



Embracing Difference

Parent Workbook

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Contents

Week 1: Understanding Neurodevelopmental Diversity

Week 2: Communication

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Week 5: Supporting Behaviour

Week 6: Celebrating Difference

Aims of the group

- To provide information and strategies for parents to support children and young people who are neuro-developmentally divergent
- To develop our understanding about how these children experience the world, and how we can support them to flourish
- To support parental self care

Week 1

Understanding Neuro-developmental Diversity



Parent experience:

Q: What did you think it would be like when you became a parent?

Q: What do you enjoy about your child?

Q: What are some of the challenges?



Neurodivergence is a term which covers a range of conditions, such as autism spectrum, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia.

There is no one 'perfect' brain, every brain is different and these differences help us to succeed in different ways. Neurodiversity has been crucial for the survival of the human race, as different skills and abilities have allowed people to excel in different ways, resulting in creative problem solving through the ages.



Parent experience:

Q: Where are you and your child on this journey?

Q: What are your hopes in terms of assessment/ diagnosis/ support?



Children with neurodevelopmental divergence will vary in their level of need.

- Not everyone who is developing differently will need a diagnosis or intervention
- Some children will not meet criteria for a diagnosis but still have difficulties that need recognition and support
- Often it is the children that don't fit into one diagnostic box which may take longer to get a diagnosis
- Some will get a diagnosis of a specific condition.
- May have problems in one area or problems in several areas.

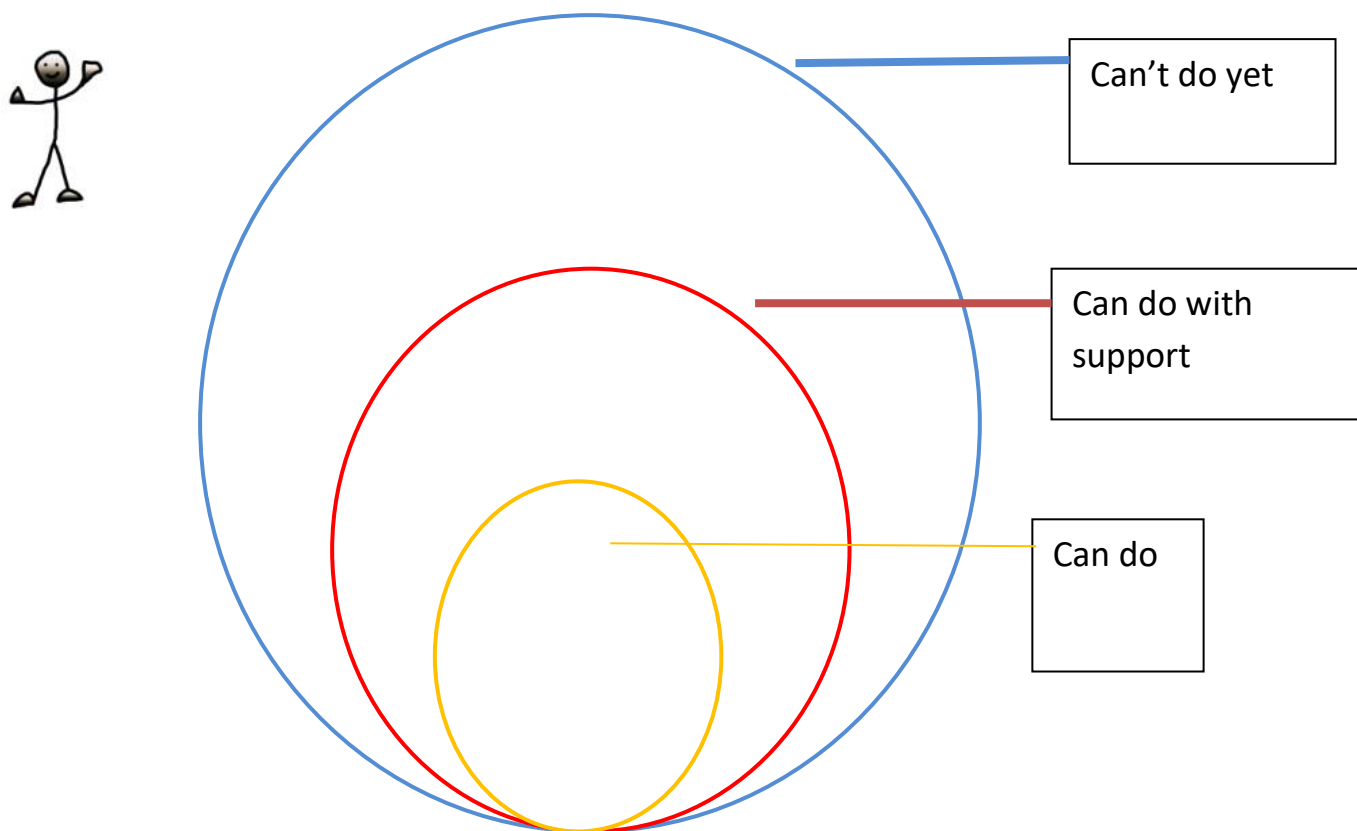
Identifying the underlying need

Autism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulties with social communication & flexibility of thought
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD/ ADD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulties with attention and concentration
Developmental coordination disorder (DCD/ dyspraxia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulties with coordination
Developmental language disorder (DLD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulties with speech and language
Sensory processing/ integration disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulties managing sensory input
Learning disability (LD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lifelong disability related to global intellectual functioning and day to day living skills
Sleep disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty with sleep



Young people with neurodivergence may be more vulnerable to developing mental health problems such as anxiety or low mood than neurotypical peers.

