

Discover autism!

When Behaviour is Confusing:

How to Understand and Support Children with Neurodevelopmental Differences

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Why do some children and young people struggle in school and life?

Learning and Neurodevelopmental Disorders

- **Learning disorders** like dyslexia or ADHD can make it challenging for children to keep up academically.
- **Neurodevelopmental disorders** affect a child's ability to process, understand, and retain information.

Mental Health Issues

- **Anxiety, depression, and social anxiety** can impact concentration, motivation, and engagement in learning
- **Stress from bullying** or other social issues can also contribute to struggles

Health and Physical Problems

- **Chronic illnesses** and sleep disorders can affect a child's ability to perform academically.
- **Sensory overload** and physical pain can lead to behavioral issues.



Why do some children and young people struggle in school and life?

Environmental and Social Factors

- Family dynamics, such as divorce or the arrival of a new sibling, can cause emotional distress
- Major life changes and high demands in daily life can be overwhelming

Engagement and Motivation

- Lack of engagement in school due to monotonous teaching methods or failure to connect lessons to real-world scenarios
- Disengagement can lead to disruptive or disinterested behaviour.

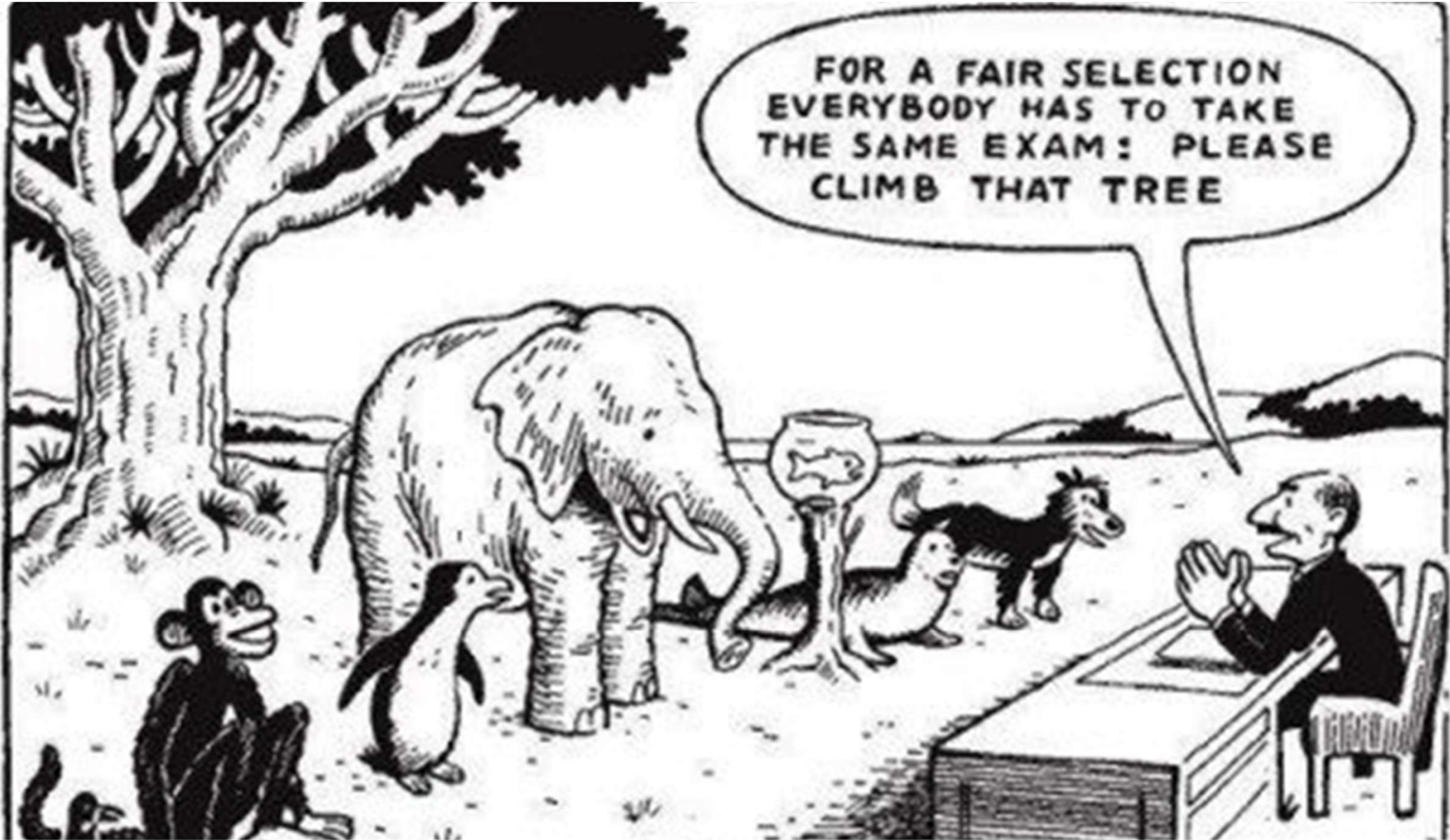
Behavioral Challenges

- Challenging behaviors may be a way for children to communicate unmet needs or exert control over their environment.
- Behaviour often considered "problematic" can signal anxiety, exhaustion, or excessive demands.

How to recognise these signals and respond empathetically?



