



SUPPORTING NEURODIVERGENT PEOPLE TO BE THEIR MOST AUTHENTIC SELVES

Katie Kerley, BSC (cur.occ) MAOTI , Horizons Therapy Services Ltd, 2022



WHO AM I?

Katie Kerley, an occupational therapist and clinical director of Horizons Therapy Services in Dundalk, Ireland

Multiply Neurodivergent- Autistic, Dyspraxic, ADHD

Sensory processing differences

Passionate about working with Neurodivergent people and helping them to be the best and most satisfied version of themselves.

Specialising in sensory processing and how it effects meaningful occupation.



TODAY WE EXPLORE...

- RATIONALE AND CLINICAL REASONING
- ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSTICS
- LANGUAGE MATTERS
- WHAT TO THROW AWAY AND WHAT TO KEEP
- HOW DO WE ENSURE WE ARE NEURO AFFIRMATIVE?
WHAT IS IT?
- THE RICH AND DIVERSE EXPERIENCE OF AUTISTICS



OCCUPATIONAL JUSTICE



- “THE RIGHT OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL TO BE ABLE TO MEET BASIC NEEDS AND TO HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND LIFE CHANCES TO REACH TOWARD HER OR HIS POTENTIAL BUT SPECIFIC TO THE INDIVIDUAL'S ENGAGEMENT IN DIVERSE AND MEANINGFUL OCCUPATION.” – WILLARD AND TOWNSEND



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS HAVE AN ETHICAL AND MORAL DUTY TO ENSURE THAT OUR CLIENTS GET TO ENGAGE IN OCCUPATIONS THAT ARE MEANINGFUL TO THEM.

WE DO NOT GET TO DECIDE WHAT IS MEANINGFUL TO A PERSON
THIS IS DIVERSE AND UNIQUE TO EACH INDIVIDUAL

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO ENABLE PEOPLE TO BE THEIR MOST REAL AND AUTHENTIC SELVES THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF OCCUPATIONS AND ACTIVITIES THAT PROVIDE JOY, PURPOSE OR VALUE TO THEM.

