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EMBRACING NEURODIVERSITY:

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, PROFESSIONALS AND ALLIES



ADHD SLT

Neurodivergent-Affirming
Speech and Language Therapist
and Well-Being Support

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Hello,

My name is Jamie Louise Hollis (she/her) and I am a Neurodivergent Speech and Language Therapist based in Kent, England. I made this resource about embracing neurodiversity as I am passionate about all things neurodivergent-affirming. This guide is designed for anyone who supports neurodivergent individuals, whether in a professional or personal capacity.

In this resource, I delve into the principles and practices that help create supportive, inclusive environments for neurodivergent people. The guide covers essential concepts, practical strategies, and respectful language to use when working with or supporting neurodivergent individuals.

At the end of the guide, you'll find a glossary of useful terms to help clarify and reinforce the concepts discussed. I hope this resource proves to be a valuable tool in fostering understanding and positive interactions.

Kind regards,

Jamie

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY

1. LEARN ABOUT NEURODIVERSITY:

- Neurodiversity refers to the natural differences in how people's brains work and how they think and feel. This includes variations in social skills, learning styles, attention, mood, and other mental functions.

- **Some conditions that are part of neurodiversity include:**



Developmental Language Disorder

Epilepsy

Autism

Dyslexia

Dyspraxia

Tourette's Syndrome

ADHD

Down Syndrome

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UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY

2. ACKNOWLEDGE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

- Work on understanding that neurodivergent people experience the world in ways that are different from neurotypical people.
- Neurotypical refers to a person who does not have any neurological differences or conditions.
- Recognize that neurodivergent people have unique and different perspectives.
- Always use a strengths-based approach, e.g. for an ADHD person, highlight their creativity instead of a difficulty with focus.



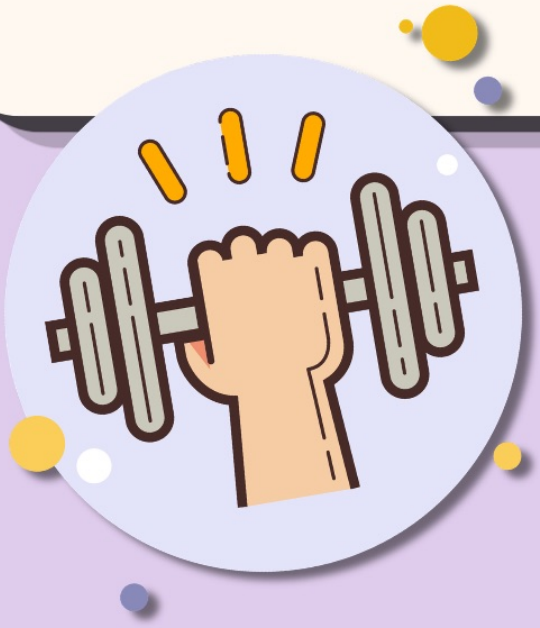


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COMMUNICATION

3. USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- Ask individuals how they prefer to identify, such as 'autistic person,' 'person with autism,' 'person with ADHD,' or 'ADHDer.' Some may use terms like 'AuDHD' if they identify with both autism and ADHD.
- Avoid terms that pathologize neurodivergence, such as 'suffering from,' 'afflicted by,' 'disorder,' 'cure,' 'deficits,' 'compliance,' and 'conformity.'
- Change the language you use: use 'difficulties' instead of 'deficits,' and emphasise strengths.



