

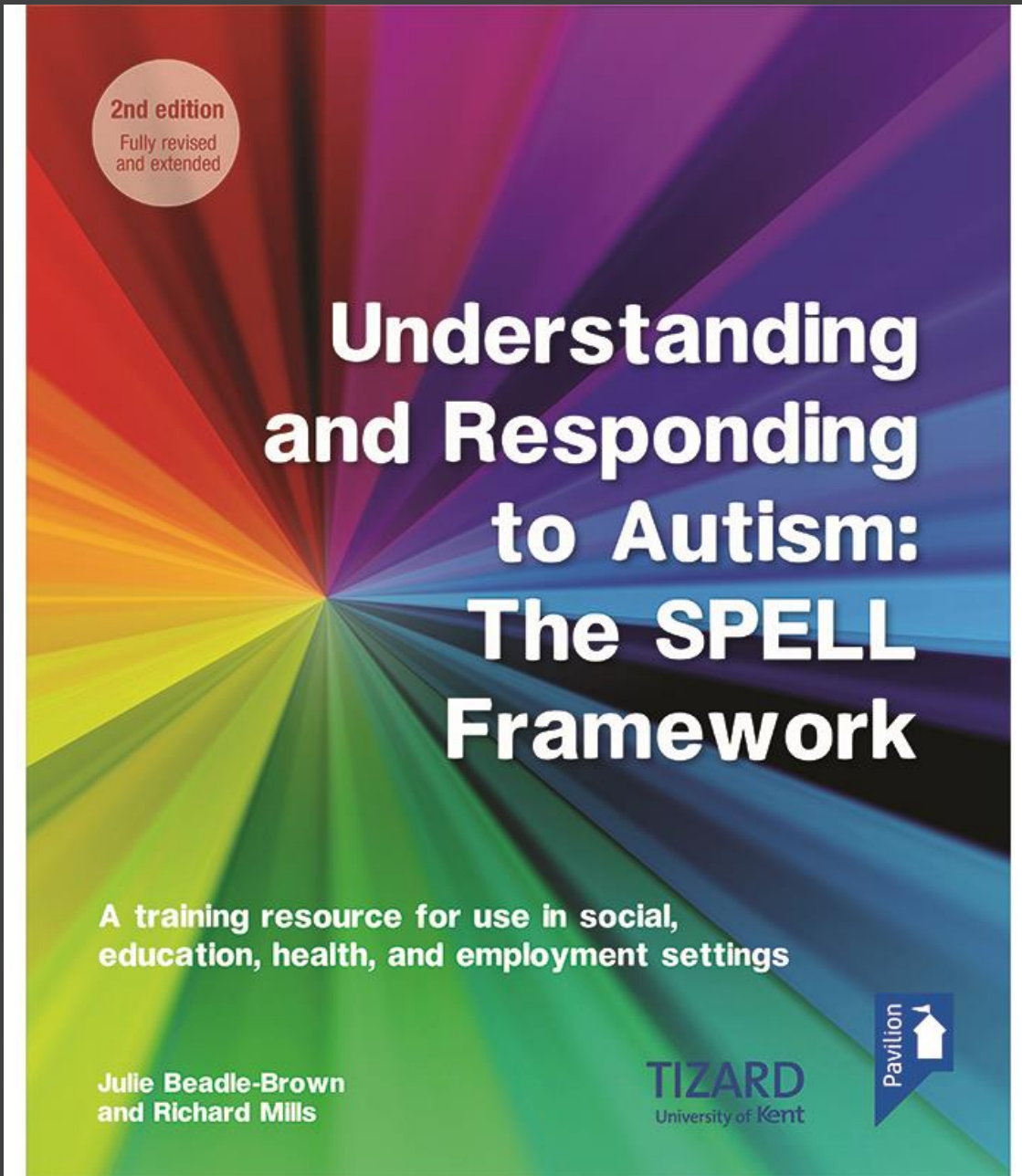
# SPELL

Understanding and  
responding to autism

Overview

Riga 2023

Dr Richard Mills



2nd edition

Fully revised  
and extended

# Understanding and Responding to Autism: The SPELL Framework

A training resource for use in social,  
education, health, and employment settings

Julie Beadle-Brown  
and Richard Mills

TIZARD  
University of Kent



Prepared by

Richard Mills

With thanks to

Julie Beadle-Brown & Joe Powell



Finish



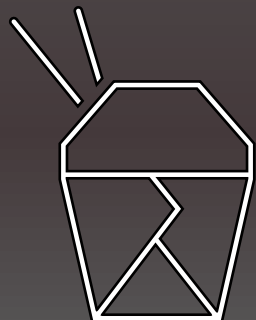
Work



Water



Break



Food (lunch)



Lavatory



*A pdf of content will be available following the course*



10: 30



Work



Water



11:15



break



Lavatory



12: 00



Finish



A close-up portrait of Dr. Lorna Wing, an elderly woman with short, curly, light brown hair, wearing glasses and a dark blue jacket over a pink top. She is smiling warmly at the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing a bookshelf with various books.

*Dr Lorna Wing*

*“For many autistic people the  
world can be a very scary place.  
It’s our job to make it less so”*

---

# Background

Originally developed by National Autistic Society UK (NAS) staff and residents

- Lorna Wing
- Judith Gould
- Richard Mills
- Mike Collins
- John Clements
- Rosemary Siddles
- Joe Powell
- Jacqui Ashton-Smith
- Catherine Burkin
- Chris Atkins

Later revisions in partnership with the Tizard Centre, University of Kent and AT-Autism, London

- Julie Beadle-Brown and Damian Milton

# Introduction

- Initially based on Montessori educational approaches
- Amended and extended to work with children and adults and across settings
- Seeing the world through an 'autism lens'
- Ethical

# Introduction

- *It is up to us* as teachers, clinicians, parents to understand and engage autistic people on what they found to be helpful— and avoid the unhelpful
- Recognition of autism as broad and variable
- Inclusive. What's helpful to autistic people is helpful to everyone
- Not about 'fixing' autism

# Introduction

## For example

- Do I know what is expected of me?
- Have I understood your intentions?
- Have I *misunderstood your* intentions?
- Are you seeing my point of view?
- Where do I get help and advice?

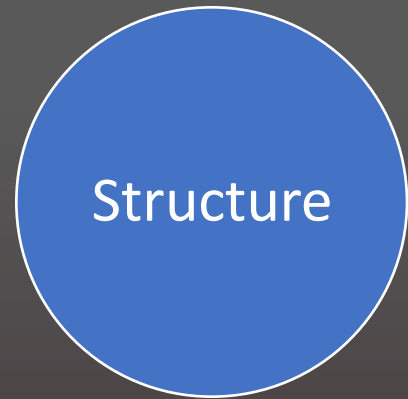


# Key points

- **Making autism accessible**
- **Ethical and inclusive**
- **Practical mnemonic**

## Key points

- Helps anticipate and identify difficulties, and develop opportunities
- Understand the barriers to learning, opportunity, and wellbeing
- **Accept it's our job** to remove or reduce these barriers
- We learn about autism from autistic people – **if we accept, listen, and connect**



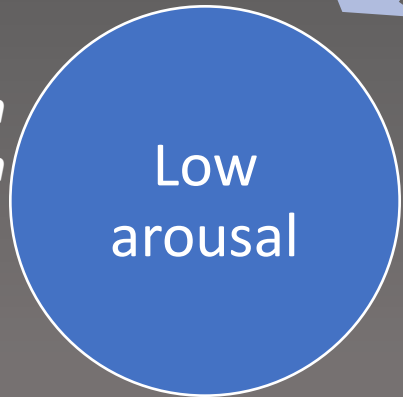
*Predict events- clarify expectations*



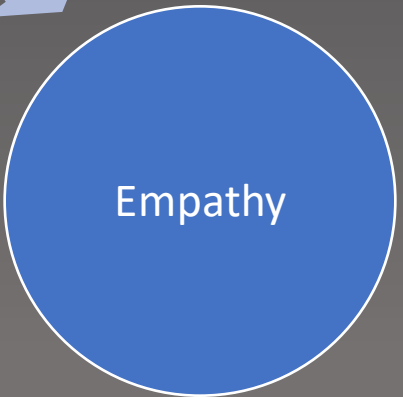
*Consistency, fairness  
connection &  
belonging*