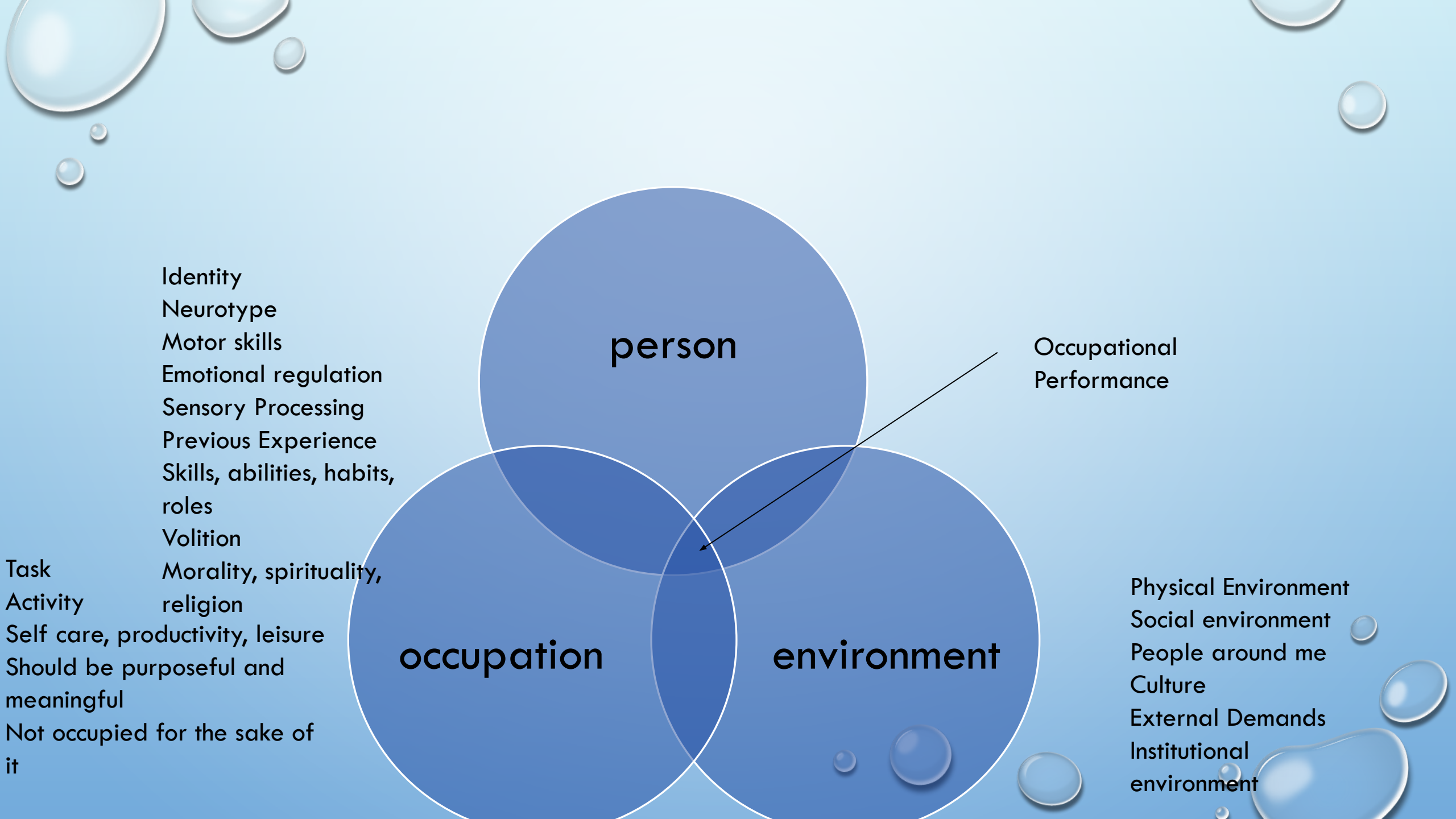


“ENFORCING NEURO-NORMATIVE STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR AND OCCUPATION DENIES AN AUTISTIC PERSON THE RIGHT TO THEIR OWN INDIVIDUALITY AND THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE WHAT IS MEANINGFUL TO THEM. THIS IS AN OCCUPATIONAL JUSTICE ISSUE AS WELL AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE.”

Katie Kerley

Katie Kerley -
Occupational
Therapist





person

Identity
Neurotype
Motor skills
Emotional regulation
Sensory Processing
Previous Experience
Skills, abilities, habits, roles
Volition
Morality, spirituality, religion

Occupational Performance

occupation

Task
Activity
Self care, productivity, leisure
Should be purposeful and meaningful
Not occupied for the sake of it

environment

Physical Environment
Social environment
People around me
Culture
External Demands
Institutional environment

WHY???

Why is this person coming to see me?

Why is this goal meaningful to them?

Why are we doing this?



OTHER QUESTIONS TO ASK...

- IS THIS ETHICAL/ MORAL?
- IS THIS PERSON CENTRED?
- WHAT IS INFORMING MY PRACTICE?
- WHAT IS THIS PERSON'S LIVED EXPERIENCE? (HERE ANECDOTES MATTER)
- WHAT BRINGS MEANING TO THIS PERSON'S LIFE?
- IS THIS RIGHT FOR THIS PERSON?
- HOW DO I KNOW?
- WHO IS BENEFITTING??

A person in a dark suit is shown from the chest up, holding a glowing, translucent brain with intricate neural connections. The background is dark blue with several bubbles of various sizes floating around. The text is centered in white, bold, uppercase letters.

• NO PERSON NEEDS TO BE IN THERAPY JUST FOR BEING NEURODIVERGENT

THE UNLEARNING JOURNEY...



THINGS I LEARNED TO SCRAP

- SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING
- WHOLE BODY LISTENING
- PECS
- BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION
- PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE
- DIAGNOSIS = THERAPY
- “FITTING IN”
- ASSUMING OBSERVATIONS ARE CORRECT



WORDS I THREW OUT *

- AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER
- IMPAIRMENT
- DYSFUNCTION
- DEFICIT
- SYMPTOM
- FUNCTIONING LEVELS
- ASPERGERS
- TREATMENT
- MORE....

* I STILL RESPECT MY CLIENT'S PREFERENCES....

