



Neurodivergent-Friendly Playbook of

Social Communication

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Photo by Jean-Philippe Delberghe

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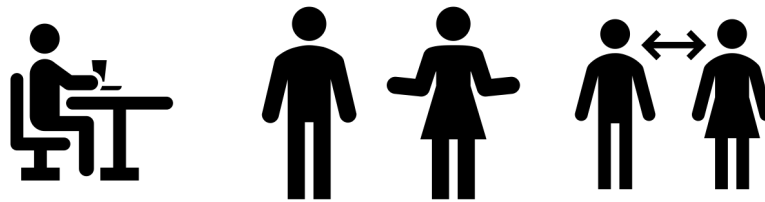
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What is this playbook for?

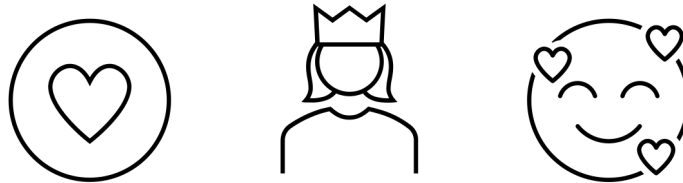
Feeling comfortable in social situations can be challenging for neurodivergent folks. This playbook is designed to help you build a skill set that helps make social interactions go more smoothly

Three areas of skill building are included to help promote more positive social interactions

1. **Social skills** - explore and try out verbal and non-verbal skills to grease the wheels of social interactions



2. **Self-confidence** – exercises to help you build confidence to show yourself that you are worthy of friendship



3. **Sensory processing** – understanding how you interact with your sensory world is an important aspect of engaging in social interactions. Sights, sounds, smells, textures, and other sensory information can impact our comfortability in environments, which can have a direct impact on our interactions



How do you show up?

An important aspect of self-understanding is knowing how you show up in the social world. The list of strategies below are ways that neurodivergent people have "compensated" or mimicked allistic people as a way to navigate social interactions.

Check off any of the *Compensating* strategies that you have used¹

- ☐ I create scripts to help me navigate social situations
- ☐ I tend to repeat phrases exactly as others have said them
- ☐ I watch others interact in order to learn or understand social skills
- ☐ I practice making facial expressions or using body language (could be in front of a mirror)
- ☐ I research how to use social skills
- ☐ I learn how to use social skills by watching TV shows and movies
- ☐ I use behaviours that I learned from watching other people interact
- ☐ I copy other peoples behaviours, body language, or expressions during social interactions



- (A) Have you found these strategies helpful?
- (B) Does using these strategies impact your energy level?
- (C) How do using these strategies intersect with your core belief?

How do you show up?

An important aspect of self-understanding is knowing how you show up in the social world. The list of strategies below are ways that neurodivergent people have “masked” or actively suppressed their neurodivergent traits

Check off any of the *Masking* strategies that you have used¹

- ☐ I monitor my body language to appear relaxed
- ☐ I am always thinking about the impression I make to others
- ☐ I adjust my body language to appear interested in the conversation
- ☐ I am keenly aware of the impression I make on others
- ☐ I monitor my body language and facial expressions to appear interested in other people
- ☐ I am heavily focused on my own facial expressions and body language in social situations
- ☐ I adjust my facial expressions and body language to appear relaxed
- ☐ I feel the need to make eye contact with others, even if I don't want to



- (A) Have you found these strategies helpful?
- (B) Does using these strategies impact your energy level?
- (C) How do using these strategies intersect with your core belief?

How do you show up?