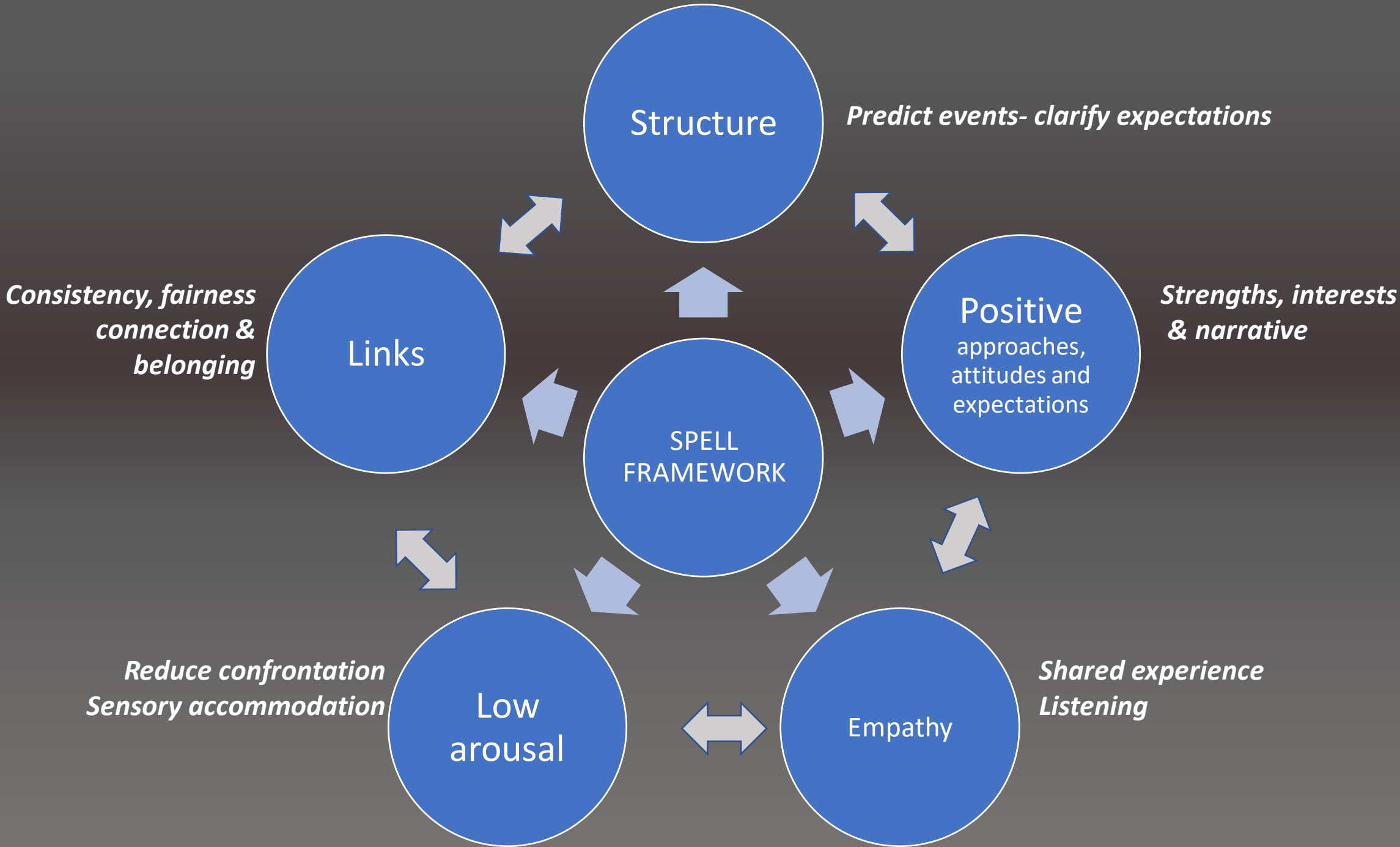
*Strengths, interests  
& narrative*

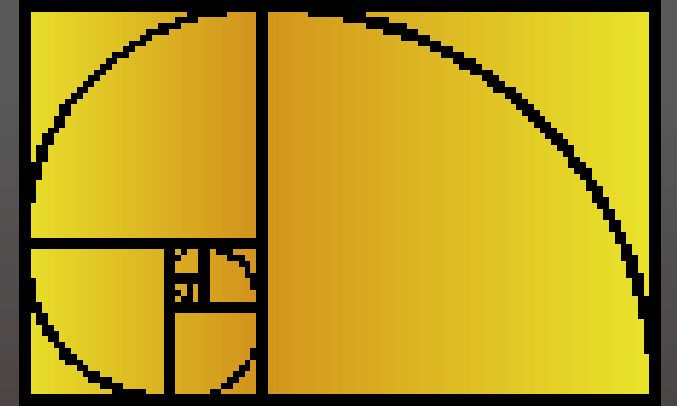


*Reduce confrontation  
Sensory accommodation*



*Shared experience  
Listening*





# Happiness and wellbeing

Aristotle's golden mean and

the SPELL framework

**Vice (deficiency)**

**Virtue (happiness)**

**Vice (excess)**

**Structure**

**Positive**

attitudes and expectations

**Empathy**

**Low arousal**

**Links**



**Vice (deficiency)**

**Virtue (happiness)**

**Vice (excess)**

Chaos/un-bounded

**Structure**

Negativity/stigma/denial of agency/ disrespect

**Positive**  
attitudes and expectations

Self-centredness/insensitivity  
Not listening

**Empathy**

Underload/no arousal or stimulation

**Low arousal**

Fragmentation/isolation/  
disconnection

**Links**

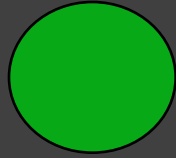
**Vice (deficiency)**

**Virtue (happiness)**

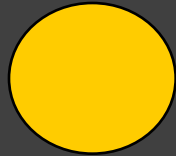
**Vice (excess)**

Chaos/un-bounded	<b>Structure</b>	Rigidity/over-bounded
Negativity/stigma/denial of agency/ disrespect	<b>Positive</b> attitudes and expectations	Denial of difficulties/ acting without care/ patronisation/ tokenism
Self-centredness/insensitivity Not listening	<b>Empathy</b>	Gullibility/ hyper-empathy/ sentimentality/mawkishness
Underload/no arousal or stimulation	<b>Low arousal</b>	Overload/ over- arousal / over- stimulation
Fragmentation/isolation/ disconnection	<b>Links</b>	Fusion/ compulsion/ compliance/ Control

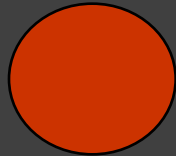
Auditing our  
work



The SPELL  
framework as a  
useful mechanism  
for audit

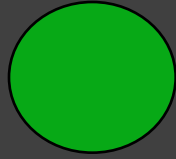


(SPELL audit)



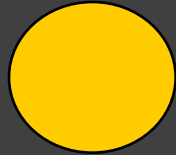
Rating

SPELL



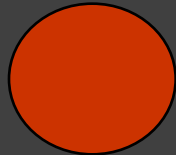
### Examples of good practice

- Where the principle has been understood and incorporated



### Example of misunderstanding

- Where the principle has been misunderstood or misapplied



### Example of violation

- Where the principle has been ignored, rejected or opposed

# Structure

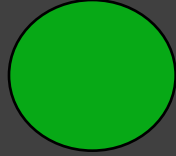




# Structure

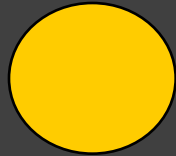
- We all need help to organise and live our lives  
*e.g. diaries, schedules, planners, signage*
- We are unfulfilled, or become anxious, ineffective or exhausted if our lives lack structure - or expectations of us are unclear
- Structure helps to organise and **prevent overwhelm, reduce anxiety and gives choice, purpose, and meaning**

