

Making psychology accessible: Autism Spectrum Condition

What is Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and how do we make adjustments in community mental health settings?

Holly Drew

Clinical Associate Psychologist
Oxleas Bromley ADAPT East

Email: holly.drew2@nhs.net

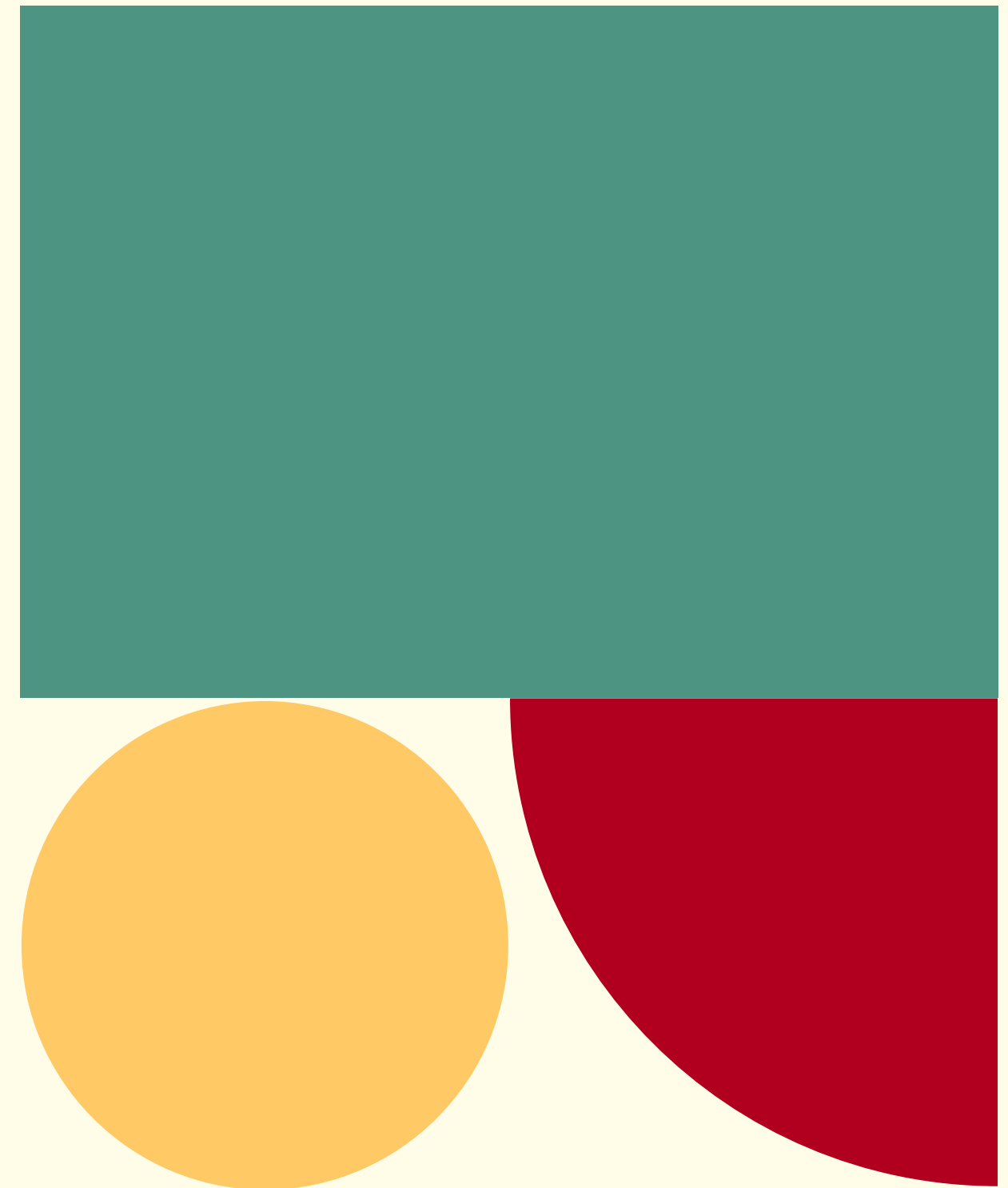


About Me

I'm Holly. A newly qualified clinical associate psychologist in Oxleas Bromley ADAPT East

