



Realising the potential of neurodiversity in the workplace

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Learning Outcomes

- Understand what we mean by neurodiversity and neurodivergent.
- Understand the experience of neurodiverse people in the workplace.
- Recognise the unique strengths and value neurodiversity brings to the workforce.
- Understand how to make your workplace a more inclusive place and realise the benefits of all employees.

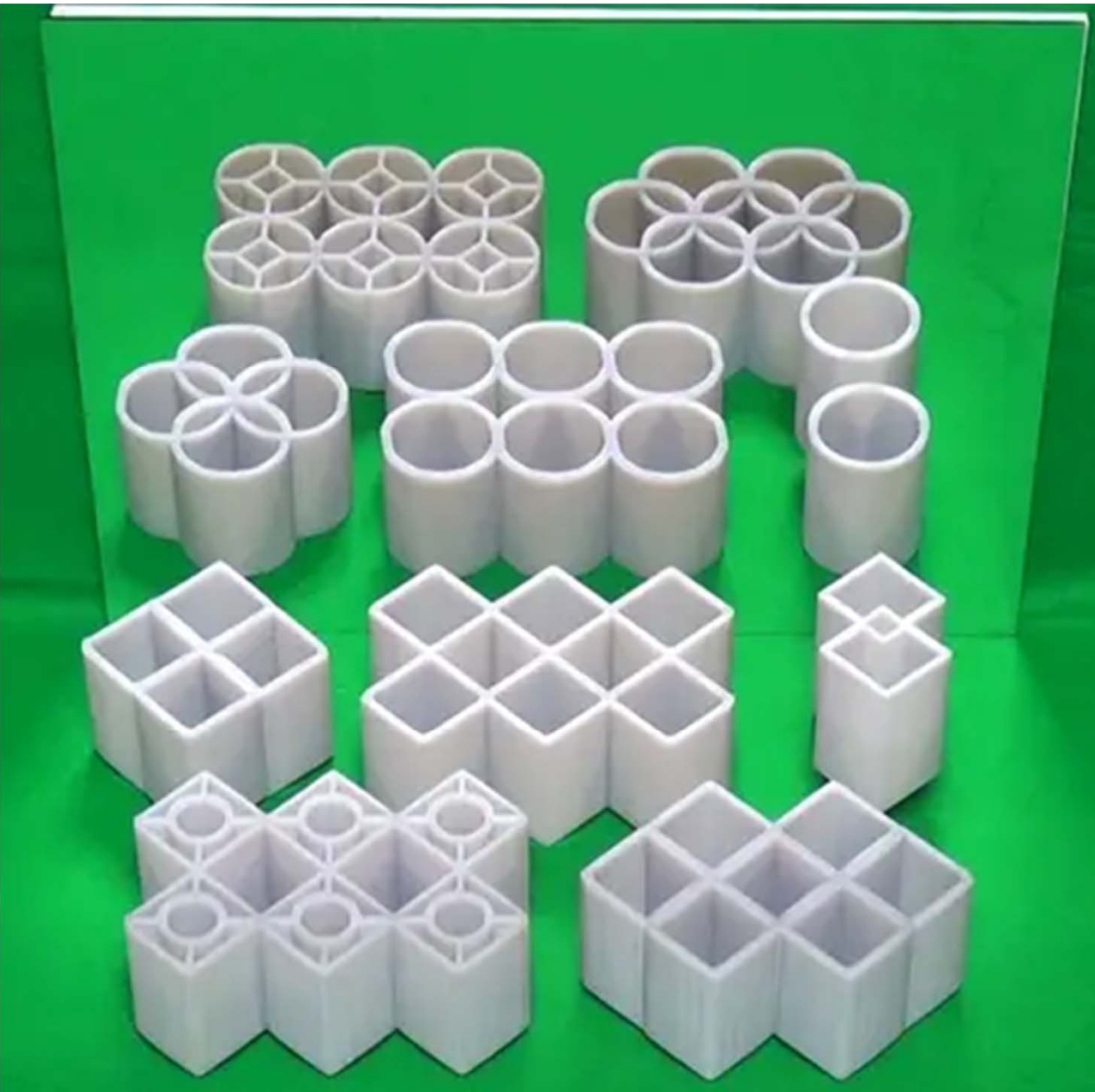
Our active brains

- Our brains process and interpret information from our senses to make meaning and help us interact with the world.
- The processing and interpreting are key here - our brains are doing active work to recreate our experiences.
- A couple of examples of our brains doing this...



What colour are these strawberries?





- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWfFco7K9v8>

Experiences differ

- Being mindful our brains actively process the world makes it easier to see how people can readily experience the world in different ways.
- A couple of better-known examples of this difference in experience of the same thing.....

There are two ways of perceiving this picture; one way you see a younger woman and one way an older woman





What colour is this dress?

Neurotypical

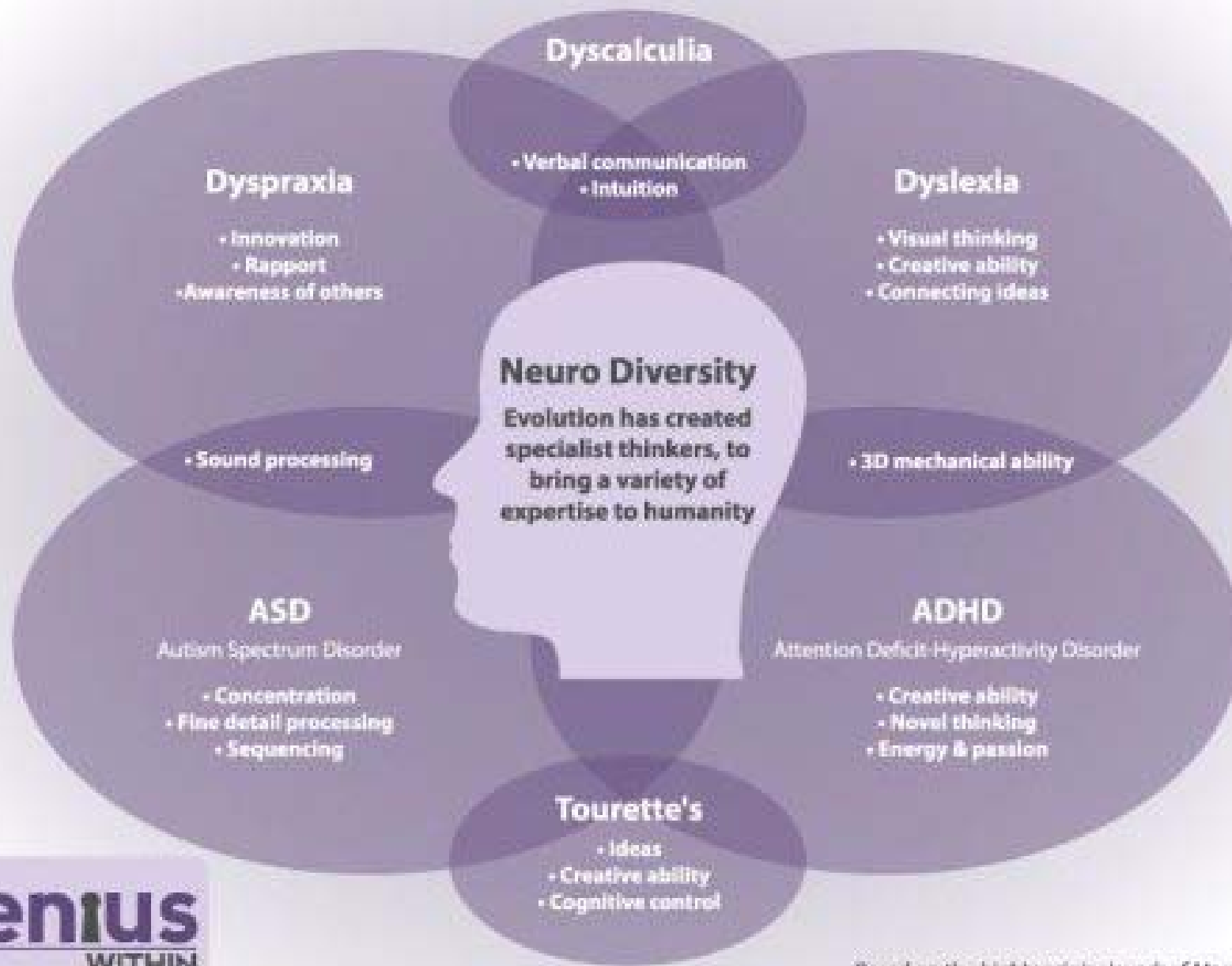
- I have used examples of visual processes here due to the medium of this presentation, but this variation in our experience of the world happens across the senses all the time.
- This variation is helpful in collectively being able to approach the world creatively and with different strengths.
- However, for most people there is a broad general overlap in our interpretation of our individual experiences. These people are described as being neurotypical.

