

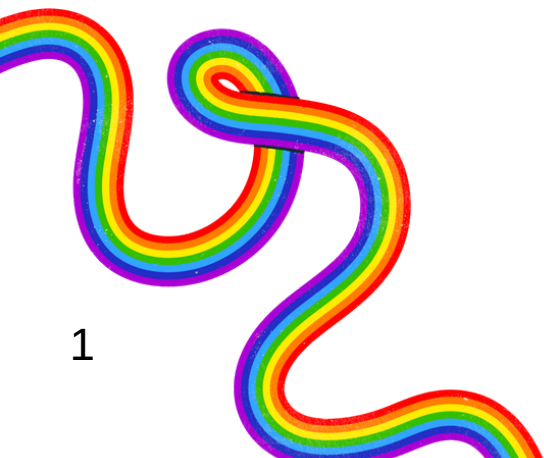


UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

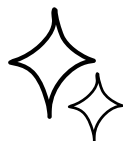
a short guide to understanding
your autistic friend, family
member, lollipop lady, or dentist...
(amongst others)

H Lockwood

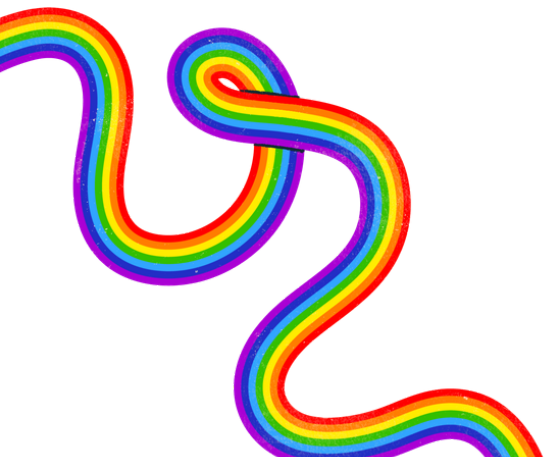




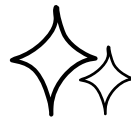
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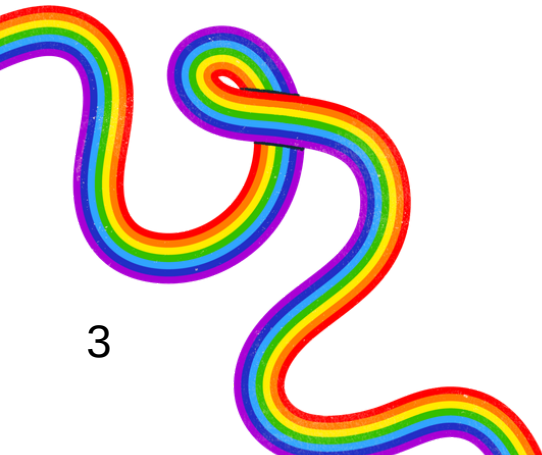
THE SPECTRUM