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THESE USED TO BE PECS BOARDS.... UNTIL WE KNEW BETTER

- ROOTS IN BEHAVIOURISM & COMPLIANCE
- PITCHES COMMUNICATION AS AN EXCHANGE INSTEAD OF A DYNAMIC PROCESS,
- ONLY ALLOWS FOR REQUESTS (NO COMMENTS, NO NARRATIVE ETC).
- NOT A TOTAL COMMUNICATION APPROACH
- DOES NOT HONOUR ALL FORMS OF COMMUNICATION.





**THERE IS NO SHAME IN ADMITTING THAT YOU WERE PREVIOUSLY
SPEAKING FROM A LESS INFORMED PLACE – KELLY HAYES**

NEURO-AFFIRMING PRACTICE IS...

- RECOGNISING AND RESPECTING THAT ALL DIFFERENT TYPES OF MINDS ARE VALUABLE, IMPORTANT, AND WORTHY OF RESPECT
- CENTRING ND VOICES, AUTISTIC LED
- DIFFERENT WAY OF BEING, THINKING, EXPERIENCING
- DIVERGENCE IS A NATURAL, NORMAL AND NEEDED PART OF HUMAN DIVERSITY.
- SHOULD ALWAYS BE A WORK IN PROGRESS,
- REMAIN OPEN TO CORRECTION

CONT....

- RECOGNISE THE STRENGTHS, CULTURE AND IDENTITY OF DIFFERENT NEUROTYPES
- ACKNOWLEDGE SUPPORT NEEDS
- AIM TO MEET THOSE NEEDS BY ADAPTING THE ENVIRONMENT, TASK/ACTIVITY, COMMUNICATION AND DEMANDS WHEN NEEDED
- DO NOT CHANGE A PERSON'S WAY OF BEING OR SEEK COMPLIANCE OR CONFORMITY.

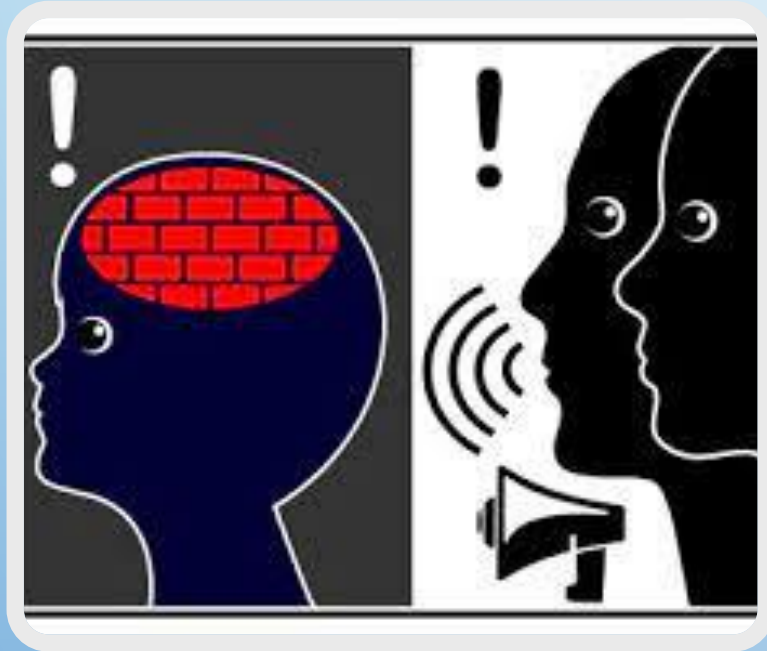


- ONE OF THE BIGGEST HURDLES WE HAVE TO CROSS IS THE NEED FOR SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES
 - WE ADVOCATE FOR THIS
- AMPLIFY AND LEARN FROM THE VOICES OF NEURODIVERGENT PEOPLE AND THE RICH COMMUNITIES WE ARE PART OF
- EDUCATE THE GENERAL POPULATION

**WE CANNOT REMAIN
COMPLICIT IN A BROKEN
SYSTEM**



WHAT ARE WE SAYING WHEN WE PUSH COMPLIANCE?



- YOUR COMFORT DOESN'T MATTER
- I DON'T CARE WHY
- YOUR NEEDS ARE LESS IMPORTANT THAN COMPLIANCE
- MAKES CHILDREN VULNERABLE
- HOW COMPLIANT CHILDREN COPE AS ADULTS??

The background features a complex, abstract pattern of swirling colors in shades of dark blue, teal, brown, and black, resembling marbled paper or liquid. Scattered throughout the composition are numerous bubbles of varying sizes, some with highlights, giving the impression of an underwater scene or a microscopic view.

