



NEUROCURIOUS?

A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO LEARNING AND THRIVING

Joanna Bailey and India Barnhill

Bluebird[®]
PSYCHOLOGY



Acknowledgement of Country

WELCOME



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Introducing

JO & INDI

Bluebird[®]
PSYCHOLOGY



Joanna Bailey

- Clinical psychologist and Director of Bluebird Psychology in Castle Hill.
- Neurodivergent person and a parent of Neurodivergent children.
- Facilitator of Bright Birds Women's ADHD Support Group.
- Member of the Australian ADHD Professionals Association.
- Board approved supervisor of trainee psychologists.
- Alumni of Western Sydney University

India Barnhill

- Current Psychology student
- Psychology Assistant at Bluebird Psychology
- Passionate about understanding neurodiversity and mental health
- Advocates for environments where difference is recognised, accepted, and celebrated
- Co-facilitator of Neurokin Society Support Group
- Alumni of Western Sydney University



Our Values and Vision at Bluebird

Who are we?

Bluebird aims to create a warm and inviting space with comfortable lighting, cozy music, a variety of drink options, and friendly and compassionate team members.

Our neuroaffirming approach

We take a neuroaffirming approach that values each person's unique mind. Guided by lived experience, we create compassionate, inclusive spaces where people feel truly understood

Our Core Values

Compassion, Creativity,
Community

We lead with empathy and respect, offering flexible, open-minded support tailored to each person. Through genuine connection and collaboration, we foster a sense of belonging within our team and the wider community.



Overview of Session structure and participation options

What's happening today?

- Neurocurious?
- Pros and Cons of Diagnosis
- New Ways to Be Successful at Uni
- Supports, Resources & August Group Invitation
- Wrap-Up & Final Reflections



Before we get started:

Feel free to move around, eat and drink, sit where you feel comfortable

Cameras and chat box will be off for your privacy

There is a lot of content so please hold questions until the end. You can write questions in the Q and A box,



This webinar will be recorded and will be available for others to access as a resource. Please keep this in mind when sharing any of your personal information in the Q and A box. Please mark yourself as 'anonymous' for your own privacy.



Important Note:

The information we will be covering is a very brief overview of very complex topics and is not intended to provide comprehensive or detailed information.

If these topics are relevant to you or your loved ones, please explore this further with your treating professionals



Neurocurious?

What is Neurodiversity?

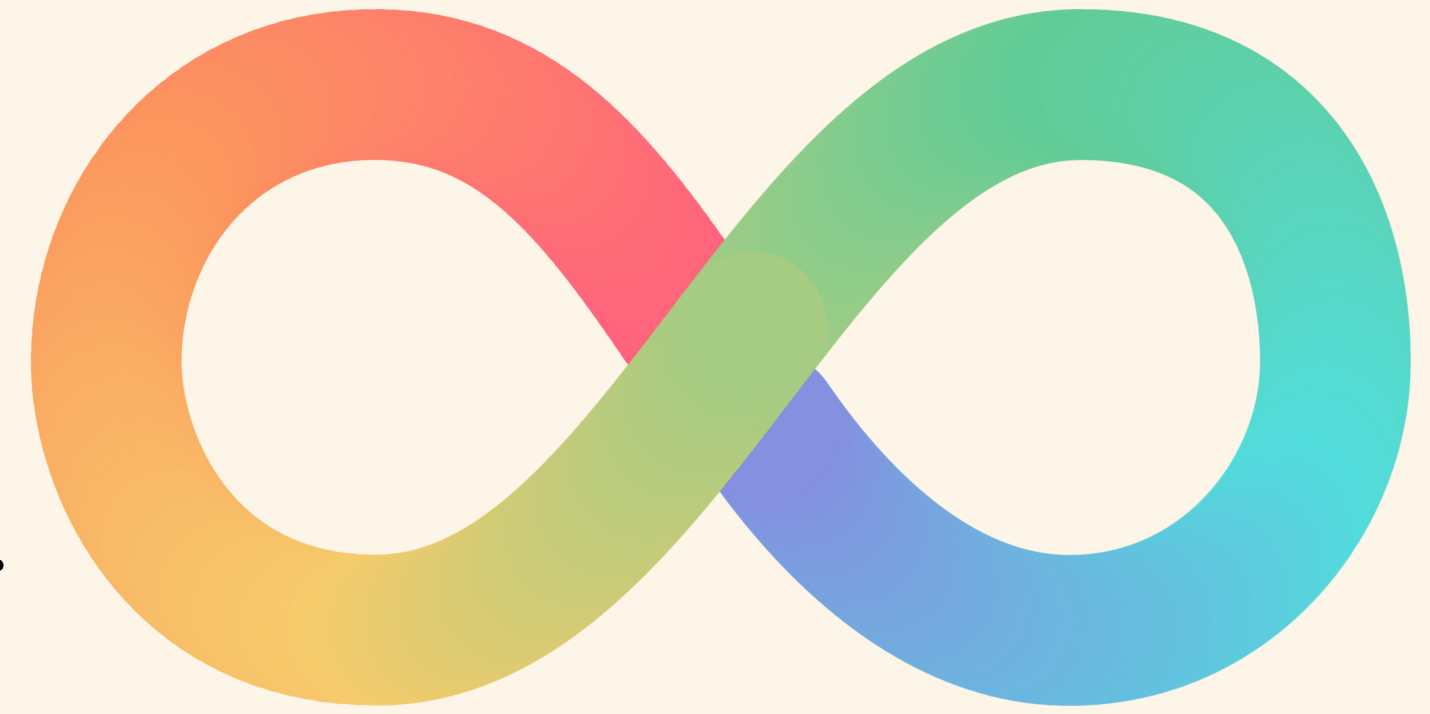
WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

Neurodiversity is a term originally coined by Australian sociologist, Judy Singer, in the late-1990s.

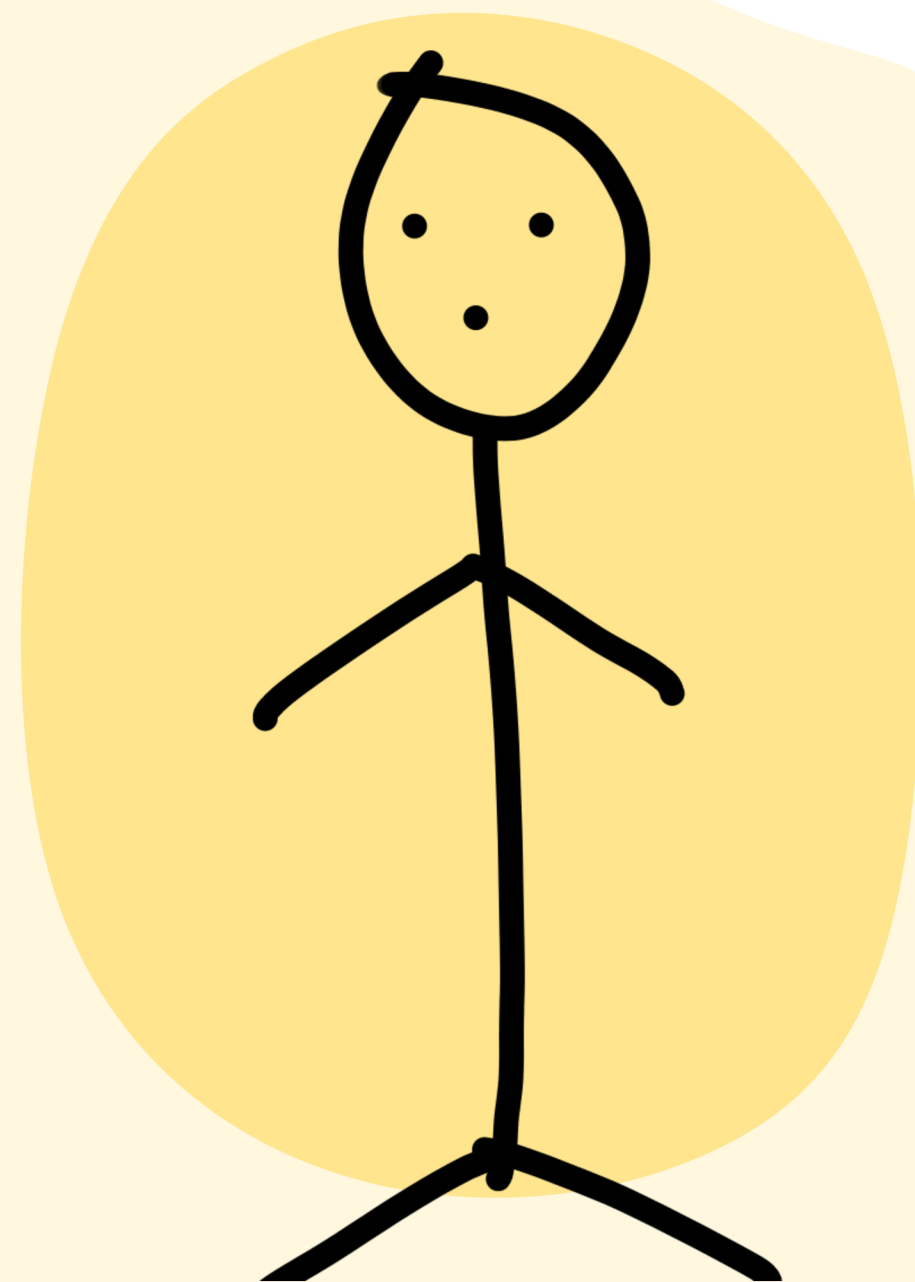
“Neurodiversity is:

- a state of nature to be respected
- an analytical tool for examining social issues
- an argument for the conservation and facilitation of human diversity.

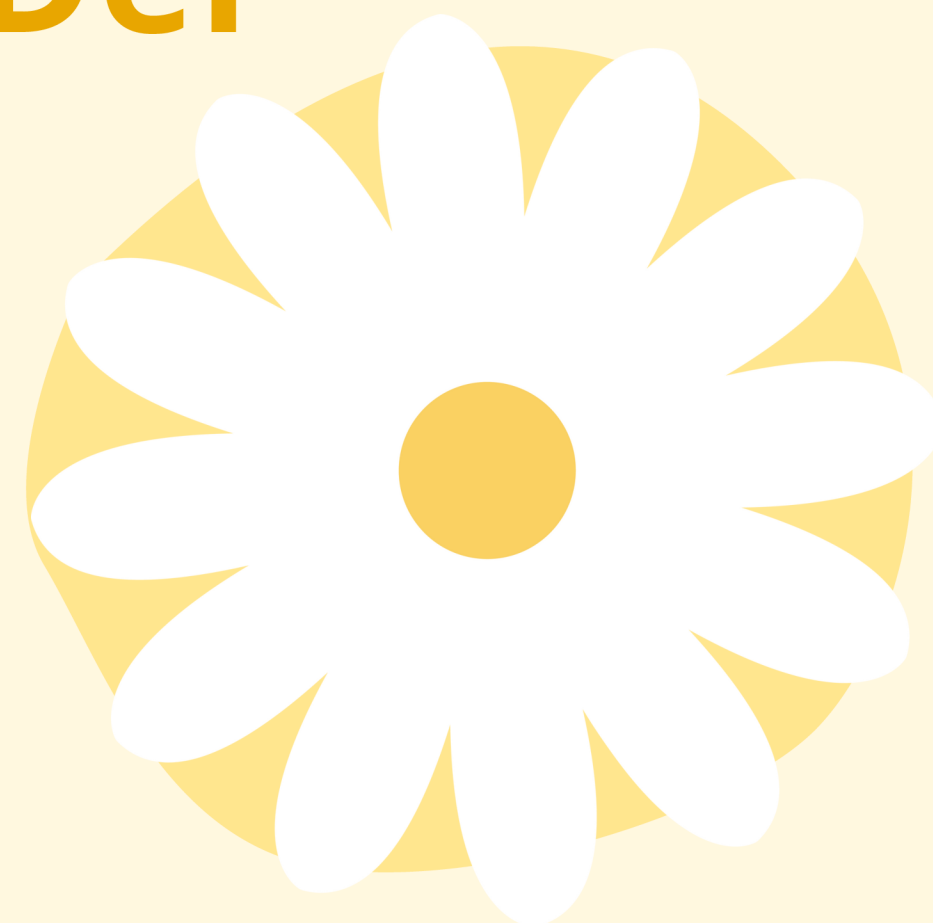
Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?" - J.Singer



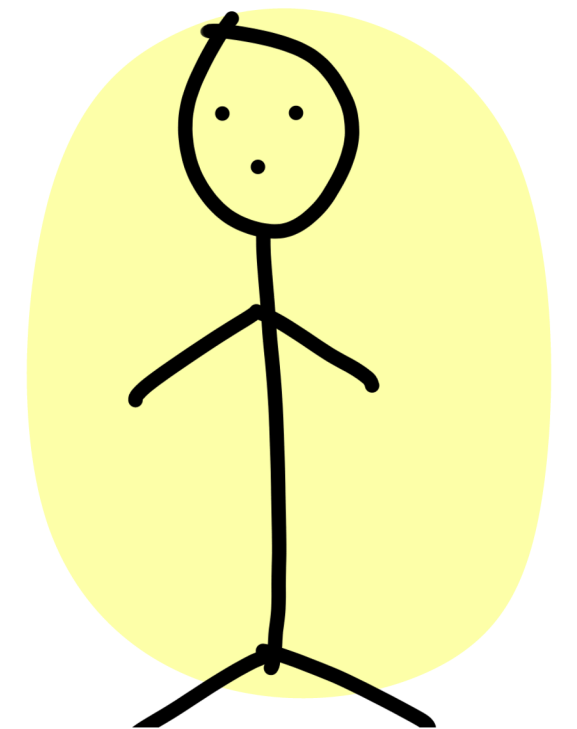
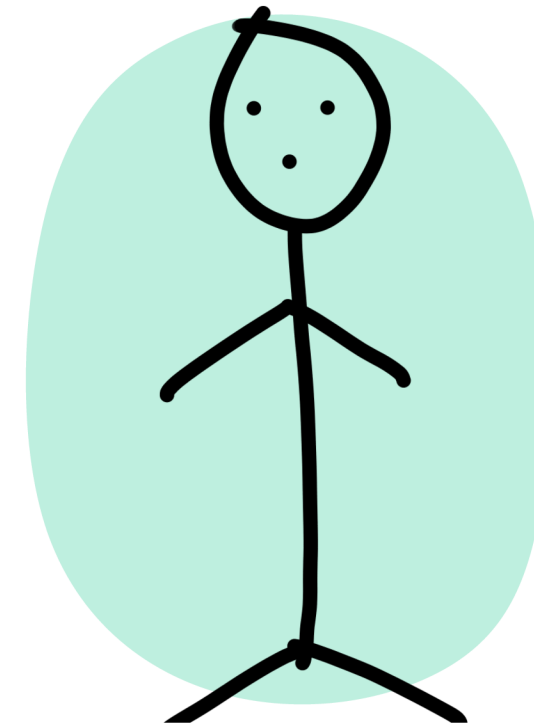
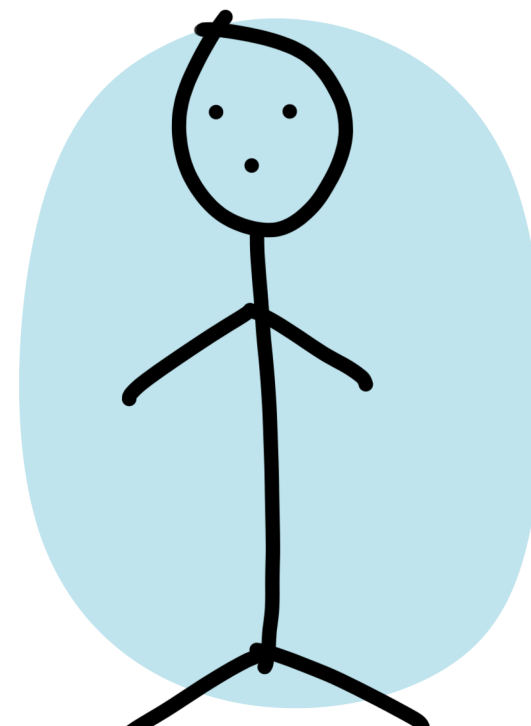
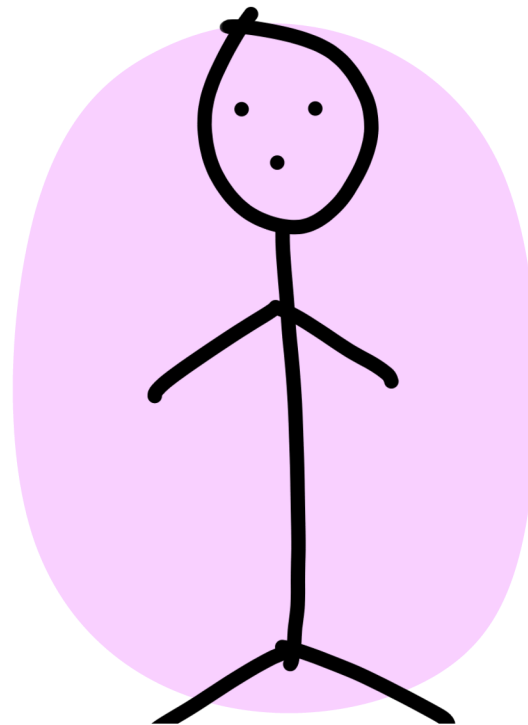
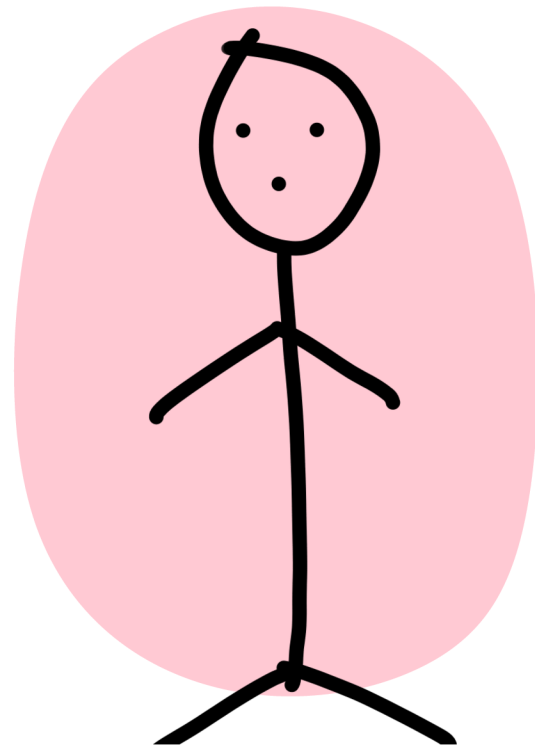
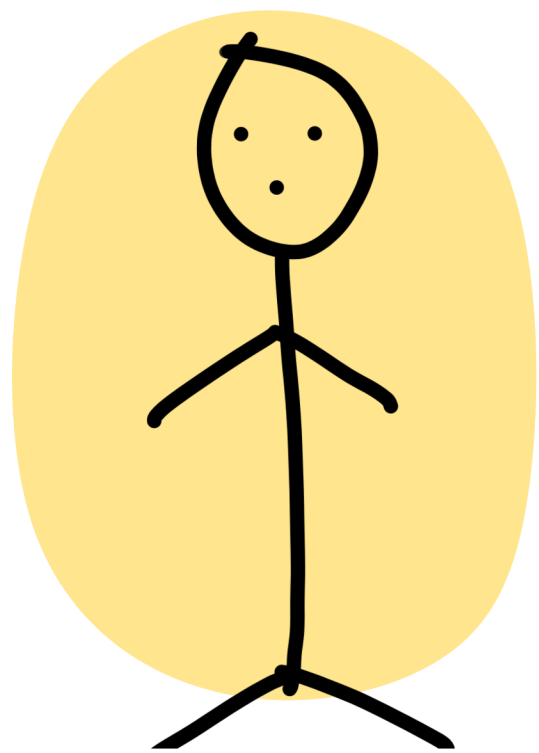
hello



