



# At Risk Forum

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# Acknowledgment of Country



- I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pay respects to elders past and present.
- Attribution: Artwork by Narmi Collins-Widders, 2020.

# Differences in neurodiversity terms

## Neurodiversity



Neurotypical brains are the ones most people are used to.



Any brain that is NOT neurotypical is said to be neurodivergent



## Getting the language right



This group is NEURODIVERSE.  
It has more than one type of brain.  
(including a neurotypical brain!)



# **A BRIEF (RE) INTRODUCTION TO OUR WORK**



# My mum was a huge inspiration behind my creation of I CAN Network



Mum deliberately set out to build a network around me. You were in the network if you made it **safe** for me to take risks.

# I CAN Network Today

- Australia's largest **Autistic-led organisation** (74 of 99 staff are Autistic)
- Each year, we empower more than **2000 Autistic young people** with a sense of optimism, confidence & pride through our school-based (primary & secondary) and online group mentoring programs
- We also offer professional development, training and consultancy based on our near-decade of leadership in mentoring Autistic young people





# Our Autistic-led group mentoring is available across Victoria to young people ages 8-22



## ONLINE GROUP MENTORING

- Offered nationally throughout the school year and during school holidays
- Dozens of different groups/themes offered each cycle
- Most participants cover costs via NDIS funding



## SCHOOL-BASED GROUP MENTORING

- Primary and secondary programs across the state (face-to-face or online delivery depending on location)
- Partnerships with 81 Victorian government schools (on track for 101 by June 2023!)

# **WHY OUR COLLECTIVE EFFORTS MATTER**

**TW: INCLUDES DISCUSSION OF SUICIDE**



# Autistic people face much poorer life outcomes than peers

## Education

77.7% experience difficulties in school

77% bullied within the past month

32.4% do not complete Year 10 or above

## Post -School

Only 8.1% have a university qualification

Unemployment rate is 31.6% for Autistic adults, almost 6 times the rate of those without disability

## Mental Health

Suicide rate up to 7 times the national average

Much higher prevalence of anxiety and depression than the general population

Attribution: Amaze, 2018; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018; 2021 ASfAR Health, Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention in Autism Conference (Joint Report, led by La Trobe University).

# School refusal is also a huge barrier for Autistic learners

- **School refusal** refers to a young person's inability to attend or participate in formal education. You might also hear it called 'school attendance difficulties', 'school phobia' or 'school can't'. It is not the same as truancy.
- For many Autistic learners with school attendance difficulties, the inability to attend school **may not be a conscious choice. It is a response to feeling unsafe.**
- **Ways it can present:** Stomach aches, headaches, sleep disturbance; not wanting to get out of bed; crying, begging not to attend school; hiding; late to school or to certain classes; absence from school on single days over many weeks; absence from school for many days over many weeks or an extended period of time; complete shutdown/burnout.
- School refusal exists on a continuum

**MILD:** Might not fully engage, might miss periodic classes or days

**SEVERE:** missing more than 6 months of school; burnout/nervous system shutdown



In a very recent survey of 441 Australia-based parents/carers whose children are experiencing school attendance difficulties

**71% of respondents identified  
“*Limited safe people at school*”**

as a key reason their child was struggling - the #1 response.

# **HOW DO WE TURN THESE DISMAL OUTCOMES AROUND?**



# **It starts with safety...we need to feel safe to be ourselves**

- As Autistic students, we have a sixth sense about who understands us, who accepts us and who believes in us.
- When we feel safe, we are more able to ask for help, double check things and take risks (including socially).
- This allows us to become more visible and engaged in our school community.

# The teacher who was my safe person at school: the late Christine Horvath

## *Mrs Horvath...*

- ✓ Was a great listener
- ✓ Focused on the individual
- ✓ Relentlessly leveraged a student's strengths
- ✓ Created public opportunities in a year level to profile strengths and backed it up with emotional assurances
- ✓ Networked students who struggled to network
- ✓ Shared her own struggles...her vulnerability made her very relatable
- ✓ Understood the need for role models and 'characters' to provide a script and persona for the student who needed them
- ✓ Established boundaries
- ✓ Was wise enough to step away when you didn't need her, but she made sure you knew that she was available

