



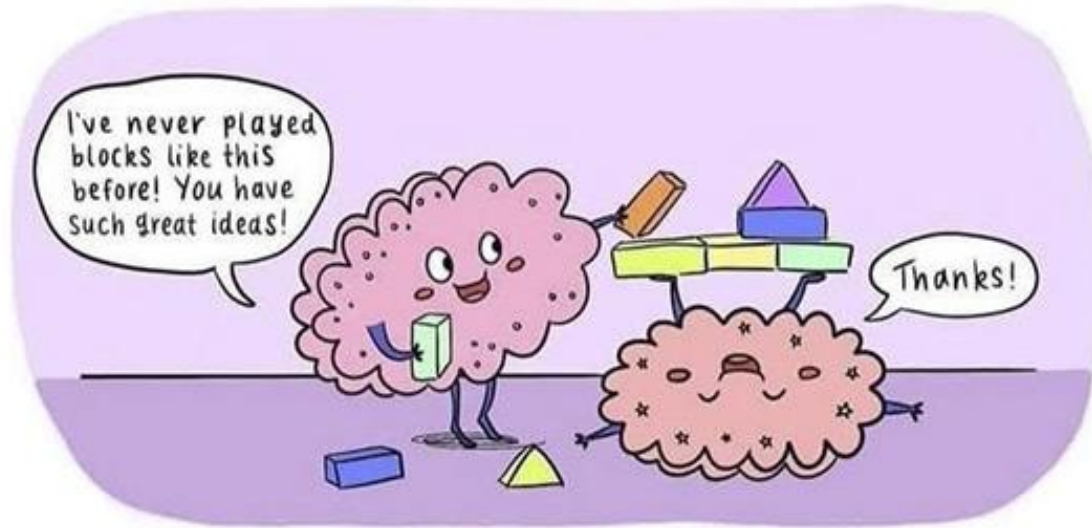
What can we do to protect and support our neurodivergent children's mental health?

Tamsin Cox

Principal Educational Psychologist

ALL brains are EQUALLY important.

Sometimes people think that neurotypical brains are the best ones, just because they are the brains that lots of people are used to.



The truth is- the world NEEDS people who think differently, otherwise things would never change.

NeuroWild

Support: two sides of the same coin.....

Support is most effective when it combines **both**:

❖ Making supportive adjustments to **the environment**

and

❖ Helping **the child to build a 'toolkit'** of understanding and strategies to help them to support themselves



Once upon a guess... the story of prediction

- The human experience is defined by **uncertainty**; it is ‘written into the script of life’ (Nowotny, 2015)
- We therefore spend our lives trying to create some sort of certainty from the world or at least trying to manage the uncertainty – we make plans, we save for a pension, we back up our files, we check the weather, we take out insurance, we Google, and so on...
- Having **certainty** about how the world works and our place in it helps us to feel comfortable about knowing how things are, but also crucially *how things will be*.

This allows us to feel in control as we can predict what might happen and prepare for what might come... we are then rarely surprised by our everyday experience of the world





Snowball fights in t-shirts



Activity

- Think about something simple like going out for a meal to celebrate an event.....
- What do you do to make sure this happens and all goes smoothly?
- What *predictions* do you make to help you prepare?

What if it is harder to make, store and access predictions about the world?

Being neurodivergent means that for most children the world is experienced as a **highly unpredictable** place.

This is because neurodivergence generally includes differences with:

- **Processing and making sense of information** (social, sensory, environmental, internal)
- **Social interaction and communication** (people are highly unpredictable)
- **Flexible thinking and adaptive behaviour** (changing what you think and how you behave based upon changing information / situations)

All of this makes it much harder for neurodivergent children to process, make sense of, match to previous experience and therefore **predict the world and their experiences.**

This leads to uncertainty, which then often leads to fear (loss of control), stress, and then anxiety





Neurodivergence and Executive Functioning (the brain's 'Air Traffic Controller')

Processing and
retaining
information
(working memory)

Managing change
and transition
(flexibility of
thinking)

Adaptability

Organisation

Managing social
cues and
communication

Hyperfocus and
Distractibility

Time blindness
and sequencing

Impulsivity



One young person's experience....

‘My unease is not the fear of something bad, but of **something out of my control**. Situations I am not in charge of and **events I can't predict** confuse me, whether they are negative or positive.’

(James, 2017)



Activity

Now imagine this activity again....

- You're told you're going to a restaurant, but struggle to process, organise and hold onto the information
- You cannot hold onto a sense of time which means you don't know when it's happening
- You cannot predict what might happen when you get there or plan for this

How would you be feeling?

What would help you to feel differently?

Reducing anxiety: increasing ‘certainty’ by making the world more predictable

Two of the key components that help us to create certainty:

- ***A perceived sense of control*** (agency)
- ***Knowledge*** (which helps us to make more accurate predictions)

Therefore, we can help children and young people by:

- ***Reducing the amount of uncertainty*** we / the environment creates for them
- Creating ways in which we can help them ***access more knowledge to build better prior models*** and help give them a sense of agency

Better prior models make The World more predictable





Increasing Structural Certainty

- Increasing knowledge to make the world **more predictable** by providing clear, consistent, permanent information in a way that makes sense for your child
- Have clear routines, but allow flexibility
- Structure and support around **transitions and change** is particularly important
- Giving them a **sense of agency** over the planning – shared planning, choices (e.g. dinner first or bath first?; football and then Molly's party or just football?)

Increasing **Social** Certainty

Increase

Increase your child's knowledge about social situations and social communication

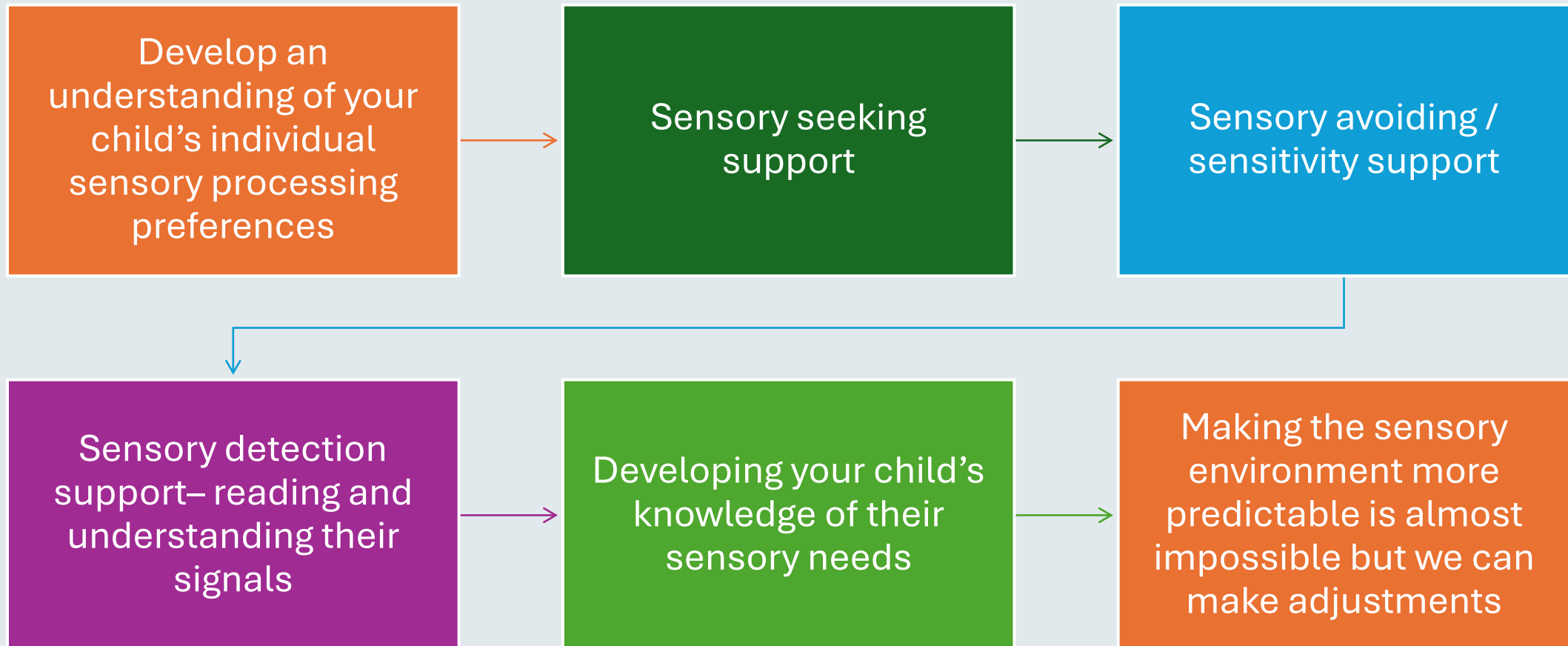
Support

Support their ability to predict social situations and other people
Use clear, consistent, concrete communication

Help

Help your child to feel a sense of agency around social situations (options, choices, exit strategies, reduce expectations)

Increasing **Sensory** Certainty



Neurodivergence and Social Belonging

Masking – covering up / hiding what is happening underneath

Social camouflaging – ‘pretending’ / taking on a role to appear socially ‘acceptable’ / neurotypical or to present as ‘fitting in’

Self-concept, Self-esteem and Social Inclusion – who am I, am I any ‘good’ and do I fit in?

