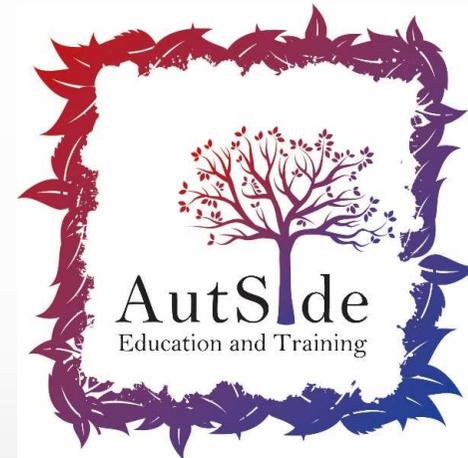


AUTISM, ANXIETY & SENSORY PROCESSING

Including 'Embracing Safe Stims'



Emma Durman

**Outside Education
& Training**

There are many definitions of Autism:

“Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them”

(National Autistic Society, 2017)

“Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the name for a range of similar conditions, including Asperger syndrome, that affect a person's social interaction, communication, interests and behaviour”

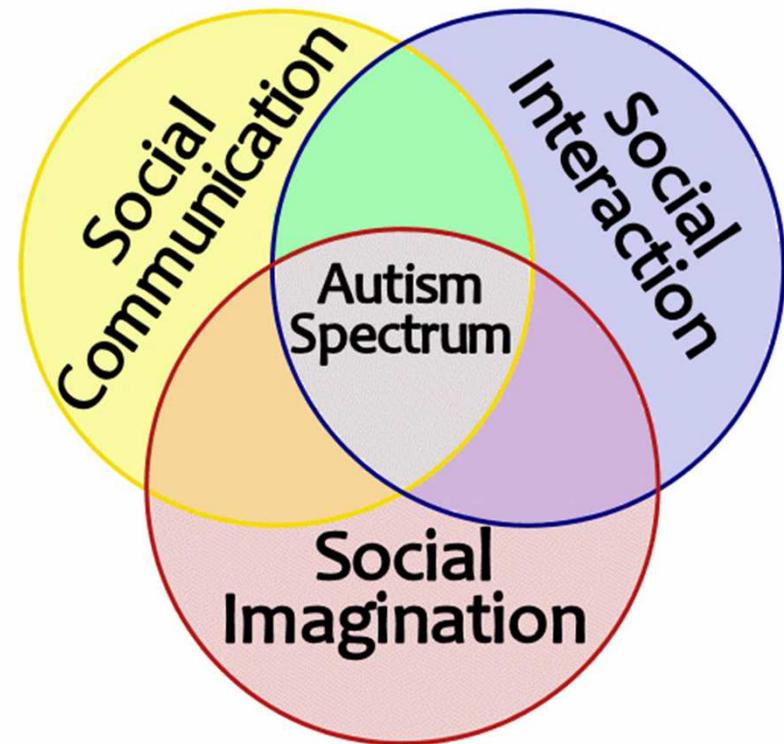
(NHS Choices, 2017)

“Autism is a developmental disorder that can cause problems with social interaction, language skills and physical behaviour. People with autism may also be more sensitive to everyday sensory information”

(BBC Science, 2013)

THE 'TRIAD'

- Wing and Gould came up with the idea of Autism as a spectrum and their triad still informs our diagnostic criteria decades later
- It suggests that Autistic people will have key differences in social interaction, social communication and social imagination
- There are lots of theories about how this looks – but in reality presentation of these differences varies hugely and is unique to each individual



WHAT DOES THIS REALLY MEAN?

We have much to learn about Autism, neurodiversity and the brain in general – but it is clear that Autism is a complicated concept, which is influenced by genetics, environment, cognition and much more

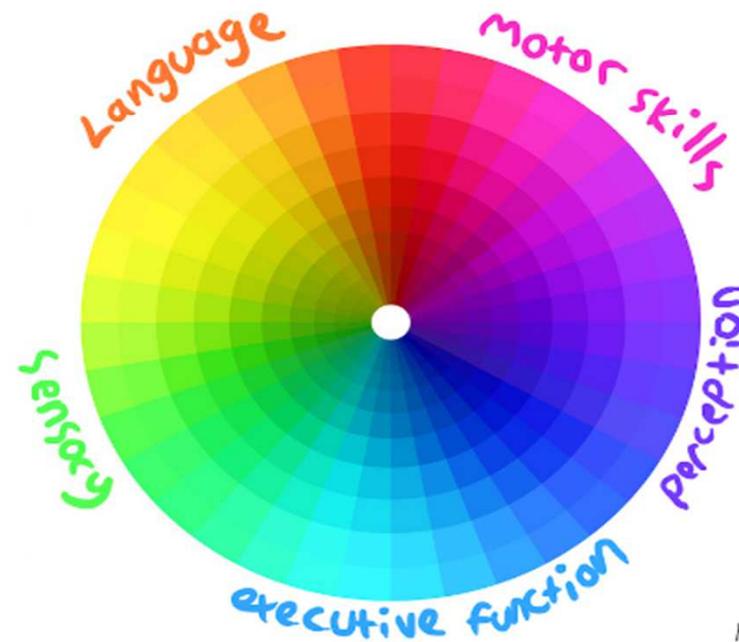
What we do know, is that Autistic people experience the world in a different way, which can bring great joy and strengths, and also challenges.



What does the autism spectrum look like?

