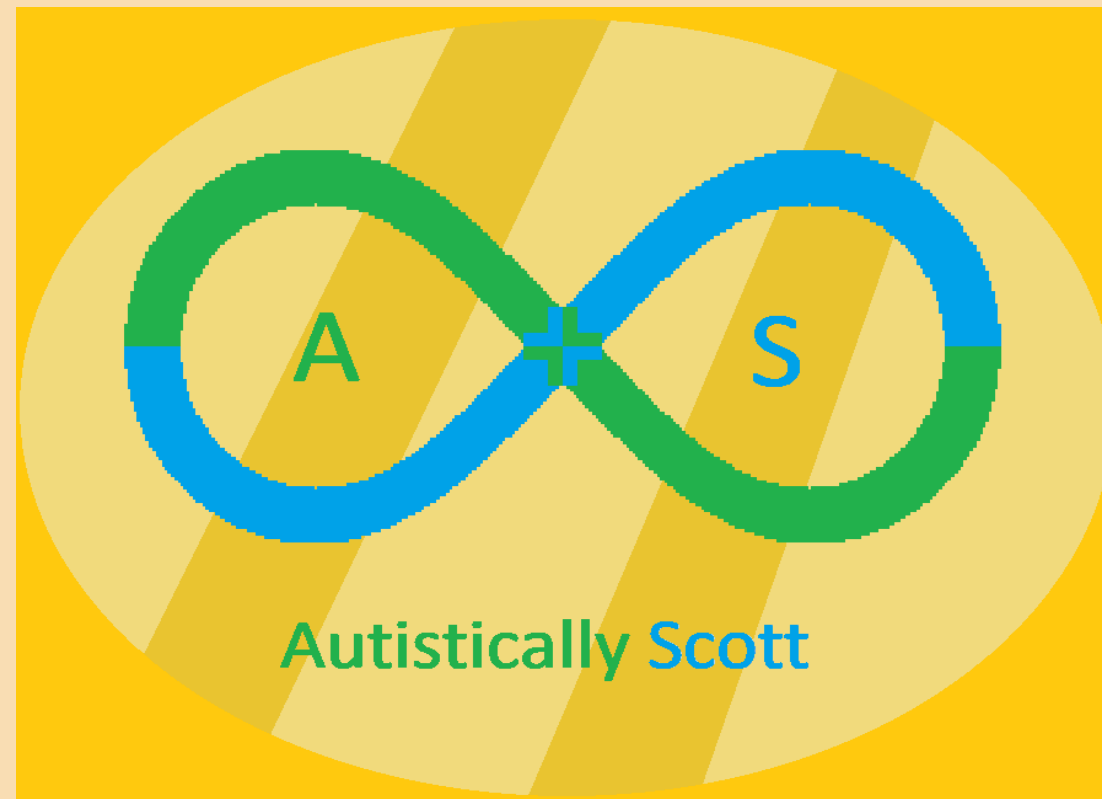


# Autistic Joy & Passionate Interests



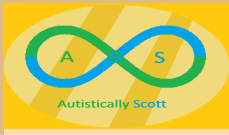


# Who am I?



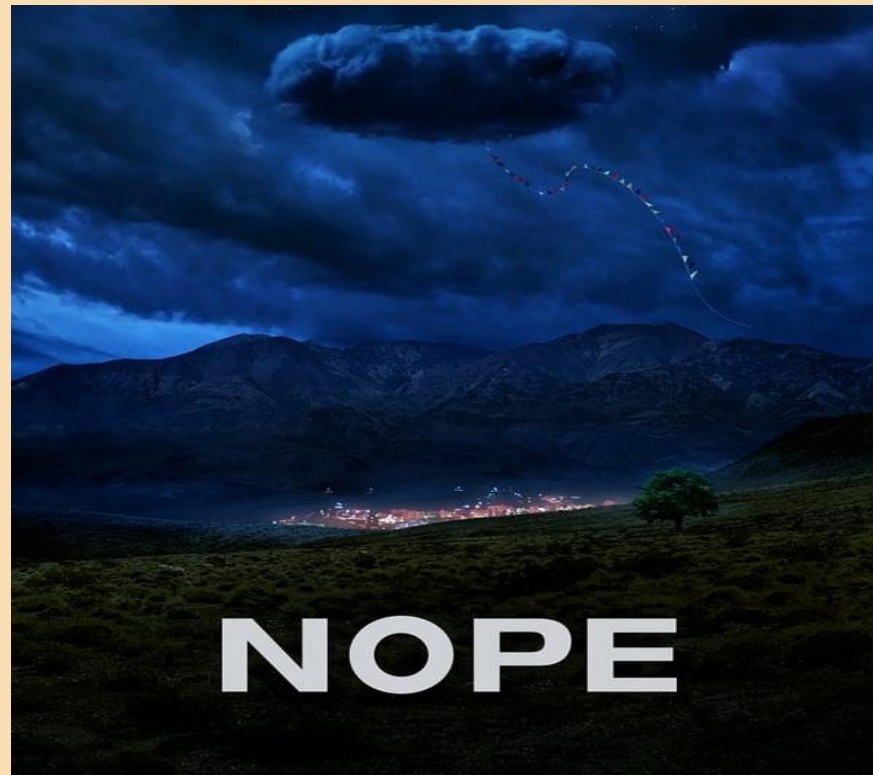
## Scott Neilson (he/him)

