

# Being a Neurodivergent Parent

- My journey towards diagnosis
- Expectations versus the reality
- Managing the diverse needs within the family
- Feeling overwhelmed and avoiding burnout
- Maintaining boundaries and balance
- Buffering and belonging



# About me



ADHD person



Neurodivergent  
parent



Over 20 years'  
experience working  
with children, young  
people and their  
families

# Becoming a parent

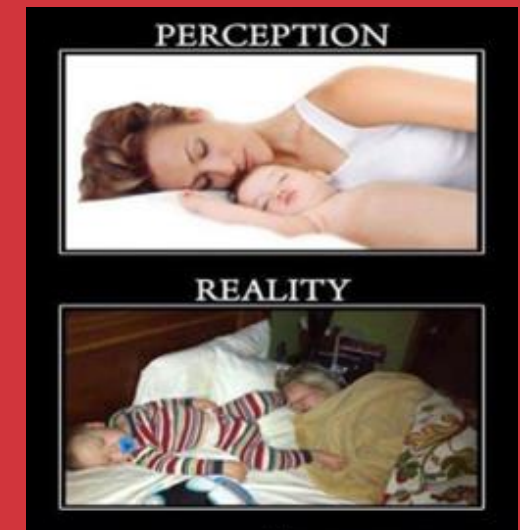
*"All you need are  
rules, routines and  
boundaries"*



## Expectation V's The Reality



- It takes a village to raise a child
- Parent job description
- Hormonal changes
- Different presentation in females
- Sensory sensitives and triggers
- Executive function and dopamine





