

# Understanding Neurodiversity: Supporting Children at Home and School

MHST have three core functions

To deliver evidence-based interventions in an educational setting for mild-to-moderate mental health issues

Support the Mental Health Lead in each school or college to introduce or develop whole school or college approach

Give timely advice to school and college staff and liaise with external specialist services to help children and young people to get the right support and stay in education.

## What is the Mental Health Support Team (MHST)?



# Housekeeping

Disclaimer:

*The tools and suggestions we speak about are not a one-size-fits-all.*

*All children, young people, and families are unique and we need to try to use a person-centred approach to find the best solution.*



Respect help us to create a safe space



Confidentiality



Any other boundaries we would like to set?



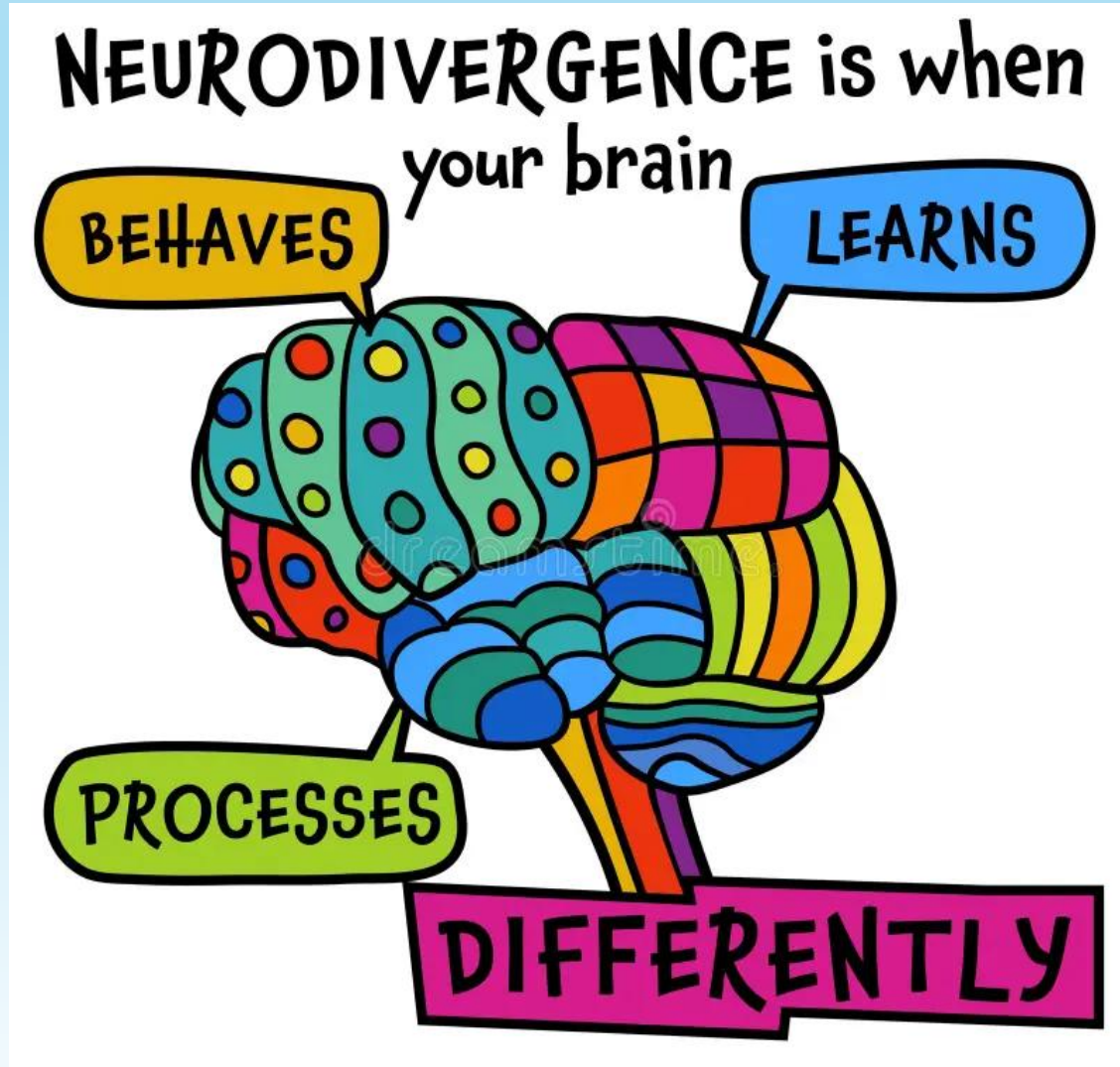
# Agenda

- What is Neurodiversity?
- Overview of Autism, ADHD and other differences
- Understanding behaviours
- Universal and Home Strategies
- Local Support Available
- Questions and Reflections

