

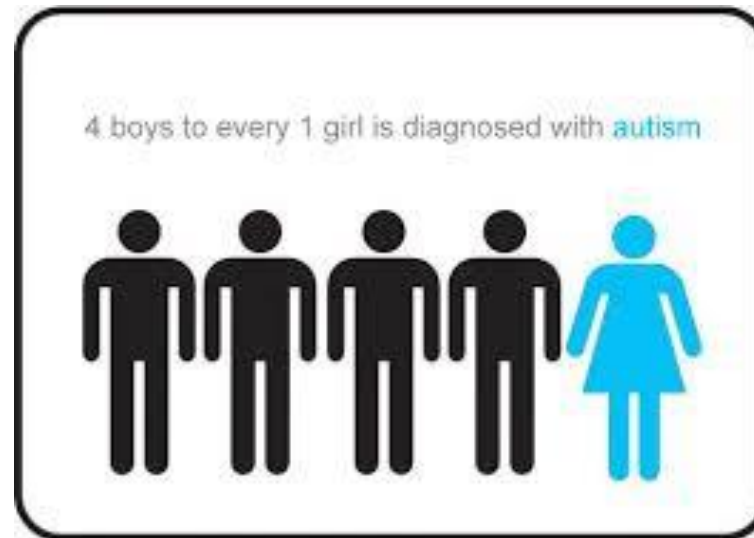
Anxiety and Autism

C&I Team



**Nottinghamshire
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Many stereotypes surround children diagnosed with autism, and they tend to be categorised as differences in socialisation and emotional skills.

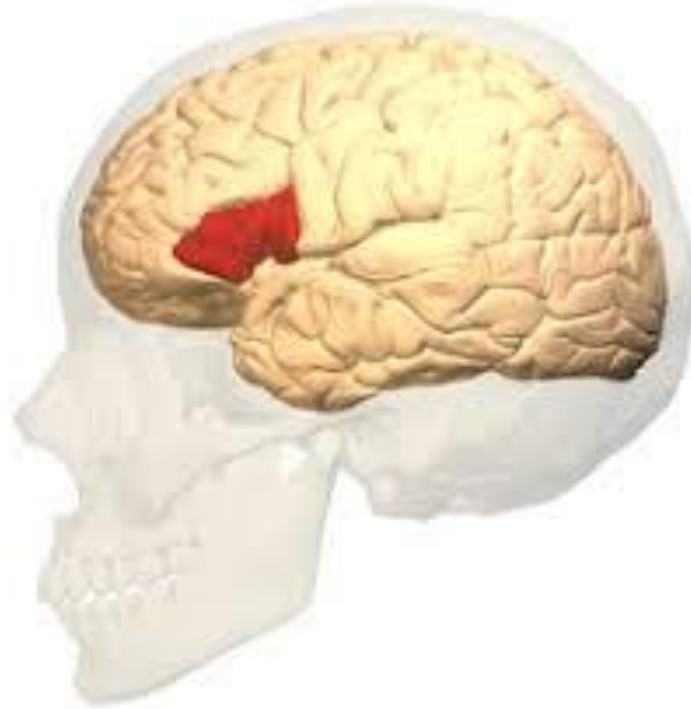


Definition of Autism

Autism is a term used to describe a neurological difference in brain development that has a marked effect on how a child develops.



Broca's area of the brain



Autism

Autism is a different way of being rather than a 'deficient' or 'disordered' way of being.



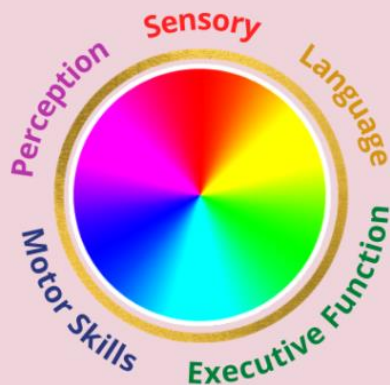
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AUTISM IS A NON-LINEAR SPECTRUM

It does **not** look like this:



Autism is much more **complex** and **dynamic**. Every autistic individual is **unique**, and so are our traits and support needs. We all have varying degrees of autistic traits. Some may have serious sensory issues, while others have none, and so on. There is **endless variation**, and they change and evolve throughout our lives, even from day to day.