Neurodiversity and neurodivergent

- Some people's brains are 'wired' so that they routinely experience aspects of the world differently from the majority of people.
- Neurodiversity is the concept that this sort of difference is like any other human variation and should be recognised and respected in this way.
- People who experience the world in this way are described as neurodivergent.

Neurodiversity and neurodivergent

- Although this variation is viewed as a spectrum, people who are described as neurodivergent have clusters of specific differences.
- This group includes people who are diagnosed as autistic or with AD(H)D, dyslexia etc.



Neurodiversity and neurodivergent

- There is increasing recognition of the benefits of supporting neurodiversity to get the best out of people, including in the workplace.
- This includes general principles supportive of neurodiversity as well as adjustments to meet individual needs – both are important as neurodivergent people may or may not have a diagnosis.



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Deeper dive for HR and D&I professionals

Checklist for neurodiversity commissioning

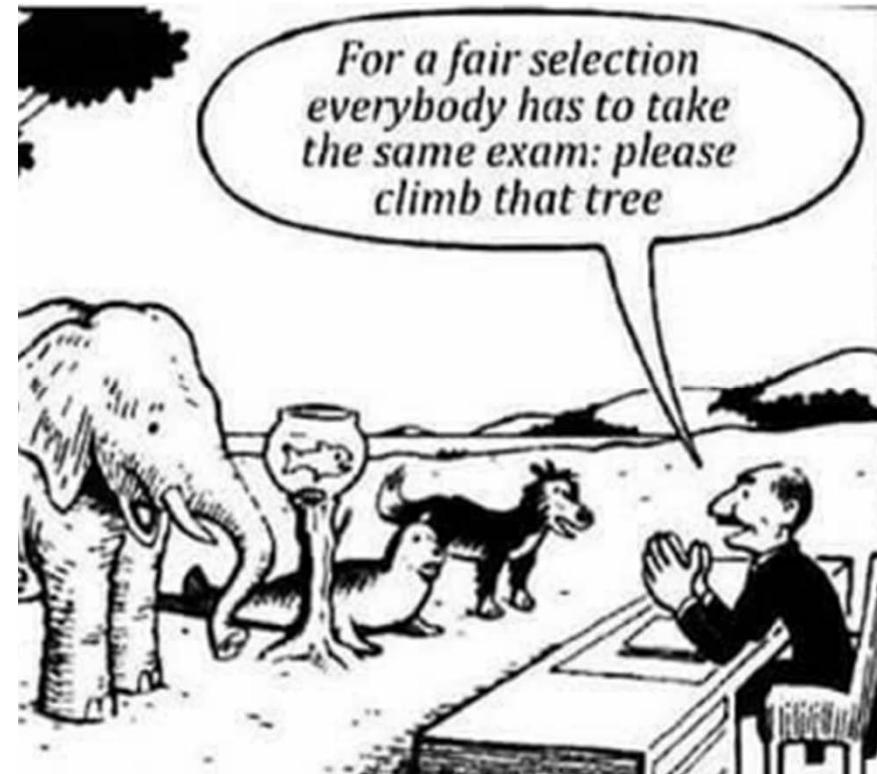
13 August 2020

Neurodiversity toolkit

GAIN Group for Autism, Insurance and Neurodiversity

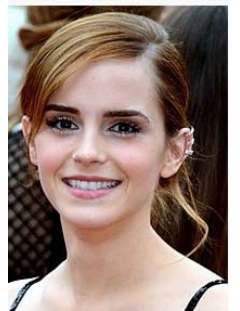
Re-Focusing on strengths

- Commonly people who are neurodiverse are described in deficit or impairment language.
 - Autism Spectrum **Disorder**
 - Attention **Deficit** Hyperactivity **Disorder**
- This can be flipped to be strengths focussed.
- ‘Condition’ preferred to disorder
- ‘Differently attentioned’
- **Socially constructed...**





Successful
neurodivergent



Strengths and gifts

- Thinking differently: creativity and problem solving
- Functioning differently in a team
- High standards

Thinking differently...



“The advantage is that my brain sees and puts information in my head differently, more interestingly than if I saw like everyone else.”

- Whoopi Goldberg on her Dyslexia

Creativity and problem solving...

I problem-solve very organically, linking and applying unrelated recollections, knowledge and experience to figure out what will work.