# What can you see?



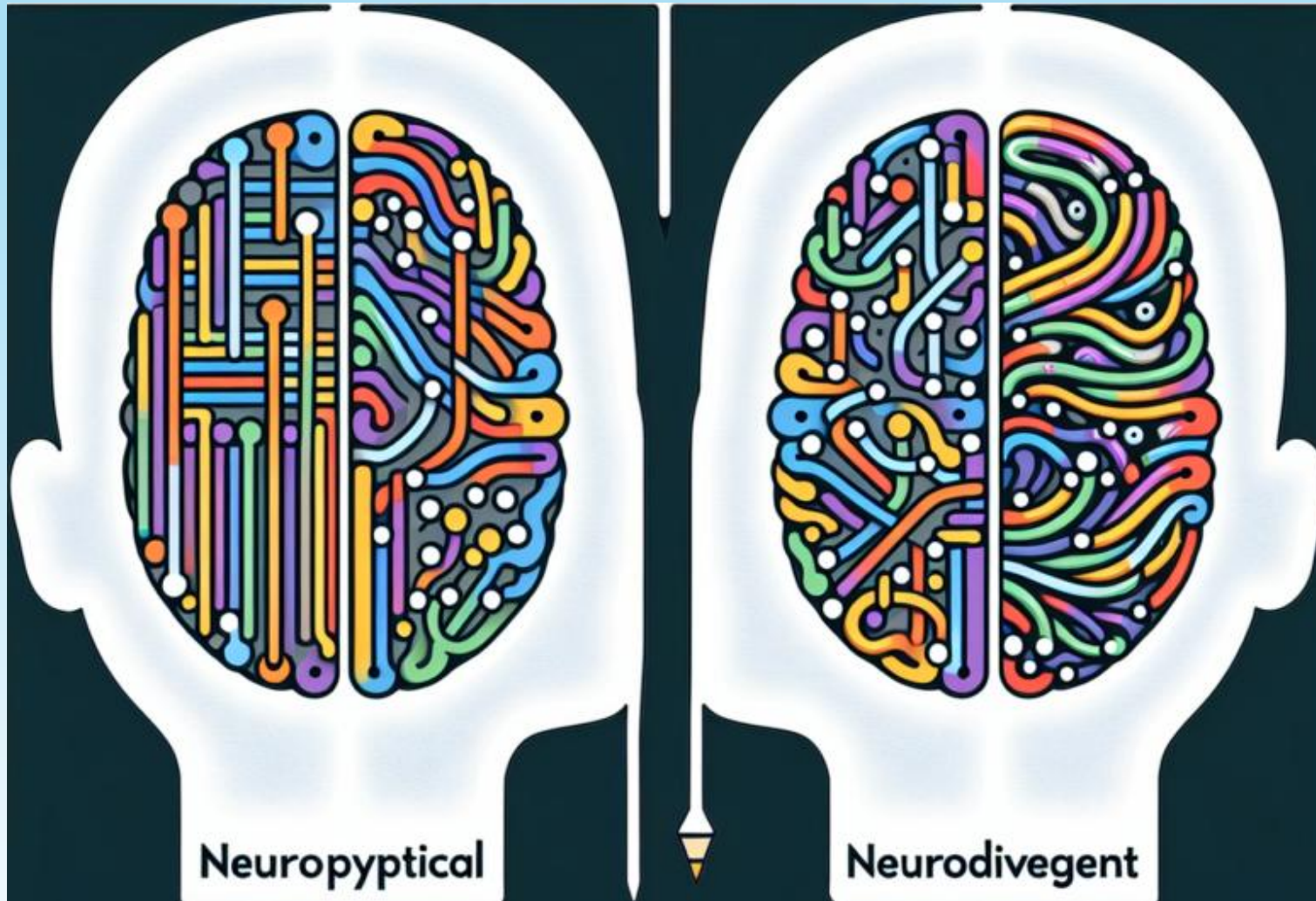
# What is Neurodiversity?