# Structure



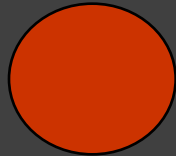
## Examples of good practice

- Visual timetable-sequencing
- Visual choices
- Clear written and/or visual instructions
- Good warning of potential problems



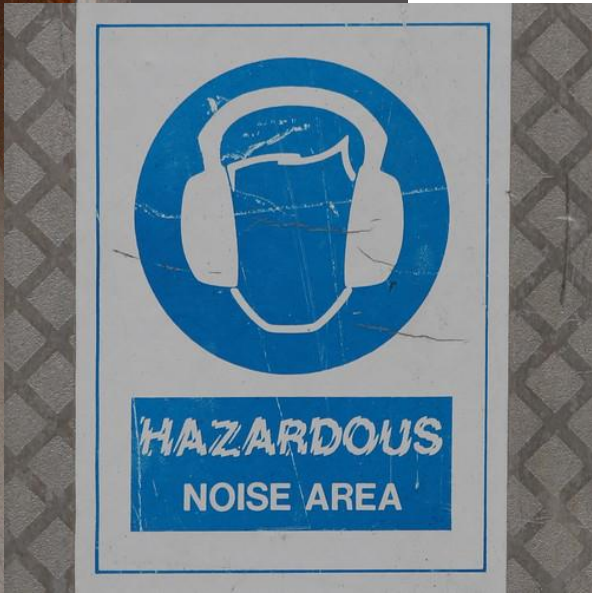
## Example of misunderstanding

- No differentiation. uniform programme or schedule for all



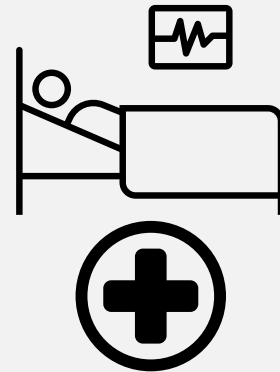
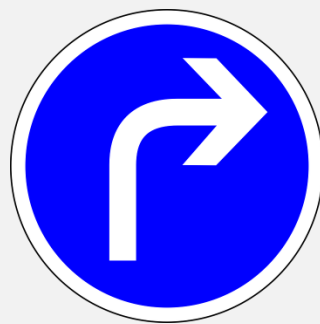
## Example of violation

- No structure – e.g., prompt dependent
- Chaotic environment
- Expectations unclear
- Verbal instruction only



病院を見つけるには、50メートルで右折します

**50 m**



Sustancias tóxicas Las mascarillas deben usarse en todo momento





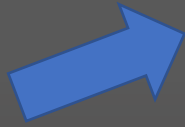


Visual navigation

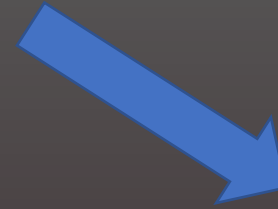




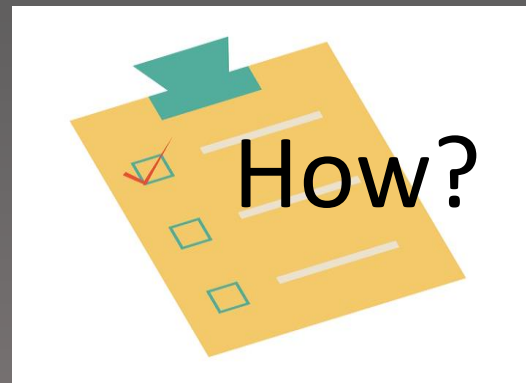
NEXT? - FINISHED?



What ?



Where?



When? – how long for?







**Daily programmes**

**Student schedules**

**Student self-evaluation sheets**

**Details of morning courses**

**Details of afternoon courses**

**-planning and organisation-student schedules ready for use-**





# Academic Wall Planner 2011-2012



	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S						
Sept					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Oct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31				
Nov					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Dec					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Jan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31				
Feb					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29		
March					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
April	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31				
May					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
June					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
July					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Aug					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31



www.teakster.co.uk





Daniel's Choice Board



radio



librarybooks



write



colour



eat



write



tea



coffee



draw



music



play



television









First Great Western

First Great Western

Customer Reception

POSITION CLOSED



Train

Train departures

Train departures

Left luggage →

Platforms T2 to 14 →

Hilton London Paddington →

Cash machines →

The Lawn →

Airline check-in →

Underground →

Way out →











	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
1		Long Day	Long Day	Night	Holiday	Holiday					Notes									
2	Mon 06/Oct/2021																			
3	Tue 05/Oct/2021																			
4	Wed 04/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
5	Thu 03/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
6	Fri 02/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
7	Sat 01/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
8	Sun 26/Oct/2021																			
9	Mon 15/Oct/2021																			
10	Tue 12/Oct/2021																			
11	Wed 10/Oct/2021																			
12	Thu 04/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
13	Fri 04/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
14	Sat 03/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
15	Sun 27/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
16	Mon 18/Oct/2021																			
17	Tue 09/Oct/2021																			
18	Wed 06/Oct/2021																			
19	Thu 21/Oct/2021																			
20	Fri 20/Oct/2021																			
21	Sat 19/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
22	Sun 20/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
23	Mon 22/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
24	Tue 23/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
25	Wed 24/Oct/2021			X	X	X	X	X	X											
26	Thu 28/Oct/2021																			
27	Fri 29/Oct/2021																			
28	Sat 30/Oct/2021																			
29	Sun 31/Oct/2021																			
30	<b>Buildsheet</b>																			
31	1. Replace "NA" "NB" etc in row (1) with the names of the staff members																			
32	2. Enter the date of the first day in the row in cell A2																			
33	3. Select the name for each staff member from the dropdown in each cell in columns C, D and E																			
34	4. Select the name for a staff member from the dropdown in each cell in columns H and I																			
35	5. Enter any notes against a day																			
36	6. Enter the dates for who completed the form, date completed and time sent																			
37	7. Save with a file name of "Data 2021 month <Month> of <Year>" eg. "Data 2021 OCTOBER 20000 v1.xlsx"																			
38	Person that completed the role: <input type="text"/> Date completed: <input type="text"/> Date emailed to employer: <input type="text"/>																			

Person	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
1st day									
2nd day									
3rd day									
4th day									
5th day									
6th day									
7th day									
8th day									
9th day									

Structure also allows for 'reasonable adjustment' to work schedule = rest and predictability

**Positive**  
approaches  
(attitudes) and  
expectations

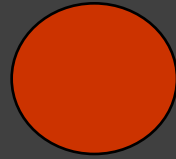
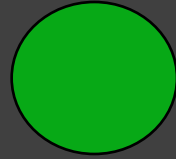


# Positive approaches (attitudes) and expectations

- We prefer what interests and motivate us
- We respond to opportunities that build on our strengths and interests, rather than focus on what we can't do - or find stressful
- We thrive when **we connect with people** who have confidence in, accept and respect us and speak well of us
- Agency /choice important to us
- We may overlook or underestimate ability or talent because of communication issues, especially if the other person doesn't speak or if we don't understand their language