I bring different kinds of thinking

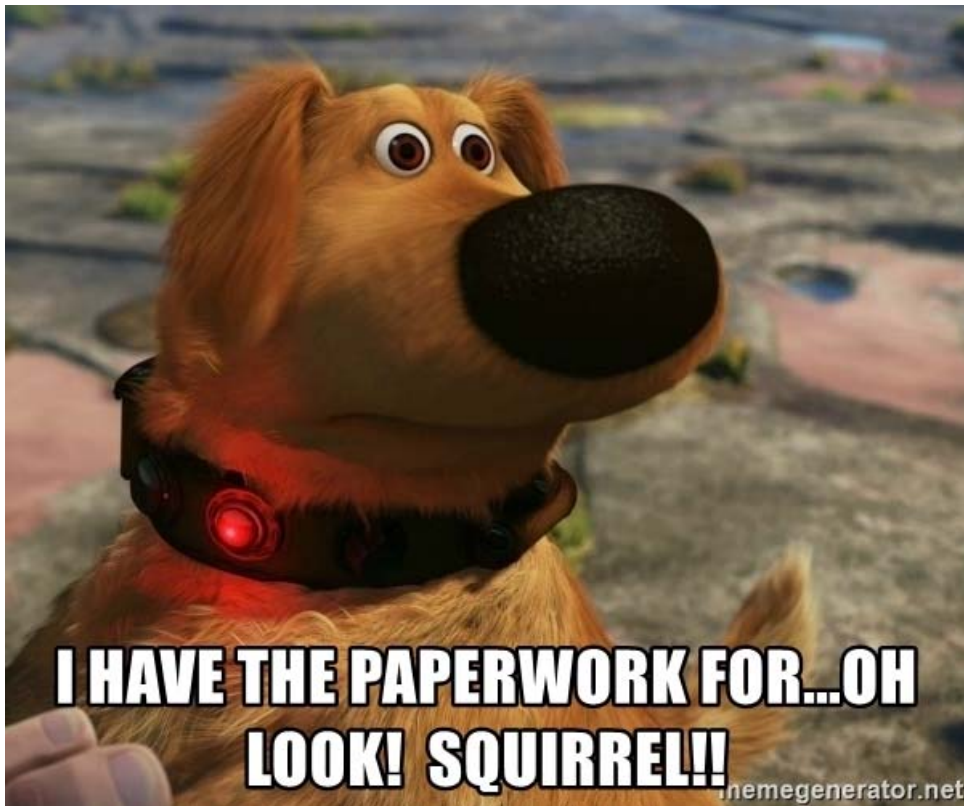
I can be more open minded and can think outside the box

I relate things holistically – relating things to each other more readily than many other people

Our thought patterns are not always the same as others, which can only be a benefit when trying to solve an issue

More creative tasks can suit someone who has a tendency to switch from task to task and is used to leaving one task unfinished, then returning to it later

Switching attention....



I am able to flit between jobs at speed with no impact on the tasks themselves, with the ability to respond almost instantly to a query on one client and instantly hop into another task

if someone else needs my help, then I can switch my attention to them readily and it is very rare that I will be reluctant to do this. When managing people, this can immediately save time – and also makes me seem a very receptive and supportive manager

Functioning differently in a team

I stand out from the crowd and this works well for me

I do have an ego, but I don't lose anything by accepting another person's point of view or conceding to their point of view

I can see things from other peoples' perspectives perhaps more readily than a lot of people

I can move on from minor issues quickly. I'll have forgotten about it.

A neurodivergent person can be an inspiration – or even just demonstrate what can be achieved

High Standards...

I do my own research thoroughly. I'll have facts to back up everything.

Detailed, technical work – reviewing legal documentation - suits someone who is comfortable focussing on a specific task in which they specialise for a prolonged period of time

Detailed, process-driven work – analysing large amounts of complex data – suits someone with an eye for detail and desire for accuracy

Things are high quality as if I make a mistake I'll start again.

Research supports different cognitive profiles, and particular strengths

- [Subclinical symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\) are associated with specific creative processes - ScienceDirect](#)
- [The Creativity of ADHD - Scientific American](#)
- [Scope of Semantic Activation and Innovative Thinking in College Students with ADHD: Creativity Research Journal: Vol 28, No 3 \(tandfonline.com\)](#)
- [Brief Report: Character Strengths in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder Without Intellectual Impairment. - Abstract - Europe PMC](#)
- [A Virtual Reality Test Identifies the Visuospatial Strengths of Adolescents with Dyslexia | CyberPsychology & Behavior \(liebertpub.com\)](#)
- [Entrepreneurship and psychological disorders: How ADHD can be productively harnessed – ScienceDirect](#)

Expert by experience: ADHD

[after having my second child] tiredness put a great strain on many aspects of my life and it was at this point I needed to seek additional external support.

