

# Neurodiversity Affirming Practise

*Ealing Speech and Language Therapy*

# Today's Plan

What do we mean by  
neurodiversity?

Changing our language

True or False activity

Changes to interventions and  
targets

Neurodiversity affirming  
interventions

Questions

# Key Terms

## Neurotypical

a group or an individual who thinks, perceives, and behaves in ways that are considered 'the norm' by the general population.

## Neurodivergent

a group or an individual whose brain develops or works differently from what is considered 'the norm' by the general population. This includes autistic people as well as those with ADHD, dyslexia and more.

## Neurodiverse

this refers to a group which has more than one different type of brain e.g. a group with autistic, dyslexic and neurotypical people in.

**Today we will focus on neurodivergence in terms of autism**



# What is Neurodiversity?

The Neurodiversity Movement recognises that different brains and the different ways of thinking are all valid.

We do not need to change an autistic person to make them seem more neurotypical.

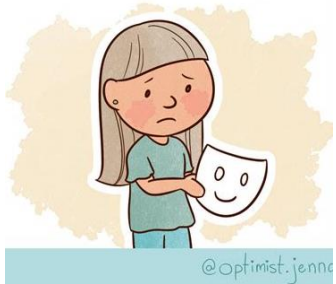
Using a social model of disability means it is the environment that is disabling, rather than the disability coming from the individual- we need to accommodate for all different types of brains.

# ND groups SLT work with

- Developmental Language Disorder
- Autism
- ADHD
- Selective Mutism
- Intellectual Disability
- AAC users
- Speech sound disorders (dyspraxia, inconsistent, consistent)

# Why is it important?

"Masking" autism  
is exhausting



Autistic people do not need 'fixing' and autistic communication styles are valid. Masking autistic traits can lead to burnout!

We need to prepare our students to self-advocate for the accommodations they need



We can put supports in place to allow our students to participate in school life and the wider community.



Autism acceptance 2022

With Z.A.P Advocacy and PANDAS



# Masking

[BBC Two - Inside Our Autistic Minds, Flo's Film](#)

We'd also recommend watching this programme on BBC iplayer:  
Christine McGuinness – Unmasking my Autism



# Changing perspectives

ASD

autism

# Changing perspectives

person with autism

autistic person

# Changing perspectives

social difficulties

social differences

# Changing perspectives

red flags  
symptoms

traits  
signs

# Changing perspectives

obsession

passion  
special interest

# Changing perspectives

functioning labels

describe strengths  
and needs

# Changing perspectives

## The autistic spectrum



C.L. Lynch  
@lynchauthor

Imagine if ASD was described like types of cupcake. You have some with icing, some with sprinkles, some chocolate, some vanilla but they're all cupcakes.

"But how cupcake is it?"

"What?"

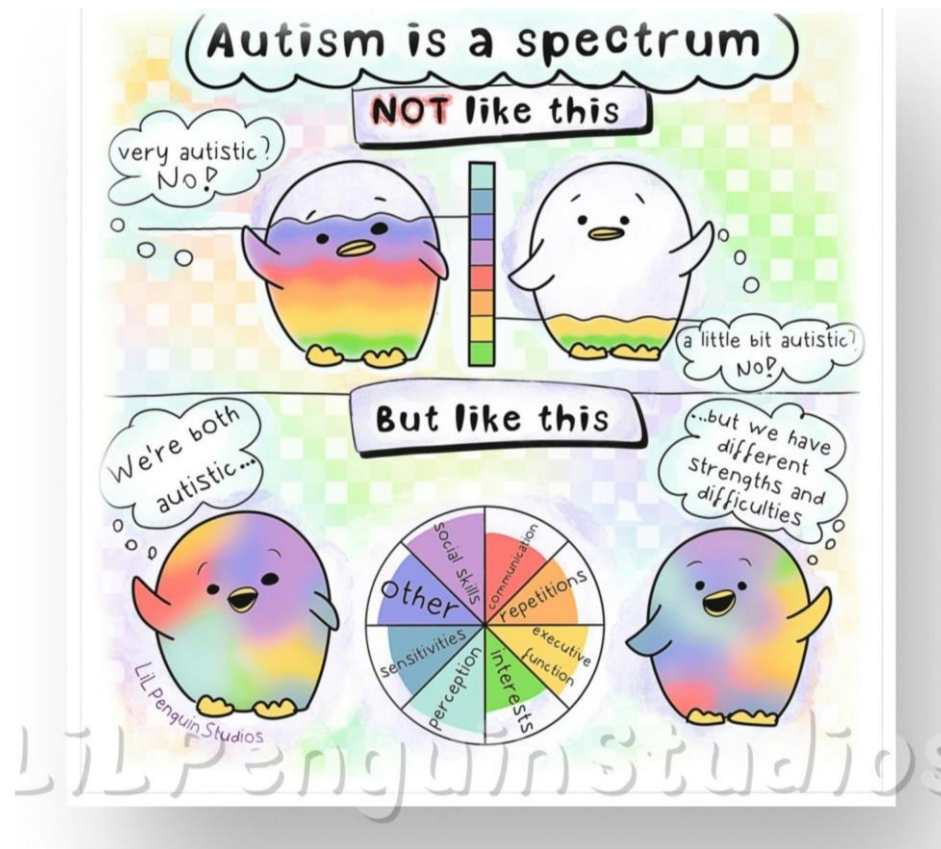
"Like it is a little bit cupcake or severely cupcake?"