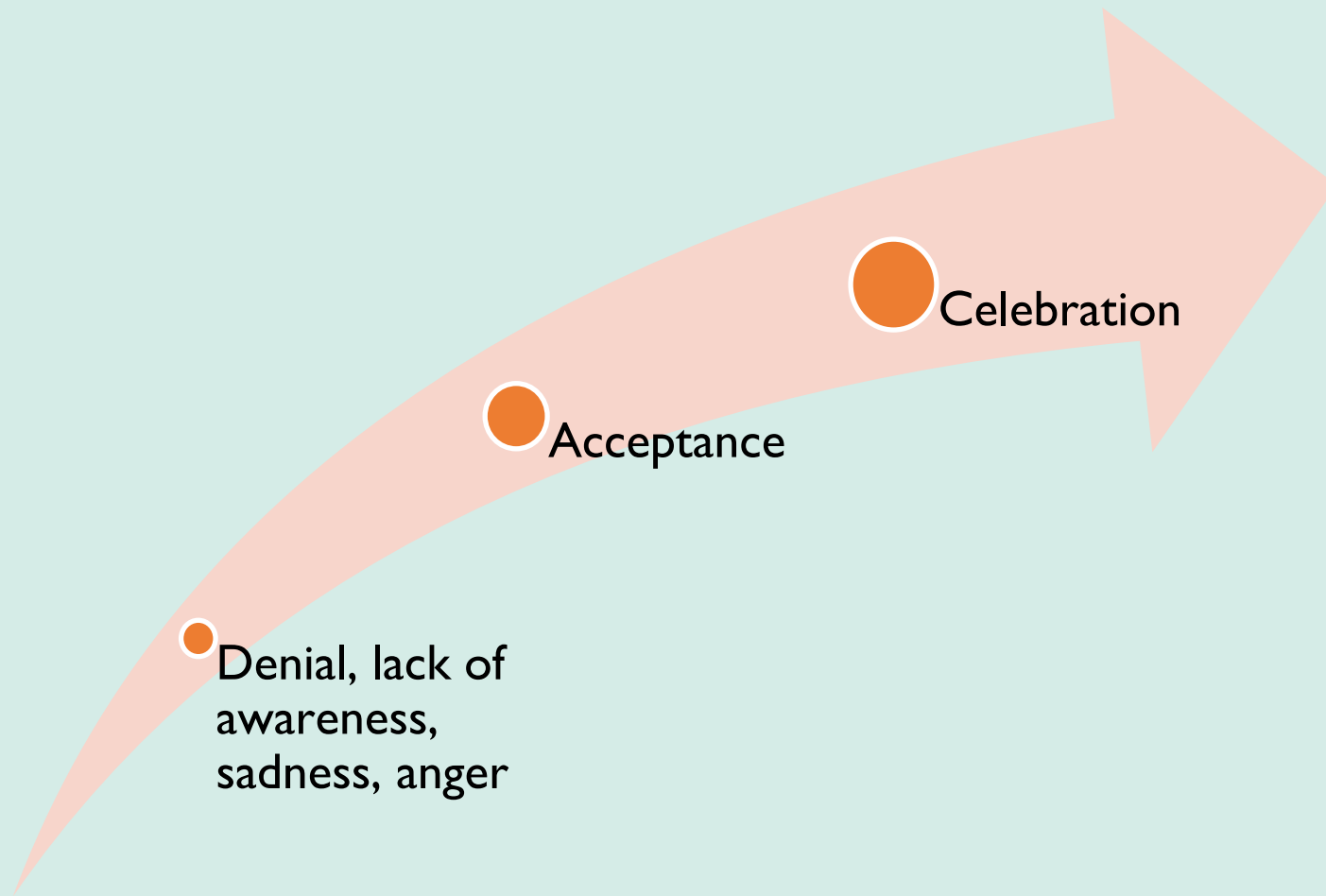




# Parents need that sense of safety, too

- Many parents of Autistic children are worn down from a world that signals that their child is 'defective'. When an educator sees that child's strengths and validates their worth, it can create a critical reserve of trust and safety - with both the student and the parent.
- Autism runs in families. If you are supporting an Autistic learner, there is a good chance you are dealing with an Autistic/Neurodivergent parent. Keep this in mind, especially with regards to communication style and preferences.

# You will likely encounter a range of parent mindsets toward Autism



- The societal narrative on Autism is still heavily deficits-based.
- It can be a very sensitive balancing act when working with families whose mindsets toward Autism are negative.
- Teachers and schools that **embrace** and **celebrate** their Autistic students can positively influence the way parents view Autism (and how Autistic kids see themselves!)

# Important caveat: supporting undiagnosed students

- A parent or carer might turn to you for validation that their child is neurodivergent (or assurances that they are not). Or, you might be the first to suspect that your student is neurodivergent.
- It's essential that there is a foundation of trust and safety in place before you have these types of conversations with families.
- It's important not to try to function as a diagnostician by “ruling in” or “ruling out” anything. The immense value you can add is through sharing your observations and encouragement.
- Start from a strengths-based perspective on the student.
- Help the parent/carers see the potential benefits of their child gaining a better understanding of how their brain works.



# Sample script for “Planting A Seed”

- “Ollie has such a vivid imagination and attention to detail. He sees things that most of us miss and has such a creative way of looking at problems.
- “You have mentioned to me before that Ollie struggles to organise his work and that he finds group projects and school assemblies to be particularly stressful. I’ve noticed those things as well. I can see that when he gets overwhelmed, he starts to see himself in a negative light.
- “I’ve seen that profile of unique strengths and sensitivities in many of my neurodivergent students. Have you ever thought about Ollie and neuro-differences, such as Autism and ADHD?
- “I’ve seen how positive it can be when my neurodivergent students gain an understanding of how their brain works - why some things come so easily and why others are harder. Having those answers also allows us adults to provide even better support.”

# Bookmark these key resources

## Autism Connect

*Run by AMAZE*



A free, national Autism helpline, offering independent and expert over phone, email and web chat. Autism Connect supports Autistic people, their families and carers, teachers, health professionals, researchers and the broader community. Operates 8am-7pm (Eastern) from Monday-Friday. 1-300-308-699.

<https://www.amaze.org.au/autismconnect>

## TARA

*Private support space for parents & carers led by The Autistic Realm Australia*

Australia-based, Autistic-led closed Facebook group for parents & carers of Autistic young people (or those suspected of being). The space is neuro-affirming, highly supportive and very popular with many of our I CAN families. Members have the option of posting anonymously as well.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/581453665321975>