Neuro = Brain  
Divergent = Different

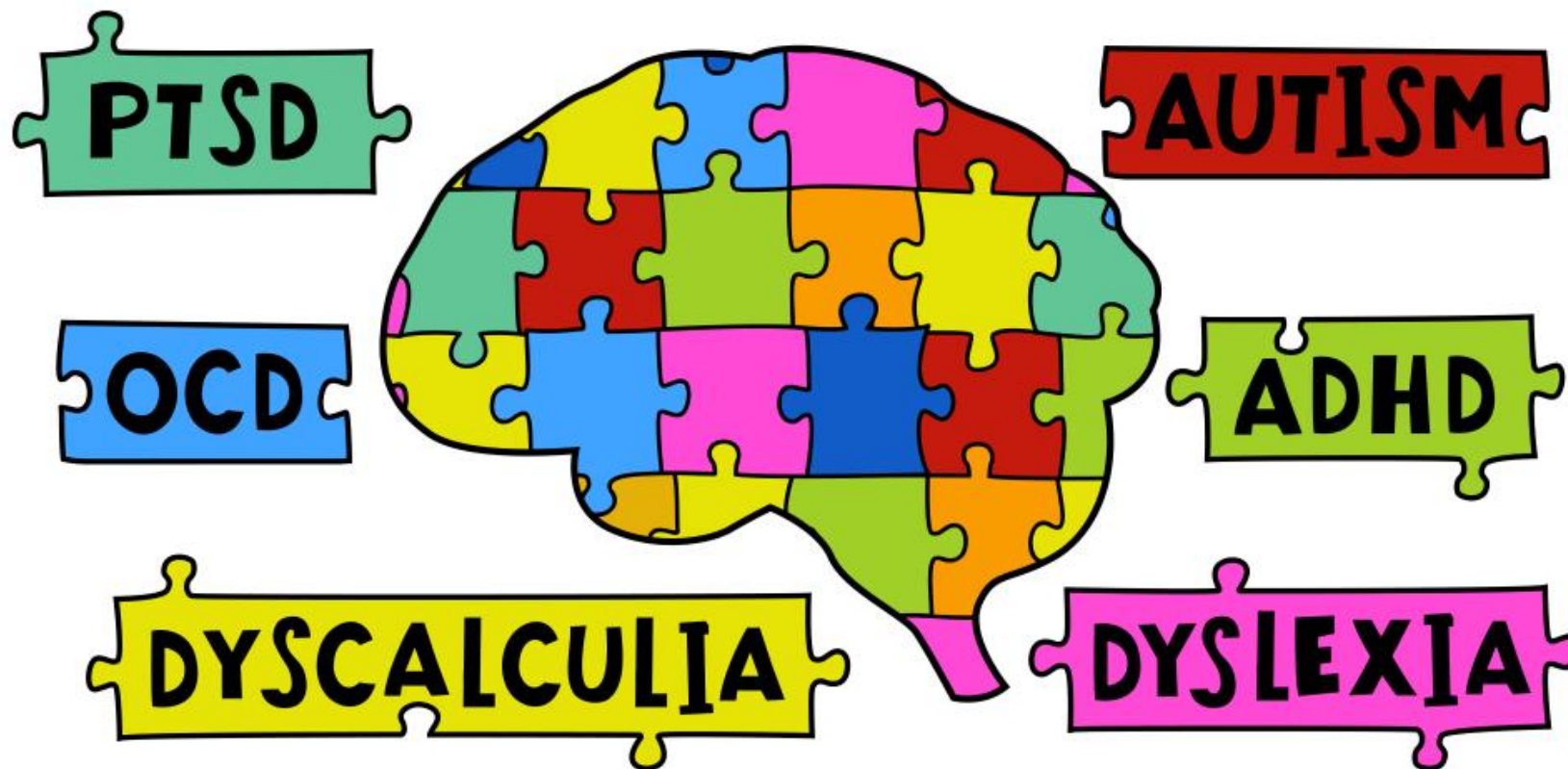
Neurodivergence means that a person's brain works in a way that is different from what is considered 'typical'