# Positive approaches (attitudes) and expectations



## Examples of good practice

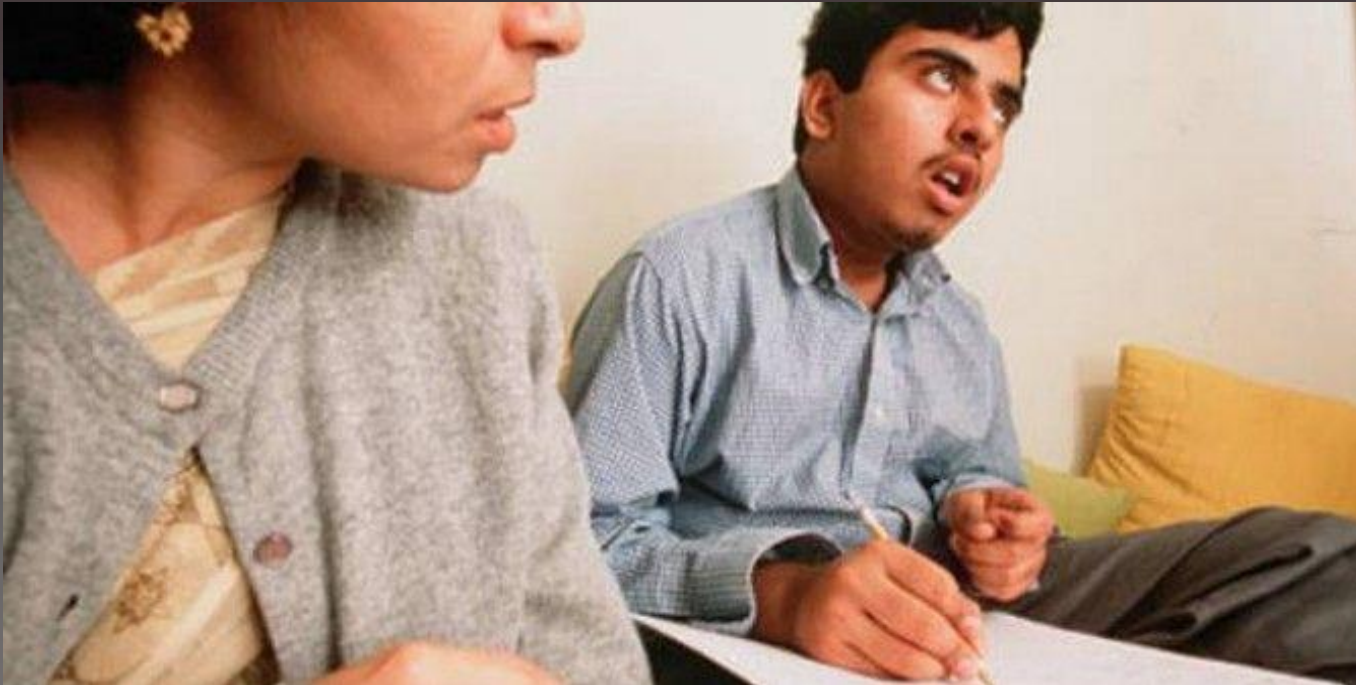
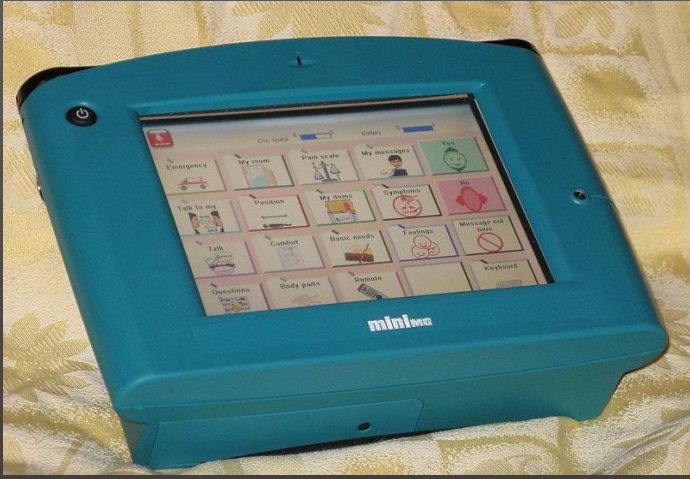
- Establish/ integrate interests and strengths
- Enhance self-confidence, agency, and self-esteem
- Changes, choices, coping with difficulties are sensitively supported
- Respect for difference: respectful language

## Example of misunderstanding

- Person pursues own strategies without guidance, support or boundaries- even if harmful
- Positive behavioural support (PBS)

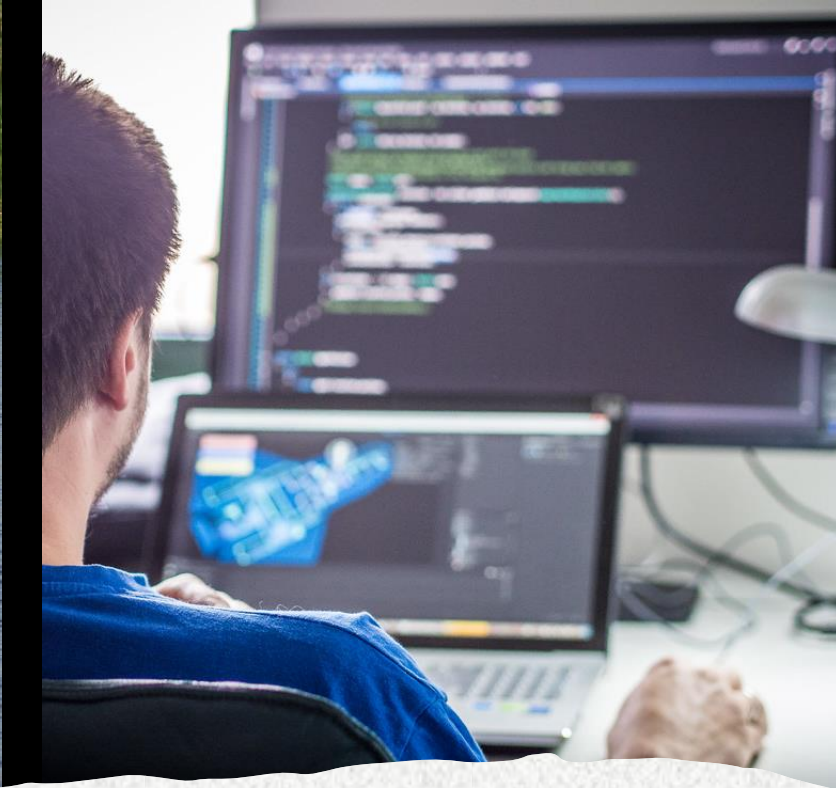
## Examples of violations

- Programme based on 'fixing' 'deficits'
- Choice denied –compulsion /confrontation
- Person referred to in demeaning or negative ways
- Poorly maintained or neglected environment



Open our  
minds





Students of the Month.



## Pushing boundaries



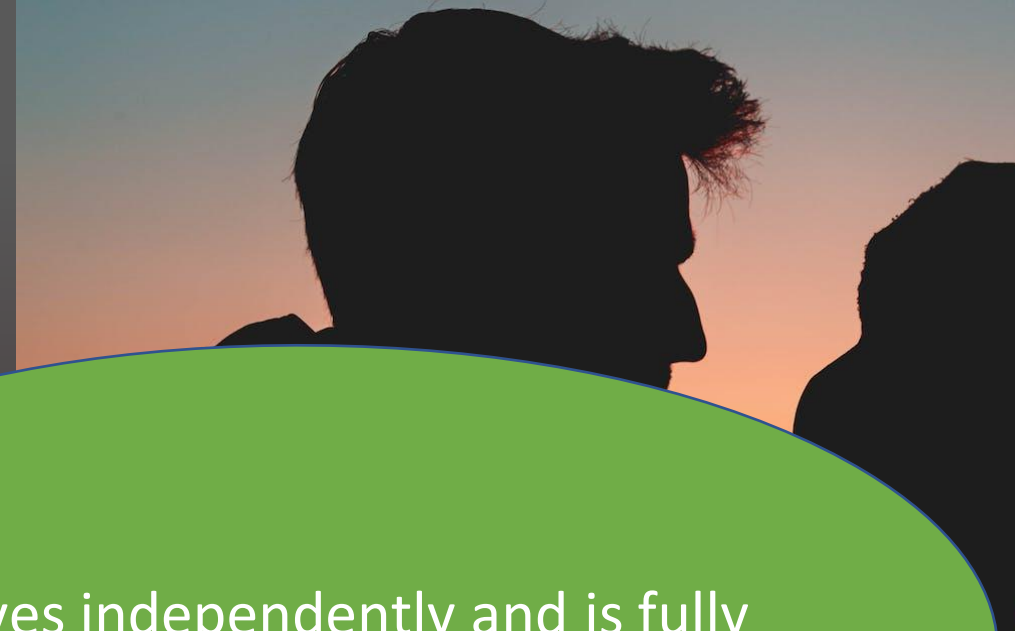
## Narratives

“Joe gets an intensive one-to-one package”