How Children Learn



It is important to be realistic about what your child is able to do at the moment, and what they can't either because they don't yet have the skills required for this, or because they can't access those skills at the moment. (For example, if they are too upset or anxious)

Parental self care and the 6 ways to well being



If you are feeling exhausted and stressed out, or emotionally 'full up', it becomes very difficult to stay calm and cope with your child's difficulties. In order for you to be able to meet your children's need as successfully as you can, it is important that you look after yourself.

Connect

With other parents • your partner • a colleague at lunchtime when you are at work • Call someone instead of texting them • Get back in touch with someone you miss • Look through old photos and share a memory/ story with someone
Say hello to a neighbour • Make time to connect with someone you care about- it is easy to forget when our lives are so busy.

Learn

Ask a colleague or friend about something that interests them • Sign up for a class • Set yourself a challenge • Go to a museum, • Learn to cook something new • Visit somewhere you haven't been before (might just be a new part of town, a different walk from your usual route)

Be active

Play your favourite song and dance to it • Go for a walk at lunchtime • Walk to school • Get off the bus one stop earlier and walk the final part of your journey • Go to your local park • Stretch and move your limbs in the morning, midday and evening • Join a new sports club or team • Walk the dog • Do some gardening • Climb a tree • Try out a new exercise class • Learn how to swim or ride a bike • Create a five a side football team • Try crazy golf or bowling with your mates • Walk to see friends instead of going in the car

Be present

Take time to be still • Reflect • Breathe • Become aware of your surroundings • Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you

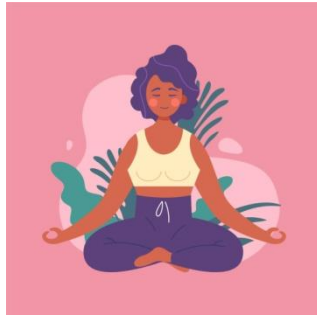
Give

Say thank you to someone who has helped you and let them know what it meant to you • De-clutter at home and donate unused items to charity • Make something for someone (like a cake!) • Offer someone a hug • Check in with a friend • Help out with a local event • Help an elderly neighbour • Do something thoughtful for someone else, and notice how it makes you feel.

Self Care

Take a bath • Read a book • Do something that you find pleasurable • Take time to put on clothes that make you feel good • Get your hair done • Meet up with friends • Have some quiet time watching tv • Do a hobby • Get a massage • Cuddle your pets!

Parental Self Care plan



Pick an activity from the list or choose one of your own. Plan, when and where will you do this?

Notice how you feel before and after doing the activity

Self Care Activity:

When and where will I do it?

How did it make me feel?

Week 2 Communication

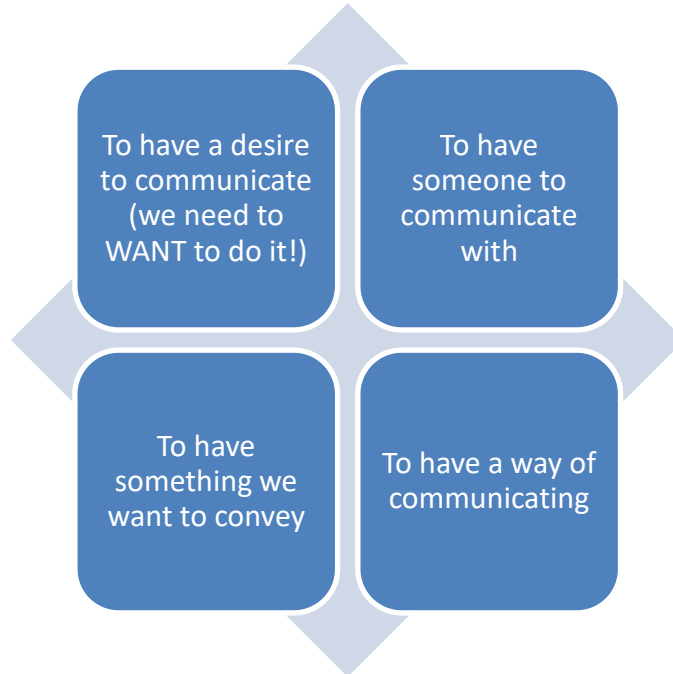


Parent experience:

Q. Is it always easy to communicate what you are thinking?

Q. When do you find it more difficult?

Why do we communicate?