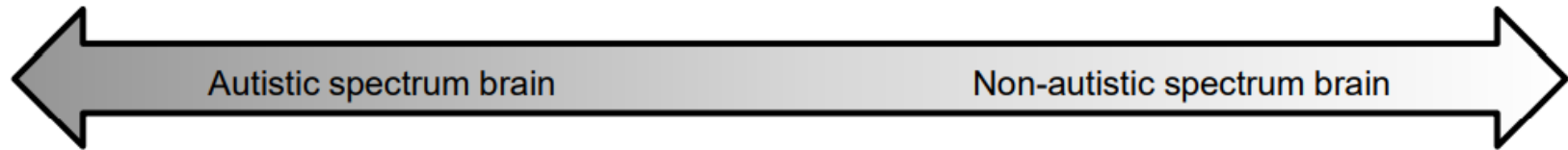
It looks more like this



@__ninstagram__



Difference or Diversity?



- Thinks about the details
- Perceives information independent of context
- Logic/cognition focused
- Enjoyment of known/preferred experiences/ideas
- Focus on self and preferred people, objects, places, experiences
- Concrete, logical thinker
- Literal interpretation and use of language

- Thinks about the big picture
- Perceives the context of information as well as the information
- Feeling/emotion focused
- Enjoyment of new/novel experiences and ideas
- Enjoyment of and focus on social interactions
- Abstract, emotional thinker
- Social and contextual use of and interpretation of language



Autistic people have differences in three areas of development. These are:



Social understanding
and communication



Flexibility, information
processing, and
understanding

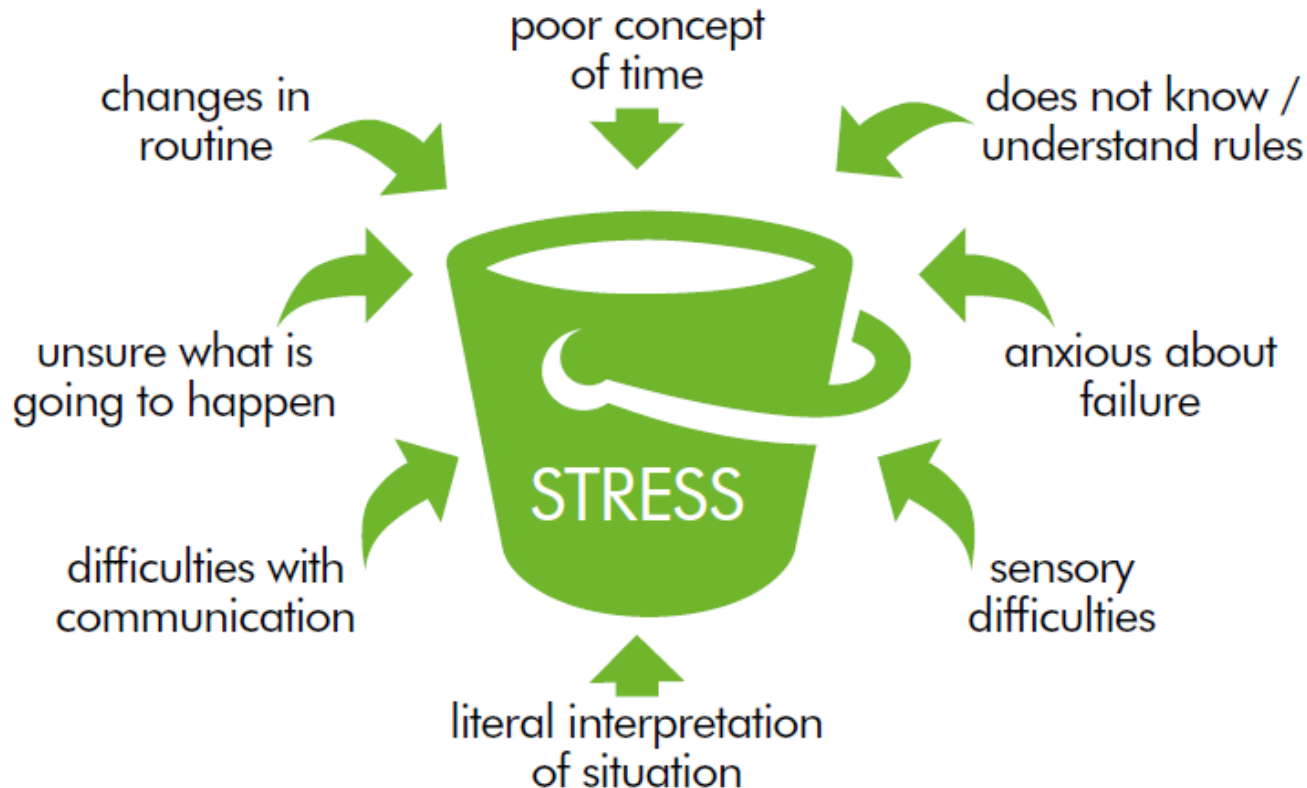


Sensory processing
and integration



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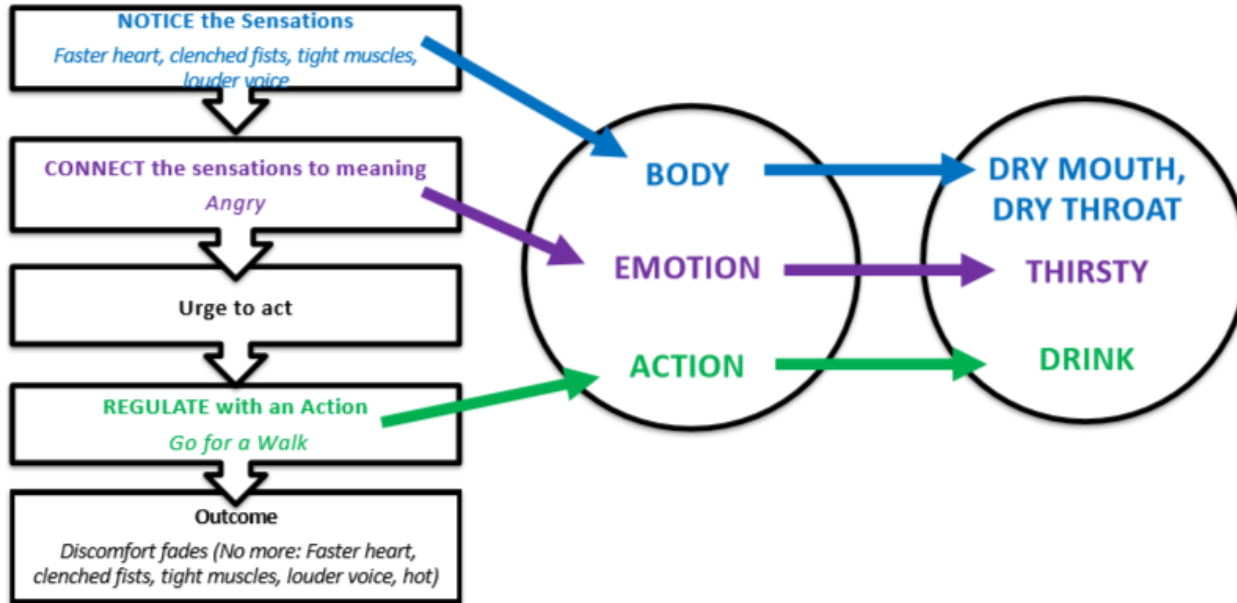
What increases levels of anxiety for autistic children?



What stops neuro-typical people from feeling anxious all of the time?

- Naming emotion/feeling and sharing responsibility to seek comfort
- Seeing the bigger picture and putting a situation in perspective
- Keeping safe by observing and adjusting body language/behaviour accordingly
- The environment is comfortable and there is sufficient time to process information
- Understanding verbal communication and inference
- Rationalising abstract thinking

Interoception & Self Regulation



ahler & Bravener 2018



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Poor Interoceptive Awareness: Connected to Many Conditions

- Anxiety
- Depression
- SPD
- ADHD
- Eating Disorders
- Obesity
- Schizophrenia
- Dementia
- OCD
- Trauma Disorders
- Panic Disorder
- Suicide Attempters & Planners
- Drug & Alcohol Addiction
- Chronic Pain Syndromes
- Autism

Mahler & Bravener 2018



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Autism and anxiety are not separate entities ...