COMPLIANCE IS NEVER THE GOAL

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THINGS TO BE MINDFUL OF...



BEHAVIOUR IS **NEVER** THE WHOLE PICTURE

IT IS WHAT WE SEE ON THE SURFACE

BEHAVIOUR ≠ EMOTIONS



- EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION IS NOT A CHOICE
- MELTDOWNS ARE NOT A CHOICE
- BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION
- MISGUIDED TO APPROACH THESE AS BEHAVIOURS
- LET'S NOT SWOOP IN AND TARGET SOMETHING THAT IS PROVIDING US INSIGHT?

AUTONOMY AND SELF ADVOCACY



- CONSENT
- BODILY AUTONOMY
- A VALUABLE LIFE SKILL
- NO IS A COMPLETE SENTENCE
- CHILDREN HAVE TO BE ABLE TO EXPRESS DISCOMFORT, DISLIKE, UPSET ETC
- POWER TO EXERT INFLUENCE
- MAKE CHOICES

COMMUNICATION

- HONOUR ALL FORMS
- TOTAL COMMUNICATION APPROACH INCLUDING...
- SPEECH,
- VOCALISATIONS
- GESTURES
- BODY LANGUAGE
- BEING TAKEN BY THE HAND TO THINGS AND PLACES
- AAC (ALTERNATIVE AND AUGMENTED COMMUNICATION).





- ADAPT YOUR COMMUNICATION
- SILENCE IS OK, OFTEN VALUABLE
- LEARN TO BE COMFORTABLE
- DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE
- UNRESTRICTED ACCESS TO ROBUST AND RELIABLE AAC

WHAT ELSE TO LEARN ABOUT...



- DOUBLE EMPATHY PROBLEM
- THEORY OF MIND??
- MONOTROPISM/ INFODUMPING

SUPPORT NEEDS



Unrestricted access

Readily available

Flexible

Tailored to individual

Sometimes we need to advocate for support needs in other environments

IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENT

- WILL LIKELY NEVER BE PERFECT
- ADAPT WHAT YOU CAN
- - LIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS ETC
- ENSURE COMFORT, SAFETY, SECURITY
- OPPORTUNITIES AND AFFORDANCES VERUS BARRIERS



AUTISTIC CULTURE

- RICH AND DIVERSE!
- COMMUNITY
- WE ARE EXTRA-ORDINARY AND ORDINARY
- WE MATTER BECAUSE WE ARE HUMAN





TRAUMA...



INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES



Cannot be neuroaffirmative without being inclusive of all forms of diversity

Racial identity

Culture, religious or moral beliefs

Lgbtqia

Gender identity

Co-occurring disability

Other neurodivergences

Mindfulness of trauma

IDENTIFICATION/ DIAGNOSIS

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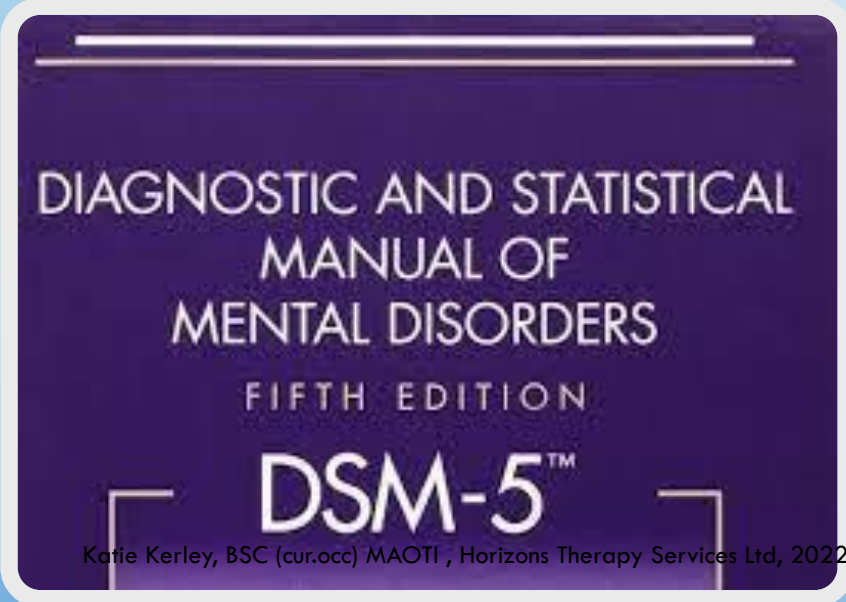
WORDS DO HAVE POWER