# Why is this so hard?

Who's carrying the mental load

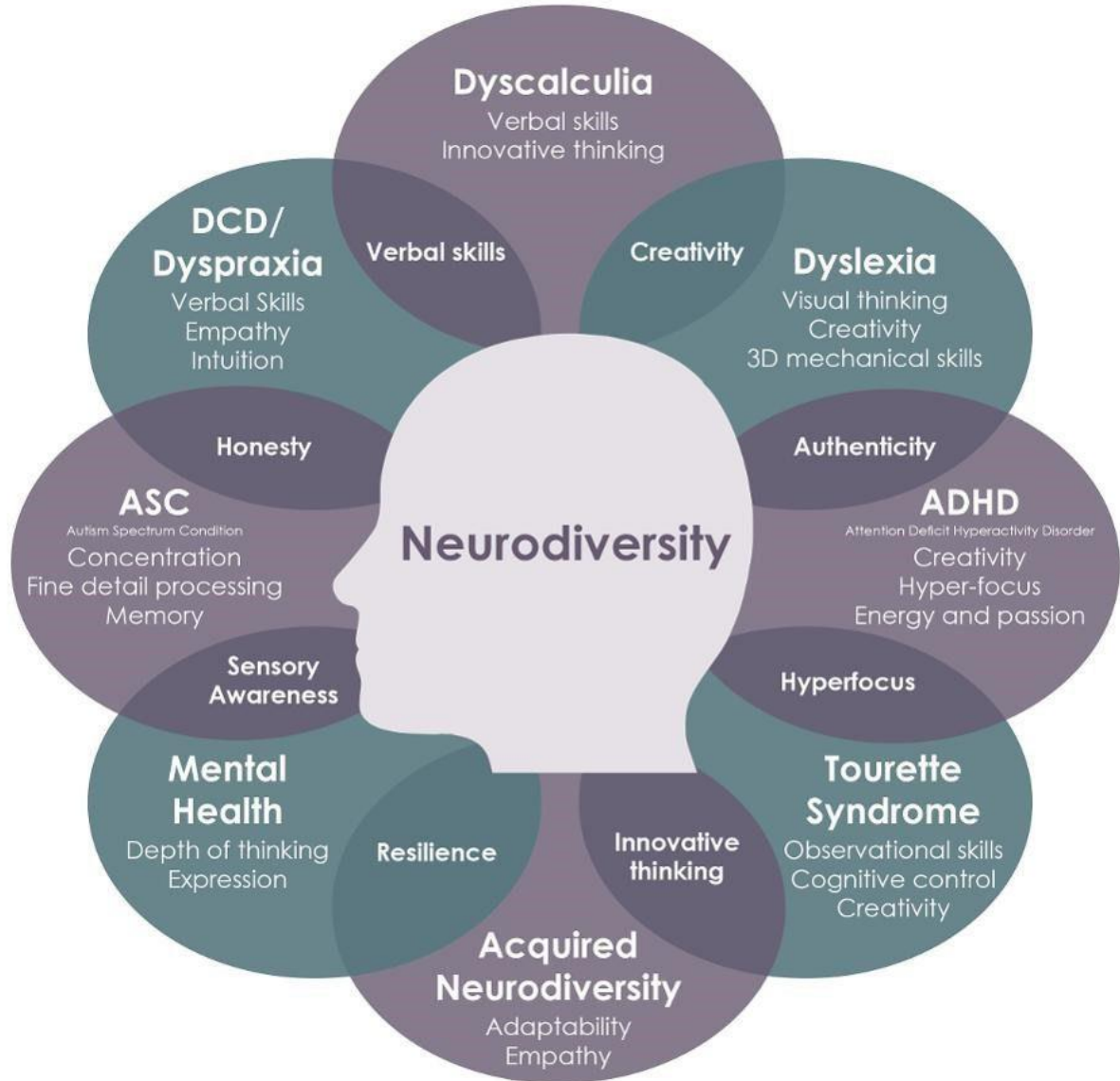
# TWO SIDES, SAME COIN



@danidonovan

What's it like having a neurodivergent parent?

- Funny
- Kind
- Great at helping us with our problems
- You get how we feel
  
- Late
- Burning food
- Grumpy in the morning
- Panic cleaning



Created by Dr Nancy Doyle based on the work of Mary Colley

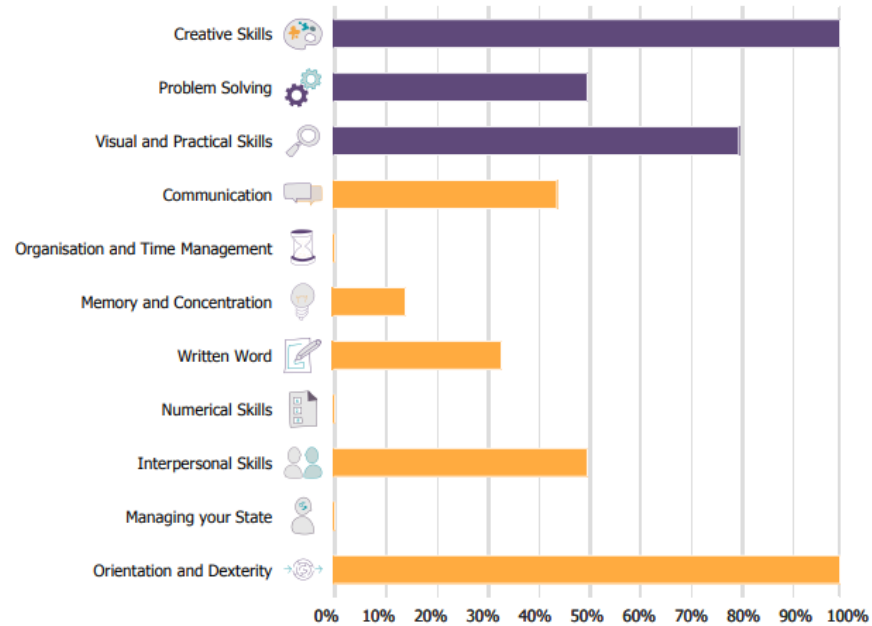
# Traits versus Impact

- We don't fit inside one box
- Frequency
- Since childhood
- Developed coping strategies
- Impacts different areas in life - sense of self, relationships, job and your overall health and well-being.