External presentation may not show the extent of anxiety. Like autism, anxiety can ...

- Be invisible
- Be masked
- Be hidden
- Present itself as a mental health condition



8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

1. Anger

The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.



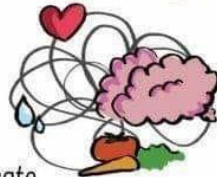
2. Difficulty Sleeping

In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.



3. Defiance

Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.



5. Lack of Focus

Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.

FOCUS

6. Avoidance

Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.



7. Negativity

People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

8. Overplanning

Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.

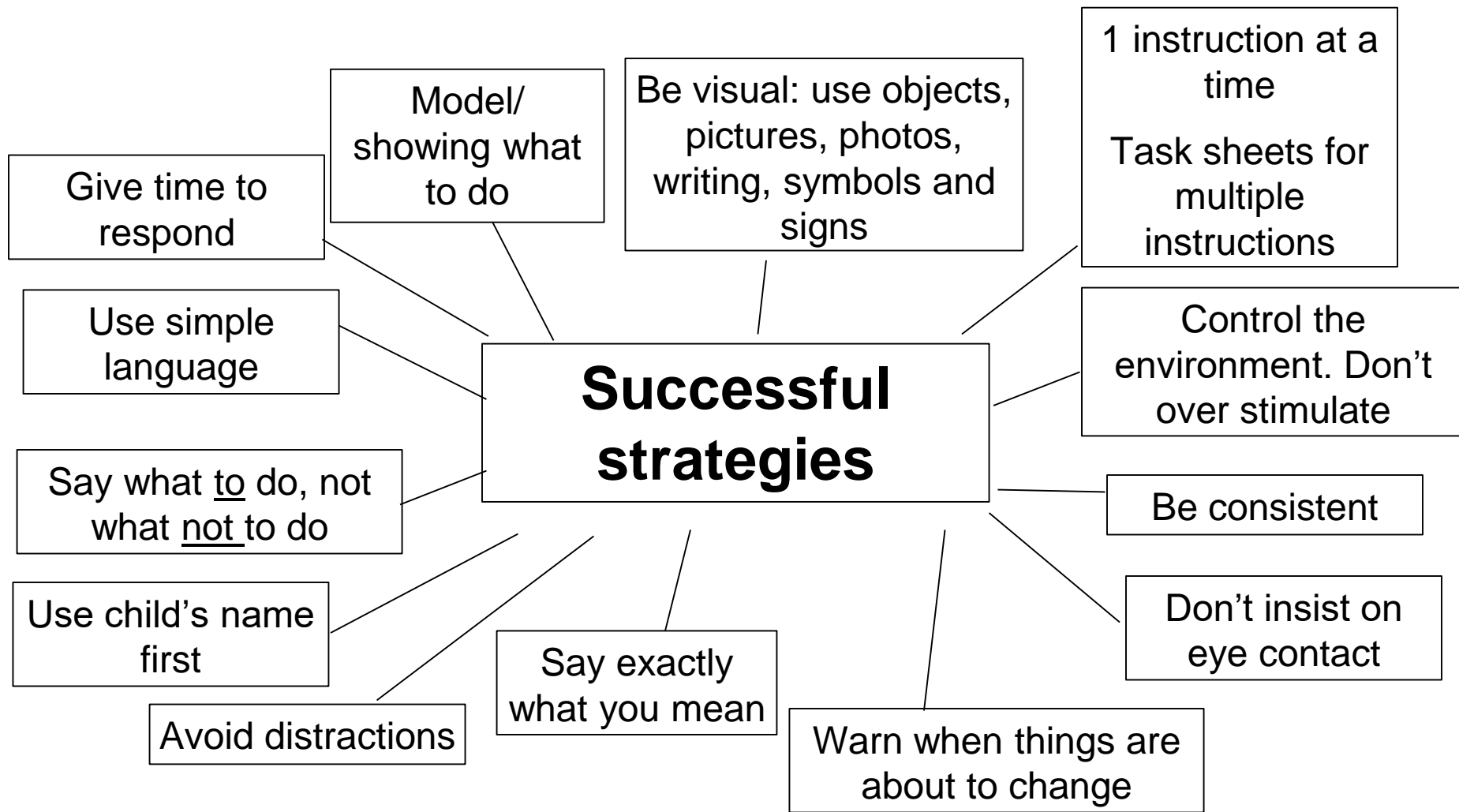


4. Chandeliering

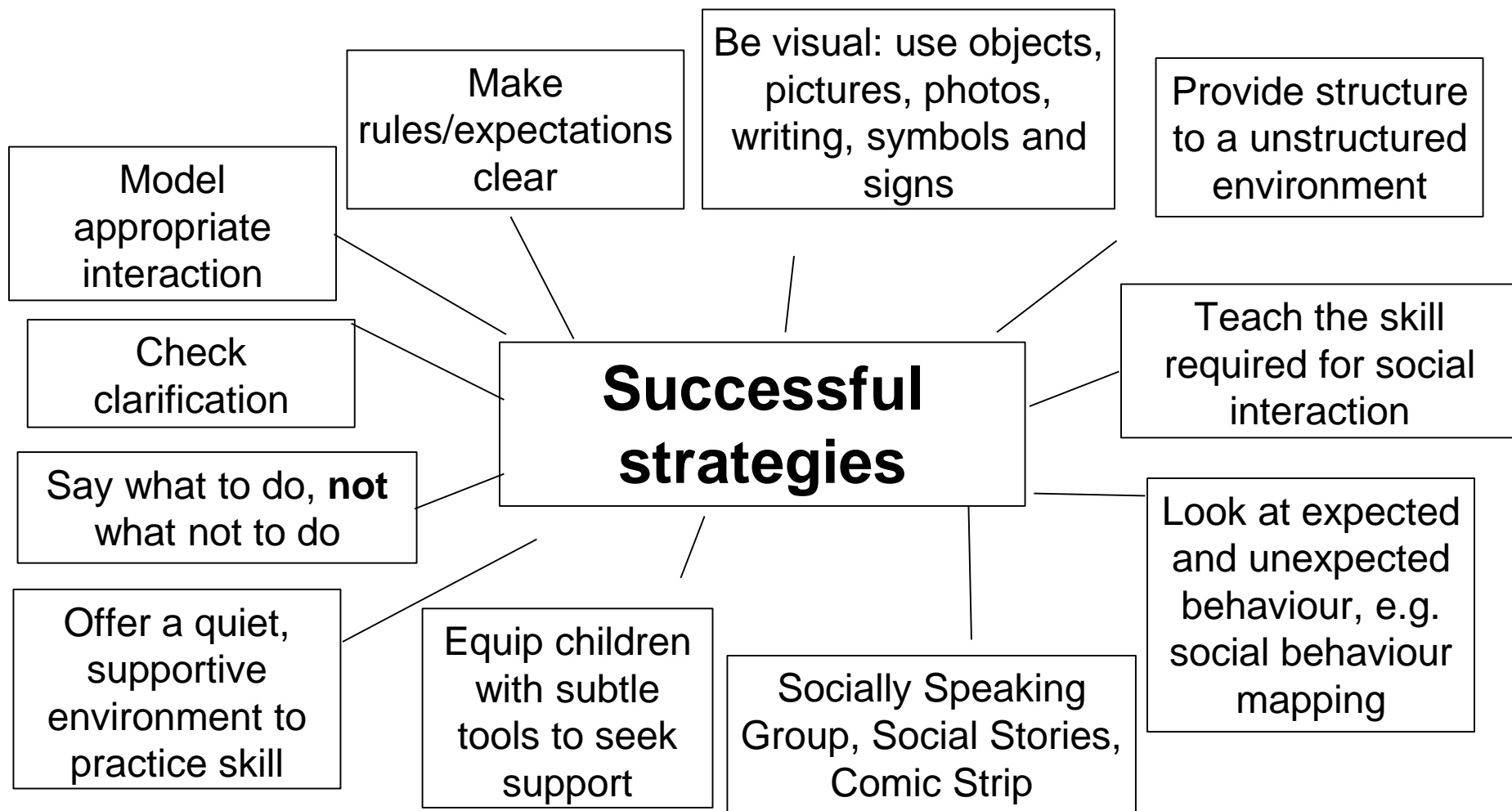
Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.