# Creating that sense of safety: Four practical frames

1

**Keep yourself  
open minded**

2

**Adopt a  
strengths-based  
approach**

3

**Give your  
Autistic student  
something that  
can control**

4

**Understand  
common  
Autistic  
experiences**

# Frame #1: Keep yourself open minded

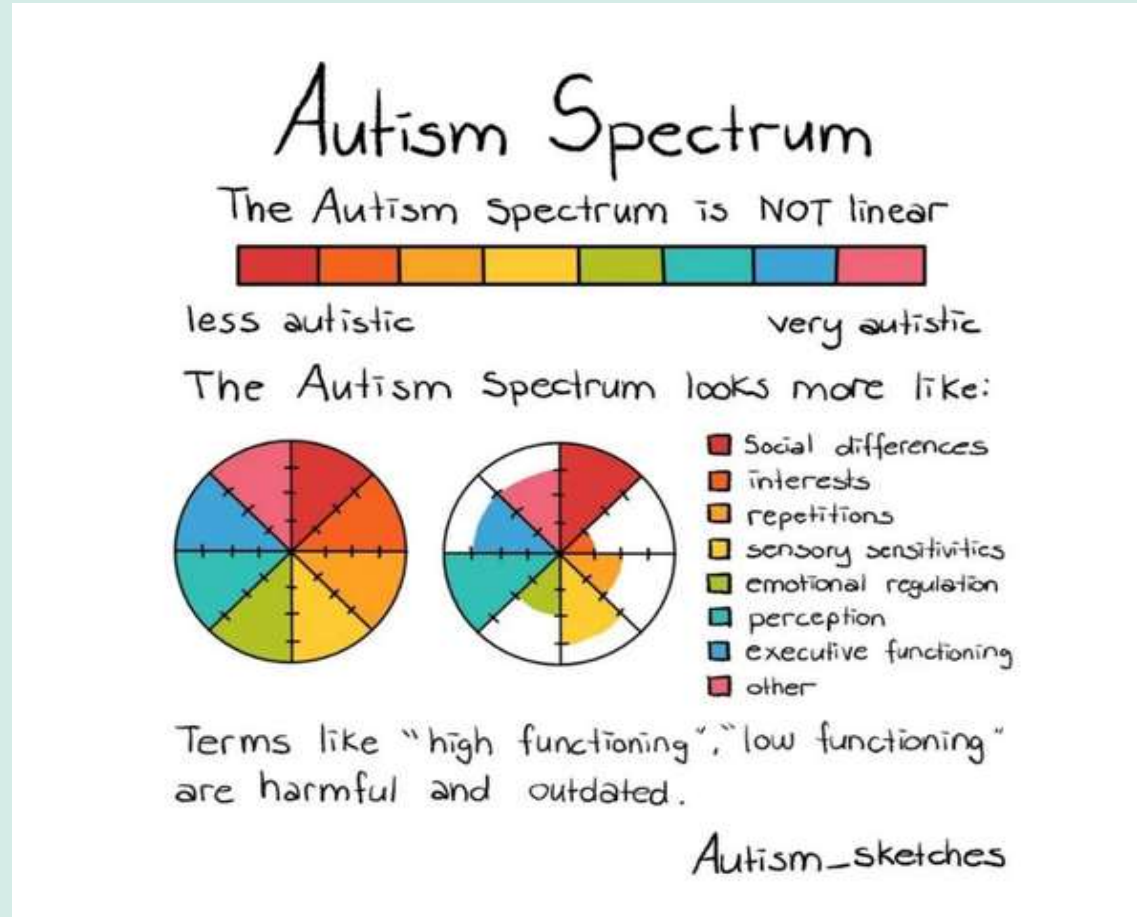


**Keep yourself  
open minded**

- Be willing to ‘rethink’ what you might have been taught about Autism
- Don’t judge on neuro-normative standards
- See beyond the right now...see what could be
- Be brave enough to bring your openness to the water cooler conversations in the staff room (powerful ripple effect!)



# We're open to the evolving understanding of Autism



Credit: 23 year-old Autistic content creator Anouk (@Autism\_Sketches/Instagram)

# See that *capable* senior student in every *struggling* Autistic young person you support

*The best teachers don't just see what's in front of them. They see what could be.*

- Capable of developing self-advocacy skills
- Capable of having post-school goals
- Capable of making meaningful connections
- Capable of living a more self-determined life

Right now, only 34.2% of our Autistic young people are completing Year 10 ...together, we can change that statistic!

# Be brave enough to radiate your openness



- Change the negative narrative around a student: share their strengths and moments of kindness
- Recognise that parents, like you, are trying their best
- Amplify Autistic voices - share great Autistic content or something you've learnt with your colleagues (hint: check out our social media pages)

# Frame #2: Adopt a strengths-based approach

2

**Adopt a  
strengths-based  
approach**

- **First reactions matter:** Your Autistic student (and family) will detect whether you see them as a series of ‘deficits’ or as someone with strengths and inherent worth
- Incorporate strengths into Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- Leverage their interests/passions – these will be natural areas of strength
- Acknowledge and support needs



# Differences between two approaches

Deficits-based approach	Strengths-based approach
<i>What is the Autistic person struggling with?</i>	<i>What can the Autistic person do?</i>
Focus on an Autistic person's deficits	Focus on an Autistic person's strengths
Programs aim to rectify what Autistic people are struggling with	Programs leverage and promote an Autistic person's strengths and interests
There is a prescribed solution to solve the problem	Solutions are flexible depending on a person's strengths
Aim is for Autistic people to be more 'normal'	Aim is for Autistic people to be more accepting of themselves and reach their potential

# Profiling/celebrating strengths

- There might be a skill or a talent you can profile.
- Example – consider what you profile at assembly, in a school newsletter, etc. The purpose is to influence the ‘whisper’ behind a young person and ensure it is positive.
- Discern whether the young person is ready for profiling. Sometimes the discernment will be easy. Sometimes you will need to explicitly check with their parent.
- Don’t profile with absolutes. Set the young person up for success.

# Highlighting strengths: a few scripts to keep up your sleeve

- *‘Wow! That’s a really creative way of looking at it.’*
- *‘I had never thought of it that way before.’*
- *‘You know what? I’ve learnt something, too!’*

# Frame #3: Give your student something they can control

3

**Give your  
Autistic student  
something that  
can control**

- Uncertainty is a huge driver of anxiety and overwhelm in Autistic students
- Ensure that expectations are clear
- Whenever possible, offer options in situations that might be overwhelming (e.g. lunchtime activity rather than open-ended school yard)
- Whenever possible, offer options to reduce stress of assignments/activities (e.g. letting student present to teacher privately or with a friend present, rather than to entire class)
- Give the student a specific role



# Having a designated ‘responsibility’ can help alleviate anxiety and help build sense of worth

## SOME EXAMPLES WE’VE SEEN

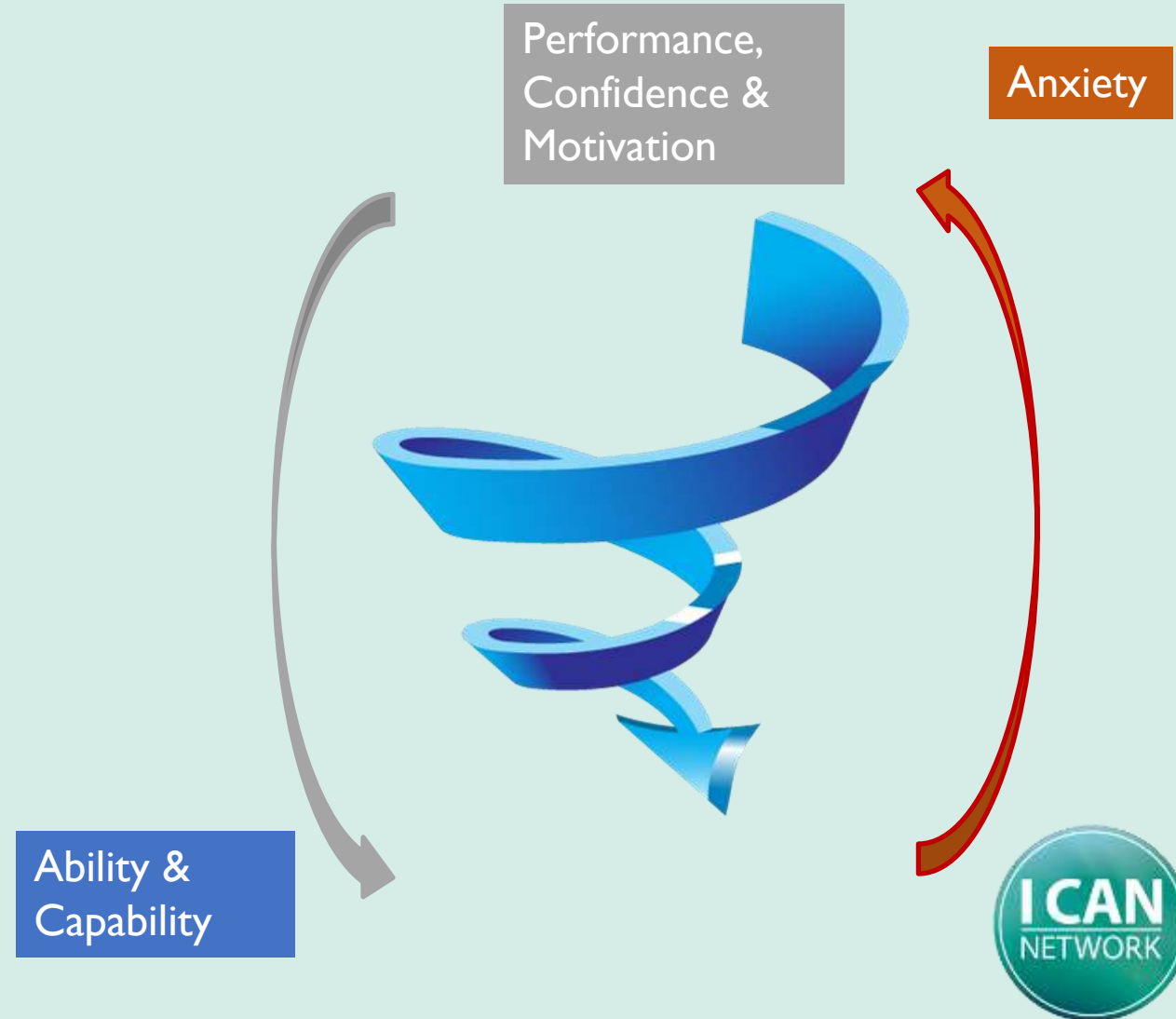
- Garden aide (e.g. caring for plants at school)
- Photographer/scorekeeper at sports carnival
- Coach/mentor (e.g. chess, coding)
- Messenger/errand runner
- Library assistant
- Artist-in-residence (e.g. designing decorations for classroom, creating cards)