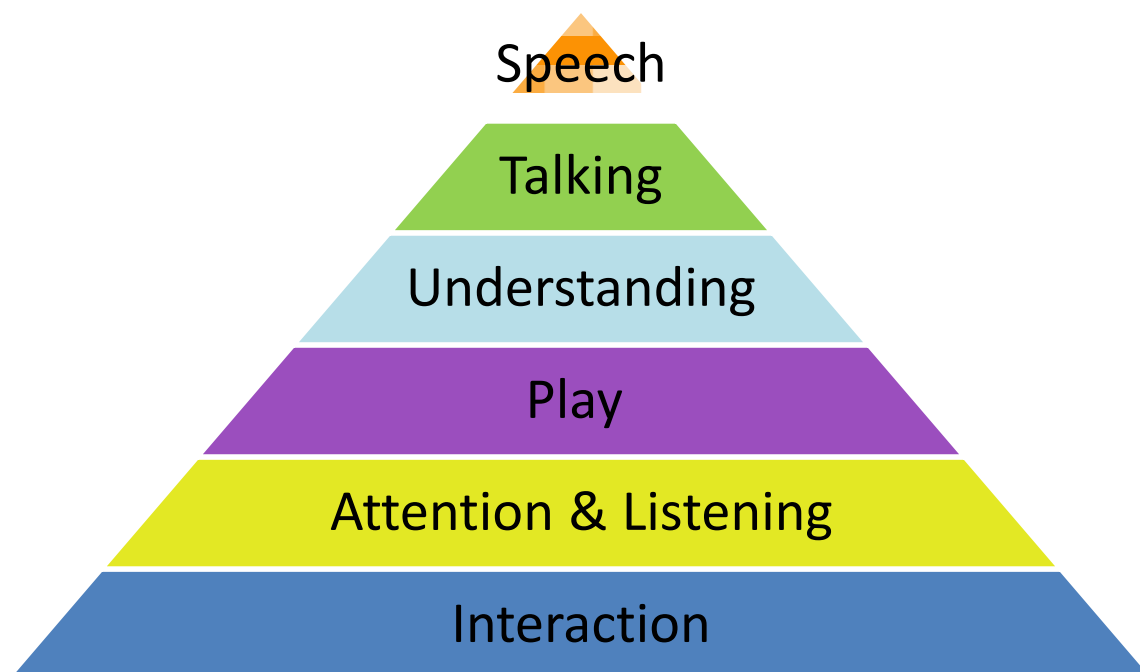


We follow a set of unspoken rules which help us to communicate effectively – such as taking turns in conversation, knowing how much information to share in a situation, what volume to use, when to change our approach in response to someone else's presentation.





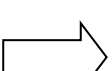
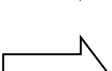
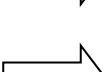
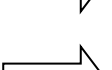
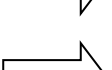
We learn these rules through trial and error, from modeling by other people, and from the cues in our environment.

Young people who are neuro-divergent may find it difficult to understand these unspoken rules without support.

Stages of language development



Supporting Communication

-  Be realistic about what your child can do
-  Be face to face
-  Encourage turn taking
-  Limit choices
-  Visual aids
-  Giving time to think
-  Don't anticipate or jump in too quickly
-  Help them be calm
-  Use their name
-  First, then
-  Positively state requests
-  Reduce language
-  Use a sign to indicate 'finished'
-  Say things in the order they will happen
-  Praise the attempt
-  Rehearsal/ scripting

Building Communication Through Play



Communication is built on the foundations of interaction, attention and play. From the beginning children develop the ability to communicate through interaction with others, first learning to use expressions, gestures and sounds, and then finally words. Play is the natural way in which children explore and learn about the world, and where they practice their skills of thinking, problem solving and communication.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when you are playing with your child:

- Follow your child's lead
- Be patient
- Comment on what is happening rather than asking questions

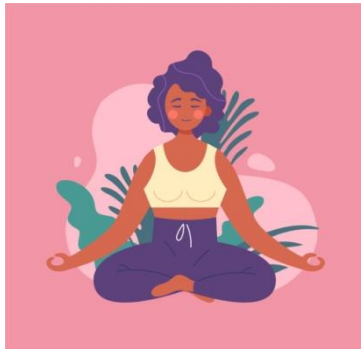


Parent Experience

Think about places where your child struggles to communicate.

Q. What changes could you make to the environment to support their communication?

Parental Self Care



Communication is an important part of self-care. It may help to share how you are feeling with a loved one or someone you trust.