- AUTISTIC, DISABILITY....NOT BAD WORDS!
- SO MANY EUPHEMISMS – THIS IS A PROBLEM
- DESTIGMATISE THESE WORDS!!!
- LANGUAGE EVOLVES ALL THE TIME
- HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE TO FAMILIES AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS?
- ARE WE HELPING TO BREAK THE STIGMA?
- LETS NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE TRAGEDY NARRATIVE
- TEACH THE WHOLE COMMUNITY



DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

- DO WE BELONG IN THE DSM???
- WHY ARE WE TRAPPED HERE??
- PROFESSIONALS ARE TRAPPED, NEURODIVERGENT HUMANS ARE TRAPPED?
- HOW ELSE CAN WE GET SUPPORT OR ACCOMMODATIONS??
- IS THIS RIGHT??



ASSESSMENT

- MOSTLY BASED ON OBSERVATION (BY NT !)
- HEAVILY BIASED - GENDER, RACIAL ETC
- OFTEN MEASURES DISTRESS
- WE MISS AUTISTIC JOY AND TALENT
- HUGE NEED FOR CHANGE
- CAN BE HARD TO ACCESS



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF IN REPORT WRITING

How would I feel if this report were about me?

Am I comfortable knowing this child might read this when they are older, or even now?

Is it traumatizing?

Is the voice of her person reflected?

AM I SETTING THEM UP TO BE PATHOLOGISED?

HAVE I ACKNOWLEDGED STRENGTHS AS WELL AS CHALLENGES?

QUESTION TIME





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HOW CAN WE SUPPORT?



BE CURIOUS!!

(ALL THE TIME)



ADAPT THE PROCESS

- MAKE IT BESPOKE
- ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL
- CHECK IN REGULARLY
- GO OFF-PISTE
- DON'T BE RIGID! BLEND APPROACHES
- COLLABORATE THE WHOLE WAY
- REMOTE OR IN PERSON?



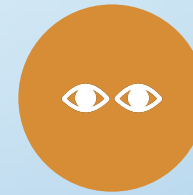
OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER



Making booking process accessible



Prior information on the process



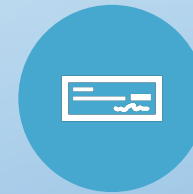
Clarity is kindness!



Space and time for questions



Access to pictures of you and the space beforehand



A “vibe check”

PRESUME COMPETENCE



- **PRESUMED COMPETENCE IS A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH THAT ASSUMES THE ABILITIES TO LEARN, THINK AND UNDERSTAND**
- NOT ASSUMING SOMEONE CAN'T
- ALL TOO COMMON EXPERIENCE FOR NON-SPEAKING, MINIMALLY SPEAKING OR SITUATIONALLY MUTE PEOPLE
- “THE LEAST DANGEROUS ASSUMPTION” – ANNE DONNELLAN



THE THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE



- WE ARE PARTNERS, WE DO THIS TOGETHER
- TRUST, WARMTH, EMPATHY
- I AM NOT AN AUTHORITY, I DO NOT BRING SHAME, GUILT, OR DISCIPLINE
- NO EXPECTATIONS
- YOU MAKE YOUR OWN CHOICES, YOUR VALUES, YOUR WISHES
- YOU CHOOSE WHAT YOU DO
- THERAPEUTIC USE OF SELF
- CONNECT AS HUMANS
- I PROVIDE SUPPORT/ COACHING/ INFORMATION IN A WAY THAT IS BESPOKE TO YOU AND YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

NO THANK YOU



HAVE A DAY.

**YOU CAN
TELL ME TO
SHOVE IT!**

ADJUST EXPECTATIONS



- WHAT DO WE EXPECT/ DEMAND?
- GREETINGS? MANNERS? EYE-CONTACT?
HANDSHAKE? PROXIMITY?
- WHAT DEMANDS ARE WE PLACING?
- QUESTIONS ARE NOT CHALLENGES
- STIMMING, ECHOLALIA ETC ARE WELCOME!
- NOT IMPORTANT?? LET IT GO...

