A Neurodivergent Lens

- **Neurodiversity** is the idea that brain function varies across the population. Neurodiversity embraces autism and other disorders as a different way of thinking and behaving.
- **Inclusive, nonjudgmental language:** Some research has found that the majority of the autistic community prefers identity-first language ("an autistic person"). **It is best to ask directly about a person's preferred language, and how they want to be addressed.**
- **Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)** is associated with differences in communication, learning, and behavior, though it can look different from person to person. People with ASD may have a wide range of strengths, abilities, needs, and challenges.
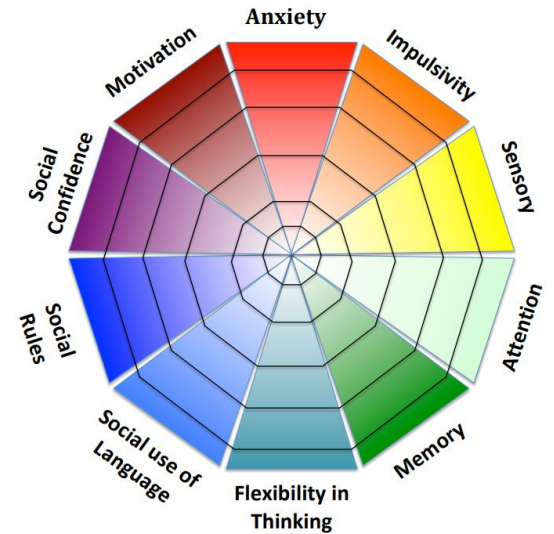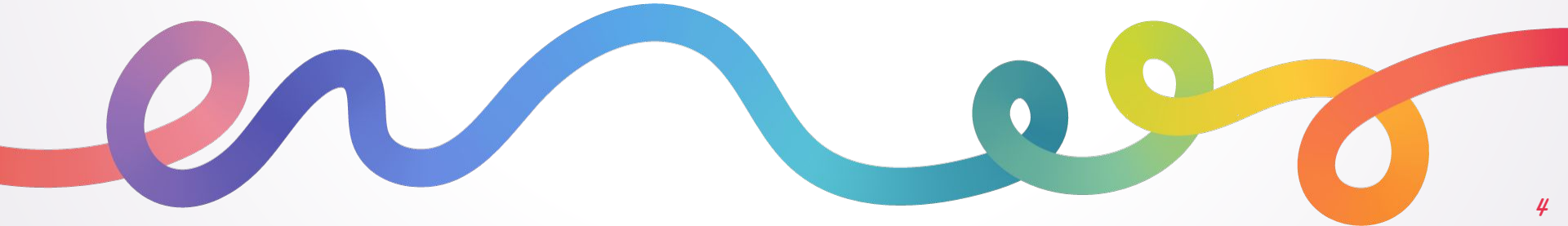
Spotlight on Autism Spectrum Disorder

Persistent differences (*deficits*) in social interaction across multiple contexts

(in each area)

Differences in social emotional reciprocity

Differences in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction

Differences in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships

Spotlight on Autism Spectrum Disorder

Repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities

(at least two of the four)

Insistence on sameness, inflexibility with routines, or ritualized patterns of behavior

Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus

Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment
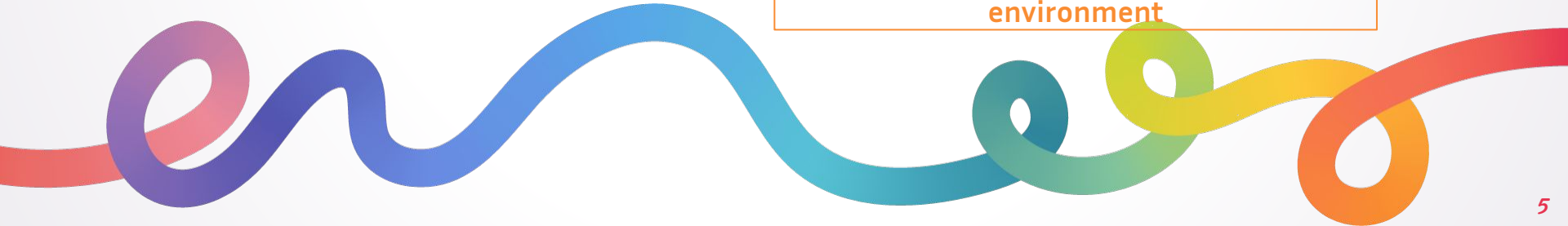
Spotlight on Autism Spectrum Disorder

Traits (symptoms) must be present in the early developmental period (may not fully manifest until demands exceed capacities, or may be masked by learned strategies in later life).

Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning.

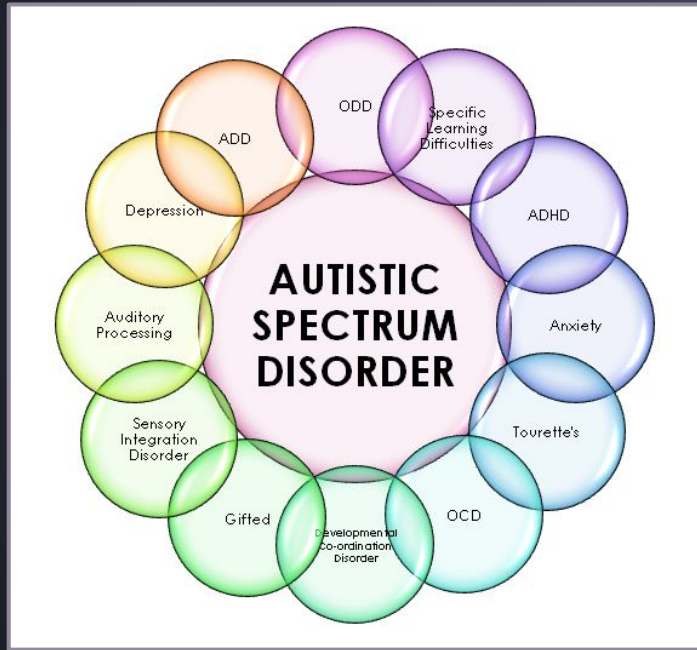"These '*disturbances'* are not better explained by intellectual disability."
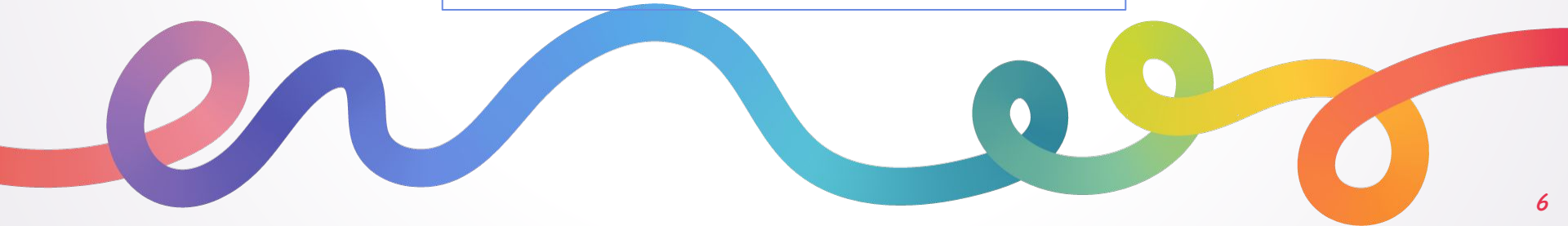
Focus on building strengths...

Targeting **behavior**, not disability....

# Comorbidities & Overlap

- These are just examples of other conditions that can overlap with autism spectrum disorder
- It is even more important that we build upon the differences that we might see to help our children be successful
- For example, we may see an overlap in **executive functioning** differences in ADHD and ASD, and therefore we try to work with the behaviors that may be associated

IEP classifications fall within the following categories...

