Neurodivergent Coaching

Supporting Autistics & ADHDers

Presented By:

Shannon Lopez | Clinical Psychologist

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Copyright Statement

Acknowledgement of Country

I begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we all gather, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and emerging.

I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

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Hello!

Shannon Lopez

Clinical Psychologist

- She/her
- Neurodiversity-affirming practitioner
- Strong interest in working with and supporting neurodivergent people of all ages

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Objectives & Outcomes

1. **Foundation to the Brainstyles**
   - Autism
   - ADHD
   - AuADHD
2. **Therapy vs Coaching?**
   - Understanding the differences
   - Approaches
   - Case Studies
3. **Skills**
   -ADHD specific
   - Autism specific
   - AuADHD friendly
   - Case Studies

Brainstyle Foundations

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Brain Style Foundations

Neurodiversity

- Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation of neurotypes, or brain styles, within the human population
- A neurodivergent brain that is one that is functioning differently to the societal norm, or typical way a brain may be expected to function

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Brain Style Foundations

Social Model of Disability

Neurodiverse individuals are not disordered, but part of natural variation

Societal norms an expectations ie. Neurotypical norms, disadvantage neurodiverse individuals

Support and “intervention” therefore needs to provide a better environment for the neurodiverse individual, and assist the around them to understand them

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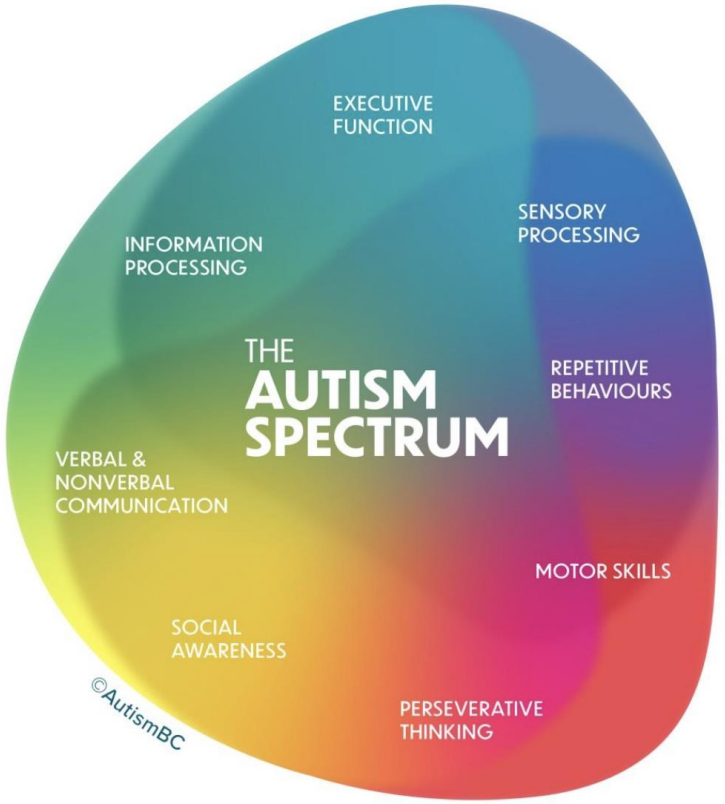
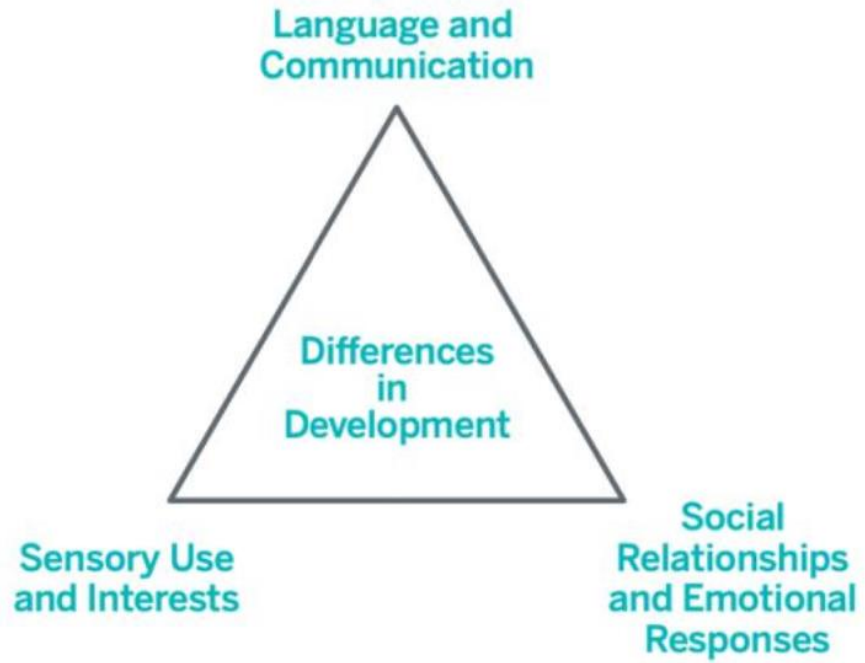
Brain Style Foundations

Autism

- Neurodevelopmental Brain Style
  - 2 sets of criteria within the DSM-V-TR
    - A. Social Communication Deficits
    - B. Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours and interests
  - With/without intellectual impairment
  - 3 Levels of support needs