An important aspect of self-understanding is knowing how you show up in the social world. The list of strategies below are ways that neurodivergent people have “**assimilated**” or pushed themselves to engage in behaviours that do not come naturally and cause discomfort

Check off any of the *Assimilating* strategies that you have used¹

- ☐ I feel as though the conversation doesn't naturally flow when I talk to others
- ☐ I feel like I am pretending to be “normal” in social situations
- ☐ I feel that I have to force myself to interact with others in social situations
- ☐ I believe that I cannot be my true self with others
- ☐ I feel the need to put on an act to get through a social situation
- ☐ I try to avoid interacting with others in social situations
- ☐ I need the support of others in order to socialize
- ☐ I feel a sense of “performance” versus being authentic in social situations



- (A) Have you found these strategies helpful?
- (B) Does using these strategies impact your energy level?
- (C) How do using these strategies intersect with your core belief?

How do you show up?

An important aspect of self-understanding is knowing how you show up in the social world. Considering the lists of strategies of compensating, masking, and assimilating behaviours

How would you prefer to show up?

Instead of compensating, I would prefer

Instead of masking, I would prefer

Instead of assimilating, I would prefer



- (A) What would it be like to socially interact as your authentic self?
- (B) What would the most scary part be if you were socially authentic?
- (C) What is the most exciting part be if you were socially authentic?

My strengths and qualities

Look at the list below. Choose at least 5 strengths /qualities you embody. Use a different coloured pen and choose 5 that someone close to you would say you possess.

Kind	Confident	Independent
Intelligent	Optimistic	Trusting
Hardworking	Respectful	Resilient
Loyal	Determined	Cheerful
Attractive	Skilled	Self-directed
Down-to-earth	Helpful	Reliable
Goofy	Motivated	Relaxed
Creative	Insightful	Listener
Accepting	Funny	Brave
Strong	Patient	Decisive
Friendly	Realistic	Enthusiastic
Flexible	Honest	Forgiving
Nurturing	Generous	Humble
Thoughtful	Modest	Sensitive
Confident	Serious	Organized
Selfless	Practical	Mature
Grateful	Courteous	Focused
Open-minded	Frugal	Responsible
Cooperative	Tolerant	Innovative

My strengths and qualities

Take five of the qualities you chose on the previous page and list them here.

I am

I am

I am

I am

I am

Now consider how these qualities have benefited you or someone else in your life. For example, the quality of bravery has benefited me because I got through a very painful situation and became stronger because of it.

Now list your benefits below

The quality of has benefited me because:

The quality of has benefited me because:

The quality of has benefited me because:

The quality of has benefited me because:

The quality of has benefited me because:

My strengths and qualities

Now come up with ways that you can honour your qualities in ways that are meaningful.

For example, when faced with challenges, I will remember the times I have overcome adversity in my life.

Now list the ways you will honour your positive qualities:



(A) Was this exercise difficult?

(B) Did you talk through this exercise with anyone?

Exploring my strengths and qualities

Things I am good at

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Compliments I have received

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Times I have made others happy

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Challenges I have overcome

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Exploring character strengths

Your strengths influence how you act, want, and feel that can benefit you and others around you. There are six greater virtues:

1. Wisdom – your cognitive strengths related to seeking, gaining, and applying knowledge
2. Humanity – interpersonal strengths related to caring for and being close to others
3. Courage – emotional strengths related to willpower and tenacity to achieve your goals and overcome adversity
4. Justice – civic strengths related to your role in society and community
5. Temperance – strengths such as humility and self-regulation
6. Transcendence – spirituality, appreciation of beauty, and others that connect you to a 'bigger picture' and provide purpose

Instructions

To answer the following questions, consider the experiences you have had across your lifetime

1. As a child, what were your favourite pastimes? What activities brought you joy?

2. Reflect back a pleasant memory from before you turned 5. What were you doing? How did you feel at the time?

Exploring character strengths

Instructions

To answer the following questions, consider the experiences you have had across your lifetime

3. What was one of your proudest achievements during elementary school? What made you feel confident? Accomplished?

4. During this time, what was your favourite thing about yourself?

5. As a teenager, what are you particularly proud of having overcome? How did you deal with that struggle and how did you feel afterward?