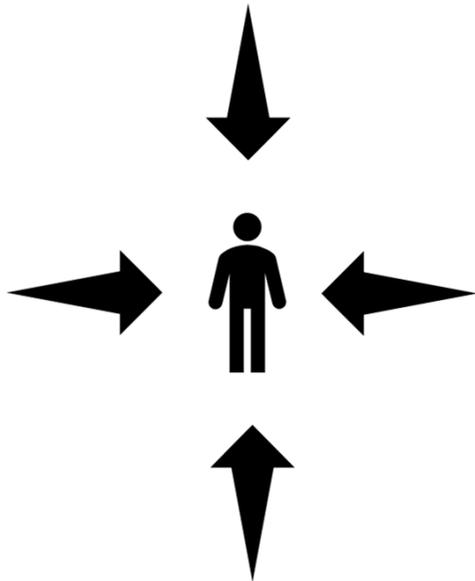
It is important to remember that it is very difficult to describe an individual accurately with 'high functioning' or low functioning labels. The autism spectrum isn't really a line from low functioning to high functioning, as a lot of individuals will have high areas of ability mixed with high levels of need.

We often call extreme differences in ability and need 'spiky' profiles.



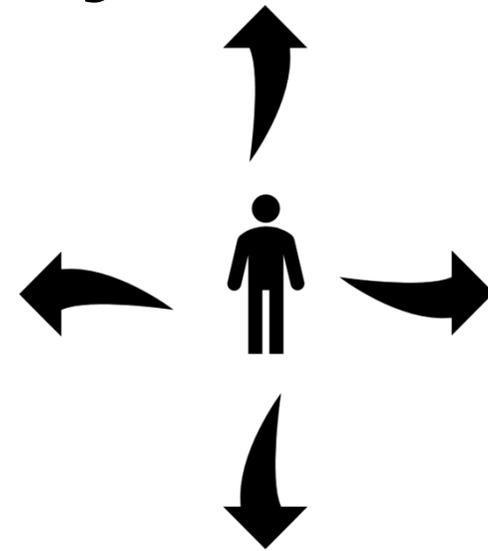
Circular spectrum by
Rebecca Burgess
Montage @sciencebase

Medical vs Social Model of Disability



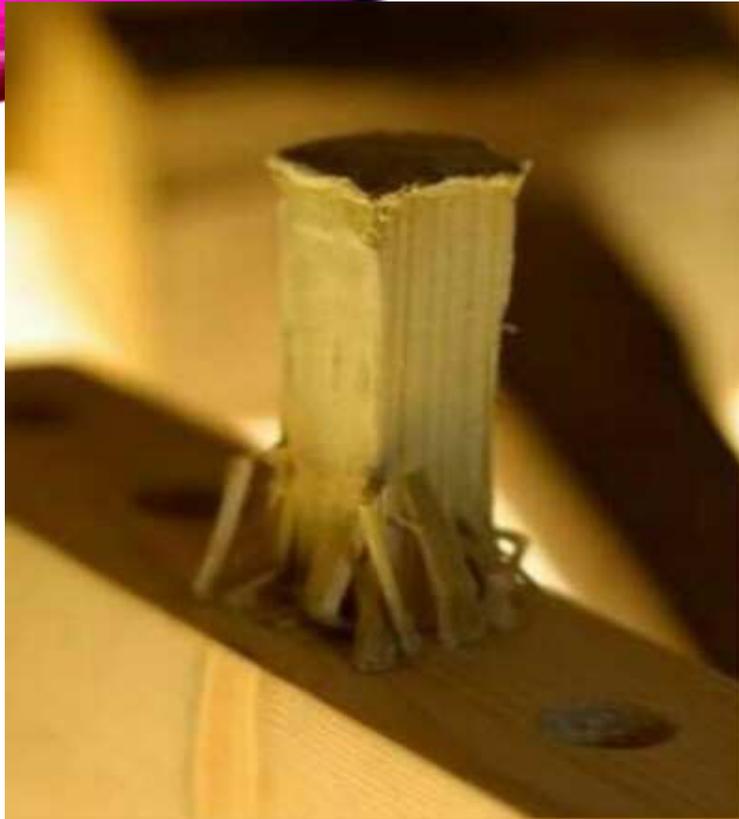
Medical

Puts emphasis on person as 'disabled'. That their condition means they are inherently 'broken', in need of individual treatment.



Social

Puts emphasis on society and environmental barriers. Suggests if accommodations and adaptations were made at a societal level person would no longer be 'disabled'.



"Autistics are the ultimate square pegs, and the problem with pounding a square peg into a round hole is not the hammering is hard work.

It's that you're

destroying the peg."

~Paul Collins

Âû



INTEROCEPTION

- The 8th sense
- Interoception gathers messages from throughout the body, i.e. our organs, muscles, skin, bones, etc. and sends them to the brain.
- The brain processes these messages and enables us to feel and identify sensations like hunger, itchiness, pain, body temperature, nausea, need to urinate, etc.
- Additionally, interoception allows us to feel our emotions.



AUTISM AND ANXIETY

As we have seen, lots of the social and sensory differences that may be present in Autistic people contribute to and intensify anxiety to overwhelming levels

Studies suggest up to 84% of Autistic individuals are affected by Anxiety



ANXIETY ISN'T ALWAYS A 'BAD' THING

- Anxiety is a natural human emotion
- It is a part of life, everyone will experience Anxiety at some point in their lives
- Anxiety has a purpose – it is an instinctive response to help us recognise and respond to imminent threats/danger

ANXIETY BECOMES UNHEALTHY WHEN:

- It is ever present, regardless of if there is a real immediate danger
- When irrational fears take hold, and cannot be reasoned away
- When the body is therefore kept in a state of 'fight or flight'
- When it interferes with our ability to function



CATASTROPHISING



ANXIETY GIRL!

able to jump to the worst conclusion
in a single bound!

