



# A Guide To Understanding, Developing, And Applying #ReasonableAccommodations For Autistic People

## UNDERSTANDING THE AUTISTIC MIND **1**

NOTEBOOKS FOR NAVIGATING DIFFERENT MINDS



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[Asper Revolution](#)

[Asperchica](#)

[Asperbuho](#)

[Autista al aparato](#)

[AutisTara](#)

[Autista Construyendo](#)

[Aprender a Quererm](#)

[-Autista cuestionando paradigmas](#)

[Bits desde el Espectro](#)

[El Autismo Informal](#)

[Neurodiverletras Â](#)

[Yo no soy un puzle](#)

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[UnstrangeMind](#)

[Autistic, Typing](#)

[MisTÂght](#)

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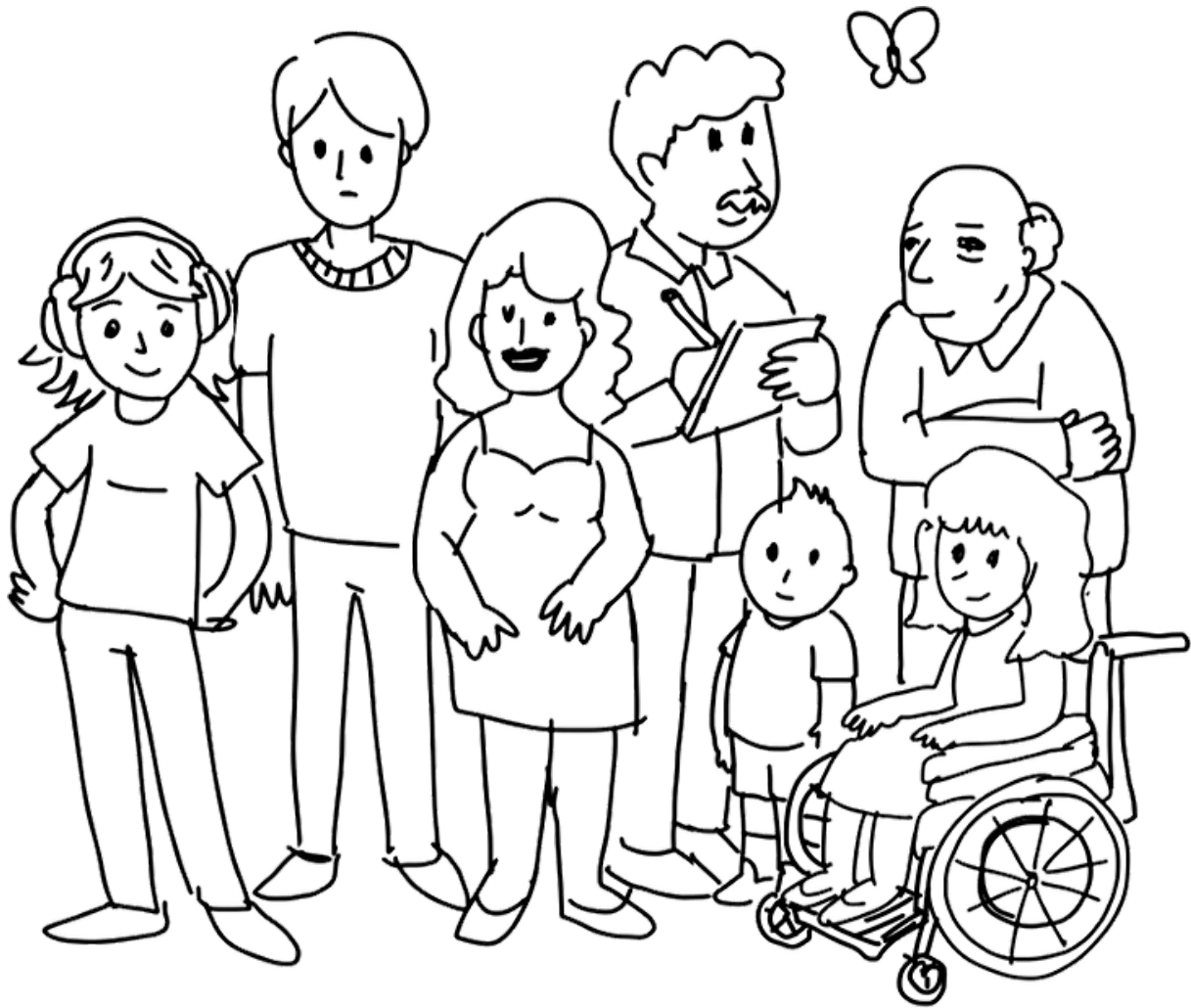
[Reach Every Voice](#)

[ICARS](#)

Final sketch:

[Steve Asbell](#)

**UNDERSTANDING  
THE AUTISTIC MIND**



"He who understands also loves,  
observes, sees...  
The more knowledge inherent in a  
thing, the greater the love..."

Whoever believes that all fruits ripen  
at the same time as strawberries  
knows nothing about the grapes."

PARACELSUS

**02**

## **HOW DOES THE AUTISTIC MIND WORK?**

What we autistic adults have learned about how our mind works and how it differs from most people's minds

**14**

## **AUTISTIC OVERLOAD**

The infamous "autistic meltdown,"  
Not "spoiled," not "lazy"

**23**

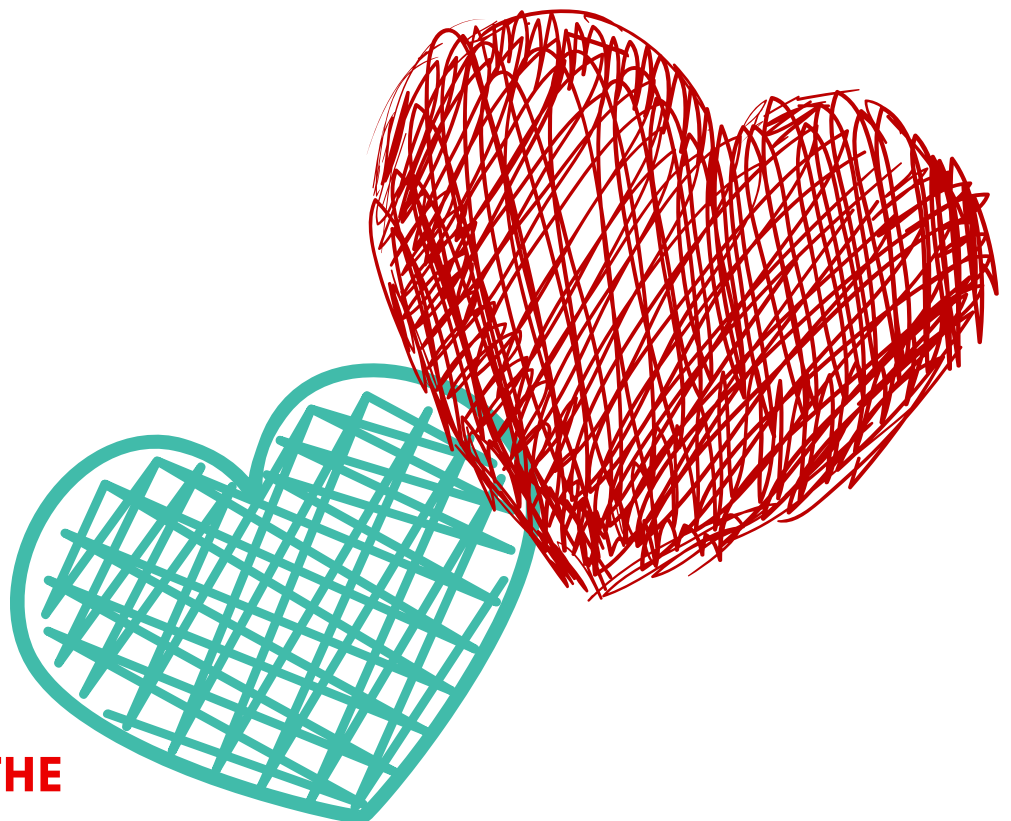
## **HOW DO AUTISTIC MINDS GET OVERLOADED?**

Not everything is sensory

**35**

## **THEY ARE NOT SYMPTOMS, THEY ARE AUTISTIC TOOLS**

What works for us and why autistic characteristics should not be pathologized.



# EVERY AUTISTIC PERSON YOU KNOW

is fighting a battle  
you know nothing about

Hello

We know that educating an autistic person is not an easy task. All previous beliefs about when, what, and how to teach a child are no longer valid in the face of our differences, and parents and teachers are left working on unsteady ground.

You should know that being autistic in a world designed for neurotypicals is not easy either. Education, communication, and even environments are not designed for the way our minds work.

This guide is intended to summarize what hundreds of autistic people around the world (speakers and non-speakers) have discovered about the atypical way our minds work, the difficulties we face daily, and how we have learned to cope with them.

This is our contribution to the real understanding of the autistic experience and how parents and teachers can help us.

We hope that this guide will help you understand us, and that from that place of knowledge, you will be able to understand, develop, and apply the #ReasonableAccommodations necessary for the autistic people in your lives to achieve the goal of accessibility to the dignified life they deserve.

Thank you for listening to  
us.



# HOW DOES THE AUTISTIC MIND WORK?

What we autistic adults have learned about  
how our mind works and how it differs from  
most people's minds



# I CAN'T DISCRIMINATE AMONG STIMULI



**Allistic mind**

Imagine a very tidy library, with lots of shelves and a comfortable desk with an open book on the table.

When a book salesman comes through the door, you pick out one or two books that you think are relevant and put them on the shelves waiting for the moment you need to use them.

The rest you don't buy because you already have similar books that talk about the same subject and you **sense** that they won't be useful.

The library is your mind... and books are the **sensory, emotional, or cognitive** stimuli that the environment offers you. Most people's minds are like that.

Their brains have a kind of **natural stimulus discrimination system** that allows them to choose which books will go into the library, and that only leaves the books on the table that are useful for this specific moment, while the others stay on the shelves. It is a capacity that I find frankly amazing. And the most amazing thing of all is that nobody taught them how to do it. It's just the way their minds work.

## GLOSSARY:

**ALLISTIC:** Term used in the autistic community to refer to anyone who is not on the autism spectrum.

Alista comes from the Greek "allos" which means the other and the suffix "ismus" which means condition of, i.e. condition of being focused on the outside. Unlike autism which would be from being centered on the inside.

Now imagine a library where there are no shelves and no desk.

Where all the books are stripped, the walls are wallpapered, and thousands of red threads interconnect the information in one book with the information in another like a detective's corkboard.

As if there wasn't enough chaos, when the salesman arrives at your library, without asking you, he strips off all the books he has and sticks them on the wall.

And all without you being able to do anything about it. And no matter how hard you try to change it, you never succeed.

That's how our autistic brains work: We don't have the same ability to discriminate among stimuli.

Choosing a single book or putting it on the shelf automatically is an innate neurological ability, **so it cannot be learned.**

We cannot choose which stimuli come in or which stimuli we will use that day. Nor can we get rid of them; if they have already entered our minds, processing them is the only way to get rid of them.