Exploring character strengths

Instructions

To answer the following questions, consider the experiences you have had across your lifetime

6. What did you particularly enjoy doing well? What feelings came up then? How about now?

7. In the past, what activities have always made you feel you are being "true to yourself"?

8. What aspects of your job or your life in general, do you feel you carry out particularly well? What emotions do you experience?

Exploring character strengths

Instructions

To answer the following questions, consider the experiences you have had across your lifetime

9. Looking back on the past 5 years, what are some ways that you're proud to have grown?

10. How do you enjoy spending your free time? How would you spend it if you could do anything? What would that be like?

11. What positive impacts does being neurodivergent have on your life?

Who am I?

Identity is how you think about, describe, and present yourself. It can be made up of different roles you have, your traits, or your experiences. For example, an identity may include sister, father, child, parent, dog owner, cat owner, kind person, neurodivergent, etc. A strong sense of identity can help give meaning to life.

Instructions: Name parts of your identity and describe what it means to you. Then, rate how much you identify with each part (1 = very little; 10 = very strongly)

Part of my identity:

What it means to me:.

Rating (1-10):

Part of my identity:

What it means to me:.

Rating (1-10):

Part of my identity:

What it means to me:.

Rating (1-10):

Part of my identity:

What it means to me:.

Rating (1-10):

Reflect on the most important aspects of who you are, then write a title or nickname for your identity. For example: The Poetry-Loving Energetic Mathlete or Silly Cat Mom with Tattoos. Be as creative as you like!

Self-love sentence stems

This exercise is designed to help you put words to your strengths. This is much easier with sentence stems. Complete the phrases and if it comes naturally to you, add more

1. The three things I love best about myself are: _____,
_____, and _____.
2. I'm exceptionally good at _____.
3. I am showing more interest in _____.
4. _____ is something I really want to cultivate more
of in my life.
5. This week, I'm going to reward myself by _____
_____.
6. I choose not to worry about _____
_____.
7. I've been told I have great _____.
8. I deserve to feel good because I do my best to _____.
9. _____ is something about me that others have admired.
10. I'm really looking forward to _____.
11. _____ and _____ are two people who give me strength.
12. I choose to be proud of having _____ because I deserve it.
13. This week I've gotten better (even just a little!) at _____.
14. I can't change _____ about myself, and I choose to accept it.
15. This week, I'm giving myself a break from thinking about _____.

Loving kindness meditation

Before we dive into social skills, let's end with a meditative practice. Find a quiet and comfortable place to practice this meditation.

Bring awareness to your breath for a few moments, paying attention to each breathe in and each breathe out

You can place one hand over your chest if you prefer and feel the warm sensation

Bring attention inward by saying to yourself:

1. May I be filled with kindness
2. May I be safe
3. May I be well
4. May I be calm

You can add other sentences that feel appropriate to you

Keep repeating these statements

If you mind begins to wander, gently bring your attention back to your breath and repeat the statements

After spending a few moments doing this, visualize someone you care about

Spend a few moments visualizing this person in front of you and repeat the statements:

1. May I be filled with kindness
2. May I be safe
3. May I be well
4. May I be calm

Keep repeating the statements

If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breath

Socially connecting person-to-person

Let's dive into skills for social interactions. Remember, developing friendships take time. Keep these tips in mind when connecting with others

Some people are not open to building a connection – many people are open to making a new connection, but others may not be. If their body language is telling you that they do not want to talk, respect that

- We will learn more about non-verbal cues and how to read signs of comfort and discomfort

If someone is in the middle of an activity (working on an assignment, exercising, etc.), and you try to speak with them, it may not go well. Wait until the person is not in the middle of something before trying to start a conversation with them.

- There are quite a few examples of how to build conversations in this playbook for you to try and practice

Start conversations by considering context. If you are in line at a concert, ask them how they first got introduced to the band, what their favourite song is, etc.

- There are some great examples of conversation topics throughout this playbook!

Not all successful first or second conversations lead to friendships. That's ok. It is a positive experience and you can move forward with what went well and work on things you didn't like about the interaction.

