

Minding Autistic Minds

A vital conference on Autistic mental health

Hosted by AUsome Training

Hybrid conference: Osprey Hotel, Naas, Co. Kildare & online

Two days of neuro-affirming talks & workshops

Day 1, 24th April: Autistic Adults

Day 2 25th April: Autistic Minors

Why join our “Minding Autistic minds” conference?

Did you know that...

... 80% of Autistics struggle with anxiety?

... 60% of Autistics are affected by depression?

... 36% of Autistics meet the criteria for PTSD?

Our community is in crisis.

Be part of the solution!

Together, let's tackle the mental health crisis faced by Autistic adults and children.

Autistic mental health is the critical topic of discussion in this conference. During our neuro-affirming talks and interactive workshops, we will highlight the need for significant improvements in services, schools, colleges and workplaces. Learn how you can make a significant difference in Autistic people's lives today.

Day 1: April 24th

The first day of our conference is designed for professionals who support Autistic adults: from (mental) health professionals and educators to HR personnel and social workers, this conference is tailored to address the pressing issue of Autistic mental health and well-being. Gain first-hand insights and a practical skillset.

Day 2: April 25th

The second day of our conference is designed specifically for schools, parents, caregivers, and professionals working with Autistic children and teens. Discover the crucial role of mental health in the lives of Autistic children, gain valuable insights, and learn practical approaches to support their well-being.

Agenda Day 1: Autistic Adults

All times are in Irish Summer Time

| Time | Speaker | Presentation |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 9:30-9:45 | Evaleen Whelton | Opening |
| 9:50-10:25 | Eoin Stephens | Autistic Mental Health & Wellbeing: Towards a Clearer Vision and New Language |
| 10:30-11:05 | Katie Kerley | Autistic Advocacy: The Collective Strength of Allies |
| 11:05-11:30 | | Break |
| 11:35- 12:15 | Eoin, Katie, Jessica | Workshops 1 |
| 12:20- 12:55 | Eoin, Katie, Jessica | Workshops 2 |
| 1:00-2:00 | | Lunch |
| 2:00-2:40 | Kieran Rose | Marginalisation, Masking and Mental Health in Adulthood |
| 2:45-3:20 | Jessica K Doyle | Exploring Perception: Sensory is so much more than you think it is. |
| 3:25-4:10 | Eoin, Katie, Jessica | Workshops 3 |
| 4:15-4:45 | Kieran Rose | Practical Applications & Guided Discussion |
| 4:50-5:10 | Caoimh Connolly-Murphy & Max Whelan | Lived experience by members of the non-speaking community |
| 5:10-5:15 | Evaleen Whelton | Close |

Agenda Day 2: Autistic Minors

All times are in Irish Summer Time

| Time | Speaker | Presentation |
|--------------|--|---|
| 9:30-9:45 | Evaleen Whelton | Opening |
| 9:50-10:25 | Katie Kerley | Advocacy is for everyone: Autistics and Allies |
| 10:30-11:05 | Siobhán Uí Dhálaigh | Authentic Autistic Inclusion in Schools |
| 11:05-11:30 | | Break |
| 11:35- 12:15 | Katie, Siobhán, Elaine | Workshops 1 |
| 12:20- 12:55 | Katie, Siobhán, Elaine | Workshops 2 |
| 1:00-2:00 | | Lunch |
| 2:00-2:40 | Kieran Rose | Marginalisation, Masking and Mental Health for Children & Young People |
| 2:45-3:20 | Elaine McGreevy | Exploring Emotions: Supporting Development of Authentic Emotional Communication Skills |
| 3:25-4:10 | Katie, Siobhán, Elaine | Workshops 3 |
| 4:15-4:45 | Kieran Rose | Practical Applications & Guided Discussion |
| 4:50-5:10 | Caoimh Connolly-Murphy & Max Whelan | Lived experience by members of the non-speaking community |
| 5:10-5:15 | Evaleen Whelton | Close |

Workshop Topics

Please note:

Unfortunately, online attendees will not be able to attend workshops. Workshops will not be recorded. In-person attendees will be able to attend all workshops.