We autistic people have to process all the stimuli because **we cannot filter input.**





# MY MIND IS FANTASTIC...

... I'M SERIOUS.

If you already know an autistic person, especially an autistic boy or girl, I'm sure this cartoon of Ro Quintana will remind you of them.

Can you remember a time when your autistic child pointed out to someone that they previously said they believed one thing, but then their actions made it seem like they believe the opposite?



We are natural detectors of hypocrisy!

And if you don't believe me, ask the Israeli army that hires autistic people to look for information in satellite images, the Silicon Valley executives who hire autistic people to look for computer code errors, or just look at Greta Thunberg who decided she couldn't stand the hypocrisy of talking about global warming anymore and not doing anything about it.

My autistic mind **is a computer super-specialized in collecting detailed information and realizing the relationship between the details**. And this particular way of collecting and processing information means very good things, like:

- I notice details that the vast majority cannot see without making a great effort.
- I have a strong focus on conscious learning and encyclopedic knowledge. Conscious learning is our strength, and we're good at it.

- I can see how all the parts of a whole are related. I see the world as an interconnected system.
- I realize alternative solutions that the vast majority do not have access to.
- I don't miss details that at first sight may seem irrelevant, but when you connect them you realize that they can be decisive.
- I have no attachment to learned and cognitively accepted norms, so I can problem-solve without restrictions.
- I have extraordinary strengths in developing critical thinking.
- I bring different perspectives to the table from most, providing an invaluable source of new ideas.
- I do not submit to the norms of the majority without reflection, enriching team discussions and promoting critical thinking throughout society.

## ... BUT IT ALSO HAS DISADVANTAGES

In the world created for a neurotypical majority, your experience of my autistic mind would be similar to you having to do a research paper with 20 open books, making complex crossings of information, while the novice school band practices a battle march a few feet away. And on top of that, you're irritated and scared because that morning your partner told you he couldn't handle the relationship anymore. It's like that 24 hours a day, 365 days a year!



Do you realize how stressful it is to live in a world that is too chaotic and saturated with stimuli for your mind to process? The way our brains process the world needs a different environment than the one we have created as a society so that the following doesn't happen:

- That I run out of energy because I have to use a large part of my conscious resources to do what most people do automatically and effortlessly: filter stimuli.
- That I get stuck in a task because I don't have all the data to complete it and free my mind to move on to the next one.
- That I lose my train of thought because the world insists that I accept more stimuli than I can process.
- That I have to "study" to do things that are natural to most people because they were created for their way of processing the world.
- That it is difficult for me to accept rules if I do not fully understand the purpose or which are incoherent for my mind because they were created for different minds.
- That my intentions are misunderstood, or I end up misinterpreting those of others, because my processes and therefore the way in which I express them are very different.
- That I'm left in a situation of vulnerability to bullying and mistreatment because of a lack of acceptance of my differences.
- To end up facing an abominable chaos due to an excess of stimuli, which at best paralyzes me, and at worst causes an autistic meltdown.

# NO "LACK OF EMPATHY," NO "SOCIAL DEFICIENCIES,"

... IT'S A DIFFERENT MIND

"Some people say that autistic people don't feel enough. We're saying the exact opposite: They feel too much."

**Kamila Markram**  
Neuroscientist &  
autism researcher

"I have no idea when it comes to reading subtle clues, but I'm very empathetic. I can walk into a room and feel what everyone else is feeling, and I think that's pretty common in autism. The problem is that it all comes faster than I can process it"

"In any case, I find it hard to have too much empathy, if someone else is upset, I'm upset. There were times during school when other people behaved badly, and if the teacher scolded them, I felt as if they were scolding me"

Self-advocates in the autistic community around the world have been saying this for years. It is finally being studied and the results prove us right: we react in an unusually intense way to the pain of others.

Empathy is made up of four parts: perspective taking (understanding the point of view of others), fantasy (identification with fictional characters), empathic concern (sympathy and compassion for others), and personal distress (how disturbed one becomes at seeing others in distress).

The most recent studies have confirmed that autistic people have more difficulties with the cognitive part of empathy, that is, understanding the point of view of others (mostly neurotypical) and what they expect. However, we have the same empathic concern as neurotypicals, and we have a significantly higher score on personal distress.

While most non-autistics have a free pass to socialize (because if they assume that the other person's mind works like their own, they are more likely to be right), we autistic people aren't great at understanding what most people think or need because our minds are too different from theirs. We just don't think or feel the same way.

In situations where the majority of neurotypical people feel relieved to receive a kiss, a hug, or just to talk about it, we need concrete solutions, isolation to process, or simply to distract ourselves from the subject so as not to overload ourselves and, as a consequence, offer them what we would need in that situation and not what others expect.

Thus, when, for example, we talk incessantly about our special interests, we do not deliberately try to dominate the conversation. It happens that out of emotion or exhaustion, we simply forget that there is a great difference between our interests and the intensity of these, with those of our conversation partners.

It is just as difficult for an autistic person to imagine that someone is not passionate about number patterns as it is for most people to imagine that someone may have a lot to say about number patterns and want very much to find someone to relate to that interest.

Every day, we autistic people are faced with the obligation to make an effort to learn and accept the "logic" behind the behaviors and social conventions that society, mostly neurotypical, has established - invisible (and often contradictory) codes that govern social situations.



## GLOSSARY:

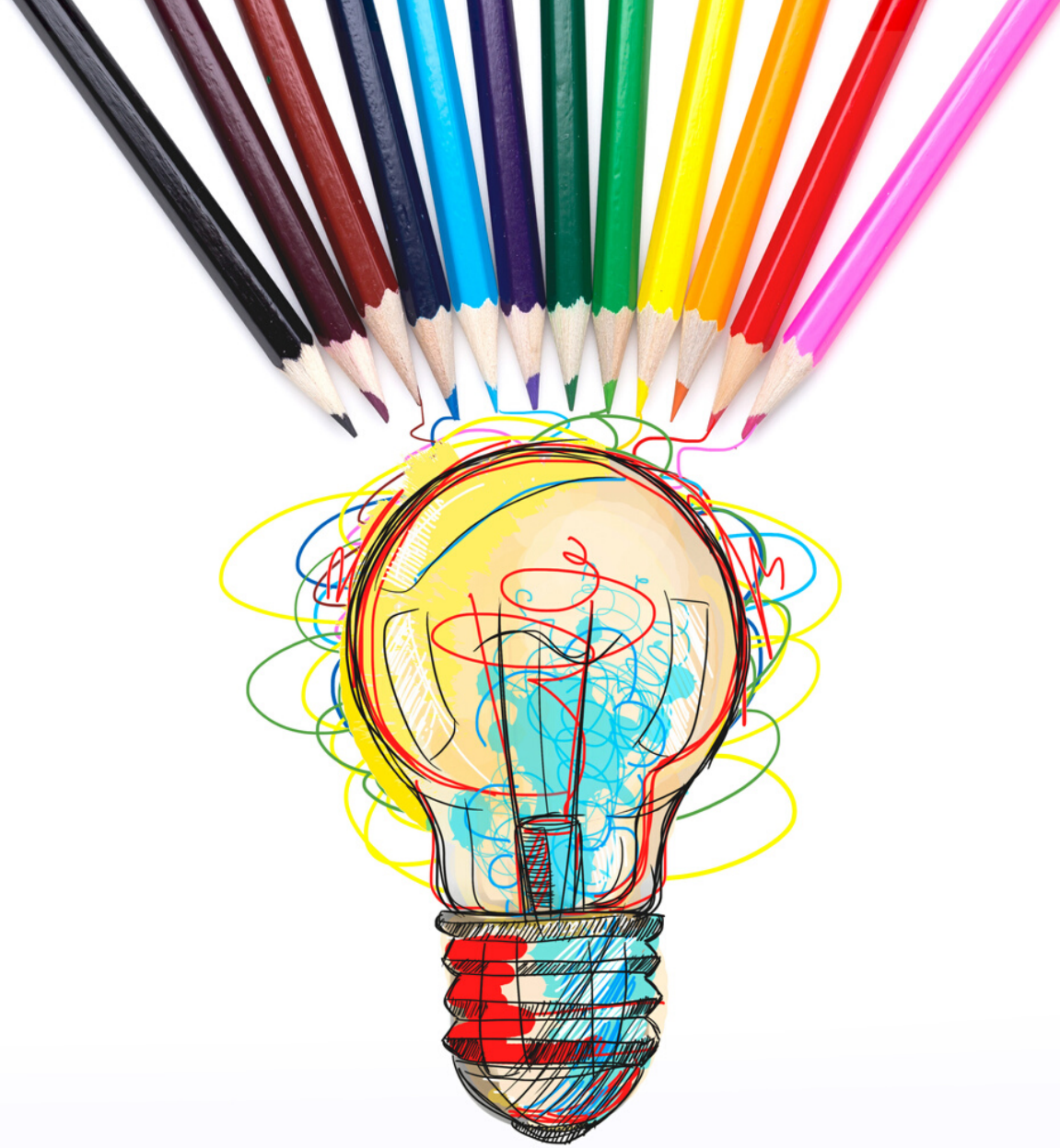
**EMPATHY:** Greek word meaning "to offer" and commonly defined as "the ability to recognize, perceive and feel directly the emotion of the other."

Other definitions:

R.R.Greenon:  
Empathizing means sharing, experiencing another person's feelings.

Heinz Kohut:  
Empathy is the ability to think and feel in another person's inner life.

Berger:  
The ability to know emotionally what another is experiencing from that other person's frame of reference, the ability to test another's feelings or to put oneself in another's shoes.



This takes a monumental effort that is not usually visible and is never free because it has a high cost that translates into: high levels of tension, anxiety, guilt, frustration, resentment, etc.

With honesty, can we say...

...that society is making a similar attempt?

...that society is making some effort to understand, validate, and legitimize the experiences of autistic people in their community?

Is society truly and honestly empathetic?

TO THINKING ↗

# I AM "THE OTHER"

..and it hurts!!

Fantasies about discovering that we are adopted, aliens waiting to be picked up, or mutants-- identifying with the "weirdos," the outcasts, and the abused are common among us. Before any diagnosis we have all felt we are "the other," and it is not a coincidence.

We autistic people are not insensitive. We want to interact and connect. As if it were not difficult enough already because the world is too intense for our neurology, we must also "adapt" to be accepted as valid human beings, giving up our identity, self-worth, and even our health to be included.

The authorities force us to submit to systems that do not take into account our differences, making access to our human rights difficult.

The set of social, political, cultural, and personal rules favors a particular way of thinking, feeling, behaving, and communicating as superior to others: the neurotypical form.

Our parents are ashamed of our differences, and we notice it. They continually repress us when out of instinct we obey our neurology. They deny us reasonable adjustments because according to their own neurology, our differences are meaningless and no one has explained to them that it is a right.



The vast majority of medical interventions around autism are not accepting of autism as one of the many biological possibilities of human diversity. Without evidence, they pathologize our differences, dehumanizing us.

The authorities force us to submit to systems that do not take into account our differences, making access to our human rights difficult.