This is Daisy
Daisy is an ADHDer



These are Daisy's friends
They all have diverse brain
functioning

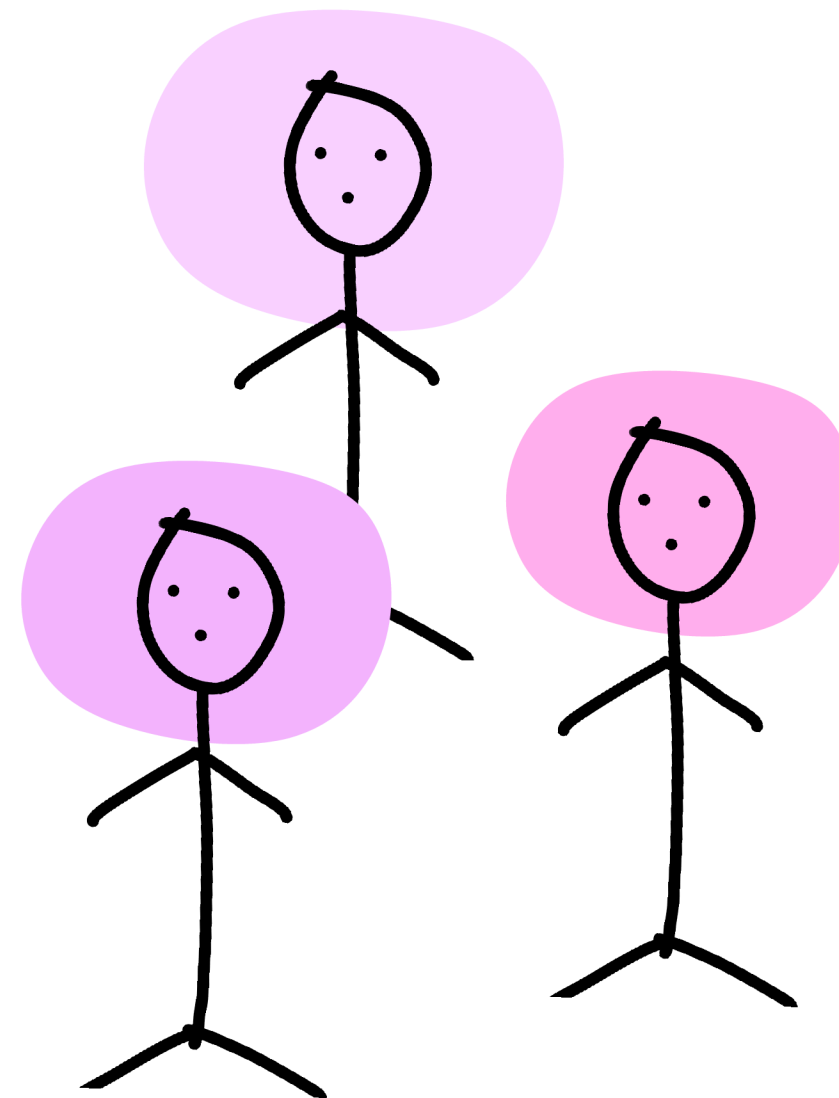


Daisy
ADHD

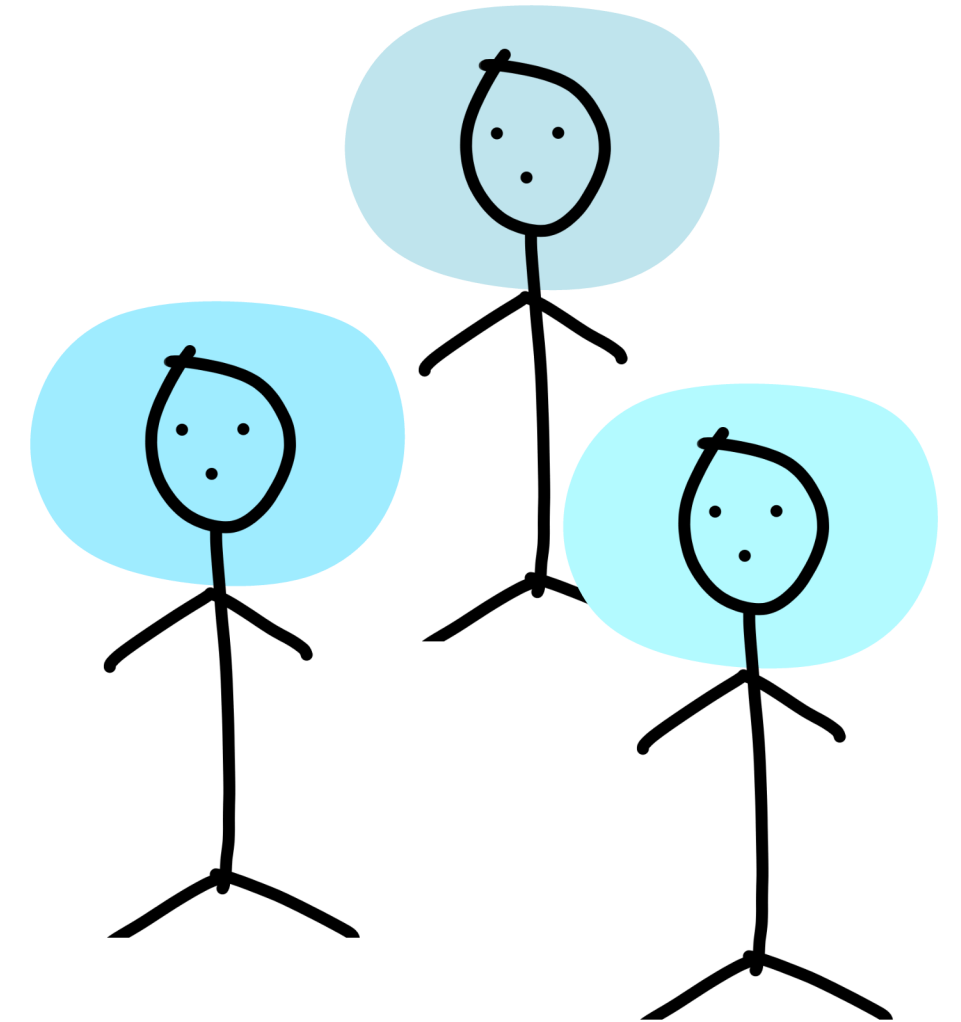
Some people's brain functions are
similar enough that they can be
categorised with a specific
diagnosis or descriptor



ADHD

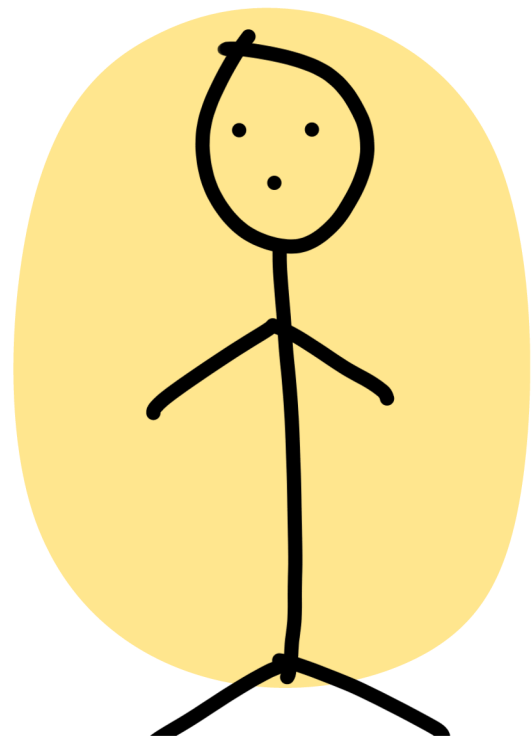


Autism

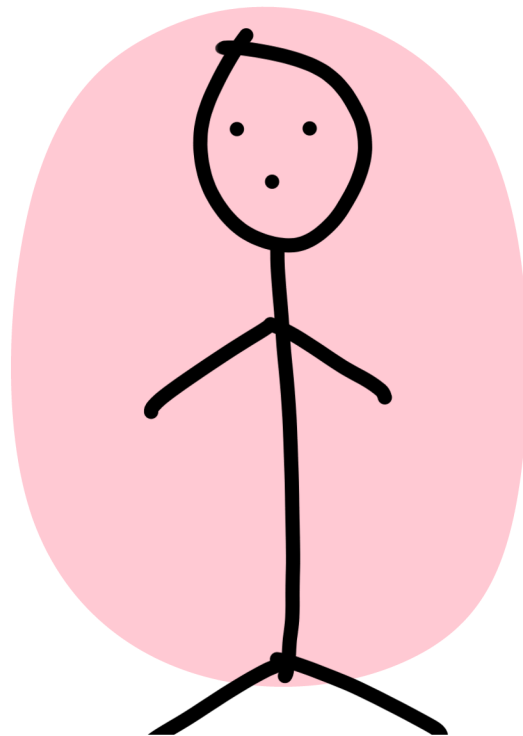


**Tourette
Syndrome**

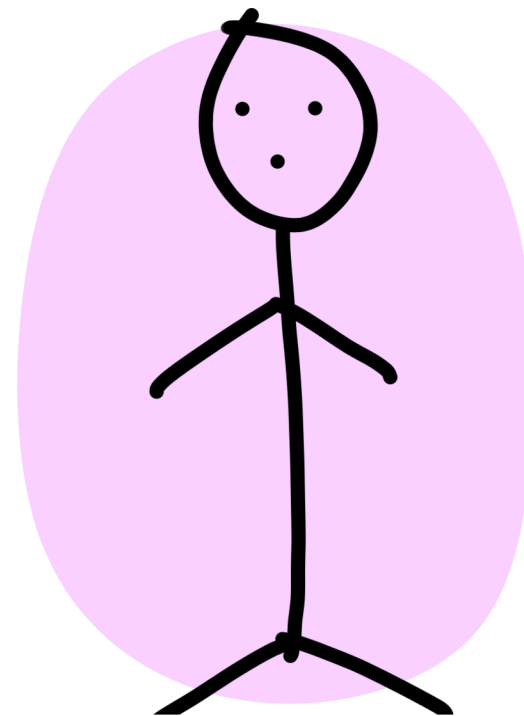
Some of this group are '**Neurodivergent**'
(Meaning - '**Non-Typical**' Brain functioning)



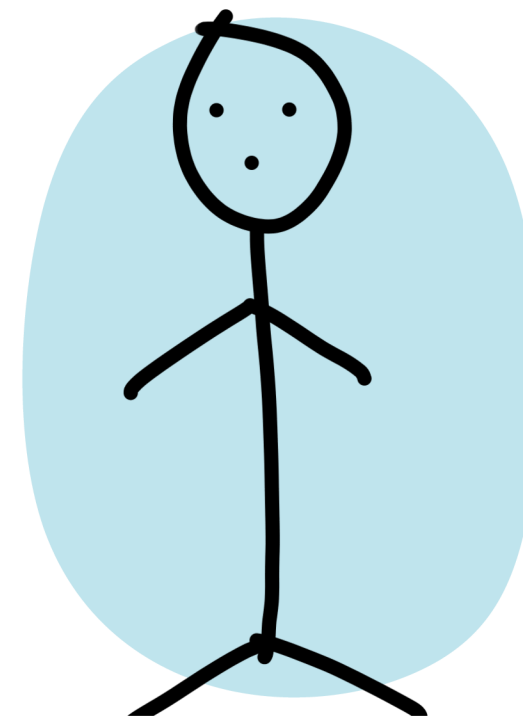
Daisy
ADHD



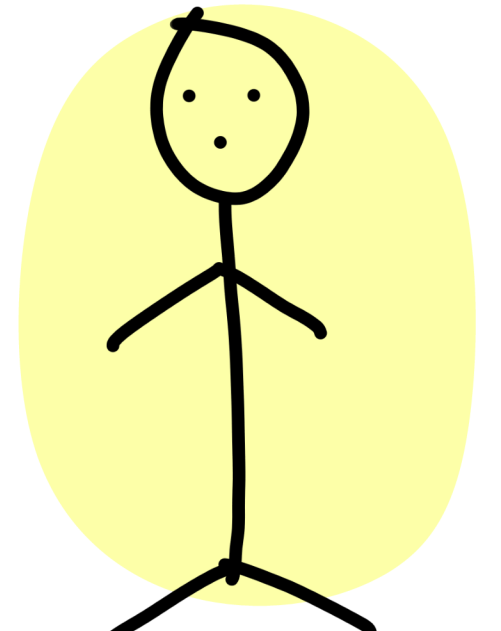
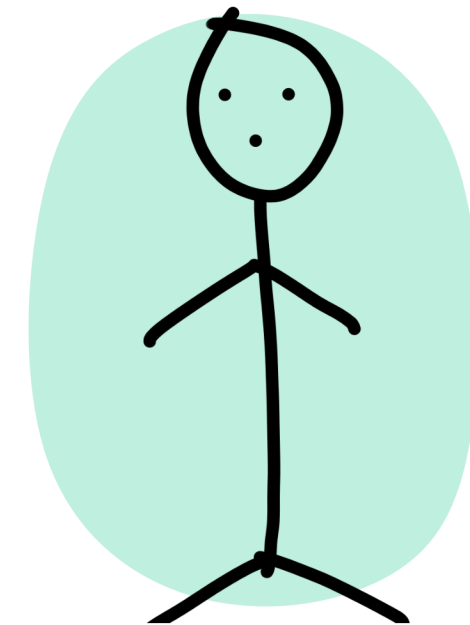
Poppy
ADHD