- Autism
- Deafness
- Deaf-blindness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Learning disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health-impairment
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment (which includes blindness)
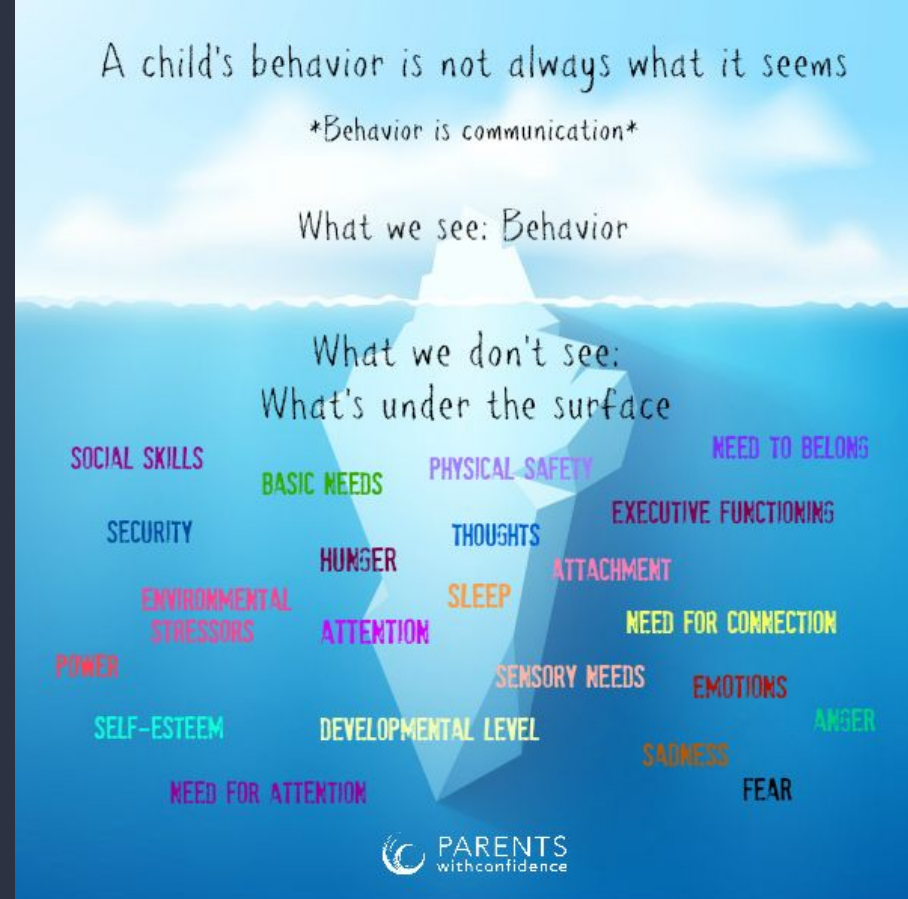
Regardless of classification status, it is our purpose to meet children where they are.

Executive Functioning Skills

Impulse Control

Emotional Control

Self-Monitoring

Planning and Prioritizing

Working Memory

Flexible Thinking

Organization

Task Initiation

5 point scale	Explanation	What can I do?
5	I need help NOW!	Remove self from the situation—accept help from adults
4	I am really upset!	Count to 5 Take deep breaths Finger Touches
3	I've got a problem	Tell the teacher, ask for help, use break card, think positive thoughts
2	Things are pretty good!	Keep saying "I am going to be OK" to myself
1	I am feeling great!	Keep up the good work!

Supporting Executive Function

- Use of task analysis: breaking down instructions into steps
- Task analyses are also used as "visual schedules," to assist in time management, planning, and prioritizing
- Provide a clear expectation and consequence for any behavior: functional or vocational (clear the table, take out the garbage, time on computer)
- Color coding and other visual prompts: can be faded without adult interference
- Folders, task boxes: gives context for planning and expectations, allows the individual to self-pace and self-monitor
- "Self-regulation" chart: provides context for behavior
- **Technology**! Applications such as Google Keep, Egenda, First/Then Visual Schedule
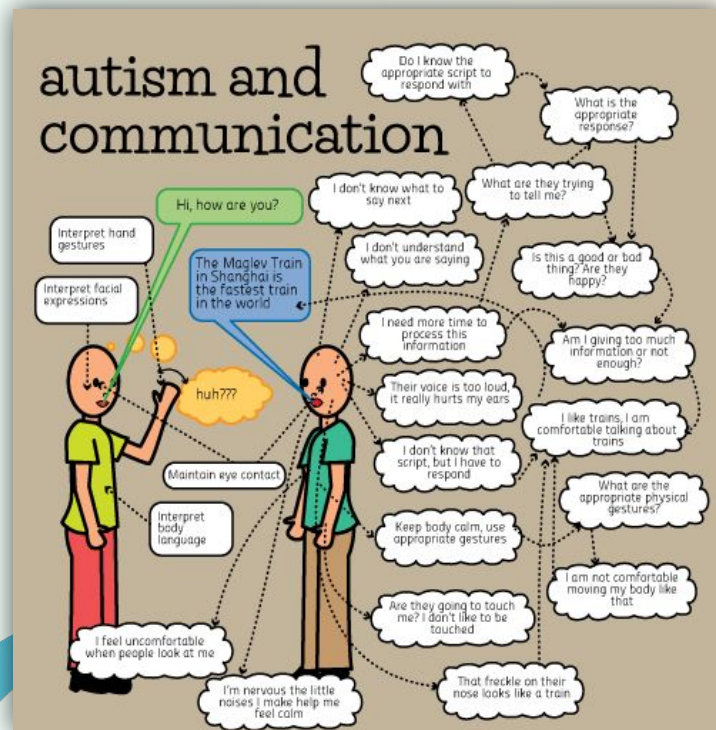
Communication Skills

