

**Quality of life is a human right,
but not a reality
for far too many
Humans**



Autism & Trauma

By A/Prof. Wenn Lawson

Presentation Aims:



Firstly, a note on **language** and what Autism means compared to being Allistic (non-Autistic).

Secondly, reasons being autistic is traumatic causing individuals to '**adapt to morph**' to 'mask' their true Autistic selves.

Thirdly, going forward, with out masking, is an outcome of neuro-affirmative practice that supports 'all' individuals and accommodates their difference, **whatever their intersectionality**.

Importance of language

- ❑ Identity-first (autistic person) vs. person-first (person with autism)
- ❑ Use of pronouns: she/he/they
- ❑ Always ask the individual about their preferences

Ref: Monk, R., Whitehouse, A. J. O., & Waddington, H. (2022).
The use of language in autism research. *Trends in Neurosciences*.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tins.2022.08.009>



How to talk about autism

Potentially offensive	Autistic preferred
Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)	Autism, autistic ✓
Person-first language (person with autism)	Identity-first language [autistic (person)] ✓
Autism symptoms and impairments	Specific autistic experiences and characteristics ✓
At risk of autism	May be autistic; increased likelihood of being autistic ✓
Co-morbidity	Co-occurring ✓
Functioning (e.g., high/low functioning) and severity (e.g., mild/ moderate/ severe) labels	Specific support needs ✓
Cure, treatment, or intervention	Specific support or service ✓
Restricted interests and obsessions	Specialised, focussed, or intense interests ✓
Normal person	Allistic or non-autistic ✓