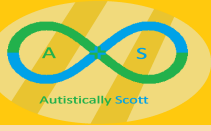
- Autistic trainer, consultant and blogger.
- The need for Autistic training
- Promoting Autistic identity and culture
- References and visuals by Autistic people



# How our Interests have been Perceived

- “Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus” - DSM-5
- Also seen as “obsessions” & “barriers to learning”
- Is this true?





AUTISTIC  
TRAITS  
REDEFINED

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**DEFECIT:** Autistics engage in highly restrictive interests with abnormal intensity.

**REDEFINED:** We are drawn to specific passions that bring us joy, help us self-regulate, foster connections with others, and allow us to process the world around us.



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@autiennele

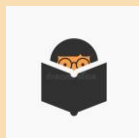
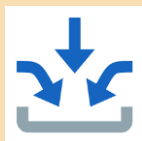


# What are Autistic Interests?

- 'Special interests' or 'Spins' often used rather than "hobbies".
- These can last a long time. Some life-long.
- Also known as 'Passionate' or 'Dedicated' interests.
- Not every Autistic person has passionate interests.

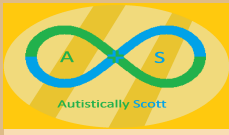
special interests

ever noticed that so many girls went undiagnosed had obvious special interests, but because it wasn't considered the typical "autistic" subject (ie: math, science, and tech) it was ignored ?