Image credit nataliedee.com



OVERLOAD – FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE

Shutdown vs Meltdown

Both mean crisis point has been reached but they look very different:

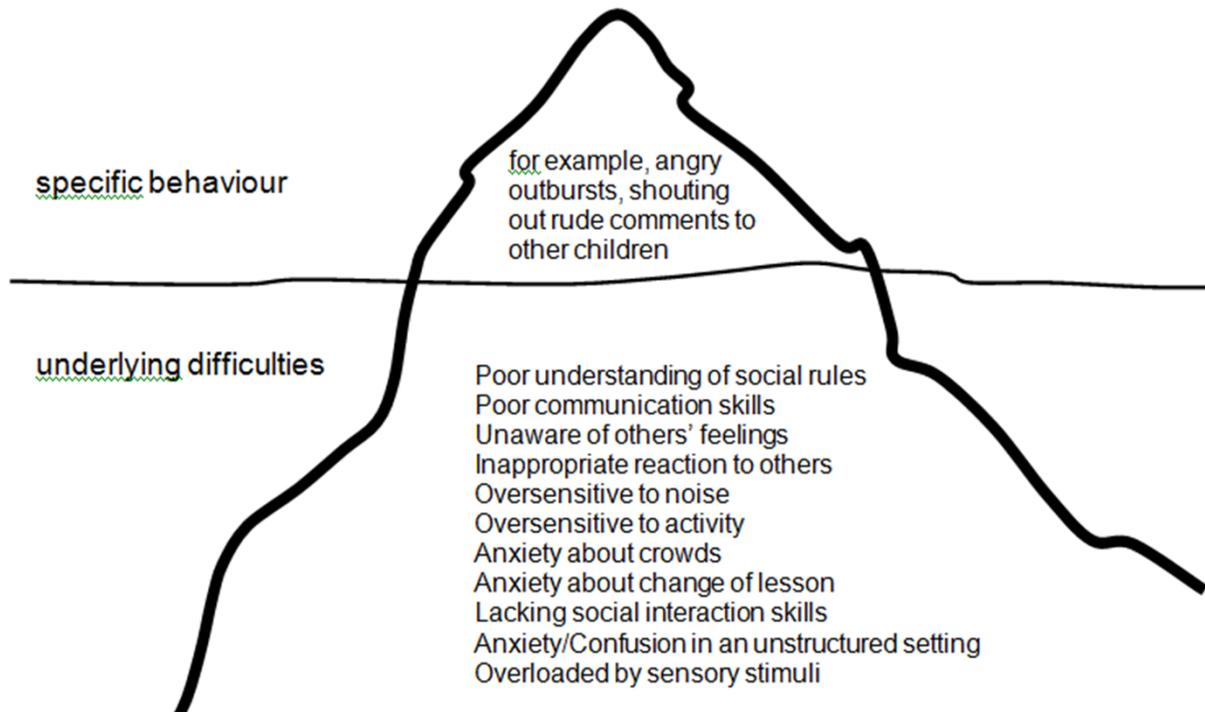
Meltdown	Shutdown
<p data-bbox="103 794 882 842">Display extreme behaviour such as:</p> <ul data-bbox="103 916 958 1086" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="103 916 383 963">▪ Self-harm<li data-bbox="103 975 367 1023">▪ Shouting<li data-bbox="103 1034 958 1086">▪ Aggression – kicking, hitting, biting <p data-bbox="510 1241 696 1278">EXTERNAL</p>	<p data-bbox="1122 783 1615 831">Complete withdrawal:</p> <ul data-bbox="1122 906 1966 1187" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="1122 906 1966 954">▪ Non -responsive to communication<li data-bbox="1122 965 1809 1013">▪ Cease to interact with world<li data-bbox="1122 1024 1787 1072">▪ Retreat to 'safe space'/hide<li data-bbox="1122 1083 1727 1131">▪ Lie down where they are<li data-bbox="1122 1142 1599 1190">▪ Be unable to move <p data-bbox="1514 1267 1744 1303">INTERNAL</p>



STRATEGIES/COPING MECHANISMS

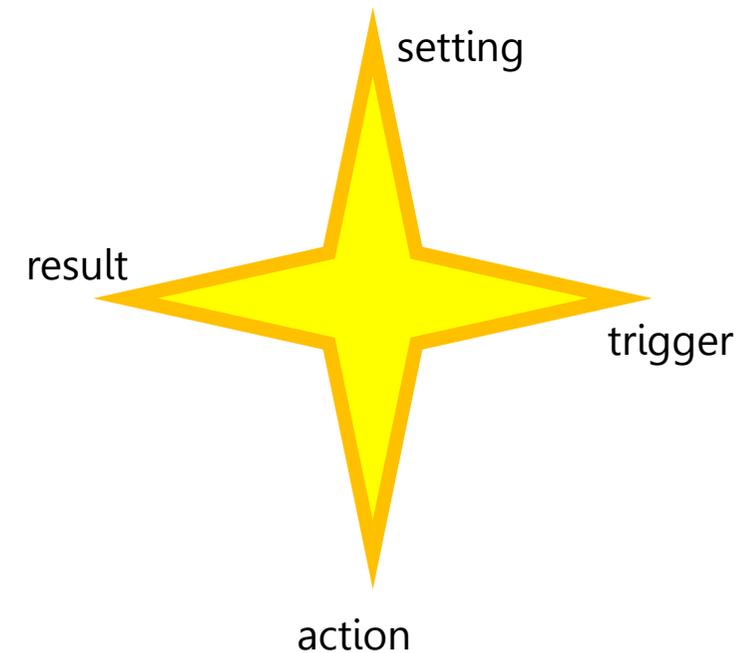
"SHERLOCKING" (OR IDENTIFYING 'TRIGGERS')