Brain Style Foundations
Autism





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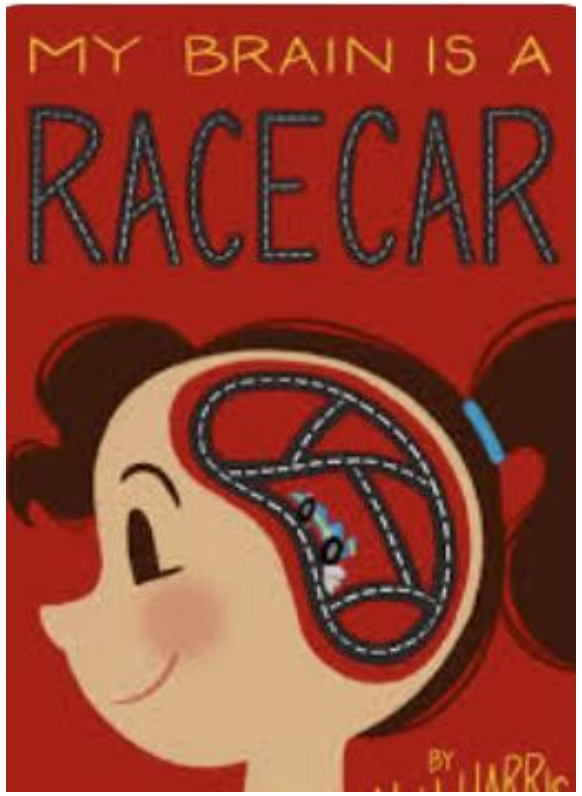
Brain Style Foundations
ADHD

- Neurodevelopmental Brain Style
- Differences in Executive Function and Development
  - Attention – Distractibility
  - Concentration & Maintaining it
  - Planning & Sequencing
  - Organisation
  - Time & Timeliness
  - Hyperactivity/Inhibitory Control
  - Impulse Control
  - Emotion Regulation



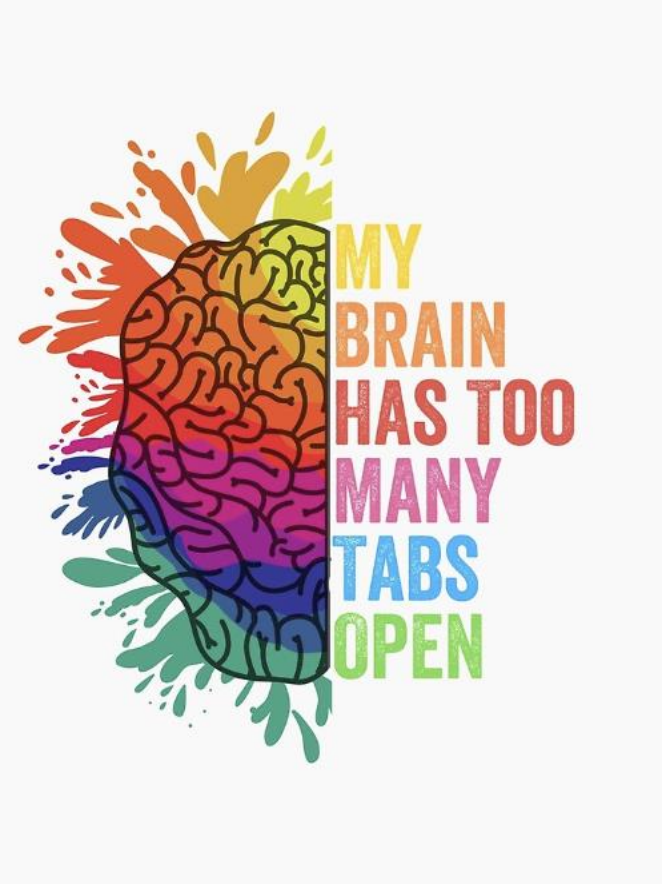
Brain Style Foundations
ADHD

- DSM-V-TR Criteria
  - Symptoms of either Inattention (min 6) or Hyperactivity (min 6) or both
  - Symptoms present for at least 6 months and prior to the age of 12
  - Causes impact to daily functioning or distress
- Deficits in dopamine and noradrenaline levels in prefrontal cortex
- Interest based Nervous System

Brain Style Foundations

ADHD & Medication

- An important part that compliments the coaching and strategies we may provide
- Australian Clinical Practice Guidelines for Identification, Diagnosis and Treatment of ADHD https://adhdguideline.aadpa.com.au/



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Brain Style Foundations
AuADHD

- Neurodevelopmental Brain Style
- Meeting criteria for both brain styles
- 50-70% co-occurrence
- Unique challenges and blending of different symptoms

Coaching vs Therapy

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Psychological Therapy

Psychological treatment is an intervention consisting of specific actions between a person or persons and a mental health professional or designee, with the intent of engaging cognitive, emotional, behavioural, or interpersonal processes, in the service of modifying health or functional outcomes, and whose core assumptions about its procedures and mechanisms of change are founded in psychological science and consistent with scientific understanding.