Source: Trends in Neurosciences, September 2022

**Autism is a matter of
attention.**

**We are monotropic, not
polytropic.**

**We are biologically
designed to work
differently to the allistic
population.**

**We are single focused, but
when interest is sparked,
we connect more widely.**

**Using our interests &
strengths help us connect.**

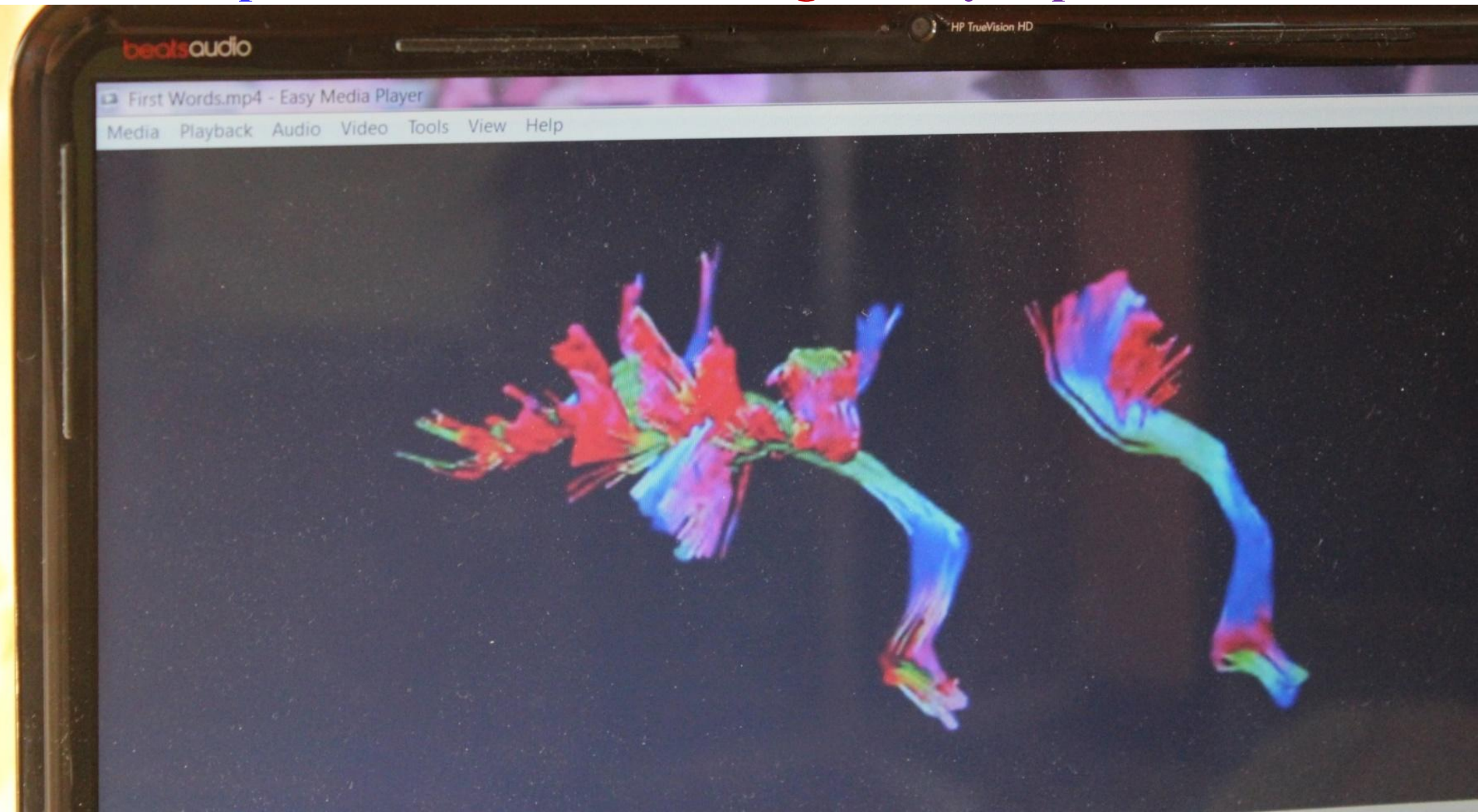
Today: Autism and Monotropism



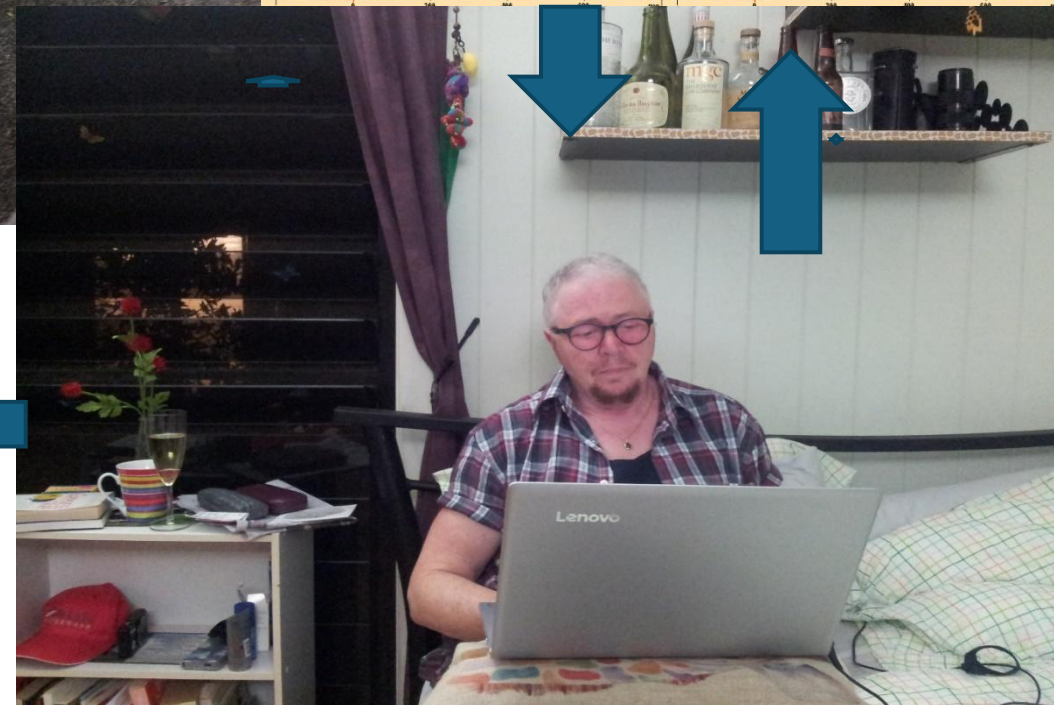
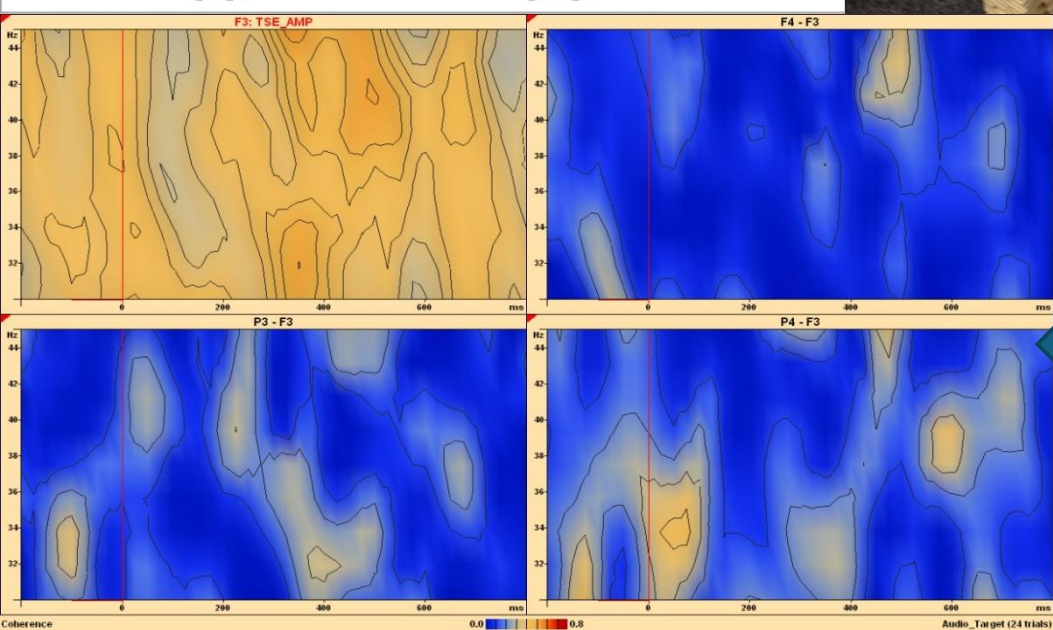
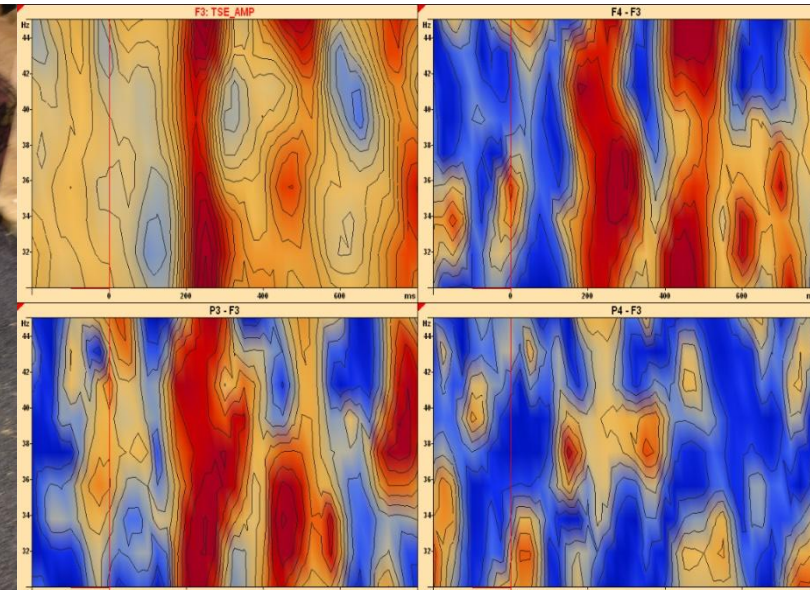
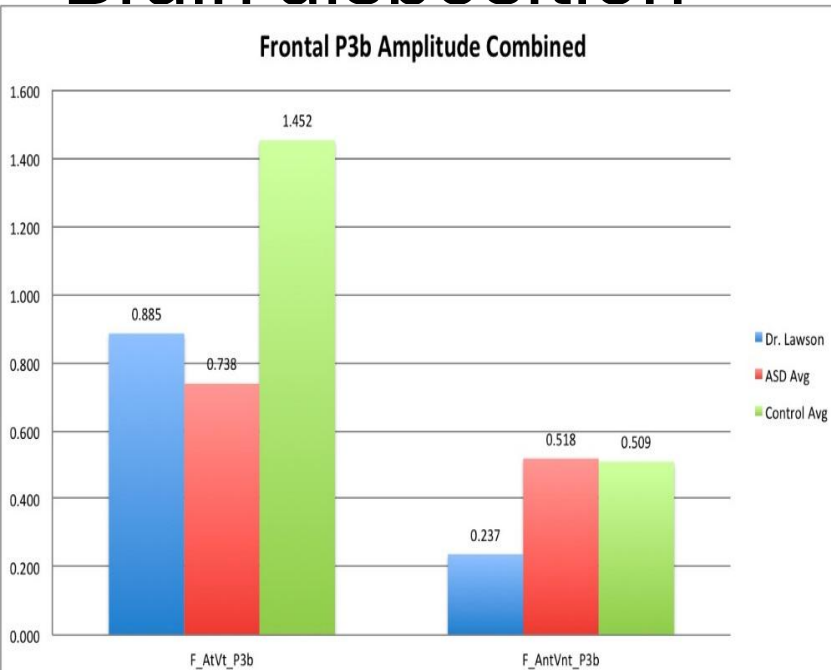