**Have you already tried this in your career?  
What has worked well?**



# Autism, anxiety & the ‘Performance Spiral’

- ‘Hidden’ social norms
- Changes in supports & routines
- Uncertainty can lead to overwhelm and catastrophising
- Changes in learning styles and environment
- Pressure of ‘Everyone else can do it!’



# Breaking events down to ‘checkpoints’ can mitigate ‘catastrophisation’

- If required, explore modified timetable
- Know who is that students ‘safe person’ (aka ‘relief valve’)
- Have a backup process in case that person is not immediately available in times of crisis
- Responsiveness from school leadership can be particularly effective in reassuring students (especially perfectionists and ‘rule followers’)
- If the student is amenable, provide regular, informal ‘check ins’
- Model the value of double checking (‘There are no silly questions’) – students need to feel safe and not judged



# Autistic overwhelm: understanding meltdowns, shutdowns & burnout

INVOLUNTARY

	COMMON SIGNS (NOT EXHAUSTIVE)	
<b>MELTDOWN:</b> <i>An involuntary response to overload from sensory stimuli, overwhelm/exhaustion/ anxiety, change or an accumulation or combination of these.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crouching, hands over ears</li> <li>• Yelling/anger</li> <li>• Self-injurious stimming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crying</li> <li>• Pacing</li> <li>• Hyperventilating</li> </ul>
<b>SHUTDOWN:</b> <i>An internalised meltdown. 'If a meltdown is a fight/flight response, then a shutdown would be a freeze.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoning out</li> <li>• Little to no talking</li> <li>• Little to no movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal/detachment</li> <li>• Hiding or defensive position</li> <li>• Doesn't respond</li> </ul>
<b>BURNOUT:</b> <i>Intense physical and mental exhaustion, often accompanied by a loss of skills and social withdrawal, due to the stress of masking or functioning in a neurotypical world. Can last for quite some time and can manifest in depression.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of motivation</li> <li>• Loss of executive functioning</li> <li>• Difficulty with self-care</li> <li>• Easier to reach overload/meltdown</li> <li>• Memory loss</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illness, digestive issues</li> <li>• Loss of speech/situational mutism</li> <li>• Inability to maintain masks or use social skills</li> <li>• Overall, may seem "more Autistic" or stereotypical</li> </ul>

Credit: *Autism & Meltdowns: A Guide* (Bendigo Advocacy & Support Services); *Autistic Shutdowns: A Guide* (My Autistic Soul); *What Is Autistic Burnout* (Autistic Women's & Non-Binary Network); *An Autistic Burnout* (Kieran Rose).

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# Bookmark these key Autistic-led resources

## Spectrum Gaming (UK)

*Barriers To Education: Understanding Trauma*



A free, neurodiversity-affirming guide for parents & professionals on understanding, preventing and reducing trauma and anxiety in Autistic young people. Informed by 350 Autistic youth voices, along with 150 Autistic adults, 600 parents and 80 professionals. Includes detailed sections on supporting young people through meltdowns and burnout.

<https://www.barrierstoeducation.co.uk/trauma>

## Yellow Ladybugs

*Supporting the Mental Health of Autistic Girls & Gender Diverse Young People*

A free, neurodiversity-affirming guide for parents & professionals, developed in collaboration with Autistic adults, parents, teachers, allied health professionals and academic researchers.

<https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/>

*\*\* Please also search our [I CAN Network Facebook page](#) for a multitude of valuable posts on meltdowns, shutdowns & burnout and other mental health-related content \*\**



# Frame #4: Understand common Autistic experiences

4

**Understand  
common  
Autistic  
experiences**

- Although each Autistic person is unique, there are traits and experiences that very common for many Autistic learners
- Your willingness to learn more - both from your individual students and the broader Autistic community - will go a long way to creating a safer learning environment

# Autistic learners face many challenges just to get through the school day

- Differences in communications
- Differences in socialising
- Differences in sensory processing/movement
- Differences in 'get stuffing done' (aka executive functioning)
- Might have co-occurring learning differences (e.g. ADHD, Dyslexia) and/or mental health needs (e.g. Anxiety, OCD, Depression)
- When our differences are not understood or accommodated, just getting through the school day can be exhausting

*'People don't understand that it's really hard for me just to get through a regular day at school. That's why I watch YouTube when I get home.'*