My role:

- Providing short-mid term psychological based interventions such as DBT skills, exposure therapy, trauma stabilisation, structured clinical management, behavioural activation
- Focus on working with autistic clients
- Adapting psychological interventions based on individual need - creating the Oxleas SCM booklet, trauma stabilisation pack
- Supporting others in working with their autistic clients



Autism*

A lifelong neurodevelopmental condition with both strengths and weaknesses to the autistic individual

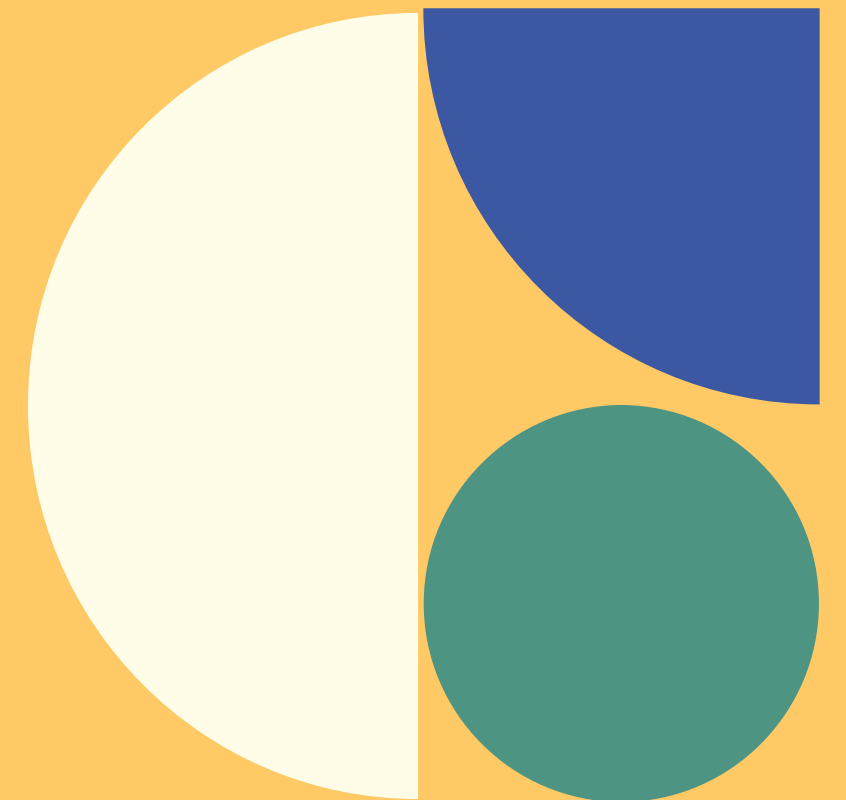
Social Reciprocity & Communication

Theory of mind
One-sided conversations
Using eye-contact differently (fleeting)
Non-verbal communication

Repetitive & Restricted Interests & Behaviours

Repetitive behaviour & speech - likely speech in adulthood
Routines & rituals
Special interests
Sensory hyper/hyposensitivity