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Coaching

- Distinct from counselling or consulting, however, related.
- Guiding a learner towards improved performance
- Rapport, observation, feedback, practical suggestion
- Range of contexts-
  - Sport and Performance
  - Executive Coaching
  - Organisational and Human Resources
  - Psychology
  - Education

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Coaching vs Therapy

Coaching

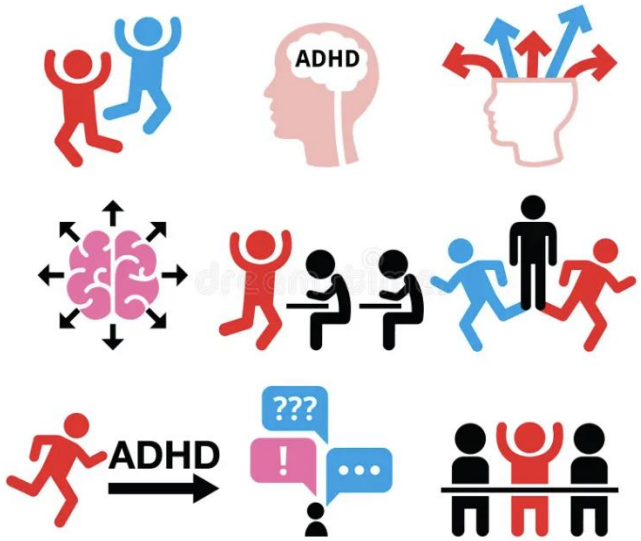
- Teaching and directive in style
- Practical suggestions
- Behaviour focus
- Shorter timeframe
- Future focused

Therapy

- Reflective
- Considering psychological processes- thoughts and emotions
- Longer time frame
- May be future focused, but also considering past history

Coaching Methods

- Evidence based Methods of Coaching
  - GROW Model (goal-focused)
  - SMART Goals
  - Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching
  - Solution-oriented
  - Motivational Interviewing
  - Models of Change



- Other Methods
  - Psychodynamic
  - Systemic
  - Result oriented
  - Narrative

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Coaching Methods
GROW Model (Goal-Focused)

- G = Goal
- R= Reality
- O= Options
- W- Way forward

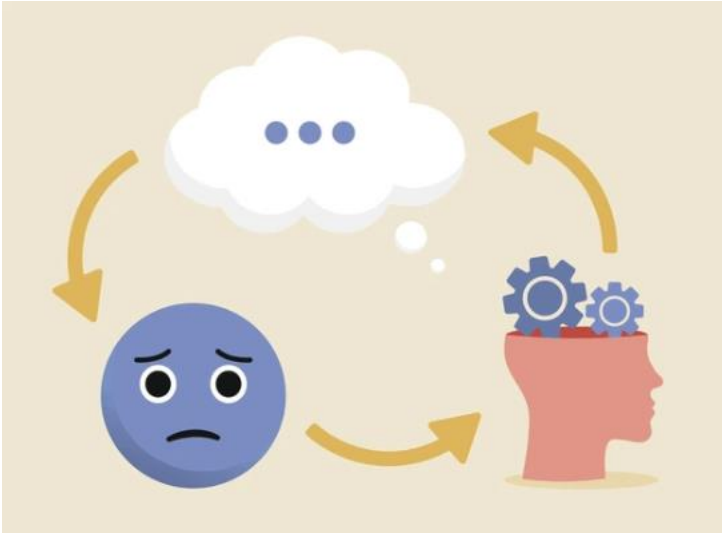
Coaching Methods
SMART Goals

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achieveable
- Realistic
- Time-bound/oriented

Coaching Methods

Cognitive Behavioural Coaching

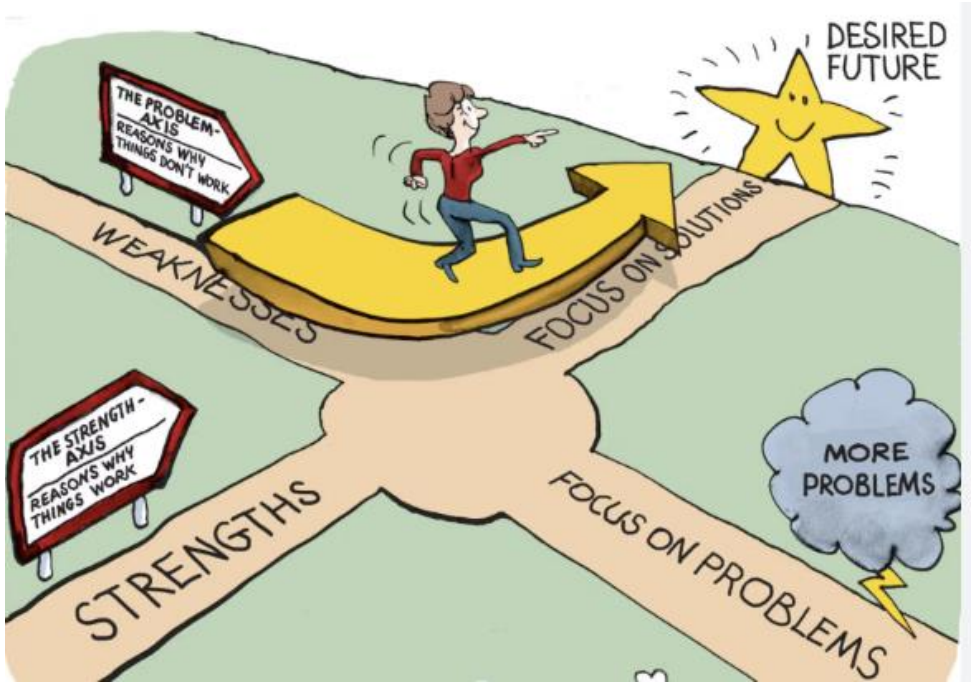
- Structured, evidence-based approach that applies principles from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Identify and change unhelpful thinking patterns, emotional responses, and behaviours that may be limiting their performance or wellbeing
- Its pretty much CBT, but with a very goal focussed and less psychological lens!



Coaching Methods

Solution-Focused Coaching

- Rooted in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)
- Future-oriented
- Strengths-based
- Brief and focused
- Client-led
- Guiding clients to envision their preferred future and take small, actionable steps toward it.