I CAN MENTEE

# Differences in communication

## KEY POINTS

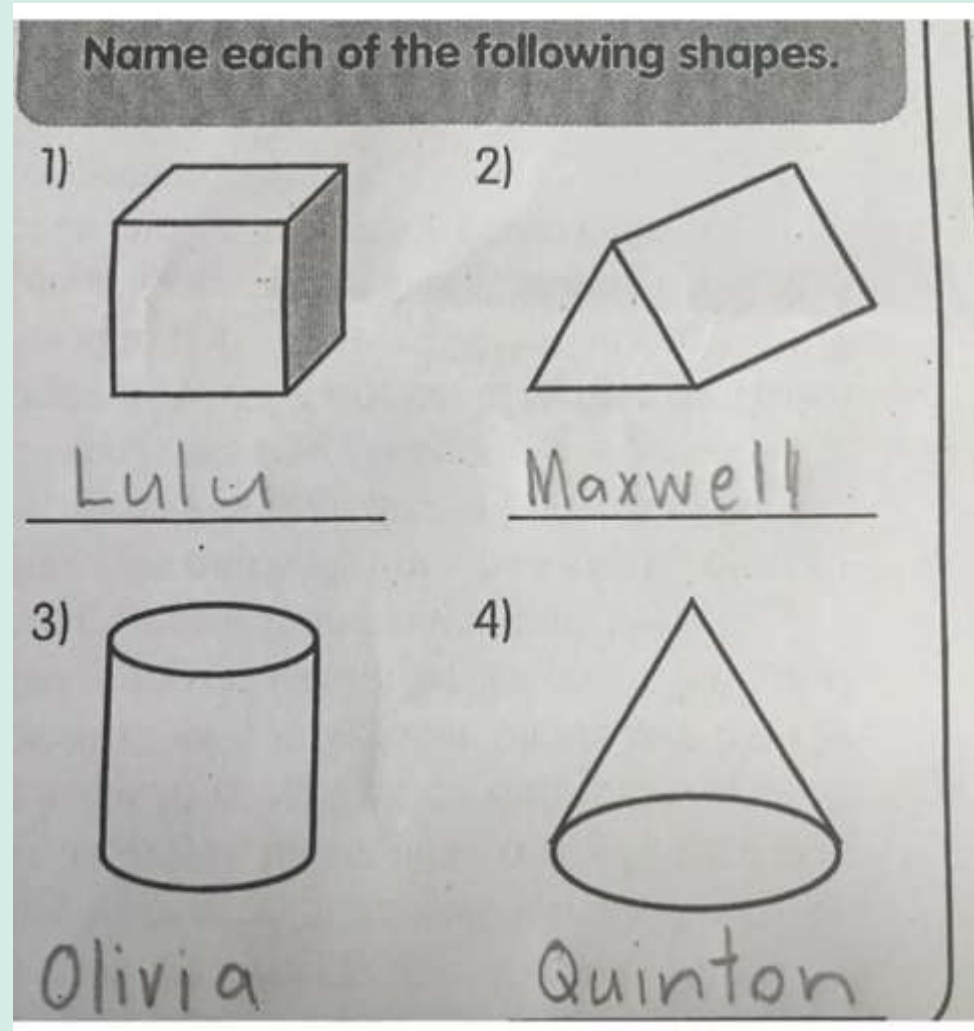
- Autistic and non-Autistic people have different ways of communicating.
- Your Autistic students might be more direct and more literal than their peers.
- Your Autistic students might require more processing time when responding.
- Your Autistic students might require more details or more explanation of what's going to happen and why.
- Your Autistic students might feel energised talking about their passion areas (including using 'info-dumping' to share knowledge)

## THINGS THAT CAN HELP

- Session plan/visual schedule
- Clear written instructions, including what is NOT expected
- Double check the student's interpretation of your instructions
- Not calling on an Autistic student 'out of the blue'
- Not insisting on eye contact
- Offering different ways for students to convey knowledge (e.g. video over live presentation)
- Use straight-forward language
- Don't penalise student for misinterpreting ambiguous instructions



# Clear instructions (and credit for our out-of-the-box thinking) make a difference!



# Clear instructions (and credit for our out-of-the-box thinking) make a difference!



# Differences in socialisation

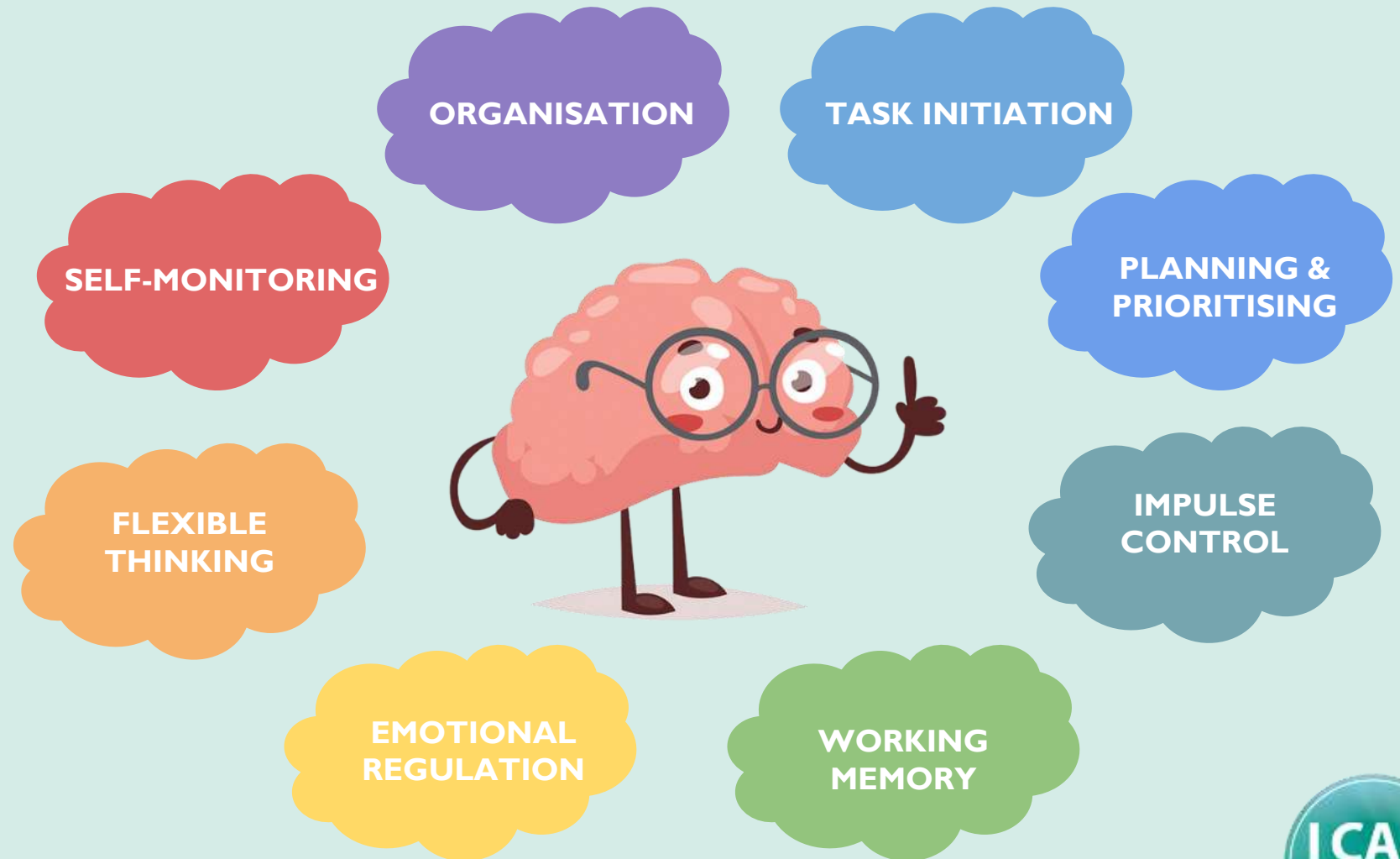
KEY POINTS	THINGS THAT CAN HELP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Autistic and non-Autistic people have different ways of socialising. When we have an opportunity to connect with people who understand us, our social skills can be quite strong!</li><li>• Autistic socialising often involves connecting over shared interests, side-by-side activities (similar to parallel play).</li><li>• Free time at recess/lunch can be overwhelming (socially and sensory wise).</li><li>• Autistic students might try to hide their social struggles by masking, gravitating toward “Mother Hen” peers or hiding out.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Having quiet spaces at lunch (e.g. library, room or space with chess/checkers or drawing materials)</li><li>• Respecting that an Autistic student might need lunchtime to “recharge” rather than forcing social interaction</li><li>• Helping students connect with other peers (within and beyond own class or year group) who share similar interests and/or setting up lunchtime clubs</li><li>• Creating ‘jobs’ or activities that students can help with (e.g. errand runner, garden supervisor, library assistant)</li><li>• Helping peers understand different ways people might socialise (i.e. normalising rather than pathologising differences)</li></ul>