1-2% of the general population



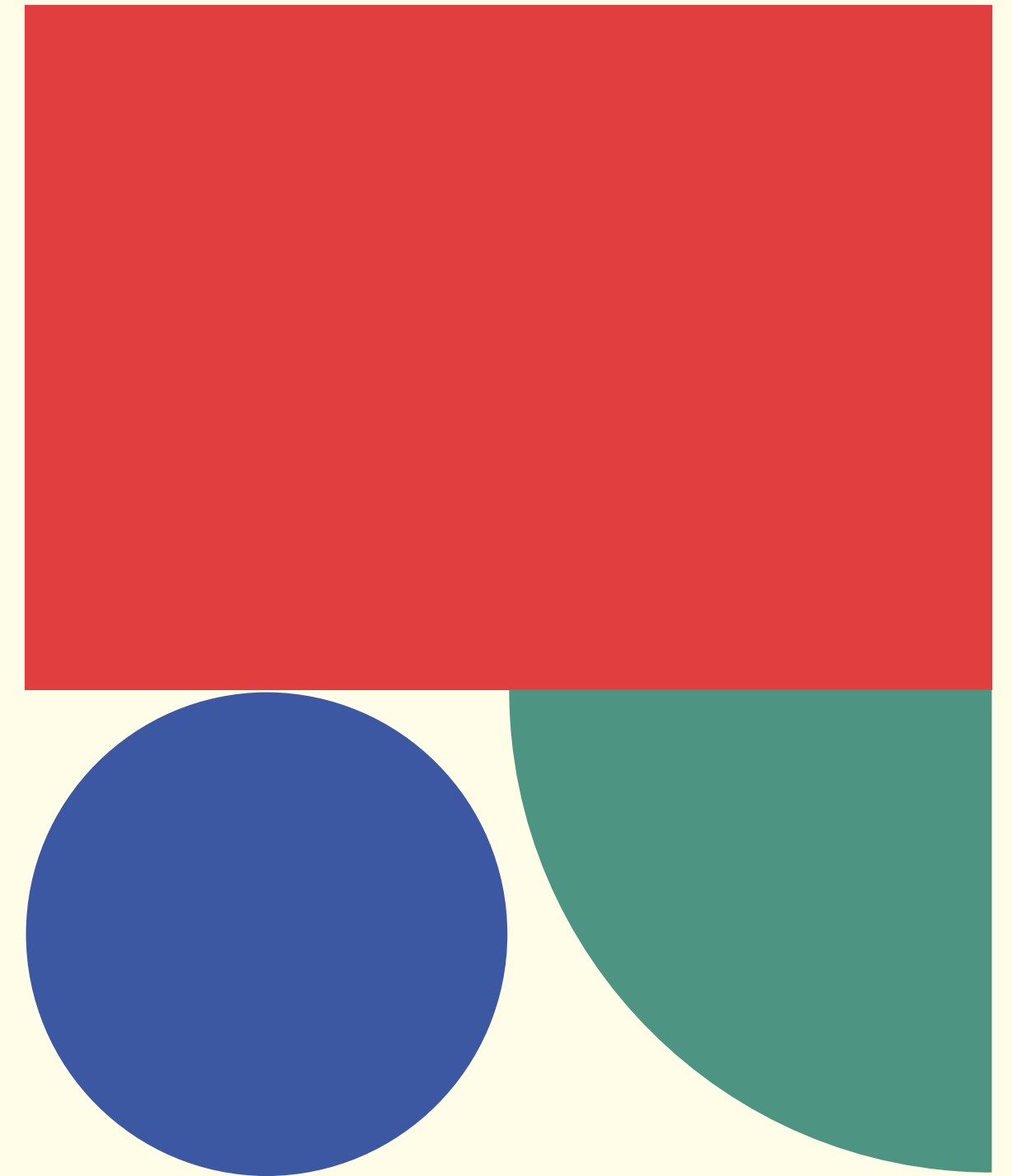
*Asperger's is no longer a formal diagnosis but some Autistic people may prefer to use it

Associated Features of ASC:

- Difficulties in executive functioning (planning, organising)
- Motor difficulties: dyspraxia, fine motor abnormalities
- Sleep problems
- Detail focused processing (tunnel vision vs birds eye view)
- Speech & language difficulty: expressive vs receptive
- Higher risk of intellectual disabilities (50-70% have an IQ in normal range)

Recognising strengths as well as difficulties

- Pattern detection
- Expertise
- Detail-focussed processing
- Excellent long-term & visual memory
- Deep focus
- Creative thought processes
- Accepting of difference & non-judgemental attitude
- Great capacity for empathy (though may be atypically expressed)
- Values of honesty, loyalty & commitment