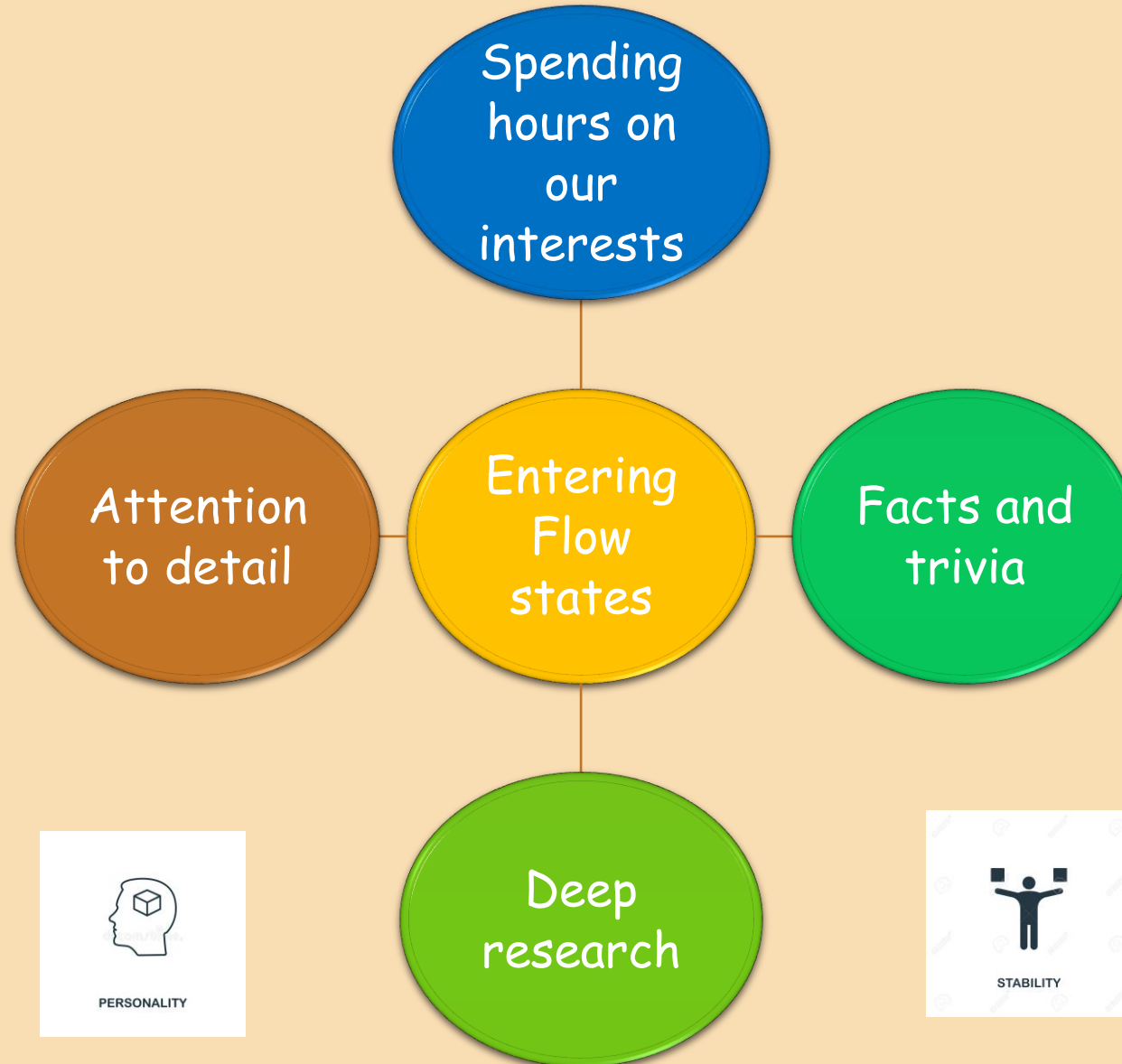


@autisticblackqueer

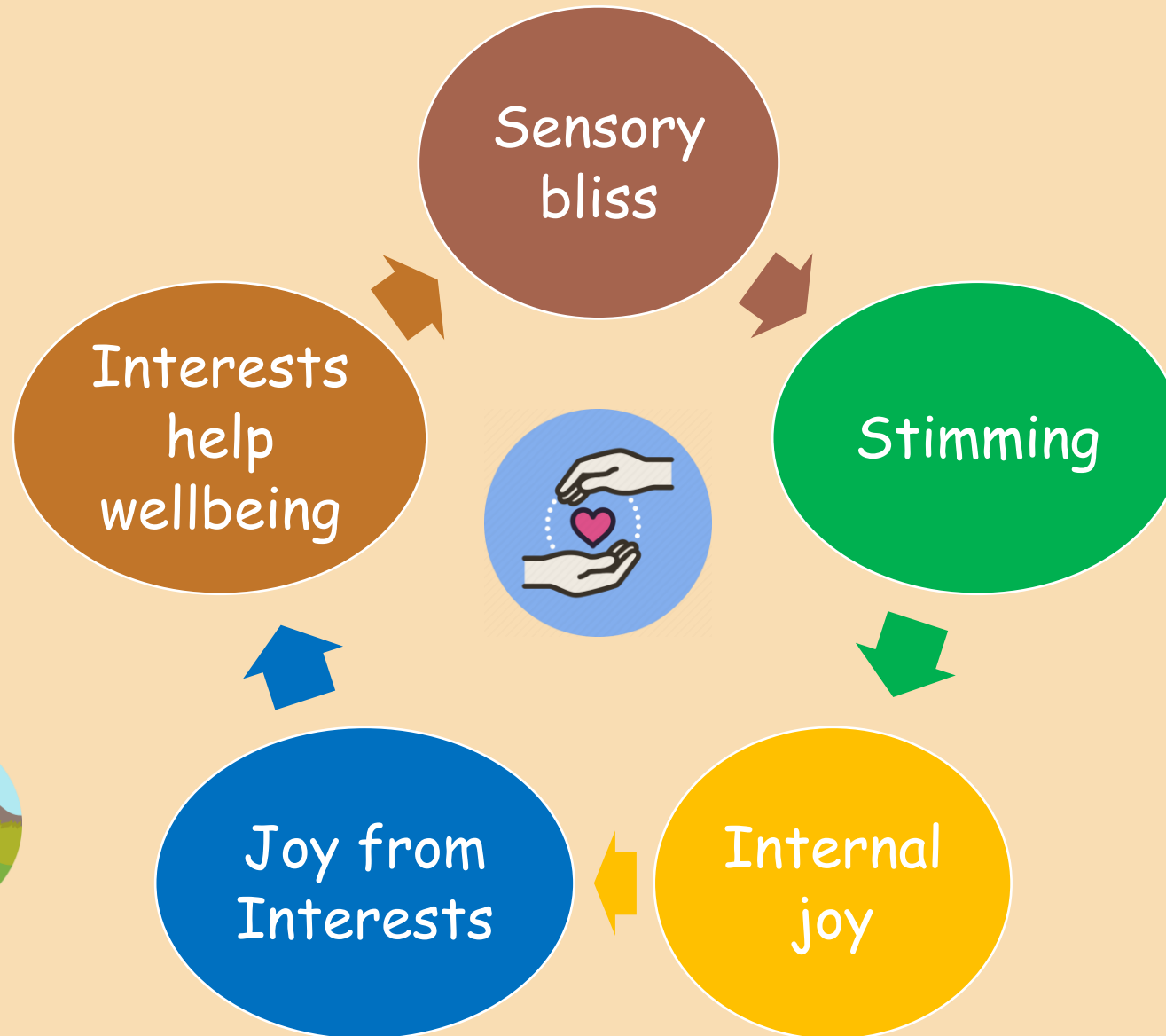




# Hyperfocus on our Interests



# Autistic Joy

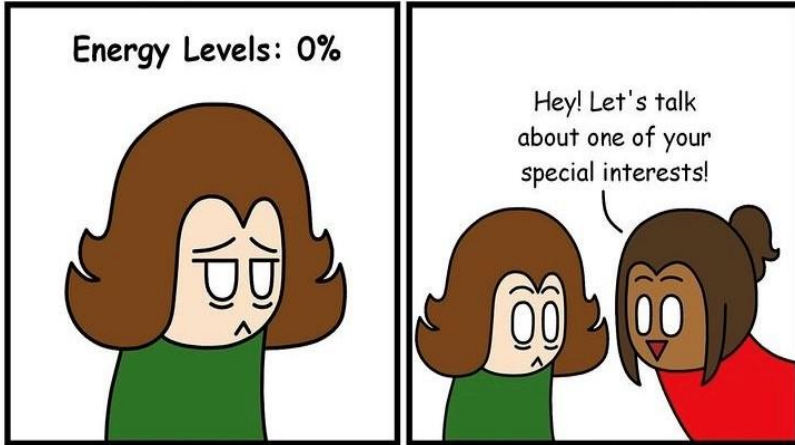


# Info dumping

Autie-biographical

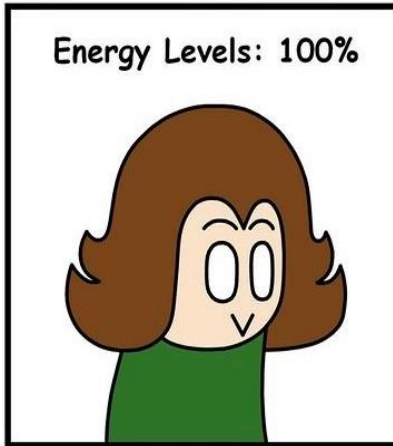
Energy Boost

Energy Levels: 0%



Hey! Let's talk  
about one of your  
special interests!

Energy Levels: 100%



By: Theresa Scovil

- Sharing information about our interests.
- Info dumping is one of the Autistic/Neurodivergent love languages.
- Reframing info dumping as connection.





# Challenges with Interests

## WHAT IT'S CAN BE LIKE WHEN A PERSON IS YOUR SPECIAL INTEREST

(FROM AN AUTISTIC PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE)

Forgetting to look after yourself and only focusing on their needs.

Mimicking the other person's behaviour, laugh, likes and dislikes.

Feeling anxious or abandoned when you're not with your special interest.

Not knowing if it's an attraction or a friendship.

Feeling like you need to be with them but also exhausted by it all.

As if your world is ending if they don't reciprocate your feelings.

You overlook their bad behaviours because you only want to see them in a good light

Feeling a high degree of comfort and safety when you're with them.

They become your lifeline.

You study and research them as if they were a project.

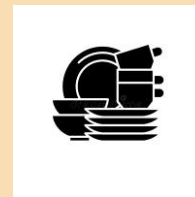
You do everything in your power to be liked by them.

Loosing sense of self.