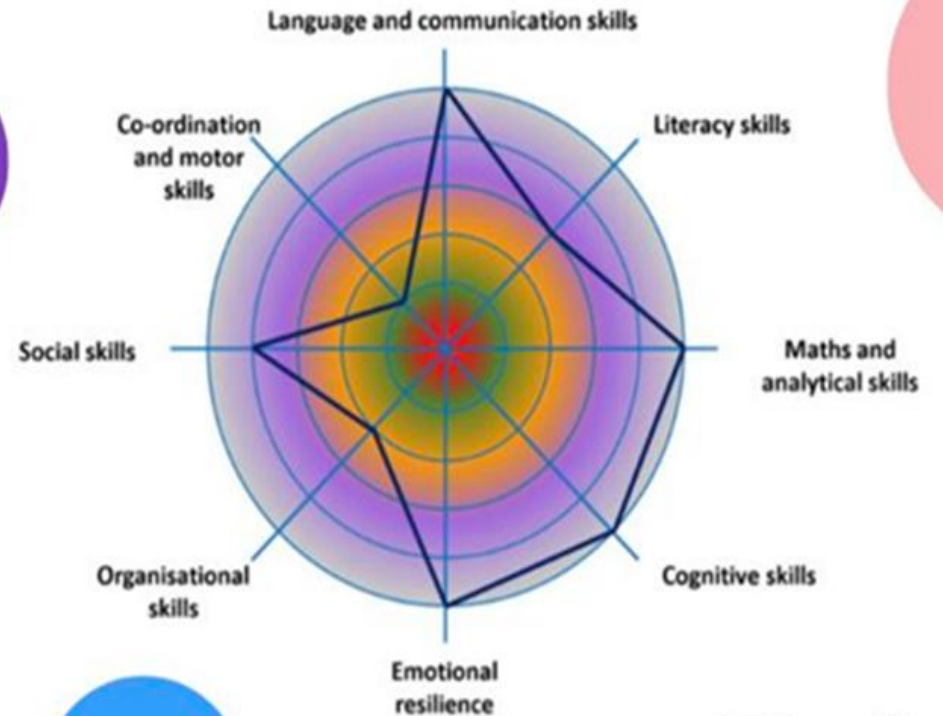
# Strengths and challenges

# Spikey learning profile

The longer the bar, the greater the strength!



