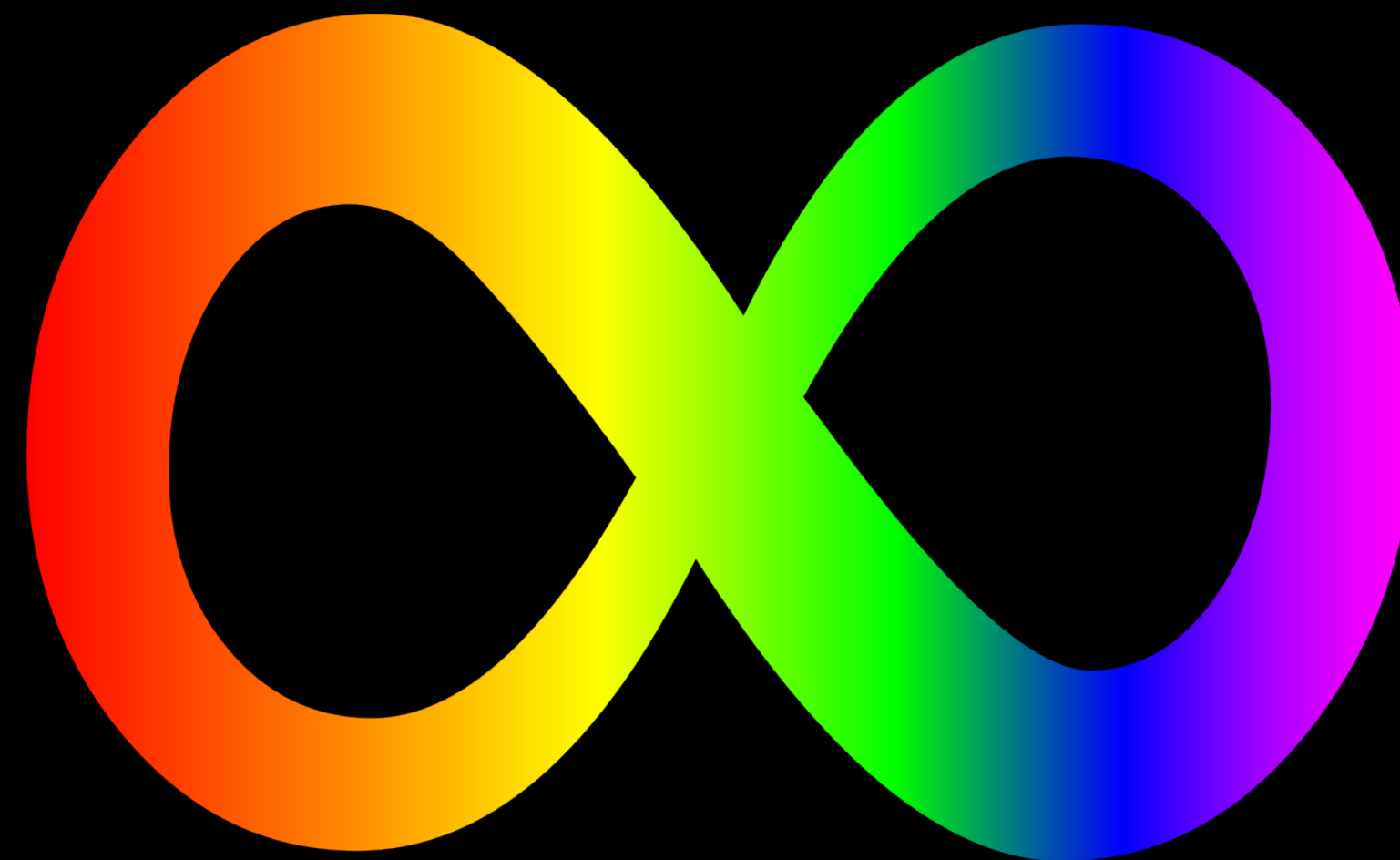


NEURODIVERSITY

- an introduction -



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

- ★ Neurodiversity is defined as the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population.
- ★ Neurodivergent can also be shortened to ND.
- ★ Those who are not neurodivergent are called neurotypical (which can be shortened to NT).
- ★ Neurodivergent disorders include :
 - Autism spectrum
 - Anxiety disorder
 - Depression
 - ADHD
 - OCD
 - PTSD
 - Auditory processing
 - Sensory processing
 - Dyslexia
 - Dyspraxia
 - Dyscalculia
 - Tourette's
 - ADD
 - ODD
 - Bipolar
 - Schizophrenia
 - BPD
 - DID
 - Dissociative disorders
 - And more :)

STIMMING

Stimming is defined as repetitive motions that you may use to help you cope with emotions, both positive and negative.