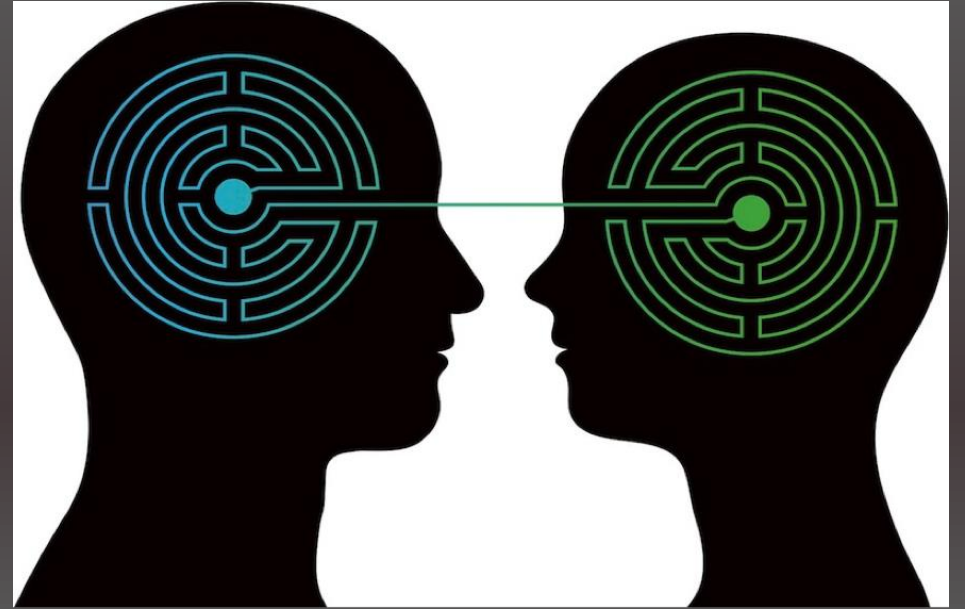
“Joe lives independently and is fully supported”

“Joe is complex”

“Joe is a very interesting person- I don't really understand him but I try”



EMPATHY

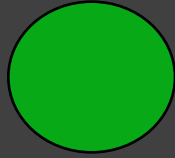


# Empathy

- We like other people to understand us, respond to us and see our point of view
- Autistic people may **experience the world as frightening, unpleasant or overwhelming** as a result of uncertainty, anxiety, how they are treated, or through their sensory experiences
- We can try to put ourselves in the place of the other person, to listen and to **understand how they are experiencing** the world
- We can anticipate based on our empathy

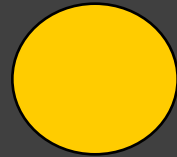


# Empathy



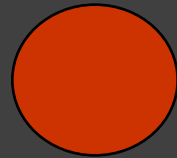
## Examples of good practice

- Identify, anticipate and understand potential aversive events or stressors
- Sensory profile –sensory audit
- Use of prosthetic devices/aids
- Assess level of comprehension
- Learn to listen



## Example of misunderstanding

- Blanket attribution of 'autism' characteristics (availability heuristic)



## Examples of violation

- Ignore views and preferences
- Confront with known stressors
- Impose our own choice / preference/ lifestyle

# Why reduce language?

Language is a code - Requires knowledge of the code - and time to process



Spoken language is auditory and abstract (here and then gone). May be taken literally or out of context

Written words and sentences are visual and concrete (here and stay) but require knowledge of the code – context may be a problem



Signs—symbols- photographs are visual (here and stay) and do not require knowledge of the code

Objects are concrete (here and stay and require no knowledge of code)



PLAY TO STRENGTHEN!

Too much information

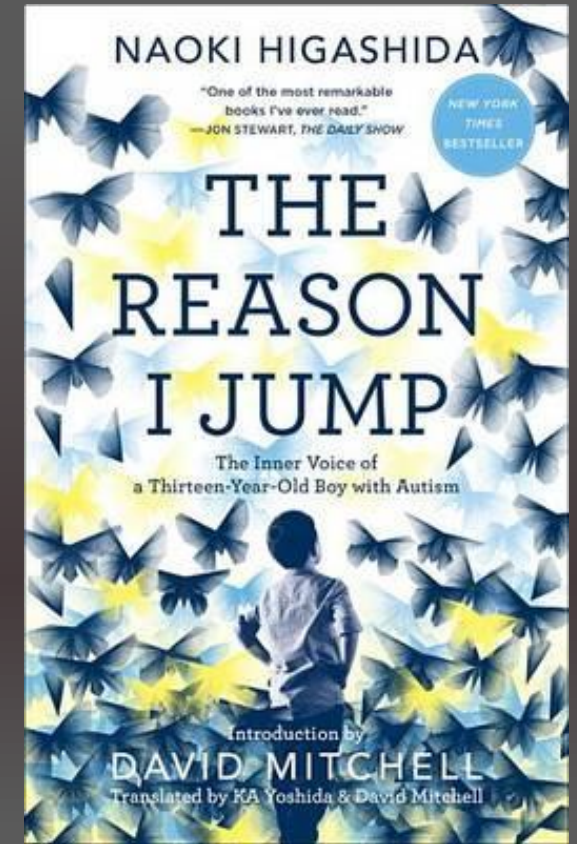
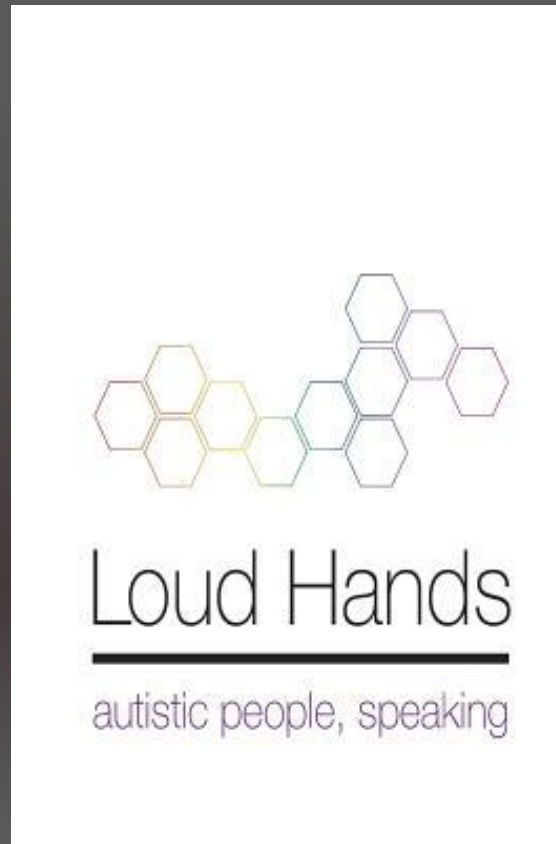
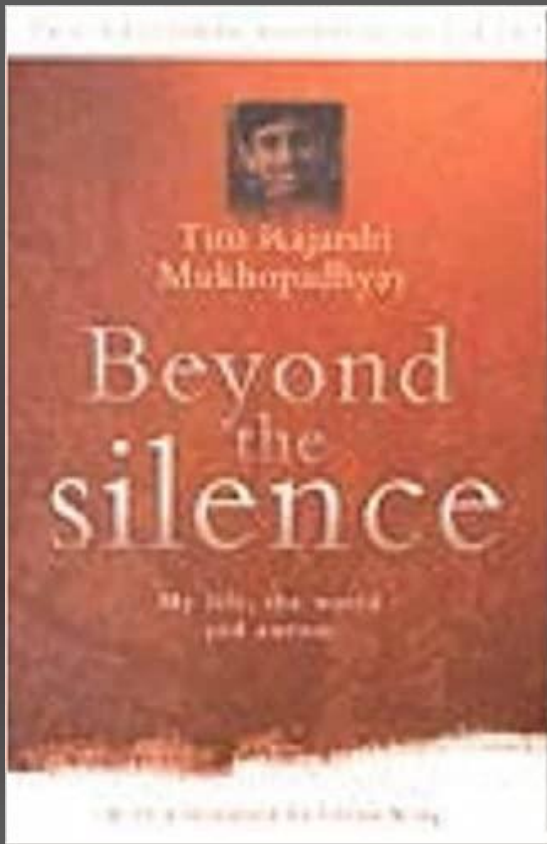
Why do we need to reduce or modify our language? Language is a code and rather like learning a foreign language, you need to know the code before understanding it and it might take time to process all of the information that is being conveyed and also the context in which it is being delivered. It is easier for many of us to process information visually, either through reading but sometimes we need to use symbols such as in road signs or by looking at objects to identify them. With spoken language we also need what is called a working memory to process the information, memorise it, make sense of it and then respond appropriately, before the information is lost from our working memory or we fail to grasp the context of the information, either because of literal interpretation, or because it is difficult to imagine or conceptualise. In autism, the ability to do this may be impaired so we need to adopt a range of strategies that take account of learning styles and memory issues in order to get the point across without the person losing the thread of what we mean to say..... .