'Iceberg' method



(teacch iceberg)

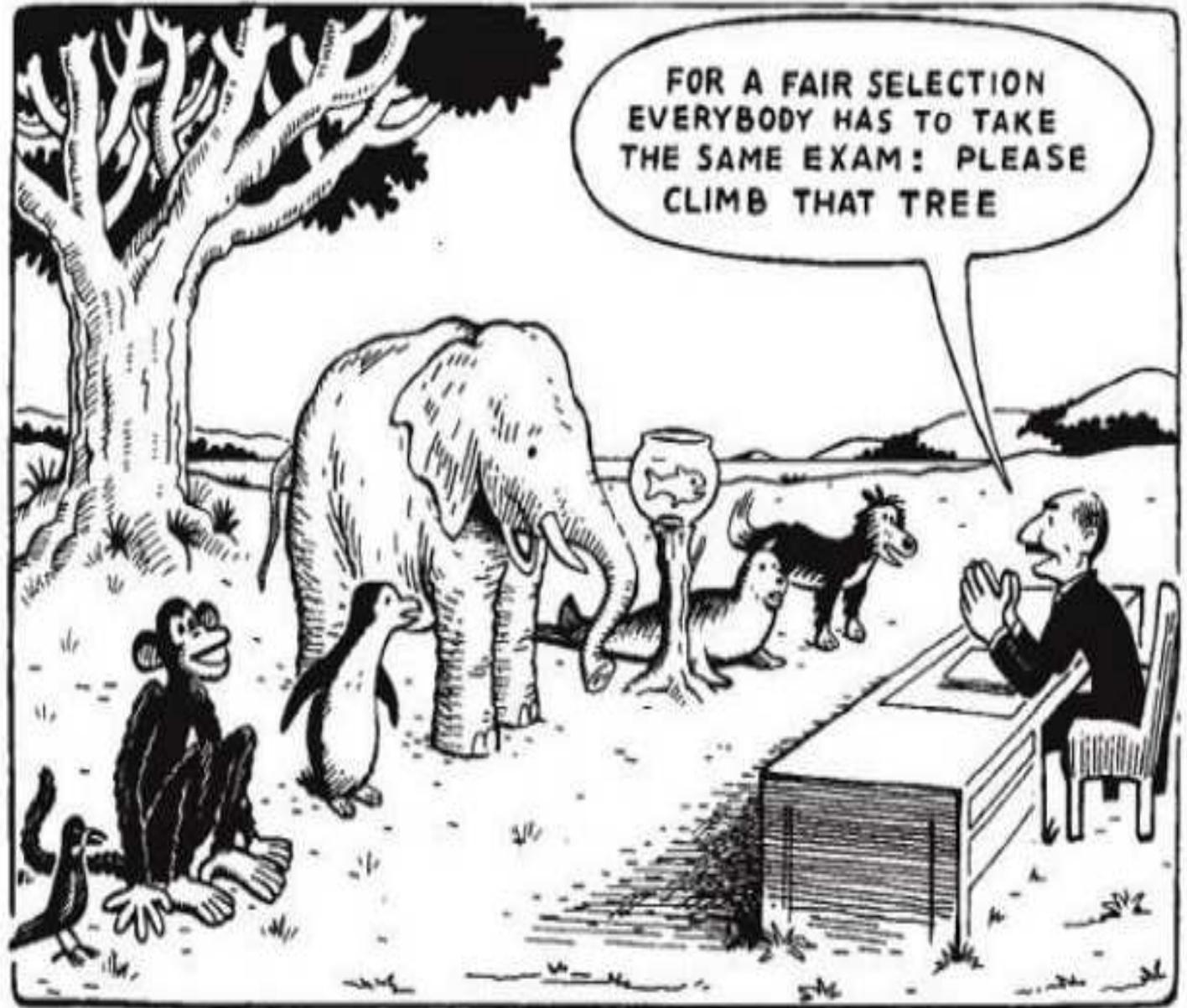
The STAR chart



REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

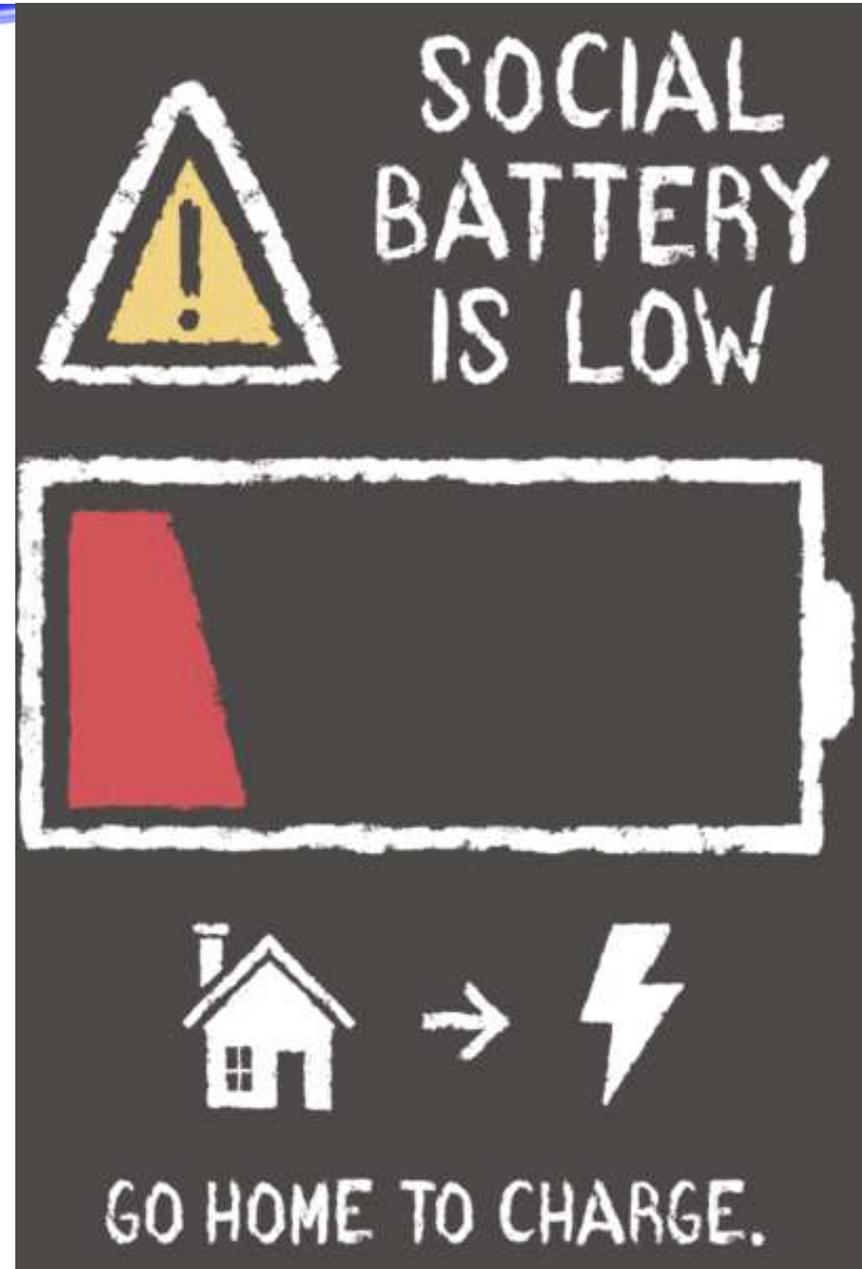
- Dim lighting
- Alternate forms of communication
- Visual supports
- Additional time
- Enhanced preparation/ planning

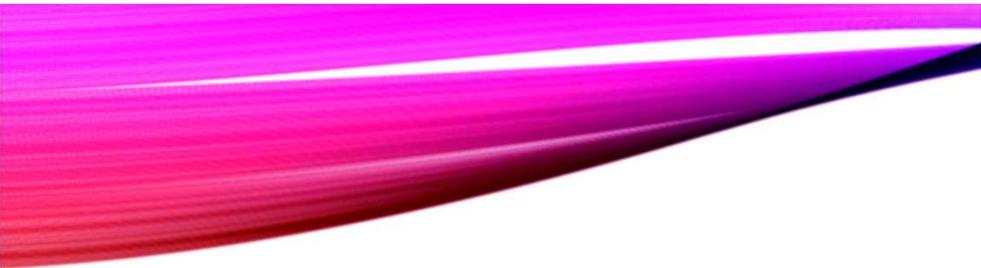
Whatever is feasible that can help!



SOCIALISING: HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

- Some people might love spending lots of time with others, some little bits, some hardly any
- Some might like to have lots of different friends, some might like to keep just a special few
- There are no hard and fast rules on the right or wrong amount of socialising, just ensuring the individual has the opportunities they want and need to socialise safely, happily and avoid isolation and loneliness
- sometimes our expectations or the expectations of others will differ drastically from what an Autistic person can manage socially





Energy Management

The Spoon Theory

The Spoon Theory



The Spoon Theory is a creative way to explain to healthy friends and family what it's like living with a chronic illness. Dysautonomia patients often have limited energy, represented by spoons. Doing too much in one day can leave you short on spoons the next day.

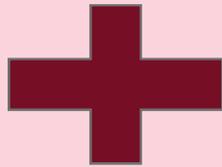
If you only had 12 spoons per day, how would you use them? Take away 1 spoon if you didn't sleep well last night, forgot to take your meds, or skipped a meal. Take away 4 spoons if you have a cold.

 get out of bed	 bathe	 make & eat a meal	 go to work/school
 get dressed	 style hair	 make plans & socialize	 go shopping
 take pills	 surf the internet	 light housework	 go to the doctor
 watch TV	 read/study	 drive somewhere	 exercise

The Spoon Theory was written by Christine Miserando, which you can check out on her website www.butyoudontlooksick.com.

Energy Management

Energy Accounting Concept



Time on ipad

Relaxing bath

Watch favourite movie



Homework

Socialising with peers

Getting dressed



Mindfulness



Strive to focus on the present.

**MINDFULNES
S**



Grounding Exercise

*For use during a panic attack,
when you need to stay calm,
or anytime you feel "disconnected" from your body.*

Look around you. Identify + name:

5 things you **see**

4 things you **feel**

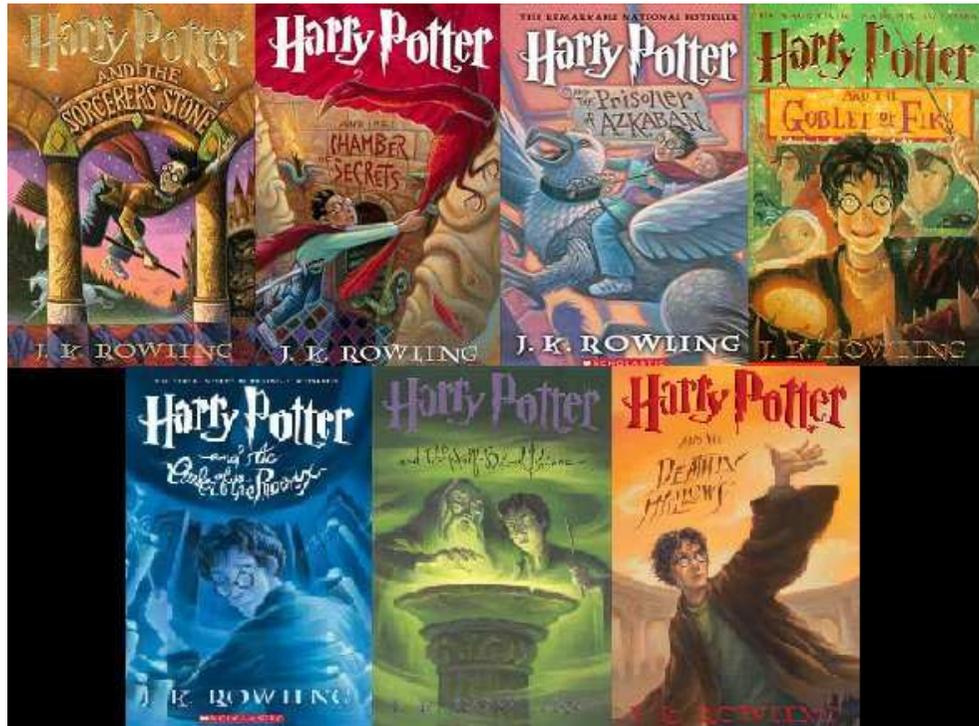
3 things you **hear**

2 things you **smell**

1 thing you **taste**

GROUNDING





**USE A
SPECIAL
INTEREST
OR HOBBY**

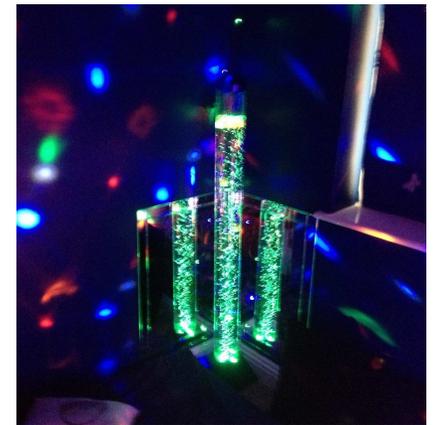


SENSORY INTERVENTIONS

• There are lots of sensory interventions, including:-

- Body socks
- Bubbles
- Bubble tubes
- Rainbow projectors
- Dark den
- Swings
- Trampolines

And many more.....



DEEP PRESSURE

- Deep Pressure is a therapy where touch or weight is used to help people who have sensory sensitivity.
- It uses pressure via touch to help someone who may need proprioceptive input to desensitise or cope with anxiety or overload

This can be achieved by:

- Squeezes – Temple Grandin made a 'squeeze machine', squeeze vest, firm hugs or massage
- Weight – weighted vest, blanket, lap pad



BODY BRUSHING

This can aid in desensitisation to tactile dysfunction and improve tolerance to clothes etc

It can be a calming therapy

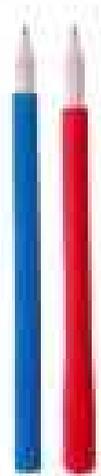
There are a variety of brushes available including:

- Surgical brushes
- Body brushes
- Facial brushes
- Hair brushes/tangle teezers

The type of brush and how much pressure is applied and for how long will vary for every individual and can fluctuate



CHEWELRY





FIDGET TOYS

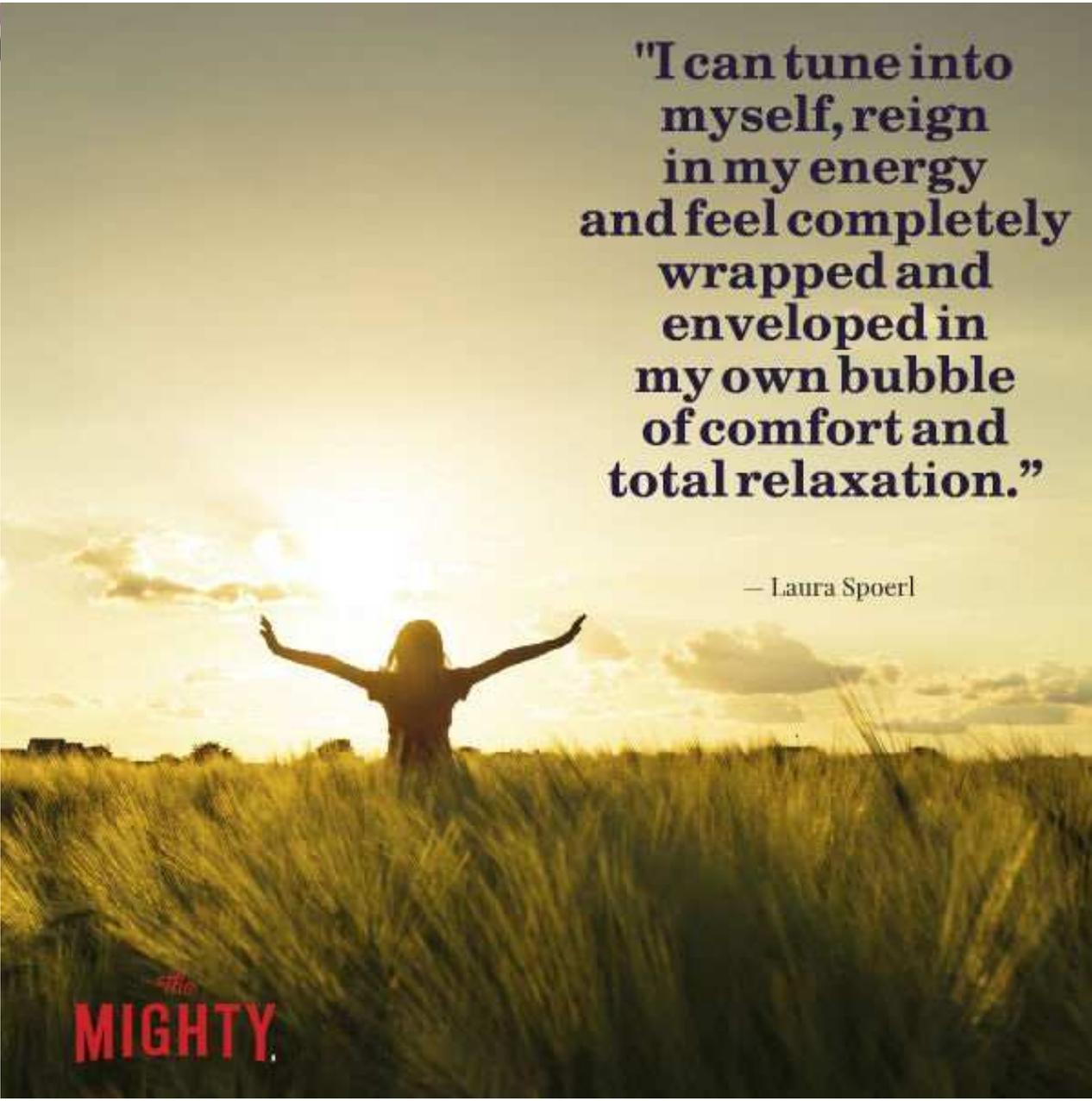
- Fidget cube
 - Fidget spinner
 - Pea pod
 - Putty
 - Tangle toy
- And many more....