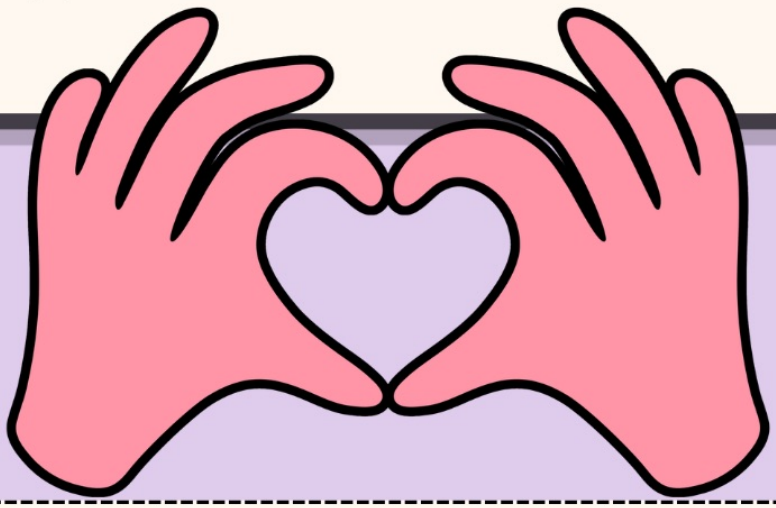


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COMMUNICATION

- DO NOT USE terms like 'high functioning' or 'low functioning,' as well as outdated or offensive terms like 'Asperger's'.
- Ask people for their pronouns, such as 'she,' 'he,' or 'they,' and normalise this by including your own pronouns in your email signature.
- Do not use terms like "mild autism" or "moderate autism" for autistic people. An autistic person's experiences with being autistic may. not be 'mild' to them and this focuses on how other people see it.
- Avoid saying things like, I'm so "ADHD/OCD" These phrases reduce serious diagnoses to quirky traits or personality quirks, minimizing the struggles that people with ADHD, OCD, or other conditions experience.





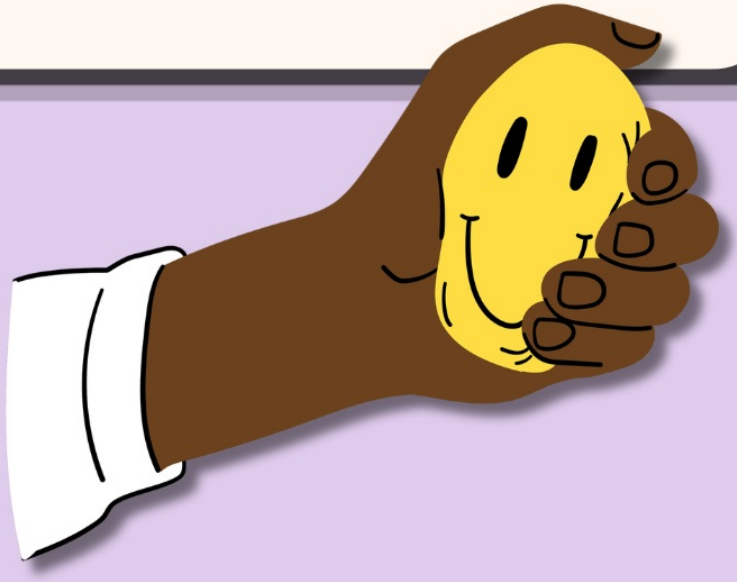
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COMMUNICATION

4. BE AWARE OF COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES

- Neurodivergent people might have different communication preferences and styles compared to neurotypical individuals.
- Some well-intentioned practices, like Active Listening, which emphasise making eye contact and sitting still, are based on neurotypical standards of communication and may not be supportive of neurodivergent individuals.
- Many neurodivergent people might prefer not to make eye contact and may fidget or stim while they talk. This doesn't mean they aren't listening.



