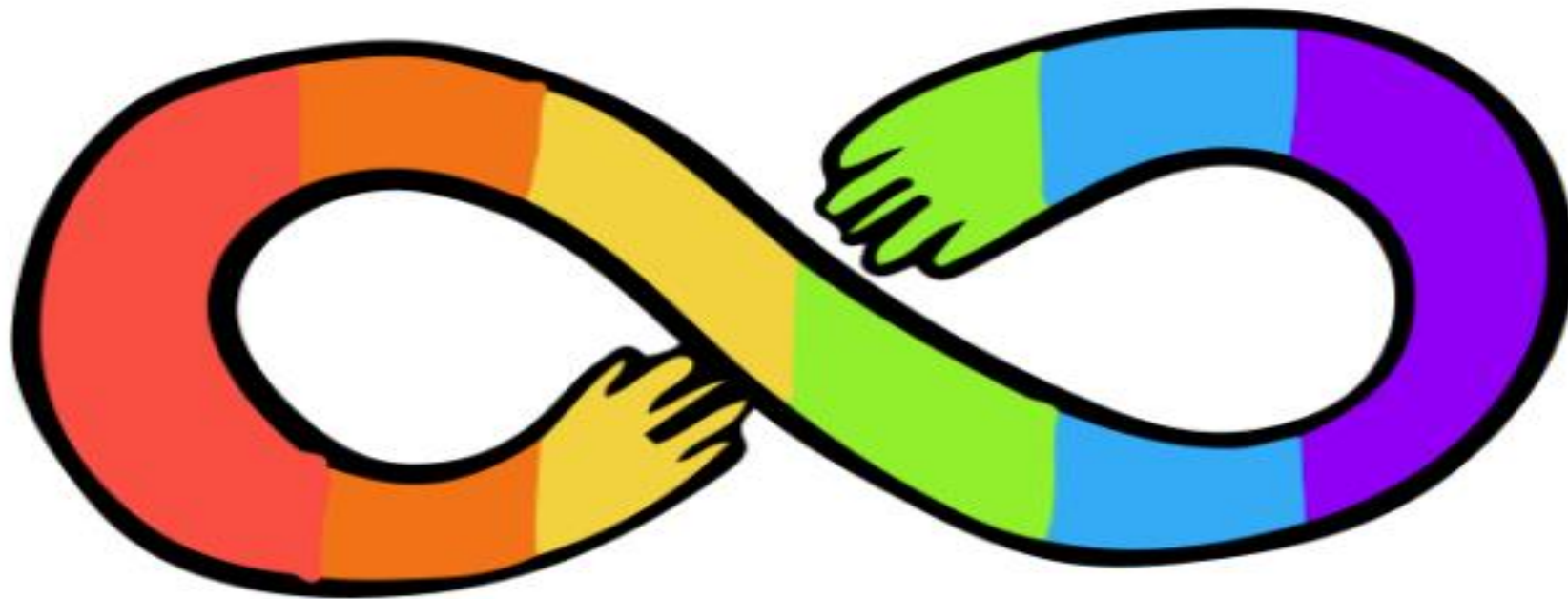


EMPOWERING **AUTISTIC** PARENTS



NURTURING **AUTISTIC** CHILDREN ©



An AIDE Canada and Autism Ontario initiative
Written and presented by Maxine Share

WHY A WEBINAR FOR AUTISTIC PARENTS

Our experiences are unique

- Knowledge builds confidence and power.
- It can improve family dynamic and pride in identity.



OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Importance of knowing, 'What does being Autistic mean' to each person
- Sensory and social communication experiences >> can be cause difficult moments/emotional/behavioural responses for parents/chld(ren).
- Self-care is an essential part of being an Autistic parent.
- Autism proud households > better mental health and self-esteem



WHERE DO WE START?