# Neurotypical Vs Neurodivergent

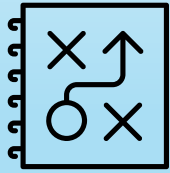


# Examples of Neurodiversity

## NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN



# Strengths of Neurodiversity



Creativity

Pattern  
Recognition

Honesty

Problem Solving

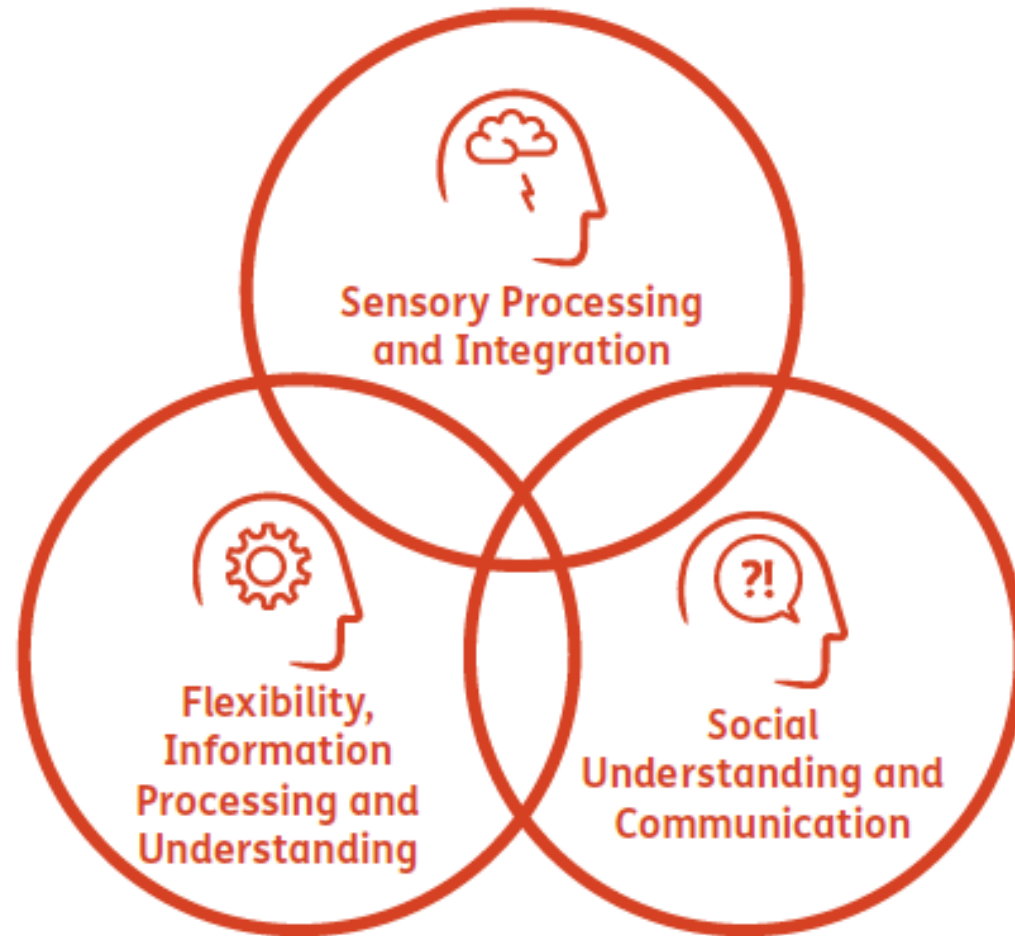
Innovative  
Thinking

Curiosity



# Differences within Neurodiversity

## The Three Areas of Difference



# Autism Spectrum Disorder



# Autism – How it may Present?

Social &  
communication  
differences

Sensory  
Sensitives

Intense Interests

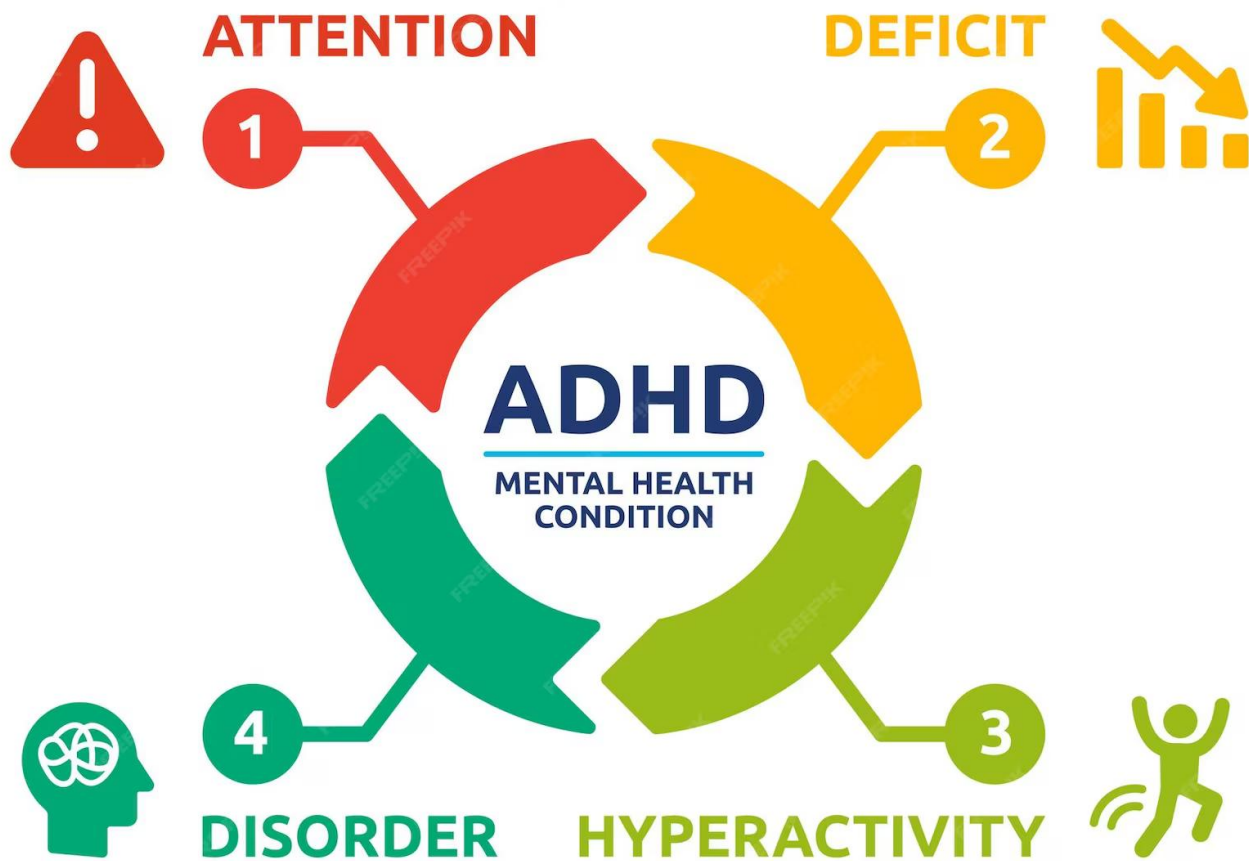
Repetitive  
behaviours

Preference for  
Routines

# Autism – Strengths



# ADHD



# ADHD – How it may Present?

Inattention

Hyperactivity

Emotional  
Regulation  
Difficulties

Impulsivity

# ADHD – Strengths



# Understanding Behaviour

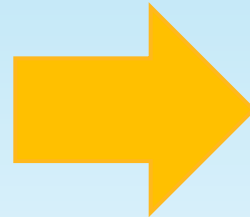
Behaviour is a form of communication

When a neurodiverse child does these:

'Meltdowns'

Struggling to move onto another task

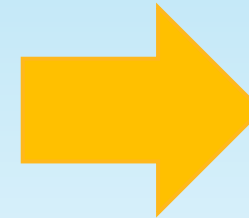
Shutting down



They might feel:

Feeling overwhelmed

Feeling anxious



They might need:

Needs support

# Responding to behaviour



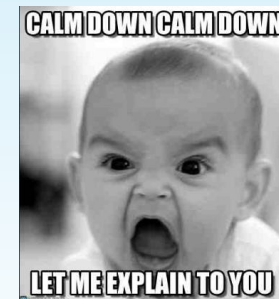
**Behaviour**  
We see and respond to this



Unwelcome behaviour is often punished but if the thoughts and feelings are resolved or eased, the behaviour will change.