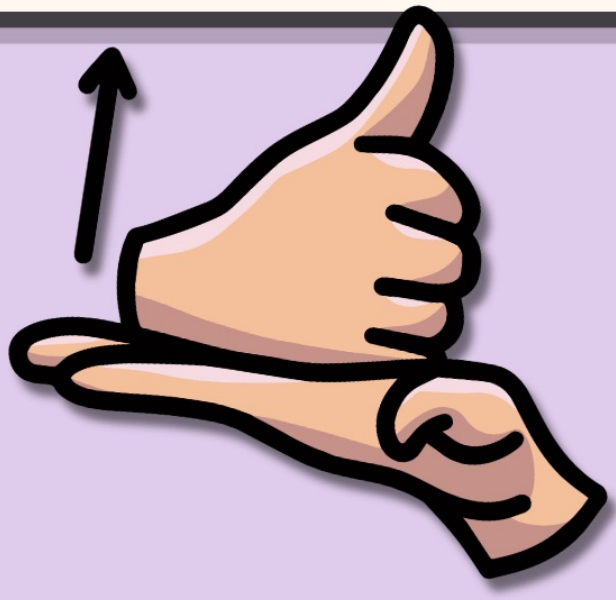


COMMUNICATION

5. FIND OUT THEIR COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

- Eye contact can make many neurodivergent people uncomfortable. If needed, find out and advocate for their preferences.
- Allow ample time for processing, using a 10-second rule when waiting for a response.
- If they still don't respond, use gentle language, such as, 'Can I do anything to help?'
- Use clear and direct language, and ask if they have any specific communication needs, such as AAC or sign language.





ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESSIBILITY

6. CREATE NEURODIVERGENT FRIENDLY SPACES

- Provide sensory-friendly environments such as rooms with controlled lighting, quiet spaces or rooms with access to wobble cushions/ear defenders.
- Offer quiet spaces for breaks from sensory input and/or 5 minute movement breaks in the day.
- Regularly check in with the person and ask if they need anything that you might not be aware of, i.e. different seating? Remote working?
- Do not use offensive symbols such as the puzzle piece - this is widely rejected by the majority of autistic people.

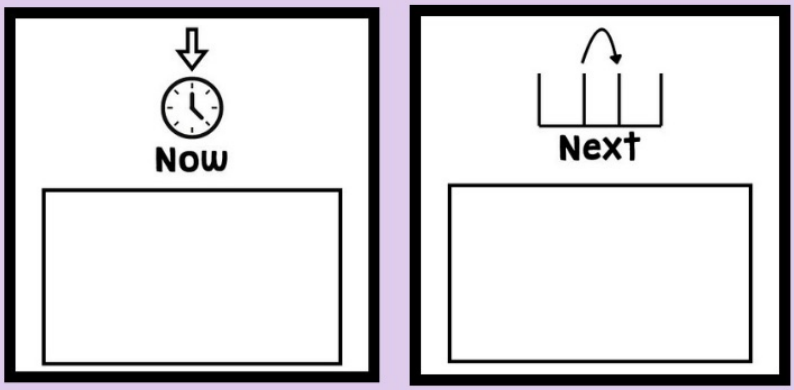




ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESSIBILITY

7. OFFER FLEXIBILITY

- Allow for flexible work/study environments, i.e remote work, different seated options.
- Be open to different ways of completing tasks.
- Offer movement breaks/sensory circuits.
- For meetings or new situations, send the adult/child a break down with what will happen, when and who will be there.
- Utilise visual aids to help with transitions, i.e now and next boards and visual time tables.
- Here are some examples below:





EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

8. EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Stay informed about neurodivergent conditions.
- Share accurate information to reduce stigma and misconceptions.
- Call out stigma and discrimination when you see it.
- Offer workshops for understanding neurodivergent communication.
- Many Speech and Language Therapists and other health care professionals provide training/workshops for this.





EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

9. ADVOCATE FOR NEURODIVERGENT RIGHTS

- Support policies and practices that promote inclusivity and accessibility.
- Stand against discrimination and advocate for equal opportunities.
- Question injustice/discrimination when you see it.
- Be proud to call yourself a neurodivergent inclusive employer/education setting! The more others see it, the more we spread the word of neurodivergent affirming approaches.
- Call out outdated terms when you hear them, e.g high and low functioning/Asperger's.





RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT

10. BUILD TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS

- Show empathy.
- Be respectful.
- Be consistent and reliable in your interactions.
- Be mindful that many neurodivergent people have faced a life of stigmatising language and mistreatment.
- Use gentle language and avoid blame-laden language, i.e. What's wrong with you?





RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT

11. OFFER SUPPORT WITHOUT OVERSTEPPING

- Ask how you can help without assuming what is needed.
- Respect their autonomy and choices.
- Do not assume competence based off one observation. Many neurodivergent have fluctuating communication profiles.