What Are We Seeing?

Areas concerned with language in the brain:
Monotropism on the Left, on the right: Polytropism.



Brain disposition



Being Monotropic

- Being single focused/minded
- Our senses may be
- overwhelming or
- underwhelming.
- So, difficult to multi-task: look at a person while walking, thinking, and processing our next move. Because we see part of the picture, not the whole thing.
- Implications for Family & relationships?
- Implications for school?
- Copy to mask difference?





Transition

**Autism is: I like it here,
please do let me stay.**

**Autism is: I know it here,
please don't take me
away.**

**If and when I leave this
place to travel to another
space,**

**I need to know it right
away. I need to know
that I'm OK.**

**Transition is so fleeting
it leaves not time to
stay.**

**Will I have time to
settle, or will I be
whisked away?**


**I know that change
can happen.**

**I know it can take
time.**

**But how can I know
what this will
mean?**

**What this will mean
for mine.**

**Transition is about
moving, “to where
or what” one asks?**

A large pile of 3D question marks, rendered in a dark, metallic-looking material, is scattered across the left side of the slide. The question marks are of various sizes and are piled together, creating a sense of depth and complexity. The background is a dark, gradient surface.

**This is my very
question, from
present or the
past.**

**Time for me is all
the same,**

**I know not of its
future.**

**I only know I trust in
'now'... tomorrow
can come, I just
need to know how.**

What is Play?

"Wenn, Wenn" I hear the teacher say.

"Wenn, Wenn, look this way".

"Wenn, Wenn", I hear the children say.

"Wenn, Wenn, come and play".

I hear the words that come each day,

"What do they mean?" I hear me say.

Words without pictures simply go away. I turn my head and look instead

at all that glitters; blue, green and red.



**You'll like it here" Father
speaks,**

Come and play with Billy"

**Inside my head my brain
just freaks,**

"How can they be so silly"?

**"Why would I want to do
this thing"**

**My mind can find no
reason.**

**"Please leave me with the
sparkly string,**

**This gives me such a
feeling...**

Being monotropic in a polytropic world is *Traumatic* unless we understand & welcome who we are. The needed accommodations, help prevent/heal trauma. It's not about changing us to fit socially accepted norms but changing societal understanding to accommodate and create a fit for us.... However different that might Look.....



Mono/Single Interest: not a choice, it's how we make connections, gain insight and form understanding.