Lilac
Autism



Lavender
Tourette
Syndrome



**Developmental
Language
Disorder**

**Auditory
Processing
Disorder**

**Oppositional
Defiance
Disorder**

Autism

OCD

**Tourette
Syndrome**

**Developmental
Disabilities**

Epilepsy

**Downs
Syndrome**

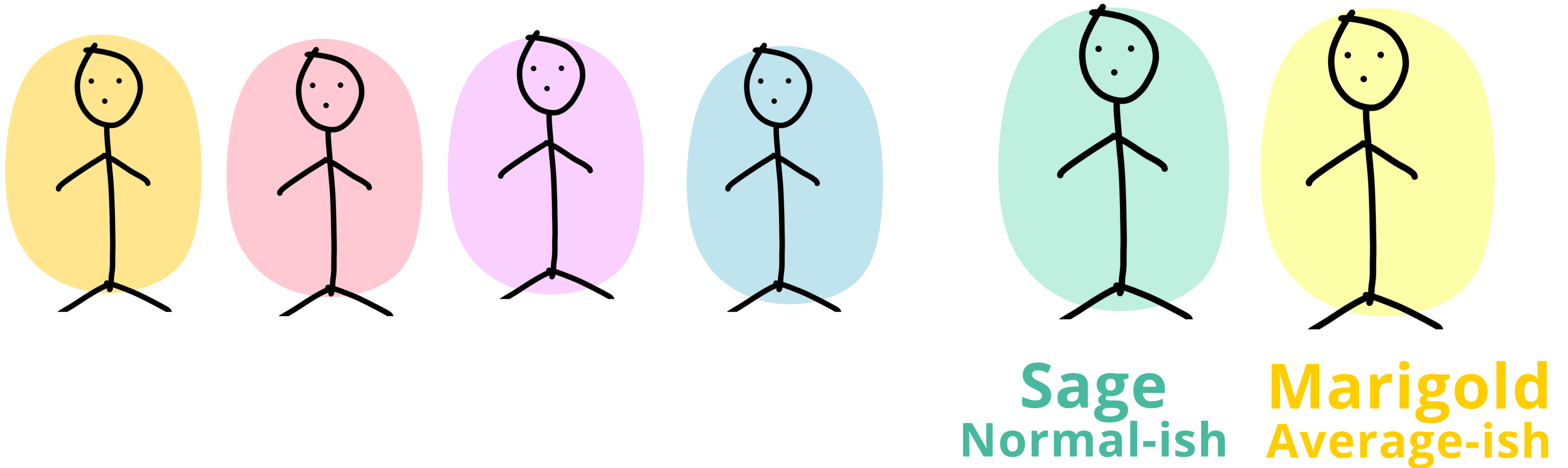
**Sensory
Processing
Disorder**

**Dyslexia,
Dyscalculia
& Dyspraxia**

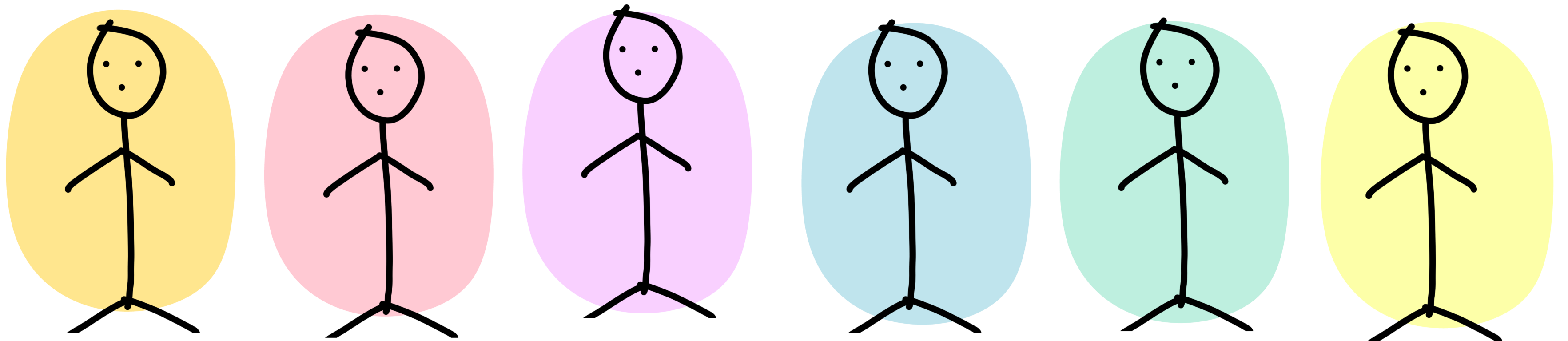
ADHD

**Some presentations
in the Neurodivergent
community include:**

And some of them are 'Neurotypical' or the 'Neuromajority'

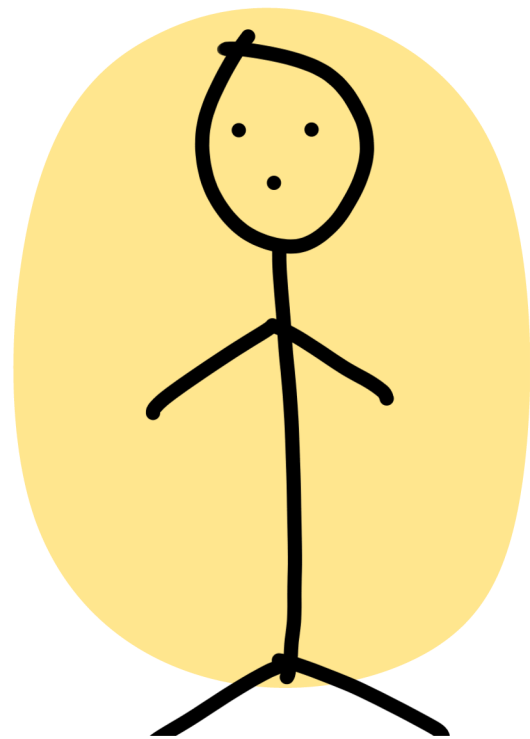


**Because they have a variety
of brain 'types' they are a**

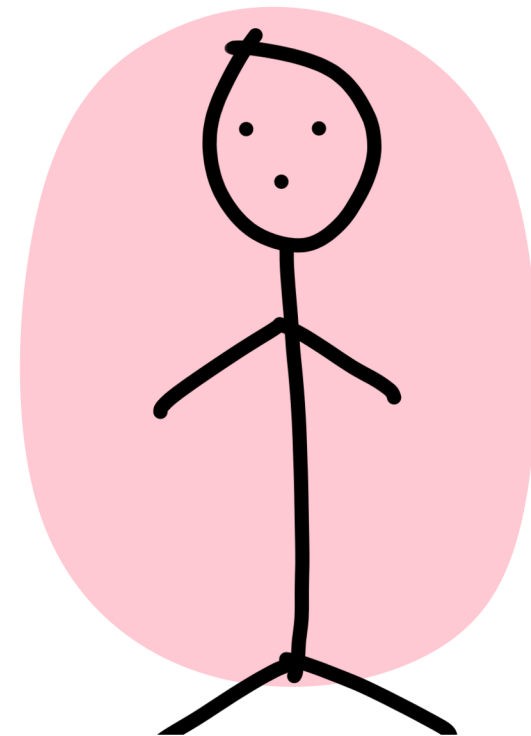


NEURODIVERSE
group

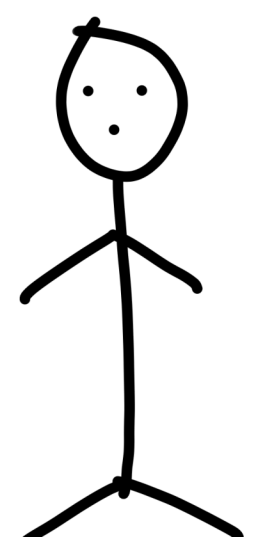
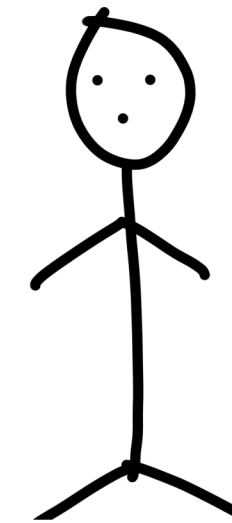
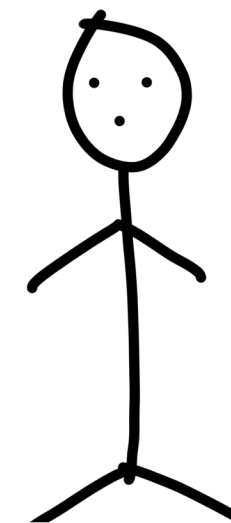
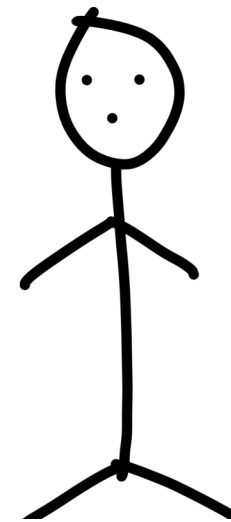
**Because Daisy and Poppy
have a similar neurotype,
they are NEUROKIN (Neurological family)**



Daisy
ADHD



Poppy
ADHD

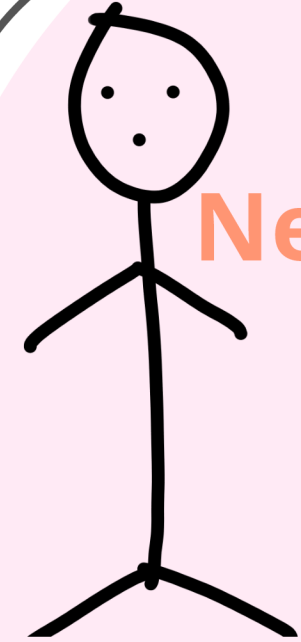


**Although they will still have their
own unique strengths and struggles**

This is a
NEURODIVERSE
group

Neurodivergent

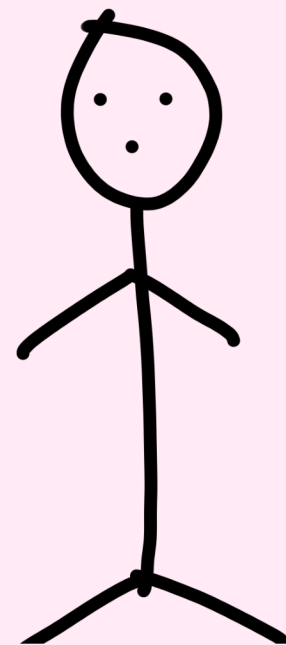
Neurokin



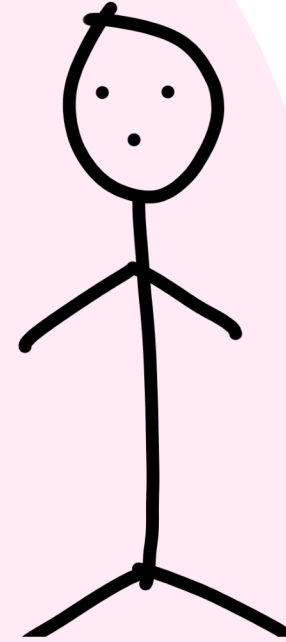
ADHD



ADHD

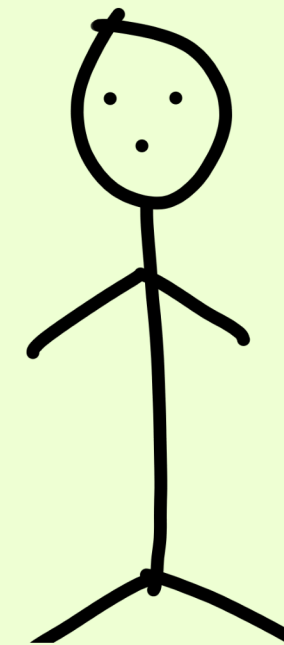


Autism

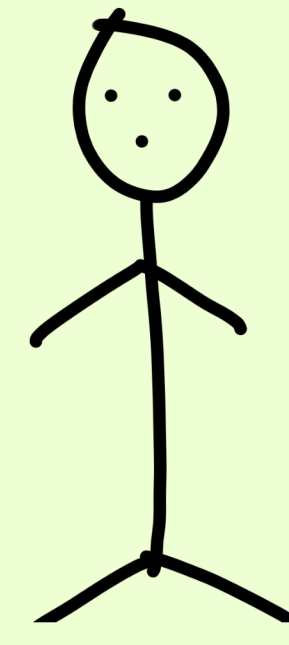


Tourette
Syndrome

Neurotypical



Normal-ish



Average-ish

Terminology:

Neurodiversity: (term from Judy Singer)

Refers to the diversity of human brains and neurological systems and our associated thoughts, feelings, actions and functioning.

Neurodivergent (term from Kassiane Asasumasu)

An individual who's mind, neurology or functioning diverges from society's expectation of the 'norm'. This can include learning, processing, feeling, interpreting, communicating, behaving and more.

Neurotypical

An individual who's functioning falls within dominant accepted social norms.

Neurodiverse

A group who have different or diverse neurological functioning as compared with each other. Society, classrooms and many other social groups are neurodiverse. An individual cannot be neurodiverse as they have one brain, they can be neurodivergent.

Neuronormativity

Standards, expectations and norms that are commonly seen as the 'right' or 'typical way of being or functioning.



Neurocurious?

What is ADHD?

A bit about ADHD

Neurological Difference:

This means that people with ADHD have unique brain wiring. ADHD is understood as a natural variation in human neurology.

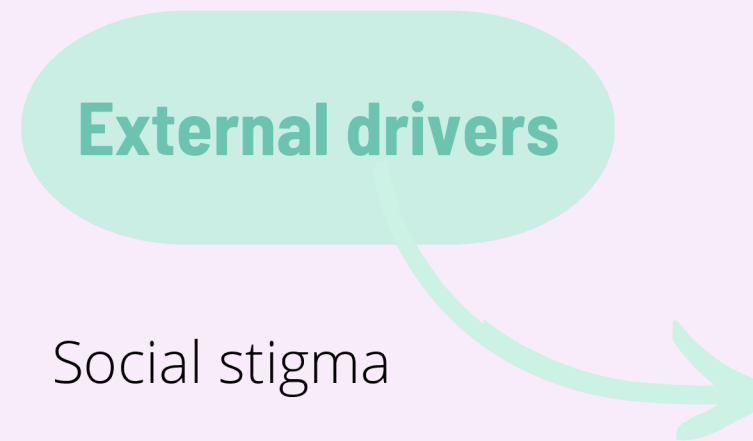
Differences exist in a range of areas including executive functioning. This means people with ADHD may have differences with impulse control, emotion regulation, decision making, focusing and organisation.

Did you know ADHD is hereditary. One study found heritability could be as high as 91%. For this reason you may want to consider ADHD traits in your biological family.

An area for debate:

Many ADHDers, researchers and support people would say that ADHD fits the definition of a **disability** - meaning that it requires accommodations and can cause significant dysfunction if these accommodations are not made, however it should not be seen as a '**disorder**', but rather than a '**difference**' if we are to take a neuroaffirmative stance.