FOR A FAIR SELECTION
EVERYBODY HAS TO TAKE
THE SAME EXAM: PLEASE
CLIMB THAT TREE

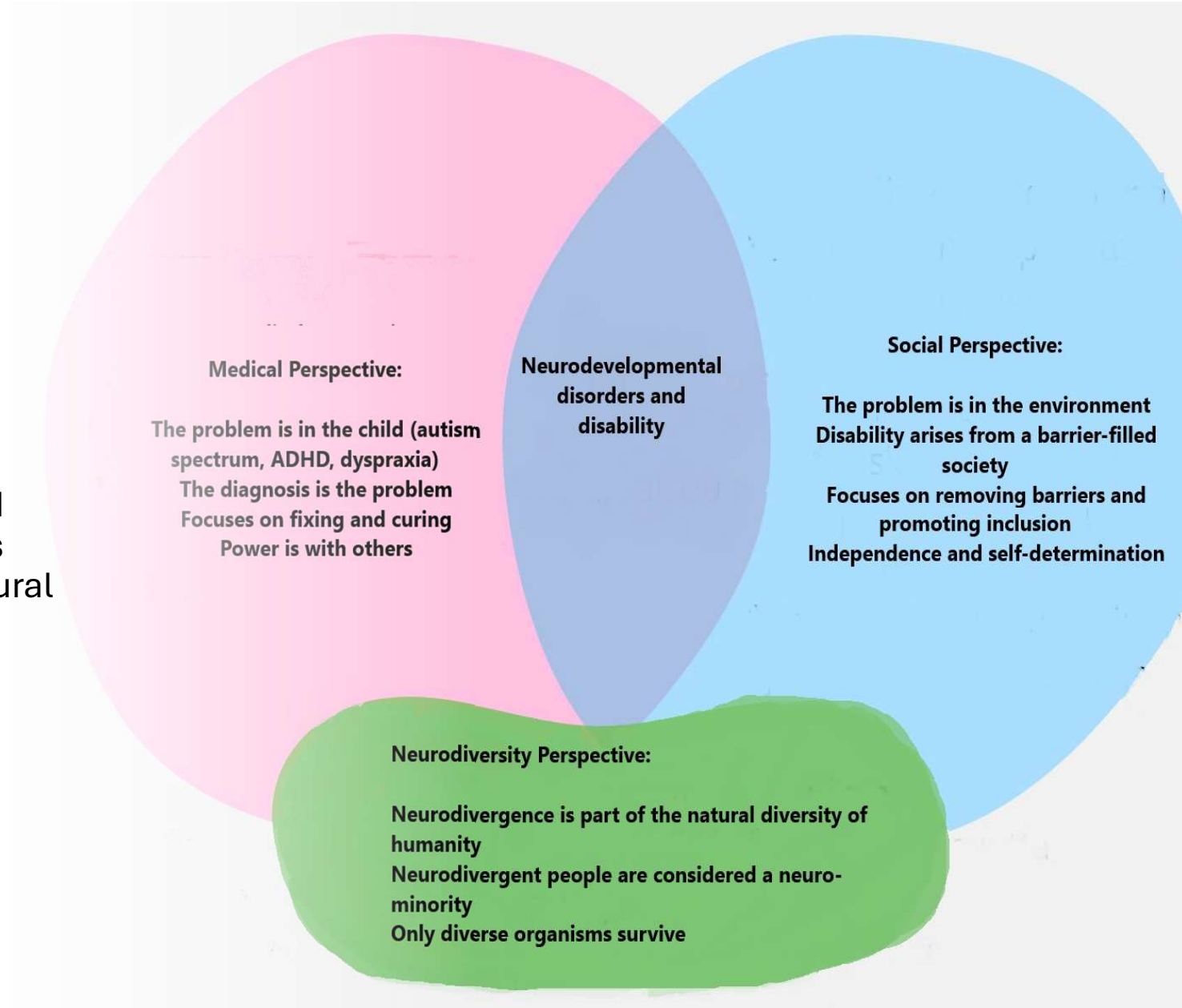


What is Neurodiversity?

Neurological Differences

Autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, and other neurological differences affect emotional and behavioural responses.

Understand these differences without judgment.



Neurodiversity - Neurominorities

A neuropsychiatric disorder affects the brain's functioning and operation and can manifest in both behavior and psychiatric symptoms.

A neurobiological disorder, on the other hand, refers to a disorder that occurred during the early developmental stages of the brain and manifests in the brain's way of processing information.

ADHD, Autism Spectrum, Tourette's, and SLI (Specific Language Impairment) are both neuropsychiatric and neurobiological.



Neurodiversity – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

A developmental neuropsychiatric disorder, prevalence 3-5%, with an individual and diverse symptom profile. Heritability:

- Inattention
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity -> Sensitivity to disturbances
- **Has a subtype which lacks impulsivity or hyperactivity.**
- **Women and girls are underdiagnosed.**

Neurodiversity – Autism Spectrum

A neurobiological developmental disorder of the central nervous system, with a prevalence of 1-1.2% of the population, and an individual symptom profile. Heritability:

- Differences in social interaction and communication
- Repetitive behavior (routines, stereotyped actions, interests)
- **Sometimes identified early and sometimes only in adulthood.**
- **Women and girls with different symptom profiles.**



Neurodiversity – Specific Language Impairments (SLI)

SLI – Developmental language disorder (previously specific language impairment, dysphasia). Prevalence about 7% of children.

- **Varies from mild to severe. More common in boys than girls. Heritability.**