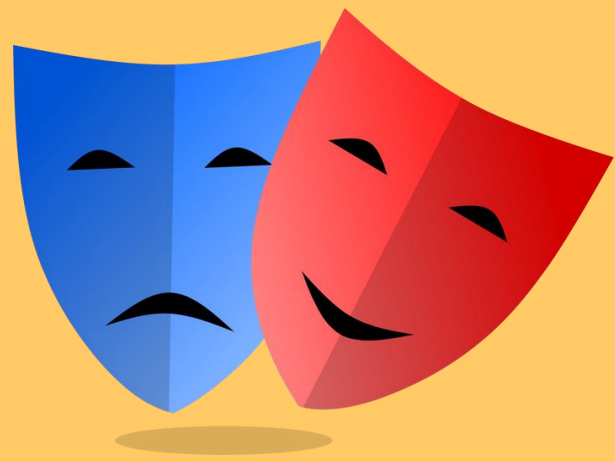
Important to remember that there is so much variability in Autism.
Features will vary across the lifespan

Using strengths in sessions

Encorporating special interests in sessions to support engagement

Looking for strengths specifically connected to being autistic





Masking

Consciously or subconsciously suppressing some behaviours to 'fit in' with non-autistic people.

- Stimming at home, not in public
- Learning eye contact
- Mimicking
- Learning unwritten social rules
- Adopting a persona not of their own

Result: increased anxiety, depression, may increase suicidal behaviours, Autistic burnout, not developing their true identity

Adaptations:

Is the person aware of their masking?

How can they remove the mask in sessions?

Who can they be around without a mask on?

Behavioural experiments

Addressing internalised stigma - self-compassion



Autistic burnout, meltdowns, shutdowns



Burnout

After prolonged masking, overstimulation, stress, change - exhaustion, loss of skills, decreased tolerance to stimuli

Meltdowns

A strong response to being overwhelmed - shaking, screaming, shouting, crying

Shutdown

A muted response to being overwhelmed - quiet, withdrawn, zoning out, unable to communicate

Adaptations

Creating a burnout plan - similar to a crisis plan

Consider the impact that alexithymia may have in recognising potential burnout

Risk

Suicidality and self harm rates are increased in populations of those with ASC

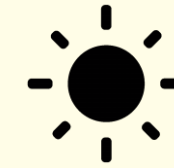


The function of the self harm

- Addressing the emotional reasons for self-harming but not forgetting about the sensory.
- Also relating the emotional and the sensory - e.g., no control over sensory environment, leading to distress

Risk factors for suicide

- non-suicidal self injury
- lack of support from social interaction difficulties
- camouflaging/masking extreme distress



Managing Self-Harm/Suicide

- Are there safer ways to meet sensory needs?
- Addressing Autistic burnout
- Helping the client to recognise their feelings - addressing alexithymia to identify and label emotional states
- Practical coping skills
- Adapted crisis plan - considering communication (verbal & nonverbal), sensory