The neuronorm forces us to camouflage ourselves when it is possible (at a very high cost in health and dignity) and when it is not possible we are denied the presumption of competence and the most basic rights are taken away from us: dignity, freedom, education and even the right to live.

We are the rare ones, the strangers, those who do not share the codes that unite society. We are the epitome of what it means to be "the other," our way of being considered "not valid."

Yes, it is true that we have difficulty in tolerating the overload of stimuli that can come from social interaction with people who are fundamentally different from us, but true exclusion comes from ableist discrimination, from lack of empathy.

Empathizing with the equal is an instinctive act, empathizing with "the other" is a conscious act. But, while autistics all over the world and at all levels of support needs are making the effort to understand the majority of neurotypical people, very few neurotypical people are making the effort to listen to us, understand us, and accept us. The truth is that there is no reciprocity.

Can you imagine what your life would be like if every day you were told: if you don't think, feel, and behave like me, you are not human enough or that you are diseased? Would you feel loved, or would you isolate yourself more?





How would you feel if you were told every day that your preferences are not valid, as if there was a legitimate rule for determining the validity of an opinion?

How would you feel if you were required to hurt yourself every day in order to meet the expectations of the other?

Autism without acceptance is a condemnation of loneliness. It means that you are not privileged to have the support networks that everyone else has. It means that people do not consider you a worthy being. That hurts and makes us deeply vulnerable to abuse.



## GLOSSARY:

**NEURONORM:** The Neuronorm is the set of social, political, cultural and personal norms that privilege a particular way of thinking, feeling, behaving, and communicating as superior to others.

**PATHOLOGIZING:** To consider or treat someone or something as medically or psychologically ill, therefore it must be cured.

**DEHUMANIZE:** To deny the human value of a person, depriving them of rights.

# AUTISTIC OVERLOAD

THE INFAMOUS  
"AUTISTIC MELTDOWN"

THEY'RE NOT SPOILED OR LAZY

Meltdown

# I HAVE LIMITS

...AND IGNORING THEM HAS CONSEQUENCES.



**MEL BAGGS**  
Non-speaking autistic.

"People have a level to which they are able to function without getting burned, a level at which we are able to function only in cases of emergency, and a level where we just can't function.

For autistic people in modern society, the first level is depleted quickly.

They try to operate at a minimum level acceptable to non-autistic people for survival, can lead us to the area the enlisted people reserve for emergencies.

Prolonged operation in "emergency mode" often results in loss of skills and overload"

## WHAT IS AUTISTIC OVERLOAD?

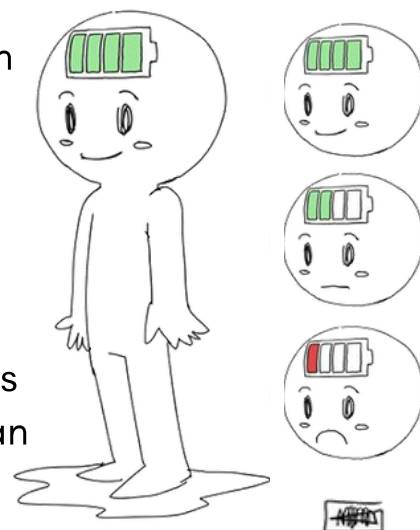
... THE MESSY SIDE OF AUTISM

Also known as autistic crises, autistic regressions and autistic overloads. Is an involuntary physiological event in which an autistic person reacts to overstimulation, with partial or complete loss of self-control, including the notion of safety.

It is a mechanism that is set in motion when we are enveloped by an excess of stimuli that exceed our brain's capacity to process them, that is, when we experience an overload.

Collapse is a natural response to stress (using the analogy of the brain as a computer, the machine shuts down before the circuits are fried), and it also happens to neurotypicals.

The major difference with us is that due to the amazing natural ability of neurotypical people to filter stimuli their, chances of entering the "emergency mode" are very low and ours are very high.



Losing control of yourself is frustrating and scary to say the least, and social expectations make it embarrassing. It also has a negative impact on physical and psychological well-being, which builds on the overstimulation.

Therefore, the slightest possibility of facing a meltdown forces us to live in perpetual alert, in a terrifying state of anxiety and fear.

Without minimal adjustments that allow us to prevent more stimuli from entering our minds than we can process, we autistic people (especially children) will isolate ourselves as much as necessary to protect ourselves.

Autistic overloads vary in type, degree, and frequency, depending on each person and their sensory profile, but they are always triggered by stimulus overload, and of these stimuli the final triggers are almost always emotional stimuli.



"My 5-year-old son tells me, crying, "Mommy please help me. I don't know what's going on in my head, I think the pill doesn't work anymore."  
I was asking him how he felt, and he told me, crying, "I don't know, Mom... I can't explain it." At that moment, I tried to calm him down, but it was different. Later, he didn't remember who he had talked to, and I had to tell him it was me.

It happens to my baby when she walks or walks around, on the bus and so on, when she gets stressed out at school, it's horrible, I don't know what to do anymore, she says she doesn't want to live with it in her head, it's not pain, but she doesn't know how to explain it.

# TYPES OF AUTISTIC OVERLOAD



**Autistic Burnout:** Society misnames them "regressions. It is a form of silent and prolonged collapse. It is mainly because the mind is busy handling the stimuli that overload it and therefore cannot focus on "maintenance tasks."

It manifests itself as: difficulties with basic tasks that the autistic person has already mastered (such as talking or socializing), headaches, nausea, muscle tension, difficulties with sleep patterns, feeling overwhelmed, feeling dissatisfied and frustrated, depression, apathy, cynicism, feeling exhausted even before the end of the day, irritability, and tendency to lose one's temper.

Without reasonable adjustments, autistic people live more than 50% of their lives in a state of burnout, and from adolescence onward, the percentage is higher due to increased social demands and the little control we have over our environment to limit stimuli to a manageable amount.

Autistic burnouts can be temporary, last months, years, and may even be permanent.

**Autistic meltdown:** A meltdown is an extreme stress reaction that manifests itself as a furious outburst of overwhelming situations, with loss of control in behavior that is expressed verbally (e.g., screaming, yelling, uncontrollable crying, verbal aggression), physically (e.g., kicking, hitting, breaking objects, biting), or both forms combined.

**Autistic shutdown:** This is the flip side of a meltdown that occurs internally... an autistic person in shutdown may seem disconnected and limited to doing the minimum necessary to survive and on auto-pilot, present with sudden mutism, isolate even more intensely, experience serious setbacks in previous learning, etc. Using the analogy of the brain as a computer... it's a blue screen.

# NOT "BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS"

At first glance, most meltdowns can be confused with "tantrums," and burnouts and shutdowns can be confused with laziness or lack of discipline.

This puts parents in an extremely difficult situation because they begin to receive a lot of pressure from their environment that can even make them doubt their own experience about what works or doesn't work for their child because they are constantly accused of being "too permissive," "not setting limits," and even "not spanking" their autistic child. Nothing could be more wrong.

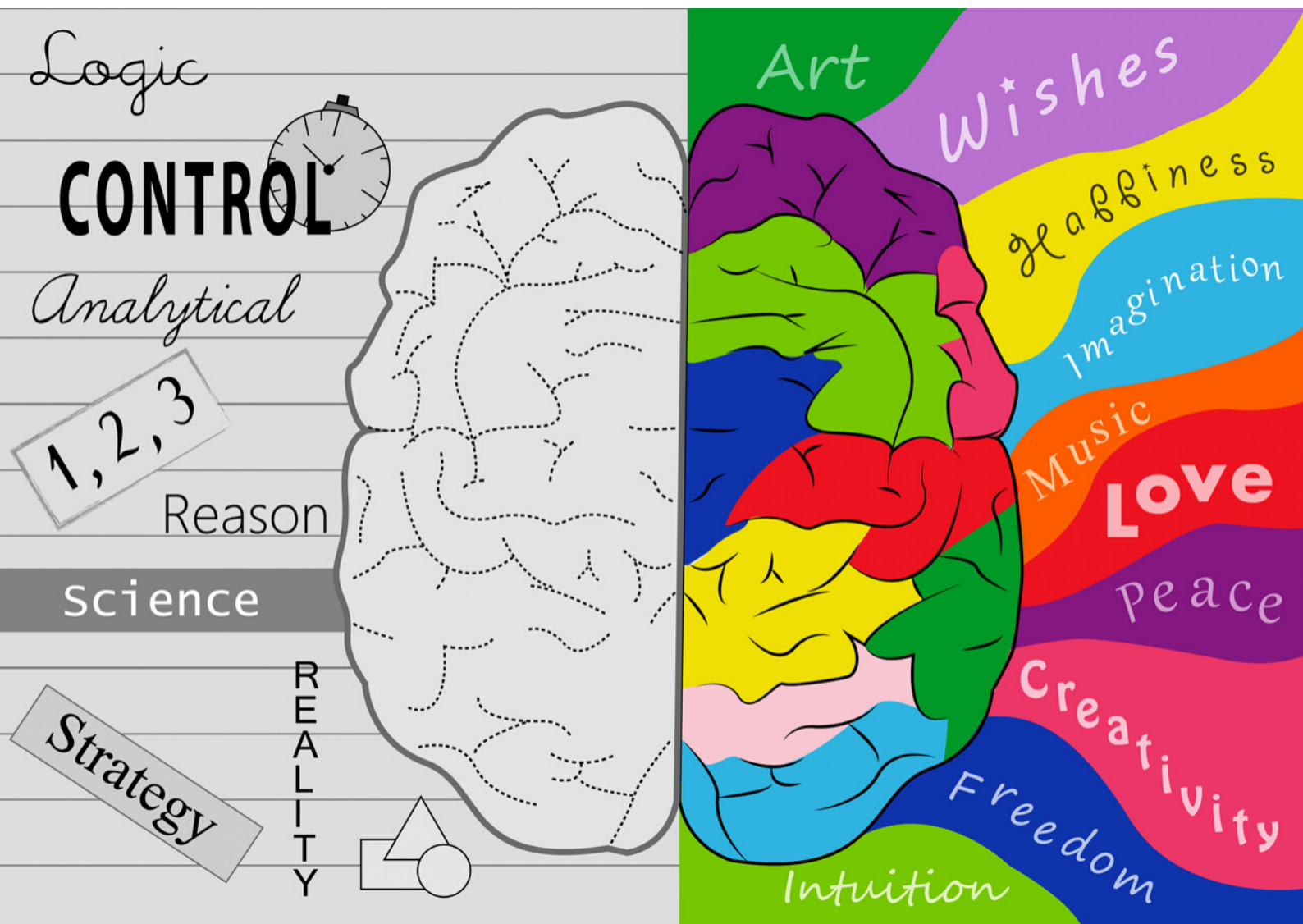
Autistic people are not people with "behavior problems." There is not a "crisis of autism" as a diagnostic criterion associated with the condition, and there are clear indicators to differentiate a overload:

- In the case of behavioral problems, the affected person will be attentive to the reaction of others. Their goal is to manipulate the behavior of the other. This does not happen in autistic overloads. Overloads occur even if no one is looking.
- Behavior problems have a clear and defined goal. Overloads do not.
- A person with "behavior problems" will be careful not to hurt himself or others. In a overload, the person loses even a sense of security and may say or do things that put him or her in a situation of obvious vulnerability, so that they may even hurt themselves without being aware of it.
- Behavioral problems stop once the desired goal has been achieved. overloads, on the other hand, tend to last even after the apparent cause has been resolved and end when the internal chaos is over and the triggering stimuli disappear.
- In "tantrums," we have the feeling that the person who has them is the one who controls the situation. In the overloads, we feel that nobody controls the situation.