Taken by: Lisa Davies on 4th January 2022

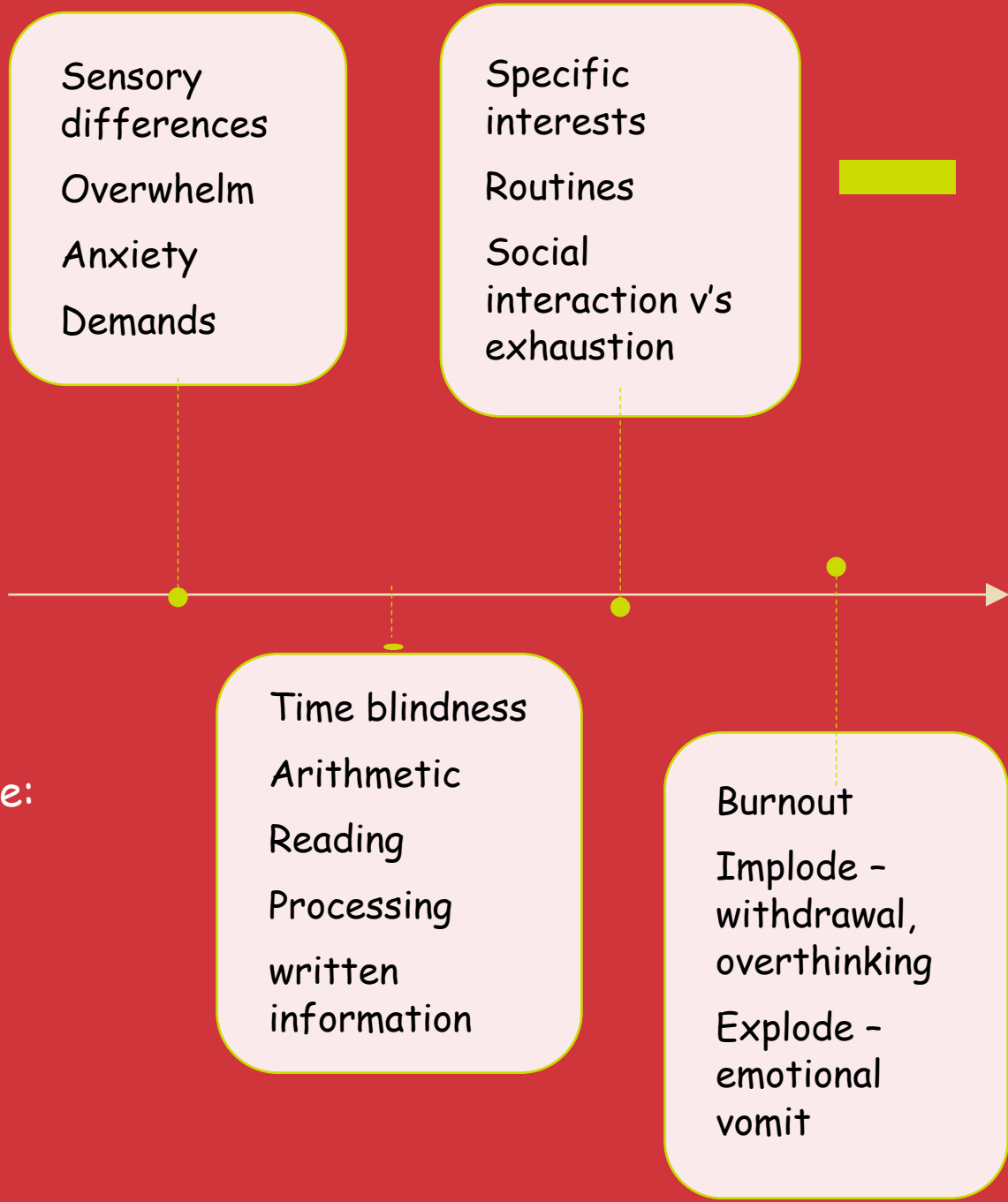






# ADHD

Ability to regulate:  
Attention  
Emotion  
Energy

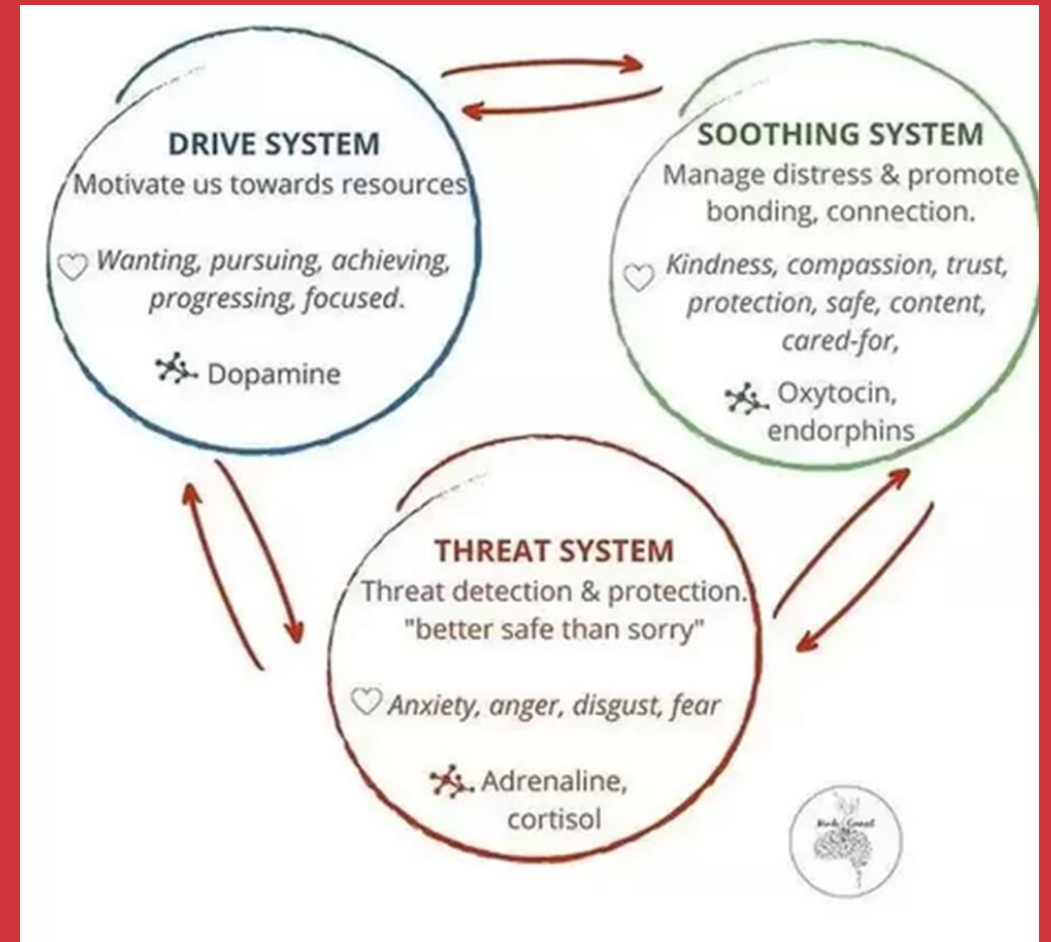


## WHAT'S YOUR FLAVOUR?





# How my brain works



# Autistic and ADHD Burnout

# QUICK GUIDE

## Causes of Autistic and ADHD Burnout:

sensory overload  
executive functioning overload  
intense levels of stress  
barriers to support/lack of accommodations  
increase in demands  
sudden or significant changes  
suppression of Autistic traits



burnout is often a result of a combination of causes and factors, not a single event