Consider these questions:

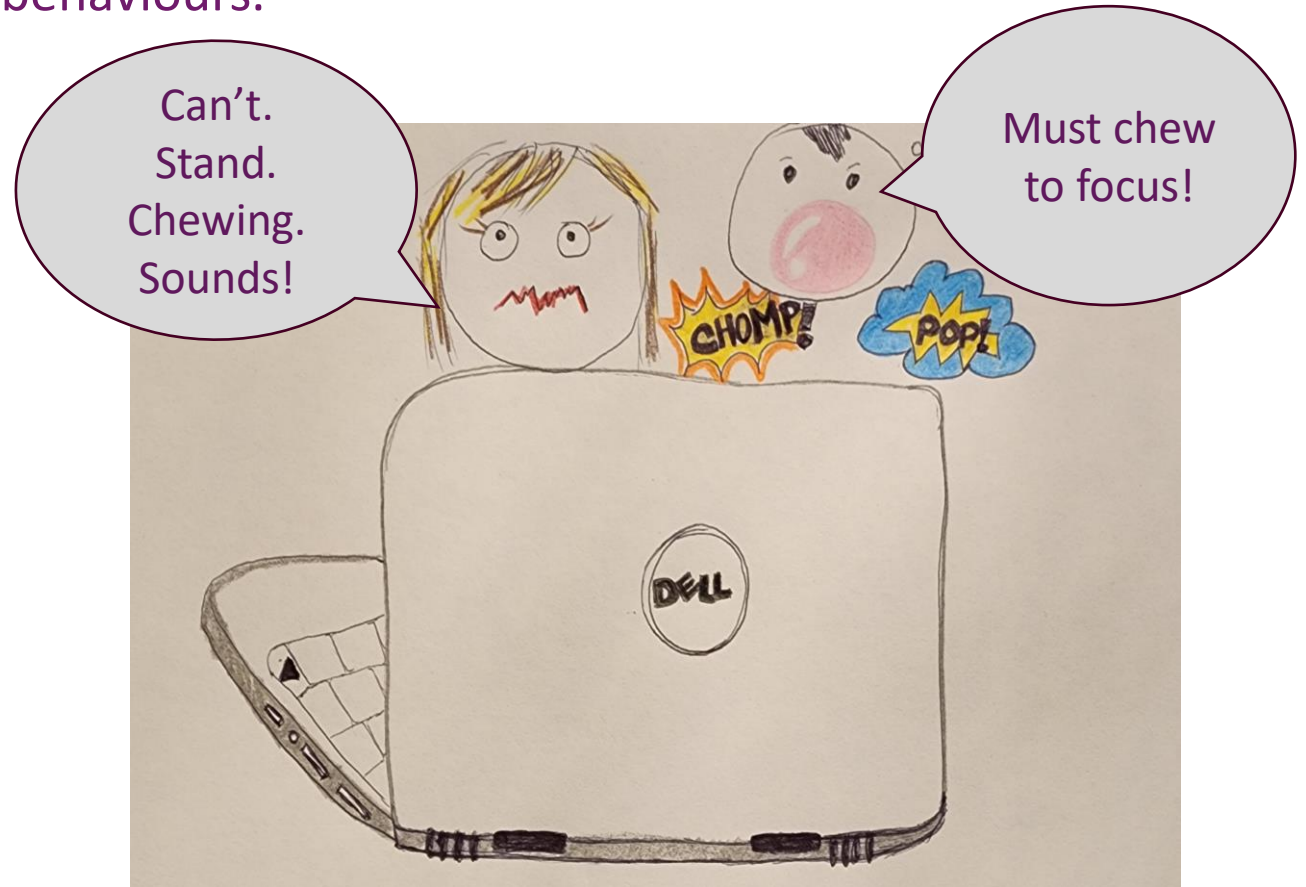
- What does being Autistic mean for you?
- What does being Autistic mean for your child(ren)?
- Answers empower you to address issues related to sensory, social communication, learning, or self-care with greater success.
- No mention of 'behaviour'. Why?