It is important to understand that, especially in children and adolescents, a poorly-managed tantrum can lead to a overload, and that a series of consecutive "tantrums" can be an indicator of ongoing overload.

# HOW DO AUTISTIC MINDS BECOME OVERLOADED?

NOT EVERYTHING IS SENSORY





## **DROP THE GLASS!**

### **Emotional discrimination**

In a group session, a psychologist raised a glass of water. When everyone was waiting to hear the question, "Is the glass half full or half empty?," she asked, "How much does this glass weigh?"

The answers from the group members varied between 5 and 8 ounces.

But the psychologist responded, "The absolute weight is not important, but the perceived weight. To me, it depends on how long I hold the glass: If I hold it for 1 minute, it's not a problem. If I hold it for 1 hour, my arm will hurt. If I hold it for 1 day, my arm will become numb and paralyzed.

"The glass doesn't change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier and harder it becomes."

## **EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD**

When worries become entrenched in our thoughts, when we stress too much and get stuck in thinking about our problems, we become exhausted, we burn out our energy, and we run out of strength to move towards solutions. This happens to everyone, even to neurotypicals.

It is all very well to be aware of the problems and to keep in mind the difficulties and the risks, but filling our head with worries for a long time exhausts us emotionally.

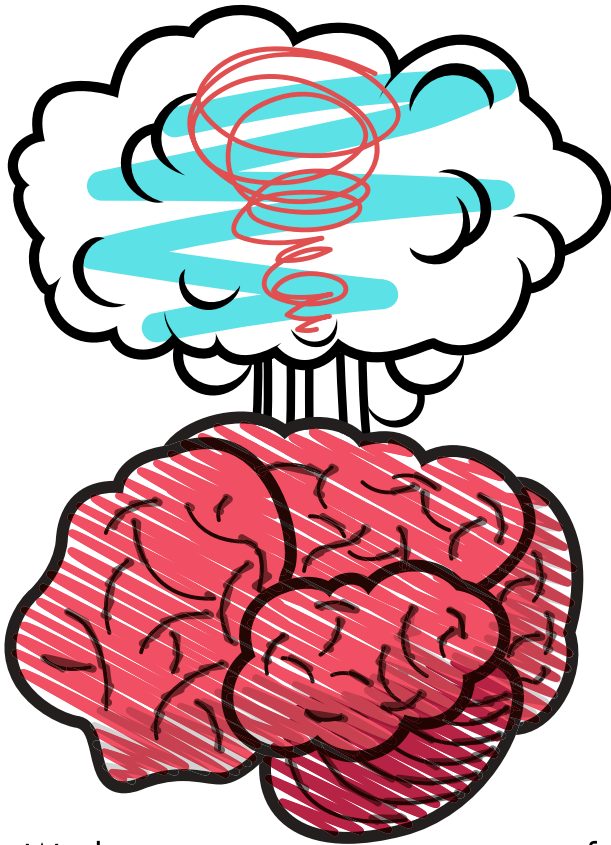
"Let it go," "ignore it," "Don't drown in a glass of water," "It's not that important," are complicated cognitive skills even for neurotypical people. For the autistic mind, they are impossible. Trivialization is a privilege of minds that can filter stimuli.

The autistic mind processes emotions with unusual intensity because it is holding thousands of bits of information for an extremely long period of time.

Now add up the gallons that discrimination forces us to carry, and you have a vague idea of what it feels like to be autistic.

Autistic people are in a constant war with the judgment and misunderstanding of other people who often ask us questions or make comments like: *Why are you always tired? Suck it up and deal with it. It's just a lack of discipline. It's all in your head. Stop being so pessimistic. Stop being so lazy, If I can handle it, so can you.*





We experience sensory overloads that exhaust us mentally, because of the clothes we are expected to wear, the food we are expected to eat, the noises we are expected to endure. etc. And when we communicate our pain, we only receive indifference and more mistreatment.

We live struggling to communicate our experiences because communication needs to be exercised to survive. But to communicate with a mind that is so different from your own only to find that you are the only one who was trying, is disheartening.

We live in a permanent state of self-defense, exhausted, frustrated, and hurt that people do not understand us, that they question our capabilities, intentions, perceptions, behaviors, feelings, empathy, tastes, our identity, and even our own sanity: disempowering us as people and affecting our self-esteem.

In this daily confrontation with the demands of the environment, the acceptance of autism as a neurological variant of humanity and a valid way of being and doing plays an important role in reducing emotions as a permanent factor of autistic overloads.

Constant and explicit messages (remember that we do not perceive praise expressed in the neurotypical way) of acceptance of our differences can do wonders for an autistic person to feel entitled the same access and to self-validate even when they have difficulties; and it will give them the feeling of being in a safe environment where they can focus their energy on learning and growing and reaching their goals.

***Be careful not to enable prejudices, nor to promote supremacist thinking in front of other neurotypes. Acceptance is about modeling the idea that our way of being, doing, and learning is as valid and acceptable to the community of which we are a part as that of any other.***

# IF IT WORKS FOR A MAJORITY, THAT DOESN'T MEANS IT WILL WORK FOR US

## Social Interaction



Because of our differences, social interaction is difficult for us; society's refusal to accept us also makes it a traumatic experience.

In order to properly attend to autistic neurology, it is necessary to consider social interaction as an intense emotional stimulus and therefore the need of the autistic person to isolate from it for self-protection must be respected.

The right approach to promoting social interaction is to reduce the fear and anxiety that it produces by making the experience a pleasant one.

Modifying the environment to create an empathic and supportive climate is the best path, and respecting the need for down time is a necessity of respect for an autistic person.

Pressuring forced social interaction will only trigger anxieties that will make the experience even more overwhelming and traumatic, achieving the opposite of the expected result.

Many of us are discouraged from interacting further because the experience has taught us that people will judge and misinterpret us when we ask for space to vent.

## DON'T NAG ME

---

Yes! Again, we autistic people process emotions with as much detail and intensity as we do sensations.

Nagging as a form of correction **does not work for autistics**. The demanding tones of voice and all the tactics aimed at causing guilt affect us so much that the intensity of these feelings puts us in danger of shutdown.

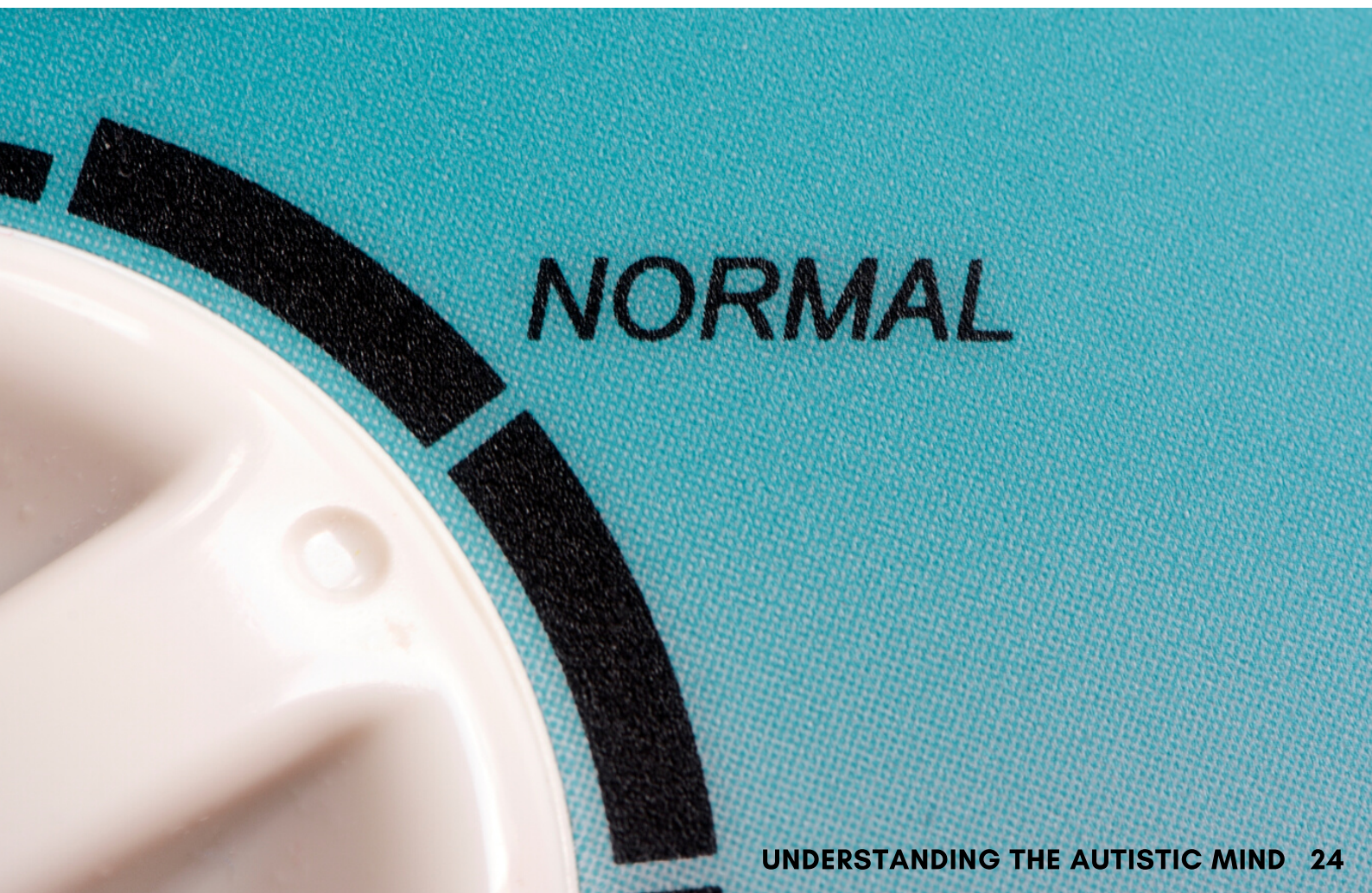
In the intense and chaotic nature of our emotional experience, any kind of demand is perceived as an aggression and can only achieve the opposite result: we become defensive, either by isolating ourselves more or by becoming defiant and rebellious against those placing demands.

To correct an autistic person, it is necessary to provide information about the mistake made and to explicitly explain what the mistake was and why it is a mistake. Remember that we find it difficult to understand the unwritten rules of most neurotypes.