IMPORTANT: Ask yourself if you like spending time with that person and if they were kind to you. You can choose to walk away from a budding friendship if it doesn't feel ok to you.

What information can non-verbal cues give us?

There are a lot of non-verbal cues that a person can use to convey information. There are many ways to summarize this information, but the most important categories are cues that signal "I am comfortable" or "I am uncomfortable"

Comfort signals tell you that a person is feeling good – when they are enjoying the interaction they are having or there is nothing troubling them

"I am feeling comfortable" signals:

1. **Reducing the distance between you** – think of this like a person wanting to be closer to you physically because they feel close to you emotionally/intellectually. Can look like turning towards you, scooting closer to you, moving something between you (moving a pillow from the couch you are both sitting on). Look down at their feet - if they are pointed towards you, that's a good sign!
2. **Tilted head or head resting on hand** – tilting of the head usually indicates curiosity whereas head resting in the hand indicates listening intently (further, if someone has their leg tucked under them, this screams comfort cause it's harder to escape)
3. **Mouth corners smile** – when people are enjoying themselves, the corners of their mouth will turn up slightly (or more)
4. **Physical touch** – this one varies by person, but if someone is comfortable in the interaction, they may touch your shoulder or knee to get your attention, or may give you a hug

You don't have to monitor all these all the time – try watching a talk show to see how the host and guest interact with each other. Do you see the cues?

Comfortable signals tell you to keep doing what you're doing and enjoy the interaction. Next we will look at signs of discomfort ...

What information can non-verbal cues give us?

Discomfort signals tell you that something is wrong – that the person is not feeling happy, something is bothering them, or they are not enjoying the interaction.

“I am feeling uncomfortable” signals:

1. **Neck touching or rubbing** – when uncomfortable, people will touch their neck to activate nerve endings that help lower heart rate; this behaviour may also look like fidgeting with a necklace
2. **Face touching or rubbing** – there are also nerve endings in the face, so people will rub there too when uncomfortable (forehead, eyes, lips, or playing with hair)
3. **Leg rubbing** – when seated, people will put their hands on their legs and slide them towards their knees
4. **Withdrawing or blocking** – if uncomfortable, people may pull back or put objects between themselves and partner (opposite of leaning in)
5. **Feet pointed away:** if the feet are pointed away from you, that's a good indication that they would rather end that conversation
6. **Interruption hand** – this indicates that a person may want to speak – when someone wants to speak, their hand may jerk upwards, often part way up before stopping
7. **Eye contact** – for neurotypical people, eye contact can indicate interest in what their conversation partner is saying; if they are looking at anything but you, that may indicate they are uncomfortable

Discomfort signals tell you that your partner is uncomfortable and that you can do some things to help them feel comfortable. You can try to learn what caused them to feel uncomfortable and see if you can remove the source of discomfort.

What information can non-verbal cues give us?

If you are speaking with someone and they lean away from you, rub their face, and they are looking away, you could *read* that they are uncomfortable. But why? In these moments, we need to consider the context:

- Are they uncomfortable with the topic?
- Is there something on your face and they aren't sure if they should tell you?
- Do they have an upset stomach?

Consider three things:

1. **The conversation** – was there something in the conversation that could have caused the change; did you ask a question and their voice (the tone) changed?
2. **The environment** – look around and see if there is something that could be the cause; Did someone they don't like come in? Is it too loud? Is there a bad smell?
3. **What they were doing before** – the day your conversation partner had before you met up to talk may be affecting their comfortability. Do you know if they were doing something that is potentially upsetting before you met; Did they have an exam? Did they have an argument with a parent? Friend? Co-worker?

If you identify a possible cause for discomfort, see if you can remove the reason. For example, if you think it was a question you asked, change to a new topic that you know they are in to. If the room is too loud or has a bad smell, suggest moving to a new place. If you think that something happened before you met them, ask them if something is up and if they want to talk about it.