Q. What would help you communicate? Who would you like to communicate with?

Next week: Sensory Differences & Sleep

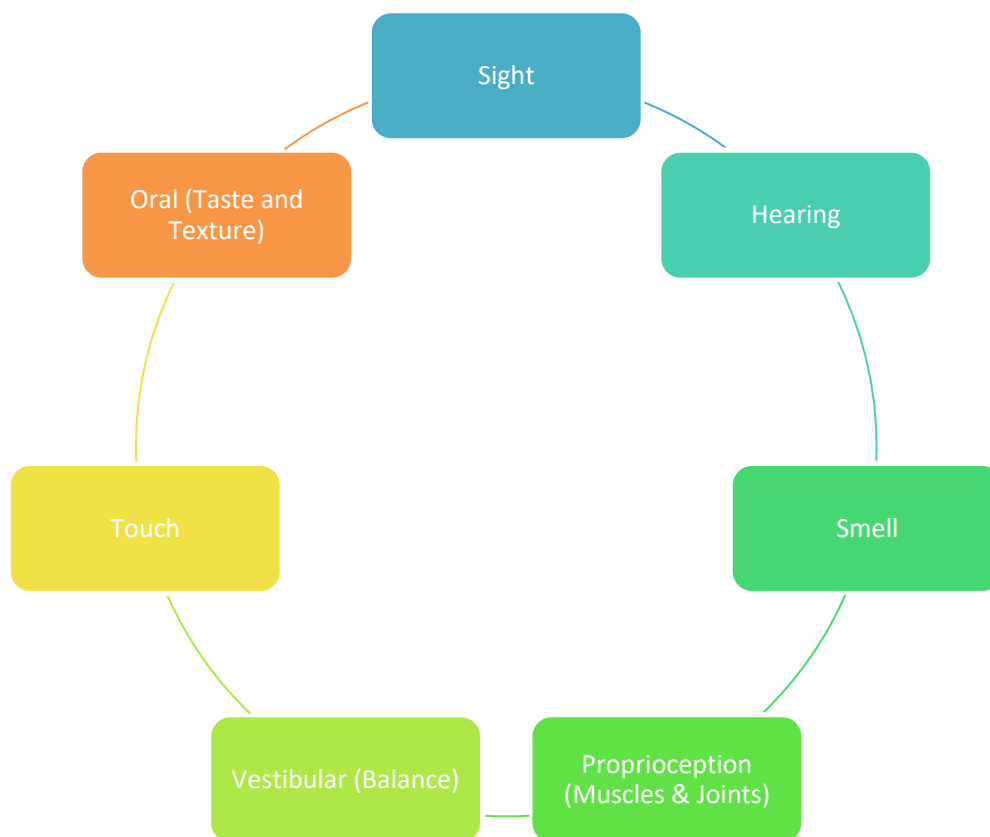
Week 3: Sensory Differences & Sleep



When we talk about **sensory processing**, we mean how the brain makes sense of the information we receive through our senses e.g. sight, smells, taste, sounds, touch.

We all have different 'thresholds' in relation to our different senses – and these can be helpful or unhelpful in different ways

Our 7 Senses



Sensory Differences

	Sensory Interests	Sensory Sensitivities
Sight	Fascination with lights, patterns, spinning things; looking carefully / up close at things	Squinting, covering eyes, avoiding light; preference for dark
Hearing	Plays music loud, makes loud noise, doesn't always hear what you say	Covers ears to sound, finds background noise distracting; or may be noisy to 'drown out' unpleasant noises
Smell	Seeks out strong smells, smelling people with little regard for personal space	Dislike for strong or new smells
Taste	Seeks out strong flavours; chews on / eats things that aren't food	Restricted diet; foods limited to certain flavours / textures; dislikes teeth brushing
Touch	Touching everyone and everything; enjoy being barefoot; unaware of being messy	Dislike of hair brushing and nail cutting; complains of clothes being scratchy; dislikes being wet / messy; dislikes light touch / deep pressure
Proprioception	Turns whole body to look at you; always "on the go"; unaware of own strength	Accident prone; trips a lot, grips things too hard or not hard enough
Vestibular	Loves theme park rides; spins around; rocking back and forth	Dislike for being upside down, dislike for travelling in a car; holds onto things for balance when they don't need to



Parent Experience:

Q. Think about your child's sensory needs. What does your child need in order to feel 'okay'?

Sensory experiences my child likes:

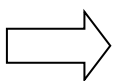
Sensory experiences my child finds difficult:



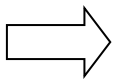
When seeking to help manage your child's sensory sensitivities or interests, it's helpful to consider 3 possible responses:

- Avoid unnecessary triggers
- Adapt the environment
- Increase your child's tolerance

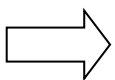
Strategies for managing sensory differences



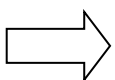
Sight: Consider adjusting colours, light or the amount of visual information (i.e. different objects) around them



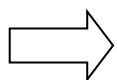
Sound: Consider music, how busy the environment is, or practical solutions like ear defenders



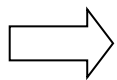
Smell: Try putting a scent they like onto something they can carry around with them, or if they struggle with smells avoid them where possible!



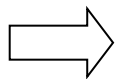
Oral: Try introducing foods gradually and making trying new foods normal for everyone



Touch: Provide any textures that they like, and use other senses to distract when not possible to avoid ones they don't like



Vestibular (balance): Make the most of play parks and provide a safe space for your child to bounce, swing, run or spin in the home if you can



Proprioception (feedback through muscles and joints): Support your child's connection with their body by using things like a weighted blanket or massage

Sleep



Sleep is really important! When we sleep our bodies are busy restoring, renewing and processing. Sleep is crucial for:

- Growth
- A healthy immune system
- Memory
- Rest and energy

On average, the human body needs different amounts of sleep at different ages:

Newborn (0-3 months)	Infants (4-11 months)	Toddlers (1-2 years)	Preschoolers(3-5 years)	School aged children (6-13 years)	Teenagers (14-17 years)	Adults (18+ years)
14-17 hours	12-15 hours	11-14 hours	10-13 hours	9-11 hours	8-10 hours	7-9 hours



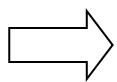
Children who are neuro-developmentally divergent may require less sleep, or may have a different sleep pattern than neuro-typical children.

Parent Experience

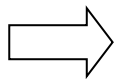
Q. How much sleep is your child getting? What strategies are helpful for them?