SENSORY PROCESSING*

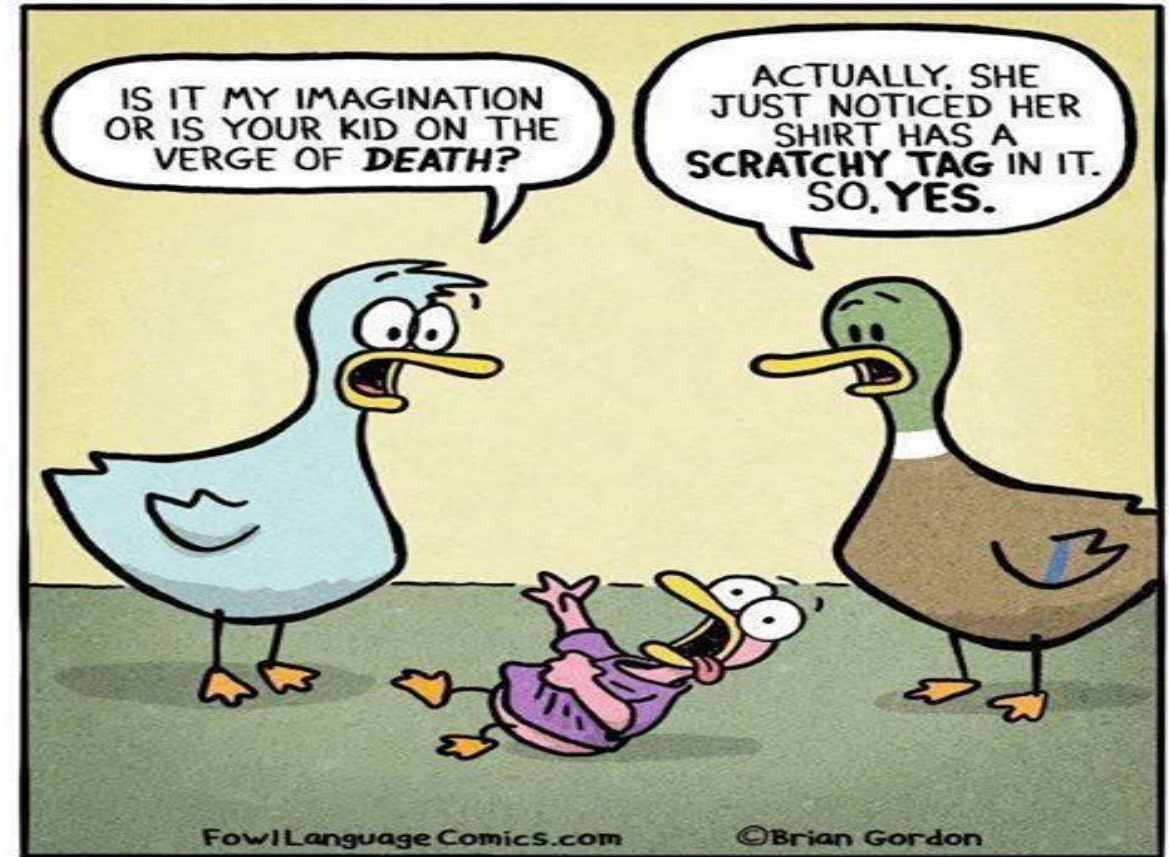
How the brain receives, interprets and uses sensory information then responds with movements or behaviours.

- Up to 90% of Autistic people have sensory and/or motor differences >> cause or contribute to emotional and behavioural responses.
- Conflicting sensory experiences can cause distress >> home/school/community.
- Sensory needs can change based on environment/ anxiety.



WHY LEARN YOUR FAMILY SENSORY PROFILES?

- Sensory/motor responses can be dramatic if it sends child into fight/flight/freeze (ex.) tactile.
- Confidently recommend school-related sensory or motor needs/ model advocacy for child(ren).



SOME SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS

PARENTS	CHILD(REN)
Sensitive to sounds loud environments, sudden noise.	Loves own devices loud, but others should be quiet.
You love to cook and experience new flavours	Tolerates few foods. Chicken nuggets/pizza/plain pasta.
Daily hygiene routine is a must.	Avoids toothbrushing/ hair washing/bathtime
People tell you 'speak up' = you talk very quietly.	People always hushing > child always uses 'outdoor voice'.
Miss meals--don't feel hunger signals.	Always hungry/doesn't recognize when they're full. Hangry?

HOW TO LEARN THE SENSORY/MOTOR PROFILE

- To know how to help, you must know what the individual needs are.
- Get **comprehensive sensory and motor assessment** by a qualified Occupational Therapist (OT). Reminder: a neurodiversity-affirming* Occupational Therapist.
- Schools rarely provide the complete sensory motor profile. Government programs, work benefits, or paying privately may be options.



SENSORY AND MOTOR 'DID YOU KNOW'

Sensory aversions can cause fear response in a child (flying insects, balloons).