- Affects functionality
- Impairs relationships
- Hinders concentration and executive function

Common factors include:

- Sensory regulation
- Executive function
- Attention regulation
- Differences in social interaction
- Emotional regulation
- Memory - partially the same
- Overlapping neuropsychiatric diagnoses
- Comorbid conditions/states
- Masking

WHAT DO WE SEE?

Social communication, interaction, imagination/flexibility

Reaction to the environment

Stress

Support and stress from the social, physical, and psychological environment

Masking

Self-determination and independent performance

Changing environment

WHO I AM

Culture, family, life experience, learned things, personality, values

Cognitive, social, and emotional developmental level

Central coherence

Executive functions

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

Social cognition

Sensory functions

Neurocognitive characteristics (Vermeulen)

Neuro-affirming approach

- Challenging the medical paradigm, pathologization, and neuronormativity
- Voice for neurominorities
- Changing negative perceptions
- Advocating for human rights
- Autonomy, equality, and inclusion
- Rooted in the autism and neurodiversity movements
- Neurodiversity
- The natural diversity of human brain types
- Neurotypicals (dominant neurotype)
- Neurodivergents (neurodiverse, neurominority)



Neuro-affirming approach

- Strengthening positive identity
- Respecting the experiences of neurominorities
- Valuing diversity
- Strength-based approach and assuming capability
- Modifying environments and structures
- Appropriate, proper support
- Enabling self-determination
- Respecting all forms of communication
- Equality and reframing expectations
- Intersectionality
- Empowering agency





SAME FOR ALL

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

ACCESSIBLE

Creating a Neuro-Affirmative and Supportive Environment

How to create safe and inclusive environment?