Day 1: Supporting Autistic Adults

| Facilitator | Workshop |
|--------------------|--|
| Eoin Stephens | Using Motivational Interviewing in Counselling with Autistic Clients |
| Katie Kerley | Autistic Self-Care: How to mind your Autistic Self |
| Jessica K Doyle | A Showing & Discussion of Jessica's short film 'When I grow up I want to be' |

Day 2: Supporting Autistic Children & Teens

| Facilitator | Workshop |
|---------------------|--|
| Katie Kerley | Nurturing the Autistic Child |
| Siobhán Uí Dhálaigh | Reframing Challenging Behaviour as Dysregulation |
| Elaine McGreevy | Creative Ways to Explore Feelings |

Eoin Stephens

Psychotherapist, Counsellor, Trainer

“Autistic mental health is a major area of concern at present. As a largely invisible and poorly understood minority group within society, Autistic people currently receive a service from our mental health services (both public and private) that is appalling, even by the low standard set by Irish mental health services.” - Eoin Stephens, BA Psychology, Dip Counselling, MA Cognitive-Behavioural Counselling, MIACP, MACI

Eoin is a **counsellor/psychotherapist & lecturer/trainer** who has worked in the areas of disability, addiction treatment, education/training, & counselling/psychotherapy in private practice **for over 30 years**, using a humanistic, pragmatic CBT approach.

After specialising primarily in the areas of **behavioural addictions & anxiety disorders** for a number of years, and working at a senior level in counselling/psychotherapy education, he received the **IACP Carl Berkeley Memorial Award** in 2010.

His work is currently focused on understanding the problems faced by Autistic adults, & their specific therapeutic needs. He is **Autistic himself**, having made the discovery in 2012.

Eoin's Presentation

Autistic Mental Health & Wellbeing: Towards a Clearer Vision and New Language

This presentation will explore the need to get clearer about **the most productive and neuro-affirmative language** to use when we talk about Autistic mental health.

The goal of improving Autistic mental health is often initially approached by identifying common types of mental illness that Autistic people are especially at risk of developing (anxiety, burnout, cPTSD, etc), and focusing on how to increase the availability of, and improve the effectiveness of, both preventative and therapeutic interventions. This is certainly a necessary task, and quite a lot is known about this area (though of course there is a lot more to be done).

But when it comes to improving Autistic mental health, the reduction of mental ill-health is not sufficient.

To get a clearer focus on Autistic mental health, **we need to be making more use of language such as “psychological & emotional wellness”**. This way of talking is being used more and more in general discussions of mental health, but still seems to be rare when the focus is on Autistic people. Given that it is still widely assumed that autism itself is a mental disorder, and that co-occurrence of mental health problems is so high in the Autistic community, it is possibly not surprising that there is little effort made to try and get a picture of what Autistic mental wellness might even look like.

This presentation will **explore the progress made** to date in creating a language and a way of thinking about Autistic mental health, and **make some suggestions about where we might go next**.

Eoin's Workshop

Using Motivational Interviewing in Counselling with Autistic Clients

This workshop will present some thoughts on using Motivational Interviewing in helping Autistic people improve their mental health.

There will be a **particular focus on the early stages of the integrating & unmasking process**.

Issues explored will include:

- How to best support clients with the process of unmasking.
- Working with anxiety that is blocking healthy change.
- Connecting with core values, creating our best selves.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a counselling approach that focuses on helping individuals explore and resolve ambivalence towards change, by engaging individuals in a respectful and empathetic conversation, exploring their own motivations and reasons for change. It is a **collaborative** and **person-centred method** that aims to **enhance intrinsic motivation** and **self-directed change**, rather than imposing external pressure or advice. The approach has been widely utilised in various fields, including addiction treatment, mental health counselling, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

Underlying motivation is often a neglected issue in therapy with Autistic people, the historical focus having been on so-called cognitive and behavioural “skills deficits”. Many issues that Autistic people struggle with, and which can be major contributors to anxiety, depression,

burnout etc, are better understood as related to motivation. Therefore, less focus should be placed on whether an Autistic person is capable or incapable of activities such as

- participating in small talk
- making “lots” of friends
- making decisions more spontaneously, with less planning
- and other highly “unautistic” ways of being

Instead, more focus should be placed on whether they want/need to invest a lot of time and energy in such activities, and on the **sense of disempowerment they are made to feel about making such choices**. Of course, Autistic people are for practical purposes often caught between their natural Autistic motivations and the need to adapt to standard ways of being in order to get daily needs met. **This workshop will look at working therapeutically with the ambivalence and confusion that this generates, and the ways in which MI can be helpful.**

Katie Kerley

Senior Occupational Therapist & Clinical Director

“Change is necessary. We cannot remain complicit in an oppressive system – this requires us all to move forward, both Neurodivergents and Neurotypicals. We need each other, and humanity needs us to work together.”

Katie is an occupational therapist and clinical director of Horizons Therapy Services in Dundalk. She is an active member of the **Paediatric Advisory Group** and the **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Advisory Group**.

Katie is **multiply neurodivergent** (Autistic, ADHD and Dyspraxic) and has a strong interest in supporting neurodivergent people be their truest and most authentic selves.

Katie specialises in **sensory processing** and how it affects meaningful occupation.

Katie provides one to one therapy to both children and adults, as well as OT assessments, and enjoys taking a **person-centred, lived-experience** and **rights-based approach** to each individual.