Low muscle tone can cause child to rest head on hand, lay instead of sit, lean on you.

Vestibular can cause a child to tilt back and rock precariously on one leg of a chair or stool

At school, Autistic children may avoid using the toilet all day due to smells/textures.

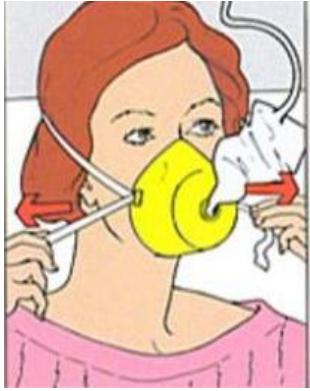
child (flying insects)

Proprioception can make your child walk, step, or move cautiously.

Proprioception can make others think your child is aggressive: too much force toward people or things.

SENSORY PARENTING TIPS

Remember to meet your sensory needs, too!



Provide ear protection > encourage everyone to wear it BEFORE they need it. Consider [Loop](#) or [Calmer](#) earbuds for noise

Avoid yelling at your child. It can trigger anxiety. Take the time to go to them.

Child is chastised in class for being disruptive? A water bottle with a pop-up straw might help. Ask your Occupational Therapist.

May need to move to learn; pacing, rocking. Use the IEP to support in school—fidget cushions, ball chair, TheraBand.

If your child keeps their coat on in class > may be sensory. Use IEP for this.

Child chews on their shirts or sleeves. Chewing gum, [chewable necklaces](#) or [pencil toppers](#) may help. Put it IEP.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SENSORY AND MOTOR DIFFERENCES

AIDE Canada's [sensory and motor strategies collection](#) has some excellent content.

Autistic adult FB groups may answer your questions. Try [Ask Autistic Adults](#), [Ask Autistics Ontario](#). Post your question to get lived experience responses.

Consider being matched to a parent mentor. They often help to [guide you to resources](#).

Some excellent web supports:

- [sensorymom.com](#)
- [SPD Parent Zone podcast](#)

THE PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

An assessment that identifies your child's learning strengths and needs.

- Should guide autism-positive teaching approaches and classroom supports.
- Can help parents to understand best ways to teach their child.
- May identify executive functioning (EF)* skills > **essential for school/work/independent living**. Up to 80% of Autistic have EF challenges. * <http://tinyurl.com/2p8s789b>



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

Flexible thinking

Ability to shift your thoughts/ change direction if required. Able to change direction if a plan isn't working. Open to new ideas to solve problems.

Emotional Regulation

Manage and respond with control during a difficult moment. Being able to control emotions in order to complete a task, achieve goals, control behaviour.

Working Memory

Keeping small amounts of info in mind for a few seconds then using it. Temporary storage of information for cognitive tasks.

Planning prioritizing

Assessing tasks in order of importance. Adjusting priorities if needed. Sequencing steps to finish task. Seeing the big picture of all the work to be done. Managing many tasks.

Impulse Control

Thinking ahead before acting. Considering the consequences on self and others. Inhibiting inappropriate responses. Paying attention/ focusing on task and ignoring distractions.

Task Initiation

Starting a task independently and in a timely manner. Avoiding excessive procrastination. Beginning the task whether interested or not.

Self-Monitoring

Reviewing our own performance actions, behaviours and making adjustments when needed. Editing our work, evaluating ourselves toward meeting a specific goal.

Organization

Organization of spaces and tasks. Organization of information, and materials need. Keeping track of time and assigning appropriate amount for each task. Knowing where to find materials.