"It... it doesn't work like that?"



# Changing perspectives

## The autistic spectrum





# Activity



**TRUE**

**OR**



**FALSE**

**TRUE****OR****FALSE**

Autism can be cured.

**FALSE**

Autism is a neurotype- a type of brain.  
It cannot be changed and does not need to be.

## Institute For the Study of the Neurologically Typical



*"The common belief that (persons) with pervasive developmental disorders are humorless is frequently mistaken." - Stephen Bauer, M.D., M.P.H.*

### What is "neurotypical"?

Neurotypical syndrome is a neurobiological disorder characterized by preoccupation with social concerns, delusions of superiority, and obsession with conformity. Neurotypical individuals often assume that their experience of the world is either the only one, or the only correct one. NTs find it difficult to be alone and are often intolerant of seemingly minor differences in others. When in groups NTs are socially and behaviorally rigid, and frequently insist on the performance of dysfunctional, destructive, and even impossible rituals as a way of maintaining group identity. NTs find it difficult to communicate directly, and have a much higher incidence of lying as compared to persons on the autistic spectrum.

### How common is it?

Tragically, as many as 149 out of every 150 individuals might be neurotypical.

### Is there any treatment for NT?

There is no known cure for Neurotypical syndrome, however, many NTs have learned to compensate for their disabilities and interact normally with autistic persons.



TRUE

OR



FALSE

Autistic people do not have deficits in social interaction, simply a different style.



TRUE

Autistic communication styles may differ from neurotypical communication styles, but they are not 'worse' in any way.

**TRUE****OR****FALSE**

When working with autistic people, we should work on helping them blend in; reducing their stimming and increasing their eye-contact.

**FALSE**

Teaching autistic children to 'blend in' can be harmful.  
Encouraging masking of autistic traits is telling students their communication style is wrong, and can lead to autistic burnout.  
Eye contact can be uncomfortable for some autistic people.  
Stimming can be an important tool for self-regulation.