## Signs of Autistic and ADHD Burnout:

inability to regulate	reduced executive functioning
exhaustion & fatigue	more frequent meltdowns
changes in sensory sensitivity	self-care tasks are harder
difficulty with communication	increase in demand avoidance

## Things to do in **advance**

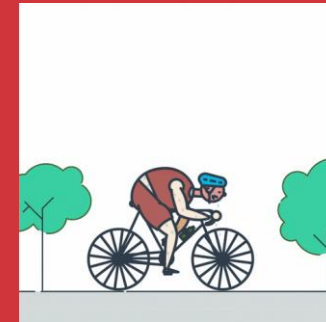
figuring out your sensory profile  
make a burnout recovery plan  
stock up on safe/same foods  
set up a sensory toolbox  
communicate with friends, loved ones, family or support people

## Supporting yourself **during**

rest, rest and more rest  
reduce as many demands as possible  
spend time with your special interests  
set up reminders for water and food  
support your sensory needs  
take a break from social interactions

# Boundaries

Notice and map your burnout cycle



- Expectations from self or others
- Lack of downtime or buffering
- People pleasing
- Poor boundaries - Know your limits and when to say NO!

## Autistic and ADHD Burnout Recovery



Incorporate sensory soothers



Nourish the body



Engage supportive movement



Engage special interests



Spending time unmasking\*



Rest



Engage rhythm



Drop unnecessary demands

Neurodivergent  
Insights

COMPARISON  
IS THE THIEF  
OF JOY.

*Theodore Roosevelt*

Follow your own path

Beliefs, goals and values

Co-regulation  
and putting  
on your own  
oxygen mask  
first

# FIT YOUR OWN OXYGEN MASK FIRST

You're no use to anyone  
if you're running on empty.  
Caring for your self first is often  
the best thing you can do,  
in order to help others.  
It isn't selfish, or Egocentric

JUST REALLY GOOD ADVICE

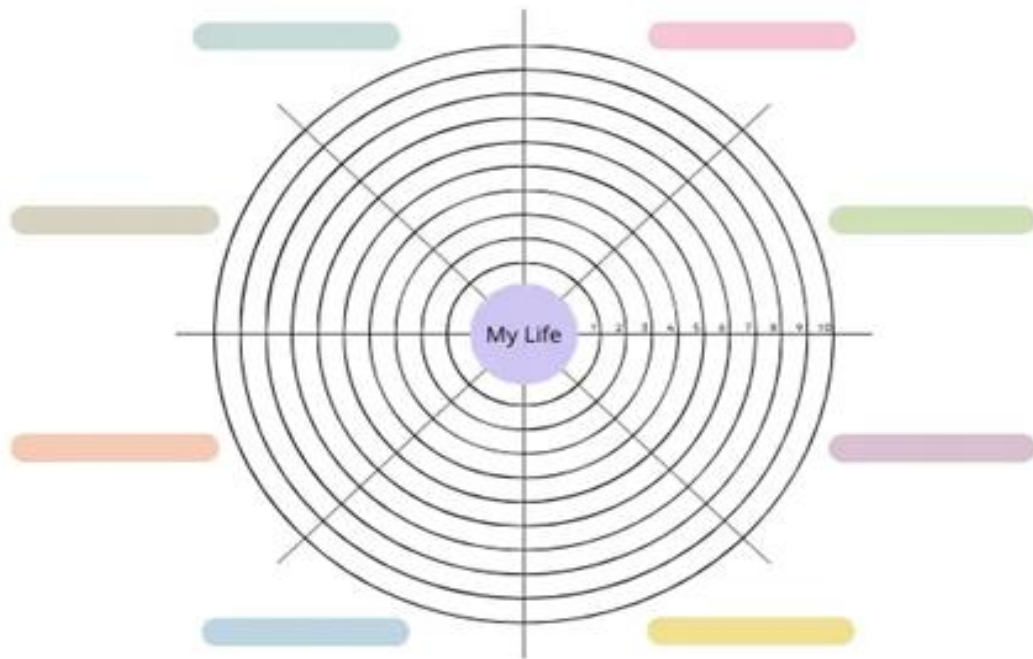


DATE \_\_\_\_\_

The Wheel of Life is an exercise to help bring balance to your life.

