

# **Helping All of Us Cope, Heal, and Thrive in Stressful Times**

*Developmental Disabilities and  
Neurodiversity Conference*  
April 5, 2024



# Introductions

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Pediatrician

South San Francisco Clinic

San Mateo Medical Center

**Be kind to  
yourself.**

**Take a break if you  
need it.**



# Objectives



Describe the science of stress biology.



Identify examples of stress-mitigation strategies that help us cope, heal, and thrive.



Identify examples of community-based support services that help us cope, heal, and thrive.



**Experiences  
Change Our  
Biology**





# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

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## Abuse



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

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## Neglect



Physical



Emotional

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## Household Challenges



Mental  
Illness



Intimate  
Partner  
Violence



Parental  
Separation  
or Divorce



Incarceration



Substance  
Misuse or  
Dependence

# ACEs Dramatically Increase Risk for at least 9 of the 10 Leading Causes of Death in the U.S.

	Leading Causes of Death in the U.S., 2017	Odds Ratios for $\geq 4$ ACEs (relative to no ACEs)
1	<b>Heart disease</b>	2.1
2	<b>Cancer</b>	2.3
3	<b>Accidents</b> (unintentional injuries)	2.6
4	<b>Chronic lower respiratory disease</b>	3.1
5	<b>Stroke</b>	2.0
6	<b>Alzheimer's disease</b> or dementia	11.2
7	<b>Diabetes</b>	1.4
8	Influenza and pneumonia	Unknown
9	<b>Kidney disease</b>	1.7
10	<b>Suicide</b> (attempts)	37.5

Source of causes of death: CDC, 2017; Sources of odds ratios: Hughes et al., 2017 for 1, 2, 4, 7, 10; Petrucelli et al., 2019 for 3 (injuries with fracture), 5; Center for Youth Wellness, 2014 for 6 (Alzheimer's or dementia); Center for Youth Wellness, 2014 and Merrick et al., 2019 for 9.

# Additional Stressors

- Racism
- Discrimination
- Poverty
- Medical trauma
- Bereavement
- Bullying
- Social isolation
- Climate change
- And more







# ACEs & Toxic Stress Can Affect Children's Health

- Asthma, Allergies
- Chronic Pain, Headaches, Stomachaches
- Weight changes
- Sleep disturbances
- Developmental delays
- Learning & behavioral difficulties
- Executive function difficulties
- Self-regulation issues

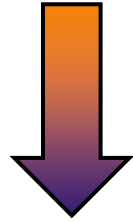
# The Stress Response





# The Stress Response

**Perceived Threat**



**Affiliate**

**Fight**

**Flight**

**Freeze**



Who else is here?

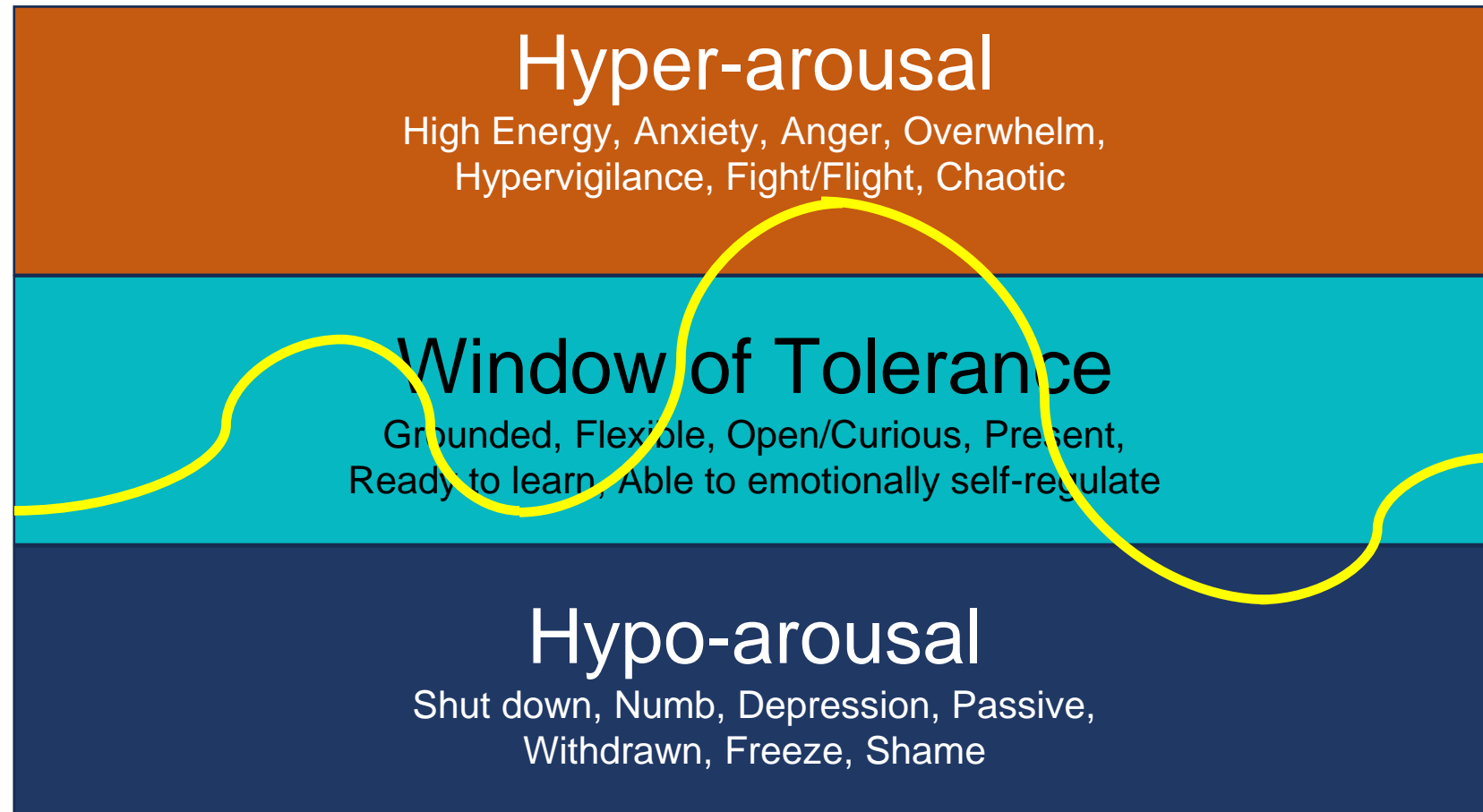
Think quick  
Get energy  
Protect

Play dead  
Prepare for pain and injury

11



# The Window of Tolerance



# Some Stress Builds Resilience

## POSITIVE



Brief activation of stress hormones which quickly return to baseline

## TOLERABLE



Time-limited activation of stress response results in short-term systemic changes