Understanding neurodivergence and what it means for them as an individual – strengths and challenges

How to make friends that are right for you – finding your tribe

How to recognise and respond to bullying

How to recognise when you need help and seek this effectively

Understanding and supporting masking and social camouflaging

- **Masking:**

- covering up who you really are
- hiding / suppressing emotions and behaviours
- presenting as 'fine' on the outside

- **Social camouflaging:**

- pretending to be the person you think you should be / who everyone expects you to be
- putting on an act / playing a role to help you to 'fit in'



AUTISTIC PEOPLE AND CAMOUFLAGING AKA MASKING & MIRRORING

FUELLED BY
INTENSE DESIRE
TO FIT IN

CAN CAUSE
MENTAL HEALTH
DIFFICULTIES

CAN LEAD TO
AUTISTIC
BURNOUT



RAISES RISK
OF SELF
HARM AND
SUICIDE

CAN LEAD TO
DENIAL OF
SUPPORT

CAN HIDE TRAITS
WHEN DIAGNOSIS
IS NEEDED

OFTEN A
'SURVIVAL'
STRATEGY



DESIGNED BY SUNSHINE SUPPORT

Using information from experiences & expertise within our team

www.sunshine-support.org

When a SQUIRREL hides their
Squirrel traits and PRETENDS to
be a BEAVER, this is called



MASKING

Sound problematic yet?

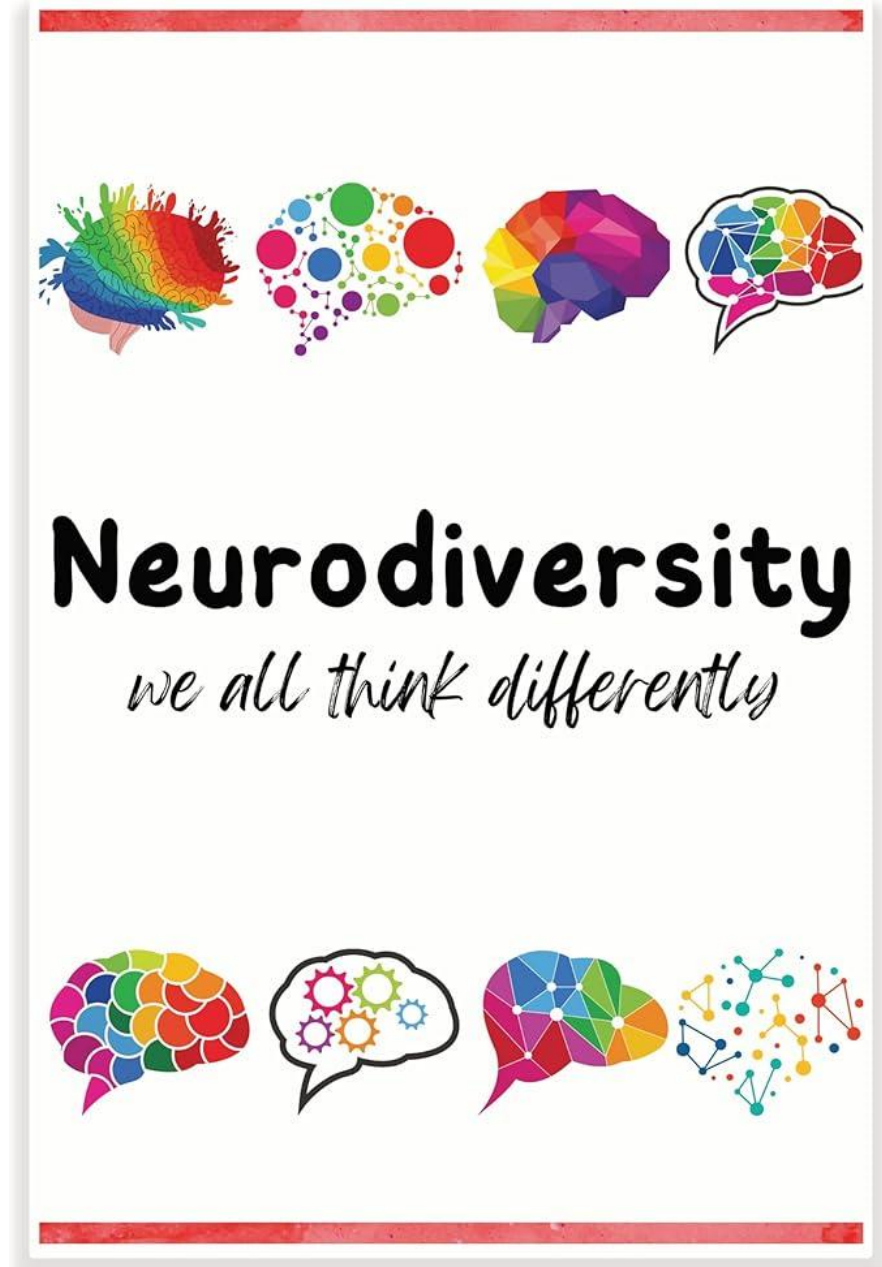
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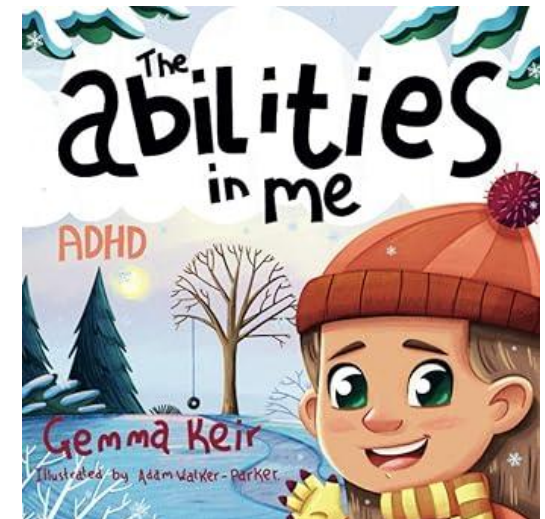
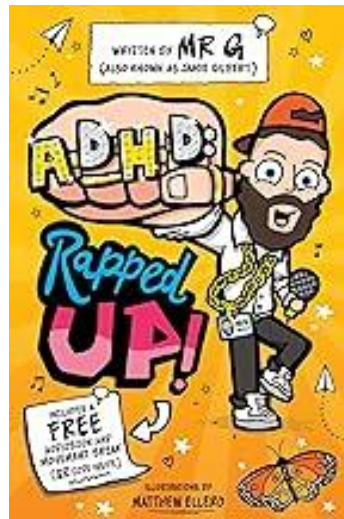
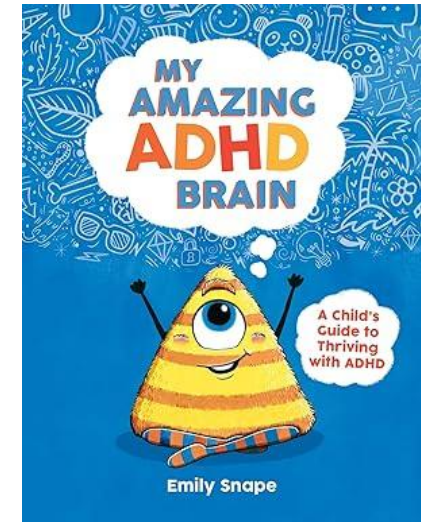
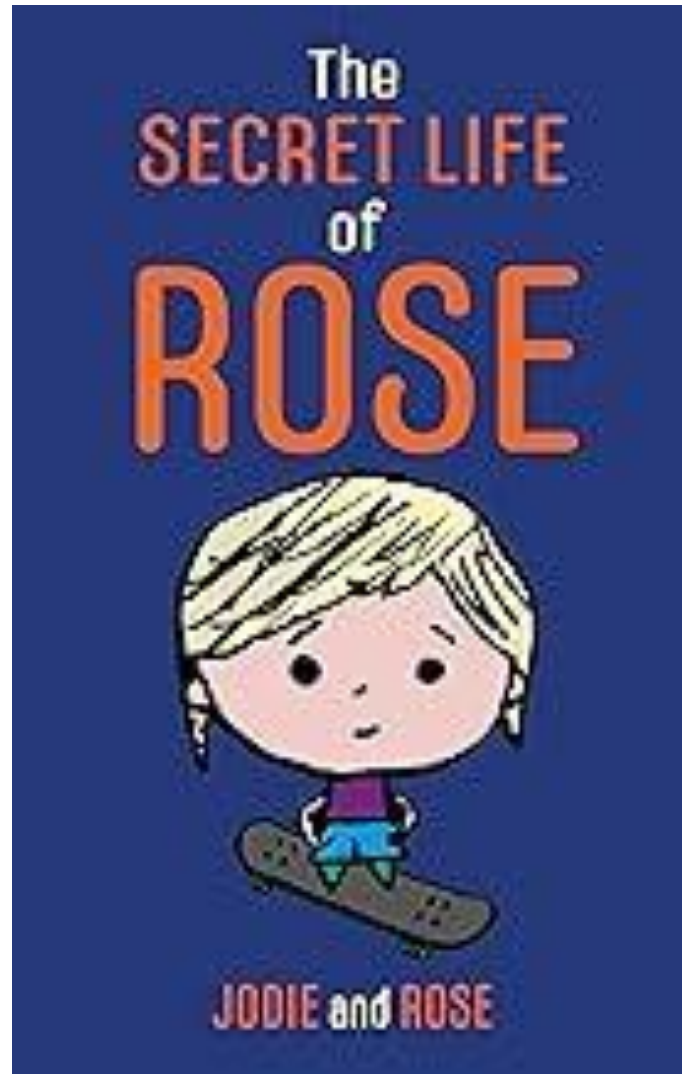
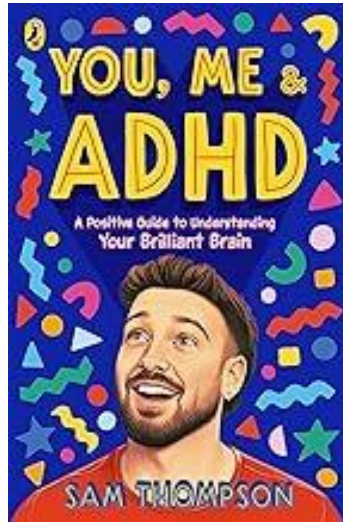
Masking and Unmasking