1. Identify key areas of your life that matter most to you.
2. Rate your satisfaction for each area from 1 (not satisfied) to 10 (very satisfied).
3. Color in the corresponding number of circles in each section to show your rating.

Be honest with your scores. The goal isn't perfection, but to identify areas needing more attention.



# Balance

## Wheel of Life

- What is taking up most of my time and energy
- How to can you bring more balance into my life
- What are my boundaries. When to say NO!

# Become a sensory detective

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Touch

Smell

Taste

Hearing

Vision

Vestibular - balance

Proprioceptive - body awareness

Interoception - state of internal organs (pain, heat, illness, hunger, toileting etc)



# What makes you tick and what gives you the ick!



What am I feeling?

Where in my body do I feel it?

What is happening in my environment / life right now?

What's available to me currently?

1. Body scanning
2. Sensory seeking or avoiding
3. Stress tolerance
4. Energy levels
5. Sensory soothing toolkit - calm the chaos or activate bounce back





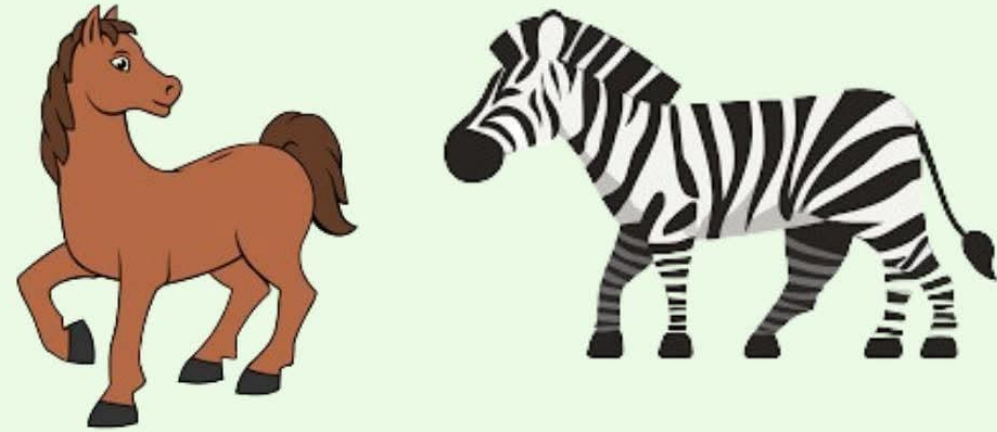
# Belonging

"The opposite of belonging is fitting in"

Brene Brown

The most terrible loneliness is not the kind that comes from being alone, but from being misunderstood. It is the loneliness of standing in a crowded room, surrounded by people who do not see you, who do not hear you, who do not know the true essence of who you are.

-George Orwell



Feeling like a weird horse for part of your life and then realising you are not a weird horse but a perfectly good zebra

@neurodivergent\_lou

## Belonging

"The truth is: Belonging starts with self-acceptance. Your level of belonging, in fact, can never be greater than your level of self-acceptance, because believing that you're enough is what gives you the courage to be authentic, vulnerable and imperfect."

- BRENE BROWN

**There is no such thing as being the perfect parent. So just be a real one.**

—SUE ATKINS

RD

Connect with others - Vitamin C

Delegate tasks

Problem solve as a team

Lean into learning

Communicating your own needs

Respect your feelings - unmasking

It's OK to ask for help

Have fun as a family



Belonging

Imagination

Give it time



# Buffering - Self Survival Hacks



- Processing skills - auditory, verbal and visual
- Multi-tasking myths
- Recharge - creativity and nature
- Shush the critical voice

Self regulation  
= co regulation

Self care

Routines and  
predictability

Write it down  
- lists and  
journaling

Habit stacking

Priority matrix

Pomodoro  
technique

Gamification

Body doubling  
Accountability  
buddy

Chunking -  
break it down

Timers, apps  
and technology

Energy bank  
accounting

Mini deadlines  
and mind  
mapping

Tech free time

Music and  
movement

Pause and be in  
moment



# What really matters?

- Late
- Burning food
- Grumpy in the morning
- Panic cleaning
  
- **Funny**
- **Kind**
- **Great at helping us with our problems**
- **You get how we feel**

# Key takeaways



Being an ND parent does not equal poor parenting or poor mental health.



One size does not fit all - Do what works for you and your family



It's OK to ask for help and take time to recharge

Balance, boundaries, buffering and belonging



Acceptance, self-belief and compassion. You are good enough and so are your children.