50-70% of Autistics have a diagnosis of
ADHD

<http://tinyurl.com/2h8vhrv6>

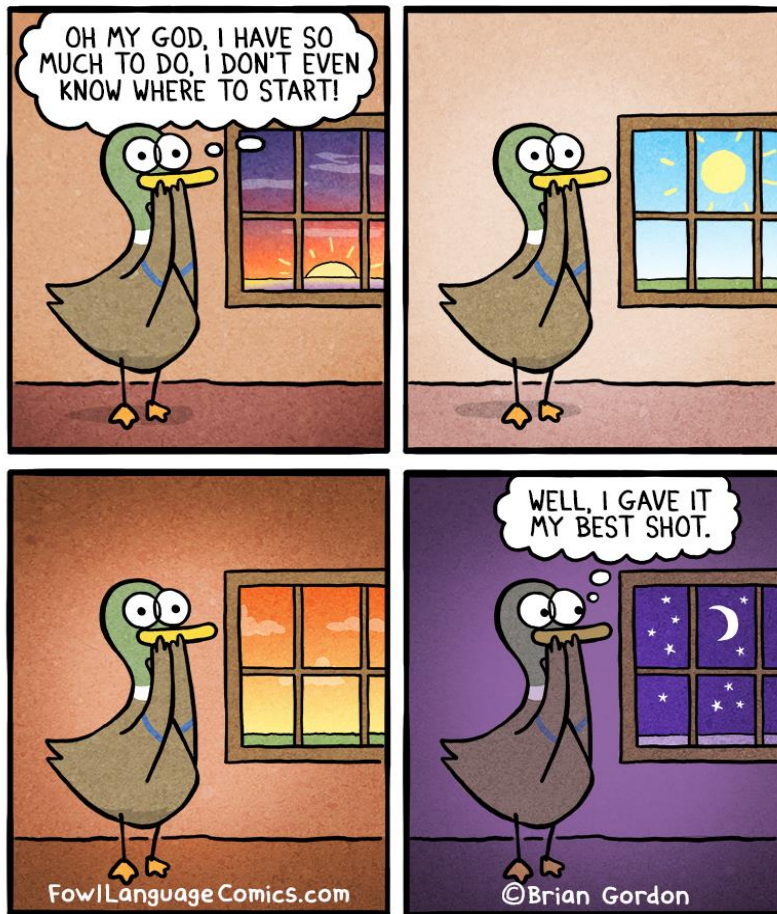
Emotion regulation: social-emotional age in Autistic children may lag behind their biological age.

GOOD TO KNOW

- Emotional brain vs thinking brain >> anxiety, depression, sensory issues and lack OF sleep can make EF worse for parents and children.
- Some Autistic parents are very organized. Some are not, and struggle to teach routine and predictability when they have never mastered these.
- EF struggles can impact mental health, self-esteem >>can result in coping behaviours i.e.. school avoidance, demand avoidance/making appointments/ difficult calls.
- Understanding EF can reduce behaviours and emotional responses related to any areas of weakness by providing proper supports.

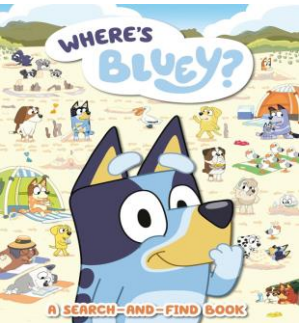


SUPPORTING YOUR OWN EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING DIFFICULTIES



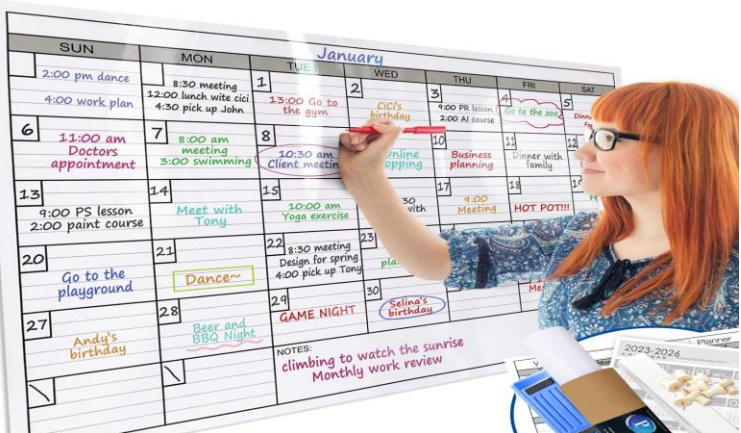
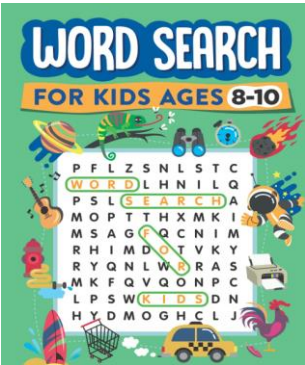
- Use your areas of academic strength to support any weaknesses.
- Visual learner > use schedules and visual reminders ; socially motivated? Body double or body double app.*
- Don't like to be told what to do: the schedule is 'telling them what to do' reframe: "I am in charge of creating a routine that works for me and my family."
- [Ask other Autistics](#) on FB what strategies have worked for them.

