

Understanding Neurodiversity: Combating ableism in CPD

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WHO AM I?



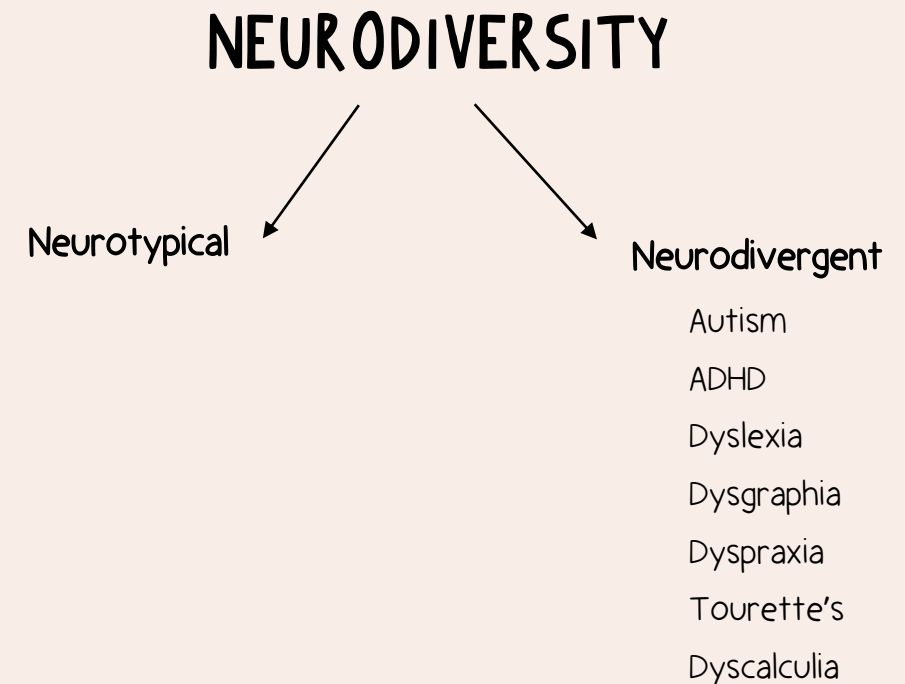
- ✓ "Autistic SLT" – Founder of www.autisticslt.com
- ✓ Speech and Language Therapist
- ✓ Specialist school for autistic children aged 5 – 19
- ✓ Professional speaker, trainer, advocate

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

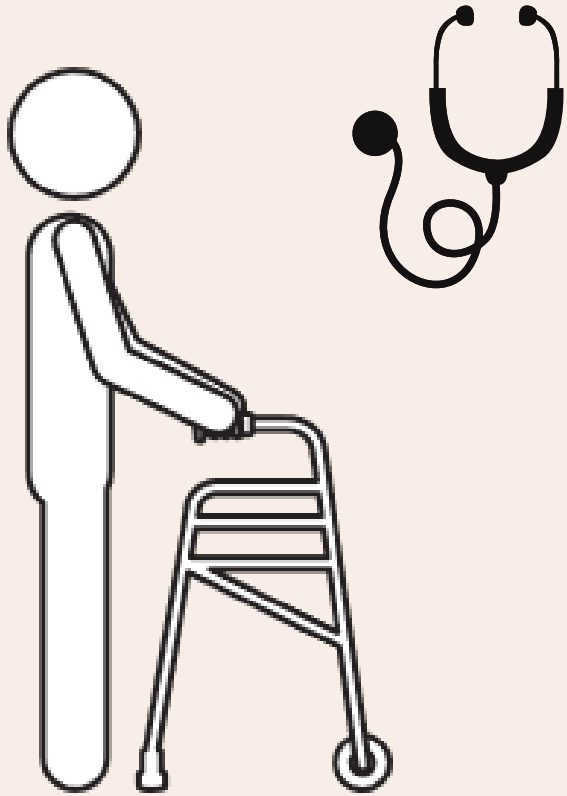


EVERYONE IS NEURODIVERSE!

Diversity of the human mind. Differences in thinking, feeling, experiencing the world. A natural variation in body-mind. First coined in 1990s by Judy Singer.



WHAT IS ABLEISM?