# Differences in sensory processing

KEY POINTS	THINGS THAT CAN HELP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Each Autistic person will process sensory experiences in their own way. They might be hyper (over reaction) sensitive, hypo (under reactive) or a combination of both.</li><li>● Sensory processing differences don't just refer to the five sense of touch, taste, smell, sight &amp; sound.</li><li>● They also might include challenges with the vestibular system (sense of movement), proprioception sense (sense of body movement/where limbs are &amp; how we use them) and interoception (understanding and interpreting one's own bodily signals)</li><li>● Sensory overload/not having sensory needs met can be traumatic</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Sensory/movement breaks built into the day rather than having to 'earn' them [ <i>'The day they need them the most is the day they are least likely to earn them.'</i> ]</li><li>● Having a sensory space to recharge (ideally to be used before crisis point occurs)</li><li>● Understanding from your student/their family what their sensory triggers tend to be (e.g. bright lights) and trying to mitigate these in the classroom</li><li>● Being allowed adjustments to uniforms</li><li>● Flexibility around large, loud events (e.g. school assemblies, sports carnivals, etc.)</li><li>● Allowing fidgets and normalising stimming</li></ul>

# You might notice your Autistic/Neurodivergent students having difficulty 'getting stuff done'

Many of us face challenges with **executive functioning**, the range of skills needed to 'get stuff done'.





# Differences in executive functioning

KEY POINTS	THINGS THAT CAN HELP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Executive functioning challenges are not exclusive to ADHD - they are extremely common in Autistic learners and other neurodivergent learners as well.</li><li>• Be aware of the impact of mindsets and languages - students with executive functioning difficulties are often perceived as being 'lazy', 'under-achievers', 'not applying themselves', 'manipulative'. This can have a lasting detrimental effect on their self worth.</li><li>• Anxiety &amp; executive functioning capability are closely interrelated. When anxiety rises, executive functioning skills drop. When executive functioning needs are not met, anxiety rises.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help your student develop a plan for how/when to ask for help (e.g. 'If I'm unable to get started after X minutes, I will ask for help.') This prevents catastrophisation.</li><li>• Break down tasks into discrete chunks (see example for <a href="#">writing assignments</a>). Create a scaffold for how to complete the task. Include an example of what a 'finished' product looks like.</li><li>• Allow lectures/instructions to be recorded and/or share summary notes from each class</li><li>• Go for the small wins &amp; easy-to-implement changes. 'Hacks' have the most value when they can become habitual.</li><li>• Leverage lived experience resources, including Seth Perler's outstanding work on <a href="#">supporting students with executive functioning challenges</a>.</li></ul>



# **SUPPORTING AUTISTIC LGBTIQA+ STUDENTS**

**TW: INCLUDES DISCUSSION OF SUICIDE & SELF-HARM**

# There is a significant overlap between the Autistic and LGBTIQ+ communities



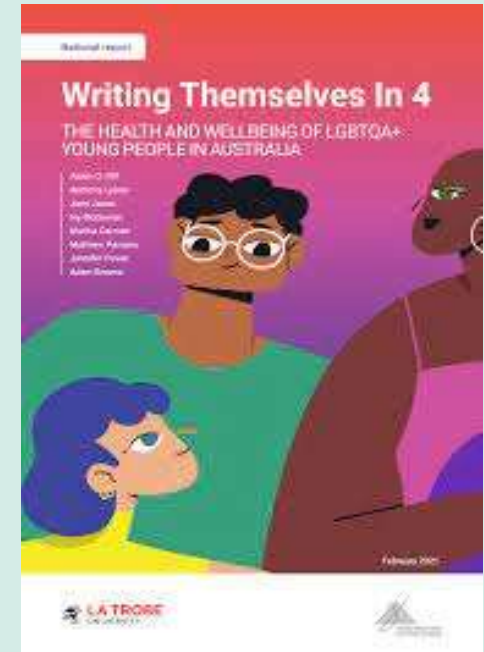
- An estimated 42-69% of Autistic people are non-hetero/straight (e.g. gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, etc.)
- Research from 2020 indicates that Autistic people are 3 to 6 times more likely to identify as trans/gender diverse than non Autistic peers
- A 2018 Australian study showed that 22.5% of transgender adolescents also had a diagnosis of Autism (ten times that of cisgender peers)

Credit: *Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT)*,

# From Australia's largest study to date on the wellbeing of LGBTIQA+ young people

*La Trobe University's 'Writing Themselves In 4' (2021)*

- More than 68% of Autistic/Neurodivergent & LGBTIQA+ young people ages 14-21 have experienced suicide ideation in the past 12 months
- 1 in 8 Autistic/Neurodivergent & LGBTIQA+ young people reported a suicide attempt in the past year; more than 1 in 3 reported a suicide attempt in their lifetime
- The latter rate is more than twice as high as LGBTIQA+ young people without a disability and five times as high as the peers who are neither disabled nor LGBTIQA+



# Safe spaces & safe people for this doubly marginalised group are especially critical



- We have created an outstanding suite of youth-informed resources with an array of valuable embedded resources/support & information spaces specifically for:
  - Autistic LGBTIQA+ young people
  - Parents/carers, teachers
  - Service providers
- We also offer online mentoring groups for Autistic & LGBTIQA+ teens (13-17) and young adults (18-22), led by young adult mentors who are also Autistic & LGBTIQA+

**KEY RESOURCE LINK:** <https://icannetwork.online/autistic-lgbtqia/>



# **KEY RESOURCES TO HELP FOSTER AUTISTIC-FRIENDLY SCHOOL CULTURES**

# Video for student assemblies or school newsletter

## *'The Art of Learning With Autism'*

- 8-minute video featuring insights from Autistic young people
- Features a former I CAN mentor (now speech pathology student)
- Created by Department of Education Victoria

[https://player.vimeo.com/video/762132685?h=e665d0f02d&badge=0&autopause=0&player\\_id=0&app\\_id=58479](https://player.vimeo.com/video/762132685?h=e665d0f02d&badge=0&autopause=0&player_id=0&app_id=58479)



# Autistic-crafted tip sheets for school newsletter or staff meeting



**NURTURING SELF-ESTEEM & PRIDE IN AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE**

Parents, carers, teachers and other adults of influence can play an important part in helping an Autistic young person develop self-esteem and pride in who they are. Below are some tips (not exhaustive) from Autistic members of our I CAN family - Autistic young people and adults - on how you can help nurture that positive sense of self.