This is a common trait shared by neurodivergent people, because of the different sensory and processing needs that affect many neurodivergent individuals. Neurotypicals can also stim, but generally less frequently and normally only in an anxiety inducing situation. The critical difference is that negative stims in neurodivergent people can end up causing physical harm either to themselves or others if they are distressed and not receiving help.

Common stims include :

- ★ flapping hands
- ★ bouncing leg
- ★ rocking
- ★ twisting or pulling own hair
- ★ biting nails
- ★ biting or picking at skin
- ★ repetitive blinking
- ★ humming or making another repetitive noise
- ★ bouncing or jumping
- ★ fiddling with something
- ★ cracking joints or clicking fingers
- ★ drumming fingers



SPECIAL INTERESTS/HYPERFIXATIONS

Having special interests and/or hyperfixations is something which is experienced by the majority of neurodivergent people. They are both defined by an intense focus on a specific topic. Special interest is a term used exclusively by autistic people whereas hyperfixation tends to be used by the rest of the neurodivergent community. This is mostly because it can present slightly differently in autistic individuals but also stemmed from the rest of the community not wanting to take and appropriate a word for themselves when it was specifically designed for the autistic community. They aren't inherently very different, it's more a mark of respect. Hyperfixation is more of an umbrella term.

To summarise, special interest is an autism exclusive term and hyperfixation covers the rest of the neurodivergent umbrella. Neither of these terms should be used to describe a neurotypical's experience.

If you have a neurodivergent friend, ask them if they have any hyperfixations! Most of us love to talk about them. :)

TICS

Tics (involuntary movements or sounds) can also be linked to stimming. They are more commonly known to be a trait specific to Tourette's syndrome but tics are actually common stimming behaviours among other neurodivergent disorders, such as OCD! The key difference between experiencing tics and having Tourette's is that, with Tourette's, you have to have been experiencing multiple motor tics and at least one vocal tic which have been persisting for at least a year.

Common tics which could be experienced without having Tourette's are things like head jerking, shoulder jerking, squeak-like sounds, humming and others.

CO-OCCURRANCE

Co-occurrence between neurodiverse disorders is very large! If someone has one neurodiverse disorder, it is significantly more likely they will have more than one. For example, approximately 1 in 2 people with ADHD also have dyslexia compared to 1 in 5 people who have dyslexia but not ADHD.

Interestingly, 30% of the global population are thought to be neurodiverse. We may be a minority, but we're not such a small one as some may think! We are not alone. :)

STEREOTYPES & STIGMA

All of the incorrect stereotypes around neurodiverse conditions are probably one of my biggest pet peeves. Here are a list of some of the stereotypes/assumptions which are most frustrating for us (from me and my ND peers) :

- ★ Having OCD is not the same as being a perfectionist; OCD is not a verb!
- ★ Being autistic does not mean being apathetic! It can often be the complete opposite.
- ★ Having ADHD is not all about being hyperactive and easily distractible! Most people with ADHD actually struggle with hyper focus and will accidentally spend hours and hours on something without even realising it. Also, having ADHD does not equal being lazy!
- ★ Having depression is not the same as just being sad or having a bad day!
- ★ Having anxiety is not the same as feeling everyday nerves. Being anxious is something that anyone can feel but that is completely different from an anxiety disorder!
- ★ Having dyslexia or dyspraxia does not make you stupid!

DOs & DON'Ts

Things not to say to neurodivergent people because we're fed up of hearing them :

- ★ Have you tried doing more exercise?
- ★ Have you tried getting more sleep?
- ★ You're just having a bad day.
- ★ Have you tried making lists/setting reminders?
- ★ It can't be that bad! You're overreacting.
- ★ Have you tried using a diary?
- ★ Have you tried enjoying the little things in life?
- ★ Why are you so ungrateful? Your life is so great!

What could you actually say/do to be a supportive ally :

- ★ If your ND friend appears to be distressed or struggling, do not make a fuss. Quietly ask if you can do anything to help but don't push them.
- ★ Ask about their boundaries. Some ND people find noise or physical touch/closeness uncomfortable and distressing so make sure you check what they're ok with and respect those boundaries.
- ★ Be patient! Don't get frustrated with us, we're doing our best.
- ★ Most importantly of all, ask your ND friends what you can do to be a supportive ally to them. Everyones experiences and needs are different!