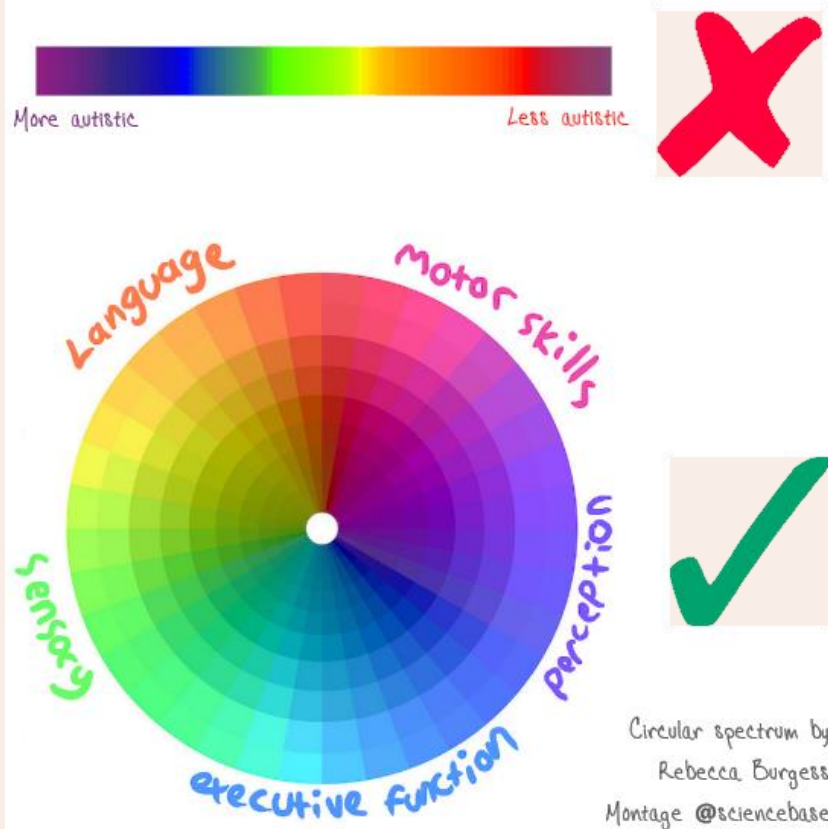
- A system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence.
- Disabled people deemed 'less than'
- Oppression, prejudice, beliefs, practices that dehumanise disabled people
- Rooted in privilege – what's your privilege?

A MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

- ☐ Deficit / disorder
- ☐ Symptoms / impairments
- ☐ Fix. Treat. Cure.
- ☐ Expected norms and developmental milestones



What does the autism spectrum look like?



UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

"autism levels"

"Mild, moderate, severe"

"High functioning, low functioning"

Autistic **or** person with autism? – Botha et al., 2021



ABLEISM: COMMON PRACTICES

- **Improving 'social skills'** – turn-taking, play goals, eye-contact, joint attention
- **Desensitisation** / exposure therapy to increase sensory tolerance
- **Behaviourism**: controlling behaviour through: visuals, Social Stories, rewards, sabotage, physically moving the child's hand/arm/wrist
- **Fading supports**: "we need to make them as independent as possible!"



NEURODIVERSITY PARADIGM - MODEL

- ❑ Autism is a difference: not a disorder
- ❑ Change the environment – not the child
- ❑ Strengths-based approach
- ❑ Child-led (not child-centred)
- ❑ Non-behavioural based approaches
- ❑ Avoiding deficit-based language and terminology



CPD: PROBLEMS WITH AUTISM RESEARCH

- Historically led by non-autistic academics and researchers
- Simon Baron-Cohen: Theory of Mind, research Spectrum10K
- Female vs male autism – (Kieran Rose & Amy Pearson, 2021)
- Desensitisation Therapy ineffective (Green et al., 2019)
- Social Skills Training:
 - Limited evidence (Howlin, 2020; Kasari et al., 2015; Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al., 2014))
 - Eye-contact can be physically painful for autistic people (Dalton et al., 2005; Madipakkam, 2017)
 - Theory of Mind research flawed (Dziobek et al., 2007; Milton, 2012)
 - Causes masking (Cassidy et al., 2018; Rose & Pearson, 2020; Richards et al., 2019; Cage & Trixell-Whitman 2019).



CHOOSING CPD ACTIVITY: BE CAUTIOUS

A comparison of practices

Pro-Neurodiversity Model	Medical Model
Celebrate autism	Reduce repetitive behaviours
Strengths and difficulties / needs	Deficits, impairments
"Autistic child"	"Child has autism / Child with autism"
Accept differences in attention	Improve eye-contact, turn taking
"Meltdowns / sensory overload"	"Tantrums", "challenging behaviour"
Training, conferences, events led by autistic / ND people	Training, events led by non-autistic / non-ND people

Questions?



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