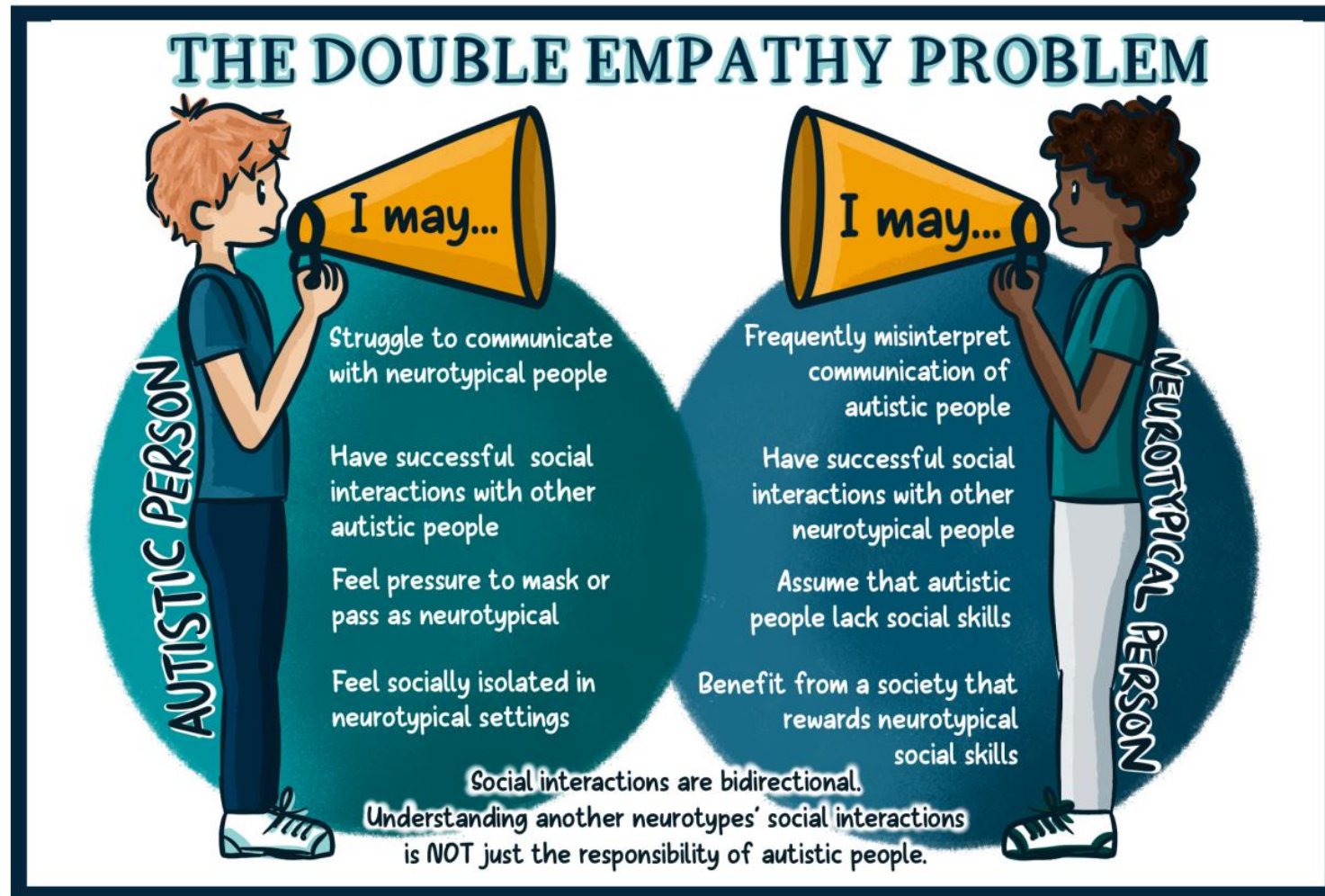
**TRUE****OR****FALSE**

Conversations with autistic people may break down due to their social impairments.

**FALSE**

Autistic people do not have social impairments.  
Conversations between autistic and allistic (non-autistic) people may break down due to differences in communication style.

# The double empathy problem



**TRUE****OR****FALSE**

Autistic individuals can present very differently and have very different experiences of the world

**TRUE**

There can be lots of overlap in the profiles of autistic individuals, but there is also a lot of variability.



Autistic people experience and process the world in a different way.

**Each autistic person is unique**, however there are some differences that autistic people may share with each other:

- Differences in sensory processing
- Strengths in memory skills, particularly relating to interests
- Strengths in skills to focus intensively on a chosen activity
- Differences in social communication styles
- Preference for predictability
- Processing emotions.



# Principles to guide neurodiversity-affirming practice

Celebrate the individual's strengths, interests and communication identity

Enhance the individual's functional and diverse communication skills and self-advocacy in the important places in their life

Facilitate positive communication opportunities and experiences (from the individual's perspective)

Put the individual's well-being and engagement at the heart of whatever we advise or demonstrate

Support the key people in the individual's life to feel confident in how to support and enable the individual's communication

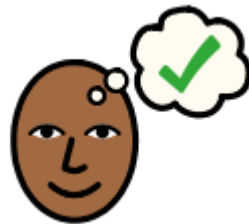
# What's staying the same?