This must be done without nagging, blame, or manipulation, and to assume that there is a possibility that the autistic person does not share the same values that establish what is "normal" in the society in which he or she lives, that they need to discuss the unwritten rules, and that they can even decide not to agree.

Respectful parenting is the effective formula for teaching limits.

Remember that we also possess excessive empathy when we attend to the emotions of others and experience the emotions of others, especially in the face of injustice, as if they were our own. Attending to a situation where someone else is being antagonized generates as much anguish as if we were the target, and it upsets us too much to see others in distress.



# 50 WAYS SOCIETY GASLIGHTS AND PUTS UP BARRIERS FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE

Terra Vance is the CEO and founder of the nonprofit organization, NeuroClastic, and a consultant in industrial and organizational psychology specialized in diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism, and poverty dynamics.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white, speech-bubble-shaped card. The card has red text written on it. The background is dark, making the hands and the card stand out.

Everybody is a little bit autistic.  
We all have to make adjustments.

**Be careful what you put up with.  
You're teaching people how to treat  
your child.**

Autistic people, adults and children, are infantilized, gaslighted, and manipulated regularly by society- individuals and institutions.

I asked some friends about messages they receive from society that are gaslighting.

It took about ten minutes to collect these responses from autistic adults and teens, and I could have made the list "500 ways" instead of 50 had I waited another hour or so.

This is important to acknowledge and validate. Living while autistic is difficult, traumatic in a complex way, because society does this in blatant and subtle ways, in ways that are plausibly deniable.

The mental health field, loved ones, parents, siblings, employers, educators... even sometimes other autistics have internalized these messages so deeply that they become a part of a person's worldview.

In order for autistic people to gain parity and to live without the extant trauma of constant social messaging that is toxic and destructive— non-autistic people have to take a stand and use their privilege and platforms to educate others about why it's not okay to continue to maintain the behaviors and thought patterns which cause such unfavorable circumstances for autistic people.

1. Telling us that our sensory differences are “no big deal” and that we just need to “be resilient” and learn to deal with it. They assume their brains are the same as ours and assume we can habituate when we can't, so instead force us to be in awful environments to try to “habituate us” to the stimulus. Which is just further traumatizing us. Thinking they get to decide what is loud, bright, painful, or tastes funny.



2. Not acknowledging that many of us grew up in environments that weren't conducive to fostering our talents ended up as late bloomers, then assuming we're Né'er-do-wells or we're unmotivated or unambitious. We just haven't bloomed yet, and it's a profound difference... but when we do bloom, look out.

3. When they claim to have empathy and that we don't, but then only measure empathy in NT ways like eye contact or understanding NT behavior.

## GLOSSARY:

**GASLIGHTING:** It is a form of psychological manipulation that seeks to sow doubt in a target individual or in the members of a target group, making them question their own memory, perception, and sanity. Using persistent denial, disorientation, contradiction, and lying, it attempts to destabilize the victim and delegitimize the victim's beliefs.

**NT OR NEUROTYPICAL:** People whose brains are configured similarly to the majority's and whose way of thinking, perceiving, and behaving constitutes the neuronorm.



4. When ABA therapists claim that ABA therapy for 40 hours is not exhausting for small children because it's "just play," when social play can be beyond-exhausting over extended periods of time for autistic kids.

5. Their version of empathy is, "I accept and appreciate X, but if you become more like us, it won't be a problem." That ain't empathy! And they yet tell us we're the ones who lack empathy!

6. "You need to stop flapping your arms/rocking/bouncing your leg! People are going to think you're crazy."

7. Telling us our special interests are stupid, a waste of time, or not age/gender appropriate.

8. Telling us we don't meet the neurotypical expectations that are set for us.

9. Not acknowledging the accomplishments we do achieve that are far beyond the neurotypical markers for "high achievement" in those specific areas.



10. NT person says something and autistic person misunderstands it: It's the autistic person's fault because they have processing difficulties.

Autistic person says something and NT person misunderstands it: It's the autistic person's fault because they have impaired communication skills.

This is in spite of the fact that generally, the autistic person is the one literally stating or carrying out the desired or indicated action, while the NT person is relying on assumption, innuendo, tone of voice, body language or other things that really aren't communication.

The idea that the NT person could have communicated unclearly or ambiguously is **never even considered**.

11. When they know you're autistic, they invalidate you by saying that you can't understand basic things, or they recreate stories using the subtext they inferred and twist the narrative to claim you're purposefully upsetting, offending, inconveniencing, or provoking them. But, they know you're autistic, thus they need to take your words literally, and you tell them to take you literally and there is no subtext... and they still insist the subtext is there.



12. Telling autistic kids that they are not playing “properly.” Isn’t the whole point of “play” that it should be enjoyable and free of arbitrary constraints or expectations for what one should do? Isn’t thinking in unique or unusual ways during play considered “creative” and therefore praiseworthy? It is... for neurotypical children.

13. Talking about us while ignoring that we are saying something different about ourselves.

14. Acting like we need to just “try harder” to be gainfully employed as if our work ethic is to blame for why we are not monetizing our talents.

15. I cannot begin to quantify how much I:

A. Hate manipulation

B. Am constantly accused of being a manipulator because it’s not believed that there is no subtext in my words

16. Telling autistic people that “no one else is interested in \_\_\_\_\_ except you,” as though this should be a criterion for what is a valid interest.

17. “Everyone is on the spectrum these days.”



17. "Everyone is on the spectrum these days."

18. Assuming that autistic people are less creative when we are really creative differently.

19. Assuming when hearing accounts of an incident from both an autistic and an NT that the NT person has a better understanding of the situation.

20. The assumption that autistic style and communication aren't sexy; thinking adult autistics don't want relationships or don't make good partners.

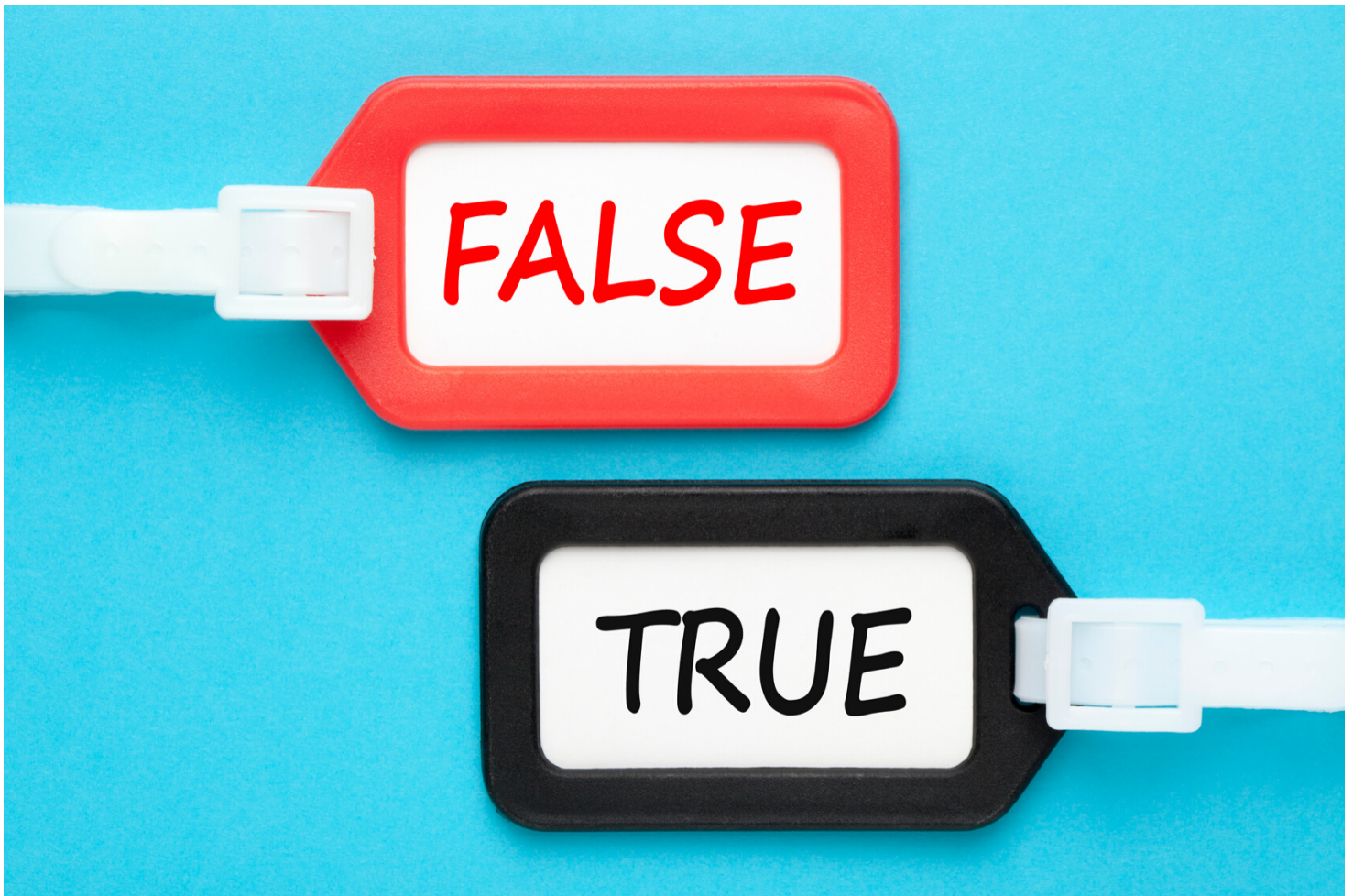
21. Assuming that we have "black-and-white thinking" while at the same time making giant generalizations about autistic people and their "lack of theory of mind."

22. Invalidating self-diagnosis while simultaneously claiming absolute knowledge on behalf of parents of autistic kids, or saying things like, "We're all a little bit autistic," as mentioned above.



23. Judging the impact of our autism based on how well we are “functioning,” aka masking, and assuming something is wrong when we take breaks to be ourselves.
24. Telling us to “be ourselves,” but when we actually are they basically say, “but not like that.”
25. Feeling sad for us when we decline to participate in social events (when the fact is that we are simply happier not participating).
26. Grieving over the fact that we are not like (their expectations for) “normal” people or mourning an autism diagnosis right in front of the autistic person.
27. Defining the goals of our “therapy” for us based on what they think we should want.
28. Treating medical/neurological issues like sensory processing disorder, dyspraxia, and ADHD like they are personality disorders or mental illnesses.
29. Assuming that we wish we were not autistic.
30. Telling us that they accept us for who we are, but asking us not to put a label on ourselves or to talk about our autism.
31. Being treated like an adult child after disclosing autism and getting the “bless your heart” treatment, or having people tell you “you’re doing great” for being able to perform basic tasks.
32. Judging the depth of our thoughts or feelings by our nonverbal communication, or lack thereof, because this is how we choose to express ourselves. If our facial expressions and body language aren’t “expressive” enough, they insist that we are unfeeling.
33. Telling us, as children and even as adults, that we will grow out of our beliefs, style, and behaviors.
34. Not understanding why trying to “cure” us is so offensive.
35. Always being “Too Much.” Living in a perpetual state of apology for my too-Muchness and being expected to come from a place of gratitude and deference for the rest of the world “tolerating” it.