These skills take practice and may not always work (we may not be able to uncover why or help our friends deal with discomfort) but can help provide a guide for reading social cues.

Starting and keeping a conversation going

How do we start a conversation and then keep it going? To keep things simple, let's include two important parts of conversations. Invitation and Inspiration.

What is an invitation?

An invitation is a question or statement that clearly lets your partner know its their turn to talk and gives a suggestion on what they could talk about

For example: "What did you do today?" This clearly lets your partner know its their turn to talk AND tells them what they can talk about (their day)

Once they respond, if you are unsure what to say next, throw out another invitation to keep the conversation going. For example, if they said "I had work and then went for a walk", you could say "see anything cool on the walk?"

Most invitations are questions but not all questions are good invitations. To be good, they need to let the person know its their turn, offer a suggestion on what to talk about, and be open-ended (not easily answered by saying just yes or no)

For example, if instead of saying "what did you do this weekend" which opens them up to talk about anything they did, you asked "did you have a good weekend?" they may just say yes or no

When you use more open-ended questions, it also gives you the chance to show them that you are interested in them - because you want to know more about them – showing that you care

How do you know what open-ended questions to choose?

That takes thought and practice....

Wendler, D. (2020). Improve your social skills.

How to ask a good question

When starting a conversation, start with more superficial questions before delving into more specific topics.

First, superficial topics include topics that are not likely to be emotionally or intellectually charged and can include:

- **Weather** – “What is up with the weather today?”
- **Sports** – “What did you think of the hockey game last night?”
- **Entertainment** – “What did you think of Barbie film?”
- **Food** – “Where is a good place for Thai in the city?”

As the conversation progresses, you can ask about more personal topics

- **Work** - “Where are you working?”
“What’s it like to work there?”
- **Hobbies** – “What do you usually do to unwind?”
“How often do you get to do that?”
- **Family** – “Do you have any [siblings/ kids/pets etc.]?”
“Where are you favourite spots to [eat/take a walk, etc.]?”
- **Travel** – “Where did you go the last time you took a trip?”
“Have you travelled since COVID?”

As your friendship progresses overtime, you gain the opportunity to ask intimate questions (about love, loss, hopes, and dreams).

Remember, as you ask people questions about themselves, you should also be prepared to answer questions about yourself that fall within the same level of intimacy (from superficial, to personal, to intimate).

Starting and keeping a conversation going

How do we start a conversation and then keep it going? To keep things simple, let's include two important parts of conversations. Invitation and Inspiration.

What is an inspiration?

Invitations are great ways to kick off a conversation but are not enough to keep it going. We need to also inspire our partners to add to the conversation

What is an inspiration? Inspiration happens when you share something with your conversation partner that makes them want to share something too! An inspiration is less explicit, in that it does not directly tell your partner it's their turn to talk, nor does it tell them what they should talk about

In this way, your partner has more freedom about what they want to share. For example, if you tell your partner about the awesome movie you went to on the weekend, it allows your partner to choose how they want to respond. They may ask you a question about the movie, or they may tell you about a movie they saw, or they may share their opinion on the movie that you saw. It's up to them

When you share details about yourself and inspire your partner to share, it frees you from having to know what to say next.

And, when they share something about themselves, you can choose how to respond. Do you share something similar to what they did? Do you ask them a question about the thing they did? Or do you share your opinions on the topic of their conversation (not about them, but the topic)?

Use what you know about the person to inspire them. If you know they are really into Marvel movies, share something about a movie or character. That will ignite their interest and spark the conversation

How to use invitation and inspiration?