Coaching Methods

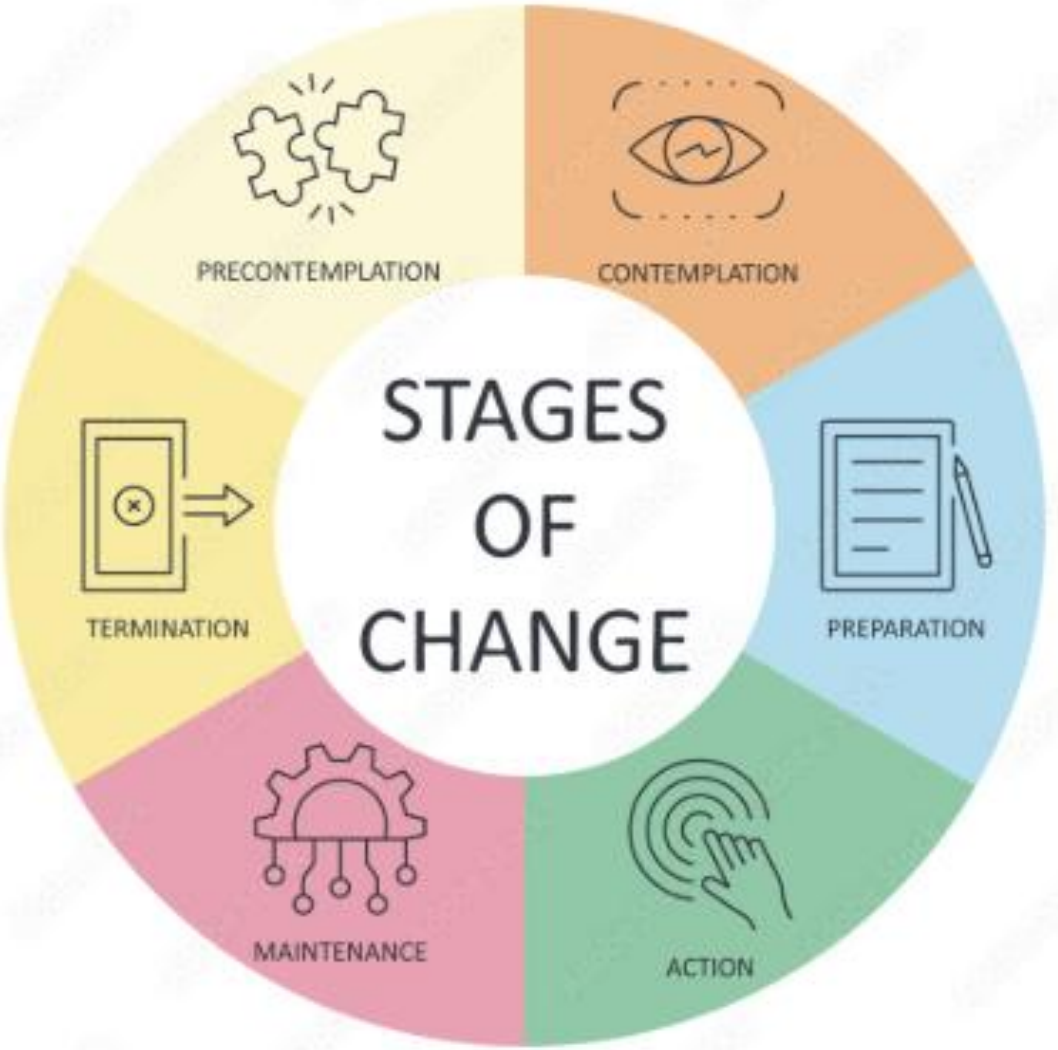
Motivational Interviewing

- Core Principles
  - Open questions
  - Affirmations (genuine recognition of strengths)
  - Reflective listening
  - Summarising
- These are delivered with the *spirit*
  - Partnership (collaboration, not authority)
  - Acceptance (unconditional positive regard)
  - Compassion (prioritising the client's welfare)
  - Evocation (drawing out rather than imposing motivation)

Coaching Methods

Models of Change

- Transtheoretical Model (TTM) or Stages of Change Model
  - Change is a process, not a one-time event.
  - People may move back and forth between stages.
  - Effective support matches the stage the person is in.



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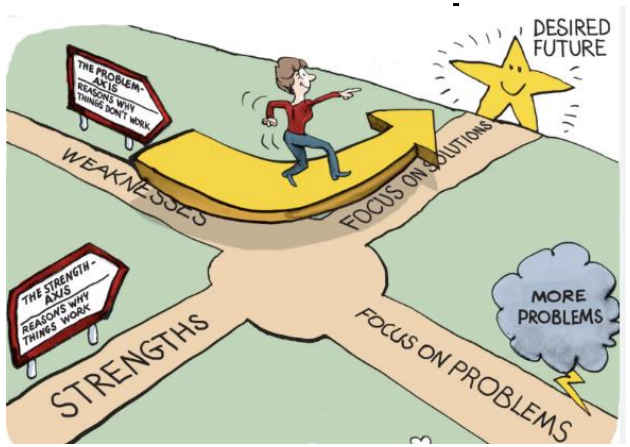
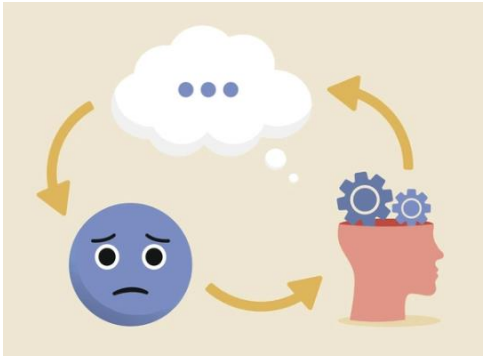
Coaching Methods
Case Studies