Active listening – dialogue





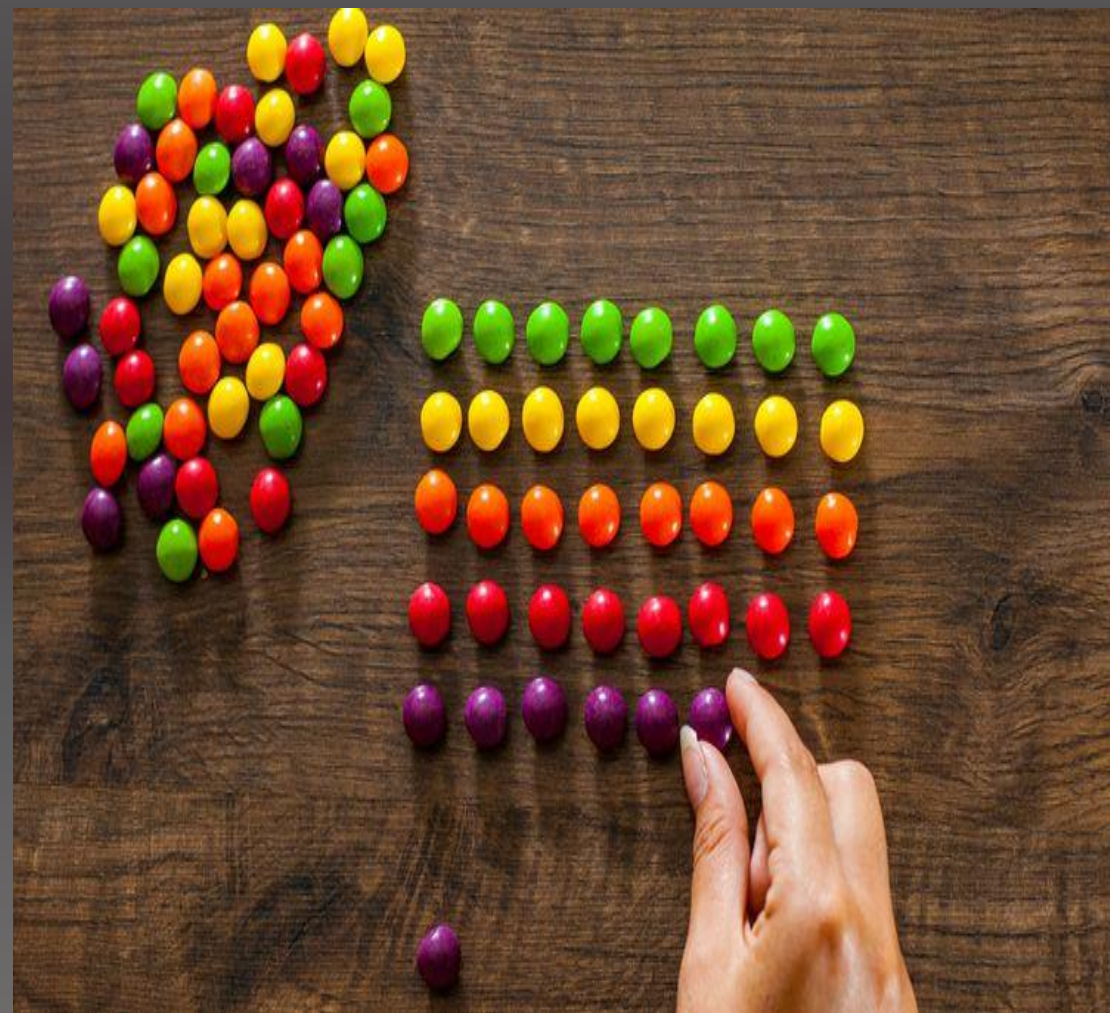


Open our minds

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# Comfort in exactness



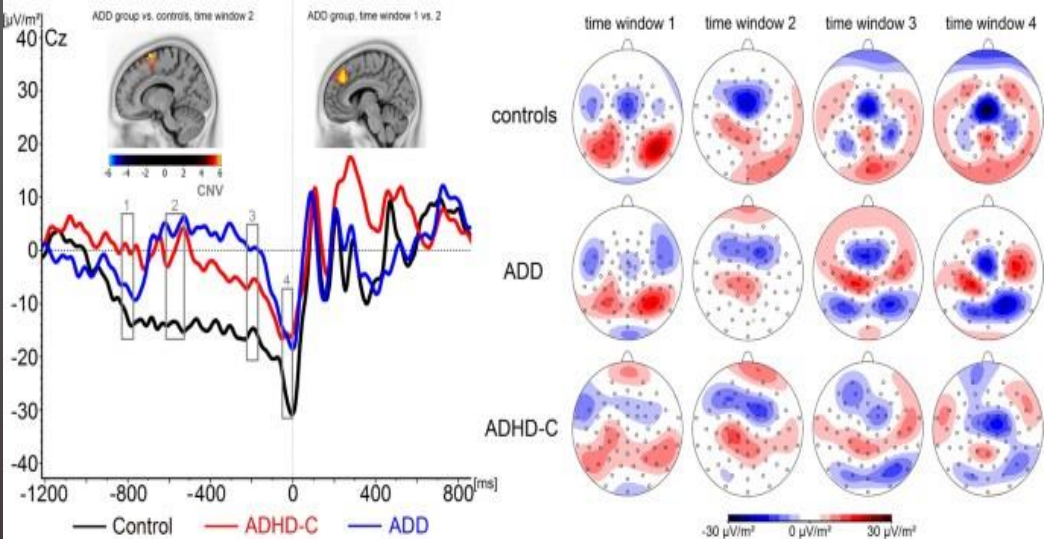


Too much information?





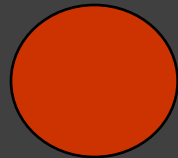
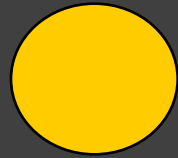
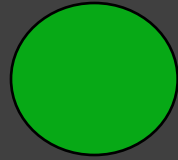
# LOW AROUSAL



## Low arousal

- Arousal is the physiological and psychological state of being awoken or stimulated
- Arousal activates the brain, increases heart rate and blood pressure and sensory alertness-‘flight , fight, or freeze’
- In autism, stress and sensory overload may cause over-arousal, leading to extreme anxiety, meltdown, shut down, trauma or long-term health problems
- We reduce arousal through calm, kind interactions, avoiding confrontation, providing structure and developing empathy
- Low arousal **does not mean no arousal**

# Low arousal



## Examples of Good practice

- Audit sensory environment
- Speak clearly; work calmly and quietly
- Interactions clear and unambiguous
- Avoid confrontation –be kind

## Examples of misunderstanding

- Environment 'Spartan' or austere
- Low arousal interpreted as 'no arousal'

## Examples of violation

- Confrontation, distraction
- Environment maintains known stressors e.g.
  - Loud or indiscriminate TV / music, odours (including perfumes and air-fresheners)
  - Background noise, Clutter
  - Harsh (especially fluorescent) lighting