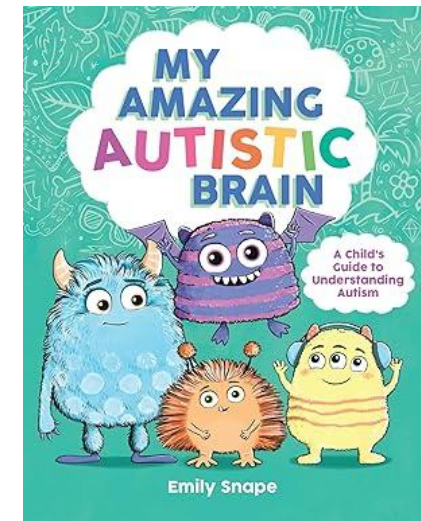
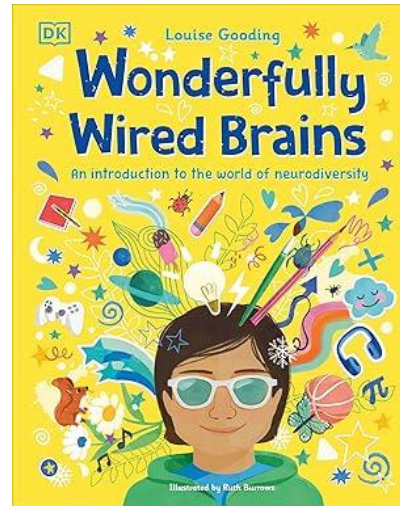
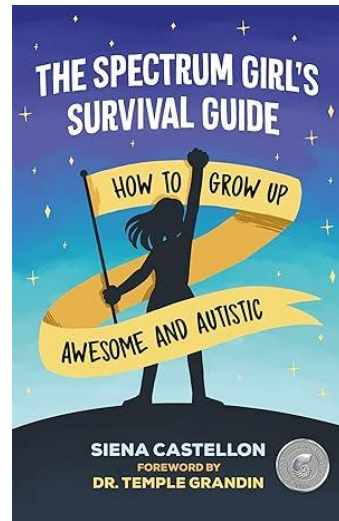
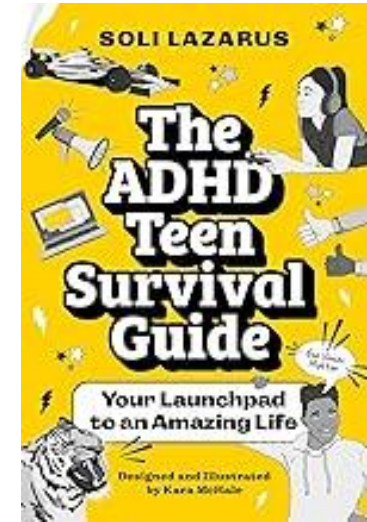
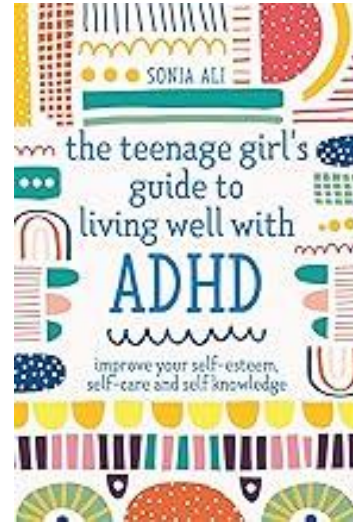
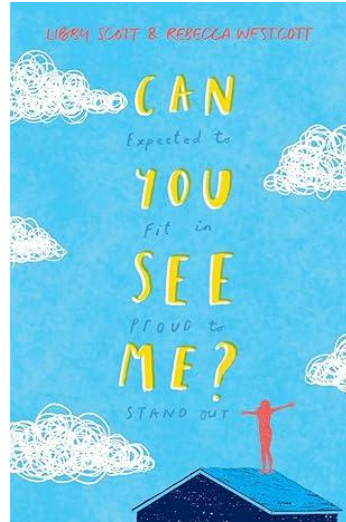


Self-concept and self-esteem

- Understanding neurodivergence as difference not disorder (not just the ‘diagnosis’)
- Their individual profile – what does neurodivergence mean for them, including their strengths
- Positive feedback and self-talk
- Learning about and getting to know other neurodivergent people
- Having permission to ‘unmask’