Supporting communication



Supporting social understanding



Supporting the processing of information

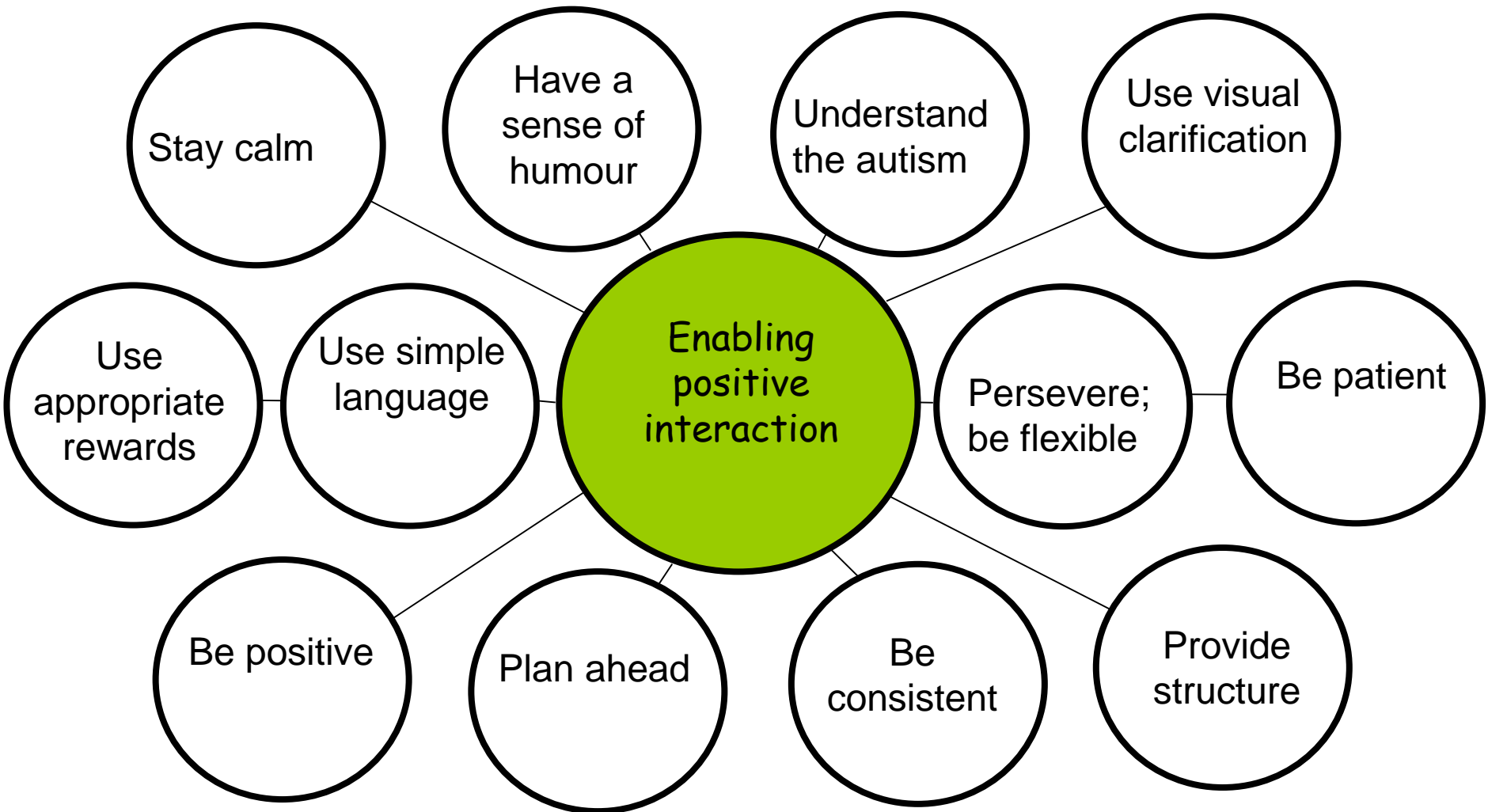
- Visual frameworks
- Allow 6-10 seconds processing time
- Offer adapted timetables – e.g. timetable for a Monday not the whole week – recognise students might need to be taught the skills to use them
- Provide clear routines throughout the day
- Support and utilise special interests. Consider allowing time in the day for a student to be able to access this
- Have strategies in place to deal with sudden change
- Provide opportunities for practical working to consolidate learning
- Support students with difficulties in organisation- offer areas for them to store belonging, offer peer support, provide checklists, resource lists
- Make homework and expectations clear and explicit. Ask students to read it back, use visual supports.
- Point out when you really need them to listen and retain information
- Support the passing of time – if appropriate use a timer