Sleep Hygiene

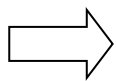
There are a number of things we can do that increase the chance of children getting a good night's sleep



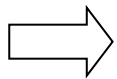
Have a consistent bedtime routine. Sleep is a **habit** that we get in to. Try to do the same things, at the same time, in roughly the same order each night when getting ready for bed.



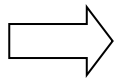
Avoid naps once school aged



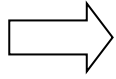
Keep bed only for sleeping in. This will help your body associate bed with sleep.



Switch electronic devices off.

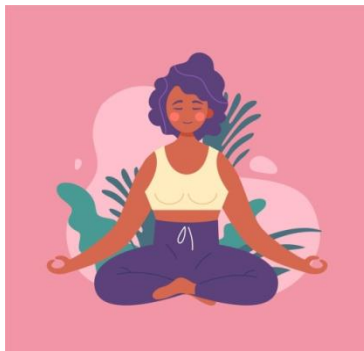


Encourage a healthy lifestyle. Exercise and eating healthily will help you sleep better.



Consider sensory environment. Is it too hot/ cold/ noisy?

Parental Self Care



Q. Consider your sensory needs. What sensations do you like and dislike?

Q. What can you do more of to help you relax?

My Sleep Plan:

I would like to be asleep aroundpm.

I will start my own wind down aroundpm.

To help me relax before sleeping, I will try

Some lifestyle changes I will make include (consider food, drink, exercise):

Next week: Social- emotional Development

Notes

Week 4: Social-emotional Development



When we speak about **social- emotional development**, we mean a person's ability to understand social situations, manage and experience emotions, regulate their own behaviour in relation to others and the ability to develop positive relationships with others.

Children who are neuro-divergent may face additional challenges to their social and emotional development such as:

- Mind-blindness
- Difficulties understanding unspoken social rules
- Difficulties understanding implicit information
- Taking things literally
- Difficulties adapting communication for different social situations
- Rigidity of thought and inflexibility
- Special interests



- All challenges can be strengths too
- Where children struggle socially we can find ways to support that development
- It's important to interact with your child in line with their **developmental** age, not their chronological age

Parent experience



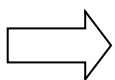
Q. What can my child currently do?

Q. What can they do with support?

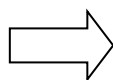
Q. What can they not manage yet?

Strategies

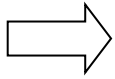
Even though it can be more difficult for neuro-divergent children to manage social relationships than for other children, we can still do lots to help them grow! Strategies we can use include:



Attention and Play



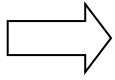
Coaching



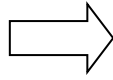
Positive reinforcement



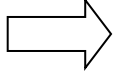
Scaffolding



Modelling



Social stories



Visual timetables / information

Routines and Boundaries



Children need routines to feel safe and secure. A predictable routine reduces anxiety and stress and frees children up to be able to focus on other things (like learning, exploring, playing).

Children who are neuro-divergent may be particularly reliant on routines to help them predict what is going to happen next, to reduce anxiety and increase the likelihood of compliance.

Boundaries are also necessary for children to feel safe. Boundaries and rules must be consistent and apply to everybody.

Remember that all children push the boundaries sometimes- this is a normal and healthy part of development!



Parent Experience

Q. What routines and boundaries do you have at home? Is there anything you would like to be more consistent with to support your child's social and emotional development?

Routines

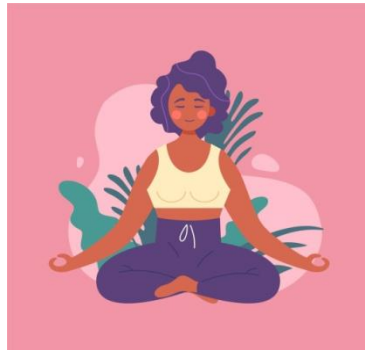
Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Boundaries