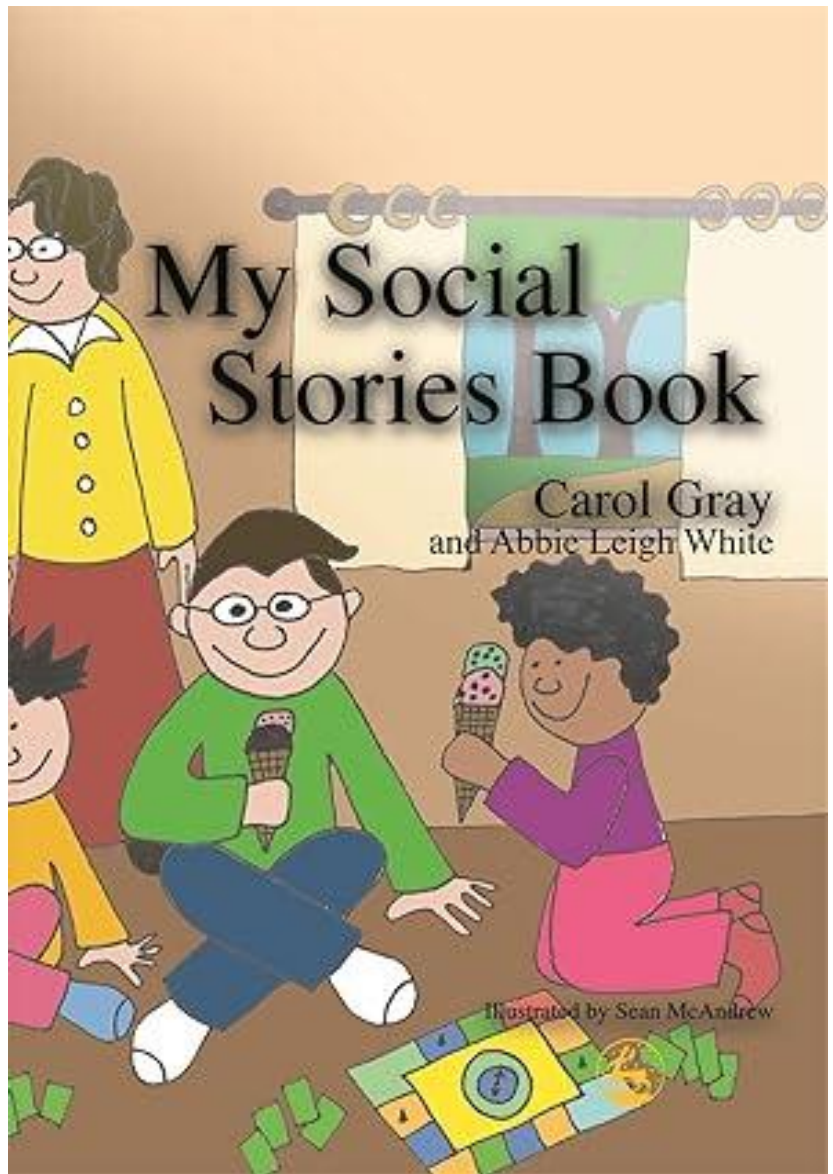




Social confidence and belonging

- What does it mean to be a friend?
- Who are the right friends for me?
- How do I find people I connect with?
- What is bullying, what can it look like and how does it feel?
- Comic Strip Conversations
- Social Stories





COMIC STRIP CONVERSATIONS



#1

Outline a conversation



#2

clarify social situations



#3

add visual supports

CREATED USING
POWTOON

Comic Strip Conversation



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Comic strip conversations

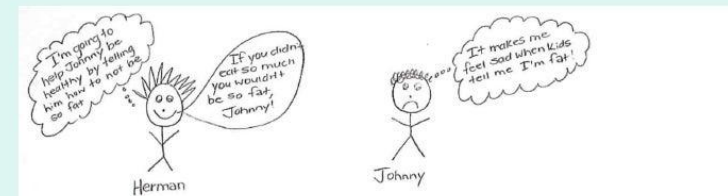
Have you had a difficult or confusing conversation? Try using this tool to think about what the person said and what they may have been thinking or feeling. Sometimes what people say and what they mean or what they are thinking can be very different

Where

bad idea, hostile, anger, unfriendly
questions
frightened
good idea, happy, friendly
sad, uncomfortable

proud
comfortable, sad
facts, things we know
confused

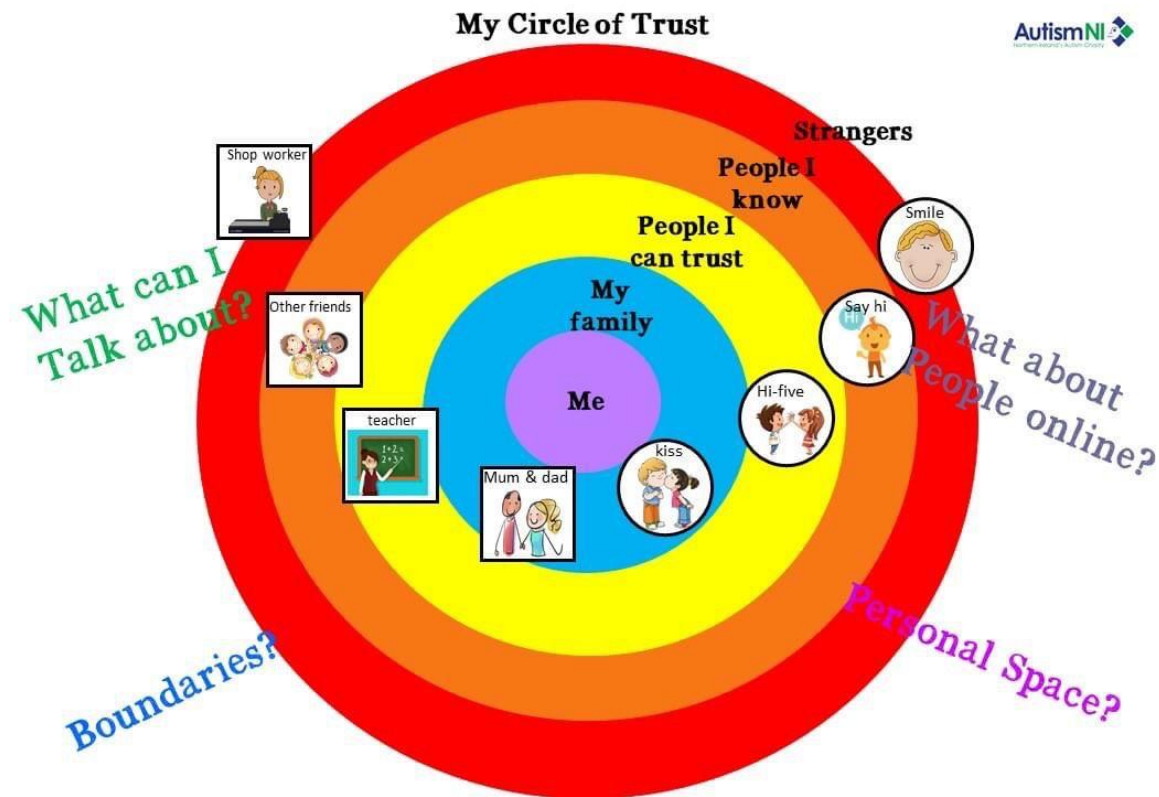
Comic Strip Conversations



It makes Johnny sad when I tell him he wouldn't be so fat if he didn't eat so much. Johnny doesn't like to be told he is fat. Even if I'm trying to help I shouldn't tell Johnny that he is fat. I shouldn't tell anyone that they are fat. When I want to help Johnny be healthy I can ask him if he wants a healthy snack like an apple or pretzels. If Johnny says, "No!", then I should talk about something else.

Trust and seeking help

- How do we know who to trust?
- The Circles of Trust activity
- How do we know when we need help? Who do I seek help from?
- How do we get help when we need it? (verbal, visual, touch, through actions / behaviour)
- Building positive help-seeking behaviours