**Thoughts and feelings**  
driving the behaviour. We don't usually see or respond to this

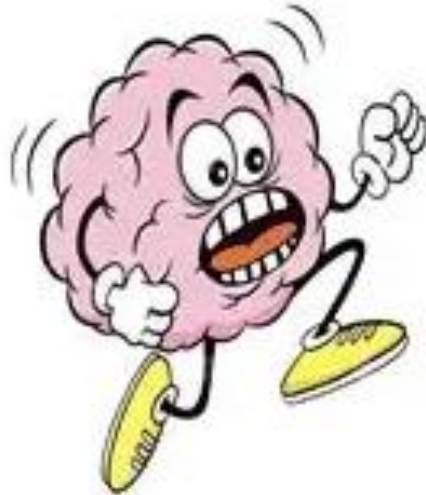


# Anxiety/Stress

**Fight**



flight



FREEZE



# It starts with developing an awareness...

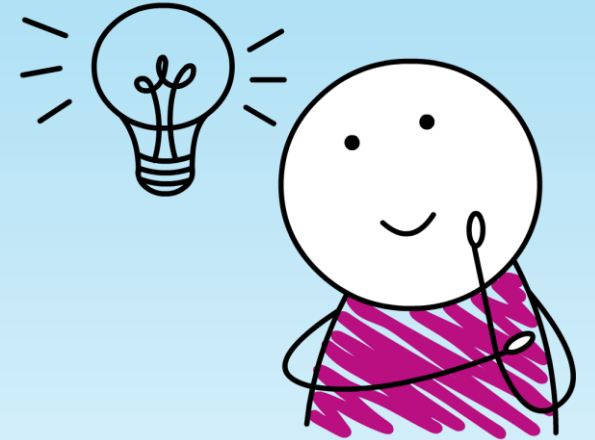
- Knowing about feelings helps children understand themselves, the situation they are in, and whether they need to do something to manage the feeling.
- Talk about emotions at home. Normalise and **model** it. Make it part of the everyday. Ask questions related to feelings:
  - *I felt frustrated at work today so I went for a walk at lunch time and felt much better.*
  - *How did you feel when we were late for school?*
  - *In this story how do you think the character felt about X happening?*
  - *Did you sleep well last night?*



# How can we respond?

- **Validate, normalise and identify their feelings. Reflect on what you see:**

- *I can see that you are very worried.*
- *I would feel very angry if that happened to me.*
- *I can understand why you are feeling sad.*
- *I think most people would feel worried if that happened to them.*



- **Give them time to reconnect their thinking brain:**

- *It's hard to think things through when we are upset, so we need to figure this out when you are feeling less upset.*

- **Create a sense of collaboration:**

- *What do you think we should do next?*

- **You don't have to know the answers:**

- *I'm not sure what to do about that.  
I need to have a think about it but  
I will try my best to help you.*

- **Give children as much choice and control as possible:**

- *Would you like to do it now or later?*
- *Would you like to tell your teacher or shall we do it together?*

- **Give hope for the future:**

- *I know this is a really difficult feeling but I want you to remember that you won't always feel like this, the feeling will go.*

- **If children tell you about their difficult feelings, thank them:**

- *Thank you for telling me about this, I can imagine it wasn't an easy thing to do.*