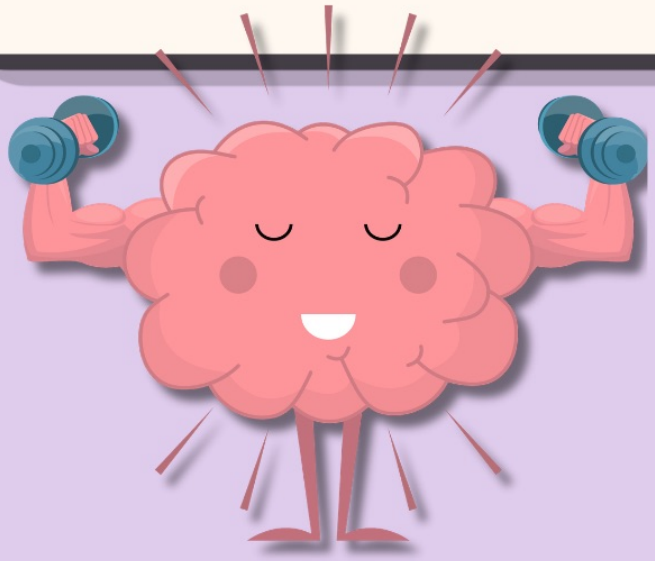




RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT

12. RECOGNISE AND CELEBRATE STRENGTHS

- Take a strengths-based approach.
- Focus more on what they can do, i.e creativity, hyper focus, passionate.
- Encourage them to pursue interests and passions.







SELF-REFLECTION & GROWTH

13. REFLECT ON YOUR BIASES

- Do you have any preconceived notions about any neurodivergence? i.e that autistic people lack empathy? That ADHD isn't real?
- Reflect on these myths and find out how these misconceptions begun. Continuously work to challenge and change them.
- Educate others about your new found knowledge.





SELF-REFLECTION & GROWTH

14. SEEK FEEDBACK

- Ask your neurodivergent person/people for feedback on how you can be more affirming.
- Take a non defensive stance and be open to making changes.





RESOURCES & SUPPORT

15. PROVIDE ACCESS TO RESOURCES

- Share information on support services, accommodation and advocacy groups.
- Connect neurodivergent people to communities and networks that can provide additional support.
- Deliver educations sessions/workshops on understanding neurodiversity.



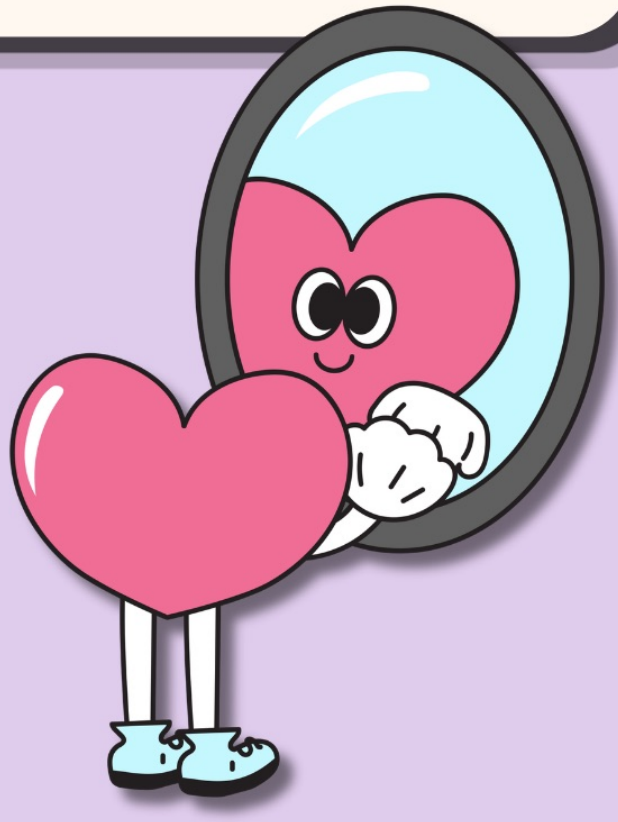


RESOURCES & SUPPORT

16. ENCOURAGE SELF-ADVOCACY

- Support neurodivergent people to advocate for their own needs and rights BUT be there for them if they need support if someone challenges their right to self determination.
- Empower them to take an active role in decisions that impact their lives.