Neurodivergence and Emotional Regulation

Interoception

Alexithymia

Masking /
camouflaging

Reduced
help-seeking

Dynamic
Capacity and
fatigue

A different
experience of
stress/anxiety

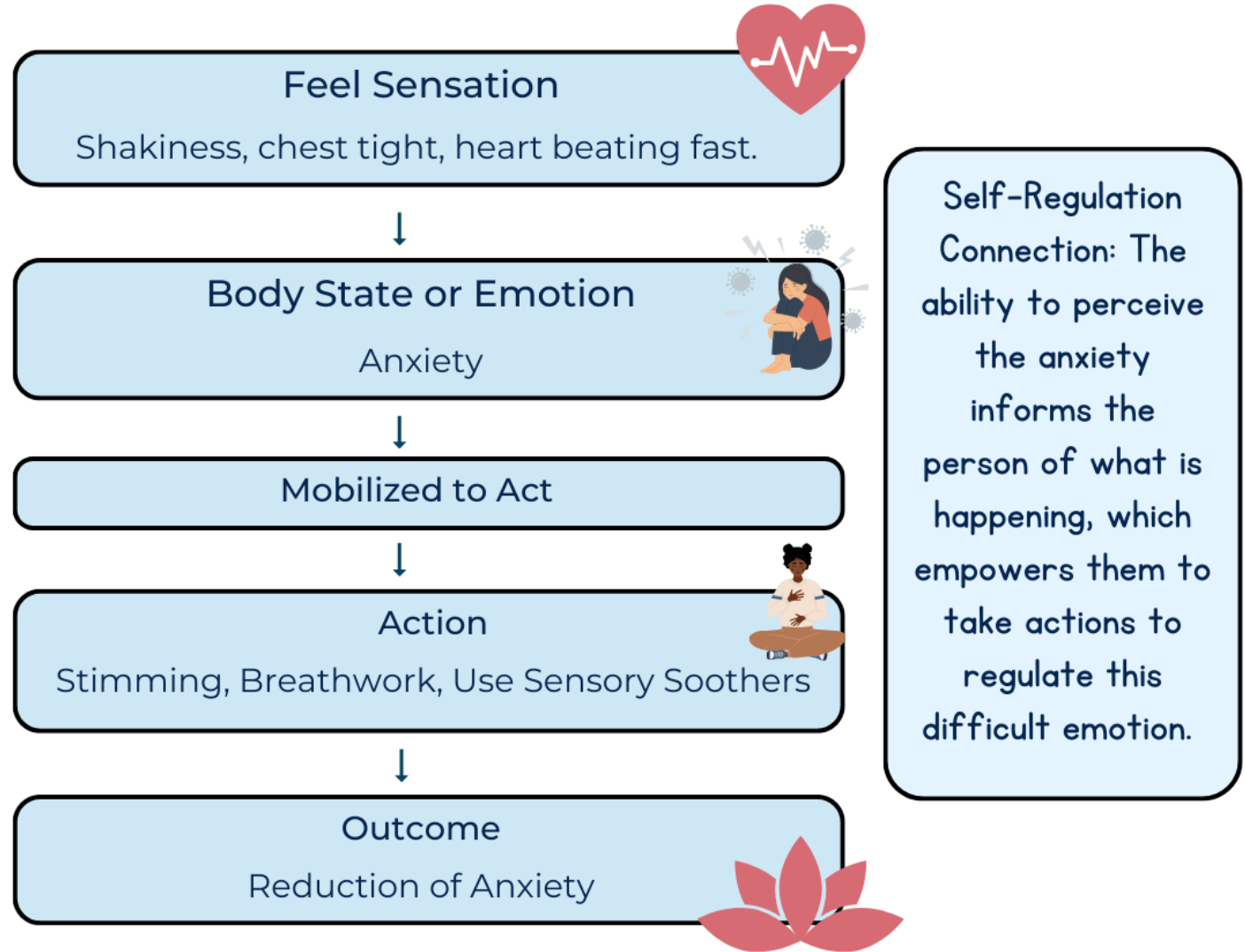
Interoception and Emotional Regulation (Emotion States)

- Sad
- Frustrated
- Anxious
- Nervous
- Proud
- Surprised
- Joyful
- Excited
- Scared

FEELINGS LIST					
					
Happy	Peaceful	Fear	Surprise	Sad	Anger
Content Cheerful Proud Confident Silly Energetic Excited Enthusiastic Eager Hopeful Optimistic Elation	Calm Loving Affectionate Trusting Relaxed Thoughtful Caring Thankful Accepted Valued Inspired Passionate	Shy Nervous Worried Anxious Regret Excluded Insecure Embarrassed Scared Frightened Terrified Panic	Startled Confused Shocked Overwhelmed Speechless Curious Amazed Moved Awe-struck Crushed Stunned Bewildered	Bored Tired Lonely Guilty Disappointed Hurt Insignificant Inferior Rejected Hopeless Depressed Miserable	Annoyed Frustrated Irritated Jealous Offended Mad Disgusted Hateful Furious Agitated Enraged Hostile

Linking body signals, emotions and actions

- To understand and manage an emotion a child first has to be able to recognise the **body signals** associated with that emotion
- They then have to be able to **label the emotion**
- They then have to be able to **scale the signal / emotion**
- They then require a **toolkit of strategies** to 'manage' the emotion effectively



Linking Physical (Body) Signals to Emotions

Once a child can identify their body signals and is able to describe these, whether using words and / or visuals.....

Then we need to help them link those physical sensations to their emotions.

For example, I feel hot and sweaty, I have butterflies in my tummy and I feel sick inside.... I'm feeling worried.

Linking Emotions with Bodily Sensation Cards

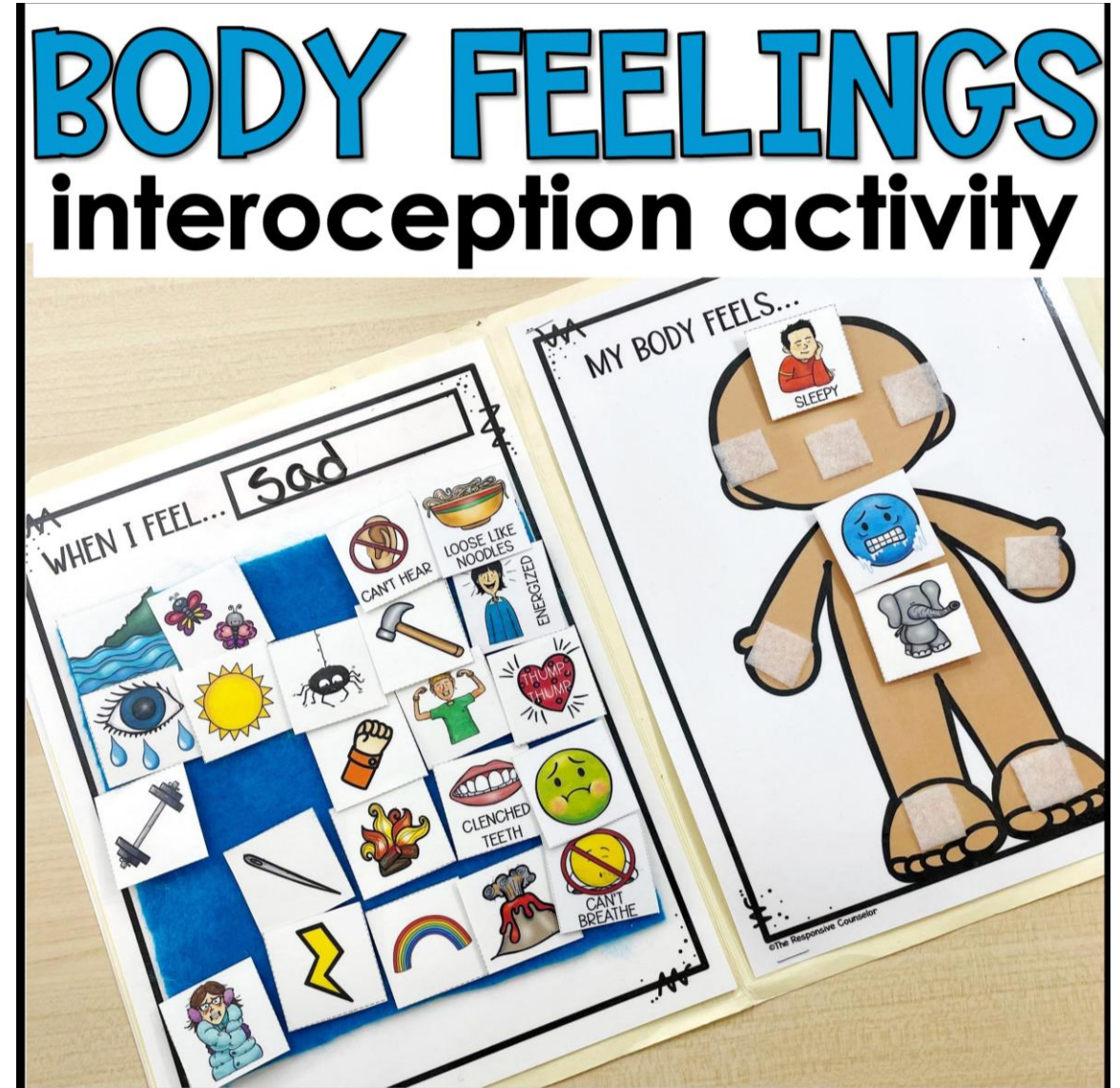
build interoception skills!

			fidgety foot tapping	need to move face scrunched	breathless speechless
ANGER 	SAD 	HAPPY 	When we feel insecure, we might feel bodily sensations like...	When we feel lonely, we might feel bodily sensations like...	When we feel joy, we might feel bodily sensations like...
hiding warm	heaviness cold inside	open energetic			