Conversations based on invitations can seem like an interview. To keep conversations flowing, sprinkle in moments of inspiration. Invitations provide structure to a conversation (who's turn and what topic) whereas inspiration adds intimacy and flexibility (more personal and they get to choose the direction to go next)

In general, at the beginning of a conversation, use more invitations to play around with topics and use inspiration once you fall on a topic you want to explore further. If the conversation begins to feel awkward or stalls, switch back to an invitation

Use invitations when

1. The conversation is just starting
2. You don't know the person very well
3. Your partner doesn't seem to know what to say

Using invitations lets your partner know you are interested in them and want to learn more about them. As the conversation progresses, you can include more inspiration

Use inspirations when

1. Your partner shared something personal with you
2. Your partner asks a personal question (that you are comfortable answering)
3. You have gotten to know the person better

If you **started** the conversation with inspiration, you would be sharing a lot about yourself instead of asking them about themselves. This puts the focus on you and tells your partner that you aren't interested in hearing about them. As the conversation progresses, sharing more details about yourself, through inspirations, shows your partner that you are feeling more comfortable and want to get to know them better

More tips? Yes, please!

When you start a conversation with someone, think about your social context for your first topic. For example, if you see someone from one of your classes, start by asking them if they are ready for an upcoming exam. If you see someone at a party, ask them how they know the host

Ask people questions that get them to share stories, not facts. For example, "where do you work?" asks them for a fact - their workplace. If you ask, "what's it like to work there?" you ask them to share a story with you

If you or your partner are throwing off cues that you don't like the topic, ask a question to start a different one. For example, if you ask an open-ended questions and get only short responses, the other person might be uncomfortable or bored with the conversation. (For example, "How was your summer vacation?" and they say, "Ok, I guess," that might mean they don't want to talk about it)

Remember, not all conversations are going to work out. Each time you have a conversation, its an opportunity to try out your skills and practice

If you are unsure of what to say in a conversation, it helps to have some pre-prepped stories that you can pull out to inspire your conversation partner...

Social stories for conversation

Having some tried and true stories to share can be very helpful in social situations. This exercise will help you create some stories about yourself that you can use in social situations. The nice thing about sharing stories is that once you have shared yours, its your partners turn to share

Consider the following story starts. Think of a beginning, middle, and end for each scenario. For example: A memory from childhood.

Beginning: I lived next to the ocean when I was growing up. It was great to grow up and see whales.

Middle: We used to go down to the dock and watch the humpback whales. There were a lot of them, and they would breach quite often.

End: I remember they used to come so close to the dock. We could literally look down onto the back of the whale as it was swimming by. It was so cool.

A memory from childhood

Beginning:

Middle:

End:

Social stories for conversation

A silly or funny mistake

Beginning:

Middle:

End:

How you got into a hobby or interest

Beginning:

Middle:

End:

Two big communication differences

There are two big communication differences between neurotypical and neurodivergent folks that can lead to conflict: directness and correctness

Direct vs. indirect communication

A person uses **direct communication** when they say explicitly and plainly what they are thinking or what they want you to do

A person uses **indirect communication** when they do not explicitly or plainly say what they are thinking or want you to do. Rather, they use gestures, body language, and tone of voice to provide cues to what they want

Many neurotypical people use indirect communication to make requests

Why? Indirect communication allows one to adjust their message based on how the other person responds. Many people like to avoid conflict, and if they make an indirect request, they can easily adjust the parameters of the request to avoid conflict if the person they are talking to has a negative reaction ("I can't have that report done today, its too much work")

Indirect communication can prevent missteps, conflicts, and even cultural miscommunications

Being able to use and read indirect communication requires the ability to attend to and read body language, subtle word choices, and look for nonverbal indicators

Indirect communication can lead to challenges if you are not skilled in these methods. For example, a boss may use indirect communication to make a request, which you may not interpret as a request and fail to deliver on an assignment. The result = conflict at work

Two big communication differences

There are two big communication differences between neurotypical and neurodivergent folks that can lead to conflict: directness and correctness

Direct vs. indirect communication

Again, a person uses **direct communication** when they say explicitly and plainly what they are thinking or what they want you to do

Example 1: Marie says "Yes, lets go to that movie" while smiling when you ask her to see Star Wars

Example 2: Steve says "Jane wants that report by end of day today" while delivering a curt nod