Expressive

Pragmatic

Receptive

Supporting Communication

- Diagnoses (primarily ASD and speech/language impairment) impact receptive, expressive, and pragmatic (social) communication to varying degrees
- Evidence based practices to support acquisition include observational learning through video modeling, video self-modeling: encourages the individual to be an active participant
- **Peer-mediated interventions:** peer modeling and feedback
- Social stories, "priming" (modeled preparation for a situation) to frame upcoming or unknown situations, "social autopsy" to analyze a social interaction and make errors "teachable moments"
- **Functional communication training**: encouraging replacement language for challenging behavior, and reinforcing those phrases

Social and Emotional Well-Being

- We all have our "off days." Think about the effort that it takes to go through the entire day when you are not feeling well, feeling upset, or have experienced something traumatic
- When routines are disrupted, expectations shift, higher effort is expected when a skill does not come naturally or easily to you
- Encourage self-regulation strategies such as meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness
- Encourage positive and flexible thinking
- If necessary and appropriate, review medication management

Motivation and Reinforcement

- The individual must have a say, to "buy-in" to any intervention
- Lack of motivation and input in his/her own life can result in challenging behavior and frustration
- Self-determination is key, and naturally occurring consequences (positive and negative) should be addressed.
- Consider your own performance when you are not motivated (socially, financially, intrinsically)
- **Positive reinforcement is used to shape behavior**, then work towards independence.

Motivation and Reinforcement

Contingent:

Reinforcement delivery must be contingent, meaning, access to a reinforcer only occurs after the target behavior has been demonstrated. Free access is not helpful...

Immediate:

The reinforcer must be delivered as **quickly** as possible following the target behavior that we are looking to increase. We wouldn't reinforce hand raising by calling on a student 10 minutes later.

Deprivation:

Not having access to something that is highly desirable. Often this is used to increase the value of an item/activity to someone.
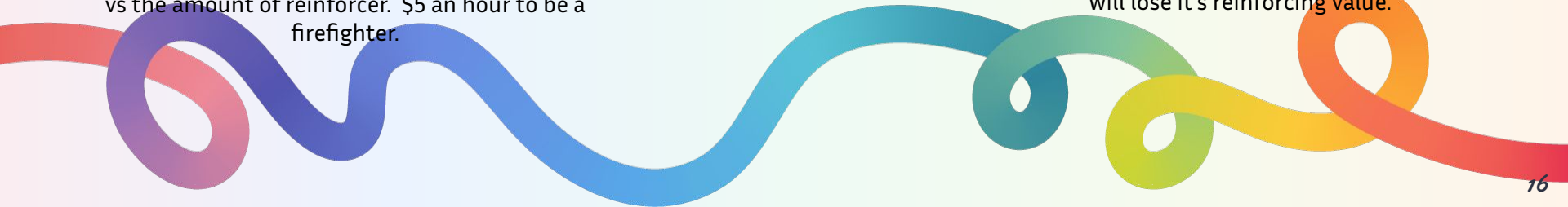
Size (Magnitude):

This refers to how much of the reinforcer you get/are giving. Weigh the difficulty of the task vs the amount of reinforcer. $5 an hour to be a firefighter.

Satiation:

Satiation refers to having too much. If the same reinforcer is used over and over again, it will lose it's reinforcing value.

Skill Generalization

- **Generalization allows us to apply learned skills across settings, people, stimuli (materials) and responses – the ultimate goal.**
- Deficits in generalization make it difficult to apply this knowledge across varying situations
- Another example is social skills instruction in Speech: it is ideal to generalize to classroom, social settings, community, and vocational settings
- Skills are maintained by continuing to practice them even after they are mastered. Otherwise, you risk losing competency in the skill, or lose the skill altogether.

Final Words... Self-Advocacy

- *"A successful self-advocate requires one verbalize one's needs and to understand what action steps are necessary to meet those needs."* - Stephen M. Shore
- Individuals should consider why they are disclosing this information, and to whom
- Self-disclosure can occur to varying degrees. **Self-advocacy is a critical skill, regardless of your child's support needs and communication style**

Your Guide to **Self Advocacy**

What is it?

Self Advocacy is when YOU step up and take responsibility for your learning, your interests, and what you need, by letting others know!

1 Identify what you need to be the most successful version of you!

2 Think of who you need in your corner to accomplish what you need.

3 Ask the teacher. You can speak to them in person, send an email asking to speak in private, or raise your hand!

4 Know your accommodations and remember to ask for them whenever you need!