STIMMING

- The term stimming is short for self stimulatory behavior. Also known as self regulatory behavior.
- It is a repetitive movement or sound that provides sensory input
- It can help Autistic people manage anxiety, cope in difficult environments, manage sensory overload and can be a necessary and even joyful experience.



"I can tune into myself, reign in my energy and feel completely wrapped and enveloped in my own bubble of comfort and total relaxation."

— Laura Spoerl

the MIGHTY



"It's involuntary, so I don't always realize I'm bouncing my leg. It bothers some people, but I can't help it."

— Sydney Brown

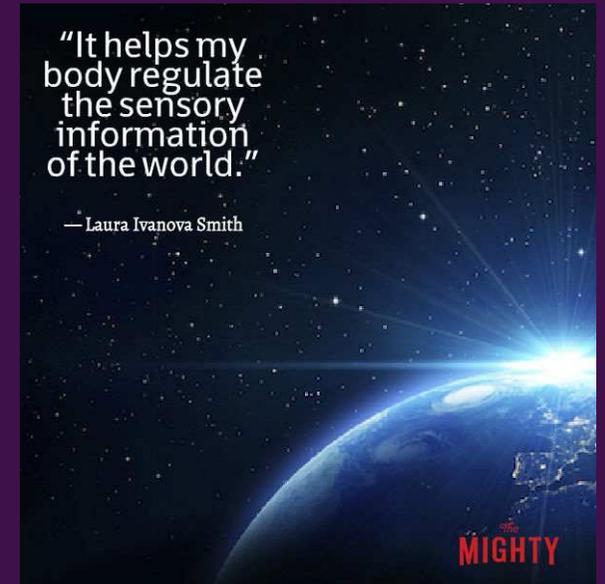
The MIGHTY



"Stimming is like breathing... just as natural, just as important."

— Katy Kenah

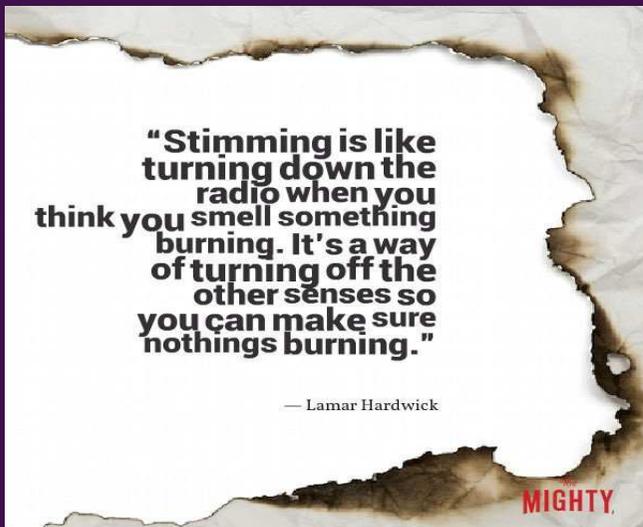
The MIGHTY



"It helps my body regulate the sensory information of the world."

— Laura Ivanova Smith

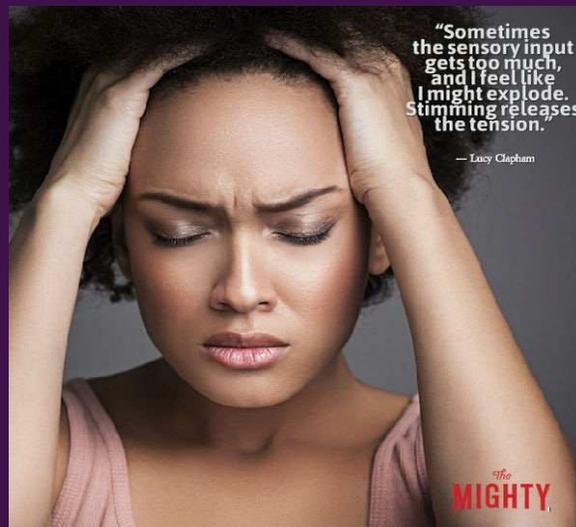
The MIGHTY



"Stimming is like turning down the radio when you think you smell something burning. It's a way of turning off the other senses so you can make sure nothings burning."