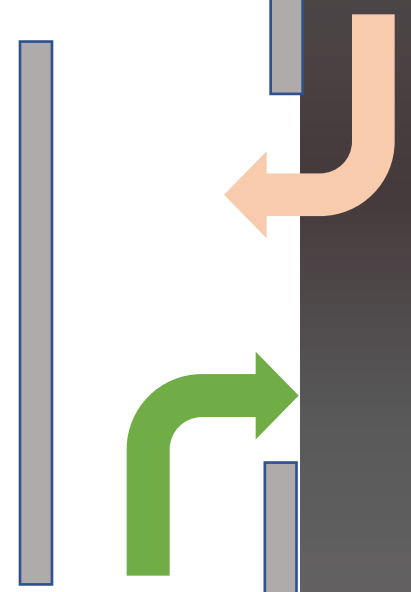
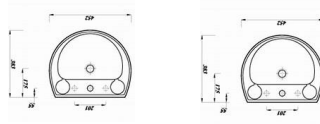
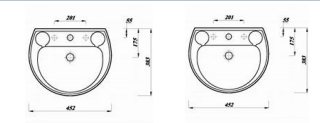
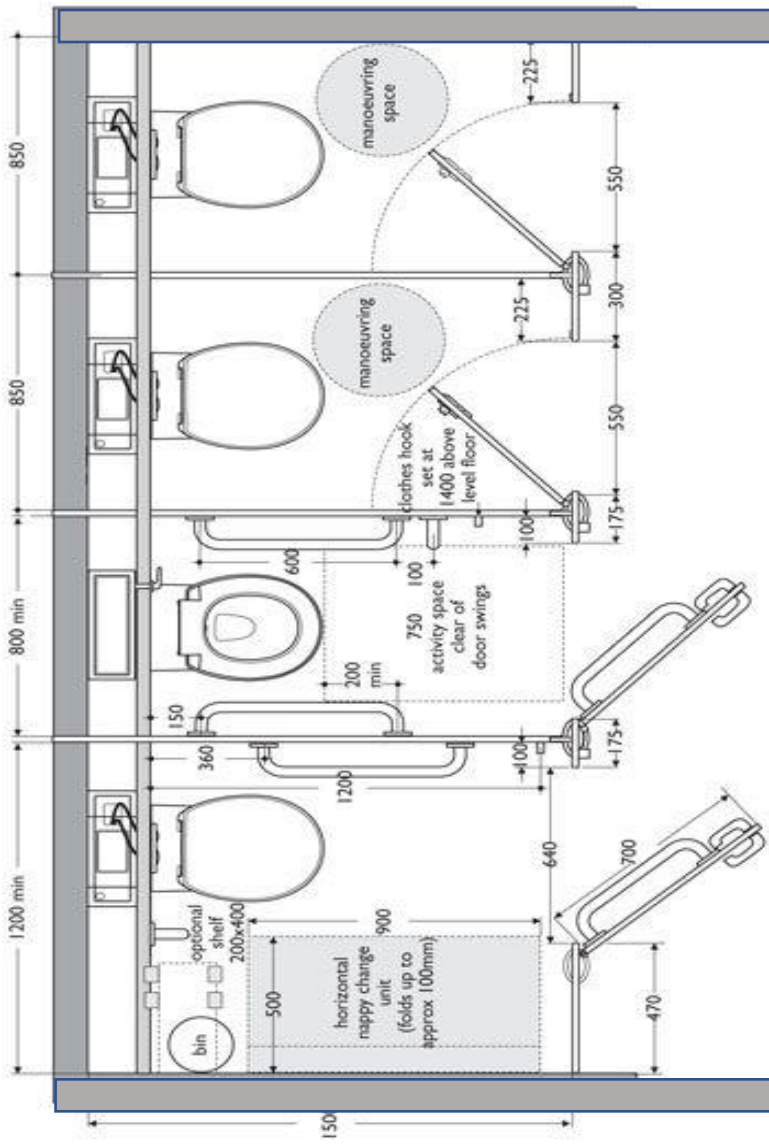
















Sensory regulation (and fun) (proprioception, vestibular)

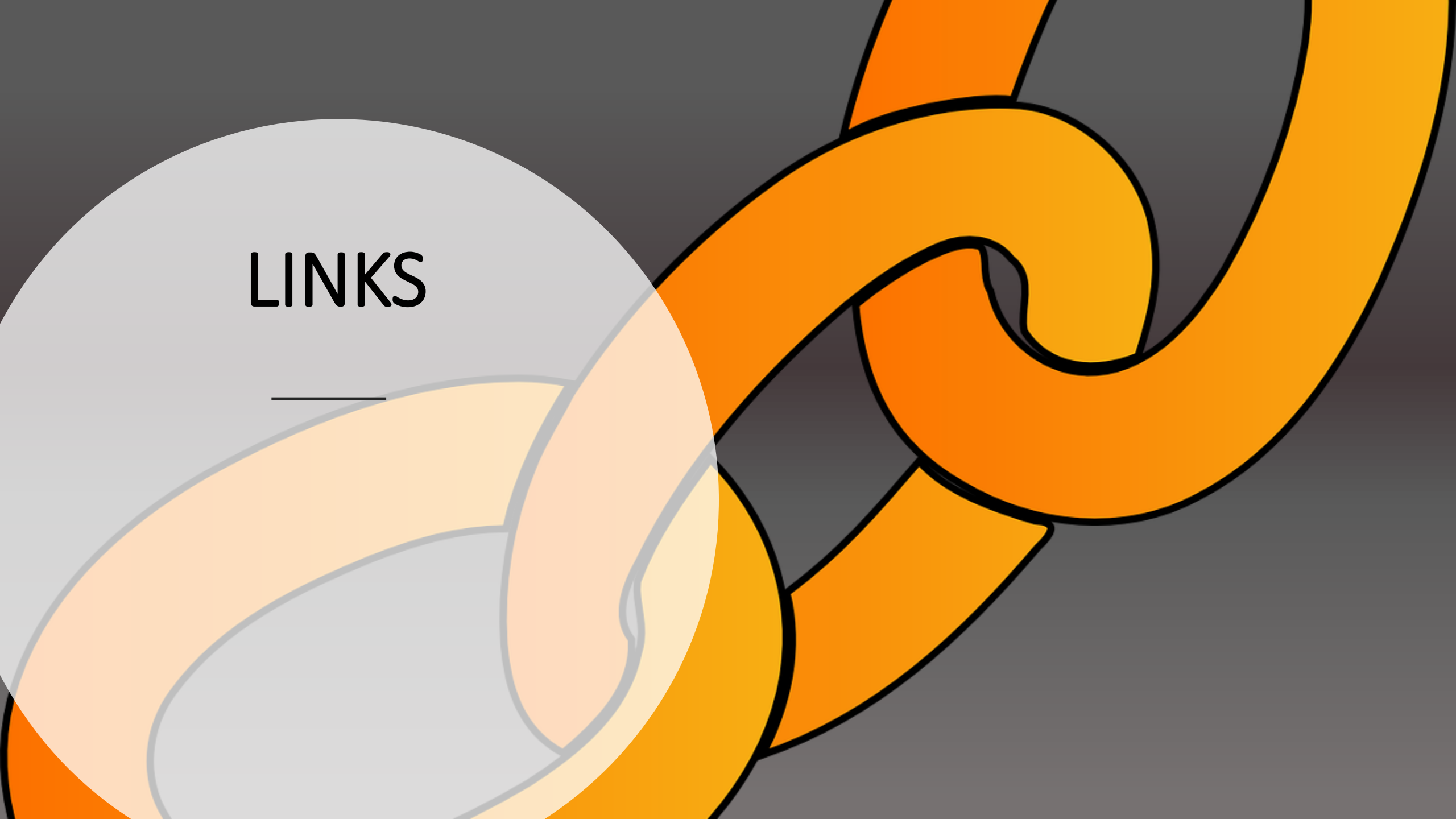
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LINKS