**ACCEPT AND SUPPORT THEM AS THEY ARE.** Autistic young people deserve to know that they are accepted for who they are as they are. Strive to understand how an Autistic young person experiences the world so that they can have more meaningful support and opportunities.

**REMINDE THEM OF THEIR STRENGTHS.** So much of the societal narrative around Autism is around a "deficits model". Recognising, leveraging and celebrating a young person's strengths can go a long way toward helping them feel good about who they are and giving them confidence to take on new challenges.

**BE THAT SAFE PERSON WHO WILL LISTEN.** Many of us can point to one key adult who believed in us before we believed in ourselves. Never underestimate the positive impact that an adult can have when they offer unconditional support to an Autistic young person and listen without judgement.

**SHOW GENUINE INTEREST IN AND SEEK OPPORTUNITIES AROUND THEIR PASSIONS.** Autistic passions can be a source of immense joy, comfort, learning, connection with others and, in some cases, a pathway to our future study or employment. Showing a genuine interest in these passions is a powerful way to forge a deeper, trusting relationship with an Autistic young person you care about. Look for opportunities for them to connect with others who share similar passions.

See valuable related resources and more Autistic reflections at: <https://www.icannetwork.com.au/2020/12/16/autistic-and-adults-on-how-you-can-help-nurture-that-positive-sense-of-self/>

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## *Nurturing Self-Esteem & Pride In Autistic Young People*

## *Always Remember... Tips & Encouragement For Our Younger Autistic Peers*

*These and other resources shaped by Autistic young adults can be found on our website:*

*(<https://icannetwork.online/online-resources/>)*



**ALWAYS REMEMBER...**

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE**

MANY PEOPLE CAN RELATE TO THE THINGS YOU MIGHT BE FEELING OR EXPERIENCING. GETTING TO KNOW OTHER AUTISTIC PEOPLE - WHETHER IT'S THROUGH ONLINE MENTORING OR IN PERSON OR THROUGH BOOKS, BLOGS AND VLOGS - CAN HELP CREATE A FEELING OF UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNITY.

**THE WORLD NEEDS ALL KINDS OF MINDS**

OUR WORLD WOULD BE VERY BORING AND BLAND IF WE ALL LOOKED AT THINGS THE SAME WAY. BEING AUTISTIC MEANS WE SEE AND PERCEIVE THINGS IN WAYS MANY OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT NOT. WE HELP MAKE THE WORLD A MORE INTERESTING AND INNOVATIVE PLACE.

**FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS**

WE ALL HAVE THINGS THAT ARE CHALLENGING FOR US, BUT EACH OF US HAS PERSONAL STRENGTHS AS WELL. ALWAYS REMEMBER TO FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS. THEY WILL TAKE YOU WHERE YOU NEED TO GO IN LIFE.

**EMBRACE YOUR PASSIONS**

EVERYONE HAS THEM AND EVERYONE NEEDS THEM! THE THINGS WE ARE DEEPLY INTERESTED IN CAN BRING A LOT OF COMFORT AND HAPPINESS. OFTEN THEY CAN HELP US CONNECT WITH OTHER PEOPLE WHO SHARE SIMILAR INTERESTS. DON'T APOLOGISE FOR THE THINGS YOU LOVE - IT'S VERY COOL TO HAVE DEEP KNOWLEDGE AND A DEEP LEVEL OF INTEREST.

**YOU ARE AWESOME... JUST THE WAY YOU ARE**

ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE GROWING UP, THERE CAN BE A LOT OF PRESSURE TO LOOK AND ACT LIKE OTHER PEOPLE IN ORDER TO "FIT IN", WHICH CAN BE VERY DRAINING! YOU TRULY ARE AWESOME... JUST THE WAY YOU ARE. YOU DESERVE TO HAVE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE WHO FEEL THE SAME WAY ABOUT YOU.

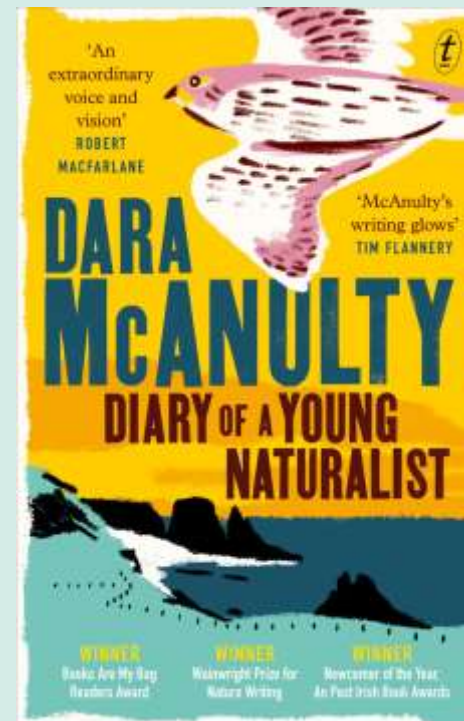
For related resources and encouragement, please see: <https://www.icannetwork.com.au/2020/12/16/important-reminders-resources-for-our-younger-autistic-peers/>

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# Books for school newsletter or library display (Autistic authors)



From the carefully curated booklist, '[100ish Books For Autistic Adolescents, Teens & Tweens](#)' (includes fiction featuring Autistic characters, guides and autobiographies and resources for parents/carers and teachers), created by *That Au-Some Book Club*, an international online book club that explores respectful depictions of Autism and Neurodiversity

# WRAPPING UP

# The most important key takeaway



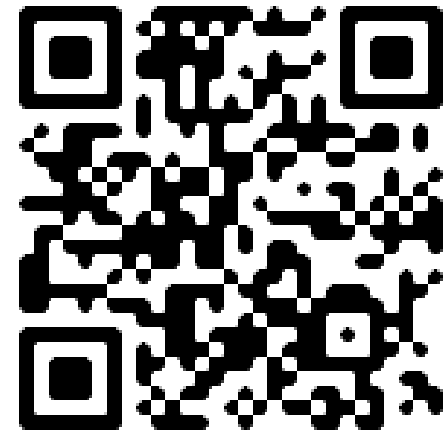
- The key to empowering your Autistic students is incredibly simple yet also very challenging.
- You don't have to be an 'Autism expert' to make a difference.
- Your ability to build **trust** with a student, to become that '**safe person**' to them because of your non-judgmental eyes and **open belief** in who they are, can produce life-changing impact.