## TOXIC



Prolonged, excessive activation of stress response



## Survival/Emotional Brain

On high alert

Trouble regulating  
emotions

Compromised sense  
of safety and trust



## Thinking/Planning Brain

Trouble focusing

Trouble planning

Learning new things



## Endocrine/ Immune

Extra or depleted  
stress hormones,  
sugar, proteins

Trouble sleeping

More frequent  
aches and pains



**We can  
all cope,  
heal, and  
thrive.**





AND



## **Address Stressors**

- Partner with individuals and communities to lower the stress load

## **Internal Stress Responses**

- Skills to calm the stress response in the moment
- Long-term healing strategies and interventions

## **Improve**

- Health and Wellbeing
- Opportunity
- Equity

# Address the Stressors

- Assess current safety and provide any needed resources.
- Anticipate: What are the stressors? Triggers?
  - Es. If loud noises are a stressor, identify quiet spaces, sound canceling headphones
- Find tools and resources on [www.acesaware.org/manage](http://www.acesaware.org/manage) stress to support you and your patients.
- Connect to resources using [www.findhelp](http://www.findhelp) or [your local 2-1-1](#) which can also provide resources such as housing, childcare, and legal services.
- Leverage your networks of care resource list for the resources most often needed in your community.



# Trauma-Informed Care Principles

- Establish the physical and emotional **safety** of patients/clients and staff
- **Build trust** between providers/staff and patients/clients
- **Recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma exposure on physical and mental health
- Provide connections to **peer support**
- Promote **patient-centered, evidence-based care**
- Ensure provider and patient **collaboration**
- Provide care that is sensitive to the patient's/client's **racial, ethnic, and cultural background, and gender identity**



**Address the Internal Stress Response**

# Strategies to lower stress hormones in the moment:

## Hyper-arousal

High Energy, Anxiety, Anger, Overwhelm,  
Hypervigilance, Fight/Flight, Chaotic

## Window of Tolerance

Grounded, Flexible, Open/Curious, Present,  
Ready to learn, Able to emotionally self-regulate

## Hypo-arousal

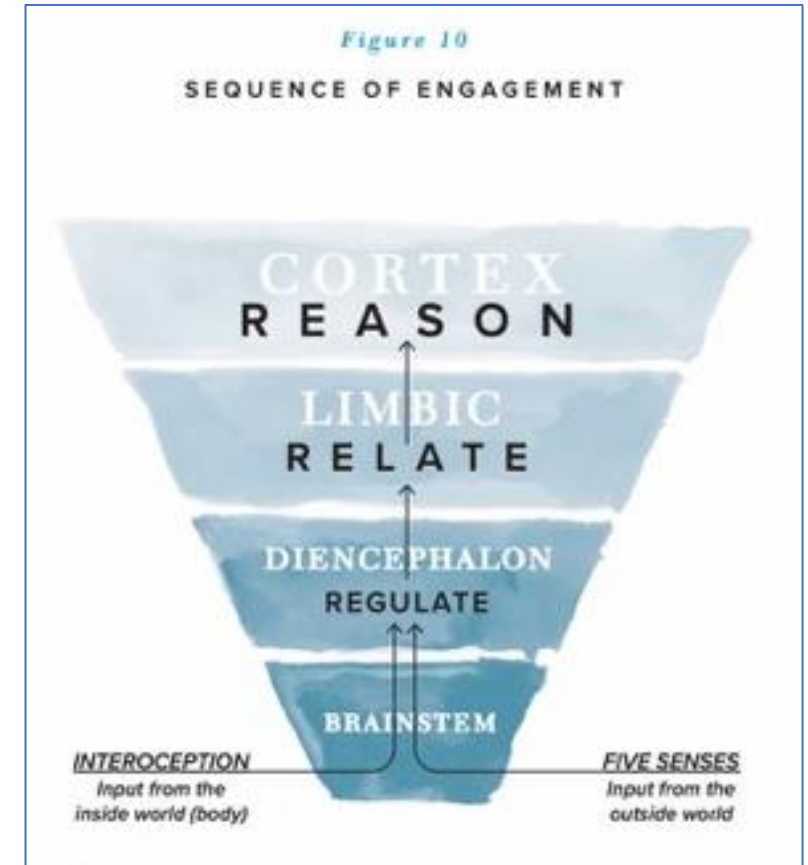
Shut down, Numb, Depression, Passive,  
Withdrawn, Freeze, Shame

- Grounding techniques.
- Breathing techniques.
- Sensory support.
- Progressive muscle relaxation.
- Exercise.
- Reach out to your support person



# Regulate Relate Reason

1. First, **regulate** ourselves and co-regulate the other person. Help them feel safe and calm, reducing their stress responses.
2. Then **relate** to their emotions. Help them feel understood and connected.
3. Once the other person feels safe and understood, engage them to process what happened through **reason**.