Supporting expressive language skills



Total communication approach



Developing understanding of language



Using visual supports



Providing opportunities for social interaction



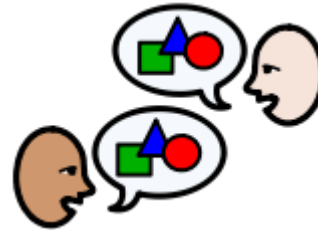
Supporting understanding of social situations



# What's changing?



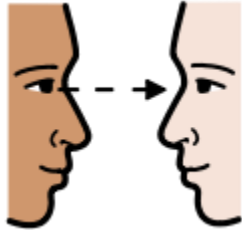
Whole body listening



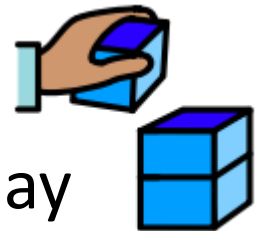
Topic maintenance



Taking turns in conversation

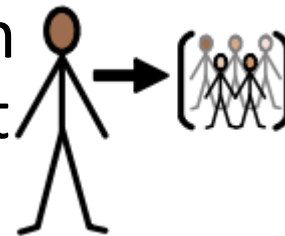


Teaching expected behaviours



Changing play styles

Pushing for joining in with peers when not interested



# What's changing?



Supporting self-advocacy around conversations



Providing play and social opportunities without expectation



Self-advocacy for own needs and sensory supports



Understanding communication identity

# Communication Identity

- Recognising own communication style
- Understanding that others' communication styles may differ
- Discussing self-advocacy around own communication style

**My Communication Identity** 🐰

- I speak only English
- I mostly speak in an average volume
- My gesture is moving my hand with something in it. Like flipping my pencil often.
- If someone talks over me I would feel a bit annoyed and keep quiet.

**About me and my interests:**  
My favourite topic to talk about are food and funny jokes!  
I love learning more about food around the world and also getting a quick laugh!

# Communication Identity

- Recognising own communication style
- Understanding that others' communication styles may differ
- Discussing self-advocacy around own communication style

Feelings and Communication - rating how I feel

**With people I don't know, outside of school.**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 I can't do this I can sometimes I can do this  
 I feel quite uncomfortable, but sometimes it would depend.

**With people I've met before but don't know much.**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 I can't do this I can sometimes I can do this  
 I feel quite excited, I love getting to know people.

**With friends I know.**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 I can't do this I can sometimes I can do this  
 I feel safe when talking to my friends.

**At home with my family.**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 I can't do this I can sometimes I can do this  
 I feel very safe when talking to my family.

# Communication Identity

- Recognising own communication style
- Understanding that others' communication styles may differ
- Discussing self-advocacy around own communication style

NHS  
Ealing Community Partners

### Thinking about communication - example

Things I find easy when communicating with other people	Things I find hard when communicating with other people
<p><del>Things I find easy when communicating with other people</del></p> <p>listening to talking about things you're interested in</p> <p>people talking for a long time</p> <p>ending a conversation</p> <p>talking on the phone</p>	<p>starting a conversation</p> <p>understanding people's emotions</p> <p>talking in noisy places</p>

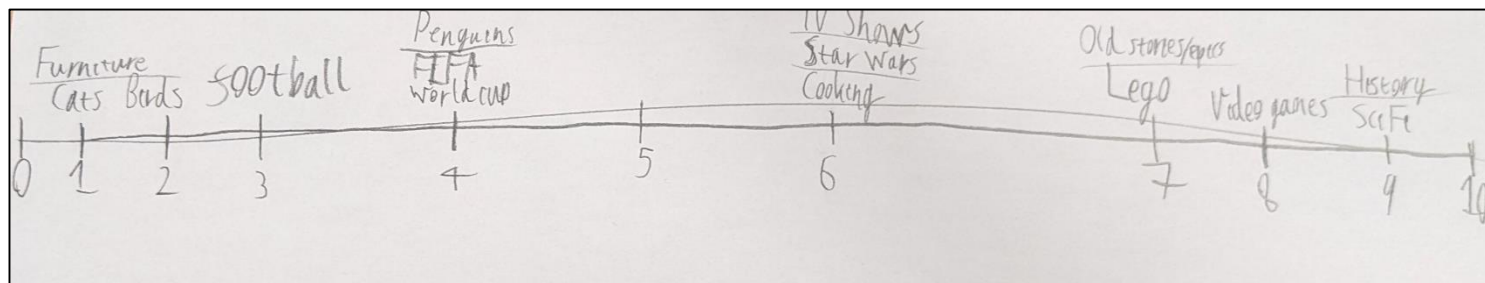
What makes communication easier?