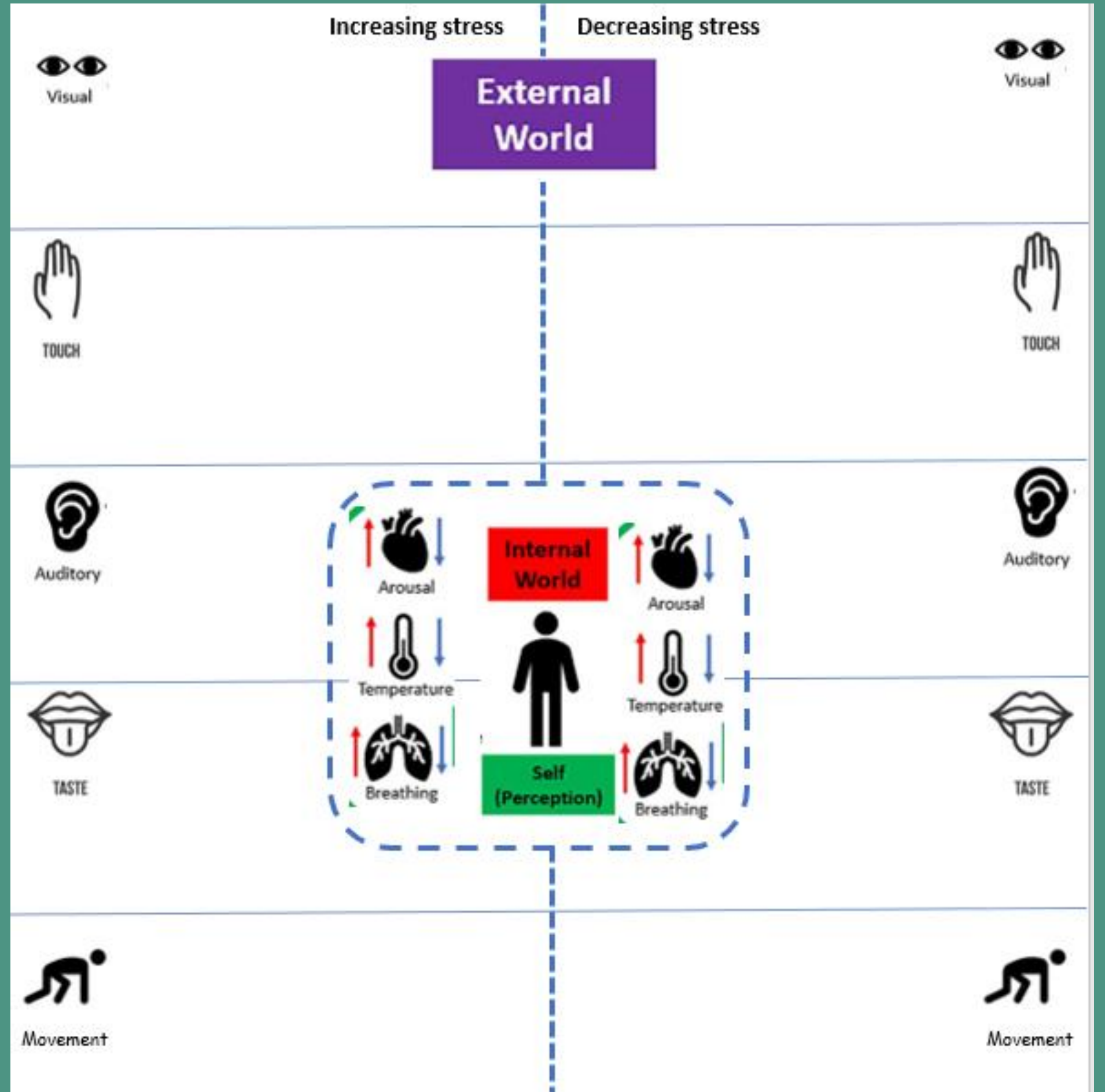
Burnout Plan

What triggers burnout?

What coping strategies work best?

My warning signs...

What indicates I am disguising burnout or camouflaging?

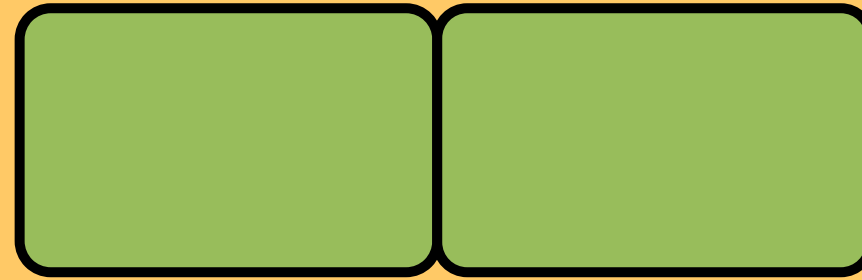


Communication

Communication cards

To help the individual communicate their emotions/needs.