# Skill Building and Collaborative Problem Solving

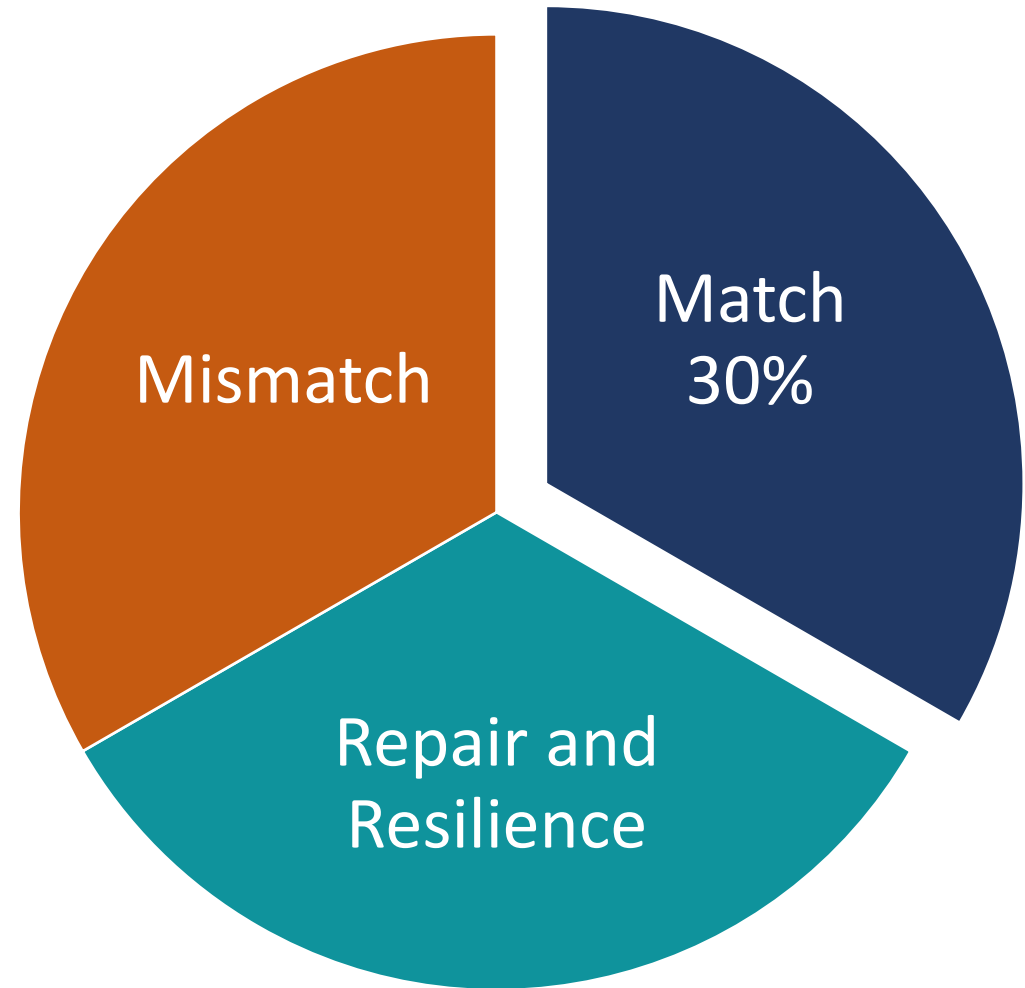
- **Behavior as communication:** When children are acting out, they are trying to communicate something.
- **Teach skills:** Often kids who are not doing well, cannot do well because they are missing a skill.
  - Stressors
  - Stress response

“Kids with challenging behavior don’t lack the *will* to behave well.

**They lack the *skills* to behave well.”**

**Collaborative Problem Solving**

Mismatch + Repair  
=  
Connection +  
Resilience



# Long-term healing: Address long-term effects from toxic stress

- Consider strategies and interventions that can improve neurologic, endocrine, immune, and metabolic function.