After numerous consultations with Doctors and Psychiatrists, I was officially diagnosed with ADHD and subsequently prescribed with medication - this has provided me with is the ability to have a stop button - the opportunity to pause ahead of responding to a query or a 'trigger' ensuring that I respond in the appropriate manner. It also gave me a much longer period of stability in what others may call normal everyday situations, whereby I was able to handle them with ease in comparison to pre medication.

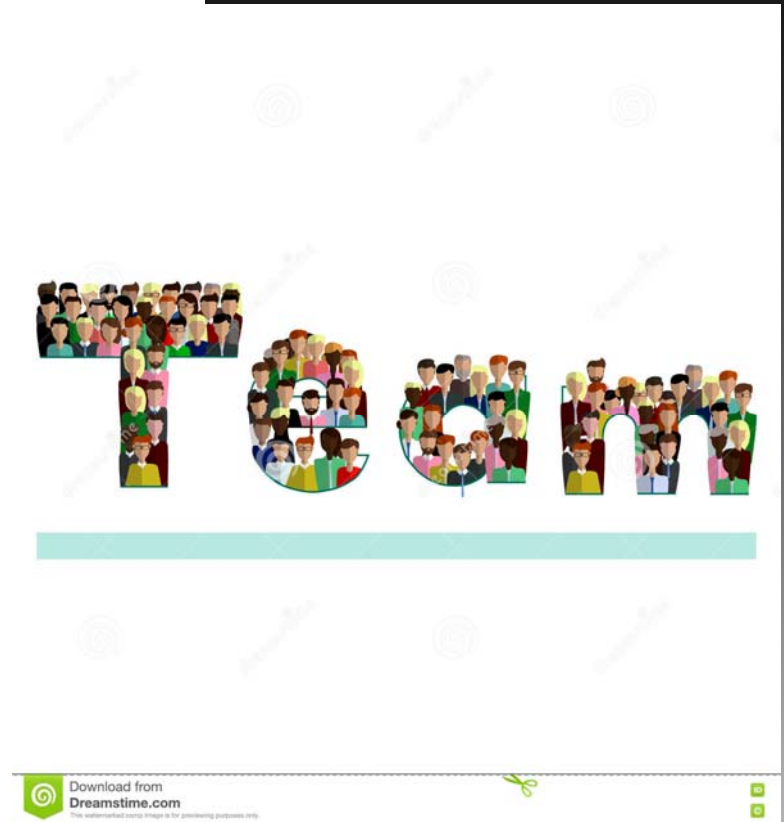
For me one of the key things was being absolutely open and honest about my issues. [This] helped me as much as others to understand my issues, and gave me the confidence to find solutions (with the help of a very loving and supportive wife). Having ADHD very much felt like a curse at first, but knowing and learning how to use it to my advantage has made me a better person both at home and at work and helped push my career further than I thought possible years ago and I have the confidence to take it even further.



Expert by experience: Tom Moore

Creating an inclusive workplace

- “The strength of a team is each individual member. The strength of an individual is the team”
- Find individual's strengths and assign tasks that play to these
- Don't make assumptions
- Create an atmosphere where difference is accepted and encouraged
- Google is looking to empower neurodivergent people, "It is time to create more humane and diverse work environments"



Consider the environment

- Impact of sensory needs- noise, lighting, positioning of desks
- Use of noise cancelling headphones
- Managing distractions
- Allowing for movement breaks
- Home working opportunities
- Adjustments to working times
- "It helps if I have my own work space and can complete tasks."



Supporting Communication

- Be clear and direct in communication
- Allow for processing time- be aware of the impact of stress
- Make things visual- use of lists and taking notes
- Avoid sarcasm and ambiguity
- Use consistent language
- Encourage asking and checking
- "It helps when people give me more time and give me paper copies of things"



Supporting social interaction

- Buddy system
- Link people up together with complementary skills
- Regular 1-1 meetings to check in and problem solve
- Give honest feedback
- "I feel supported and included with colleagues when they ask me to do things and socialise"



Summary

- We have introduced the concepts of neurodiversity and neurodivergence.
- Given an overview of the strengths associated with neurodiversity and the benefits of inclusive environments.
- Outlined some examples of how environments can be adapted to support neurodiversity.



Panel Questions

Speakers

- Julian Morris, Clinical Psychologist

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- Tom Moore, Expert by Experience

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- Amy Ford, Autism Lead

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Further reading

The first title is one that we have not read, but has been recommended to us.

The next four are ones we have read and may be interesting/useful to participants

The final one is recommended recognising that people who are neurodivergent may be more likely to have neurodivergent children,. As such, this is a helpful book, although a bit more deficit focussed