Alternatives of art/writing



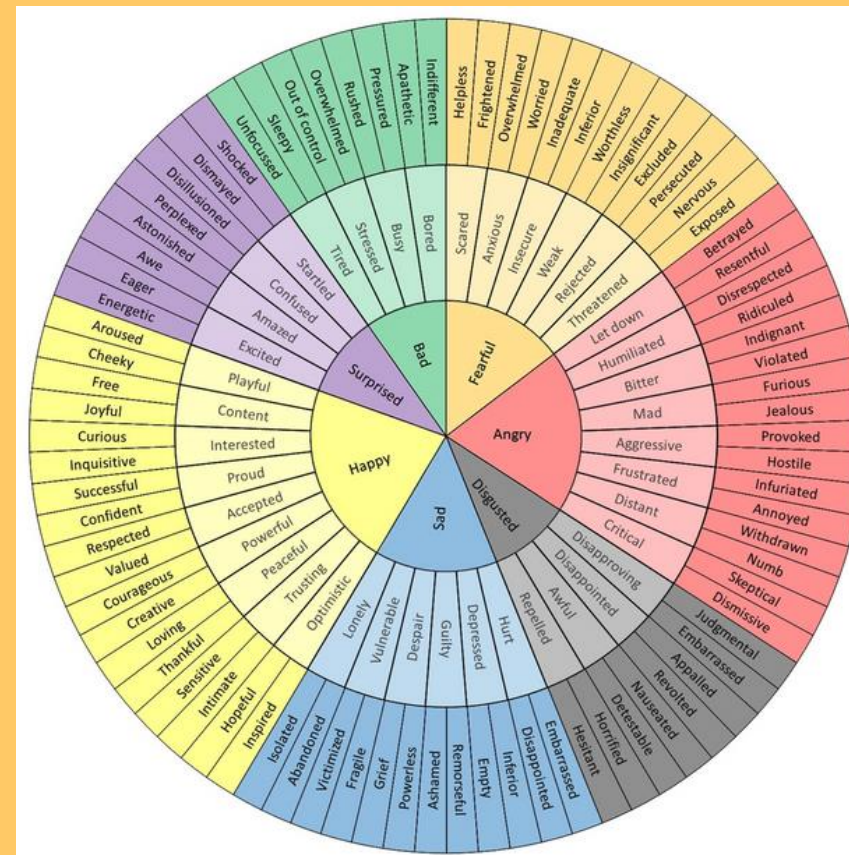
How I feel


What I need

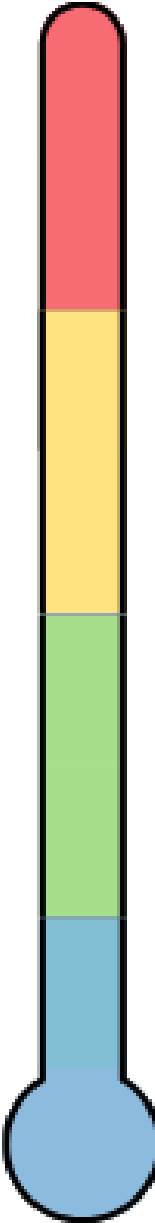
Receptive vs expressive language: checking the client's understanding

Avoiding metaphors

Supporting a client to develop their language around emotions through more psychoeducation



Improving lives 



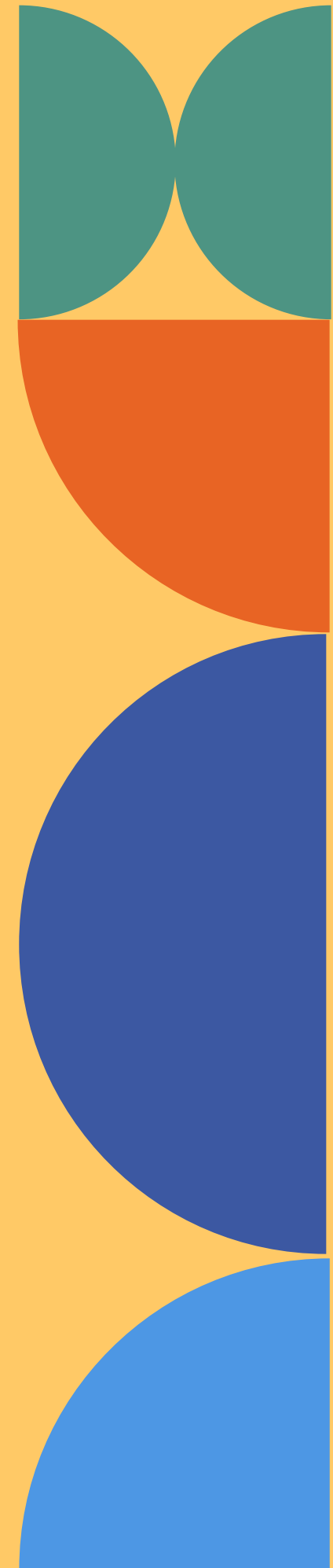
Red Zone
 Mad/Angry
 Terrified
 Ecstatic
 Panicked
 Out of control