- Using the case studies, consider the coaching methods presented and the differences to support or focus that may come from each





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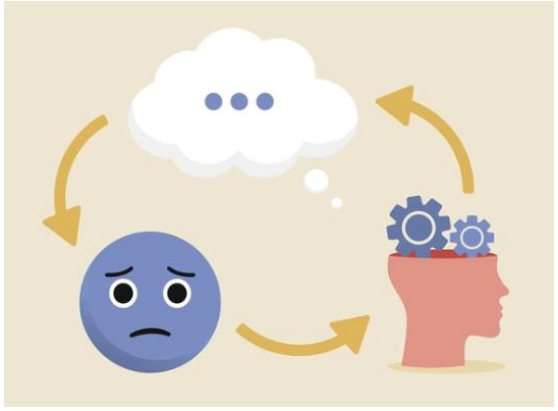
Coaching Methods
Case Study

- Mark is in his 20s and works freelance delivering parcels for Amazon, whilst he works on a film script he is developing. He identifies as Autistic
- Mark struggles to maintain a regular sleep routine, often staying up late working on his script, and though does get up and complete a range of deliveries, he knows he is missing out on a portion of the working day by getting up at 12pm
- He is hoping to create a better balance between what he views as his two jobs

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Coaching Methods
Case Study

- Kate is in her 40s, and works in recruitment. She achieves well in her role in meeting her sales and business development KPIs, though her husband believes she is a workaholic. She identifies as an ADHDer
- Kate describes that she is very disorganised, and that this has begun to effect her team as more people are now reliant on her for structure. For example, she struggles with time-blindness, using calendars, and prioritizing her time to allow for time to support her team
- Kate isn't sure what she wants to focus on, but knows she needs help



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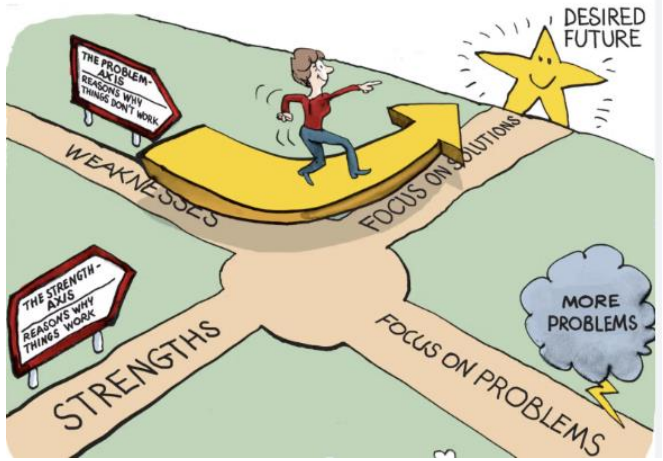
Coaching Methods
Case Study

- Kate is in her 30s, and is currently studying to be an Occupational Therapist whilst on maternity leave with her first child. She identifies as AuADHD
- Kate described that she is struggling to be proactive in managing her study load and turning in assessments without procrastinating and is finding this exhausting. She also described she is finding it difficult to build routines which would be helpful for her child, regarding sleep and usually relies on her partner to scaffold this. She described feeling “touched out” frequently



Break

Coaching for Neurodivergent Clients

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Coaching for Neurodivergent Clients

ADHD

- Increasing evidence since the 1990s that coaching for executive functioning and ADHD is associated with improved wellbeing, increased goal-attainment and decreased functional impacts
- Children, adolescents and adults

Autism

- Increasing but newer evidence that is helpful for teens and adults, and an important part of service delivery that autistic adult identify as needing

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Coaching for Neurodivergent Clients
Example Goals

ADHD

- Organisation
- Time-blindness
- Task Initiation
- Task Completion
- Motivation
- Sequencing

Autism

- Sensory Management
- Managing Transitions
- Managing Attention Shifts
- Spoon Theory
- Life Skills – vocation support