Visual support

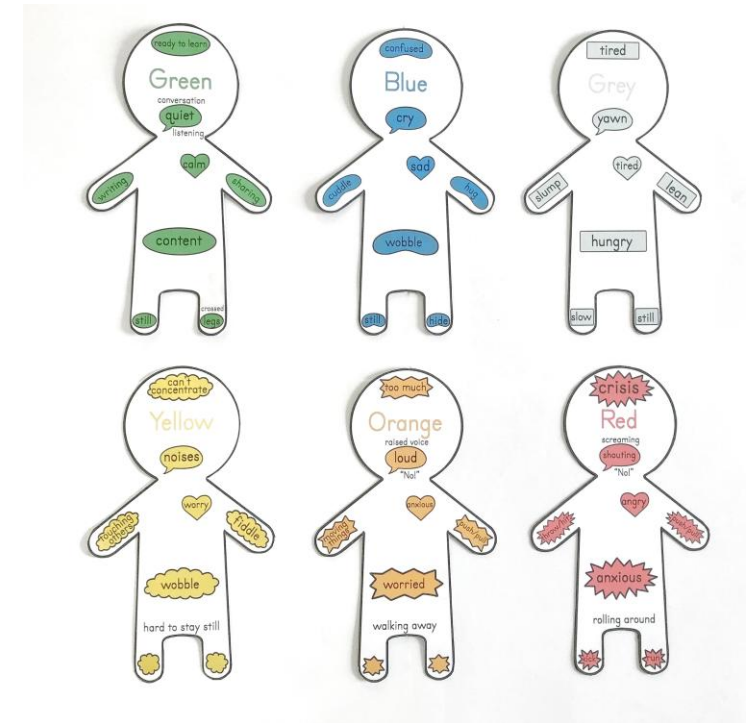
Some children will need a lot more visual support to help them to:

- Identify and label their body signals
- Map these on a body template
- Match these to an emotion



Interoception and Alexithymia

- Alexithymia in simple terms means not having ***the words to describe emotions***
- Alexithymia is more common in neurodivergent children, particularly autistic children
- Even if a child has good language skills, they can still experience alexithymia and it can be easily missed
- Many autistic children tell us they need help to develop a ***spoken language for their feelings***







Name: _____ Date: _____

Word Bank: Emotion Charades

Directions: Use the pictures and emotion vocabulary synonyms to describe how someone is feeling.

Image	Emotion Word	Synonym 1	Synonym 2
	worried	concerned	distressed
	angry	mad	irritated
	excited	animated	enthusiastic
	grouchy	testy	grumpy
	happy	glad	delighted
	sad	cheerless	gloomy

'Inside Out' Feelings Word Mat - Key Stage 2

JOY	SADNESS	FEAR	DISGUST	ANGER
				
delighted	crestfallen	afraid	appalled	angry
ecstatic	dejected	anxious	disgusted	annoyed
elated	depressed	apprehensive	dismayed	fuming
euphoric	despondent	frightened	repulsed	furious
happy	heartbroken	panicked	offended	incensed
overjoyed	miserable	tense	shocked	livid
thrilled	sad	terrified	sickened	outraged

My Emotions


astonished


happy



poorly


nervous


hot


scared


cross


sleepy


confused


cold


excited


surprised


embarrassed


sad

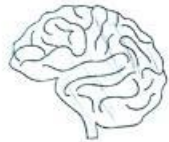
ink saving Eco

Developing a word bank for emotions

When I feel an emotion

*emotions include mad, sad, silly, happy, or frustrated. We can notice sensations in our bodies when we have emotions.

I can notice it in my:



Brain
Dizzy
Full
Distracted



Lungs (breathing)
Fast
Slow
Normal



Heart rate
Fast
Slow
Pounding



Hands
Loose
Clenched
Fidgeting



Tummy
Hurts
Tight
Normal
Butterflies



Feet
Want to run
Fidgeting
Normal

List some things you might feel and where you feel them

Brain - focused
Hands - hot
Lungs - out of breath

©Miss Jenn

HOW TO TEACH
INTEROCEPTION

Coping strategies

Once a child can **tune into** their body signals and can **recognise** and **label** an emotion, then they can start to develop coping strategies for managing that emotion.....

When I feel SAD



I can...

- Think about the things I am grateful for
- Draw or write down my feelings
- Listen to my favourite music
- Do my favourite activity to cheer
- Spend time with my friends, family and pets
- Talk about my feelings with someone

When I feel FEARFUL

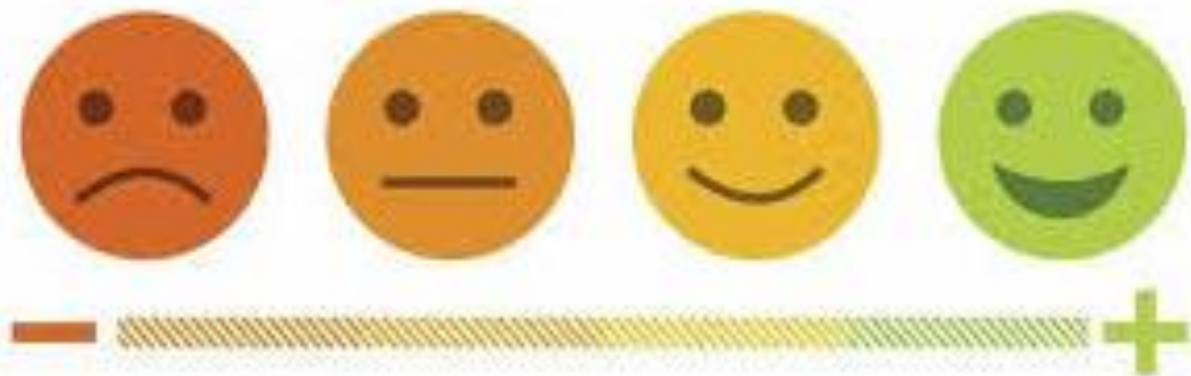


I can...

- Visualize my happy place
- Take slow, deep breaths
- Take time out, or move away from my trigger
- Focus on things I can control, such as my reactions
- Talk about my feelings with someone
- Be brave and try to face my fears

FEELINGS SCALE + COPING SKILLS

	HOW DO YOU ACT?	WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?
AGITATED ANGRY DEVASTATED FRIGHTENED FURIOUS JEALOUS STRESSED OUT	ARGUING, REFUSING TANTRUM, SHUTTING DOWN, YELLING, STOMPING	STOP, AND WALK AWAY TAKE DEEP BREATHS COUNT TO 10 OR 100 TELL AN ADULT MOVE YOUR BODY OR EXERCISE TAKE A HUG PRACTICE DEEPENING TECHNIQUES
CONFUSED EMBARRASSED EXCITED IRRITATED NERVOUS SILLY WORRIED	AVOIDING, PACING, CLINGY, HYPER SHUTTING DOWN, OVERSTIMULATED	TAKE DEEP BREATHS TAKE A BREAK PAUSE, AND ASK FOR HELP USE POSITIVE SELF-TALK RELAX AND TRY AGAIN TENSE & RELAX YOUR MUSCLES THINK OF A PEACEFUL PLACE
CONFIDENT FINE FOCUSED HAPPY HOPEFUL PEACEFUL PROUD	SMILING, RELAXED, LAUGHING, ENGAGED, PAYING ATTENTION, ENJOYING YOURSELF	SMILE & LAUGH PRACTICE GRATITUDE TAKE STEPS TOWARDS YOUR GOALS HELP SOMEONE ELSE EXERCISE KEEP LISTENING WRITE ABOUT YOUR SUCCESSSES
BORED DISAPPOINTED LONELY SAD SHY SICK TIRED	WITHDRAWN, DISENGAGED, CRYING, DEPRESSED, SLOW DOWN, UNDERSTIMULATED	GET OR GIVE A HUG OR FAMILY GET SOME FRESH AIR STRETCH LISTEN TO MUSIC MOVE YOUR BODY OR EXERCISE DO A HOBBY YOU ENJOY



**Scaling:
identifying
how you're
feeling or
measuring an
emotion**

- Visual scales can be helpful for children to express and explore how they're feeling when using 'words' is difficult
- Scales can also be helpful to start helping your child think about the size/intensity of an emotion, e.g. 2 = cross, 6 = angry, 10 = exploding

My Check In



5		<p>Explode—I feel angry and I am not sure how to calm down. I need an adult to help me.</p>
4		<p>Rumbling—I feel like I am starting to lose control. I may need space and some support.</p>
3		<p>Bubbly—I am feeling frustrated or something is worrying me. I may need a break to calm myself.</p>
2		<p>Ok—I know something is not right but I know what I need to do.</p>
1		<p>Happy—I feel good about myself and what is going on around me.</p>

Understanding and supporting Dynamic Capacity in Neurodivergent Children



Yesterday, he wasn't forced by woken bampoo but today...

And he often shares just fine, but then sometimes...