RESOURCES TO IMPROVE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS



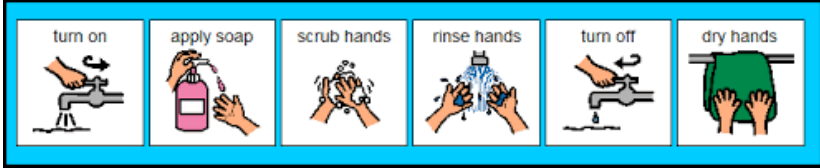
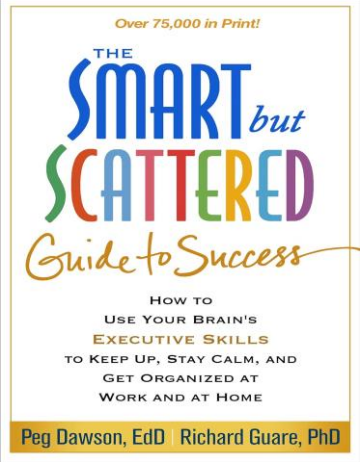
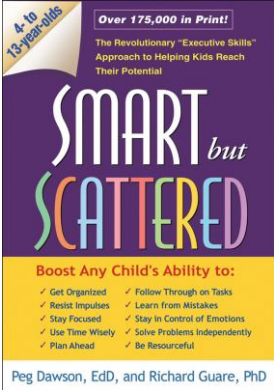
GAMES

- [Simon Says](#)
- [Freeze Dance](#)



[Body Double app](#) Dubbii to help with household chores.

RESOURCES



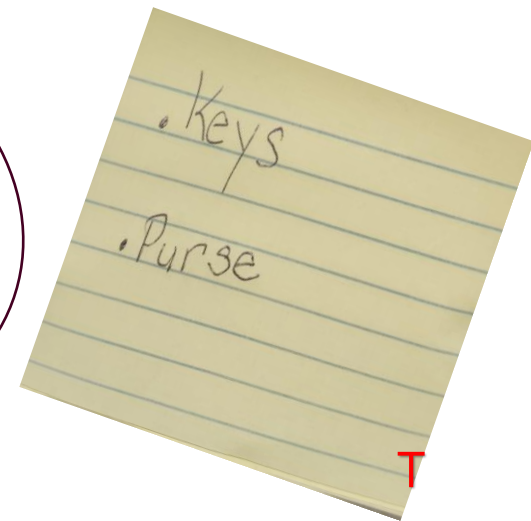
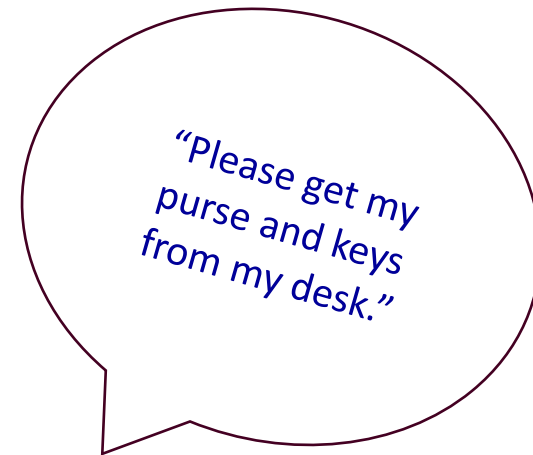
LEARN ABOUT THE PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT RESULTS

If assessment shows child(ren) has low working memory score

- = they cannot retain information they just heard long enough to do something with it.
- Example > recording homework from board/ keys and purse