Coaching Needs for ADHDers

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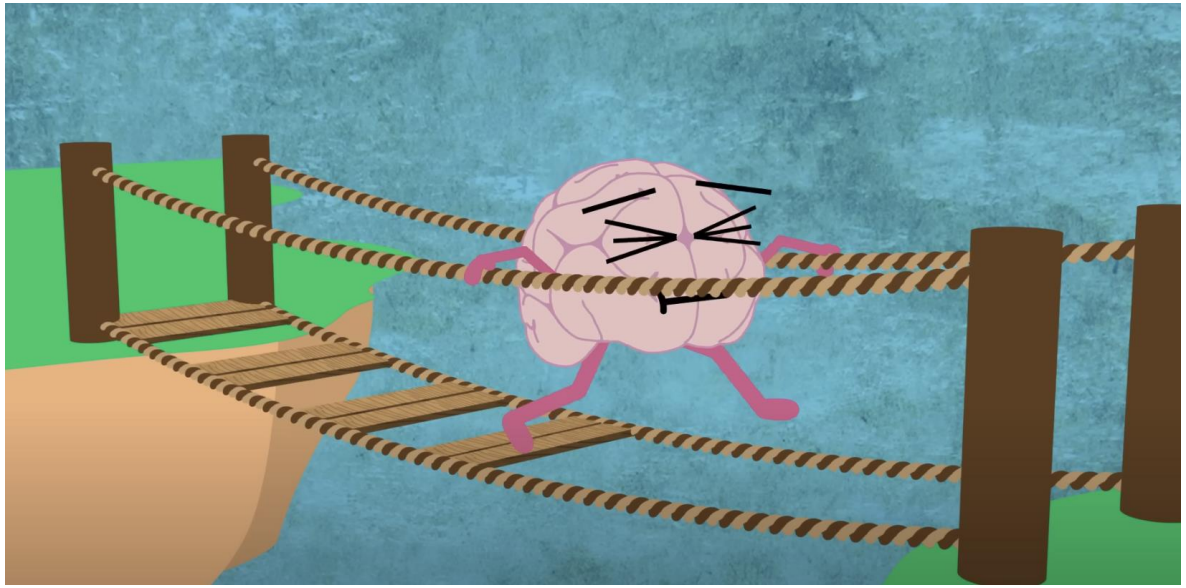
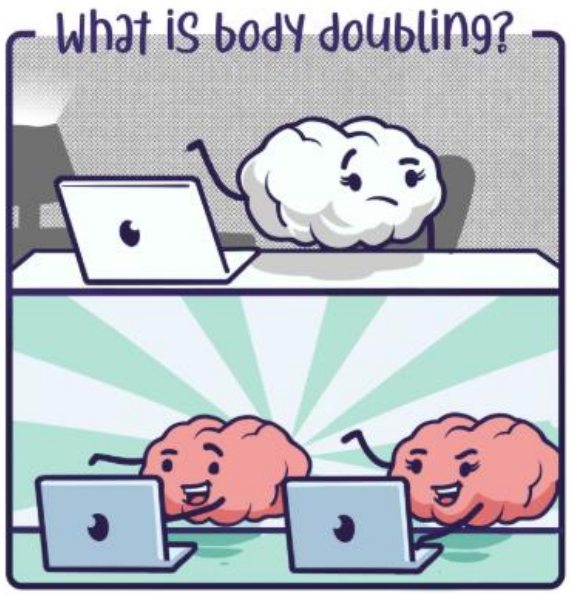
Coaching Needs for ADHDers
Task Initiation

- Interest-based nervous system
- “Building Motivation Bridge” credit How To ADHD YouTube
  - Interesting
  - Urgent
  - New
  - Novel

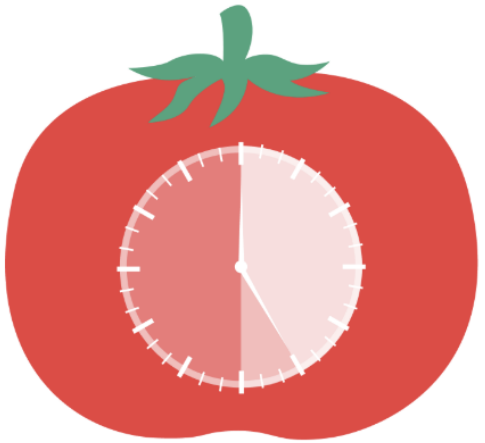


Coaching Needs for ADHDers
Task Completion

- Body doubling
  - Gentle accountability
  - Not helping with the task, just prescence



- Pomodoro method
  - Alternating focused time and break times



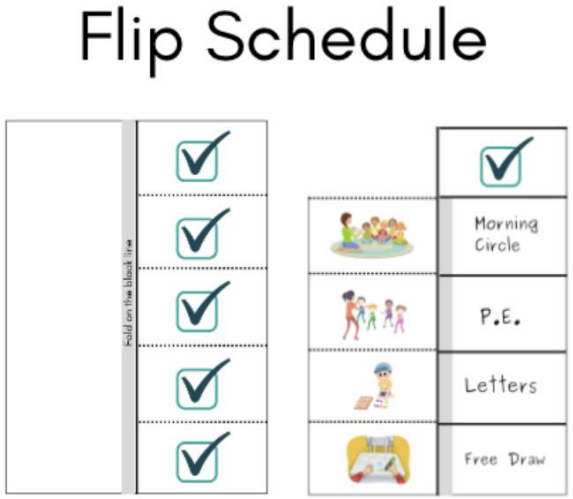
25 min working
5 min resting

Coaching Needs for ADHDers

External Environment Systems

- Time
  - Analogue clocks
  - Visual Timers
  - Reminders on smart watches

- Visual schedules + planners
  - Calendars
  - Colours
  - Whiteboards



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Coaching Needs for ADHDers

External Environment Systems

- Habit stacking
  - Pair an existing habit/routine/behaviour with a new one that the client is hoping to introduce
  - Reduces demand of initation and mental load

- Technology and AI Supports
  - Home assistants
  - ChatGPT
  - Goblin Tools https://goblin.tools/
  - Smart watches
  - Airtags/Find My Devices
  - Finch App https://finchcare.com/
  - Todist or similar https://www.todoist.com/
  - Habitica https://habitica.com/static/home

Coaching Needs for ADHDers
Stimulation

Dopamine Menu

- Exercise
- Rewards
- Stimulation
- Novelty
- Change
- Fidgets
- Workplace

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Coaching Needs for Autistics