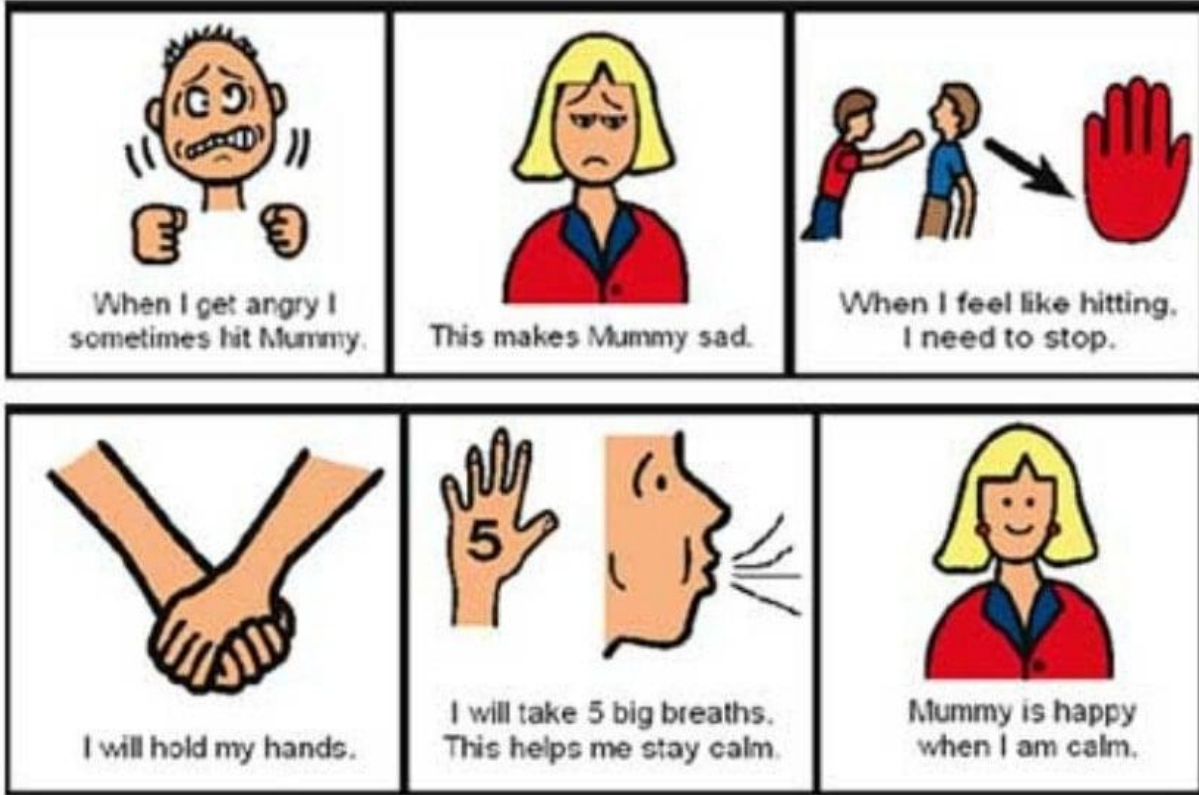




## Alternative communication methods



# Social Stories



# Ordinarily Available Provision



Register now for our webinar on  
**ORDINARILY AVAILABLE PROVISION (OAP)**  
12-1pm on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026

 Hertfordshire

 Herts Parent Carer Involvement  
[www.hertsparentcarers.org.uk](http://www.hertsparentcarers.org.uk)

 SENDIASS  
HERTS/SHIRE

- Support that schools are expected to provide for all children.
- No diagnosis needed.
- Part of a graduated approach to meeting needs.