So what does it mean? 



This time, Panda was too tired and overwhelmed to cope with this unexpected situation.


Capacity to cope with unexpected events

fatigue

emotional overwhelm

sensory overload


Check his bar - this response is not a choice. He's coping the best he can. 



Sometimes my best looks like this...

Sometimes like this...

and sometimes like this.

My effort is always HIGH, but the outcome varies significantly. 

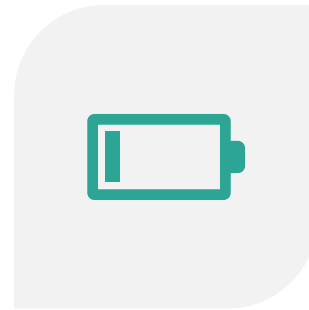
Supporting dynamic capacity



SPOON THEORY



STRESS BUCKET



BATTERY



ENERGY
ACCOUNTING

THE SPOON THEORY

Imagine your child's energy as a set of spoons.

Autistic children start the day with a certain number of spoons. When they run out, they can be **more prone to experiencing burnout**. Different activities require a different number of spoons. For example...

The infographic consists of four vertical columns, each representing an activity and its energy cost in spoons. Each column has a circular icon at the top showing the number of spoons: 1 spoon for 'Getting up', 2 spoons for 'homework', 3 spoons for 'Brushing teeth', and 4 spoons for 'School'. Below each icon is an illustration of the activity: a child waking up, a child writing, a child brushing teeth, and a school building. At the bottom of each column are icons representing the activity's requirements: a bowl of cereal for breakfast, a t-shirt and shorts for getting dressed, a child swimming for swimming class, and a broom for house tasks.

Activity	Spoons Required
Getting up	1
homework	2
Brushing teeth	3
School	4
Breakfast	1
Getting dressed	2
Swimming Class	3
House tasks	4

Explore with your child which activities feel easy and which ones wear them out. This can help you plan their days. E.g. you might plan a swimming lesson for the weekend when there's no school.

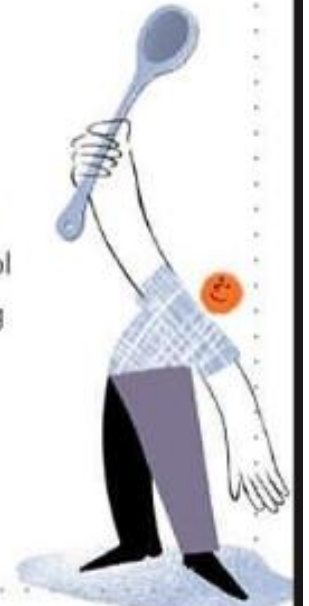
@theparentingspace_official

Spoon Theory

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

-
- The checklist is organized into two columns. The first column has three items, each with a single spoon icon above it: 'Get out of bed', 'Make a phone call', and 'Get dressed'. The second column has three items, each with two spoon icons above it: 'Take a shower', 'Manage meds', and 'Walk the dog'. Below these are two more columns, each with three items and three spoon icons above them: 'Cook a meal', 'Doctors appointment', and 'Socialize' in the first; 'Go to work/school', 'Grocery shopping', and 'Exercise' in the second.
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get out of bed | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a shower |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make a phone call | <input type="checkbox"/> Manage meds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get dressed | <input type="checkbox"/> Walk the dog |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cook a meal | <input type="checkbox"/> Go to work/school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doctors appointment | <input type="checkbox"/> Grocery shopping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Socialize | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise |

Stuff That Works.



The Stress Bucket



Stress Bucket Worksheet

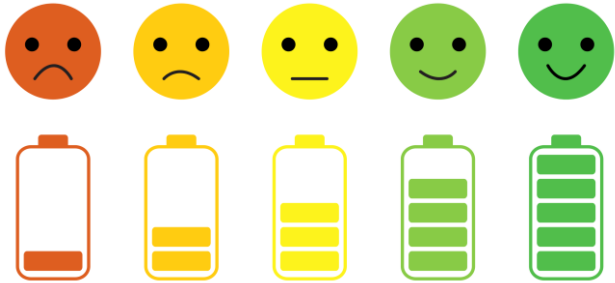
What goes into your stress bucket and what can you do to reduce the volume of stress you are holding day to day

The things that add to your stress:

Sensory or trauma triggers that flood your bucket:

Things that affect how much you can cope with stress:

Things that help you reduce stress:



Class Energy Battery



FULL ENERGY
How you feel: You feel AMAZING. You're ready to run, play and learn. You have a lot of energy.

ALMOST FULL
How you feel: You're feeling really good. You can still play and focus on things.

HALFWAY
How you feel: you may feel a little tired but still okay to do some activities.

LOW
How you feel: You feel pretty tired and are finding it hard to focus.

FLAT
How you feel: You feel really tired and it's hard to do anything.

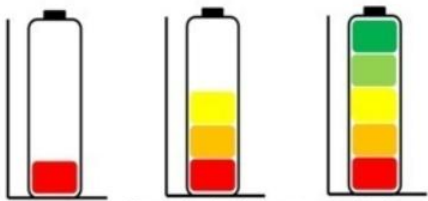
CHECK YOUR BATTERY

how are you currently feeling?



My Inner Energy Battery

• SOCIAL STORY GAME & ACTIVITY •



low

Ready to learn

high

What is the purpose of energy accounting?

- Energy Accounting works by writing a list of activities & situations that take from or add to our energy levels and adding a numerical value to each activity. This can help us work out if we have more points in the 'deposit' pot or the 'withdrawal' pot.
- This exercise can help us manage our life & mental health better and live a more balanced life. It can also really help with avoiding burnouts and emotional overload.
- It is especially helpful for people with neurodiversity, as it can help themselves and their loved ones learn how to avoid becoming too overwhelmed.



Energy Accounting Activity



Energy Drains

(Things that use up my energy)

no sleep
-insomnia

showering

loud noises

transport
-buses, trains

change in
schedules/
routine

too
much
constant
noise

studying

talking to
strangers

cooking

sensory overwhelming
outfits.

Energy Gains

(Things that recharge my battery)

painting/art/
drawing

researching
autism

Knitting

anime

wearing cute
outfits

gaming
-sims 3,
cozy grove,

roleplay
games
-Dungeons &
Dragons

watching TV shows
I've already watched.

Neurodivergence and Physical / Sensory Regulation

Sensory seeking

Sensory sensitivity

Interoception and basic physical needs

Stimming

Movement

Sensory circuits

Sleep

Eating

Movement and sensory seeking

- Work out what sensory inputs your child seems to seek / like (this will be very individual)
- Provide sensory objects (e.g. fidgets, lights, sounds)
- Create a sensory space/area/tent
- Provide access to frequent movement / sensory breaks (sensory circuits)
- Allow a calming-down period after transitions
- Give short breaks between tasks to allow for movement
- Set a variety of tasks and activities and where possible include 'hands on' activities
- Plan 'I need a break' options; help your child to recognise when this is necessary
- Allow flexible seating/standing options
- Allow stimming / repetitive movement that is safe – this helps with regulation





My Calming Choices

I need...

 alone time	 blanket	 bubbles
 counting	 cuddle	 cuddle a soft toy
 deep breaths	 go for a walk	 listen to music
 read a book	 screen time	 sensory toys

Stimming

The function of stimming:

Emotional (joy, excitement, stress, anxiety)

Physical (movement, particularly repetitive movement, is soothing for the central nervous system)

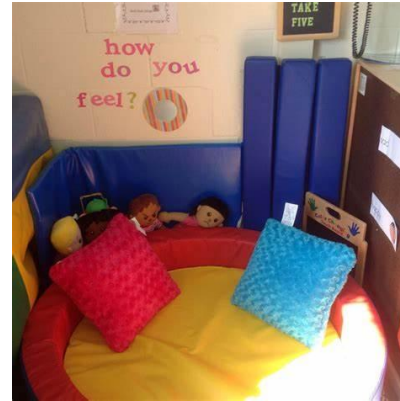
Sensory (to gain feedback or input and/or to block out other sensory sources which are overwhelming)

Overall stimming is a **self-regulatory behaviour** which needs to be understood not stopped.

Rather than stopping a behaviour, seek to find out what your child gains from it and then sensitively adjust it over time.