A small sample of primary and secondary Adult ADHD traits

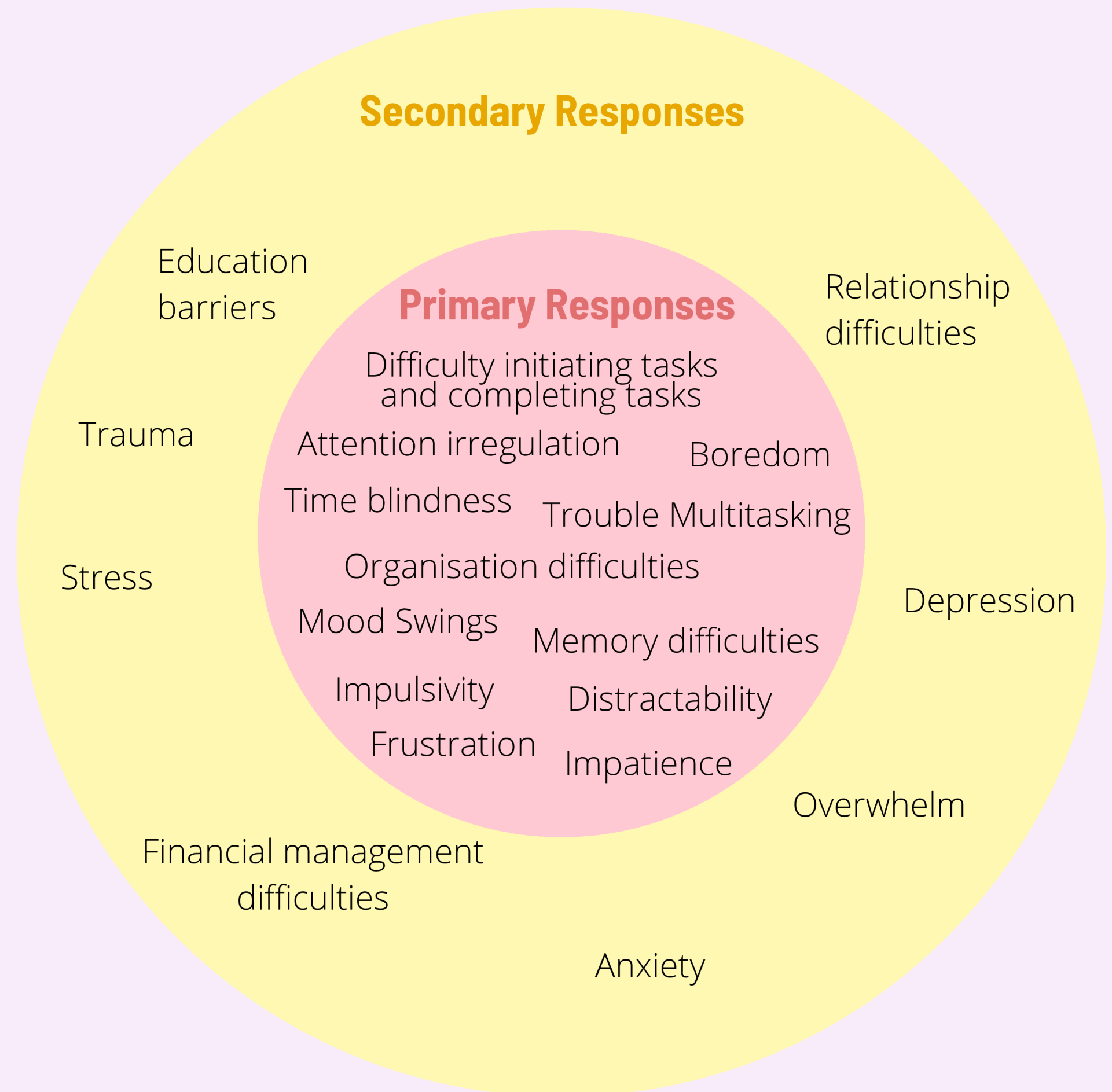


Social stigma

Social barriers

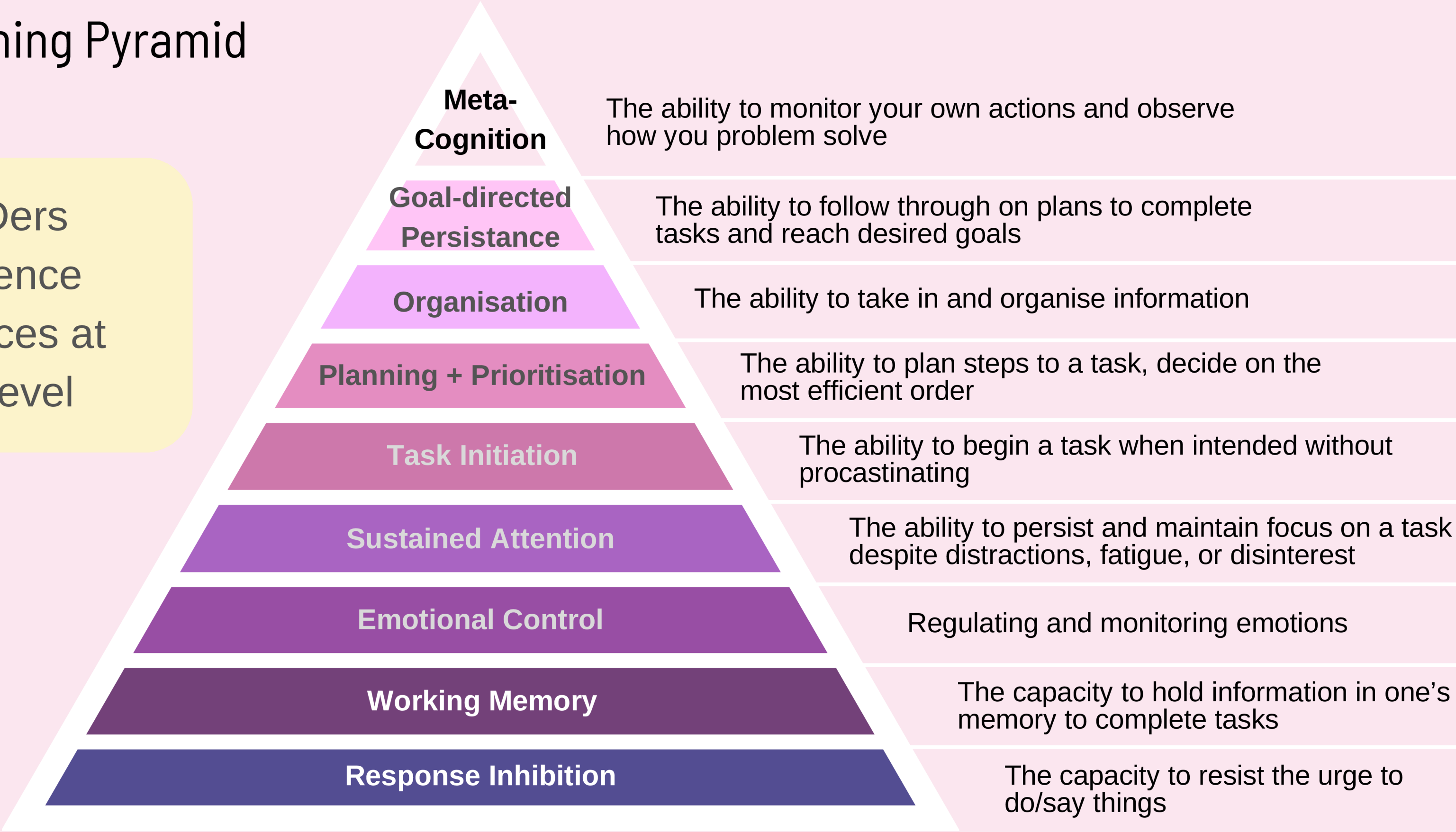
Educational barriers

Medical barriers

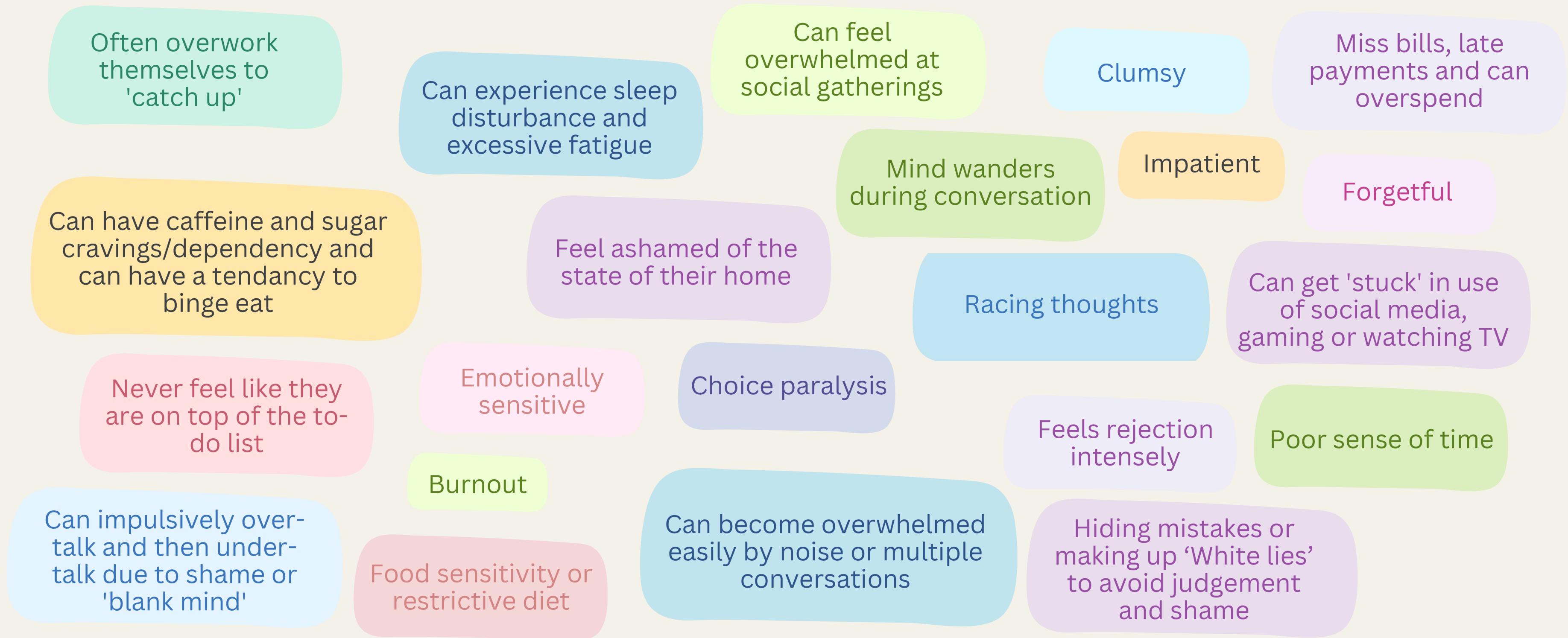


The Neurotypical Executive Functioning Pyramid

ADHDers
experience
differences at
each level



What are some lesser known experiences of ADHD





Neurocurious?

What is Autism?

A bit about Autism

Neurological Difference:

This means that people with Autism have unique brain wiring. Autism is understood as a natural variation in human neurology.

Autism is characterised by a wide range of challenges and strengths. It typically manifests in differences with social communication, repetitive behaviors, and a distinctive pattern of interests or activities. Autistic individuals vary widely in their presentations and ways of being.

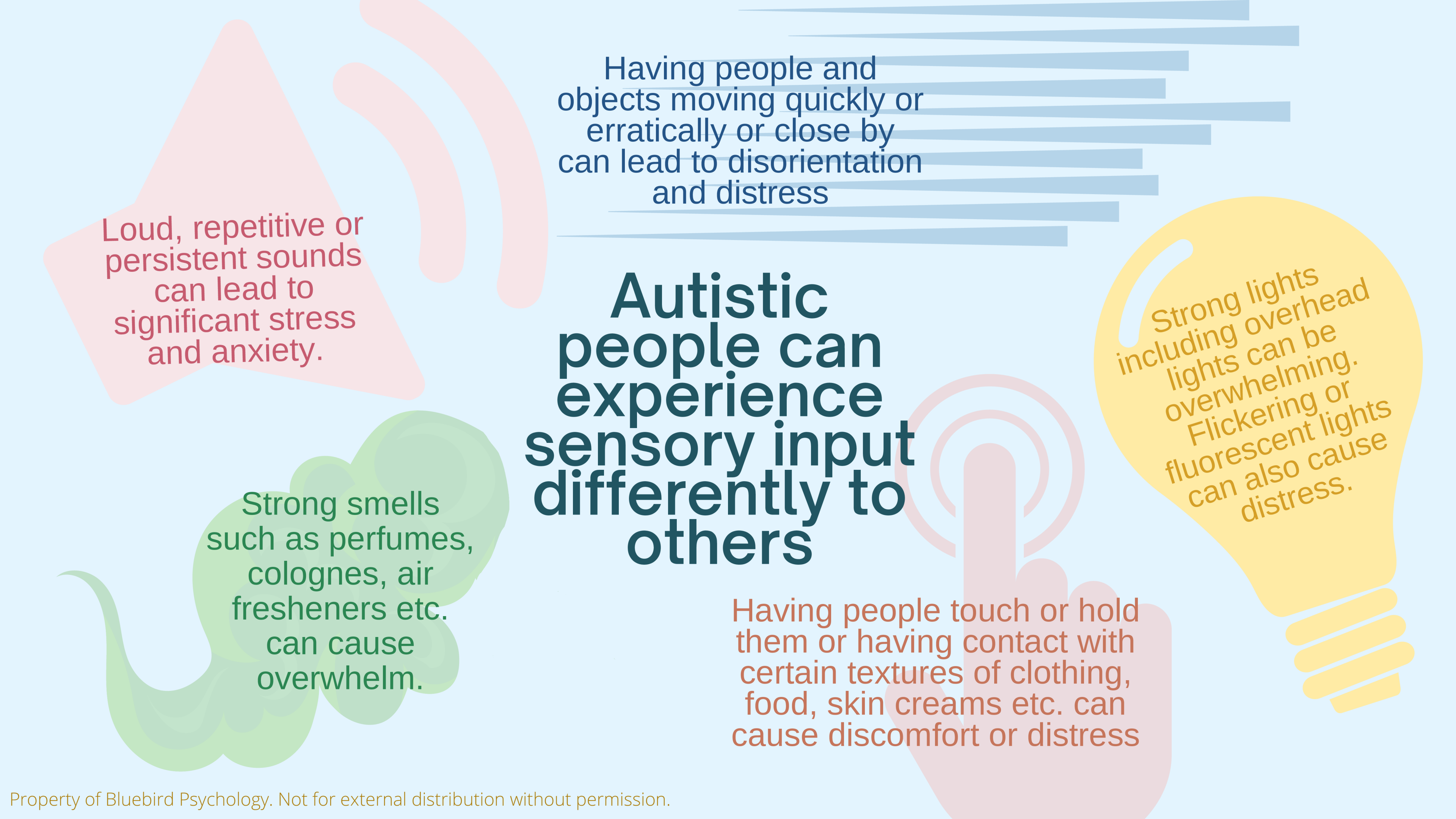
Autism is not a
'defective' brain.
It is a neurotype.

Autistic people
have social skills.
They just may be
different to
neurotypical
social skills.

A few important things to know about Autism

Autism is a dynamic
disability. A person's skills
and capacity can fluctuate
greatly depending on
their environment,
supports and their own
internal state.

People are not
'mildly',
'moderately' or
'severely' Autistic.
They are Autistic,
and have varying
support needs.



Having people and
objects moving quickly or
erratically or close by
can lead to disorientation
and distress

Loud, repetitive or
persistent sounds
can lead to
significant stress
and anxiety.

Autistic people can experience sensory input differently to others

Strong smells
such as perfumes,
colognes, air
fresheners etc.
can cause
overwhelm.

Having people touch or hold
them or having contact with
certain textures of clothing,
food, skin creams etc. can
cause discomfort or distress

Strong lights
including overhead
lights can be
overwhelming.
Flickering or
fluorescent lights
can also cause
distress.

Autism is a complex and diverse neurological difference that manifests in various ways including a combination of strengths, challenges, and sensory experiences. Here are a few common traits:

Unique ways of expressing emotions or connecting with others

Differences in social communication or interaction

Experiencing sensory overload, can make it hard to talk. This might lead them to rely on their usual routines and do things that help them calm down, like stimming.

Contrary to misconceptions, individuals with Autism usually have strong feelings of empathy and compassion, but they might show it in different ways, like through their actions instead of using words.

Strong attention to detail
Intense focus on interests or hobbies


Having a liking for routines and predictability can provide a sense of stability and safety.

These routines usually bring comfort and can enhance a person's everyday performance.

Sensory sensitivities
(e.g. sound, light, touch)
These sensitivities allow to connect with surroundings on a deeper level, helping to notice and appreciate details that others may overlook.