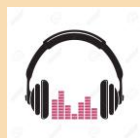
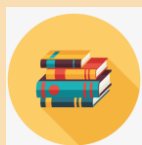
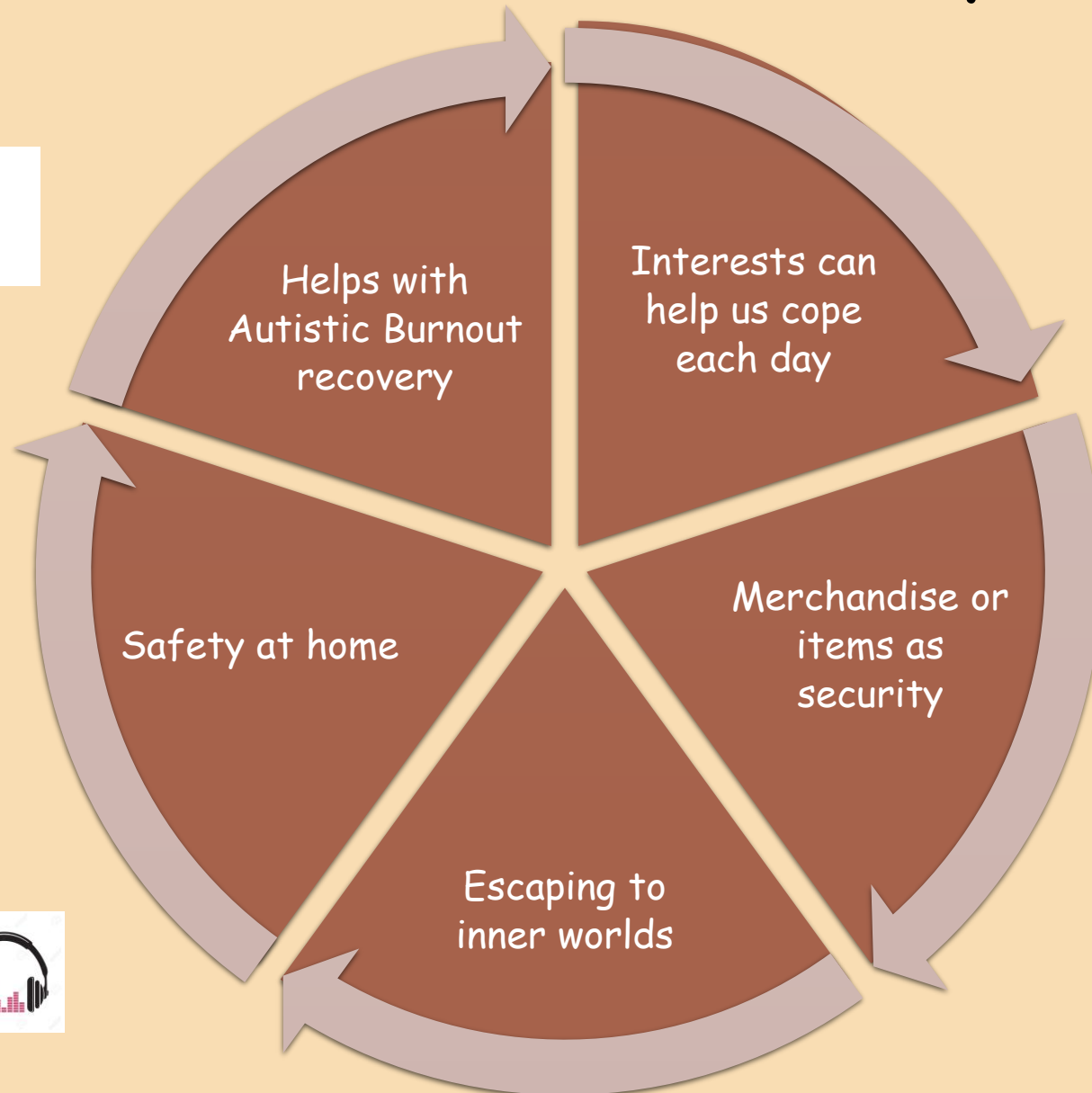
@autisticblackgirl

- Self-care
- Disruptive sleep
- Overspending
- Autistic Inertia - starting or stopping
- Masking our interests
- "Age restricted"
- People as interests





# Interests as Safety





# Gaming Wellbeing Study

- Autistic Adolescents perspectives on gaming (Claire Usher, May 2022)
- “I have my own space when I'm playing and that's what I like. It's peaceful and calm.”
- “I can actually do it without any help or someone watching over me all the time and giving me constant instruction... 'do this, do that'. Constant voices. I can just hear myself when I play. It's peaceful and quiet. I know what I'm doing anyway. It's much better.”
- “School is hard. I don't know how to do all this stuff but when I play games, I still learn skills but not with all the constant nagging. Its pressure all the time. I can just get a moment of not having that.”