# Thank you for helping us nurture Autistic learners. We appreciate your feedback.

My favourite teacher was  
always so positive about my  
strengths and always asked  
about my interests. Every  
teacher has the chance to be  
THAT teacher for an Autistic  
student, and I think that's  
really cool!

AUTISTIC INSIGHTS  
FROM I CAN MENTORS & MENTEES



Please use this QR code to  
complete a brief feedback  
survey

# **APPENDIX**

## **MORE VALUABLE RESOURCES (FROM WITHIN & BEYOND OUR TEAM)**

# **We invite you to keep up with the latest news & resources from our team**



## **I CAN NEWSLETTER**

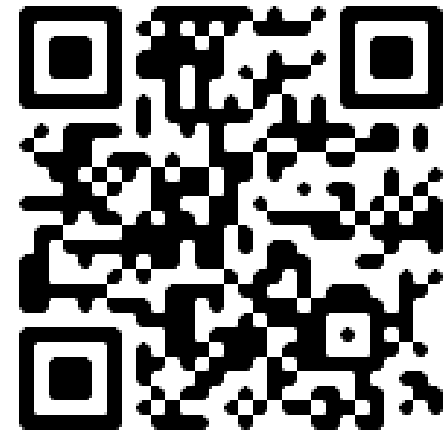
- Latest news from our mentoring programs
- Professional development events
- Spotlight on valuable resources for school and home



# Respectful resources for talking to your students about Autism & Neurodiversity

"The more people who hear positive things about Autism when they are young, the better chance we have of building a world that is inclusive."

THOMAS  
I CAN MENTEE (NOW MENTOR)



Our carefully  
researched  
resources are  
tailored to  
their needs

recommended  
for young people,

<https://icannetwork.online/talking-about-autism/>



# I CAN Network social media

- Lived experience insights that can help parents, teachers and other adults understand and support their Autistic young person/young people
- Respectful depictions of what Autistics CAN do
- Research, resources and articles that foster a more respectful, accurate narrative on Autism
- **Website:** [icannetwork.online/](https://icannetwork.online/)
- **Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/theicannetwork](https://www.facebook.com/theicannetwork)
- **Instagram:** @ican\_rethinkautism
- **Twitter:** @I\_CAN\_Network
- **LinkedIn:** [www.linkedin.com/company/i-can-network](https://www.linkedin.com/company/i-can-network); [www.linkedin.com/in/icanceochris-varney](https://www.linkedin.com/in/icanceochris-varney)
- **YouTube:** @TheICANNetwork

# Diverse Learners Hub - Department of Education Victoria

Information, tools and guidance to support students with diverse learning needs.

<https://www.vic.gov.au/diverse-learners-hub>





# Department of Education Victoria - School Mental Health Menu (1 of 2)

The **Schools Mental Health Menu** is designed to give schools confidence identifying evidence-based programs, staff and resources to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes for students.

The Menu provides over 56 evidence-based programs and initiatives for schools to access across three tiers of intervention, including:

- positive mental health promotion, such as social and emotional learning programs, wellbeing dog programs and support for positive body image
- early intervention and cohort specific support, including training for teachers in trauma-informed practice, and support for diverse cohorts
- more targeted and individualised support for students who need it.



# Department of Education Victoria - School Mental Health Menu (2 of 2)

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & TOOLS

- Professional learning is available for department staff on the [Mental Health Reform Division Arc](#) page. School staff are encouraged to follow this page to keep up to date with new learning and development opportunities.
- [The Schools Mental Health Planning Tool](#) has been developed to support schools to think about how they spend their funding. The tool helps schools align their Mental Health funding with the FISO Improvement Cycle.
- The [Skills Checklist](#) outlines the professional roles, key activities, and minimum expected qualifications of staff available for schools to purchase through the Menu. Additional mental health supports

## ADDITIONAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

- The [Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit](#) provides expert guidance and resources on mental health and wellbeing promotion and support aimed at schools and school communities, health and wellbeing workforces and mental health practitioners.
- A [Quick Guide to Student Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) resource is also available for students, parents and carers looking to access expert guidance and resources to support wellbeing in one place.



# inclusionED

(initiative of the Autism CRC)



Online professional learning community co-designed with educators for educators. Provides free, evidence-based and research-informed teaching practices to support diverse learners in inclusive classrooms.

<https://www.inclusioned.edu.au/>

# Education Services Australia



Among its services, offers online learning resources for teachers & parents to support wellbeing in the classroom and at home.

<https://www.esa.edu.au/resources/online-resources>



# Autistic employment programs/resources

PROGRAM	FOCUS	WEBSITE
myWAY Employability	Smart Web platform that supports career planning specifically for Autistic people	<a href="http://www.mywayemployability.com.au/">www.mywayemployability.com.au/</a>
Specialisterne	Assists businesses in recruiting and supporting Autistic talent	<a href="http://specialisterne.com.au/">specialisterne.com.au/</a>
DXC Dandelion Program	Helping neurodivergent people find meaningful employment (IT field)	<a href="http://dxc.com/au/en/about-us/social-impact-practice/dxc-dandelion-program">dxc.com/au/en/about-us/social-impact-practice/dxc-dandelion-program</a>
Xceptional	Helping businesses attract neurodivergent talent & create accessible, inclusive workplaces	<a href="https://xceptional.io/">https://xceptional.io/</a>
Untapped	Bringing together organisations that are passionate about the inclusion of neurodivergent people in the workplace	<a href="https://www.untapped-group.com/">https://www.untapped-group.com/</a>
auticon	Offering inclusion and technology solutions that benefit from Autistic skill sets	<a href="https://auticon.com/us/">https://auticon.com/us/</a>
Australian Spatial Analytics	Opportunities in spatial and data analytics	<a href="https://www.asanalytics.com.au/">https://www.asanalytics.com.au/</a>
ANZ Spectrum Program	Opportunities in cyber security, coding, testing and data services.	<a href="http://www.anz.com.au/about-us/esg/workplace-participation-diversity/accessible-workplace/">www.anz.com.au/about-us/esg/workplace-participation-diversity/accessible-workplace/</a>

# School refusal support

- [Navigator Program](#) - Department of Education, Victoria
- [School Can't \[School Phobia/School Refusal Australia\]](#) closed Facebook Group: trauma-informed support & information space for parents & carers