**A small sample of
Primary and Secondary
Autistic traits
(with a focus on internalised
adult presentations)**

External drivers

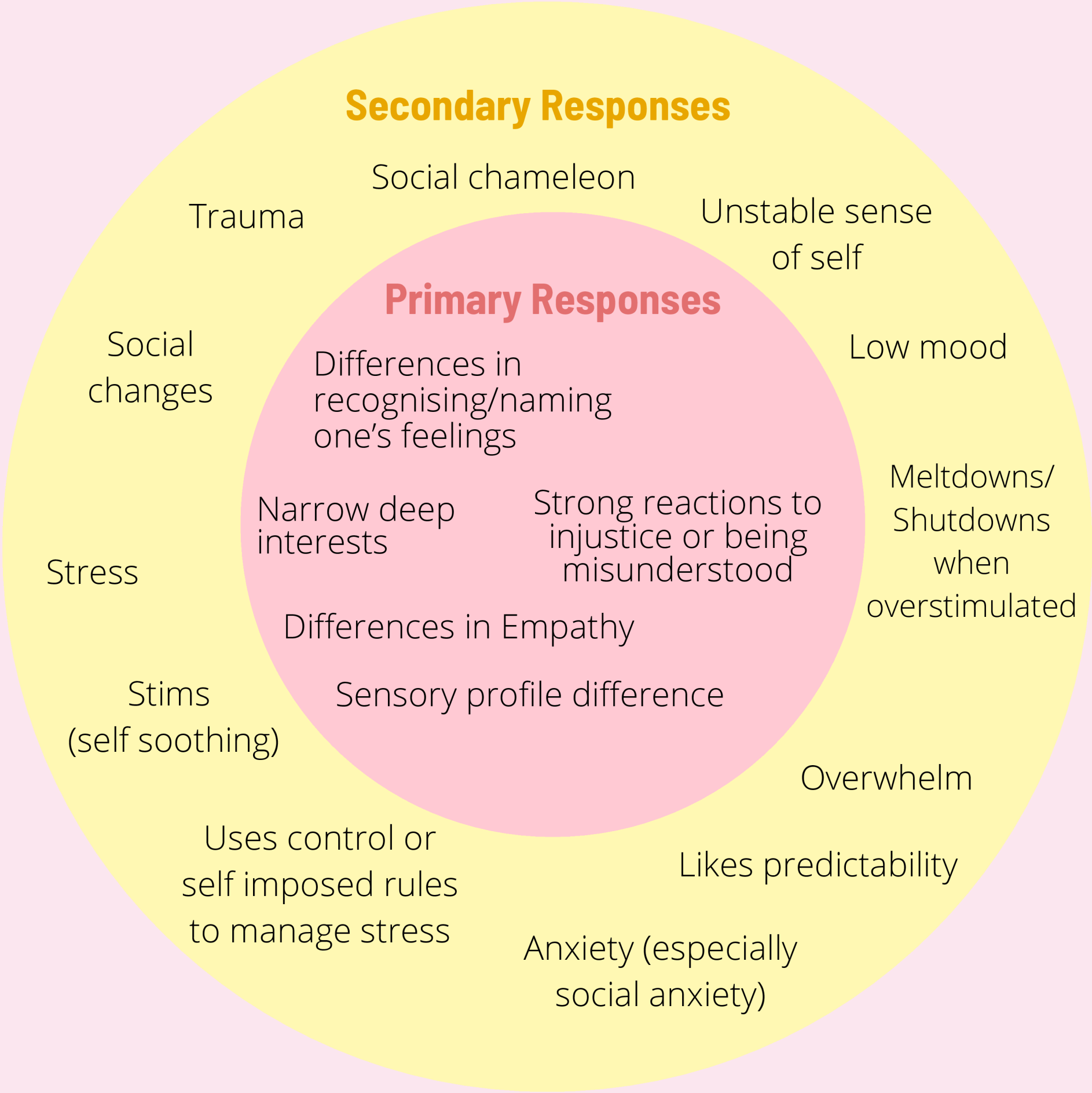


Social stigma

Social barriers

Educational barriers

Medical barriers



What are some lesser known experiences of Autism?

Sensory-seeking behaviour – craving intense input (e.g. spinning, loud music, chewing) rather than avoiding it

Situational mutism – becoming unable to speak in specific social settings or under stress

Monotropism – intense focus on one interest or task, with difficulty switching attention

Can be clumsy

Need for closure – discomfort with unfinished tasks or uncertainty

Difficulty with interoception – trouble sensing internal body cues (e.g. hunger, thirst, pain, or needing the bathroom)

Mind wanders during conversation

Can be Impatient

Can be Forgetful

Flat affect – facial expression and tone might not match inner emotional experience

Rigid moral thinking – a strong sense of justice or fairness, often perceived as inflexibility

Alexithymia – difficulty identifying or expressing emotions

Cognitive fatigue from masking exhaustion from constantly monitoring and adjusting behaviour to fit in

Emotionally sensitive

Choice paralysis

Tactile defensiveness – extreme discomfort with light touch or certain fabrics

Burnout

Echolalia – repeating words or phrases as a way of processing or communicating

Food sensitivity or restrictive diet

Slow processing speed – taking longer to respond or process verbal information (not due to lack of understanding)

Camouflaging through scripting – using rehearsed phrases or behaviours to navigate social situations

Feels rejection intensely

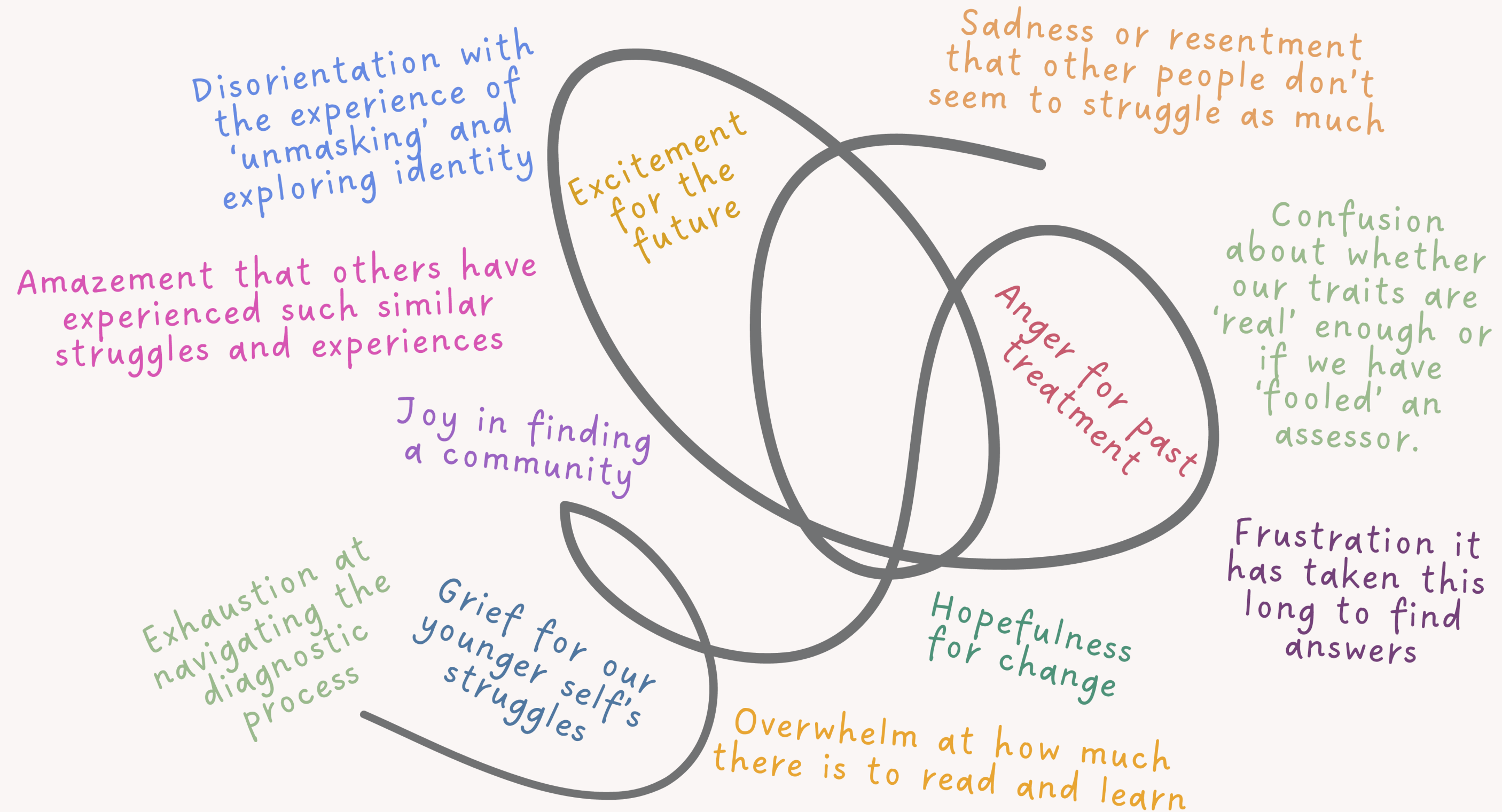


Neurocurious?

*What does it mean to be
'questioning' your neurotype?*



THE WIBBLY WOBBLY EXPERIENCE OF The Journey of Exploring Diagnosis



Exploring what it means to be “Neurocurious”

Questioning is a sign of self-awareness.

Wondering “Am I neurodivergent?” can reflect deep curiosity and courage. It shows you’re paying attention to your patterns, needs, and strengths.

Exploration is Valid

Questioning doesn’t make you less valid. You are allowed to change, grow, and redefine what fits you — at your own pace.

It’s okay to be uncertain.

You don’t have to “have it all figured out.” Many people explore their identity for years — and that’s a valid part of the journey.

It’s a process, not a destination.

You may shift between labels, understandings, and ways of seeing yourself. There’s no rush to “decide” or “prove” anything.

Why do we need labels?



"I'm a normal zebra,
not a very
strange horse!"

"Why do you need a label? Because there is comfort in knowing that you are a normal zebra, not a strange horse. Because you can't find a community of other zebras, can't learn what makes a zebra thrive, what brings [you] a zebra joy, if you don't know you are a zebra and you are learning solely from horses. It is near impossible to be happy and mentally healthy if you're spending all your life thinking you're a failed horse, having others tell you you are failed horse, when all along you could be thriving and understood if everyone, including you, just knew you were a zebra."

- @OMGIMAUTISTIC on Twitter/Instagram

I'm not a broken neurotypical
I am a whole and complete
neurodivergent person

Part of being Neurocurious is exploring Neuronormativity and Ableism

Neuronormative expectations set the 'gold standard' of what it means to be a human such as:

- Independence
- Full time work
- Consistency
- Able-bodied
- High intelligence
- Neurotypical brain
- Successful

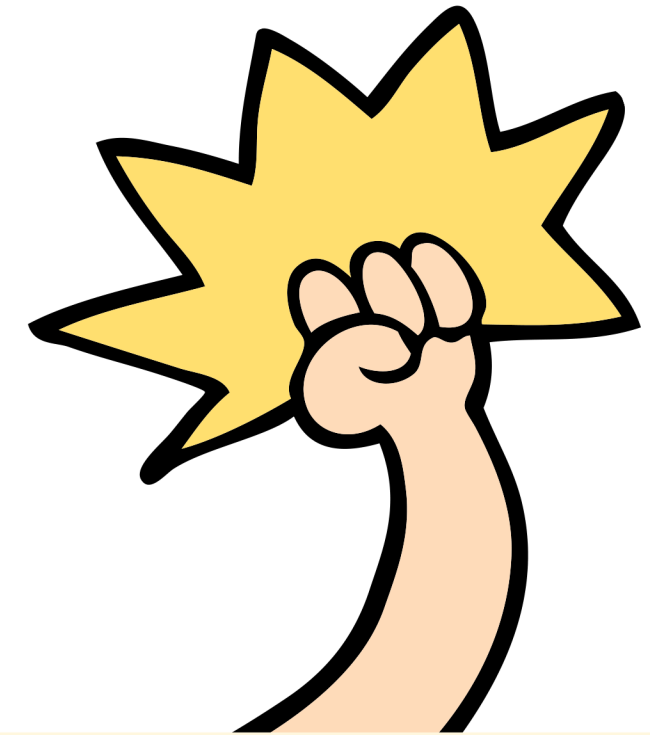


Ableism is belief that everyone should be able to live by these neuronormative expectations and dismisses barriers and differences of disabled people.



Common ways that Neurodivergent people experience ableism.

- Being trained to ignore their own needs in order to behave 'correctly'
- Being expected to have neurotypical skills and abilities
- Having accommodations denied or taken away as they are seen to be unnecessary
- Having their struggles dismissed or diminished



How can we dismantle ableism?

- Identify ableism in yourself and the circles you move in.
- Recognise that there are many 'right' ways of being, communicating and learning
- Be open minded to new view points
- Learn from disabled people, listen to their experiences
- Build spaces where differences are supported and celebrated.



Neurocurious?
Should I seek assessment or not?

Some pros and cons of undertaking formal assessment

Pros

- Careful assessment of differential (alternative) or comorbid (co-existing) diagnosis
- Clarity and understanding
- Validation
- Self advocacy
- Accommodations at work and in study
- Access to formal services or supports such as medication for ADHD
- Shedding of guilt and shame that has come from identifying as 'broken' or 'weird' rather than neurodivergent

Cons

- Cost of time and money
- Difficulties with availabilities of assessors
- Difficulty locating assessors who are knowledgeable and affirming in their approach
- Navigating the system
- Can create vulnerability to peoples unhelpful judgements and stigma

Who to see for diagnosis

**Psychologist or other
diagnosing mental health
professional**

For psychometric/interview
assessment, diagnosis and
ongoing supports

**Paediatrician or
child/adolescent
psychiatrist**

For childhood interview
based assessment,
diagnosis and
medical/medication
management

Psychiatrist

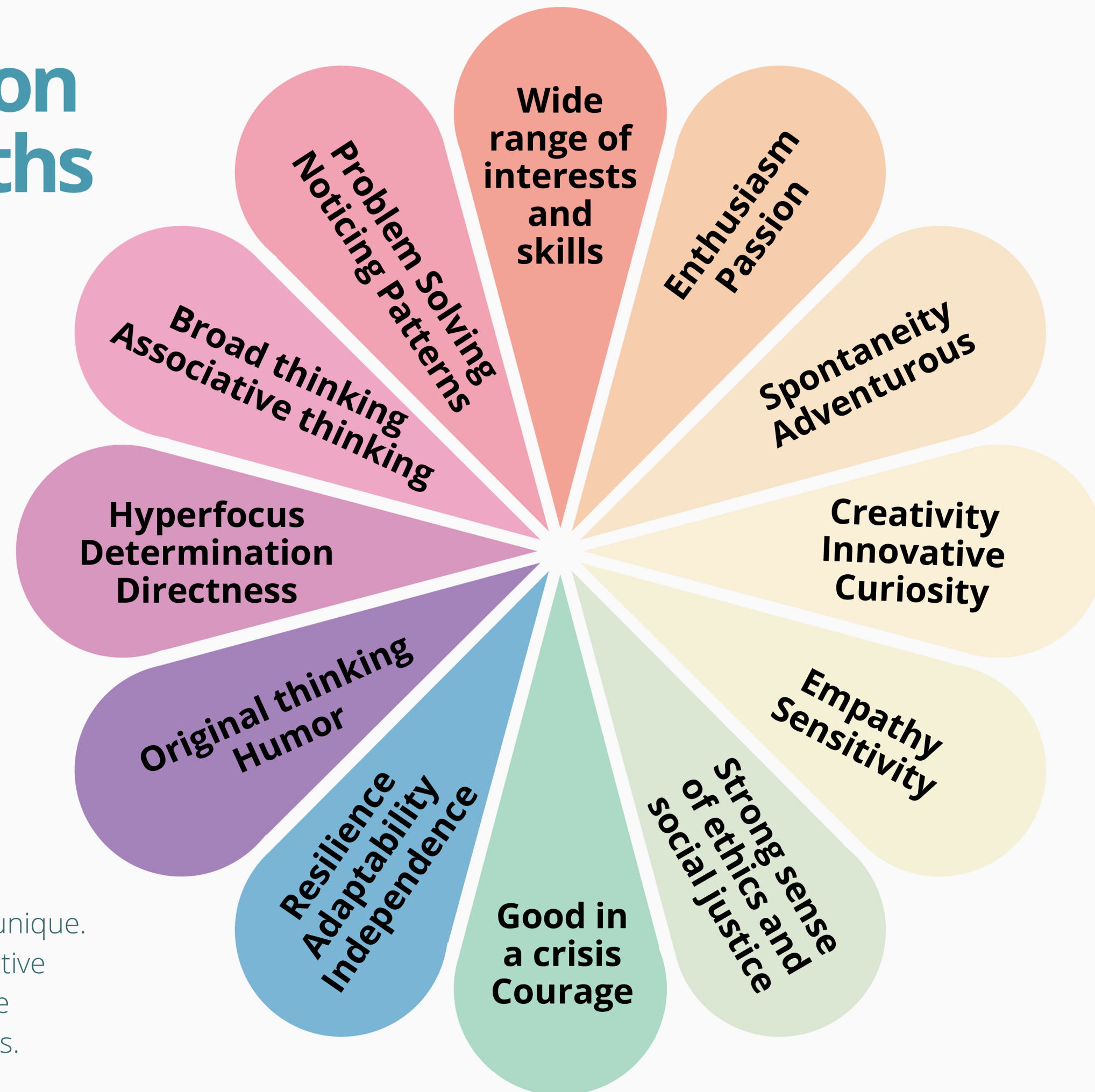
For adult interview based
assessment, diagnosis
and medical/medication
management

Consider: What is my main goal for assessment?
(Eg. NDIS Funding, Medication, Detailed information)
Does this professional regularly provide this service and do
they do this from a framework that I am comfortable with?