— Lamar Hardwick

The MIGHTY



"Sometimes the sensory input gets too much, and I feel like I might explode. Stimming releases the tension."

— Lucy Clapham

The MIGHTY



"It's a combination of habit and releasing build-up of stress or internal energy in the body... it feels good."

— Planet Autism Facebook page

The MIGHTY



THE FREEDOM TO STIM

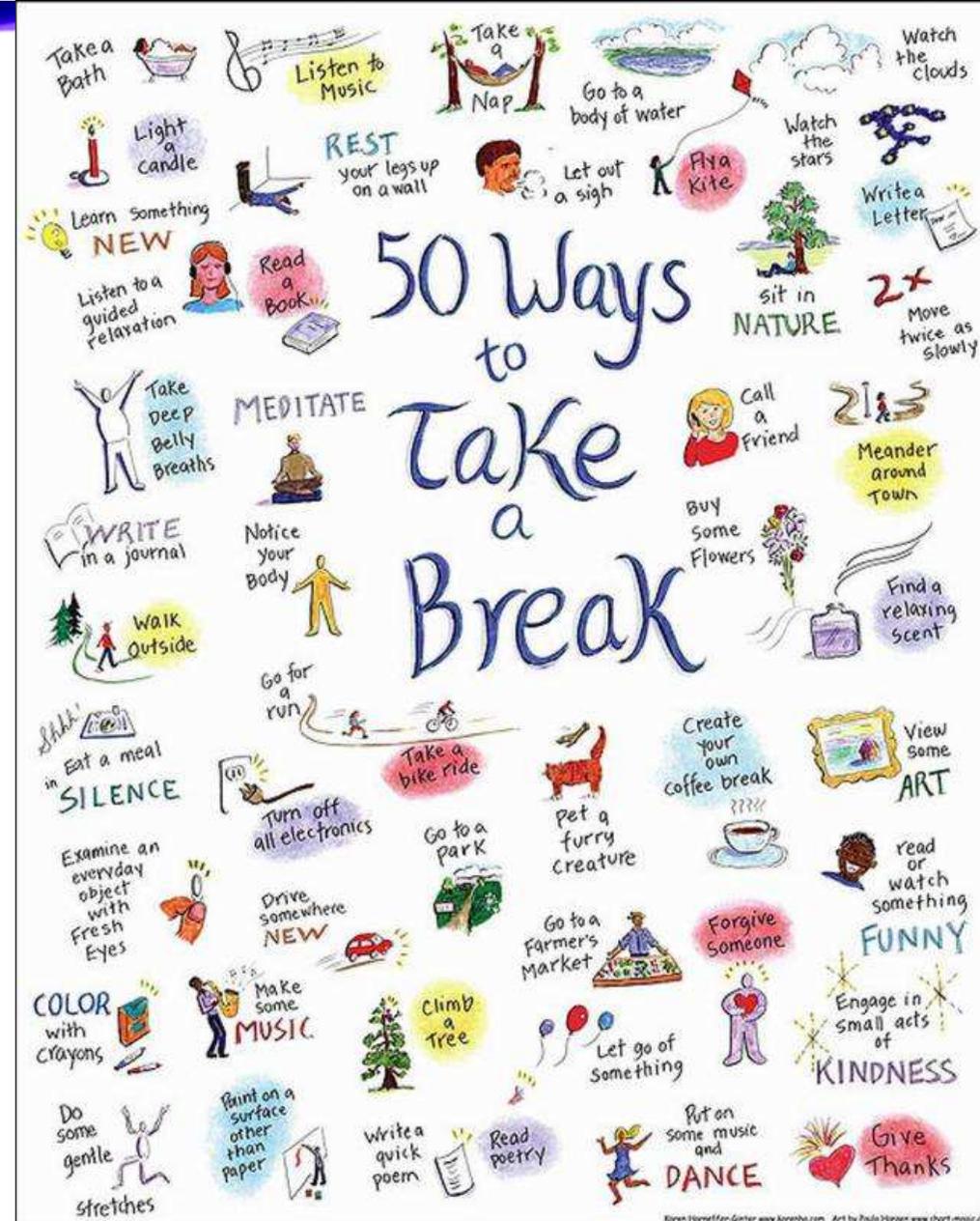
While it is important to allow ourselves the freedom to stim sometimes stims can be harmful or undesirable

In these cases we should look for ways to redirect the stims

We should never expect to stop a behaviour without replacement as this could increase anxiety, meltdowns/shutdowns and lead to development of increasingly harmful behaviours

A 'SELF CARE KIT'

- Taking time to create and build 'self care kits' can help when you're feeling overloaded or close to meltdown/shutdown/burnout
- Finding some favourite items that help calm and soothe you and having a dedicated kit filled with them can help you practice self care when you're too overwhelmed to think and plan
- Learning how you can recover from meltdown/shutdown/burnout or high periods of anxiety is key to wellbeing
- Share this information with those around you so they have a better idea of how to help and what they should avoid when you're particularly anxious or overwhelmed
- Finally, remember that sometimes accepting and acknowledging anxiety and panic can work better than fighting it – when you feel very anxious try to think about the facts and logic – that is a physiological response that will pass and doesn't always mean there is an actual threat of any kind



SOURCES OF SUPPORT



Local support groups including NAS branches etc



Websites and forums



Handouts with links to further information





Thank-you for coming



Contact details are on the handouts



Please complete an evaluation of the day



Have a safe journey home