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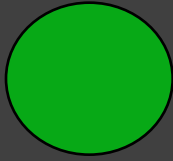


# Links

- We are each **connected** to our community, society and culture
- We thrive on connection, acceptance, tolerance, respect, kindness, and fairness- we all need to feel we **belong**
- We also thrive on consistency, honesty, and understanding
- We become distressed when these are absent, ignored, disjointed, or inconsistent
- We need to think how these are in place for each person



# Links



## Examples of good practice

- Involvement and effective communication between agencies, families and people
- Clubs, societies, interest groups; Connection, affiliation, mentoring, advocacy
- Consistency of approach



## Examples of Misunderstanding

- Uniformity mistaken for consistency
- Inconsistent or vague communication



## Examples of violation

- People 'othered' or excluded from decisions
- Changes unplanned or undertaken without consultation
- Poor coordination → inconsistent approaches

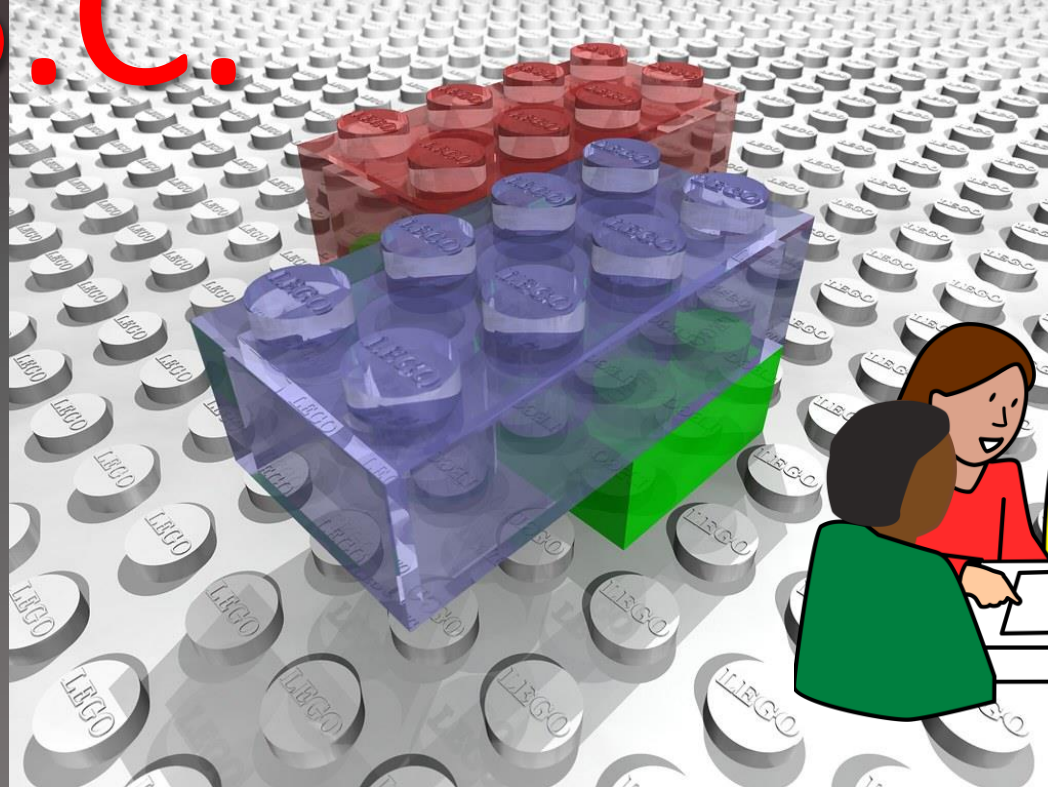
Welcome



A.B.C.



Accepted  
Belonging  
Connecting



# CONCLUSION

- SPELL framework
  - A socially valid, evidence-supported means of understanding and responding to autism
  - Empathy for the autistic perspective
  - Respectful -Avoidance of 'othering'
  - An approach to problem- solving and enhancing quality of life and opportunity
  - ABC (Acceptance, Belonging, Connection)

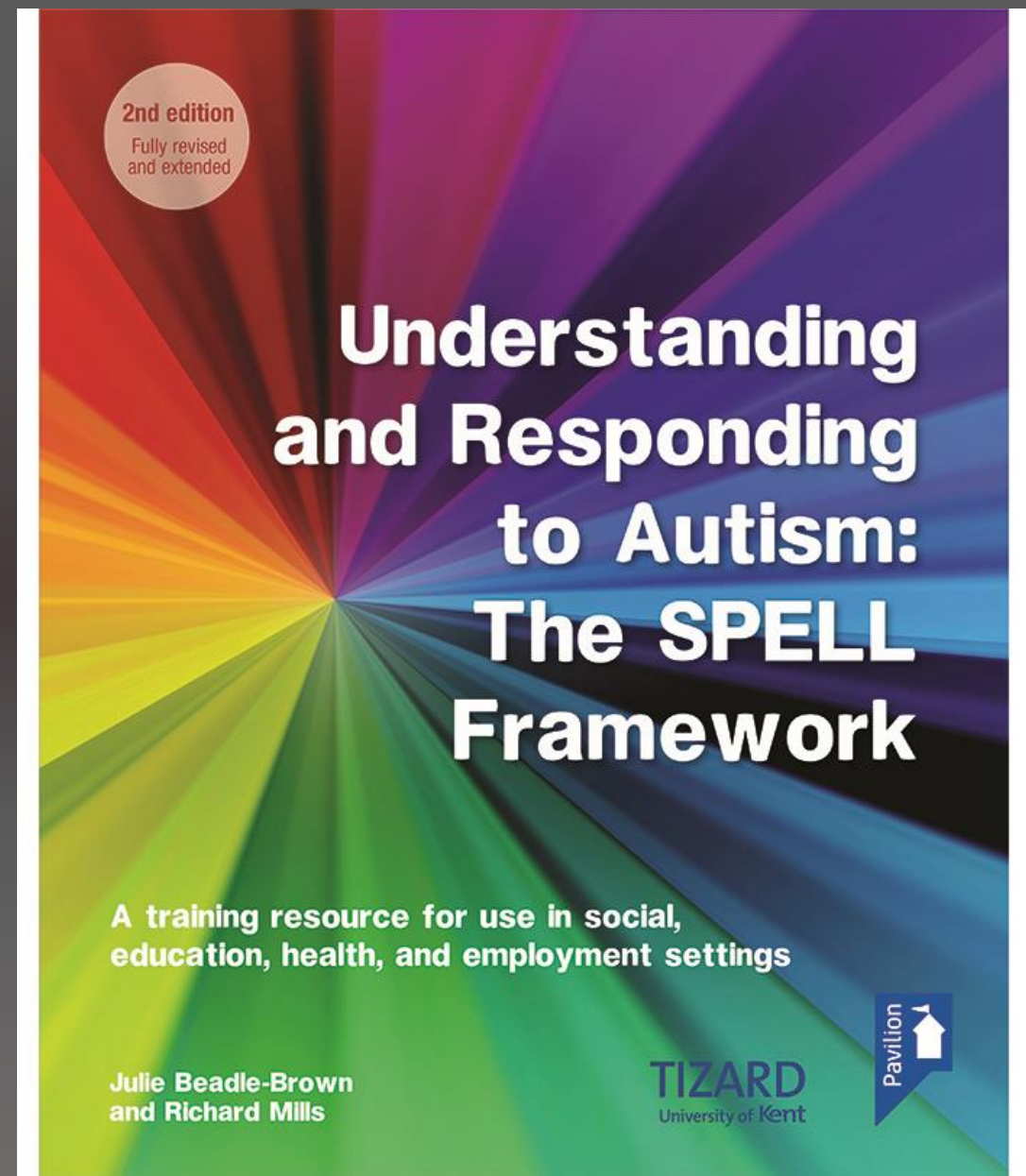


# CONCLUSION

- Modules available
  - Practice
  - Train the trainer
  - SPELL audit

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<https://www.pavpub.com/learning-disability/autism/understanding-and-responding-autism-spell-framework-2nd-edition>

Thank you

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