Again, a person uses **indirect communication** when they do not explicitly or plainly say what they are thinking or want you to do. Rather, they use gestures, body language, and tone of voice to provide cues to what they want

Example 1: Marie looks away and says "Oh yeah, maybe we could see that one. Or a different one" when you ask her to go to Star Wars

Example 2: Steve says "Jane is looking forward to seeing that report" as he points several times down on the desk and opens his eyes wider

In the first example, Mary is not directly telling you that she doesn't want to see the movie you suggested. She is hoping that you pick up on the indirect cues she dropped and figure it out (the use of *oh yeah* and *maybe* and the suggestion of a different one)

In the second example, Steve is telling you that the report is due by using the words *looking forward to seeing* while tapping several times and opening his eyes big

In such situations, when messages are delivered in an indirect manner (not explicit or plain), ask for clarification

"Is there a movie you would rather see?"

"When would Jane like to have the report?"

Two big communication differences

There are two big communication differences between neurotypical and neurodivergent folks that can lead to conflict: directness and correctness

Correct versus Right

Another area that can lead to conflict for neurodivergent folks is the difference between being right and being correct

Thought experiment: Have you ever had to do a forced choice test where you are only allowed to pick one answer? For example:

I prefer the theater over museums True False

How would you answer this question?

One person may struggle to answer this question because there is not enough information. For example, what type of theatre? Is it a stage play, musical theatre, or the cinema? And what type of museum is it? Cars, airplanes, gopher museum?. There are too many unknowns to provide a confident answer.

Another person may more easily pick an answer based on their own law of averages. That is, in general, they would think to themselves, 'I like theatre this much (say 30% because they assume its stage theatre) and I like museums this much (say 60% because they are thinking of the dinosaur museum they went to). Based on this process, they would pick Museum because of their average experience of the examples they picked to represent each category.

Who does this and what are these patterns called?

Two big communication differences

There are two big communication differences between neurotypical and neurodivergent folks that can lead to conflict: directness and correctness

Correct versus Right

When we look at the patterns in making a choice, we can label them as being correct versus being right

Being correct means free from error. For example, the earth is round

Being right is stating something that has the possibility of having an error. For example, this colour is too bright. This may be more or less true depending on the person who is asked

In this way, being correct is being factual whereas being right is more of an expression of opinion based on an average of the persons experiences

People who prefer to be correct (more likely to be neurodivergent) often encounter challenges when communicating with people who like to be right (who are more likely to be neurotypical). If a neurotypical person shares information that is *right*, a neurodivergent person may want to *correct* their information if it is incorrect, because being factual is important

This can lead to conflict because the neurotypical person may feel that you are trying to show that you are smarter than them (which most will very strongly dislike) and will react negatively ('why do you always have to be right?'). This is not usually viewed as helpful (and can be viewed as rude)

If on the other hand, a person who prefers to be correct is provided with information to correct their error, they are generally receptive to this, because again, they want to be as correct as they can be

Be mindful of the person you are talking with. Are they open to corrections? If yes, do so. If they are not open to it, stop and think before correcting. This is especially important if you value that relationship. You could instead say, 'I've been reading up on that and have some information that might be helpful if you want.' If they say 'yes', share. If they say 'no' or 'that's ok', don't share. Just move on.

Catch yourself being great!

This worksheet uses positive reinforcement to reward the awesome things you already do. Create a rewards jar for yourself – use an old box and gather some markers, stickers, or whatever decorating materials you have.

Print out a monthly calendar and add the days of the month. Each time you do a **good deed** for yourself or for someone else, give yourself a star, heart, diamond, or whatever shape you like to mark that day. Good deeds are subjective, but here are a few ideas:

- Went to the gym
- Made myself a meal
- Helped a friend
- Complimented someone
- Talked to a family member
- Took out the garbage
- Eating healthy all day
- Mowed the lawn/shovelled snow
- Made an appointment
- Completed a task that I put off
- Cleaned a room
- Met up with a friend
- Went for a walk
- Fed my pets
- Went grocery shopping
- Made my bed

As you can see, the list of good deeds includes things that you are already doing. The deeds just have to include things that make you feel good about yourself, whether that is doing things for you or for someone else.