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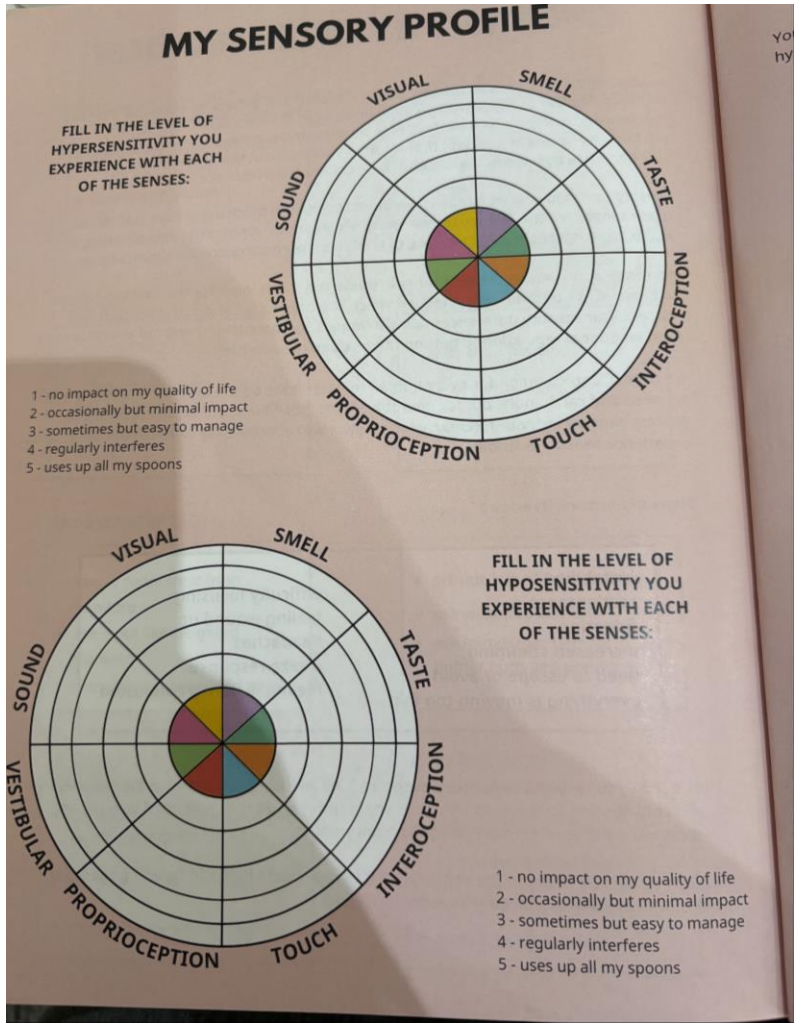
Coaching Needs for Autistics
Sensory Awareness and Management

- Managing the environment and accommodations
  - Each client's sensory profile is unique and will often already have developed coping strategies
  - Making these known and understood as coping strategies
  - Developing new ones and coaching them to engage



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Coaching Needs for Autistics
Executive Functioning

- Transitions
  - Occur throughout the day, and can be highly dysregulating
  - Transition Objects
  - Transition Periods
  - Transition Activities

- Attention Shifts
  - Preferred to non-preferred
  - Interruptions or planned
  - Finding a natural “end” or completion point – real or felt.

Coaching Needs for Autistics

Energy Management – Spoon Theory

- “Spoons” = units of energy
- Spoon drainers
  - Things that use cognitive, emotional or physical energy
- Spoon rechargers
  - Personally nourishing and help restore energy, calm, or a sense of joy
- Energy budgeting
  - saving spoons for things that matter, and recognising when to rest.

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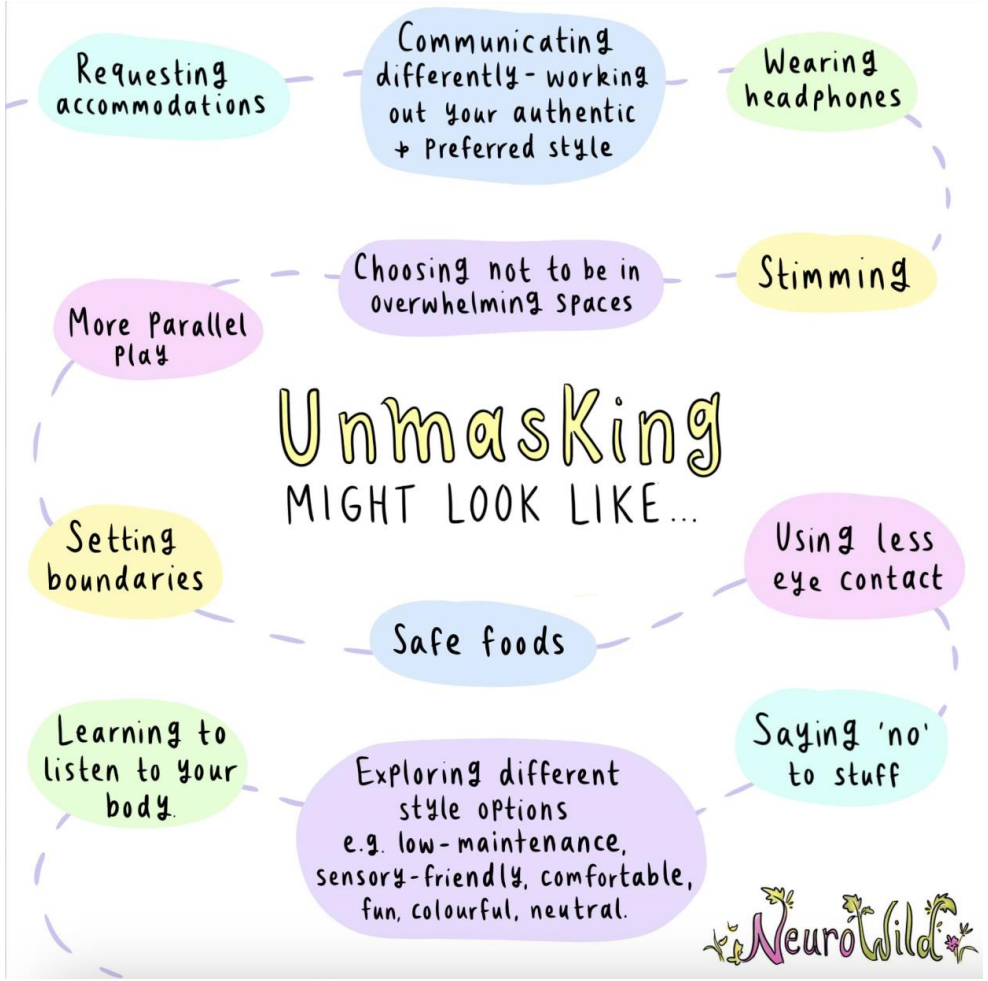
Coaching Needs for Autistics
Understanding Masking