Yellow Zone
 Frustrated
 Worried
 Excited

Green Zone
 Happy
 Focused
 Calm
 Proud
 Relaxed

Blue Zone
 Sad
 Bored
 Tired
 Sick

we're **kind** we're **fair** we **listen** we **care**





Sensory Input

Hypersensitivity: high responsiveness to sensory input

Hyposensitivity: low responsiveness to sensory input

Adaptations:

Being aware of the environment; noise levels, lighting (natural lighting often preferred), room temperature, encouraging use of sensory tools to help regulate,

Awareness of any noises that might feel unexpected (e.g., fire alarm tests)

Seek continual feedback from the client to make sure the space feels calming and safe

**Group Structured Clinical
Management (SCM): Client
Workbook**

Name:

Date:

Module joined in:

Adjusting for Autism in group settings

Providing materials for each module at the start -
set expectations around content

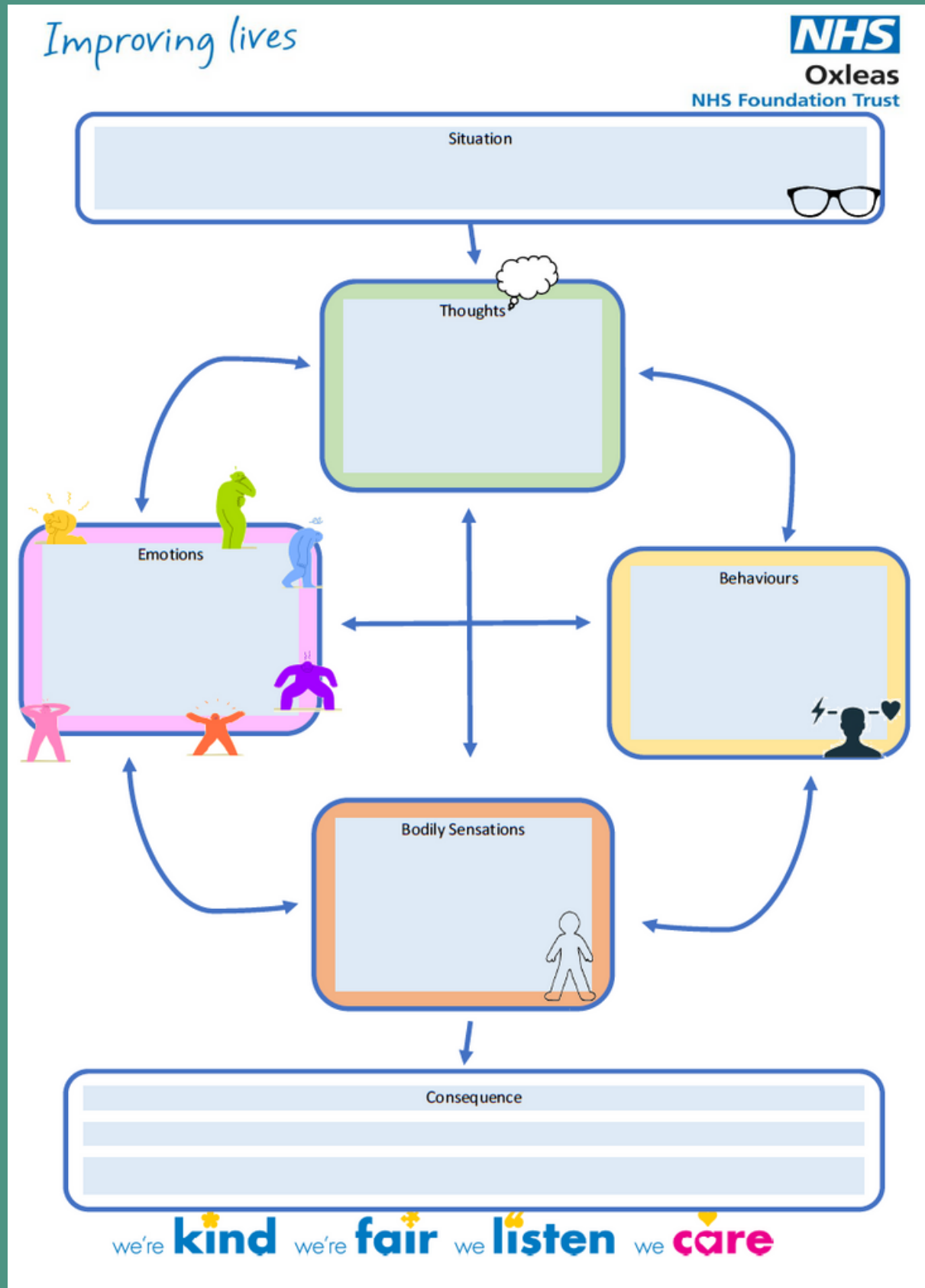
Setting expectations for the group as a whole