Communication would be more easier if it was a more direct environment with people talking more slowly and sensibly.



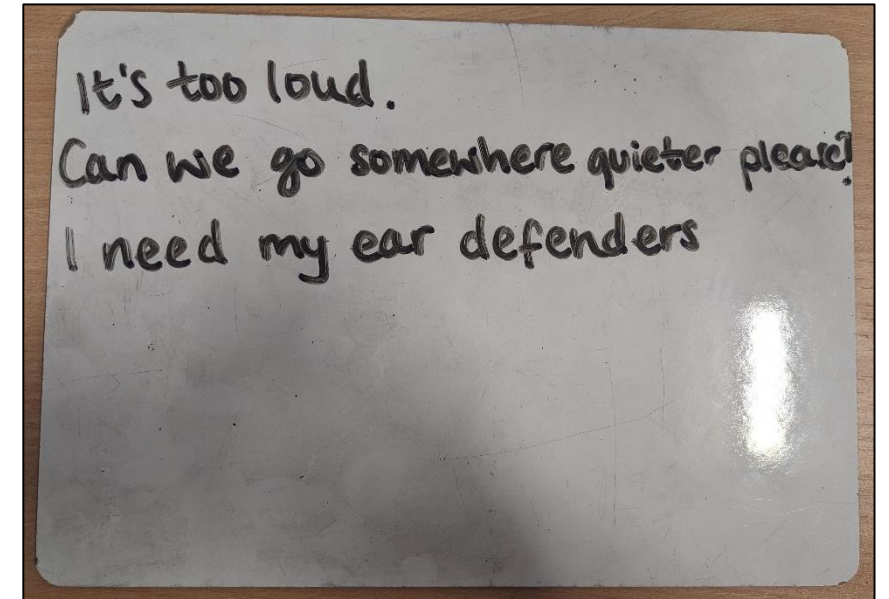
# Self-advocacy

- Understanding own preferences
- Discussing that all preferences are valid
- Finding others with similar preferences
- Scripts to use to start or end conversations
- Scripts to request accommodations



# Self-advocacy

- Understanding own preferences
- Discussing that all preferences are valid
- Finding others with similar preferences
- Scripts to use to start or end conversations
- Scripts to request accommodations



# Social Opportunities

- Creating special interest groups
- Allowing natural connections to develop
- Providing play opportunities that allow students to share experiences
- Teaching the rules of games



# Social Opportunities

- Creating special interest groups
- Allowing natural connections to develop
- Providing play opportunities that allow students to share experiences
- Teaching the rules of games



# Social Opportunities

- Creating special interest groups
- Allowing natural connections to develop
- Providing play opportunities that allow students to share experiences
- Teaching the rules of games

Bean Game

One person is the boss.

The boss says the instructions.

"Jumping beans" - everybody jumps up and down.

"Baked Beans" - everybody squats down.

"Runner beans" - everybody runs on the spot.

"Jelly beans" - everybody wiggles like jelly.

# Please look out for...

- The terms mentioned in “changing perspectives” slides
- Outcomes that do not link to child’s views and enforce neurotypical ideals
  - “must comply”
  - “increase empathy”
  - “use eye contact”
  - “take X number of turns”

A collage of various colored sticky notes (blue, yellow, pink, orange, green, light pink) scattered across the frame. Many of the notes feature large, bold black question marks, while others have simple smiley faces. A white rectangular box is centered in the middle of the collage.

Any questions?