CHILD-LED

Does not mean....

We do nothing

Aimless

Doing whatever

No boundaries



CHILD-LED



Does mean....

Sharing joy

Joining in

being curious

Notice what they notice

Respect opinions and choices

Set boundaries

Empowerment

Autonomy

Acknowledge needs

STEP BACK AND OBSERVE, SQUASH THE URGE TO INTERVENE!





PLAY

- PRIMARY OCCUPATION OF CHILDHOOD
- INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED
- THE BEST WAY FOR CHILDREN TO LEARN.
- PRECIOUS FOR ITS OWN SAKE
- WHY DO WE PLAY??
- WHAT IS PLAY??
- FUNCTIONAL PLAY???
- APPROPRIATE PLAY??
- NEURODIVERGENT STYLES OF PLAY



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SHARE JOY

- JOIN IN
- PLAY TOGETHER
- PARALLEL PLAY
- BE INTERESTED IN THEIR INTERESTS – REALLY INTERESTED!!
- ENJOY THE RIDE
- SHARE YOUR JOY TOO
- HAVE FUN!

NO SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING? NOW WHAT??

- PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES
- MEETING OF THE MINDS
- SHARED INTERESTS
- PARALLEL PLAY
- SUPPORTING A POSITIVE SENSE OF SELF
- WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS TO THIS PERSON?



A Story....



Pride noun

: a feeling that you respect yourself and deserve to be respected by other people

AUTISTIC PRIDE



Autistic children need Autistic adult role models. They need Autistic adults who are “out and proud” about their Autism.





EMBRACE THE CHAOS

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THERAPIES BASED ON
POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT
ONLY REINFORCE THAT
ACCESS TO LOVE &
JOY IS CONDITIONAL.

FROM
NEUROCLASTIC

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@NeuroClastic

THE EMOTIONAL TUNNEL

- YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH
- SOMETIMES COMPANY IS
NEEDED ON THIS JOURNEY



THE PROBLEM WITH REWARDS....

- CAN BE HARMFUL
- STILL BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION
- EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION NOT INTRINSIC
- REWARDS COMPLIANCE OR “MOST NT PERFORMANCE”
- EMBARRASSMENT, SHAME, HUMILIATION
- MISS THE POINT ENTIRELY!

WAYS TO EARN LEVELS

-  1. DRINK WATER (8-16 OZ DAILY)
-  2. COMPLETE SCHOOL FOR THE DAY
-  3. EAT AND FINISH LUNCH
-  4. EAT AND FINISH DINNER
-  5. TRY A NEW FOOD
-  6. CLEAN UP ALL MESSSES
-  7. QUIET TIME FOR 1 HOUR MINIMUM
-  8. MINIMUM 30 MINUTES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
-  9. ASK SOMEONE HOW YOU CAN HELP TODAY (THEN COMPLETE THAT TASK)

SHOW RESPECT ALL DAY (+ 1 BONUS★ IF ALL OTHER LEVELS ACHIEVED!!)

(NO HITTING, NO YELLING, NO TALKING BACK, NO FIGHTING, NO REFUSING TO DO AS ASKED, ALWAYS APOLOGIZE, ETC.)

BEHAVIOR CHART

AWESOME JOB

you earned extra reward time and a special privilege

GREAT CHOICES

you earned extra reward time!

GOOD CHOICES

thank you for making good choices!

BRAND NEW DAY

let's make it an awesome one!

WARNING

i know you can do better

STOP & THINK

think about how to make good choices

LOSE A PRIVILEGE

you can do better, don't give up!

REGULATION BEFORE EXPECTATION

GREG SANTUCCI



EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- EMOTION REGULATION INVOLVES A FLUENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BODY, MIND, AND FEELINGS.
- THE ABILITY TO ACCURATELY NOTICE AND EVALUATE CUES RELATED TO PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO STRESSFUL EVENTS
- ACCOMPANIED BY REGULATION STRATEGIES THAT INFLUENCE THE EMOTIONAL RESPONSE.
- EVIDENCE FOR LINKS BETWEEN POOR AWARENESS OF SENSORY PERCEPTION/ INTEROCEPTION AND DIFFICULTIES WITH EMOTION REGULATION.
- SENSITIVITY TO INTEROCEPTIVE SIGNALS CAN DETERMINE OUR CAPACITY TO REGULATE OUR EMOTIONS
- IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH STATE