Passion

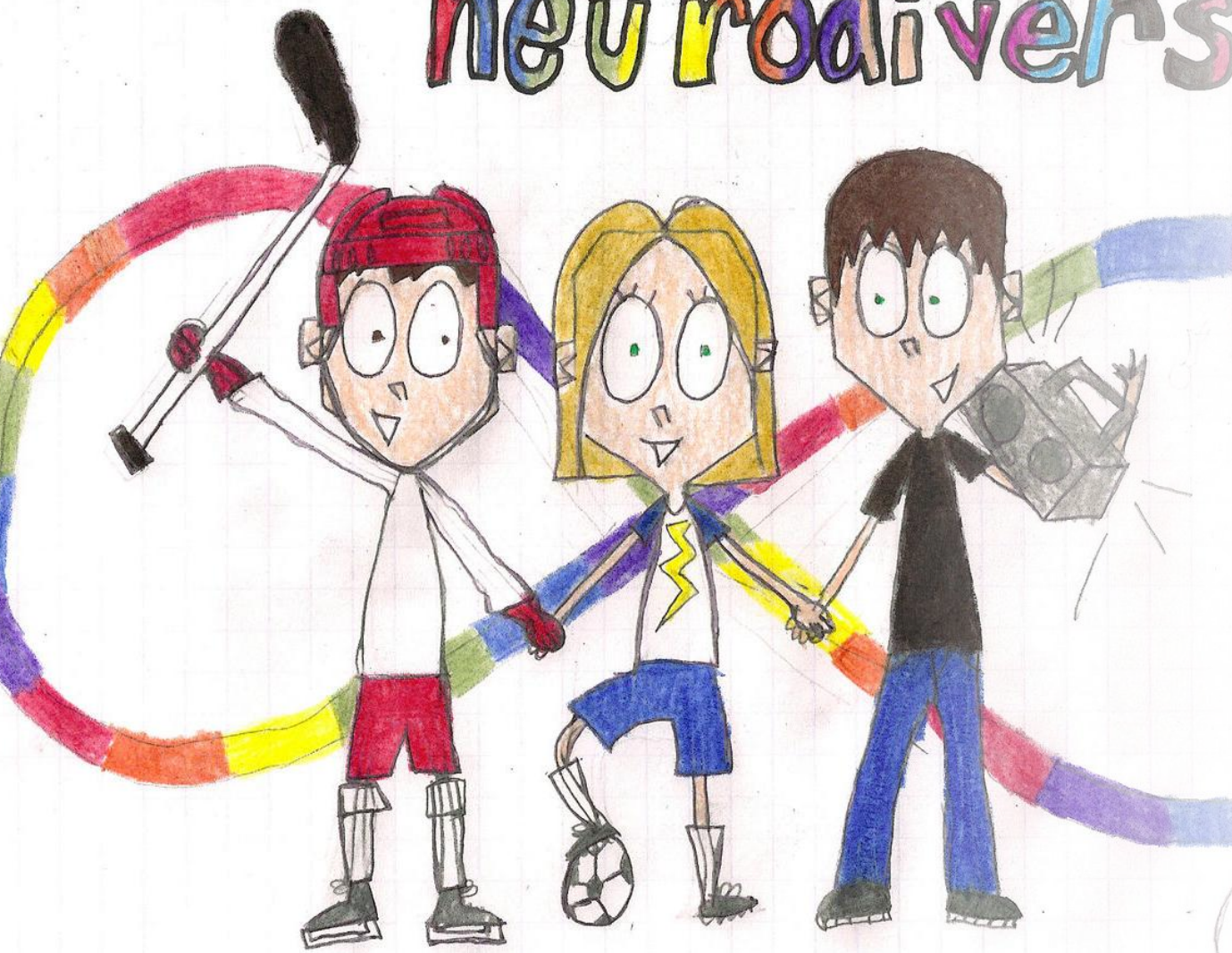


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No Interest



Support neurodiversity



'Cause life would suck a lot more if
we didn't exist!

monotropism's
natural state= **Flow**.
If expected to
change attention
quickly, we may get
'stuck'

If senses are
overloaded (we
experience senses
one at a time) we
may become 'inert'
or hindered from
activity.

Inertia is the
opposite to a flow
state.

I like
but we
about 5
Right

Properties resulting from monotropism



Single Focused Interest



Detail focus (if interested)



Interoception may be off-line



Strength Based Attention

- **Shifting attention uncomfortable**
- **Object permanence challenged**
- **Emotional regulation challenged**
- **Passionate Interests**

TRAUMA

Many will mask to fit in, but at what cost?