# Other benefits of our Interests

Shared interests can build connections



Connecting to other Autistic people



Learning through our interests



Comic by Rhia May-byrd @saltedgayfish

## What do special interests mean to autistic people?

'It's something that makes me light up with joy and be myself. . . !'

'I'm not sure I would be alive without them. They are one of the few things keeping me alive.'

'Freedom from my head for a while.'

'Something that I can look forward to.'

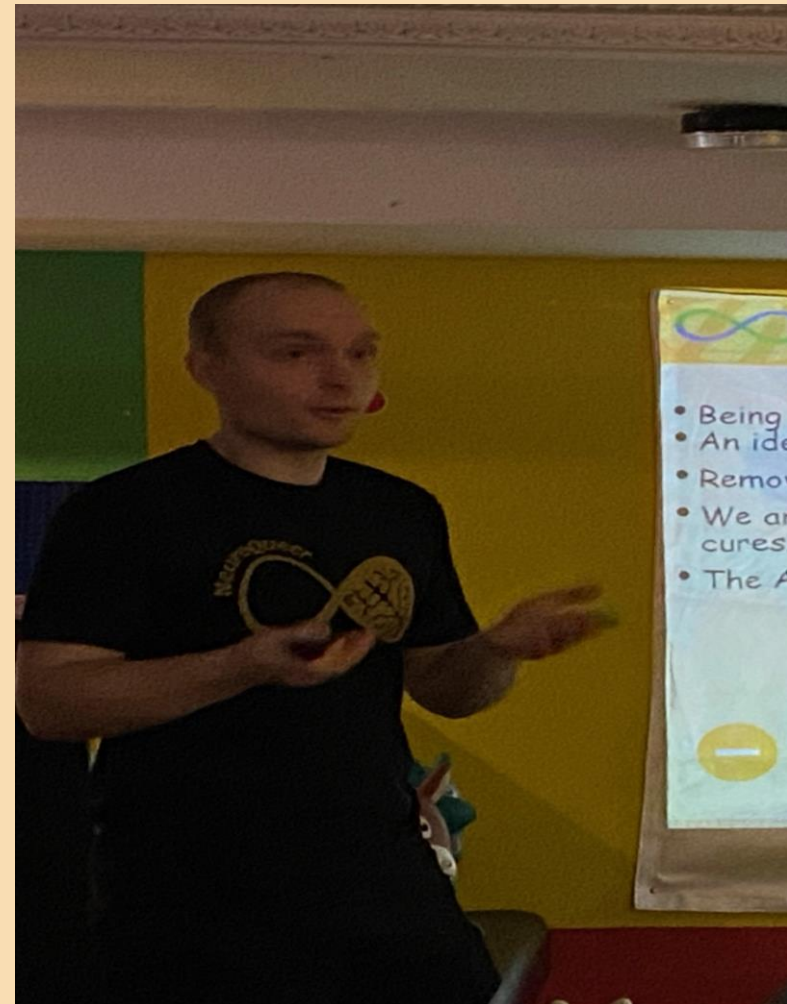
'Grounding, sense of belonging. . . !'

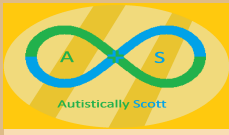
'It means the world because I find so much joy in it and I'm so glad I have that.'

@autism\_happy\_place

# Interests becoming Careers

- Having passionate interests can lead to a career based on that subject.
- Volunteering, employment, work experience, new skills.
- Autistic Culture as an interest.
- Interests do not need to lead to careers.





# Recap of Session

Interests are  
important to our  
wellbeing

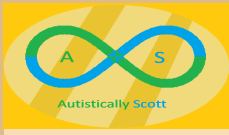
Cherish Autistic  
Joy

Info dumping is  
communication  
and a love  
language

Interest-led  
approaches can  
help us learn

Shared interests  
= connection

Passionate  
interests can lead  
to careers for  
Autistic people



# My Details

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<https://www.facebook.com/AutisticallyScott>

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Email: [autisticallyscott@gmail.com](mailto:autisticallyscott@gmail.com)