Katie loves being part of continual professional development, both as a learner and as a teacher/ mentor. She provides webinars with a variety of organisations, including AUsome Training.

Katie is passionate about being neuro-affirmative and is immersed in the neurodivergent community in Ireland, and is a member of the **Therapist Neurodiversity Collective**.

Katie's Presentations

Advocacy is for everyone; The Collective Strength of Autistics and Allies

*Self-advocacy is a funny thing – we are expected to advocate for ourselves while also existing in a world that can be hostile to our needs. This is exhausting. **Is it fair to expect Autistics to advocate alone?***

Ensuring inclusion and meeting individual needs can only make the world better – for all of humanity.

How can we work together to make the world better for all of us? This presentation will explore a neuro-affirmative mindset and practical solutions.

Katie will present this topic on both days and tailor her presentation to the unique needs of each target group and audience. Day 1 will focus on supporting Autistic adults, day 2 on supporting Autistic children and teens.

Katie's Workshops

Day 1: Autistic Self-Care: How to mind your Autistic Self

Day 2: Nurturing the Autistic child

We hear about self-care all the time, and we are always told how important it is. So much information on this is viewed through a neurotypical lens. But how do we nurture our Autistic minds, bodies and souls as adults? How do we nurture an Autistic child's self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-appreciation?

If you know, love or work with Autistic people, how do you support Autistic self-care?

Let's explore this vital topic together...

Kieran Rose

The Autistic Advocate

“Autistic Masking and Autistic Burnout are two major components of an Autistic person's life and the ones least understood. Our understanding of Autistic Masking needs to be reframed, because **Autistic Masking is a trauma response to stigma, invalidation and marginalisation.**“

Autistic author and researcher Kieran Rose has a **career background in SEND education** and public sector service delivery. He is the parent of three Autistic children.

Kieran delivers his own specialist Autism trainings focused on **deconstructing the autism narrative**, provides private consultancy to organisations and services internationally, and is a faculty member for the US-based Occupational Therapy charity The STAR Institute.

He has published a number of academic papers on Autistic Masking (in both adults and children and young people); Interpersonal Victimisation; and Intimate Partner Violence.

Kieran has guest-lectured at Universities across the UK, is peer reviewer for several academic journals, holds the title **Honorary Research Associate with the University of Sunderland**, is an **associate researcher of GRRAND University College London**. He is also the lead trainer and content creator for the NHS-funded National Autism Trainer Programme.

With Developmental Psychologist Dr Amy Pearson, he is the co-Author of the newly published book: ‘Autistic Masking: Understanding identity management and the role of stigma’.

Kieran's Presentations

Marginalisation, Masking and Mental Health

Day 1: Focus on Adulthood

In this session, Kieran will explore the root causes of marginalisation in Autistic people, tracking the development of a stigmatised identity across the lifespan; and the impact that has in terms of mental health, masking, burnout and life outcomes.

Day 2: Focus on Children and Young People

In this session, Kieran will explore the impact of stigma on Autistic children and young people, looking at how a lack of agency along with consistent exposure to harmful, normative environments contribute to marginalisation and poor mental health.

Kieran's Workshops

Practical Applications & Guided Discussion

Kieran will deliver the final session of each day; bringing everyone together to reflect on Autistic mental health and how we can collectively tackle the crisis faced by Autistic adults and children.

Kieran will give delegates the opportunity for questions and constructive reflection aimed at stigma reduction and safely fostering authenticity. Whilst he will focus on his own presentation, Kieran is also happy to take questions on other topics related to Autistic mental health.

Siobhán Uí Dhálaigh

Gaelscoil Teacher

“Autistic children are in pain; they are hurting and are suffering in our schools. They are expected to thrive in environments that don't recognise who they are, their way, their identity, their culture. They are being coached, trained and rewarded to present a more normal and acceptable version of themselves and in doing so they are being damaged. It is their absolute right to belong, to be seen, to be heard, to be validated and to be loved for being themselves, their true Autistic selves. It's time for change and for true inclusion.”

Siobhán is an **Autistic primary teacher** who **advocates for true Autistic inclusion in school communities**. She recognises the urgent need for change to ensure that autistic

children thrive as themselves and promotes neuro-affirming practices to ensure **safety, authenticity, acceptance and agency**.

She works with and supports newly discovered Autistic children on their journey of self-discovery as well as being actively involved in parent support groups.

Siobhán provides training for trainee teachers promoting a strength-based view of Autistic culture.

Siobhán's Presentation

Authentic Autistic Inclusion in Schools

The time for change is now. Too many autistic children and young people are struggling in school.