GLOSSARY

Advocacy:
Advocacy involves actively supporting and promoting the rights, needs, and interests of individuals or groups to ensure they receive fair treatment and access to resources.

AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication):
Tools and strategies used to support or replace spoken communication for individuals with difficulties in speaking. This can include communication boards, apps, or devices.

Alexithymia:
A condition where individuals have difficulty identifying and expressing their own emotions, which can affect their emotional awareness and communication with others. Often experienced by autistic/ADHD individuals.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):
A neurodevelopmental condition characterised by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that interfere with daily functioning or development. Individuals with ADHD may struggle with tasks requiring sustained focus but often excel in areas that require creativity and quick thinking.

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC):
A neurodevelopmental condition characterised by differences in social communication, behavior, and sensory experiences. Autistic individuals often have remarkable attention to detail, deep focus, and unique problem-solving skills, offering valuable perspectives and expertise.

GLOSSARY

Burnout:
A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress or overwork, leading to decreased performance and feelings of cynicism or detachment. Autistic or ADHD burnout is a more severe form of burnout, often resulting from cumulative stressors unique to neurodivergent experiences, and can have a profound impact on the individual's daily functioning and well-being.

A**uDHD:**
A term used by some individuals to describe their experience of both autism and ADHD, reflecting their combined neurodivergent traits.

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD):
Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a condition characterised by difficulties in acquiring and using language skills that are not attributable to hearing loss, intellectual disabilities, or other identifiable causes.

Discrimination:
Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or disability.

Dysgraphia:
A neurodivergence characterised by difficulties with handwriting, spelling, and organising written work.

Dyslexia:
A neurodivergence marked by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and difficulties with spelling and decoding abilities, which affects reading and writing skills.

GLOSSARY

Eye Contact Sensitivity:
The discomfort some neurodivergent individuals may feel when required to make eye contact, which can affect their ability to communicate comfortably.

Equality:
Equality is the principle of ensuring that everyone has the same rights, opportunities, and treatment regardless of their differences.

Executive Functioning:
A set of cognitive processes that include planning, organising, problem-solving, and regulating behavior and emotions, which are essential for goal-directed activities and adaptive functioning.

Fidgeting:
Movements or actions that individuals might use to help focus or self-regulate. This includes actions like tapping, shifting, or using stress balls.

Hypersensitivity:
An increased sensitivity to sensory input, such as sounds, lights, textures, or tastes, which can lead to heightened reactions or discomfort in response to stimuli that may not affect others as strongly.

Hyposensitivity:
A reduced sensitivity to sensory input, which may cause individuals to seek out more intense stimuli or fail to notice sensory information that others might find bothersome or stimulating.

GLOSSARY

Hyperfocus:
An intense and prolonged concentration on a particular activity or interest, often to the exclusion of everything else, which can lead to high productivity.

Inclusive:
An approach or practice that actively embraces and integrates diverse individuals and perspectives, ensuring that everyone has equal access, opportunities, and a sense of belonging, regardless of their differences.

Inclusive Language:
Language that respects and acknowledges the diversity of neurodivergent experiences. It avoids terms that are stigmatising or pathologizing and uses person-first or identity-first language as preferred by the individual.

Info Dumping:
The act of providing a lot of of information on a topic all at once, often in a detailed and manner that some neurotypicals may find difficult to follow.

Interoception:
The ability to perceive and interpret internal bodily sensations, such as hunger, thirst, pain, and changes in heartbeat, which helps individuals understand their internal state and regulate their emotional and physical responses.

Masking:
The process of concealing or suppressing one's natural behaviours, emotions, or traits in order to conform to social expectations or fit in, often used by neurodivergent individuals to navigate social situations.

GLOSSARY

Meltdown:
A state of intense emotional and sensory overwhelm where an individual may experience a loss of control, often resulting in outbursts, crying, or extreme distress, typically triggered by stress or overstimulation.

Neurodivergent:
A term used to describe individuals whose neurological development and functioning differ compared to the neurotypical population. This includes conditions like autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others.

Neurodiversity:
The concept that neurological differences such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia are natural variations of the human brain, rather than disorders or deficits.