Parental self-care

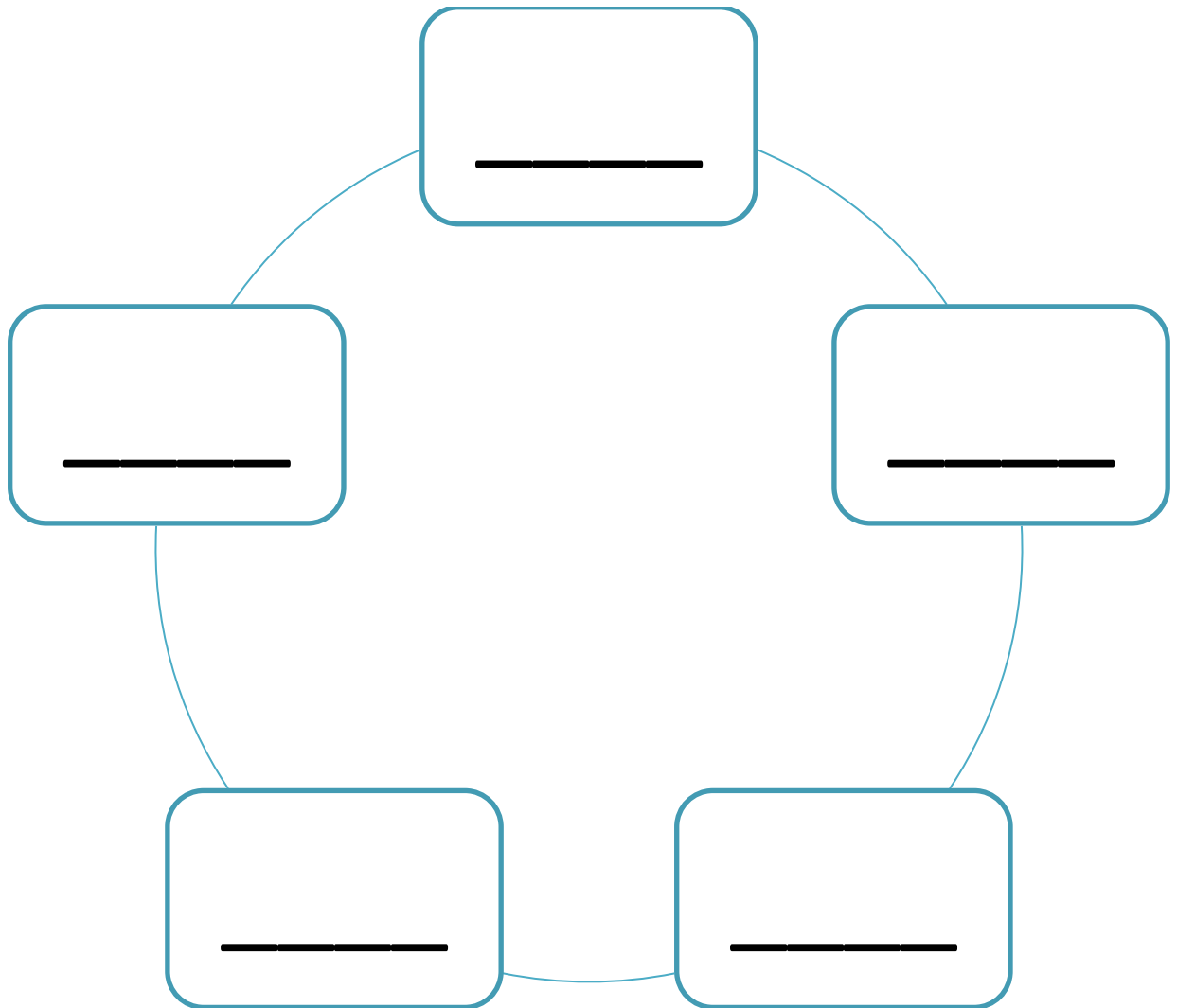


Q. Who is in your support network?

Who can you offload to – and feel better afterwards?

What are your social limits / boundaries? (I.e. how much time alone do you need in a week to feel well?)

My Support Network



Next week:

Supporting Behaviour

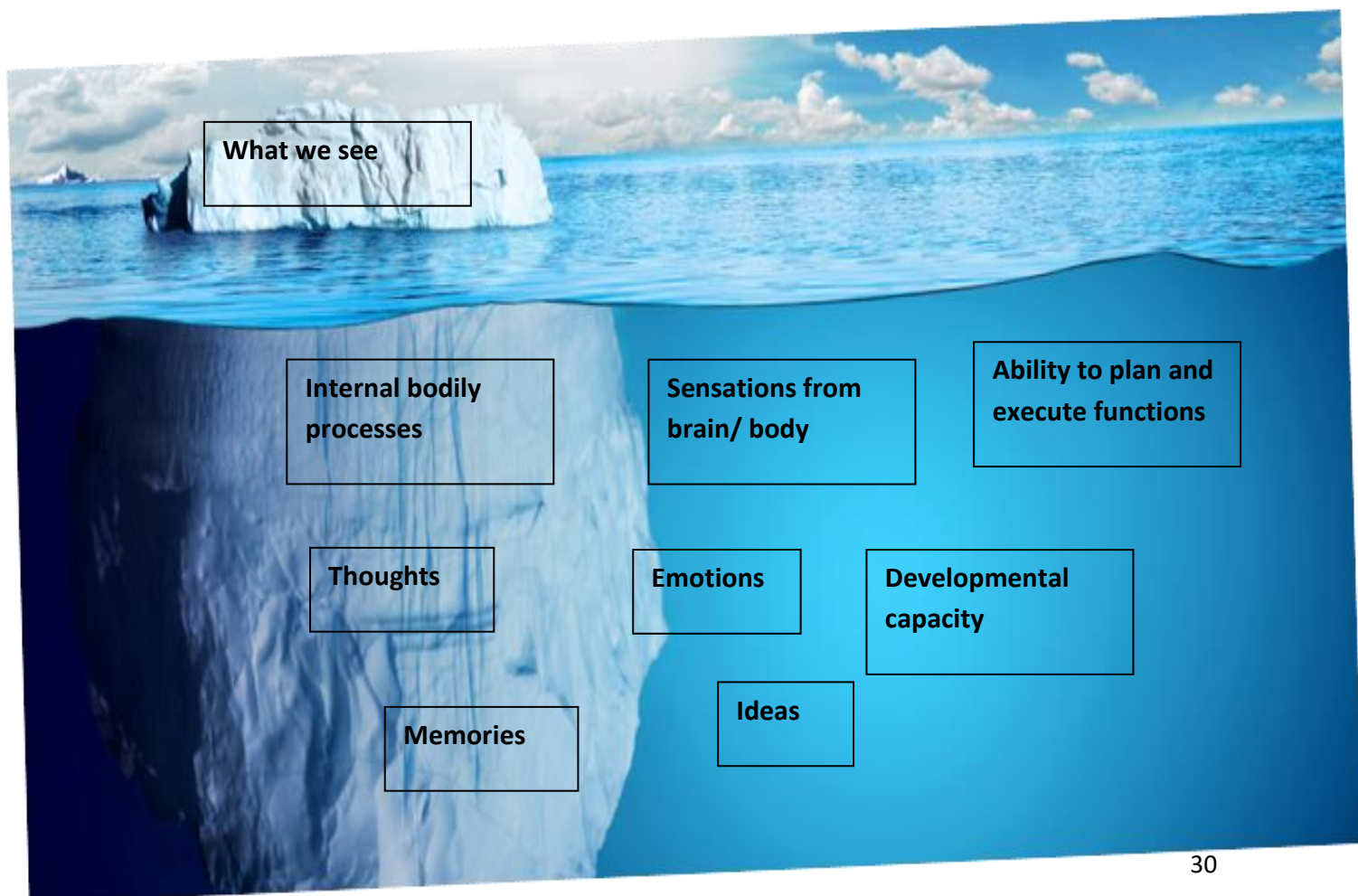
Week 5: Supporting Behaviour



When we are talking about **behavior** we mean everything that we say and do

- All behaviour is a form of communication
- A change in behaviour can signal that someone is in distress, or that they have a need.
- Children tend to express their emotions through behaviour
- Behaviour is a response to something either internal or external

The Developmental Iceberg (Delahooke, 2019)





The developmental iceberg - the tip of the iceberg is the behaviour that you see, but the processes underlying the behaviour can often be complex and affected by lots of different things.

Useful questions to ask to help us understand a child's behaviour: Does the child have the **skills** required for the situation? Have they been in this situation before? Are they **motivated** to do this? Are they aware of the **expectations**? Is the situation **predictable**? What is the **sensory** environment like?

Regulating Emotions

Red Zone:

Fight / flight response, cortisol and adrenaline are released, thinking brain is disconnected.

What you see:

Child might shout/scream, cry, throw things, hurt themselves or others, break things. They are unable to take in information.

Green zone:

Calm, able to cope with emotions without being overwhelmed, whole brain engaged

What you see:

Child is settled, can respond appropriately to instructions, is connected, can problem solve and communicate

Blue zone:

Arousal is reduced, "freeze", numbed to emotion, emotion centre and thinking brain both shut down

What you see:

Child might withdraw, be very quiet and still, unfocussed gaze, not respond to interaction. They are unable to take in information.



Parental experience

Q. Think of a time you have been out of your window of tolerance.

- What helped or made it harder?

- What pushes your child outside their window of tolerance?

- How can you tell when your child is outside their window of tolerance?

Making sense of behaviour



If you can understand why a behaviour is happening, you can try to meet the underlying need which will reduce the need for the behaviour.

Use the STAR method:

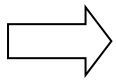
- Settings
- Triggers
- Actions
- Results



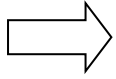
<p>Settings (i.e. where, when, who, what was going on?)</p>	<p>Triggers (i.e. Being told no/ stop. Unexpected event, change in routine, sensory environment)</p>	<p>Actions (i.e. what behaviour did you see?)</p>	<p>Results (i.e. what were the consequences, good and bad?)</p>
<p><i>e.g John was watching tv on his own in the living room</i></p>	<p><i>The tv being turned off without warning</i></p>	<p><i>Shouting, banging head with fist</i></p>	<p><i>Took 10 mins to calm down, Tv got put back on.</i></p>

STAR method (Zarkowska & Clements, 1994)

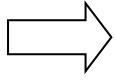
Strategies



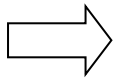
PAUSE



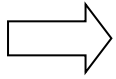
Recognise how your child is responding to signals from their body



Encourage self awareness and acceptance e.g. "it looks like your body is telling you something about how you feel/ what you need to do right now."



Encourage feeling valued, accepted and safe

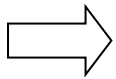


Focus on emotional regulation rather than changing behaviour

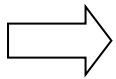


This will only be helpful when your child is CALM enough to hear it. Remember, they must be in the GREEN zone. If they are in the red/ blue zone- reduce language/ remove language completely and focus on bringing back into their window of tolerance before using this strategy.