Interoception



Underdeveloped OP: (e.g. Carer says 'just putting out the bins'; they go outside; individual seems fine. Comes in to find individual upset/angry and saying 'where were you I couldn't see you; I thought you left me') repeated over time = Trauma.



Tom, 11 yrs: invited to join
in a game. **Tom is autistic.**
He is **playing hide-and-
seek.** As soon as the others
were **out of sight,** Tom
begins to shout and rock.
**He is utterly
convinced
they are gone.**



Tom repeated this experience over and over. very upsetting for others and awful for Tom. This is not 'problem behaviour' or IQ issue. It's due to Tom's learning style and cognitive adaptation to change. Tom Lacks OP = TRAUMA.

Co-occurring with autism

- Autism rarely travels alone, it has cousins. ADHD co-occurs with autism in up to 75% of the autistic population.
- Learning differences- an intersectionality rarely considered.
- Adapt to Morph- 'difference' not noticed? Hiding contributes to Trauma
- Bölte S, Lawson WB, Marschik PB, Girdler S. Reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable: The WHO's ICF system integrates biological and psychosocial environmental determinants of autism and ADHD: The International Classification of Functioning (ICF) allows to model opposed biomedical and neurodiverse views of autism and ADHD within one framework. Bioessays. 2021 Apr 1:e2000254. doi: 10.1002/bies.202000254. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 33797095.

Reasons we adapt to morph & Unmasking

Masking (Sheild)

Body discomfort

Poor Auditory Processing

Emotion misconnection

Not popular

Always get it wrong

Bullying

Sensory disconnection

Not normal

Not safe

Not allowed

TRAUMA



Unmasking

Body comfort.

Information: in multiple ways

Name emotions (Interoception)

Create popularity via strengths

self-esteem, forgiveness

acceptance

Anti-bullying modelled

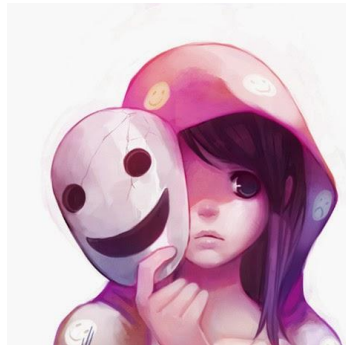
Connect senses via passions

Normal

Find Safer Spaces

Allowed

Healing over time



Intersectionality, Neuro Affirming Practice



AUTISM, QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELLBEING

- **Nuanced presentations** – Autism + Co-occurring conditions + aspects of intersectionality, sensory and passionate interest
- Race, Education, Sexuality, Ability, Age, **Gender**, Ethnicity, Culture, Language, Class, Race
- **Means multiple minority groups experience multiple injustices and prejudices = TRAUMA.**
- **THIS NEEDS TO CHANGE..... INCLUSION SAYS: WE ARE TOTALLY OK, JUST THE WAY WE ARE! Is this the message we are giving?**

Social connection, Neuro-Affirming Practice (NAP)

