't do anything about it...

Let's play
the
diagnostic
language
game
again...

10 BEHAVIOURAL FEATURES OF PDA

Research from O'Nions and colleagues (2016)

1. Non-compliance to even the most innocuous requests and insistence that others comply with their requests
2. Strategic avoidance of demands
3. Behaviours that suggest awareness of what might cause a diversion
4. Obsessive need for control, including domineering behaviour
5. A tendency to perceive themselves as having adult status
6. Poor social awareness
7. Seeming lack of responsibility or sensitivity to other people's distress
8. Sudden mood changes
9. Engagement and enjoyment in fantasy role-play
10. Extreme behaviour, for e.g., intense reactions to losing games, meltdowns



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School Integration

These are not neurotypical people.

You can't just do everything the same as you always have and expect everyone to be fine.

It is on you to make your school an inclusive environment.

The emphasis should not be on the child to change.

Changes which benefit neurodivergents will benefit all.



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ingridverse Follow

Do not punish the behaviour you want to see

I mean, it seems pretty obvious when you put it like that, right?

But how many families, when an introvert sibling or child makes an effort to socialize, snarkily say, "So, you've decided to join us"?

Or when someone does something they've had trouble doing, say, "Why can't you do that *all* the time?" (Happened to me, too often.)

Or *any* sentence containing the word "finally".

If someone makes a step, a small step, in a direction you want to encourage, *encourage* it. Don't complain about how it's not enough. Don't bring up previous stuff. Encourage it.

Because I **swear to fucking god** there is nothing more soul-killing, more motivation-crushing, than struggling to succeed and finding out that success and failure are both punished.

217,998 notes



Masking

Imagine being 3 and being left with another family who don't speak your language. They have funny rules about when you go to the toilet and want you to eat things you don't normally like.

When you're 5 they ask you to go and see some new people but you can't see them any more. And now there's more rules and shoes that hurt your feet.

A whole new crowd meet you when you're 11 and there's groups of people now who all speak different languages. Not only are there rules for what you do, but some of the people you meet have rules they won't tell you.



This is what happens to every child who goes to nursery. Only it's not... but you get what I mean...

Me when I first started **School**



Me now:



This is actually ok, I just want you to be aware of what your view point might be. The human brain is hardwired to notice difference and it is a survival mechanism.

Autistics have been made to feel they are wrong or different their whole life so how it makes you feel may be less important. Sorry if that's hard to hear.

Neurodivergent people have been trying to change how they act to fit in this whole time, and we still notice them. Maybe it's time to accept them as they are.



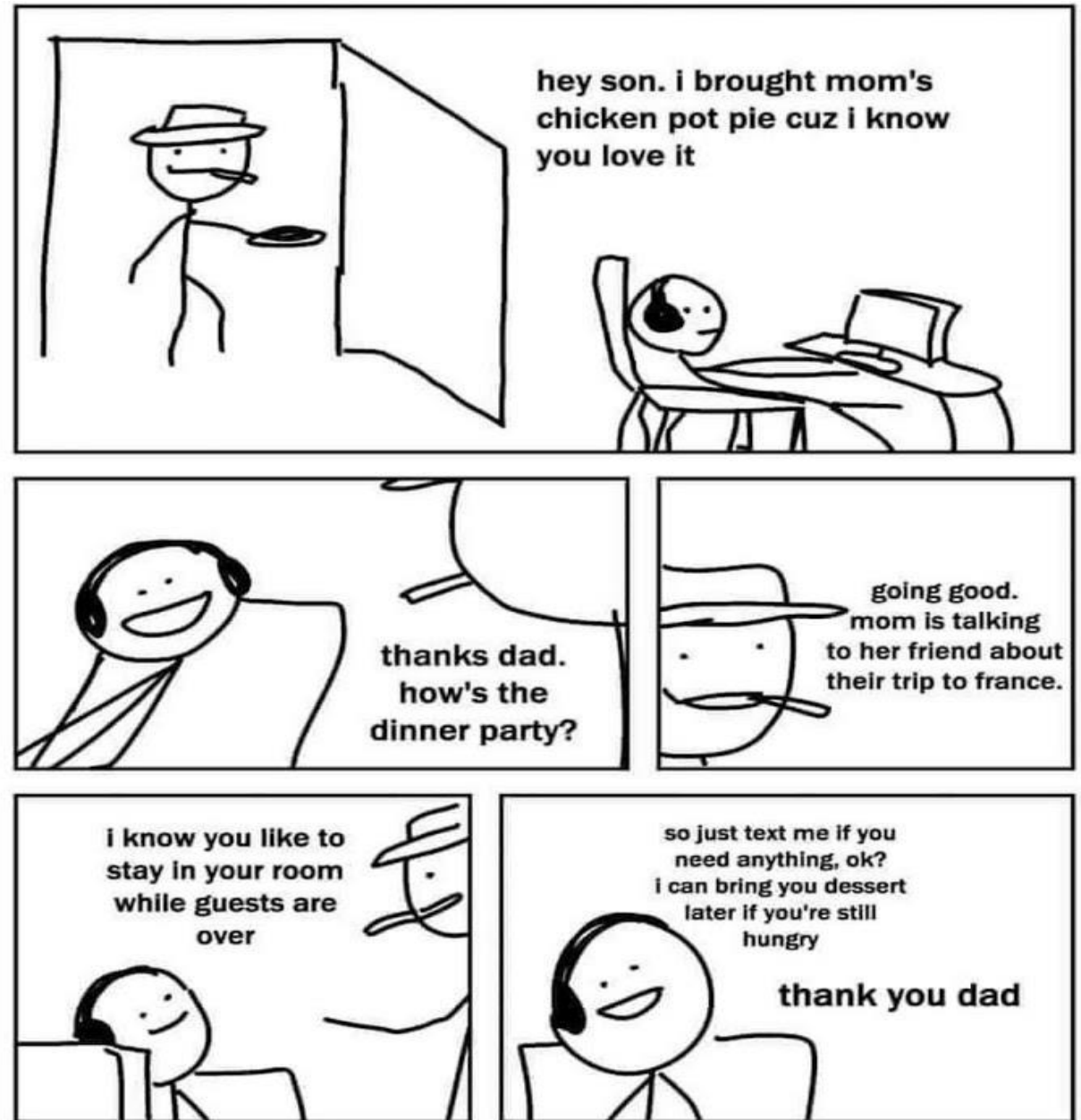
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What would you do if we sent you somewhere the rules kept changing?
Could you cope?

Pretending we are fine won't work.



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What else we can offer

- Autism and self-harm
- Trauma
- OCD and the cross overs with Anxiety
- How to involve autistic people in the organisation of your school
- Individual learning plans
- Puberty and RSE
- Primary to secondary



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