# Creating a Supportive Home Environment

Consistent routines

Preparation for Change

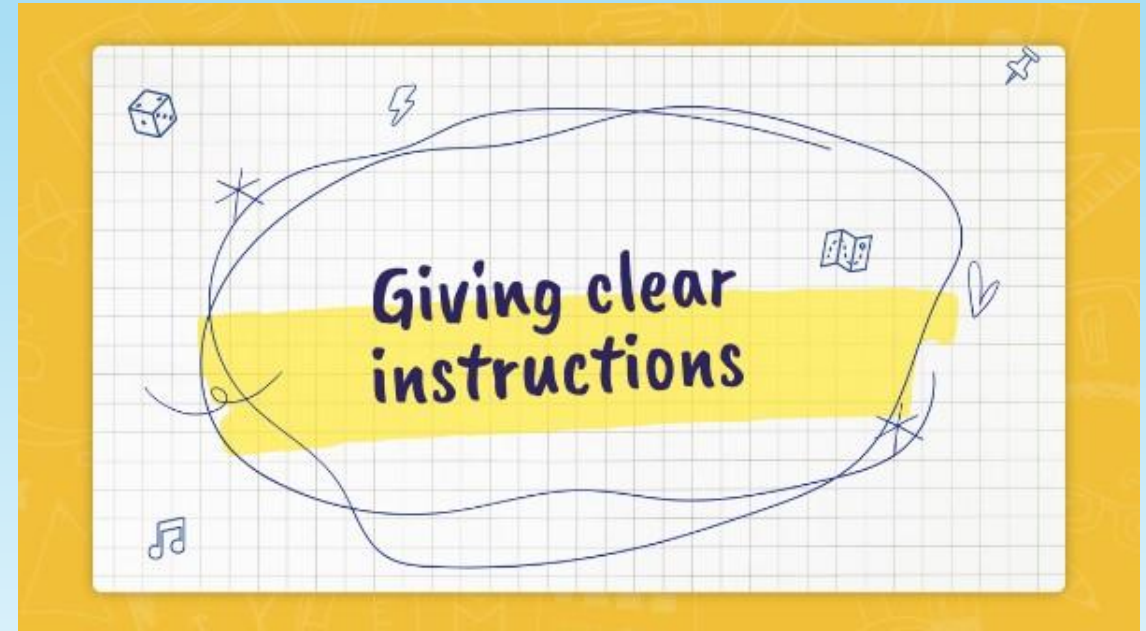
Choices with Boundaries

Sensory Support

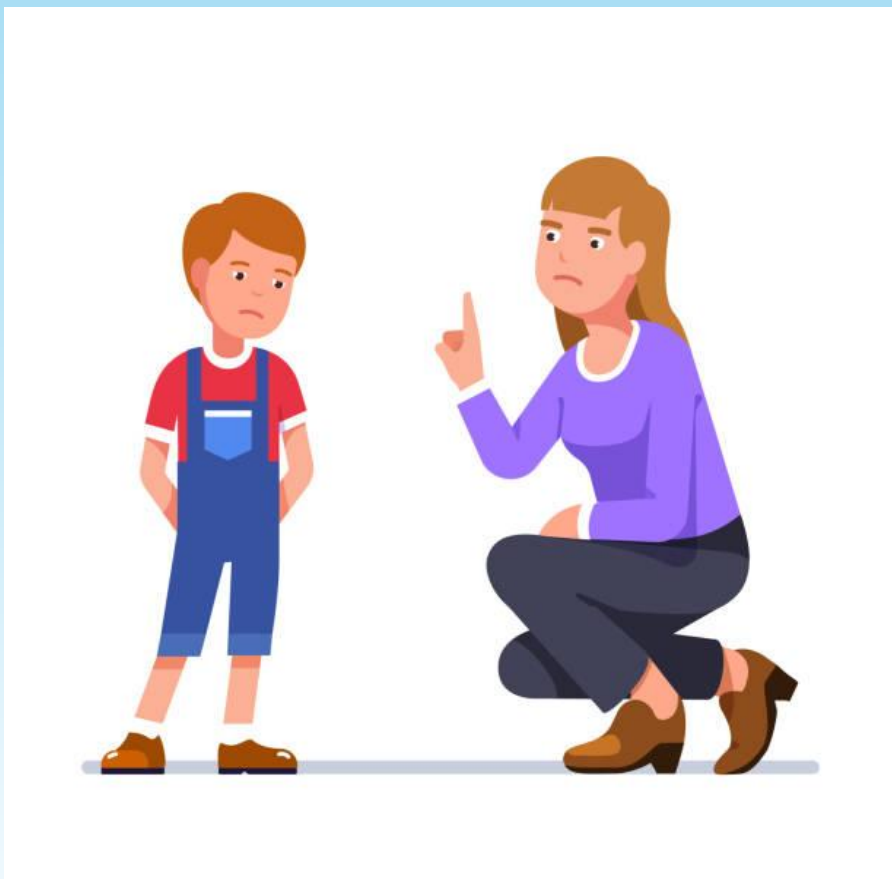
Express emotions

# Making Commands Effective

- Avoid unnecessary commands
- One command at a time
- Keep commands brief
- Use positive/do commands
- Avoid question commands
- Avoid power struggles
- Offer choices - "when...then..."
- Age-appropriate commands
- Give warnings and reminders
- Give time to comply (wait for response – 5 second rule)
- Be polite
- Use distractions and redirections

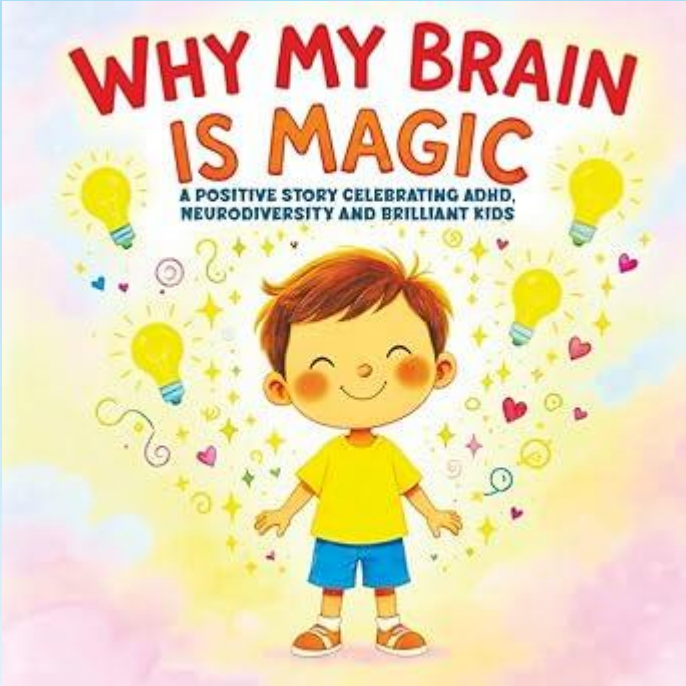
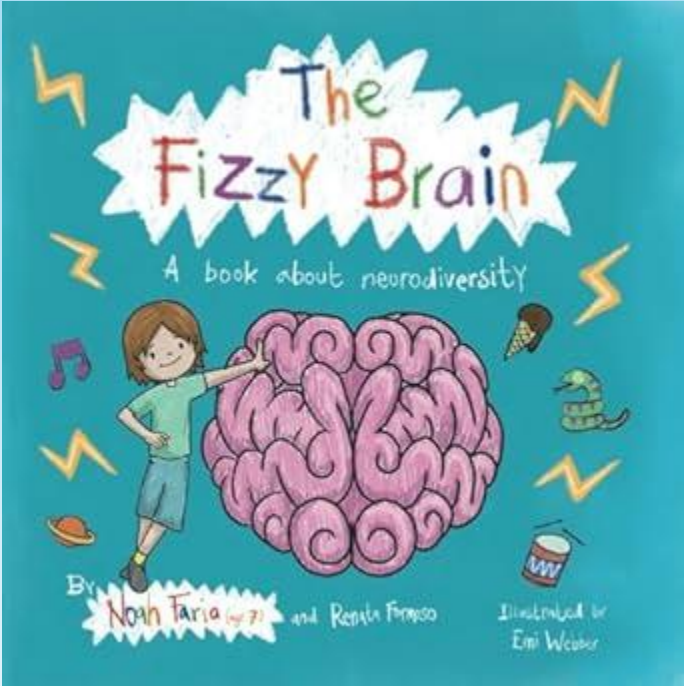
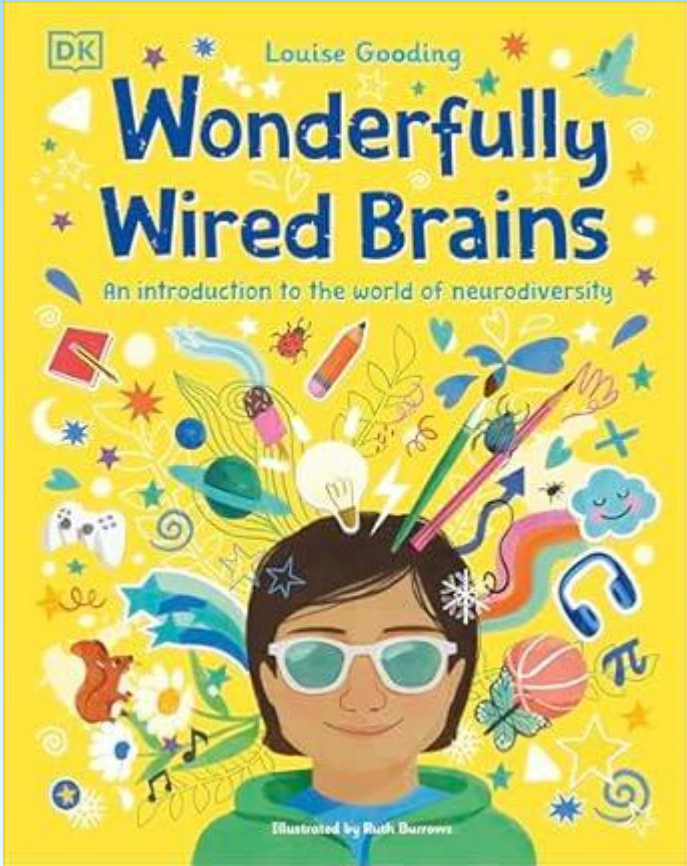