Neuronormative:
A perspective or set of practices that assumes and prioritises typical neurological functioning as the standard, often overlooking or undervaluing the needs and experiences of neurodivergent individuals.

Neurotypical:
Refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning are considered typical or within the average range, often contrasted with neurodivergent individuals.

Nonverbal Communication:
Forms of communication other than spoken words, such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures. It can be particularly relevant for understanding neurodivergent communication styles.

GLOSSARY

Neurodivergent-Affirming:
An approach or practice that acknowledges, respects, and supports the unique experiences and needs of neurodivergent individuals, emphasising their strengths and valuing their differences rather than trying to conform them to neurotypical standards.

Pathologizing:
Describing neurodivergent traits in a way that frames them as disorders or deficits rather than natural variations. Terms like "suffering from" or "afflicted by" are examples to avoid.

Processing Time:
The time needed for an individual to understand and respond to information or questions. Allowing ample processing time respects the individual's pace and reduces stress.

Persistent/pervasive Drive for Autonomy:
A strong and persistent desire for independence and self-direction, often manifesting as a consistent effort to control one's own environment and make decisions without external interference.

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD):
A condition characterised by extreme emotional sensitivity and pain in response to perceived or actual rejection, criticism, or failure, which can lead to intense emotional distress and impact one's self-esteem and social interactions. Often reported by ADHD people.

GLOSSARY

Sensory Input:
The information received through the senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell). Neurodivergent individuals may have unique sensitivities or preferences regarding sensory input.

Sensory Output:
The information or responses generated by the brain in reaction to sensory input, including how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to sensory stimuli such as sights, sounds, textures, tastes, and smells.

Sensory Seeking:
A behavior characterised by actively seeking out intense or frequent sensory experiences, such as touching various textures or engaging in stimulating activities, to fulfil a need for sensory input and regulation.

Shutdown:
A state of overwhelming stress or sensory overload where an individual may temporarily withdraw, become non-responsive, or retreat from external stimuli, often as a means of coping with excessive demands or emotional overload.

Special Interest:
A deep and intense focus on a specific topic or activity, often pursued with great enthusiasm and expertise, which provides significant enjoyment and engagement for the individual.

Stimming:
Short for self-stimulatory behavior, this refers to repetitive movements or sounds that some neurodivergent individuals use to self-regulate, such as hand-flapping or humming.

GLOSSARY

SStrengths-Based Approach:
A method that focuses on identifying and leveraging an individual's unique strengths and talents rather than emphasising their difficulties or deficits.

Situational Mutism:
A condition where an individual is unable to speak in specific social situations or environments despite having the ability to speak in other contexts, often due to anxiety or stress.

Stigma:
A negative social label or stereotype that leads to discrimination and prejudice, often resulting in the unfair treatment or marginalisation of individuals based on characteristics such as disability, mental health conditions, or neurodivergence.

Tics:
Repetitive, involuntary movements or sounds, such as blinking or throat clearing, that are characteristic of conditions like Tourette syndrome and can vary in frequency and intensity.

Tourette Syndrome:
A neurodivergence characterised by the presence of multiple motor tics and one or more vocal tics over a period of time, which can cause repetitive, involuntary movements and sounds.

Trigger:
A stimulus or situation that evokes a strong emotional or psychological response related to a past trauma, often leading to distressing symptoms or reactions.

GLOSSARY

Trauma:
A deeply distressing or disturbing experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, often resulting in long-lasting emotional, psychological, or physical effects.

Trauma Response:
The range of emotional, psychological, and physical reactions an individual experiences as a result of a traumatic event, which can include symptoms such as anxiety, hyper vigilance, or withdrawal.

Trauma-Informed:
In approach that integrates an understanding of the widespread impact of trauma into practices and interactions, emphasising safety, empathy, and support to help individuals heal and recover while avoiding re-traumatisation.

Trauma-Informed Language:
A communication approach that recognises and acknowledges the impact of trauma on individuals, using sensitive, empathetic, and non-judgmental language to create a supportive and safe environment.

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Supporting communication, autonomy and well-being through creative, flexible activities.
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