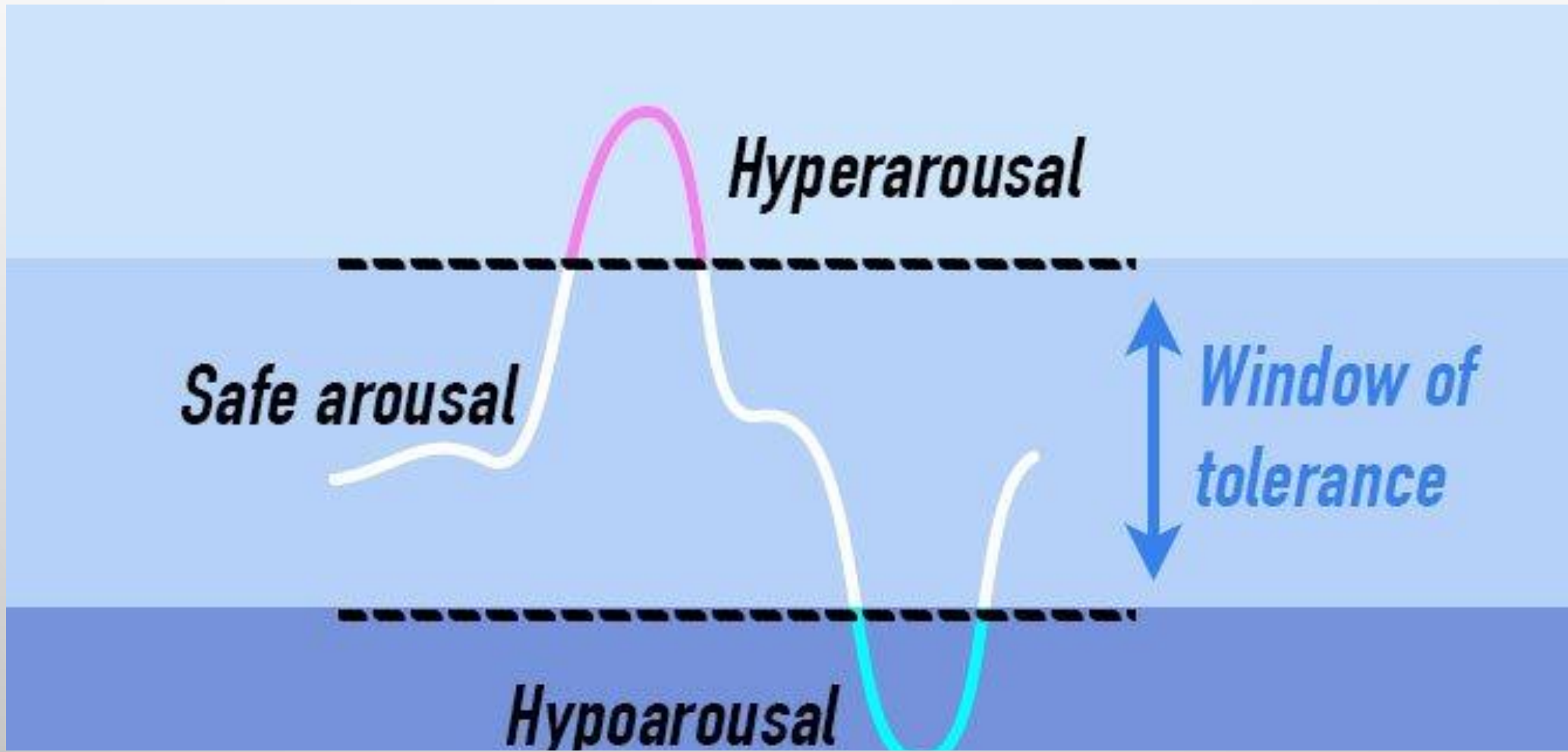
WHAT IS SELF REGULATION?