30. Telling us that they accept us for who we are, but asking us not to put a label on ourselves or to talk about our autism.



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35. Always being “Too Much.” Living in a perpetual state of apology for my too-Muchness and being expected to come from a place of gratitude and deference for the rest of the world “tolerating” it.



36. Telling us that they can't listen to us because we're "rude" when we are giving our time and energy trying to teach them something about what it means to be autistic.

37. Saying that if I just practice my social skills more and get out more, I will be more "normal."

38. Telling us we need to "agree to disagree" about when they are doing things that are absolutely oppressive. Telling us we are being "rude" when we ask them to stop doing oppressive things, or using the "both sides" narrative and telling us that we should care about the feelings of people actively harming us.

39. Claiming to support autistic people but only donating to and funding NT-run autism charities.

40. Telling autistic people that they are unqualified to discuss autism because they don't have doctorates in a social science- whilst they themselves don't have doctorates in a social science, and often have considerably less (or zero) relevant formal education than the autistic people at whom they are talking.

Simultaneously, thinking their three years as being an "autism parent" are more valid than our lifelong lived experiences as autistics.

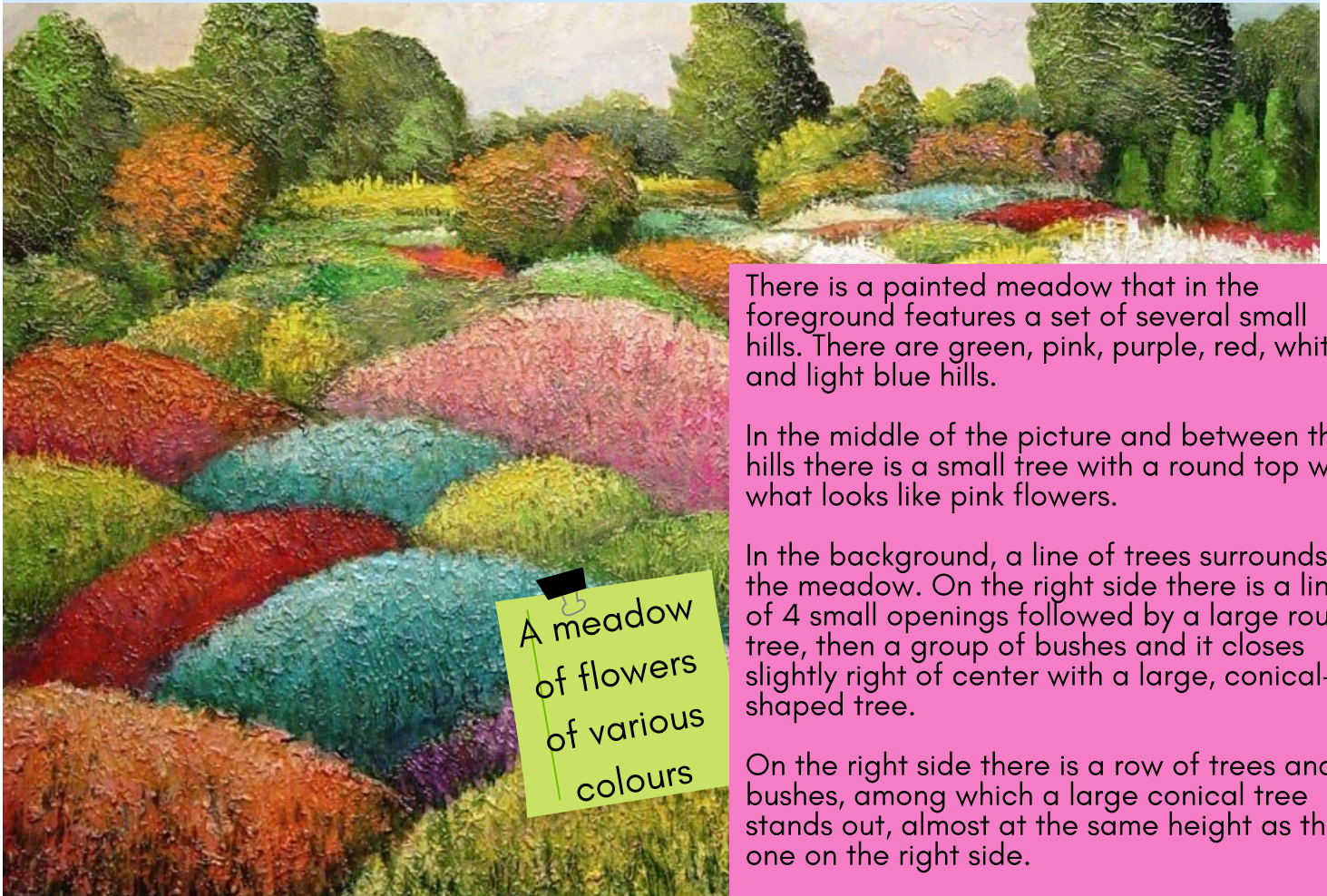
41. Telling young autistic children that they are smart and full of potential for qualities that 20 years later will deny them success and professional access.

42. Maintaining that we are always in the wrong as a de facto part of the autistic condition when any misunderstandings erupt and pathologizing our logical, reasoned approach to problem-solving as lacking in empathy.



43. Telling us if we don't fit some narrow and strict criteria that we're then not autistic and are probably just assholes who need to shape up.
44. When we try talking about its impact, tell us we're using autism as an excuse.
45. Being regarded as pedantic or difficult by mental health care providers and physicians who have almost no idea about what it means to be autistic.
46. Being misdiagnosed as having a variety of personality disorders, mood disorders, or hypochondria.
47. Being told by diagnosticians that we can't be autistic because we laugh at jokes, take baths (?!?), make eye contact, or "are not enough like Sheldon from Big Bang Theory," that we can't be autistic.
48. Conducting research study after research study based on faulty assumptions and misunderstandings about what it means to be autistic.
49. In professional literature, framing information about autistic people in a way that characterizes them solely according to perceived deficits while neglecting to acknowledge strengths.
50. Being too "gifted" for mainstream, but not gifted with the right and accurate recipe to constitute a "gifted kid," but rather considered some freak of nature who is neither fish nor fowl in this world. You learn early your contents are somehow inherently wrong.

# THERE ARE DEEP MINDS AND NIMBLE MINDS



A meadow  
of flowers  
of various  
colours

There is a painted meadow that in the foreground features a set of several small hills. There are green, pink, purple, red, white, and light blue hills.

In the middle of the picture and between the hills there is a small tree with a round top with what looks like pink flowers.

In the background, a line of trees surrounds the meadow. On the right side there is a line of 4 small openings followed by a large round tree, then a group of bushes and it closes slightly right of center with a large, conical-shaped tree.

On the right side there is a row of trees and bushes, among which a large conical tree stands out, almost at the same height as the one on the right side.

## COGNITIVE OVERLOAD

An autistic mind is, to say the least, a challenge for educators. We do not settle for superficial learning of a subject, and that is not whimsy, nor stubbornness, nor is it intended to make the teacher look bad. It is a NEED.

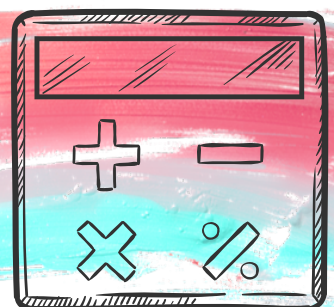
Let me explain: When we autistic people put our foot in the ocean of information that is a subject, we marvelously detect all the details and begin to analyze the relationship between them; and if the puzzle is missing pieces, we also notice it.

This incomplete puzzle becomes a set of information that we can't finish processing, and as a consequence, they stay occupying our mind in disorder without allowing us to move on to the next subject. As a protective response, we autistic people dive deep to look for the missing pieces.

Our hyper-detailed and dimensional perception forces us to become deep-sea divers. Neither agendas, nor profitability, nor social benefits can be more important than that, and neurotypical people would think the same way if they perceived the world in as much detail as we do and were exposed to the anxiety that afflicts us when we don't solve the puzzles and fill in missing links.

The neuronorm privileges a performance or achievement-oriented way of operating: the nimble mind. In this system of values that aims to pass a subject or meet the requirements of a task, it is demanded to treat each subject superficially, quickly and touching on as many topics as possible, in order to achieve the greatest number of objectives:

- Learning and solving tasks in a superficial way is prioritized and valued more.
- The goals are neither realistic nor logical for autistic neurology.
- The learning and task-solving processes that we are required to use are not flexible enough to be adapted to our neurology.
- We are required to navigate at the speed of an agile mind.
- Grades and standardized scores are prioritized and valued more than formative and creative assessments.
- We are denied the luxury of making errors as a fundamental part of any learning.
- We are judged negatively for "spending time" criticizing, sequencing, comparing, justifying, and trying to predict outcomes-- skills that are autistic strengths.

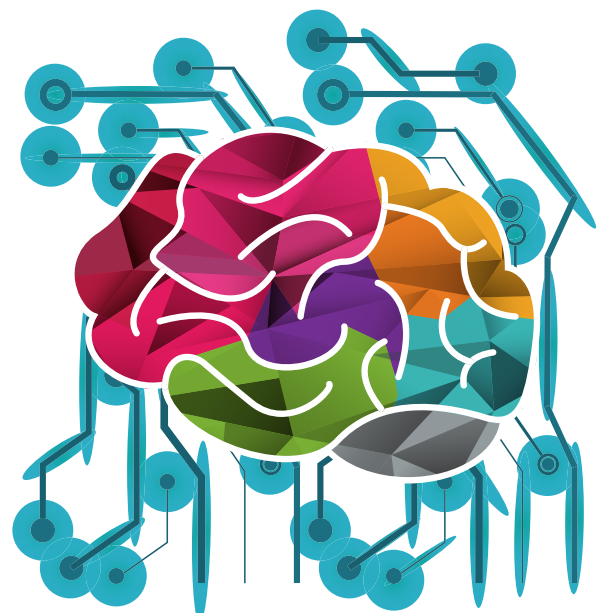


- We are denied access to time and information to complete the puzzles.
- Authority figures are limited to being a transmitter of information (with incomplete detail), rather than a facilitator of knowledge, which is what we autistic people need.
- Extrinsic motivation, to which we are immune, is prioritized, while intrinsic motivation, which does work for us, is ignored; and as a consequence our areas of passion are further dismissed.
- We are required to spend our already-limited energy on content that is useless or the purpose is not sufficiently communicated to us.

In compliance with this value system, parents, teachers, and bosses of autistic people demand that we operate by accumulating in our minds more and more unsolved puzzles, which overloads our circuits.

As a consequence, we autistic people learn early to fear the acquisition of new interests because we anticipate that we will end up immersed in chaos, we exhaust ourselves much more quickly, we are forced to expend an increasingly large part of our energy and time (which is already limited) in self-regulating work to manage overloads.

This causes us to become frustrated and immersed in the defeated feeling of "not being able" and the shame that this brings. In turn, this magnifies the pre-existing emotional overloads and compounds our anxiety.





# THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS



1

## Planning

The ability to mentally to draw up action plans and to conceive a series of steps that will lead us to a concrete goal.



2

## Goal setting

Linked to motivation, it is the skill that allows us to decide how to invest our energy and where to direct our behaviors.



3

## Decision making

It is the skill that allows us to determine which option to choose among the many that can be presented to us.



4

## Task Initiation

The ability to gather the initiative to begin an activity after planning and organizing steps.



5

## Organization

The ability to bring together and structure information in an efficient and useful way.



6

## Inhibition

The ability to resist certain impulses, control spontaneous urges, and prevent distractions from interfering with our behavior.



7

## Monitoring

The ability to keep attention on the task and regulate what and how we are doing what we are doing.



8

## Anticipation

The ability to predict in advance the results of an action and/or its consequences and to make decisions based on that information.



9

## Flexibility

The ability to be flexible is what allows us to change our way of acting or thinking in the face of possible environmental changes or to modify ongoing actions.

Paying attention to the class, buying bread before the store closes, choosing what you are going to eat-- they all seem like simple things to do, but each of them involves a series of high-level cognitive processes that allow you to carry them out.

**Executive functions** are understood as the set of skills that allow us to organize plan for hundreds of simple ideas, movements, and actions to carry out complex tasks and adapt to the environment successfully.

The problem is that these cognitive processes **are usually associated with the ability to filter stimuli.**

Let me explain:

An agile mind assimilates repetitive stimuli and learns to execute them automatically, without thinking about them, and the automation of "simple" tasks simplifies the amount of variables that an agile mind must work with. In other words, neurotypical people use their pre-judgments to make decisions quickly, and the chances of doing that best depend basically on the quality and quantity of their previous experiences.

The autistic mind, deep and detailed, perceives the micro differences between one situation and another, preventing us from assimilating them instinctively. This implies more efficient solutions even when there are no previous experiences and a high level of creativity (alternative solutions). However, this also means that there are no "simple tasks," which increases the number of variables that must be worked with; and executing too many tasks by prioritizing, ordering, and planning in a conscious way is complicated, slow, exhausting, and consumes more energy.

For us, everyday tasks are as complex as organizing a wedding with 500 guests. Can you imagine organizing a wedding with 500 guests in less than a day? How would you feel if people demanded that you organize it without a plan of action and enough details? How would you feel if the day before the event, the bride demanded that you change the color of the awnings?

It turns out that in the world we live in, the ability to do many things and do them quickly is more highly-valued, and because of this, we are denied the time and use of resources to plan in a way that is consistent with our neurology: well and meticulously.

Don't you believe me? Research on the vast number of specialists who are focused on making autistic children learn to "break their routines," unaware that the only thing they will achieve is to plunge them into **overload**. Our "inflexible routines" are the way autistic people automate maintenance decisions.



# SENSORY OVERLOAD

## NO TWO BRAINS ARE ALIKE

Specialists love the maxim, "If you've met an autistic person, you've only met an autistic person." They use it very often to dismiss the voice of autistic people with milder support needs when we talk about the difficulties in our community.

What this phrase does not explain is that everything in the previous pages applies to all autistic people: those with high support needs and those with low support needs. And the different ways these traits are expressed are due to each autistic person's personal experience, environment, accommodations provided, access to complex language, etc.

How we are completely different from each other is in our perception of sensory stimuli. Each autistic person has a different sensory profile that fluctuates between:

- Hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity
- The avoidance profile and the seeker profile
- The level of variation in how one experiences a certain sensory system.

Autistic people do not experience an consistent sensory profile; that is, it is not as simple as being a sensory seeker or a sensory avoider.



Most often, it is a combination of both. We tend to be sensory seekers for certain stimuli and avoiders for others.

The description of the hypersensitivities and hyposensitivities and the avoidant or seeking profiles of an autistic person is called his or her sensory profile.

Each sensory profile is **UNIQUE**, and understanding it is important to implement the reasonable accommodations that the person needs to avoid overstimulation.

All hypersensitivities contribute to overloading the autistic mind, and any autistic person with hypersensitivities will be in a very high state of alert that will inevitably lead them to strong states of anxiety and burnouts.

Some hyposensitivities mean a serious risk for the life and health of an autistic person.

It is also important to take into account that in cases of overload, the sensory profile of the autistic person may be altered and magnified due to the diminished ability to cognitively handle the over-accumulation of stimuli.

**NO TWO AUTISTIC PEOPLE  
ARE THE SAME.  
OUR EXPERIENCES  
MAKE US UNIQUE.**



# THE SENSORY SEEKER

When an autistic person is not sensitive to certain sensory stimuli (hyposensitive response), they tend to seek more sensory stimulation to achieve an appropriate input level for maintaining balance.

Also, there are autistic people who tend to look for certain sensory stimuli in an excessive way in order to accommodate others who are hypersensitive.

Depending on their hyper or hyposensitivity in a specific sensory system, a sensory seeker can:

- Have a high tolerance or indifference to pain.
- Enjoy bumping into people or things, often rubbing against the walls.
- Squirm in the chair, keeping their hands under their buttocks and pressing hard.
- When he is on the couch or bed, needing to have something on their body, like stuffed animals, a blanket, cushions, etc.
- Not be able to estimate their strength, pressing the pencil too hard when writing, tearing the paper or breaking the lead.
- Love to walk barefoot, avoids wearing shoes.
- Touch other people or objects a lot.
- Play too intensely (without being aware of danger), jumping, pushing, and bumping into things.
- Play with their toys roughly, often breaking them.
- Prefer tight clothing, wearing non-stretch, thick fabrics and tight belts, wear long sleeves and hoodies, tighten their shoelaces a lot, prefer high necks, or want to wear a scarf often.
- Enjoy listening to or making loud noises.
- Be unaware of other people's personal space.
- Smell all the objects they pick up.

- Chews or sucks on his hands, arms, nails, pencil, T-shirt, etc. and constantly need to have something in their mouth
- Swings and spins frequently, likes the feeling of being dizzy.
- Need to be held very tightly.

## **THE SENSORY AVOIDER**

Some autistic people avoid sensations that they experience with excessive intensity (hypersensitivity response). Depending on their hypersensitivity, a sensory avoider may:

- Hear noises that other people do not perceive with the same intensity; for example, the sound of the hands of a clock.
- Resist having their hair or nails from being cut.
- Be extremely anxious about busy soundscapes, like when all the other students are talking during recess.
- Not like to be touched on the face.
- Prefer to be in dark or in low-light rooms and is bothered by very bright environments and certain types of lights (especially florescent).
- Refuse kisses, caresses, hugs.
- He avoids swings or games that require a lot of movement.
- Not like to wear tight clothes and despise pants with elastic, tight shoes (prefers open shoes), or socks with seams.
- Not enjoy crowded spaces.
- Touch or pinch the part of the body where they have been touched to remove the sensation.
- Not enjoy certain means of travel, like by car, motorbike, bus, or boat.
- Have extreme sensitivity to certain odors.
- Not like to get their hands dirty with mud, sand, or foam.
- Reject certain textures of food and only eat plain foods or those from a specific brand.

# MORE THAN 20 SENSES

What would you say if I told you that the speech difficulties of autistic people with greater support needs are often due to sensory difficulties?



**Perception of light:** It is a sub-sense of sight. People with hypersensitivity may need dark lenses and/or have difficulty seeing shadows and volumes, flashing lights such as those of patrol cars or fluorescent lights, experience difficulty moving or headaches in spaces that are too bright or illuminated with a certain type of light. Those with hyposensitivity need more light and can easily become depressed in dimly lit places.

**Hearing:** A person with auditory hypersensitivity can hear everything at the same time and with the same volume, unable to filter a single sound and focus on it, so they may simply not understand anything that is being said to them while subjected to the overstimulation. To manage this, you can try different auditory aids such as noise-canceling headphones, raising the volume of a single stimulus to encourage hyper focus, or using ear defenders. Some autistic people with auditory hypersensitivity raise their own voice a lot when there are many people talking, turn up the volume of the TV to ranges uncomfortable to others, or need to listen to very specific music that is suited for their profile and encourages hyper focus.



**Smell:** This is one of the most primitive senses we have and is associated with our ability to detect danger and survive. In the case of olfactory hypersensitivities, there are very general to very specific ones. There are autistic people who cannot cope with any relatively strong smell and others who can cope with most of them but have serious problems coping with some very specific ones such as sweet smells or rotten smells, which can cause SEVERE nausea, headaches, and irritability.

**Taste:** It is divided into several sub senses, each with specific capabilities and functions. Perception of sweet, perception of salty, perception of sour, and perception of bitter. Some autistics are particularly sensitive to any of these and may simply not tolerate foods that produce too strong of stimuli from any of them.

**Touch:** We all know the sense of touch, but theory tells us that what we know as touch is actually a set of sub-senses that also include thermo-perception and nociception. A person with tactile hypersensitivity may not be able to wear garments with labels or of a certain type of fibre or very tight garments, may dislike physical contact, or only like deep-pressure touch but rejecting soft caresses.

**Nocioception:** It is the ability to feel pain. Some autistic people have nociceptive hypersensitivity and perceive pain, such as a headache or an injury, in a more intense way. We must be very careful not to underestimate the pain felt by autistic people just because for most of them such pain does not manifest itself in such an intense way, something as simple as acne can overload a person with hypersensitivity in this sense.

In the case of nociceptive hyposensitivity, its manifestation can be **very dangerous**. Imagine that your body does not warn you when you have a headache, infection, or burn. We all need to feel pain to set off the response alarms and avoid the agent that is hurting us. This sense is associated with our survival instinct. People with severe nociceptive hyposensitivities usually need constant accompaniment.

**Thermoception:** It's the perception of temperature and functions on an internal level. This sense can be considered as a sub-sense of touch with the specific function of informing us if our body temperature is healthy. Autistic people with thermoceptive hyposensitivity may not perceive that they are burning or perceive it too late or not perceive the cold and understand the need to warm up. People with thermoceptive hypersensitivity may not tolerate high temperatures, overly warm clothing, or may show particularly high irritability in summer.

**Proprioception:** It is the body's own ability to perceive itself. Proprioception is what allows you to dress or bathe even with your eyes closed. Even if you cannot see or touch yourself, somehow you know where your body is and how its parts are distributed. When there is hypersensitivity in this sense, the autistic may be able to perceive the heartbeat without much effort, have increased perception of muscle contractions, gastric processes, etc., even preventing them from sleep.

In the case of proprioceptive hyposensitivity, difficulties may arise with such simple tasks as taking a notebook out of the backpack without concentrating on it. In both cases the person may experience enormous clumsiness and bump into everything when walking, either because he or she does not perceive his or her own body or because they become disoriented from overstimulation.