This presentation will address:

- *How many current practices and attitudes in our schools and classrooms lead to the 'neurotypicalisation' of our Autistic children and young people, thereby denying them the right to be themselves and to grow, develop and thrive authentically.*
- *How to create and develop **safe, inclusive, neuro-affirming environments, practices and ways of thinking** that accept, value and normalise the Autistic way of sensing, experiencing and processing the world around them, as well as their communication, social and learning styles.*
- *The importance of educating and **creating a whole-school community** that accepts, normalises and celebrates difference.*

Siobhan's Workshop

Reframing Challenging Behaviour as Dysregulation

Time and time again the phrase 'challenging behaviour' is used when discussing Autistic children and young people in our schools. Often the sole aim is to stop the behaviour.

During this workshop, I want us to **dig deeper**. We will explore:

- Autistic behaviour as human behaviour
- The internal experience of behaviours
- The importance of understanding regulation and dysregulation

Jessica K Doyle

Assistant Psychologist & Researcher

“This conference is vital, it is vital to making the changes we need to make to truly make the world a neurodiversity-affirmative place. I wouldn’t change my journey because it has made me who I am, but maybe my experience can help others not have to go through the same or similar pain. Maybe we can make the system better together.”

Jessica K Doyle is Autistic, ADHD and otherwise Neurodivergent. An **Assistant Psychologist at the Adult Autism Practice** and a **Director at Thriving Autistic**, Jessica K is the **co-author** of the recently published and the world’s first **The Adult Autism Assessment Handbook: A Neurodiversity Affirmative Approach** and is co-author of **The Neurodiversity Affirmative Child Autism Assessment Handbook**, which is currently in writing.

Jessica K is currently consulting on a neurodiversity and relationships project at the **Muíriosa Foundation**, and is/has been a researcher on several projects including with **DCU** and **TCD**. She is a **Neurodiversity- Affirmative consultant** and **sensory auditor** for several clinics and organisations and is also the current **chair of the PSI Special Interest Group in Autism**. Jessica K loves cats, music, sensory exploring and diving into challenges that might just provide more opportunity for growth.

Jessica’s Presentation

Exploring Perception: Sensory is so much more than you think it is

Jessica K will give a presentation exploring perception with a particular **focus on an Autistic predictive coding model of Autistic perception**. She will explore the ways different neurotypes deal with uncertainty, difficulties in mutual understanding across neurotypes, and the roots of how our brains are set up to deal with uncertainty.

The talk will explore the idea of **designing and adapting for a Neurodiversity-Affirmative world**, designing environments which are adaptable for each person’s optimum balance. The presentation will include a showing of Jessica K’s animation/video “The Autistic Neurotype” which links together **three main Autistic theories**, Autistic Perception, Monotropism and Double Empathy.

Predictability note: The format of this talk may change somewhat but will be around similar topics to above.

Jessica's Workshop

A Showing & Discussion of When I grow up I want to be

Jessica K will host a showing and discussion on her film "When I grow up I want to be" which explores some of her own experiences growing up, from age 11 to mid 20s, her journey through the mental health system, gamble of suicide, war with "fake Jess" and indomitable energy to carve out a space in the world where she can authentically thrive.

The film explores Jessica K's experience of life as a synesthete and art she created to try to communicate her internal and external experiences and connect with other people in the world.

The film will be presented in two formats with music, this "with music" version is Jessica's preferred format for her communication style, however a non-music showing will also be available as to be accessible to the diversity of preferences we have to acquiring information.

Elaine McGreevy

Speech & Language Therapist

"This conference is vital because with a growing understanding of neurodiversity, parents and professionals are looking for more information to break this down into practical information that can be applied to their everyday contexts."

Elaine is a neurodivergent-affirming speech and language therapist who has worked with Autistic children and young people **for over 20 years**.

She is the **founder of Access Communication Ltd** where she provides speech and language therapy services for Autistic children and young people.

She **advocates for non-behavioural based therapy supports** which **honour autistic communication** so that Autistic children and young people can be **empowered** to be their most authentic self.

Elaine is the **co-founder of Divergent Perspectives**, providing training in neurodivergent-affirming approaches for health and education professionals.

Elaine's Presentation

Exploring Emotions: supporting development of authentic emotional communication skills

During this presentation, we will explore:

How emotions develop in the context of attuned, emotionally safe relationships and environments

Avoiding the pitfalls of neuro-normative communication supports

Implications of alexithymia

Key strategies for supporting authentic emotional communication development.

Elaine's Workshop

Creative Ways to Explore Feelings

A practical workshop to explore different ways to understand and express emotions:

- Emotions and **gestalt language processors**
- Expressing **energy levels** instead of emotions words
- **Alternatives to emotions words:** 'my own words,' music and playlists, dancing, metaphor, photography, art, journaling

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Website: <https://ausometraining.com>

Email: hello@ausometraining.com