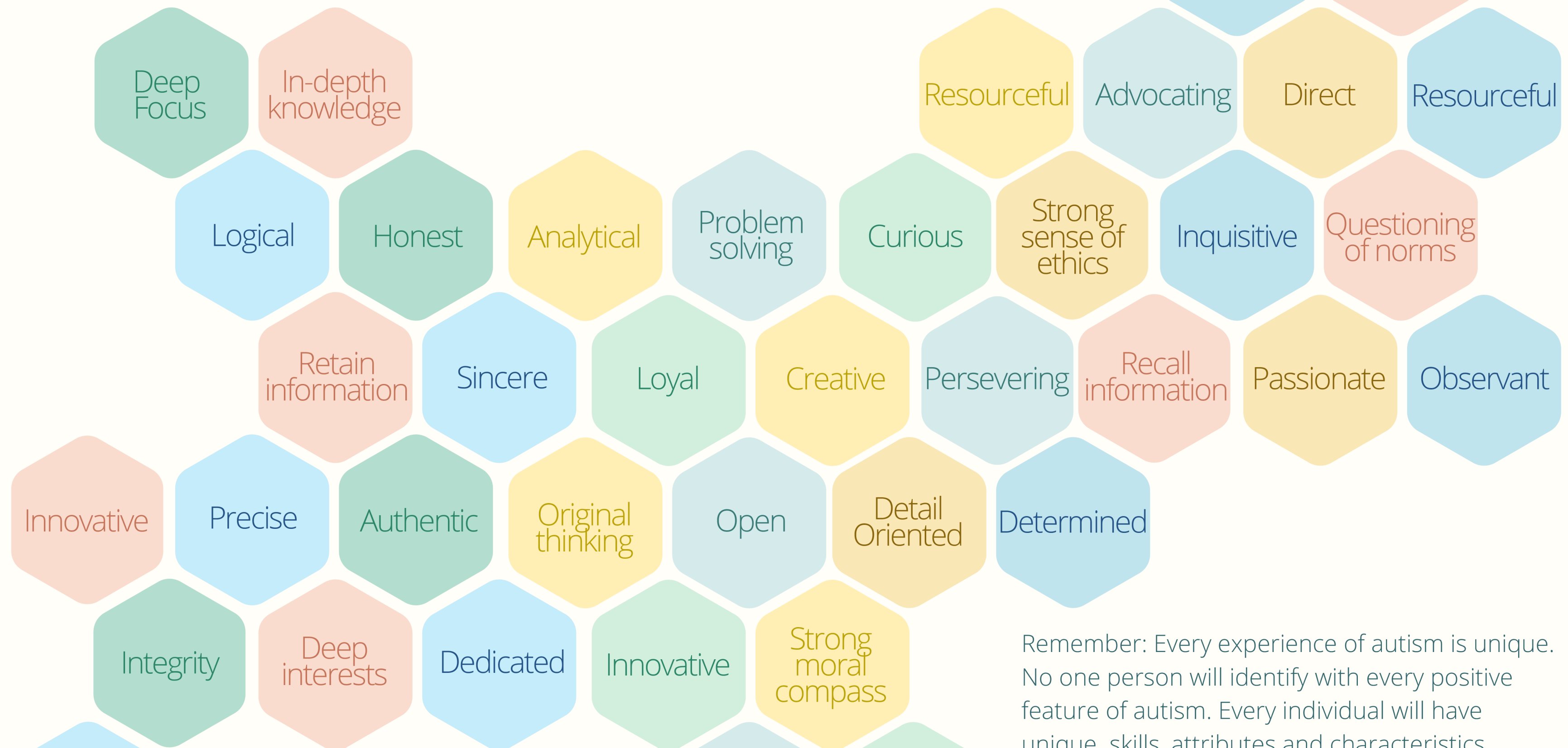
**The importance of awareness of
strengths and struggles,
regardless of formal diagnosis**

Some Common ADHD Strengths



Remember: Every experience of ADHD is unique. No one person will identify with every positive feature of autism. Every individual will have unique skills, attributes and characteristics.

Autistic Strengths



Remember: Every experience of autism is unique. No one person will identify with every positive feature of autism. Every individual will have unique skills, attributes and characteristics.

A note on burnout



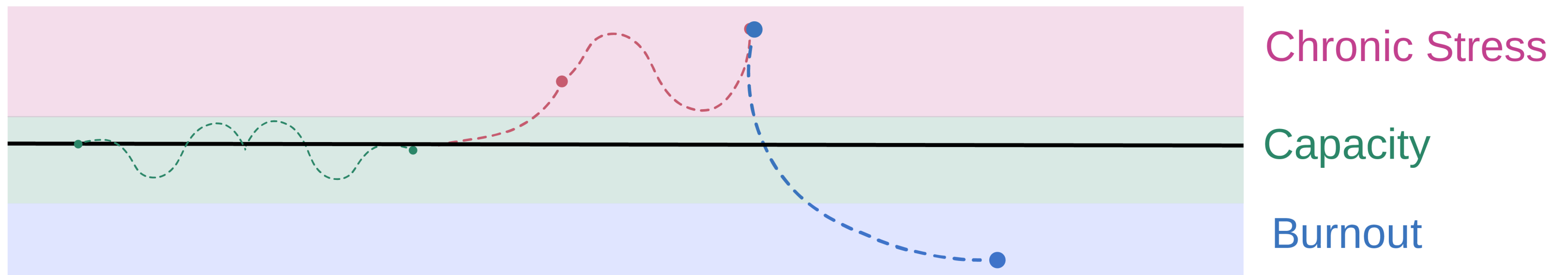
Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by **chronic stress**. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. Burnout reduces productivity, motivation, interest and energy.

When stretched too far beyond our healthy capacity, like an elastic band, we start to fray, and then snap back below our capacity.

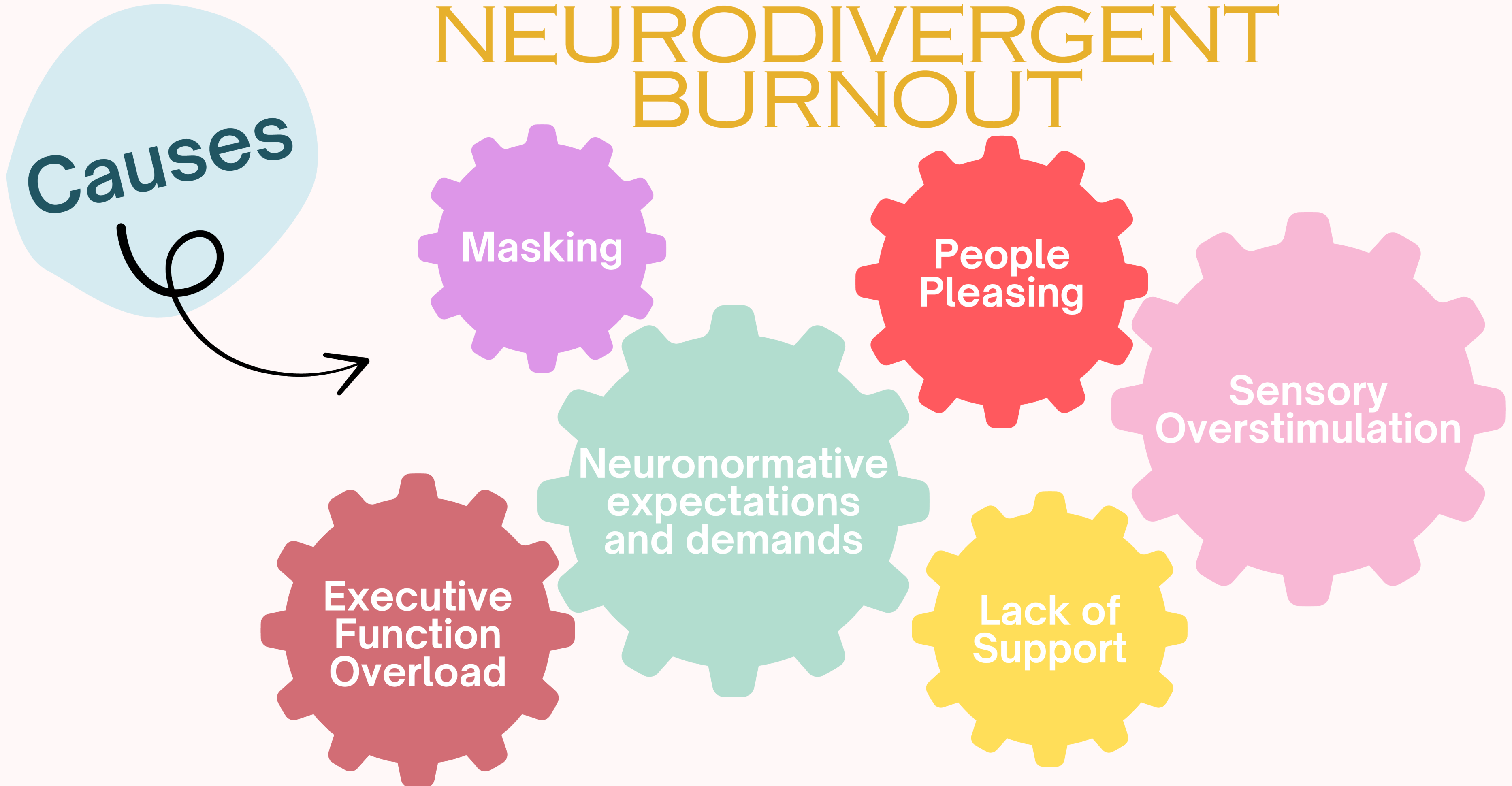
As chronic stress is very common when living with ADHD or Autism, burnout is also a common experience.

If you are experiencing burnout, this is not laziness or ineptitude. It can take months or years for our brain and body to recover and to build back to our healthy capacity. You will need to take slow reasonable steps to rebuilding your capacity whilst avoiding repeating the chronic stress cycle.

Helpful resource on Burnout: 'Burnout' by the Nagoski sisters.



NEURODIVERGENT BURNOUT



NEURODIVERGENT BURNOUT

Symptoms



Mentally



You may notice a loss of Executive Functioning skills:

- Talking
- Task initiation

Behaviours



You might find you are driven to engage in more repetitive behaviours

Emotional



You may find it more difficult to regulate your emotions:

- meltdown
- shutdowns

Physical



You may experience physical symptoms:

- Severe fatigue
- increase sensory sensitivity
- Gut issues etc

The Cycle of NEURODIVERGENT BURNOUT





**Embrace
your unique
brain wiring**

**Practice
healthy
boundaries**

**Drop
demands**

**Do stims
freely**

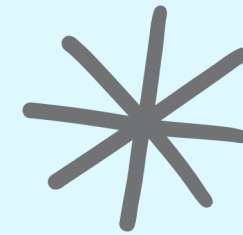
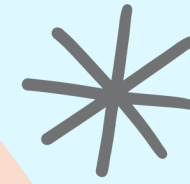
**Access
supports and
accomodations**

Rest

Reflection time

Q

If a diagnosis helped
explain your brain, what
would you want it to
clarify?"





Reframing success

'Your Best' is whatever you can do without harming your physical or mental health and not what you can accomplish by disregarding them.

Growth and Self-awareness

Success is discovering what works best for you through growth and self-awareness, rather than simply following the standard path.

It's more than just marks.

Success in university isn't only about grades. It's about growth, wellbeing, and staying connected to yourself and others. Your worth isn't measured by academic performance alone.

Wellbeing & Connection

True success means caring for your well-being and nurturing connection. It involves honoring your needs, calming your nervous system, and building meaningful relationships. Feeling safe and supported keeps you balanced, motivated, and grounded in what truly matters.

Self-Compassion is:



Mindfulness

Recognise your emotions, thoughts and experiences with a neutral and curious outlook.



Self-Kindness

Speak towards yourself and care for yourself in supportive and nurturing ways, rather than with cruelty or harsh criticism.



Humanity

Recognise that you are not alone in your fallibility, vulnerability and struggles. These are universal human experiences.

Based on the research of Kristen Neff

Bluebird
PSYCHOLOGY





Identifying Personal Learning style

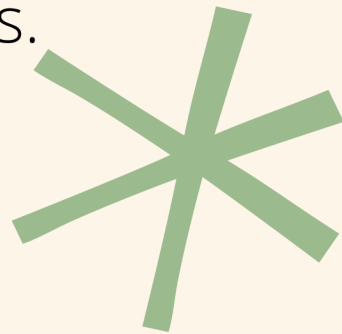
Identifying Your Personal Learning Style & Nervous System Needs

Learning styles — what works for you?

Visual: Diagrams, mind maps, colour-coding.

Verbal: Discussions, reading aloud, storytelling.

Kinaesthetic: Hands-on activities, movement, practical examples.

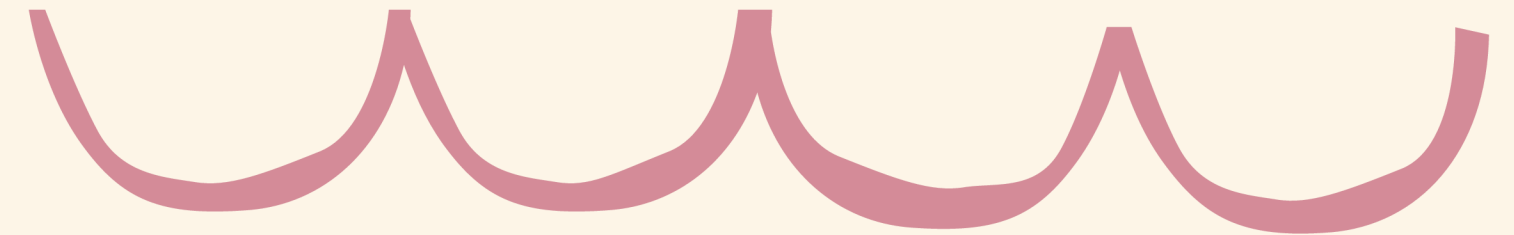


Your nervous system needs matter.

Do you focus best in quiet or with background noise?

Do you need movement breaks or fidget tools?