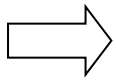
Supporting Transitions



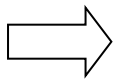
Countdown



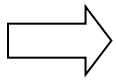
Social stories



Visual timetables

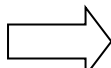
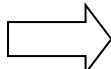



Visual/ auditory prompts e.g timer/ music

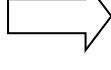



Now and next



-  Distraction
-  Scheduling a preferred activity
-  Time to process

When a Situation Escalates

-  STAY CALM but firm
-  Label feelings
-  Simplify language, avoid lengthy explanations
-  Reduce demands
-  'Do' commands
-  Have realistic expectations
-  Redirect/distract
-  Minimise risk to self and others.
-  Time to calm down

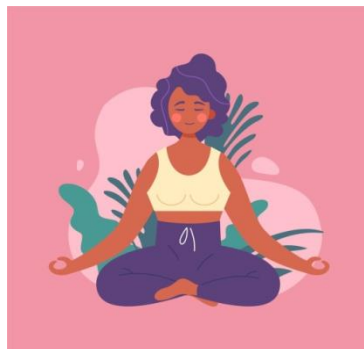


Small changes can make a **BIG** difference

Parent Experience

Q. who is on your team? (Family, friends, colleagues, professionals, local and national groups, online support)

Parental self care



- Make sure you have support
- Think about your self-care routines- what can you do to recharge your batteries?
- Remember to give yourself praise and rewards – you are doing an amazing job!
- Check in with how you are feeling- pause and take time to notice if you are feeling tired/ stressed/ anxious. Practice labeling and describing the sensations to yourself.

Week 6: Celebrating Difference

Parent Experience

Q. What has been the most helpful session and why?


What has been the most challenging?

Have you been able to make any changes, and what impact have they had?

Which tools / strategies are going to be most helpful for my family?

Siblings



 Sibling relationships are different in different families. Some siblings get on well, others might not get on so well. Whatever your family is like, managing sibling relationships is a challenge that all parents face at one point or another.

When there is one or more child in a family who is presenting with a neuro-developmental divergence there are some specific challenges that can crop up for families.

It is important for all children in a family to have space to be a child and have their needs valued equally.

Strategies to Support Positive Family Relationships

Turn-taking

It is important that all children in the family get a turn at choosing activities. This lets children know they all have equal place in the family

One on one time

This can be a challenge to manage with more than one child, and it may require scheduling. E.g. extra time before bed reading stories and hearing about their day, or joining in with a game with them straight after school. Whenever you choose to do it, and whatever it looks like, make sure your phone is away and your child has your undivided attention.

Activities together

Your children may not be able to do *everything* together, but try to find at least one or two things they can both participate in together. E.g. play computer games, bounce on the trampoline, watch a movie. Support them to find activities that they can both enjoy with each other. Remember to give them both lots of praise and attention when they play well together.

Choice

Try to give children some choice about how much time they want to spend with their sibling, and how much time they want to spend with their friends or doing their hobbies

Acknowledge feelings

Sometimes siblings of neuro-divergent children can get caught up in last minute cancellations of plans, or emotional outbursts, or other things that can cause them disappointment or upset. It's important to acknowledge these difficult feelings as well as pleasant ones. It's normal for children to have pleasant and difficult feelings towards their siblings

Permission to enjoy interests

Siblings need to practice self-care too, and to know that it's ok for them to have their own interests and hobbies. Lead by example!



It is important to support children to know what they should do if their sibling is at risk of hurting themselves or others when in distress. Give them clear, age appropriate and easy to follow guidance. This will help them to feel safe and minimize the risk of them also becoming distressed.

Parental Self Care



Ways to enhance your wellbeing:

Gratitude Practice

Spend a few minutes reflecting on three things that you have been grateful for today. Examples might include: a nice cup of tea, a hug from a loved one, seeing a beautiful sunset, taking a moment to smell the flowers in the garden, having a really good laugh about something. Even if you are having a difficult day, making time to notice the positives, no matter how small, will help to increase your sense of well being and can make the difficult times more bearable.

Mindfulness

There are lots of ways to be mindful- it really means just taking time to notice and tune in to how you are feeling and what is going on around you in the present moment. You can do it anywhere: while you are walking, doing chores, working, watching tv. Notice how your body feels and notice what you can see/ feel/ hear/ smell/ taste.

Journalling

Many people find it helpful to write down their thoughts. You might write about your day, how you feel or things that are on your mind. This is one way

to process how you feel and allows you time to reflect and make sense of it. It can give you perspective and creates space for you to think more flexibly.

Q. What will I do to improve my wellbeing?

Celebrating Your Child



Although there can be a lot of challenges when you are supporting a child who is developing differently, remember that there are also lots of unique, brilliant things about your child as well! Your child may have a different perspective on the world from other people. This unique viewpoint can lead to them having creative and novel ideas. Being able to think outside the box is a very useful skill!

Remember that there is no such thing as the 'perfect' brain- we all have differences in the way we think and see the world, and it is this neuro-diversity which is crucial for variety, creativity and has been essential for our survival as a species.

Useful Links and Contacts

- Speech & Language Therapy
<https://www.nhsfife.org/services/services-and-departments/speech-and-language-therapy/>
Facebook: NHS Fife Speech and Language Therapy Service
Twitter #banter4bairns
- Occupational Therapy - <https://www.nhsfife.org/services/all-services/occupational-therapy/children-and-young-people-s-occupational-therapy/> - advice and resources related to sensory difficulties; phone 01383 674055
- School nurses and Sleep clinic – 01592 645222 – specialist consultation and advice about sleep difficulties
- www.moodcafe.co.uk - information and resources related to mental health and wellbeing
- www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk - book onto online groups and guided self-help
- www.samh.org.uk - Scottish mental health organisation
- www.youngminds.org.uk – charity website with information and advice for both parents and young people
- Smiling Mind App - free mindfulness meditation app
- Mindshift App – Managing difficult emotions using cognitive behavioural therapy
- Calm App – guided meditation and sleep stories