- Physical accessibility -> signs, sensory issues etc.
- Psychological accessibility -> supporting independent coping, changing attitudes etc.
- Social accessibility -> common language, equality, acceptance of diversity etc.
- Cognitive accessibility -> clear general language/ plain language, or communication supported by pictures etc.



Accessibility means that everyone, regardless of their characteristics, has the opportunity to act and participate equally with others. Individuality means that accessibility does not mean the same things for all. The most important thing is to create an attitude environment where everyone has equal opportunities to participate.



Challenging the neuronormative



Wave nicely when you say bye bye!



Sit still when you do your school work!



Only small children jump while they walk!



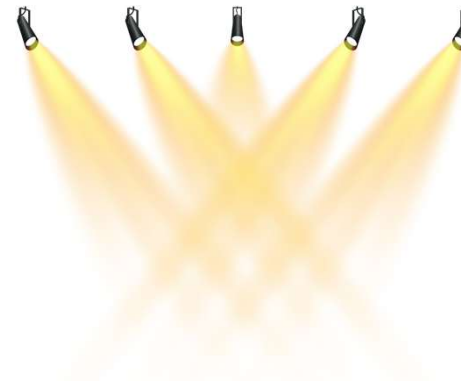
You have to taste everything



You have to be social during coffee breaks



Multitasking is obligatory!



There needs to be bright lights so that one can see!



Don't fidget, just focus!

What is Challenging behaviour?

AI answering this question:

Challenging behavior refers to actions that are of such intensity, frequency, or duration that they threaten the quality of life and/or the physical safety of the individual or others. These behaviors often lead to responses that are restrictive, aversive, or result in exclusion.

Examples of challenging behavior include:

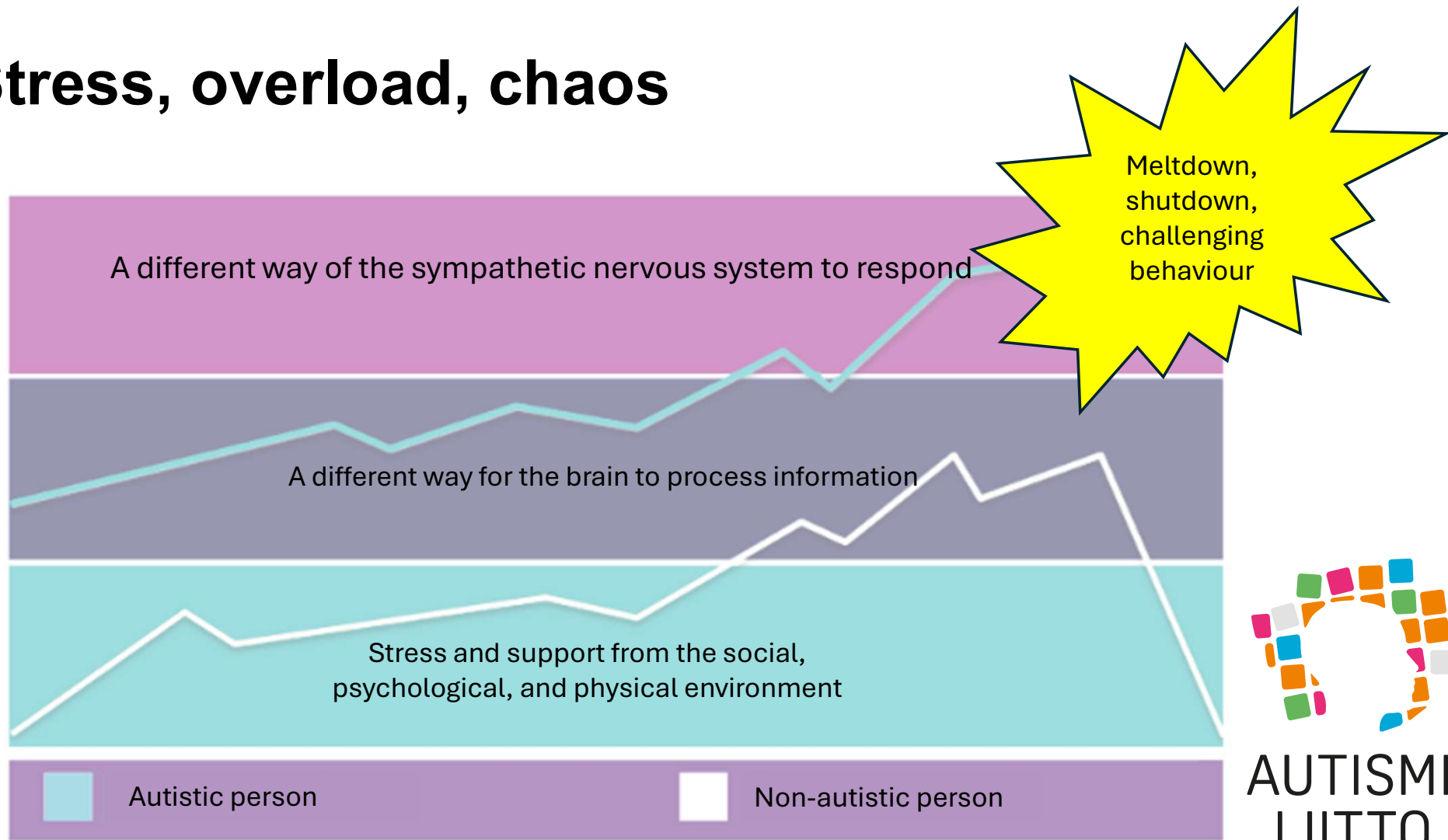
- Hurting others (e.g., hair pulling, hitting)
- Self-injury (e.g., head banging, hand biting)
- Destructive behaviors (e.g., throwing objects, breaking furniture)
- Eating inedible objects (e.g., cigarette butts, pen lids)
- Other behaviors (e.g., spitting, running off) 2

Challenging behavior is often a way for individuals, especially those with severe learning disabilities, to communicate unmet needs or to exert control over their environment.

Stress, overload, chaos

Chaos caused by stress

Levels of stress



Mukailtu lähde: Autism West Midlands



Challenging behaviour - There is always a reason for challenging behavior

- Sensory characteristics
- Executive function challenges
- Difficulties in interaction and communication
- Stress caused by social situations
- Changes in the environment
- Social ineptitude
- Pain or other physical sensations
- Stress or fear
- Difficulty understanding the situation and environment
- Cognitive inflexibility
- Learned behavior patterns
- Difficulty recognizing one's own or others' emotions

Challenging behaviour is a reaction!

Responding to Challenging Behaviour

With an undesirable behavior pattern the person achieves some short-term positive consequence, which further reinforces the behavior pattern.

- Learned behavior pattern-> A replacement
- What is essential to address?
- Eliminating possible underlying causes
- In what situations does the behavior occur and what follows from it?
- What has already been tried, what worked and what didn't?

Where to start?

1. If challenging behavior manifests in several ways, choose one form of behavior to influence.
2. Often, the underlying cause of the behavior is very close (e.g., pain).
3. In what situations does the challenging behavior NOT occur?




If we worked in a car repair shop...

Who would be responsible for maintenance and repairs?

- The car owner?
- The car?

- ✓ The car doesn't need to cooperate
- ✓ The car can't help being broken
- ✓ The mechanic should have the necessary tools and methods.
- ✓ The mechanic's methods should not endanger the car

And it's not very wise if the car works worse than before the repair.... (Bo Hejlskov Elvén)

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- Discover autism! Autism Finland training material/Pictures Pia-Maria Topi.2025
 - Haaste-model. Autism Finland training material.2024
 - Bo Hejlskov Elvén: No Biting, No Fiting, No Screaming.2010