- Masking
  - Conscious or unconscious process of hiding, suppressing or camouflaging autistic traits in order to it in, avoid judgement or meet neurotypical norms
    - Social mimicry
    - Supress natural behaviours
    - Masking or hiding challenges
  - Emotional and cognitive load
  - Deciding when is it helpful or when is it not



Coaching Needs for Autistics
Lifeskills & Work

- Values & Interests
- NDA Work Environments
  - NGOs
  - Governments
  - Flexibility
  - Accommodations
- Distress Tolerance

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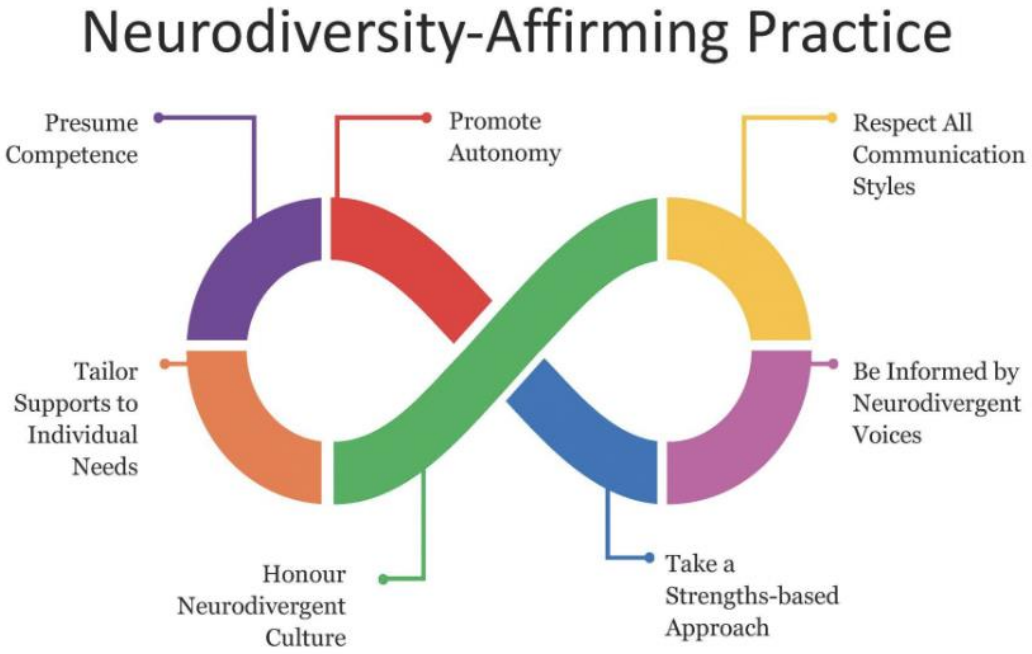
How about AuADHDers?

- This will be more varied, and need to consider what the predominant brain style that is getting in the way is in any given area of difficulty



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MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

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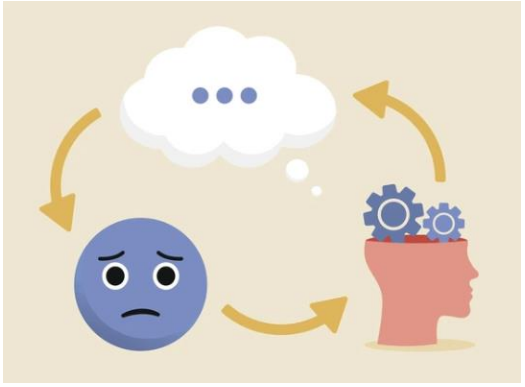

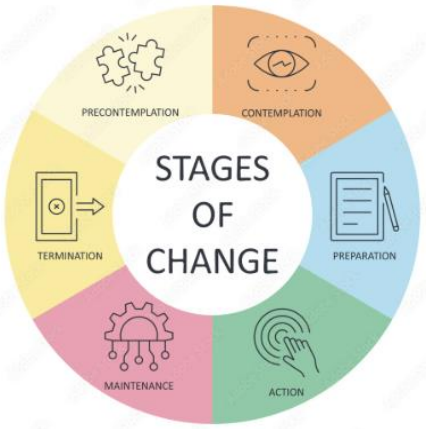

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Kahoot!

Questions/Comments

Thank you

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shannong@spencerhealth.com.au

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