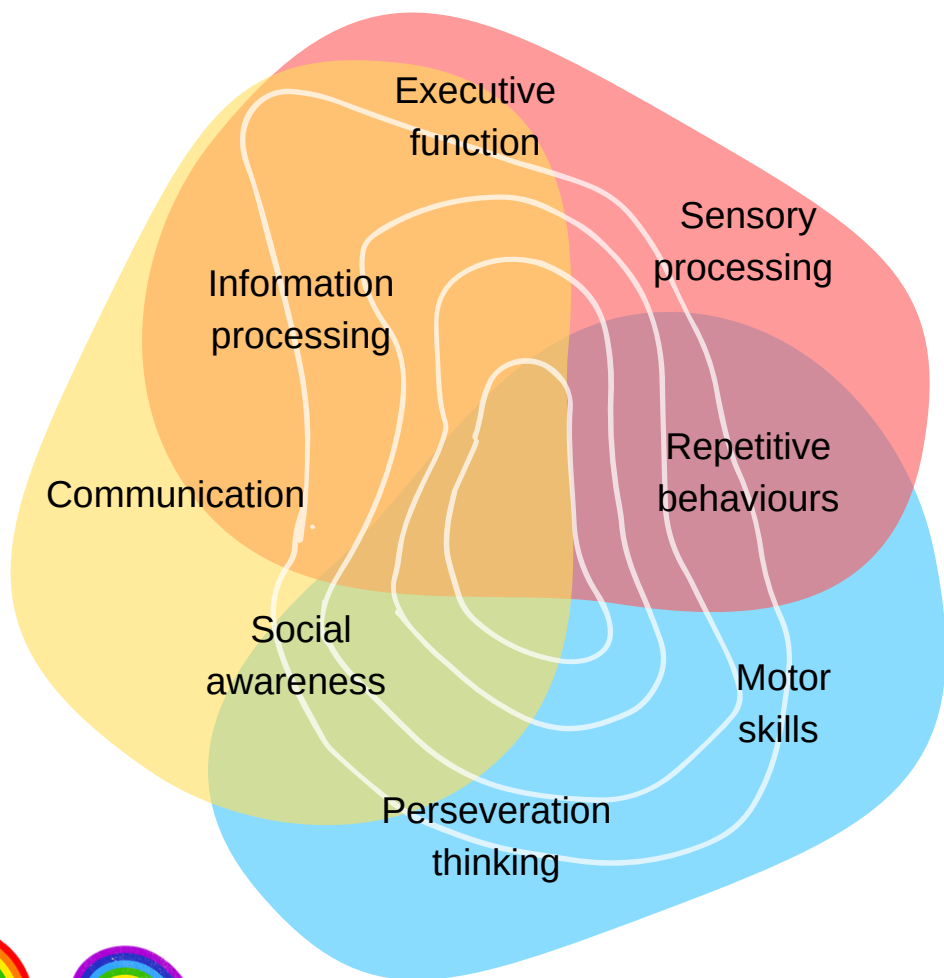
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is exactly that- a spectrum.

BUT it isn't linear and is often visualized as a circle.

While some may be excellent at processing information, or communication, they may struggle with motor skills and sensory processing.



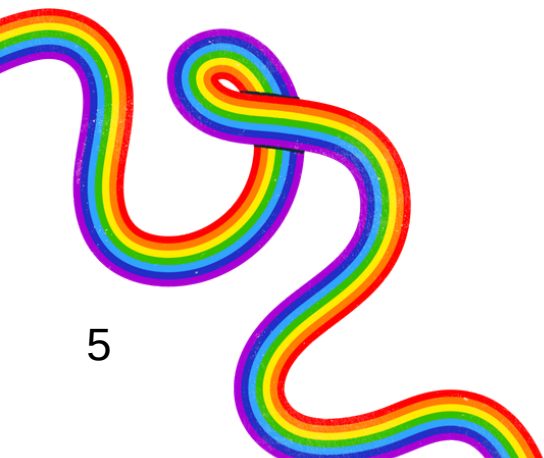
A NON-LINEAR SPECTRUM



SELF REGULATING AND 'STIMMING'

Stimming is when someone uses repetitive movements and actions to help block sensory overload and overcome anxiety. This can also help with focus.

Stimming can also be a form of communication, letting others know that one is overwhelmed.



Stims are different for everyone, but can look like:

- finger clicking
- flapping
- fidgeting
- tongue clicking
- slapping
- tapping
- spinning
- jumping
- verbal stims
- clenching fists
- rocking
- twirling hair
- arm movements
- chewing

Attempting to stop someone from stimming (e.g. by using punishments) can cause further problems for the autistic person and can lead to meltdowns and shutdown episodes.