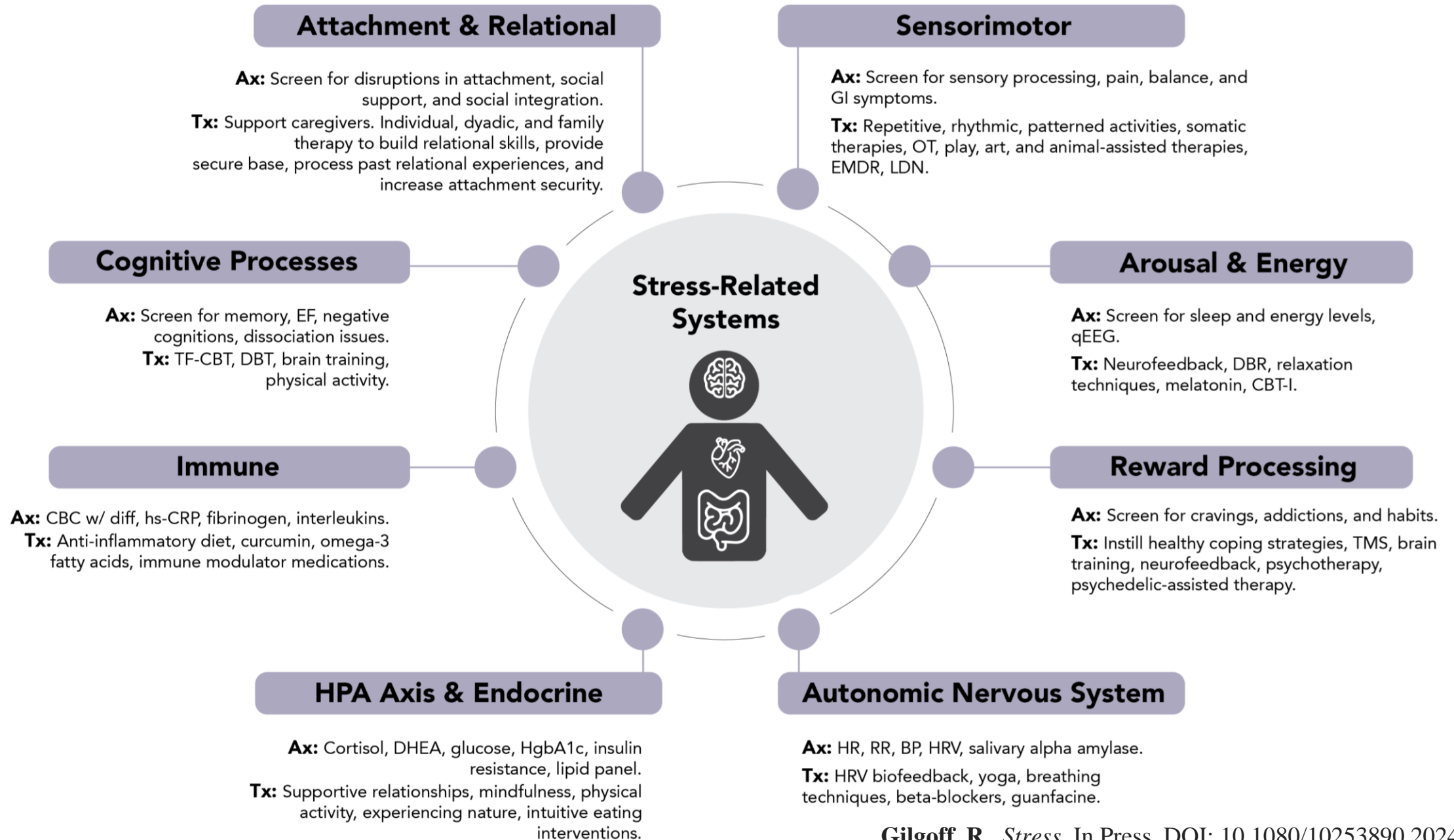




# Trauma Therapies

- ❖ [Child-Parent Psychotherapy](#) (ages birth to 6 years): Dyadic intervention for young children and their caregivers that supports family strengths and relationships.
- ❖ [Parent-Child Interaction Therapy](#) (2 to 12 years): Dyadic parent training treatment that emphasizes improving the quality of the parent-child relationship and pattern of parent-child interactions.
- ❖ [Attachment & Biobehavioral Catch-up \(ABC\)](#) (Birth to middle school): A strengths-based, focused, brief (10, 1-hour weekly sessions) dyadic, home-visiting program.
- ❖ [Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy \(TF-CBT\)](#) (verbal children and adults): A structured, short-term treatment model for children and adults who have experienced trauma.
- ❖ [Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing \(EMDR\)](#) (adolescents and adults): EMDR is focused on helping clients resolve unprocessed traumatic memories.
- ❖ [Family Systems Therapy](#) (verbal children and adults): Supports resolving family conflict or issues.
- ❖ [Cognitive Processing Therapy](#) (adolescents and adults): A type of cognitive behavioral therapy, generally 12 sessions, that helps modify maladaptive thinking related to their trauma.
- ❖ [Prolonged Exposure Therapy](#) (adolescents and adults): A cognitive behavioral therapy approach that helps clients gradually approach their memories, feelings and situations of trauma.
- ❖ [Somatic Therapy](#) (all ages): An approach that focuses on how emotions and stress appear in the body and tools to regulate the autonomic nervous system.
- ❖ [Biofeedback and Neurofeedback](#) (young children to adults): A type of therapy that allows the client to see their physiology in real-time (e.g. heart rate, coherence, brain wave patterns) to learn strategies to control their physiology.

# Stress Phenotyping Framework



# Stress Buster Resources

Becoming ACEs Aware in California Training:

<https://training.acesaware.org>

ACEs Aware Stress Busters Resource Page:

[www.acesaware.org/managestress](http://www.acesaware.org/managestress)

Wellness Corner by the VTA and PACEs

Connection: <https://vtaplus.org/continuing-education-and-support/wellness-corner/>

Stress Busters online curriculum

<https://training.acesaware.org/aa/alt/detail?id=2115>

OSG Videos: "What are ACEs" and "How to Manage Stress" <https://osg.ca.gov/aces-toxic-stress/>

SAFE Spaces: Free, on-line training for educators <https://osg.ca.gov/safespaces/>