# What doesn't help



- Punishing behaviour caused by anxiety or overwhelm
- Removing support too soon
- Assuming "they should know better"
- Comparing your child to others
- Ignoring sensory or emotional needs

# Books for children





**Thank you for listening  
Any Questions?**



*Feedback is very important to our service to continually improve the service we provide. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire using the QR code. Thank you!*

# IT'S OK TO NOT BE OK. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

<b>NHS SPA</b>	Advice, help & support (24/7)  <b>0800 6444 101</b>	<a href="https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/">https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/</a> <b>Call 111 (or 999 in an emergency)</b>
<b>Childline</b>	Advice, help & support. Online counsellors available: <a href="https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/">https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/</a>	<a href="https://www.childline.org.uk/">https://www.childline.org.uk/</a>  <b>Call 0800 11 11</b>
<b>HOPELINE UK</b>	Prevention of young suicide helpline. <i>(Phoneline open 9am – Midnight everyday)</i>	<a href="https://www.papyrus-uk.org/papyrus-hopelineuk/">https://www.papyrus-uk.org/papyrus-hopelineuk/</a> <b>Call 0800 068 4141 or Text 07786 209697</b>
<b>NSPCC</b>	Advice, help & support for parents/carers & young people.	<a href="https://www.nspcc.org.uk/">https://www.nspcc.org.uk/</a> <b>Call 0808 800 5000</b>
<b>Samaritans</b>	Advice, help & support (24/7)	<a href="https://www.samaritans.org/">https://www.samaritans.org/</a> <b>Call 116 123</b>
<b>ADDvance</b>	ADHD & Autism help & support in Herts for parents.	<a href="https://www.add-vance.org">https://www.add-vance.org</a>

<b>The Sandbox</b>	Mental health support, help & advice for parents/carers & young people in Herts.	<a href="https://sandbox.mindler.co.uk/?">https://sandbox.mindler.co.uk/?</a>
<b>Shout</b>	Mental health support (24/7)	<a href="https://giveusashout.org/">https://giveusashout.org/</a> Text 'SHOUT' to 85258
<b>Young Minds</b>	Mental health support, help & advice for parents/carers & young people.	<a href="https://www.youngminds.org.uk/">https://www.youngminds.org.uk/</a> Text 'YM' to 852558
<b>Stonewall</b>	LGBTQ+ support, help & advice for parents/carers & young people.	<a href="https://www.stonewall.org.uk">https://www.stonewall.org.uk</a>
<b>Mind</b>  Mental health support, help & advice for parents/carers & young people.	<b>BLMK</b> Bedford, Luton & Milton Keynes	<a href="https://www.mind-blmk.org.uk/how-we-can-help/central-bedfordshire/">https://www.mind-blmk.org.uk/how-we-can-help/central-bedfordshire/</a>
	<b>Bucks Mind</b>	<a href="https://www.bucksmind.org.uk">https://www.bucksmind.org.uk</a>
	<b>Herts Mind Network</b>	<a href="https://www.hertsmindnetwork.org/services-for-young-people/">https://www.hertsmindnetwork.org/services-for-young-people/</a>
<b>BEAT</b>	Eating disorder help & support. Webchat & helpline available. <i>(Phoneline open 9am-Midnight Monday-Friday &amp; 4pm-Midnight Weekends &amp; Bank Holidays)</i>	<a href="https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/">https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/</a>  <b>Call 0808 801 0677</b>