Sensitivity / sensory avoiding

- Work out what aspects of sensory input your child seems particularly sensitive to (lights, smells, sounds, touch aspects, movement)
- Allow a calming-down period after transitions
- Give short breaks between activities / social times to allow for time in a quieter / sensory reduced space
- Allow opportunities for quiet / down time during the day, provide a balance between ‘sensory demanding’ activity and time to regulate
- Support your child to recognise their sensory sensitivities and give them a way to communicate when they need a break / need quiet space / need a strategy to help
- Create a ‘sensory reduced’ area in the home
- Provide access to ear defenders / headphones / loop earbuds
- Think about lights, sounds, smells – sensory demanding environments and how your child may or may not cope in these



Self-care and organisation

- Visual supports (timetable, cue cards, planners)
- Interoception support (learning to identify body signals and what they mean, including emotions)
- Awareness of touch related sensory needs (e.g. not wanting to be close to others in a line / in assembly or seeking touch inputs by leaning on / holding onto others)
- Social stories / visual prompts for toileting needs / remembering to drink
- Motivating objects to support self-care and organisation, e.g. a brightly coloured, textured water bottle (sensory seeking)
- Plain, neutral soft clothing (sensory avoiding); adjustments to the school uniform
- Exploring sensory needs in relation to food / eating – sensory seeking / sensory avoiding – and providing support, e.g. eating in a sensory reduced setting to reduce overwhelm, close liaison between home and school to discuss food options

Linking Emotions with Bodily Sensation Cards build interoception skills!

		
fidgety foot tapping	need to move face scrunched	breathless speechless
		
When we feel things we might feel badly sometimes like...	When we feel things we might feel badly sometimes like...	When we feel things we might feel badly sometimes like...
hiding warm	heaviness cold inside	open energetic



Understanding Our Sensory Friendly Clothing...





Interoception and Physical Regulation (Body States)

- Hunger
- Thirst
- Pain
- Temperature
- Toileting needs
- Tiredness
- Digestion
- Heart rate



Tuning into, recognising and labelling body signals

Scanning	Body scanning
Mapping	Body mapping
Developing	Developing a vocabulary (building words) to describe body signals

Body Scanning

- Provides a structured activity to help children take notice of their bodies and their internal signals
- Helps to foster increased self-awareness
- Helps to make connections between physical body sensations and signals and emotions
- Once children have learnt how to do a '**body scan**', this can be used as a tool for regular body '**check-ins**' (e.g. in the morning before school, when they get home from school, before bed)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLoK5rOl8Qk>



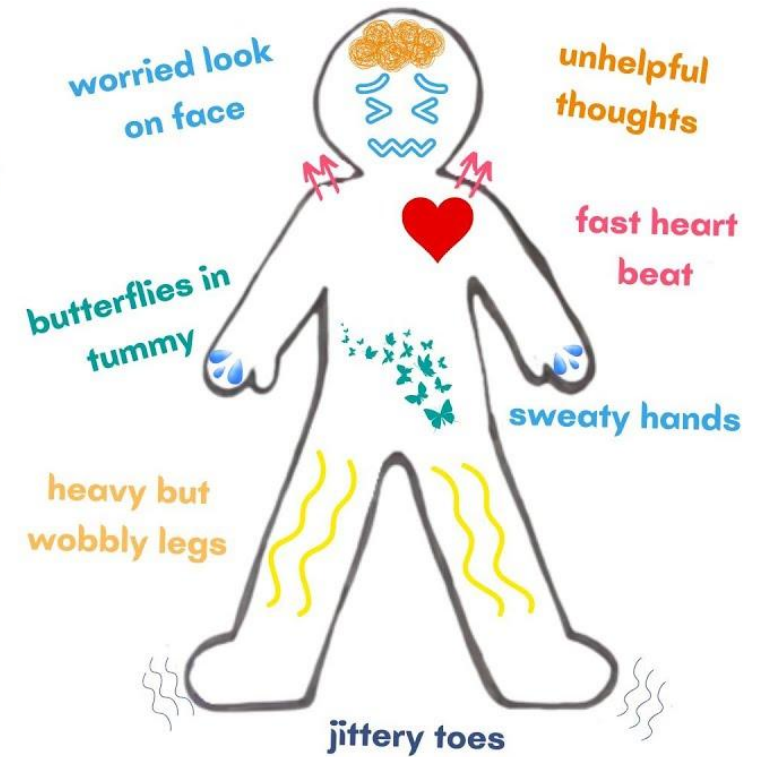
Body Mapping

Body Mapping

What is your body telling you?



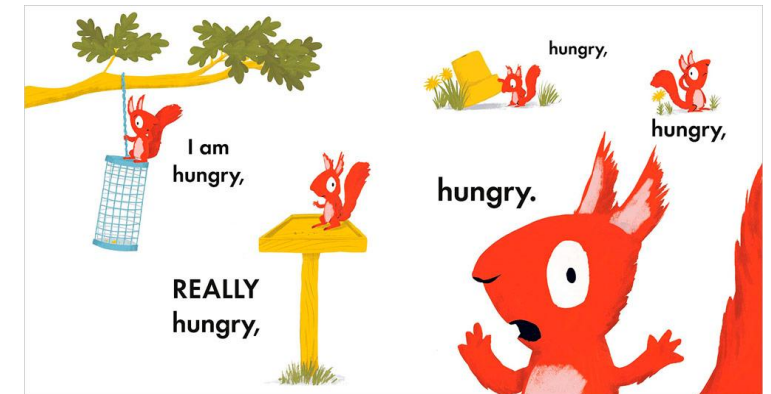
The Children's Society



A simple visual tool to help children start to identify and explore their internal signals and how these relate to different body states and then also their emotions

Supporting Interoceptive Awareness for physical body signals: modelling and games

- **Model Your Own Body Awareness:** Children learn through observation, so regularly describe your own internal sensations. For example, you can say, “I’m feeling hungry. My stomach is growling, and it feels empty,” or, “I need to go to the bathroom. My tummy feels full.” This helps children connect physical sensations with actions in a natural, everyday context.
- **Create Games Around Feelings and Sensations.** To build body awareness in a fun, non-threatening way, create games that focus on describing physical sensations related to emotions. An example would be to ask them how their tummy feels before eating, then asking them to describe how their tummy feels after eating. You can also answer these questions but be careful not to correct or suggest how your child should feel. The point of the game is to start trying to connect with feelings inside and to notice changes with bodily sensations.
- **Story books** are also a helpful tool (see resources at end of powerpoint) – image is from ‘I Am Hungry’ by Michael Rosen






Just like Dora!!

Dora wants me to remember these 3 things:

1. Keep my hands down
2. Use my words with a quiet voice
3. Keep working hard.




1. Follow a bedtime routine. Fireman Steve takes a bath, brushes his teeth, and reads for 15 minutes before turning off the light.
2. Close your eyes and try to lie still.
3. Stay in bed after the lights are out.



		
Spiderman  talks nicely.	Spiderman  helps his friends	Spiderman  looks after his clothes




Sometimes Spiderman gets upset too.
When Spiderman is upset,
he uses his words and talks to his teacher.

Supporting Interoceptive Awareness for physical body signals: visual prompts and tools

- **Use Visual Prompts and Tools:** For children who struggle with eating or recognising their hunger/fullness signals, tools like a [Snack Board](#) can be helpful. This visual guide shows how many snacks a child can have throughout the day. It reassures children who may feel anxious about food availability while helping them regulate how much they eat. For those who don't recognise hunger, the board serves as a reminder to eat regularly to maintain energy for daily activities.
- For mealtimes, a [Dinner Plate Visual](#) can indicate portion sizes and the types of food they should eat. This is particularly useful for children who may not recognise when they're full or may feel anxious about eating too little. A helpful tip is allowing extra portions of vegetables for those who crave large amounts of food, reducing feelings of restriction.
- Also see '**Power Cards**' in resources at end of Powerpoint (examples included here too) – they use characters that are motivating for the child



Sensory and sleep



- Seek advice from an **Occupational Therapist** – your child may benefit from specialist support to assist their sleep, e.g. a weighted blanket, calming sensory input before bed.
- Activities that provide calming, heavy, steady muscle work can be effective in helping sensory-seeking children to calm down / regulate before bedtime.
- Have a consistent, structured bedtime routine, which includes sensory support (e.g. calming activities, a warm bath with ‘sleep’ bath products suitable for children, low lighting, gentle music / white noise)
- It is important for school staff to know that a child with sensory processing differences also has difficulties sleeping, as this may impact on their ability to be regulated in school / the classroom (e.g. if they are overtired). Close home-school liaison is essential – e.g. a contact book with a simple sleep ‘code’



Resources