## STRESS BUSTERS

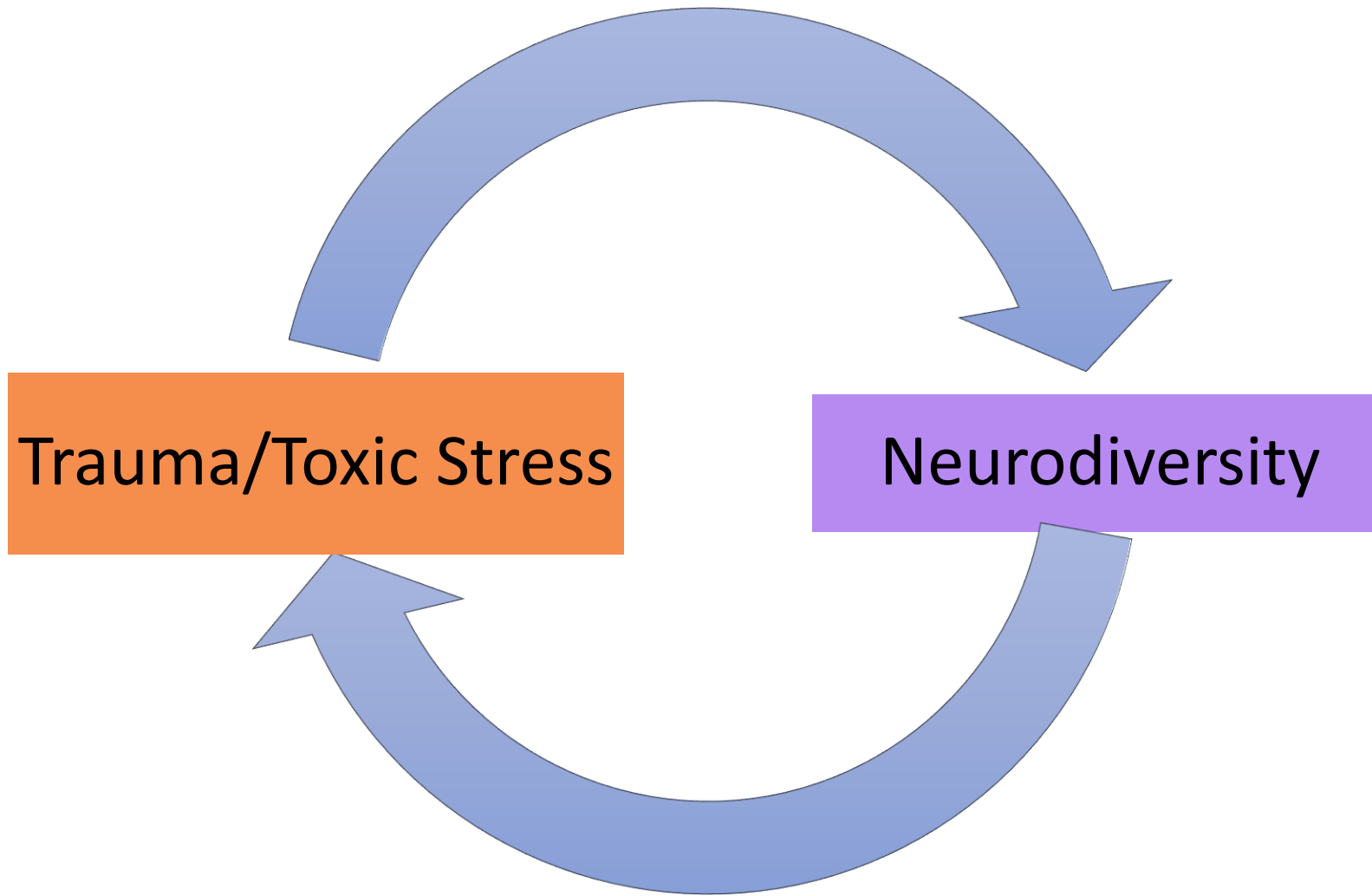
# 7 Ways to Manage Stress





# Stress and Neurodiversity







Neurodiversity and Trauma for People with Developmental Disabilities

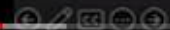
Share



Brown Family (1981)

# Neurodiversity and Trauma

Dr. Heather M Brown, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta



0:47 / 1:12:22



YouTube



<https://www.uctv.tv/shows/38878>

# **What are some aspects of stress and healing specific to neurodivergent people and their allies?**

- Some stressors are more common or more intense for ND vs. NT (neurotypical) people
- Healing strategies (“stress busters”) can be more difficult to access for ND vs. NT people

# Stressors that may be more common or more intense for ND vs. NT people

## Sensory Overload

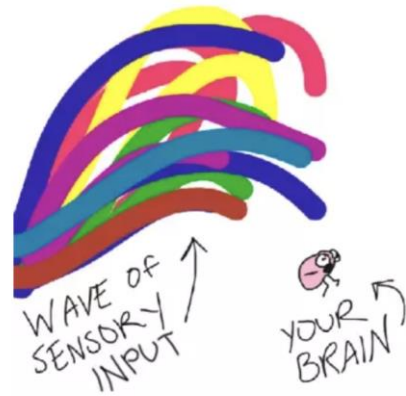


Image credit: [Eating Off Plastic](#)

## Bullying



## Ableism



<https://ds.gmu.edu/inclusive-language/>

## Masking/Camouflaging





## Neurodiversity Wellness

### Mental Health Resources

#### Neurodiversity Clinic

Clinic Director: [Lawrence Fung, MD, PhD](#)

Psychiatrist: [Thuc-Quyen Nguyen, MD](#)

Licensed Clinical Social Worker: [Hilary Oleon, LCSW](#)

DUE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS, WE ARE CURRENTLY SEEING PATIENTS VIA  
TELEHEALTH ONLY.

WE CONTINUE TO TAKE NEW PATIENTS AT THIS TIME.

Address: 401 Quarry Road, Stanford, CA

Phone numbers:

Scheduling follow-up appointments: 650-498-9111

Medication refills: 650-498-9111, option 5

#### Referrals from Stanford Providers

Please submit referral via EPIC. Please submit a referral to Psychiatry, choose  
"Psychosocial Treatment Clinic", and specify that this referral is directed to the  
Adult Neurodevelopment Clinic.

#### Referrals from non-Stanford Providers

Please send a [referral](#) by Email ([ReferralCenter@stanfordhealthcare.org](mailto:ReferralCenter@stanfordhealthcare.org)) or fax  
(650-320-9443)

### Primary Care Resources

[HEALTHCARE TOOLKIT: Patient Centered Care Tools for Autistic Adults](#)

### Independent living skills resources

[MoneyMinded](#), a comprehensive suite of financial education resources for adults

### COVID-19 Resources

#### Selected Presentations

[Dealing with Stress and Anxiety during the Pandemic](#) (Speaker: [Lawrence Fung, MD, PhD](#))

#### Selected High-Yield Resources

[COVID-19 Q&A: Dr. Lawrence Fung on Impacts on the Neurodiverse Community](#)

[CDC's Mental Health & Coping with COVID-19](#)

[COVID-19 information and resources for adults on the spectrum](#) (Autism Speaks)

[Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times](#) (University of North Carolina)

[COVID-19: Tips for Mindfulness & Coping with Anxiety](#) (Mayo Clinic)

#### Toolkits

[Supporting Individuals with Autism through Uncertain Times](#) (University of North Carolina)

[COVID-19 Resources](#) (Autism Society)

[Resources for Families of Individuals with Special Needs during Coronavirus Outbreak](#) (Early Support Program for Autism, Stanford)

[How to Talk with Kids About COVID-19](#) (Pediatric Anxiety and Traumatic Stress Clinic, Stanford)

[COVID Coach](#) (US Department of Veterans Affairs)

#### Selected Articles

[Feeling anxious about the coronavirus? A Stanford psychiatrist offers tips](#)

[How to Talk with Kids About COVID-19](#) (Lucile Packard Children's Hospital)

# AASPIRE Healthcare Toolkit [www.autismandhealth.org](http://www.autismandhealth.org)



[HOME](#) • [ABOUT](#) • [SITE MAP](#) • [PARTNERS](#) • [CONTACT](#)

Theme:



## AASPIRE Healthcare Toolkit

### Primary Care Resources for Adults on the Autism Spectrum and their Primary Care Providers

This web site has information and worksheets for adults on the autism spectrum, supporters, and healthcare providers. It focuses on primary healthcare, or healthcare with a regular doctor.

The resources on this site are meant to improve the healthcare of autistic adults. They were made by the [Academic-Autistic Spectrum Partnership in Research and Education \(AASPIRE\)](#) through a series of research studies funded by the [National Institute of Mental Health](#). AASPIRE hopes that you will find these resources helpful.

#### **PATIENTS & SUPPORTERS**

[click here](#)



Make a [Personalized Accommodations Report](#) for your healthcare provider.