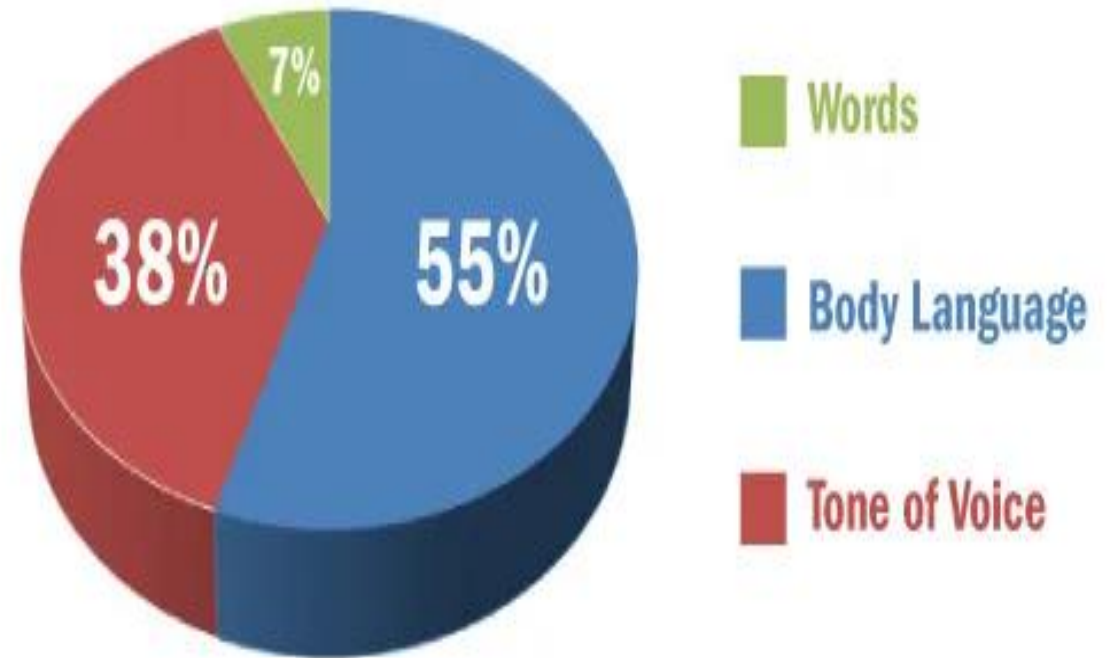
If assessment show slow processing speed = child needs extra time to process what they've heard or seen.

- Ex, incomplete tests/ tasks
- Meeting friend in the community



SOCIAL COMMUNICATION*

- Social communication >> how we use communication (both verbal and non-verbal) in all social situations.
- Includes how we communicate (w/speaking, assistive devices) and non-verbal skills (body language, tone of voice, facial expressions).
 - Standing in proximity of play >> wait to be invited
 - Interjecting self into play in middle of board games



SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- **Double empathy problem:** Autistic people don't understand expectations of non-Autistic culture/ non-Autistic culture does not understand us.
- Therapy goals > make Autistic children act like non-Autistic peers. Result can be masking = feel 'broken/ 'less than'
- Find neurodiversity affirming professionals; embracing Autistic identity > his can result in higher self-esteem and better mental health.* <http://tinyurl.com/yfsh55cn>*
- **Social interaction reprimands shame Autistic people > rumination 'social Injuries' long-lasing > anxiety/ depression. Impacts emotional and behavioural responses.**
- **Constant corrections by peers/ adults can contribute to school avoidance/ anxiety.**

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

What are the experiences in your family?

<p>Situational mutism* > parent and/or child. Ex: proposal/ answering questions when called on in class</p>	<p>'No is a trigger. Don't like to be corrected or be caught in a mistake.</p>
<p>Literal interpretation; benefits of clarification for child and parent.*</p>	<p>Accused of talking too much, too fast or too slow, interrupting, dominating conversation.</p>
<p>Misunderstand body language/ tone of others* >> often feel rejected or invisible.</p>	<p>Varied communication methods in home > iPad, visuals, echolalia, spoken word.</p>
<p>Conflict is overwhelming and will avoid it. Avoid the phone re: unexpected nature of conversation.</p>	<p>Processing speed > interpreted as a negative behaviour i.e. ignoring or lack of empathy, rudeness.</p>

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Do you and your child WANT to feel more comfortable in social interactions?*

Use strengths to create autism positive approaches, including...