Giving advance notice for group cancellation

Providing sensory tools for all group members to
have access of throughout the group

Fortnightly individual sessions for all members -
aids checking understanding

Visual Aids



MY WELLBEING TOOLKIT

GROUNDING

Safe space imagery
What can you see, hear, feel, smell, taste in your safe space?

5-4-3-2-1 Technique in your current space

- 5 things I can see
- 4 things I can hear
- 3 things I can touch
- 2 things I can smell
- 1 thing I can taste

EMERGENCY SKILL

Stop

Take a pause

Observe the situation

Proceed mindfully

COPING STRATEGIES

DISTRACTION

- going for a walk
- listening to music

OTHERS

- journaling/check the facts - is what I am thinking/feeling true or is it just a thought/feeling?
- compassionate thinking: what would I tell a friend? What is a kind alternative way to think about this?

REGULATION

BREATHING

- breathe in for 5
- hold for 5
- breathe out for 5
- repeat

SENSORY REGULATION

What sensory input increases your stress?

How can you use your senses to decrease your stress?

Remember to look back at previous worksheets for more information!

More written & visual materials (mindful of colours)

Additional Outcome Measures/Considerations

Alexithymia: The Toronto
Alexithymia Scale (TAS)

Masking: Camouflaging Autistic
Traits Questionnaire (CAT-Q)

Also: exploring sensory sensitivity such as
hypersensitivity (sensory avoidance) and
hyposensitivity (sensory-seeking)





Find support near you

Jubilee day centre

Some of our activities:

- Arts and crafts.
- Sports like trampolining, swimming and cycling.
- Walks, shopping, day trips and eating out.
- Numeracy and literacy.
- Computer sessions.
- Travel training.
- Baking.
- Recycling.
- Bowling.
- Allotment.
- Volunteering.

Self-funded or funded through local authority

Other ASD Support



These are some examples of what is available in Bromley. Take a look at the support available in your area




Support for People with Autism

Bromley Well supports people with Autism aged 16+.

- Social and leisure activities
- Health matters
- Managing your money, grants and benefits
- Housing
- Support with transition into adulthood
- Managing communication, letters, forms and applications
- Employment support
- Life skills training
- Signposting to further services



For further information please contact Bromley Well on freephone **0808 278 7898** or email spa@bromleywell.org.uk
www.bromleywell.org.uk

[f@BromleyWellService](#) [t@BromleyWell](#)

Once we receive your referral, our Information and Support Officer will contact you to arrange a one to one meeting.

Delivered by:  BROMLEY THIRD SECTOR ENTERPRISE Funded by:  THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BROMLEY www.bromley.gov.uk  **South East London**

Free



Thank you!

Questions, reflections, thoughts?