This section also has information on:

- [Healthcare](#)
- [Staying Healthy](#)
- [Your Rights in Healthcare](#)



#### **HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS**

[click here](#)

This section has information on:

- [Autism Information, Diagnosis, and Referrals](#)
- [Caring for Patients on the Autism Spectrum](#)
- [Legal and Ethical Considerations](#)
- [Associated Conditions](#)
- [Resources and Links](#)

# “Stress busters” that help reduce stress

Sleep/Rest



Music



Physical Activity



Nature



Healthy Food



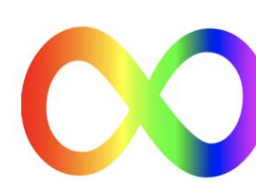
Supportive Relationships



Mindfulness



Community



# Sleep

- **Getting enough good quality sleep is probably the most important thing you can do to stay healthy.**
- **“Enough” sleep is different for different people but for most teens should be at least 8 hours.**
- **You should feel rested after sleeping. If not, talk to a doctor.**
- **When you sleep also matters.**



# Sleep Suggestions

## Tips for Good Sleep



Go to bed and get up at the same time each day, including weekends.



Keep the bedroom quiet, dark, and a comfortable temperature.



Remove electronic devices from the bedroom.



Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.

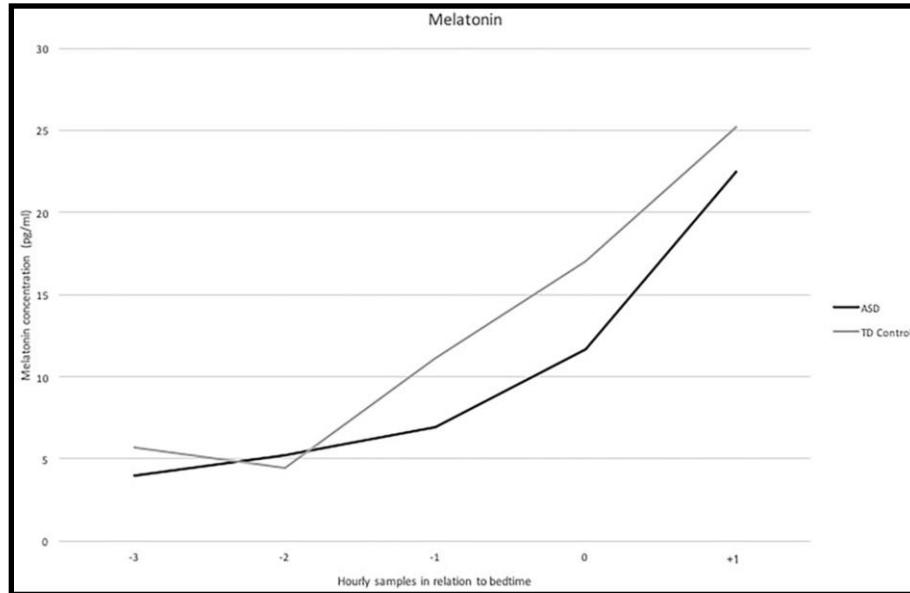


Be active during the day to help you fall asleep at night.

Learn more about good sleep habits at [www.cdc.gov/sleep](https://www.cdc.gov/sleep).

# Sleep and Neurodiversity

**Getting enough good quality sleep is challenging for a lot of neurodivergent people.**



**This study found lower levels of melatonin in autistic people compared with nonautistic people:**

Front. Neurol., 14 June 2022

Sec. Pediatric Neurology

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fneur.2022.813692>

**Sensory sensitivities can make it hard to sleep.**

**ADHD: sleep problems are common, especially after age 12**

# Sleep and Neurodiversity

## Suggestions

- **Light blocking curtains**
- **Weighted blanket**
- **Melatonin 30 min before a regular bedtime**

# Physical Activity/ Movement

**The human body is designed to be physically active.**



The Hadza tribe of Tanzania lives by subsistence hunting and foraging for berries, honey, baobab fruit and tubers. Brian Wood

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/well/move/born-to-move.html>



# Physical Activity/ Movement and Neurodiversity

[https://www.additudemag.com/exercise-and-the-adhd-brain/?src=embed\\_link](https://www.additudemag.com/exercise-and-the-adhd-brain/?src=embed_link)

**ADDITUDE** *Inside the ADHD mind*

ADHD Medication & Treatment > Natural Remedies for ADHD

## EXERCISE & GREEN TIME


### Exercise and the ADHD Brain: The Neuroscience of Movement

Research shows that physical activity sparks real, positive changes in the brain that increase attention and improve mood. What's more, exercise is an inexpensive, self-prescribed, and accessible supplemental treatment option for adults and children with ADHD.

| By [ADDitude Editors](#) | ✓ [Verified](#) | Updated on April 14, 2022



# Physical Activity/ Movement and Neurodiversity

 **AASPIRE Healthcare Toolkit**  
for Patients & Supporters


HOME • ABOUT • SITE MAP • PARTNERS • CONTACT


Theme: Light (default) A A A


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HOME > PATIENTS & SUPPORTERS > STAYING HEALTHY > EXERCISE


 **Staying Healthy**

 **Exercise**

 [Nutrition](#)

 [Preventative Care](#)

 [Recreation](#)

 **Exercise**

**Content Outline**

- [What is this topic about?](#)
- [What counts as exercise?](#)
- [How often should I exercise?](#)
- [How do I pick exercises that are right for me?](#)
- [I don't like or can't do most exercises, what should I do?](#)
- [Someone else controls my daily schedule, how do I get exercise included?](#)
- [What changes in my body can I expect if I start exercising more?](#)

This topic: [print](#) [email](#) [download as pdf](#)

**What is this topic about?**

Different sources will tell you different things on how to exercise properly. With so many different activities to choose from, figuring out what to do can be difficult. The most important thing about exercise is just to do it, do it in moderation, and do it regularly.

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**What counts as exercise?**

Exercise is anything that makes your heart beat faster, your skin sweat, and your joints and muscles get used. Cardiovascular exercise, like walking, biking, running, and swimming makes your heart beat fast and hard. Resistance exercise like weight lifting, yoga, or pilates puts weight on your muscles, bones, and joints. It's good to get both cardio-vascular and resistance exercise, but it's more important to get any kind of exercise.