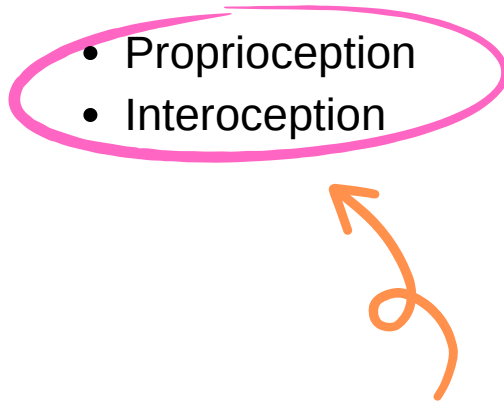


SENSORY OVERLOAD

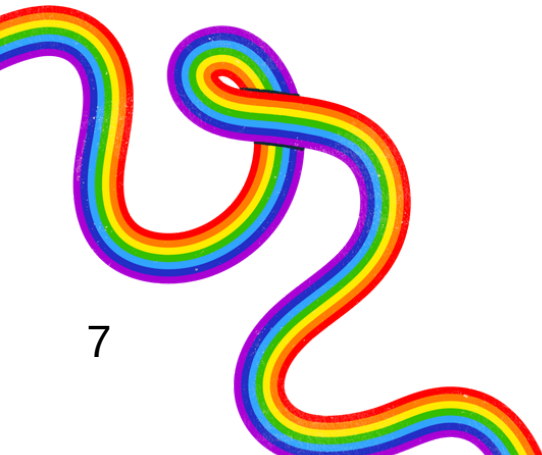


Most people know that we have five senses, but there are more than you realise.

- Sight
 - Smell
 - Taste
 - Sound
 - Touch
- Proprioception
 - Interoception



Did you know about these two?

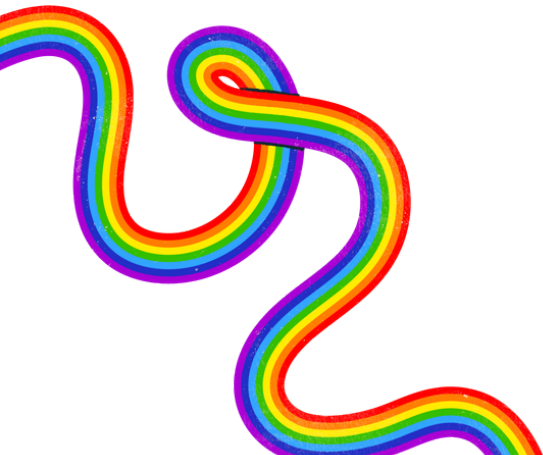


PROPRIOCEPTION

Proprioception is a sense of where your body is in the surrounding space. So it is how your body is positioned and orientated, and people may often fall over and bump into things.

INTEROCEPTION

Interoception is an awareness of feeling within your body, such as hunger and thirst. For example, some people don't get thirsty and need prompts to drink.



GETTING OVERLOADED

Sensory overload feels like someone has isolated a particular form of sensory input (e.g. a sound) and turned the volume and intensity up. That sound can be something that most people wouldn't even notice, like background noise.

It's the same for all senses, including tastes, bright lights, and even movement (e.g. travel sickness).

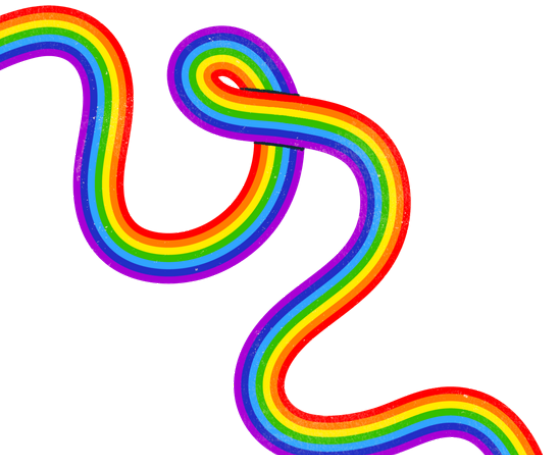


How to help

Autistic people may need help finding and implementing solutions to limit sensory input and reduce the chance of overload.

This can look like...

- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Ear defenders
- Sunglasses
- Dim lighting
- Comfortable clothing



SHUTDOWN

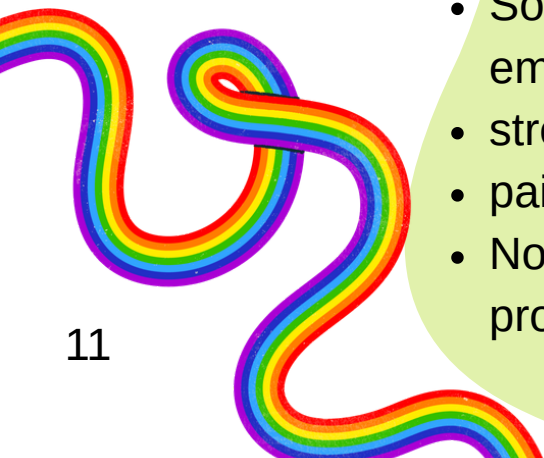
Shutdown episodes can be very distressing and are generally categorised by the following:

- Complete silence
- Inability to communicate
- Cannot move
- Sitting/laying in a dark space
- Internal freeze response
- Dissociation



Shutdown can be caused by any overwhelming input, including:

- Social, sensory, or emotional overload
- stress
- pain or illness
- Not having enough time to process change

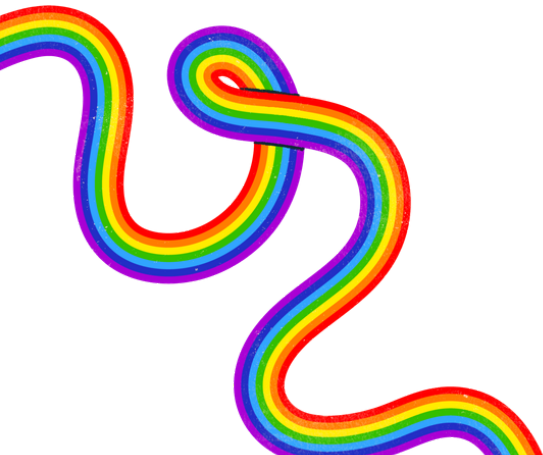
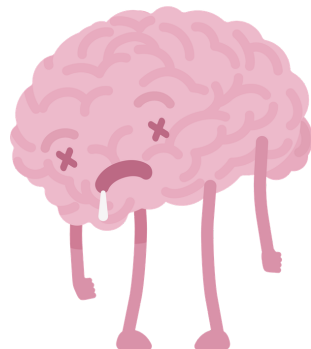


How to help

Recovering from shutdown can be a long process and often just takes time and space to process.

Reducing light and noise can help, as well as limiting physical touch.

Everyone needs time to recharge their social battery and recovering from shutdown can be a similar process. It will vary between people, but often involves having time and being patient.

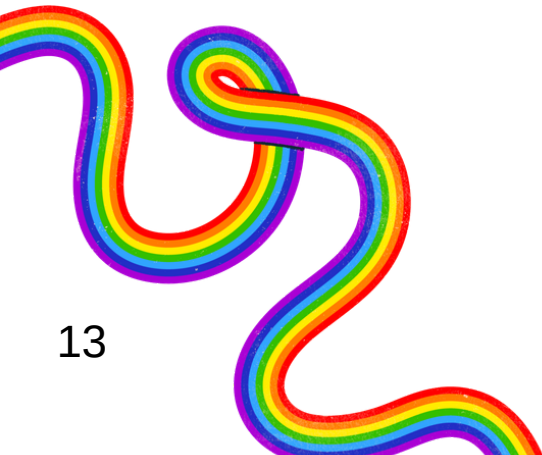


ALEXITHYMIA

Alexithymia is essentially difficulty in identifying your emotions and not knowing how you feel. It is common in autistic people and affects emotional expression.

Alexithymia can look like:

- Trouble verbalising how you feel
- Finding it hard to tell the difference between emotions and bodily sensations
- Difficulty identifying emotions in other people (faces and facial expressions)
- Often responding with 'I'm fine' when asked how you feel



What can help

You can use music and lyrics to describe how you feel and communicate your emotions. Also, you can create art in the same way.

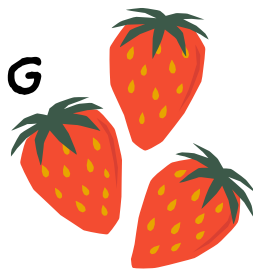
Emotion wheels can also be helpful in identifying how we feel.