Learning support

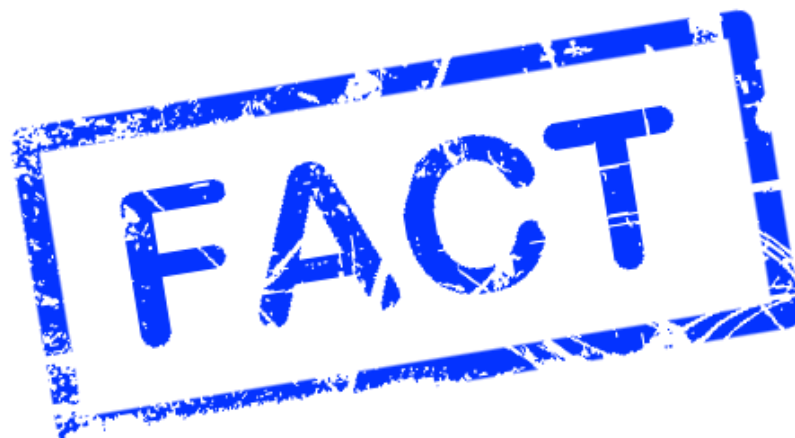
- Provide routine and structure – prepare for change (visual timetable)
- Break down tasks into smaller steps, e.g. a task sheet
- Make learning concrete, contextual and visual – supplement the written/verbal word with visual aid
- Check understanding. Might not ask for help or be avoidant to mask difficulty
- Offer tools to allow girls to ask for help, e.g. timeout cards/prompts
- Pre-teach different concepts to improve confidence
- Incorporate their special interests
- Consider using ICT to enable writing – e.g. they might prefer touch-typing
- Build flexibility in making mistakes and re-drafting work for those who seek perfectionism
- Offer guided choice to those who might like to be in control
- Support with all transitions, e.g. activity – activity, lesson – lesson
- Praise and reward to motivate
- Allow processing time, e.g. slowly count to 10 – but might need to be longer



Adult Role



Autism runs in families



In some families autism may affect more than one individual, though this is not a truism. Parents and siblings of autistic children might also be autistic without actually meeting the criteria for an autism.



People with autism are loners who don't need or seek relationships ...



Autistic people do find social communication and understanding relationships a challenge.

Despite this, the presence or proximity of an adult or other person is often key to their emotional regulation and ability to function.



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Autistic people don't easily understand people's thoughts and feelings

FACT

Probably the most well-documented research finding is that autistic people typically have difficulty in understanding another person's point of view and feelings.



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More boys are diagnosed
as autistic than girls

FACT

Four times as many boys are diagnosed as autistic as girls, though research is underway to look at whether doctors are missing diagnosing girls with the story.



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Autistic people have below average intelligence



The intellectual functioning of autistic people is generally within, and in some cases well above, the normal range. Autistic children usually attend mainstream schools.

They may still have difficulties in coping with everyday situations, and for this reason not achieve their full potential.

An autistic person can experience extreme sensory sensitivities affecting their everyday life

FACT

“What I do realise is that I do not see the world as others do. Most people take the routines of life and day to day connections for granted. The fact that they can see, hear, smell, touch and relate to others is ‘normal’. For me, these things are often painfully overwhelming, non-existent or just confusing.”