Exercise doesn't have to be complicated, or involve special equipment. A 30-minute brisk walk three to four times a week is exercise. If walking doesn't seem to be making your heart pump very fast, try running, or try putting heavy things in a backpack and going for a walk with the extra weight.

# Food (nutrition)

## Tips

- Avoid ultra-processed foods
- Eat more fruits or vegetables



Eat less of these



Eat more of these

<https://www.theguardian.com/food/2020/feb/13/how-ultra-processed-food-took-over-your-shopping-basket-brazil-carlos-monteiro>

# Food and Neurodiversity

- For some people, it's hard to notice when they are hungry or to remember to eat.
- Omega 3 1000-2000 mg/day supplement can help
- Individual differences: some people feel better when avoiding dairy and/or gluten. Everyone is different—you are the expert on you!
- There is some evidence that neurodivergent people may be especially susceptible to the adverse health effects of **ultraprocessed food (e.g. corn syrup, artificial colors)** Dufault RJ, Crider RA, Deth RC, et al. Higher rates of autism and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in American children: Are food quality issues impacting epigenetic inheritance?. *World J Clin Pediatr.* 2023;12(2):25-37. Published 2023 Mar 9. doi:10.5409/wjcp.v12.i2.25



## **Staying Healthy**



[Exercise](#)



**Nutrition**



[Preventative Care](#)



[Recreation](#)



### **Nutrition**

#### **Content Outline**

- [What is this topic about?](#)
- [What kind of diet is healthy for me?](#)
- [How do I eat healthy on a budget?](#)
- [Tips for Using the Grocery Store](#)
- [Cooking is hard for me, what are some ideas to make it easier?](#)
- [How do I cook safely?](#)
- [Someone else makes my food, how can I make sure it's healthy?](#)
- [I don't like or can't eat most food, what should I do?](#)

This topic: [print](#) [email](#) [download as pdf](#)

## **What is this topic about?**

A healthy diet can help improve or keep up good health. A healthy diet may also lower the risk for some chronic health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. A healthy diet means eating the right amounts of the right nutrients, and drinking the right amount of water. Nutrients can come from many different foods. Everyone's bodies are a little different, and there are many ways to have a healthy diet.

This section gives some links to basic information about healthy diet and nutrition.

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## **What kind of diet is healthy for me?**

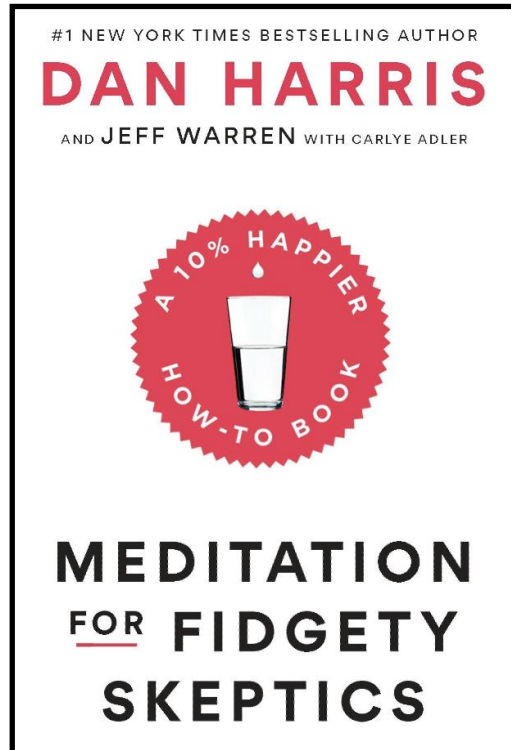
There is no single diet that is best for all people. Some people like to stick to a particular diet, like a vegan, low carbohydrate, paleo, anti-inflammatory, or Mediterranean diet. It's okay if you do not want to follow a particular diet. Following some general healthy eating guidelines is all you need to do.

### **General Guidelines**

# Music

- **Rhythmic, repetitive (“regulate”)**
- **Can enjoy alone or with others (“relate”)**
- **For some neurodivergent people, singing is easier than speaking**

# Mindfulness/Meditation



- Empathetic guide to learning meditation from the perspective of someone who describes himself as “fidgety.”
- Tips include “give yourself permission to fail” and “one minute counts.”
- Recommended by Dr. Heather M. Brown, autistic educational psychologist and researcher on autistic wellness, U of Alberta

# Nature and Neurodiversity

- **Autistic children score high on measures of “naturalist intelligence” (one of Howard Gardener’s “multiple intelligences”)**
- **13 year old autistic boy: “However often we’re ignored and pushed away by other people, nature will always give us a good big hug, here inside our hearts.”**

(Armstrong T. The healing balm of nature: Understanding and supporting the naturalist intelligence in individuals diagnosed with ASD: Comment on: "Implications of the idea of neurodiversity for understanding the origins of developmental disorders" by Nobuo Masataka. Phys Life Rev. 2017 Mar;20:109-111. doi: 10.1016/j.plrev.2017.01.012. Epub 2017 Jan 12. PMID: 28117238).

- **Many studies have shown benefits of “green time” in ADHD**

Bolanis D, Orri M, Vergunst F, Bouchard S, Robitaille É, Philippe F, Ouellet-Morin I, Girard A, Paquin V, Gauvin L, Côté S, Geoffroy MC. Increased urban greenspace in childhood associated with lower inattention deficit among adolescents. Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol. 2023 Oct 14. doi: 10.1007/s00127-023-02575-0. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 37837487.

Donovan GH, Michael YL, Gatzolis D, Mannetje A', Douwes J. Association between exposure to the natural environment, rurality, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in children in New Zealand: a linkage study. Lancet Planet Health. 2019 May;3(5):e226-e234. doi: 10.1016/S2542-5196(19)30070-1. PMID: 31128768.

# “Relational Health”

- Since 2021, endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics as a way children heal from toxic stress
- Defined by “safe, supportive and nurturing relationships (SSNRs).”
- SSNRs are based on “empathetic understanding and acceptance.” Another word used is “attunement.”
- Not “What’s wrong with you?” but rather “What happened to you?” or “What’s going on for you?”
- Represents a shift from a pathology model to a diversity model



# Pathology Model vs. Diversity Model

Why do doctors use the Pathology Model?