Alternative descriptions like 'I want to throw things' or 'I want to stay in bed' can be used to describe emotions

Search the internet for
'emotion wheels'



AUTISM AND EATING DISORDERS

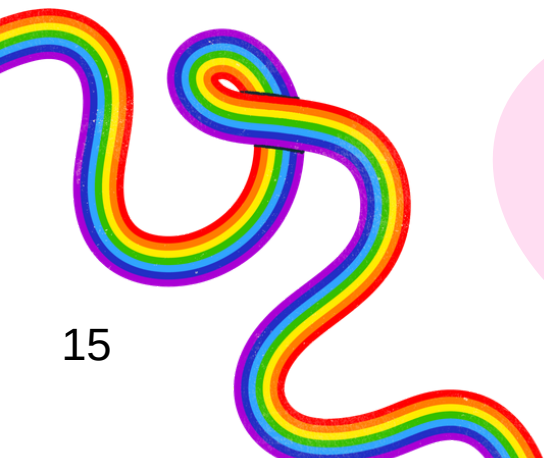


A SENSE OF SELF

Autistic people can struggle to understand themselves. They do things to fit in and can get so obsessed by the idea of fitting the perfect human mould that they can go on to develop severely disordered eating.

DISORDERED EATING

There are many eating disorders, and, just like anyone else, autistic people can struggle with any one of them. One which is quite often associated with autism is 'ARFID'.



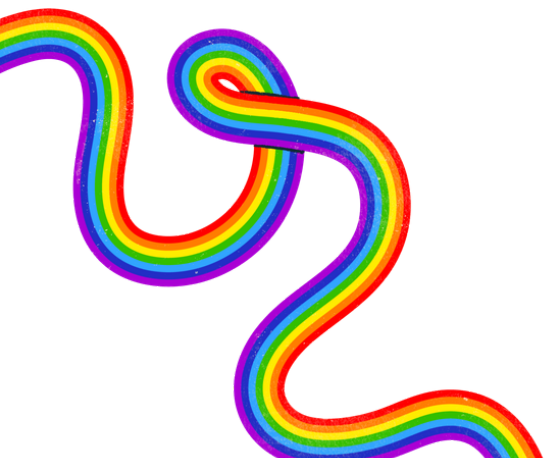
ARFID =
Avoidant/Restrictive
Food Intake Disorder

FOOD

Many autistic people struggle with the physical attributes of different foods. For example, strong tastes (such as spices) can be intolerable, but so can some textures.

Often, food items do not look or smell edible. It is likened to presenting a neurotypical person with a plate of plastic fruit or something harmful/poisonous.

Autistic people may then have a very limited diet, often seen as picky eaters.



AUTISM AND PAIN

Autistic people tend to feel pain in a different way to neurotypical people.

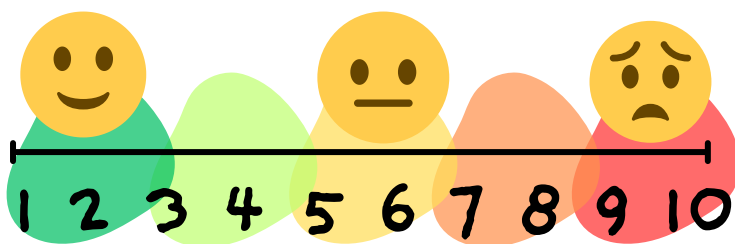
Many autistic people have a 'high pain threshold' and may not realise that they are hurt. In a care/hospital setting, it is important that people are checked (visually or using radiography) for injuries.

However, some people feel pain more intensely than most, and pain management should be frequently evaluated.



Using pain scales is not always helpful, as it is hard to relate a feeling of pain to a number.

It can be more meaningful to use colour scales and relate each colour to a pain experience. For example, green could relate to a constant pain baseline.



This adapted pain scale is particularly important during a hospital visit or admission



This short booklet is designed to give a brief overview of the common day-to-day struggles associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is designed for absolutely anyone who knows or cares for an autistic person, but can also help autistic people to understand themselves a little more.