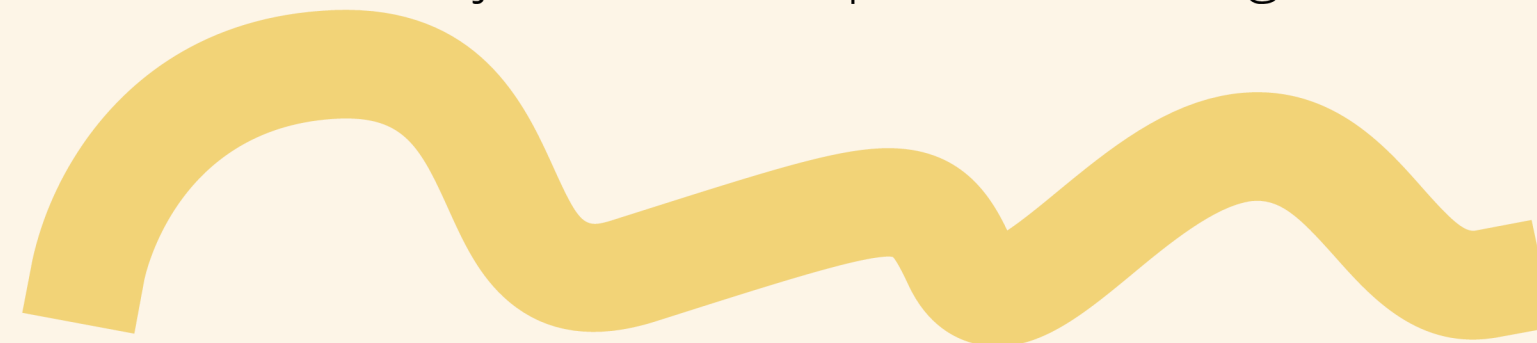
Do bright lights or busy spaces drain or energise you?



Honour your preferences.

Adapt study spaces and methods to suit you, not just “what’s expected.”

Experiment, observe, and adjust — it’s all part of building self-understanding.





Some Helpful Strengths Based Skills for Managing Study

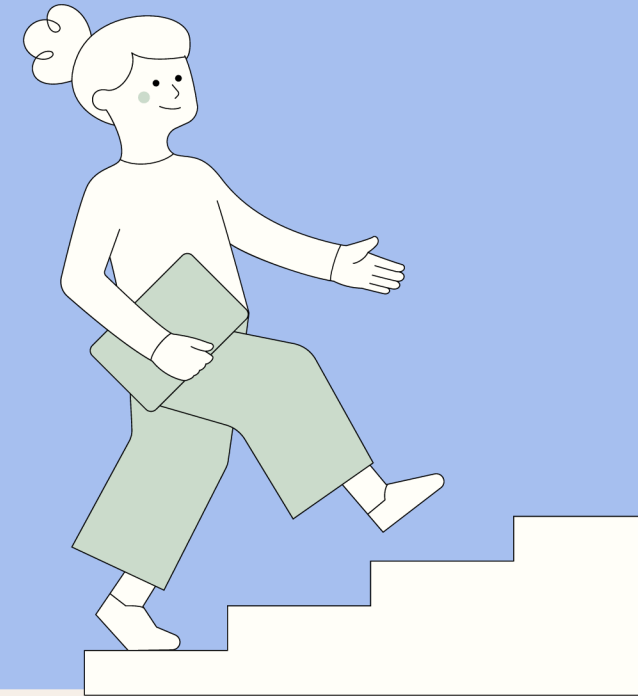


Lets zoom in on a few helpful skills

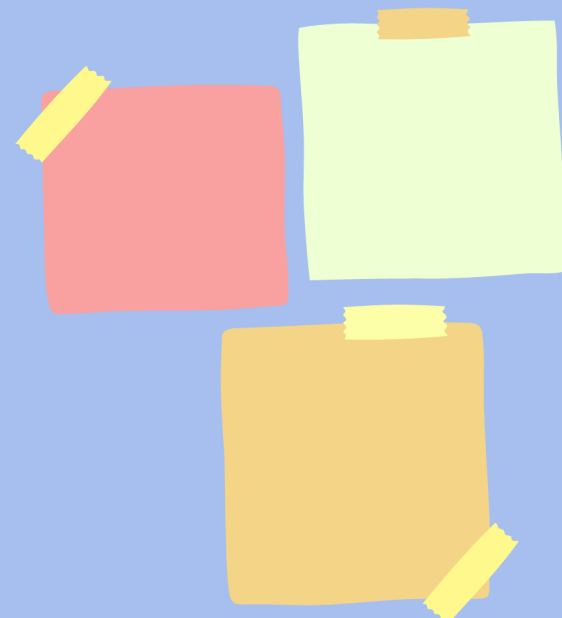
- Managing Procrastination
 - Prioritising tasks
 - Time Management
 - Task Initiation
- 

MANAGING PROCRASTINATION

Behaviour Momentum



Increase interest in the task + Decrease interest in everything else

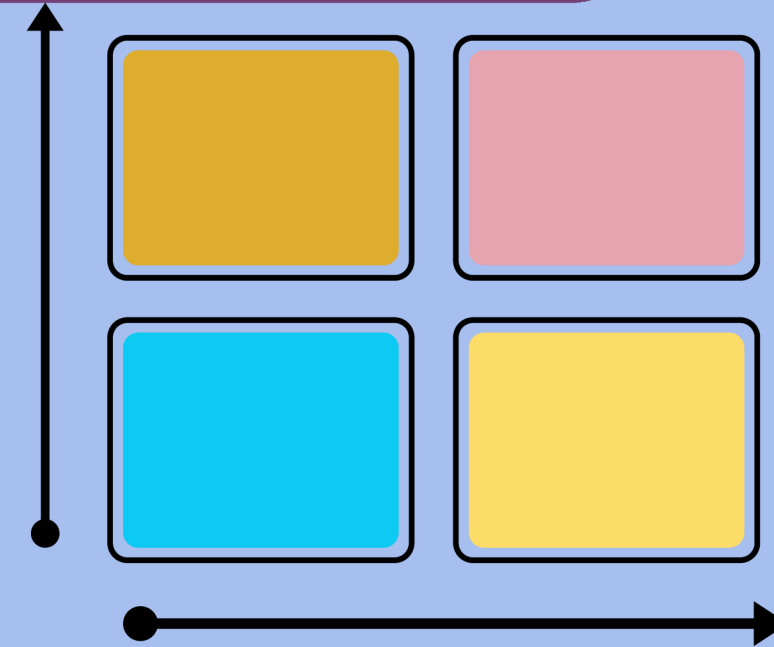


MANAGING PROCRASTINATION

Ideal environment



Executive function



Affirmations

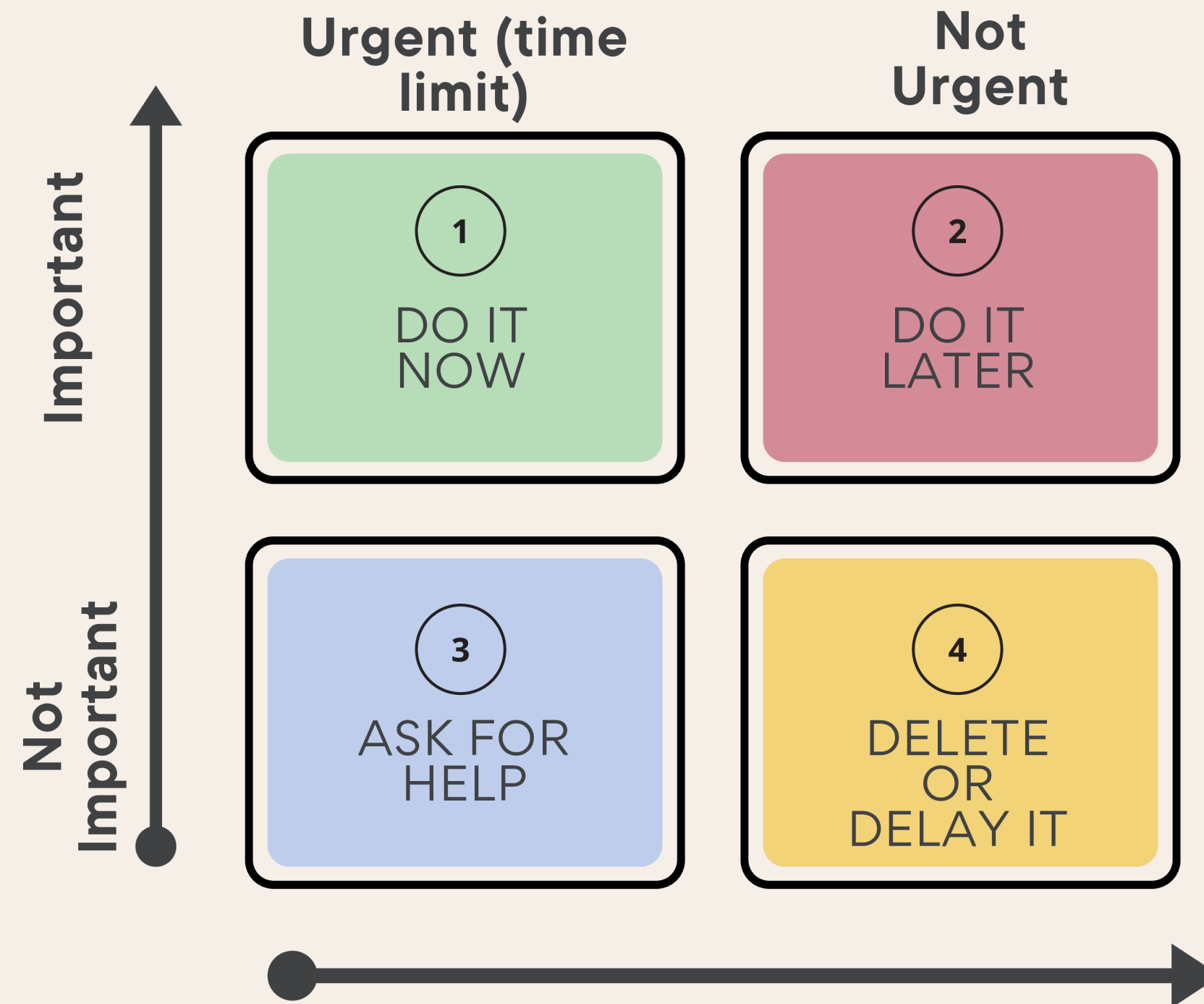


Structure & Motivation



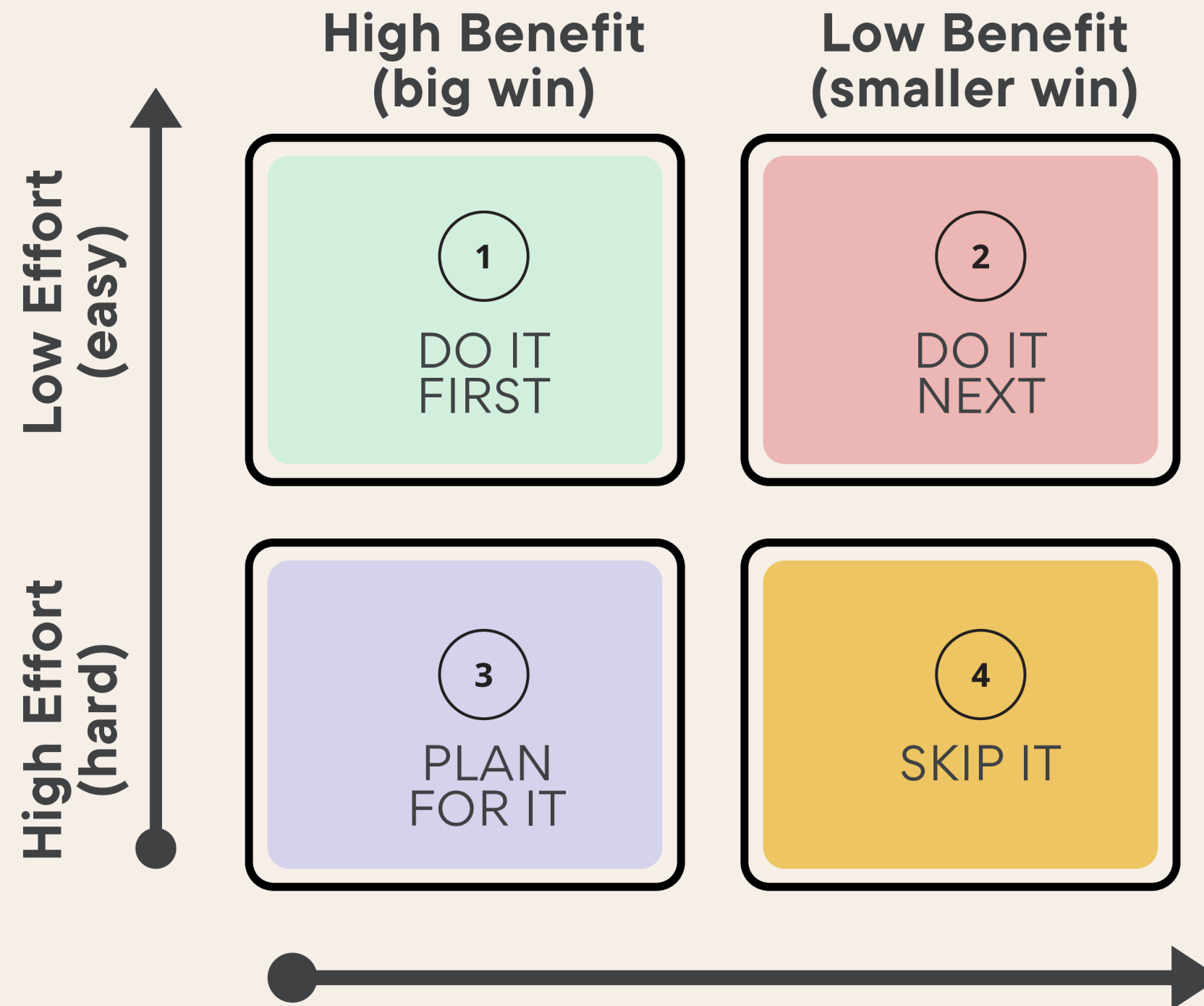
Prioritising

THE EISENHOWER MATRIX – IMPORTANCE AND URGENCY



Prioritising

THE EISENHOWER MATRIX - EFFORT AND BENEFIT



Prioritising

THE EISENHOWER MATRIX – AN EXAMPLE

| Task | Effort | Benefit | What to Do |
|------------------------------------|--------|---------|---------------------|
| Studying 15 mins for spelling test | Low | High | ✓ Do it first |
| Cleaning out your whole closet | High | Low | ✗ Skip or limit |
| Writing a story for class | High | High | 📅 Plan it |
| Sharpening every pencil | Low | Low | ? Maybe do it later |

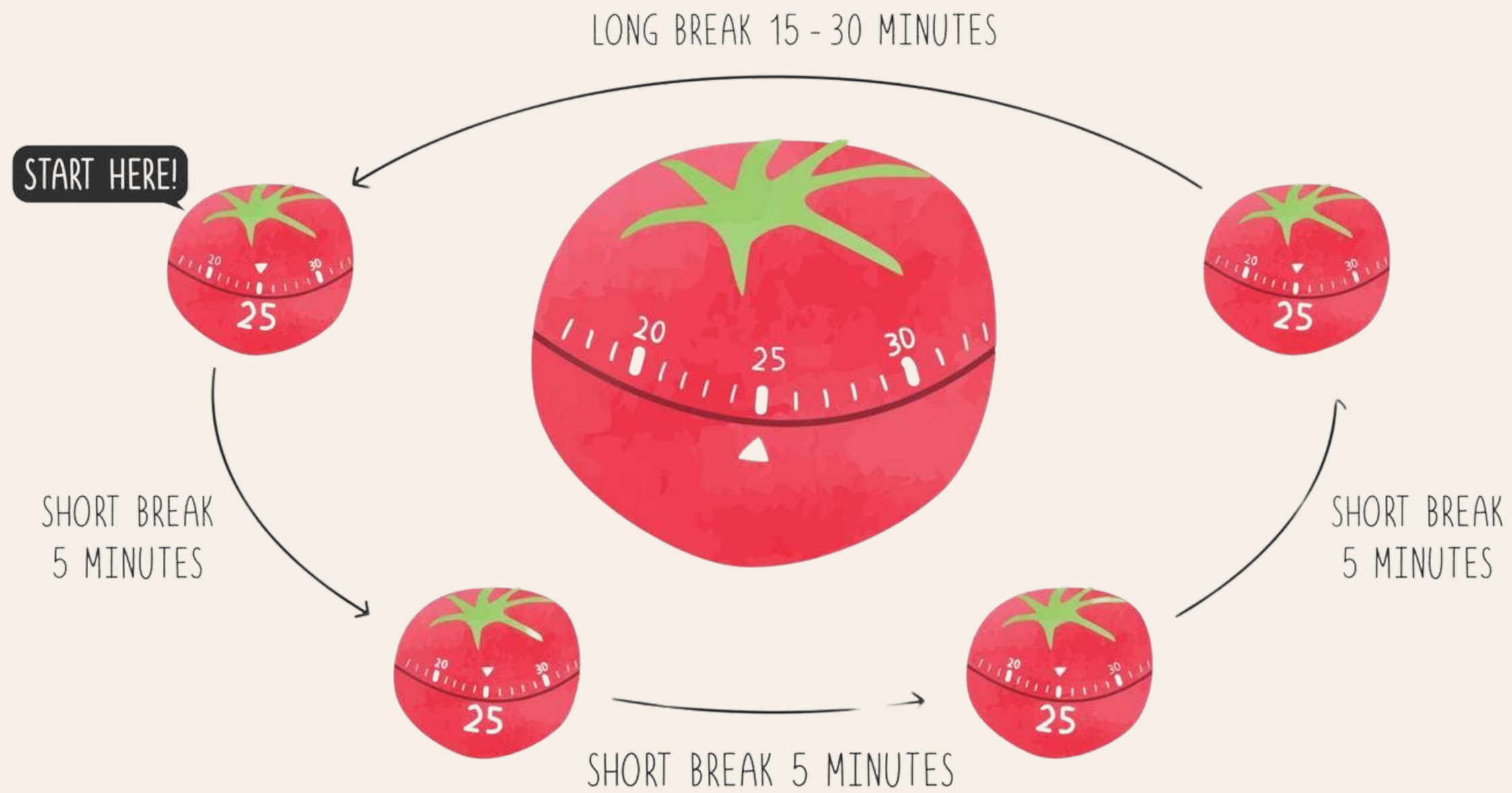
Time Management

HELPFUL TIPS AND APPS

- Routine-ify
- “Reverse” time management
- Wear a watch, set alarms
- Pomodoro Technique