- That's what they are taught in medical school.
- Most doctors, like most teachers, are neurotypical.
- A lot of doctors think that their job is to “fix.”

Areas where doctors have switched from a pathology to a diversity model in the past century:

- Handedness
- Cultural health beliefs
- SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity)
- Trauma Informed Care

# Relational Health and Neurodiversity

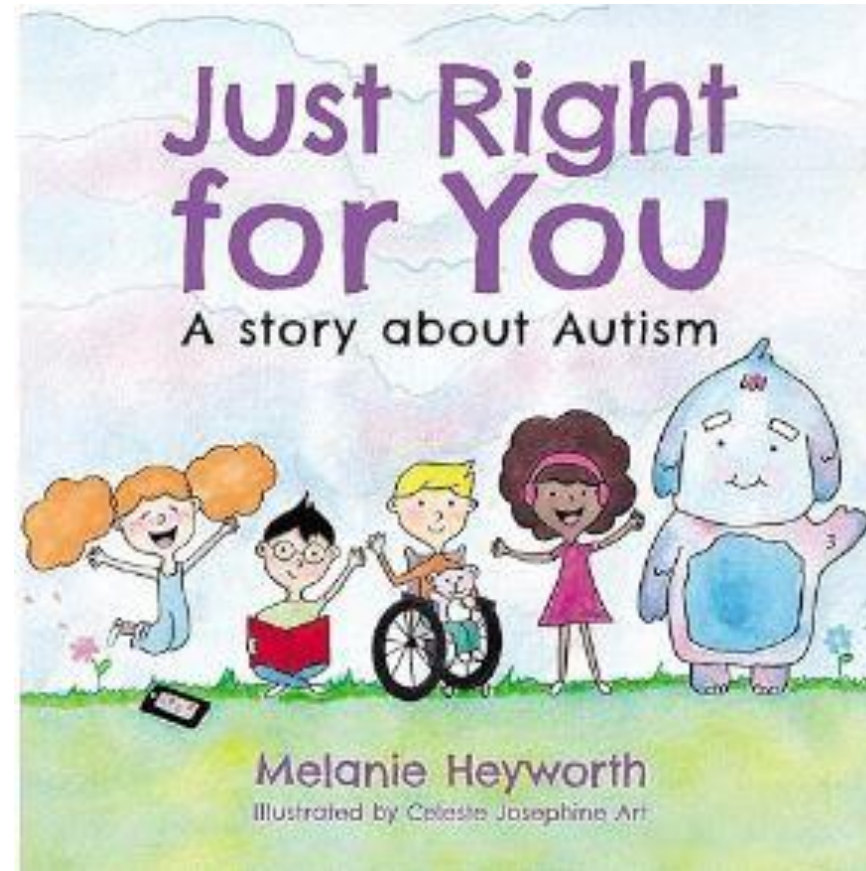
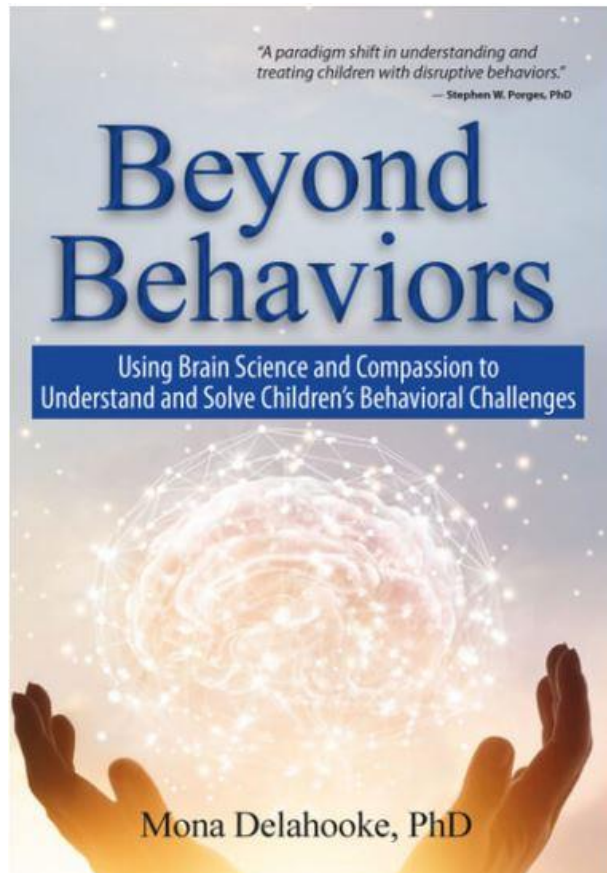
## Challenges

- Many “supports” do not use an intentionally “relational” approach and can even cause trauma in ND people whose behavior is not understood, for example “compliance based” therapies where privileges are withheld if child is not able to do a requested task, and this is interpreted as “behavioral (willful),” not as a consequence of sensorimotor dysregulation.
- People with undiagnosed neurodiversity, such as dyslexia or ADD, may be told to “just try harder”
- These are two examples where the lack of “attunement” can work against what may be otherwise good intentions.

# Relational Health and Neurodiversity

- There are evidence based behavioral supports that are intentionally relational, e.g. DIR Floortime, P.L.A.Y. Project, although these may not currently be widely available.
- Due to a technicality in the law mandating that MediCal cover behavioral therapy for autism, currently only “ABA” (behavioral therapy delivered by a BCBA certified therapist) is covered by MediCal.
- SB 805, signed into law by Gov. Newsom this summer, will change this—extends recommendation to cover all evidence based behavioral therapy including intentionally relational, attunement-based therapies.

# Relational Health and Neurodiversity



# Relational Health and Neurodiversity

- Communication: a human right and essential to feeling “understood”
- Communication can take many forms.
- Nonspeakers may benefit from techniques available at <https://communication4all.org/c4a-academy/>



# Community



**All Brains Belong VT**

NEUROINCLUSIVE HEALTHCARE & COMMUNITY



**Stanford**

Stanford Neurodiversity Project-NNEA

NETWORK FOR K-12 NEURODIVERSITY EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY



**Understood®**

The Network for K-12 Neurodiversity  
Education and Advocacy (NNEA)



**Thank you!**  
**Questions?**