- THE ABILITY TO MANAGE OUR EMOTIONS AND REACTIONS
- MONITORING HOW WE FEEL
 - BEING ABLE TO ADAPT
 - ALLOWS US TO BE RESILIENT
- NOT NECESSARILY BEING CALM!
- NOT THE SAME AS SELF CONTROL





INTERNAL BALANCE IN THE PRESENCE OF EXTERNAL STRESSORS



HOW WE LEARN TO REGULATE

- EXTERNAL REGULATION
- CO-REGULATION
- SELF-REGULATION



CO -REGULATION



Interactive process
of regulatory
support between
people

Children cannot self
regulate without
support

Healthy
relationships –
available, warm,
supportive

Provide warm
responsive
relationship

Structure
environment (hint;
people are part of
the environment)

Teach / coach/
model self
regulation skills

A dysregulated
person cannot
regulate another



REGULATION THROUGH RELATIONSHIP

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Co-regulation is natural. It's how we're built.

Self-regulation is *not* natural, and it takes a lot more effort. It causes the person to move into greater isolation *which then exacerbates the whole cycle of feeling lost from each other.*

- Bonnie Badenoch -

Episode #108



INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

- THE GREAT BIG ABA OPPOSITION RESOURCE LIST
- NEUROCLASTIC
- THERAPIST NEURODIVERSITY COLLECTIVE
- REFRAMING AUTISM
- THE DEAF AUTISTIC OT, SARAN SELVAGGI HERNANDEZ
- GREG SANTUCCI, OT
- MONA DELAHOKE
- LEARN PLAY THRIVE
- BOHO SPEECHIE
- TERRA VANCE, PSYCHOLOGIST
- BEAUTIFUL SPEECH LIFE
- ND WELLNESS OFFICIAL
- THE AUTISTIC ADVOCATE, KIERAN ROSE
- JOEL SWHWARTZ, PSYCHOLOGIST
- CARI EBERT SEMINARS
- NEURODIVERSITY AFFIRMATIVE THERAPISTS

INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

- AUTISTIC NOT WEIRD, CHRIS BONELLO
- HARRY THOMPSON, PDA EXTRAORDINAIRE
- SALLY CAT PDA
- AUTIENELLE
- FIDGETS AND FRIES, TIFFANY HAMMOND
- THE AUTISTIC ADVOCATE, KIERAN ROSE
- OT MAMA OF TWINS
- AAC NERDS
- HENNY KUPFERSTEIN
- THE AAC COACH
- THE SENSORY SLP, JESSIE GINSBERG
- BOHO SPEECHIE

IRISH RESOURCES

- THE ADULT AUTISM PRACTICE
- THE AUTISTIC BOOK CLUB
- ACORA THERAPY
- NEURODIVERSITY TRAINING INTERNATIONAL, JUDE MORROW
- AUTISM INFORMED THERAPY
- ACCESS COMMUNICATION, ELAINE MC GREEVY
- LAURA CROWLEY
- IASLT SIG AUTISM
- PSI SIG AUTISM
- BLEZZING DADA
- AAC USERS AND ALLIES IRELAND
- LIFE THROUGH MY LENS
- NEUROPRIDE IRELAND
- AUSOME TRAINING
- HORIZONS THERAPY SERVICES

SENSORY LIFESTYLE

PERSONAL

FLEXIBLE BUT CONSISTENT

FITS INTO AND BECOME PART OF ROUTINE

FRONT-LOADED

SHOULD NOT MAKE YOUR LIFE HARDER OR MORE COMPLICATED

FRONTLOADING YOUR DAY



**SENSORY REGULATION
STRATEGIES THROUGHOUT
YOUR DAY**



**BEING PROACTIVE NOT
REACTIVE**

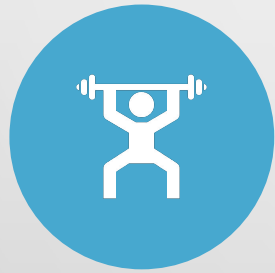


**ANTICIPATING
DYSREGULATING
EXPERIENCES**



**IT IS OUR JOB TO LET, ENABLE OR EMPOWER A CLIENT
TO DO SOMETHING, IT IS NOT OUR JOB TO GET
THEM TO DO IT**

THE ENVIRONMENT



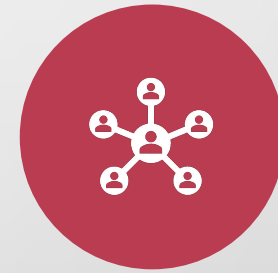
PHYSICAL



CULTURAL



INSTITUTIONAL



SOCIAL



GREG SANTUCCI'S WOOL HAT STORY

TRIGGER WARNING