PARENTS	CHILDREN
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Make appointments online; consider virtual meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Plan short playdates based on common interests.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Find a friend or advocate to attend meetings/appointments with you. Resolve conflicts by email.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Avoid correcting social communication approaches, especially in front of peers.*
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Find a family peer mentor or autism consultant to connect you to services/resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Help them understand what to expect, and what is expected of them prior to each social situation.

The idea is not to learn to pass as neurotypical, but to use your strengths to create social environments/ interactions that work for you.

WHY PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE

ME-TIME

Autistic Parents May:

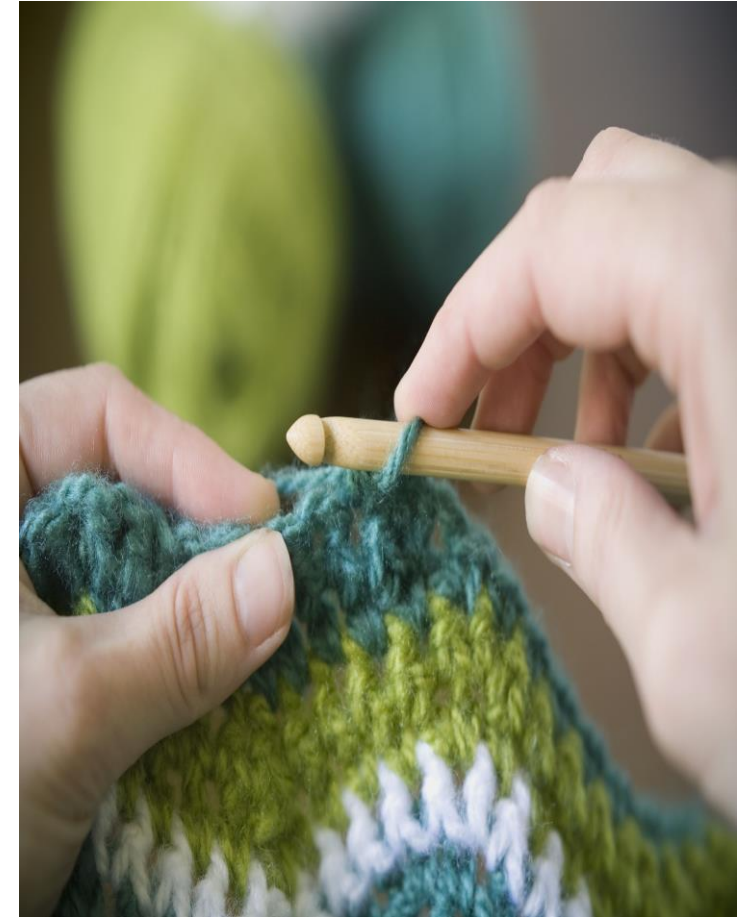


- Less natural supports/smaller social network > estranged; relative reluctant to provide care; too rigid
- Multiple Autistic children with diverse needs.
- Intense sensory/social experiences of being pulled, climbed on, homework help= fatigue is constant. Tiring.
- Are expected to teach non-Autistic social skills we struggle with ourselves, but we don't want our kids have to act NT. Mentally draining.
- Organizing playdates, attending parent-teacher meetings/professional appointments = emotionally draining.

WHY PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE

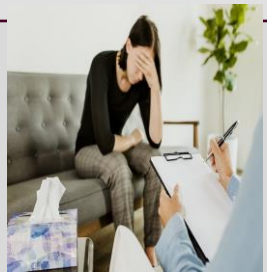
- **Helps to feel refreshed/ mental well-being improves**
 - Replenishes energy stores
 - Better prepared to support child(ren).
- **Great example** for Autistic child(ren).
 - Teaches them self-care is important.
- **Avoids Autistic Burnout**
 - Lowered ability to cope with sensory experiences/ manage life skills/ social interactions > caused when we don't get support for the demand placed on us.

YOU'E WORTH IT!



WHAT DOES SELF-CARE LOOK LIKE?

Therapy



Journaling



Breaks



Exercise



Interests



Respite



- Nap when children nap
- 10 minutes of Mindfulness
- Block toxic people
- Wake up earlier than kids to have time to yourself.

- Find a service navigator for sources of respite .
- Hire pre-teens to play with your children .
- Trade of with other Autistic parents
- Family/ friends

"At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents."

Jane D. Hull

Politician and
educator



Maxine Share

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