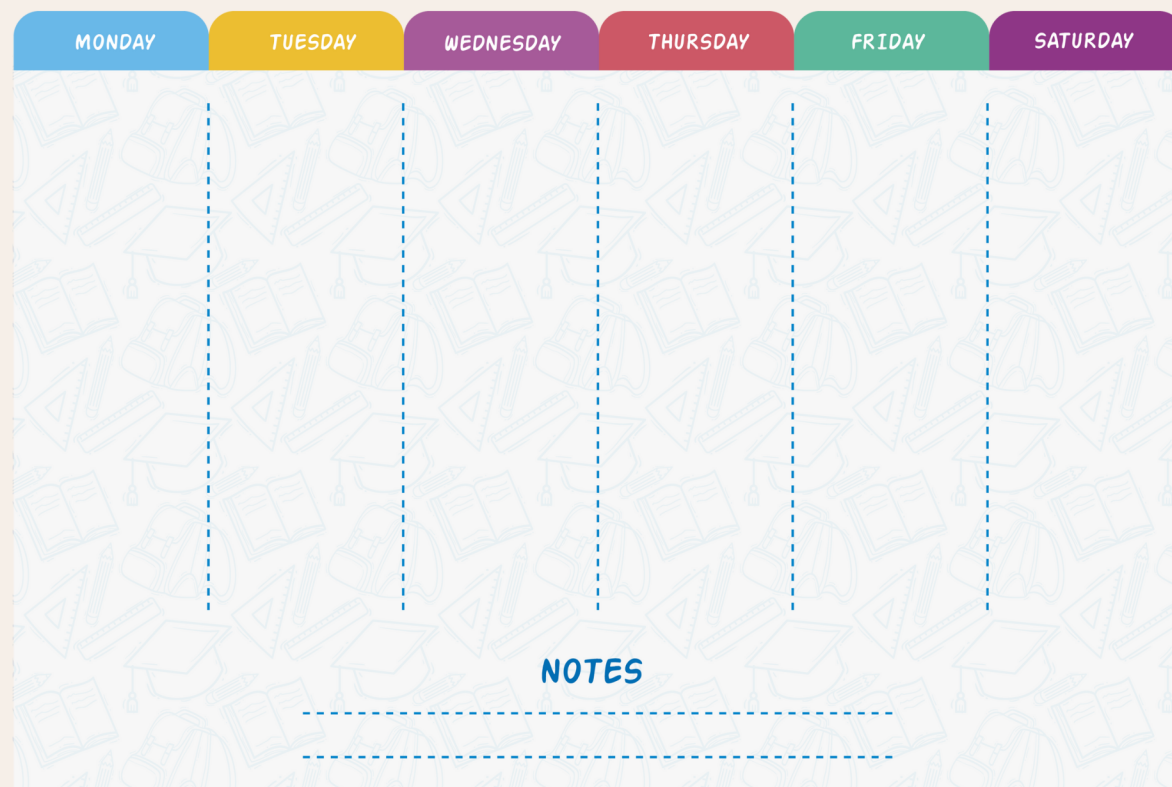
THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE



 = 25 minutes of focused work session.

Time Management

Creating a Timetable



- Schedule in all fixed appointments/classes/commitments
 - Classes
 - Other activities
 - Sleep, meals and getting ready
 - Work?
- Schedule in rest, breaks and fun
 - Rest breaks
 - Downtime
 - Movement
 - Hobbies/fun/friends
- Study time - look for usable gaps
 - 30mins or more
 - If more than 30mins, schedule in breaks

Task Initiation

Starting on an assignment

The problem for ND people:

- just words
- layout doesn't make sense
- too many words

Step 1: Rewrite/summarise the question/instructions

Step 2: Write down the “rules” (i.e. word limit, due date etc)

Step 3: Brain dump

Step 4: Create a scaffold and move brain dump into sections using dot points

Step 5: Research each section

HELPFUL TIPS AND APPS

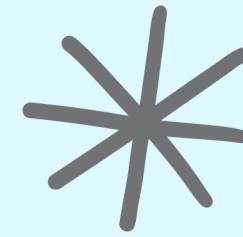
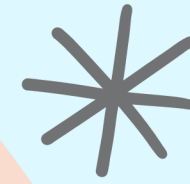
- Bionic-Reading.com
- Flow.Club
- Text a friend your to-do list (keep them updated)
- Body doubling
- NaturalReaders.com
- Goblin.Tools
- Habitica.com
- The priority or task initiation matrix
- The priority decision tree
- Finch: Self-Care Pet- app



Reflection time

Q

Which of the skills we just
discussed would you like to
test out?





Some important reminders....

**Your worth and value
is not dependent on
your productivity.**

**Build your life
around your
unique self and
the ways you
function best.**

**Nurture yourself
with kindness and
compassion.**

**'Your Best' is whatever
you can do without
harming your physical
or mental health and
not what you can
accomplish by
disregarding them.**

**Build a community
of accepting and
compassionate
people around you.**





Neurocurious?
Where can I get support?



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

Counselling Service



Qualified social workers and psychologists work with students on any issues of concern and provide **free confidential counselling services**

1300 668 370 (option 5)
Counselling@westernsydney.edu.au

Counselling Service



One to one sessions (F2F, zoom, phone)

eCounselling

Workshops

Group work

Webinars, quick clips and podcasts

Relaxation recordings

Disability Service



Assists students with a **disability** or **chronic health condition** to reach their full academic potential and to participate fully in University life

1300 668 370 (option 5)
Disability@westernsydney.edu.au

Disability Advisors assist students:

- Pre-enrolment advice
- Reasonable adjustment assessment
- Student advocacy and support
- Disability awareness training
- Educational Support Services
- Academic Integration Plans (ARAPs)
- Placement Integration Plans (PIPs)
- Adaptive technologies
- Access Rooms

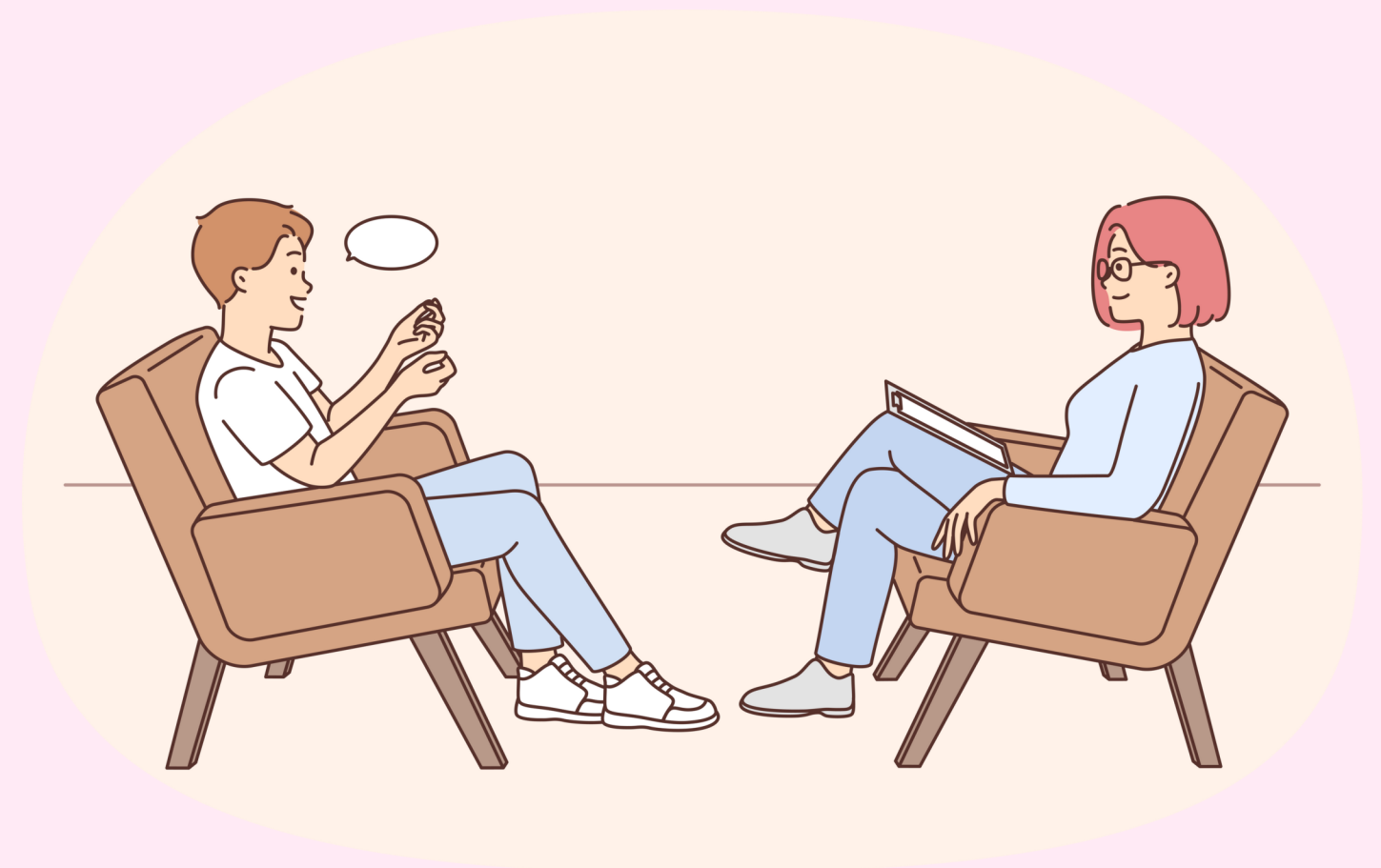
www.westernsydney.edu.au/disabilityservice



What supports are available for students at Western?

Professional Supports

- GP
- Psychologist
- Occupational Therapist
- Psychiatrist
- Professional Organiser
- Dietician
- Speech Therapist
- Plus many more...



Some helpful ADHD resources

Websites:

ADHD Australia
ADHD Foundation
ADHD Support Australia
ADDITUDE
CHADD
Neurodivergent Insights

Books:

ADHD 2.0 - E.Hallowell and J.Ratey
Taking charge of adult ADHD - Russell Barkley
The ADHD effect on Marriage - Melissa Orlov
The couples guide to thriving with ADHD - Melissa Orlov
Women with Attention Deficit Disorder - Sari Solden
A radical guide for Women with ADHD - Sari Solden



Some helpful resources

Websites:

Reframing Autism

Embrace Autism

Neuroclastic

Onwards and Upwards Psychology - Resources page

Neurodivergent Insights

Books:

Different not less - Chloe Hayden

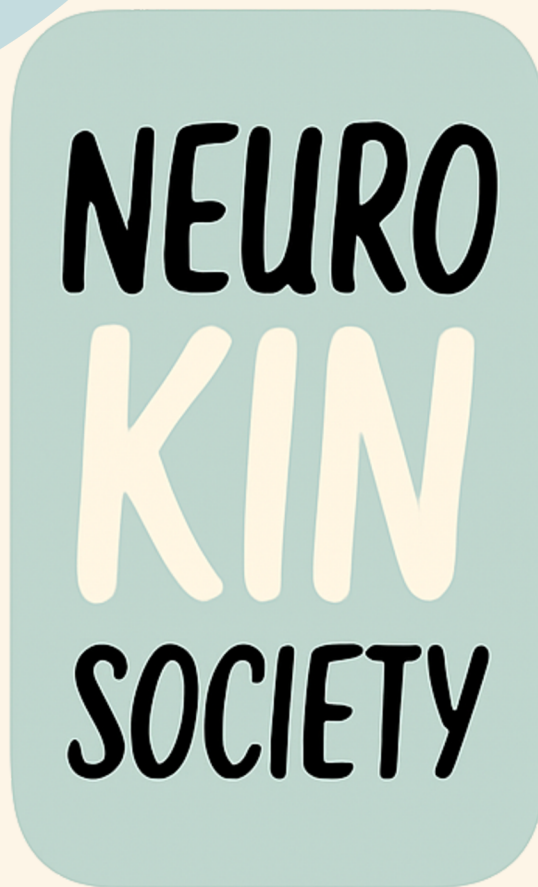
Untypical - Pete Wharmby

Neurotribes - Steve Silberman

We're not broken - Eric Garcia

Divergent Mind - Jenara Nerenberg

Unmasking Autism - Devon Price



A support and skill development community for Neurodivergent Young People (including ADHD and Autism presentations)

This group is for young adults, who have left school through to those aged in their mid 20's.

A 10 session program designed to create a sense of community and develop helpful skills in areas including:


Learning about Neurodiversity, understanding your brain, managing stigma, emotions, self care, study and burn out, communication and boundary setting skills

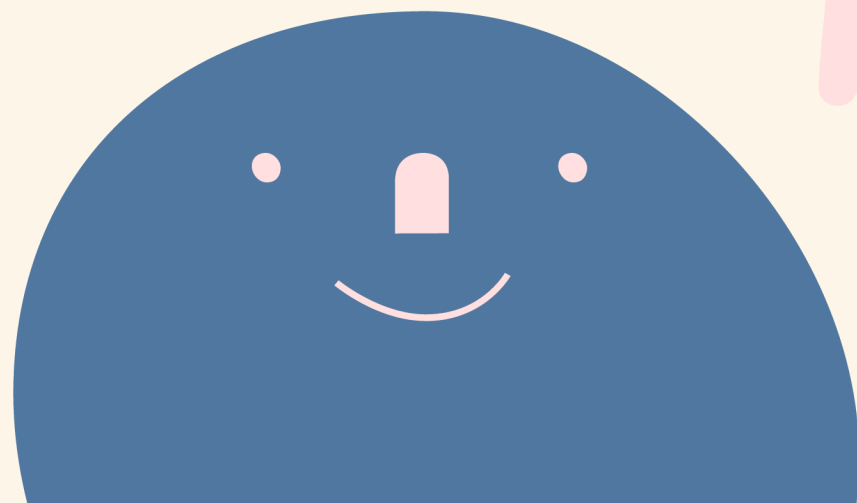
Where: Our upstairs group room (The Bluebird's Nest) at our office in Castle Hill.

When: Neurokin Young Adults - Weekly from 5PM-6:30PM on Thursday evenings from 14th August to 30th October (with a short break) .

Program Topics

- Learning about Neurodiversity, ADHD and Autism
- Managing stigma and self concept
- Emotional regulation skills
- Neuroaffirming lifestyle and self care (food, movement, personal care, social, sleep)
- Task and time management
- Procrastination and perfectionism
- Neuroaffirming organisation skills
- Neuroaffirming guide to study skills
- Burn out
- Communication and Boundary Setting

- 
- Want more webinars on neurodivergence?
 - Want more neurodivergent supports at Uni?
 - Want to join Neurokin Society?
 - Want to give us feedback?



Reflection time

Q

What's one thing you're taking away from today?

Q

Is there a strategy or idea you want to experiment with after this session?

Here's the feedback form



General Q & A

Here's the feedback form



Be kind to yourself
Stay Curious
Seek Support