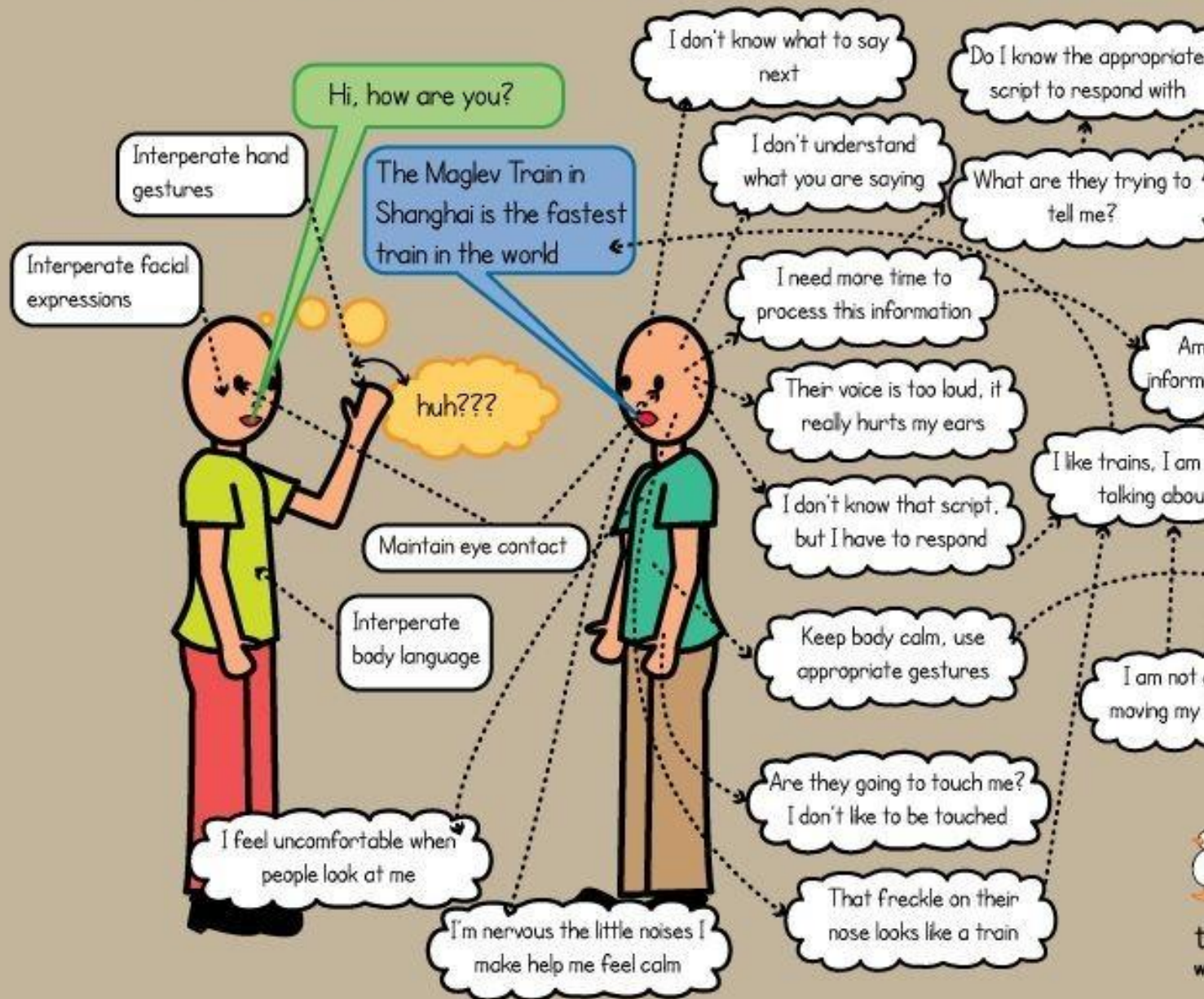
- What way do you need me to relate to you?
- What interests you?
- What helps you feel listened to?
- What helps you feel safe?



AUTISM, QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELLBEING



communication and auti



What we all need to do

- Firstly, I need to accept my difference
- Secondly, I need access to the world we all live in.
- In Summary (my tools are):
 - Interest
 - Appropriate mediums that facilitate interest
 - Accessible language in a form that captures my interest
 - My strengths motivated by interest

- **Be welcoming, accepting of our difference.**
- **Use our 'Interest'**
- **make sure sensory profile is observed**
- **Practice building interoception connections, this connects to self & to others.**
- **Build OP permanence**

Putting it All Together

- **Humans come in all shapes and packages.**
- **We need to know we belong.**
- **Offering a safe space to be ourselves is the only antidote to 'masking'. The more intersections to one's life the more potential for trauma.**
- **It takes us all, working together to combat these!**



Monotropism

- <https://www.autisticrealms.com/monotropism-1>
- <http://www://monotropism.org>
- **Monotropism questionnaire:**
<https://dlcincluded.github.io/MQ/>





Autism and mental health MOOC
on the edX platform

[https://www.edx.org/learn/
mental-health/curtin-
university-autism-and-
mental-health](https://www.edx.org/learn/mental-health/curtin-university-autism-and-mental-health)