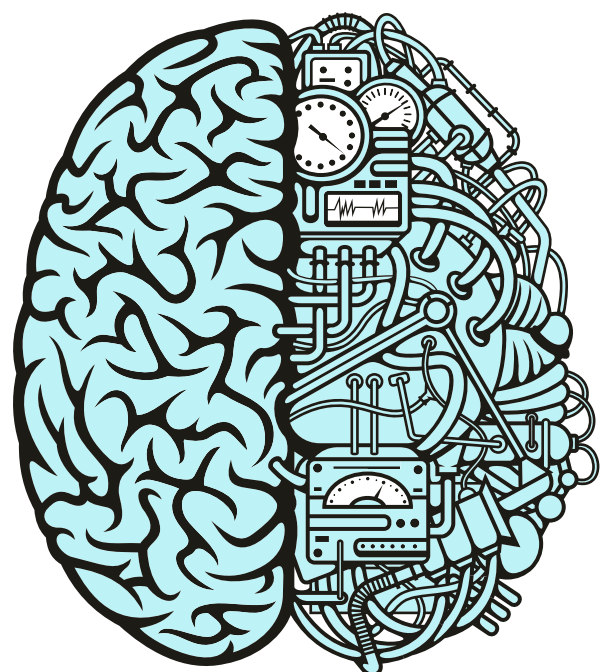
**Interoception:** It's the sense that allows us to understand and feel what's going on inside our body. Autistic people with hypersensitivity can overreact to interoceptive sensations. For example, they may eat more often than others to avoid feeling hunger pains. They may use the bathroom more often than necessary because they cannot tolerate a full bladder.

Hyposensitivities in this sense may require longer toilet training, their bodies may not be ready to begin this learning until a later age, they may not be able to hold it until they reach the toilet, or they may never be able to perceive the need to go to the toilet and may require the use of diapers even as an adult. They may not perceive hunger or thirst and therefore may not eat properly.

**Mechanoreception:** It's our motor response capability. When we possess this sense to the full we have sharp reflexes and can rely on the response of our muscles. The hyper and hyposensitivity of this sense can produce difficulties with walking, pointing, writing, and even **talking...**

This is why, for many non-speaking autistics, they intend to say one thing, but their brain processes the commands to control the speech muscles differently, resulting in a profound disability with communicating orally or with unreliable speech.

There is evidence that mechanoreceptive stimuli may be affected even in people who usually have no major problems with motor control until they are faced with an overload. While the overload lasts, they cannot speak, speak incoherently, or even cannot move at will.



This is what I would have told them, if I could have when I was a kid:

My body is not entirely under my control. I know the right answer to those cards, unfortunately my hand is not completely under my control either. My body often ignores my thoughts.

I look at my flash cards. You ask me to play 'tree,' for example, and although I can clearly differentiate between tree, house, child, and any card you have arranged, my hand does not always obey me. My mind screams, "Don't touch the house," and wham, I touch the house.

His notes say, "Ido is frustrated in today's session." Yes, frustration often occurs when your intelligence cannot be displayed and neurological forces prevent communication between mind and body, and experts conclude that you are not cognitively processing human speech.

**IDO KEDAR**

Non-speaking autistic with multiple disabilities, diagnosed with ASD III.

**Kinesthesia:** It is the perception of movement. Somehow our body has the ability to perceive and predict movement, when this happens we are using our kinaesthetic sense, in the case of hypo and hypersensitivity kinaesthetics, a person might have difficulty with simple tasks like catching a ball that comes to you, dodging projectiles (balls for example) or serious difficulties and passing distress to cross a street, because the person cannot understand or confuses the information that serves to "predict" the movement of the cars without making an additional cognitive effort, even when the cars are going in a straight line.

**Vestibular:** Vestibular perception relates to the internal sense of balance. This is one of the most important senses of all. Hyper or hyposensitive difficulties in this sense may mean that we are able to maintain balance in order to stand, but will find it difficult to move. Running, jumping, dancing, or even walking could become a challenge.

Autistic people who have difficulty with this should be given special consideration when doing physical activities. **It is not that they are not trying hard, but that they are trying much harder to do the same thing.** As well as the mechanoreceptive sense, there is evidence that vestibular stimuli can be affected by overload, even in people who generally have no major problems with this sense.

**Sense of Time:** Although there are no scientific conclusions yet that explain how clearly people perceive time, all studies conclude that time perception occurs in the brain, and many autistic people report serious difficulties in their perception of the passage of time and the need help in managing it.



# **THEY'RE NOT SYMPTOMS, THEY'RE AUTISTIC TOOLS**



**WHAT WORKS FOR US AND WHY AUTISTIC  
CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD NOT BE  
PATHOLOGIZED.**

# MY ROUTINE

## ... OR "COGNITIVE INFLEXIBILITY"

Autistic routines are our natural way of organizing ourselves, the primitive form of planning that best fits the detailed and intense neurology of autistic people.

They provide us with the security and control over the environment that allistics gain from trivialization.

The word "routine" seems to be full of negative connotations in this day and age. People seem to associate this word with all sorts of boring things, with "not living life," with "not achieving things," but incorporating routines into our lives is precisely what we autistic people need to increase our productivity, and, believe it or not, it nurtures our creativity and increases our happiness.

Having a house or desk full of papers, objects that have no place of their own, and outdated post-its makes your mind full of clutter and leaves no space to think about what is important. I'm sure you relate to this, even for allistic people.

What you may not know is that the same principle can be applied to the use of your time: if your day-to-day is chaotic, that also creates stress, and stress is counterproductive to creativity and even health.

In addition, every day we have to make thousands of decisions of all kinds, from what direction to take in an important negotiation at work, to what to eat for breakfast that day. The constant bombardment by the excess of available options generates debilitating fatigue. In fact, there is even a syndrome called "decision fatigue."



Routines become a way to build a structure around our day, give us some reassurance, and plot out the day, and thus we avoid the phenomenon known as "motivation fatigue," caused when that constant decision-making depletes our reserve of will power.

Motivation fatigue and decision fatigue generate tiredness, ease of distraction, procrastination, and a general feeling that what we are doing is not what we want to do. At the end of the day, it turns out that the hours we spend surfing on social networks in the late afternoon are caused by us exhausting our willpower by deciding to get up early and have oatmeal for breakfast that morning.

As you can see, these routines work for all of us, even for allistics; but they are essential for minds that must process more details: for the autistic mind. Hence, our attachment to routine is greater and more natural than for most people.

Routines provide us with security and control, allow us to predict events, make it easier for us to navigate the world with autonomy and self-confidence, and allow us to avoid unnecessary conflicts because it gives us room to take note of what others expect of us. It is frankly horrifying that someone would try to take all that away from autistic people.

The key to routines in autism is not to take them away from us to "make us more flexible," it is to teach us how to manage them correctly, to help us perfect the tool, which contains the "breathing room" necessary to let other things happen and to adjust to the pursuit of our dreams.





# THE RED THREAD

## ... OR HYPERFOCUS

To defend ourselves from the chaos, we autistic people developed a superpower. It's called hyper focus and it works like the red threads on the researchers' boards.

When the information is too much, we autistic people take only one of the red threads, follow it until the connections are gone and leave all the chaos of stimuli that chokes us organized.

If we stop following the red thread and look up at the wallpaper, we are plunged back into chaos and end up collapsing. It's a defence mechanism, either you follow the red thread or you sink into the chaos and stress.

Although we discover this ability from a very young age, the automatic form of this super power is not objective and is limited to the field of interest. When you discover that something interests you very much and you dive in, you discover the hyper-focus and enjoy the joy of a space of peace and mental well-being. Can it be addictive? Yes, being well has that effect, all living beings desire it.

The regulation and development of this ability, the capacity to take advantage of it and avoid it becoming a disaster that plays against you, requires a conscious, motivated, gradual and systematic learning process.

With social permission to close the library (so that there is less chaos and more desire), with access to an education that allows you to analyze yourself, with the necessary time and experience, we

### GLOSSARY:

**HYPERFOCUS:** an intense form of mental concentration or visualization that focuses on a limited subject, or beyond objective reality and within mental planes, subjective concepts, imagination, and other facets of the mind; the ability to concentrate intensely on a project or activity for several hours at a time.

autistic people can develop and learn to regulate this skill; we can learn in what, when, where, how and for how

long it is convenient for us to hyper-focus; but it will never be an easy task and if you neglect and abuse it, an **autistic overload** will occur.



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# I NEED SPACE

... ON ISOLATION

When the stimuli coming from the environment exceed the capacity of our brain to process it, or when our brain is already working at the limit of its capacity, we need to close the doors of our mind to avoid overload, and we do not open them until we have processed and dispatched the stimuli that was overloading us.

In short: When the library is in disarray, we simply close it and open it again when all the books are back in place.

Over time, we develop the ability to delay and schedule closings, but if you are not careful and delay too long: autistic burnout.

Understood like that, it sounds logical, doesn't it? You do it, too, only you need a lot more stimulus than us to get there.



CLOSED BY  
OVERLOAD

BE PATIENT, WE'LL GET TO YOU LATER

ATTE: MY AUTISTIC MIND

# KEEP STIMMING!

## OR "STEREOTYPES"

Stimming is a natural behavior that can improve emotional regulation and prevent people from overload in stressful situations. Analyze it a little. What do the experts recommend you do if you are stressed or depressed? Exercise? Listen to music? Aroma therapy? Yoga? Go dancing? Sing? Massage? A night of candles?

These are some of the best known autistic stims, and if you look at them carefully, you will see that they have their equivalent in the above list:



- **Visual:** Moving fingers in front of eyes; staring at a set of twinkling lights.



- **Auditory:** Making vocal sounds, snapping fingers, repeated rhythms.



- **Tactile:** Scratching; rubbing skin or muscles with hands or an external object; twirling hair.



- **Vestibular:** Moving the body rhythmically; to swing, to flap the hands, to rock.



- **Taste:** Licking objects or body parts, chewing gum.



- **Olfactory:** Smelling objects, body parts, or other people.

And guess what, almost everyone gets involved in some form of stimming. Some of you might bite your nails, spin your hair around your fingers, or drum on your desk when you're bored, nervous, or need to relieve tension.

The difference between the autistic stimming and those of the allistic majority lies in two points:

- **We need to do them more often:** Because of the way we process information and the lack of social acceptance, we get stressed out more often and quicker.
- **Autistic stimming is not socially accepted:** Because of the neuro-normative prejudices allistics impose, without logical explanation, that there is only one correct way to think, act and behave, stimming is considered too "odd."

The vast majority of "specialists" who work with autistic people have focused almost all their efforts on removing stimming behaviors (read: ABA) and the excuse for doing so is that they believe (without any proof) that they are a problem because it interferes with learning or leads to social exclusion.

The first point is completely false. Stimming increases our ability to stay calm, reduces the probability of facing burnout, improves our tolerance for difficult sensory situations, and allows us to concentrate, pay attention, and improve our ability to manage tasks.

The second is tantamount to telling someone to change their skin color to be included; it is equivalent to blaming a marginalized person for the discrimination they are suffering.

Autistic people should be allowed to make their own decisions about what is worth the social consequences. Parents and educators should encourage stimming as long as it is not harmful to the child or people in his or her environment, and society should stop stigmatizing and pathologizing stimming.



*The stimming is  
the spirit of the autistic!!*