Each time you add a star to the calendar, put a dollar in the Reward Jar. If you add multiple stars, give yourself multiple dollars.

At the end of the month (or whatever time period you choose), take the money out of your Reward Jar and buy yourself something special – you deserve it! You can add the Reward you are working towards on the bottom of your calendar. Here are some ideas:

- Go to my favourite restaurant
- Buy a new book
- Take a day off
- Enjoy your favourite dessert
- Download an album
- Buy some new shoes
- Take a friend for coffee
- Go to the cinema

Catch yourself being great!

Month:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

My Good Deed Reward is:

Catch yourself being great!

Month:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

My Good Deed Reward is:

Active listening

Treating listening as an active process - be a part of the conversation. Active listeners:

- (1) show that they are listening,
- (2) encourage sharing, and
- (3) ask clarifying questions to understand the speaker

(1) Encourage Sharing:

(A) Ask open-ended questions. The goal of these questions is to encourage the speaker to give more details about what they are talking about. You can use these questions to tell the speaker you are listening to that you want to hear more

"What is ___ like?"

"How did you feel when ___?"

"Tell me more about ___?"

"How do you ___?"

"What do you like about ___?"

"What do you think about ___?"

(B) Use reflections. Summarize what the speaker said in your own words. Include emotional content if you can (speaker may have communicated through tone or body language)

Speaker: I've been struggling at school. There is so much to do and I am having a hard time keeping up.

Listener: It sounds like you are doing your best to keep up but there is a lot to do.

Active listening

(2) Show You are Listening:

(A) Put away anything that can distract you. Playing on your phone, watching TV, or doing other things when someone is talking to you may send a message to the speaker that what they are saying is not important. Putting away distractions allows you to focus on the conversation and help the speaker feel heard

(B) Use verbal and non-verbal signs

Verbal	"uh-huh"	"that's interesting"	"that makes sense"	"I understand"
Non-verbal	Nodding in agreement	Reacting to their emotions (happy = smiling, sad = frowning)		Eye contact (if comfortable)

(3) Strive to Understand:

Focus on listening instead of what you want to say next. A listener's job is to understand the speaker's point of view, *even if you don't agree*. Avoid making judgments until you understand their point

Review:

- Did you find this helpful? If yes, how?
- How may you use active listening moving forward?

Assertive communication

A style of communication in which a person stands up for their own needs and wants, while also considering the needs and wants of others. Assertive communication style does not include behaving passively or aggressively

(1) Traits of Assertive Communicators:

- Clearly state needs and wants
 - Listen to others without interruption
 - Speaking at an appropriate volume (not shouting or whispering)
 - Speaking in a steady tone of voice
 - Hold arms to side or gesture with hands (do not wrap arms around body*)
 - Make eye contact*
- * If comfortable

(2) Assertiveness Tips:

- (A) Respect yourself.** Your needs, wants, and rights are just as important as anyone else's. It is 100% okay to express what you want, while also respecting the rights as others
- (B) Express your thoughts and feelings calmly.** Things to avoid include giving the silent treatment (not talking, ignoring the person), and yelling or threatening the person. Do your best to express yourself in a calm and factual manner, using sentences that begin with "I feel" E.g. "I am feeling overwhelmed and would appreciate a day to finish this assignment"
- (C) Plan what you are going to say.** You know your wants and needs. Plan or write out how to ask for them so that you do not have to think of the words for your request on the spot
- (D) Say "no" when you need to.** We cannot make everyone happy all the time. You can say "no" to a request from someone without making up an excuse. Be honest. E.g., "I am sorry, but I do not have the time to help with that this time. Perhaps ____ can help?"

Assertive communication

Practice: Before writing your response for each scenario below, consider what your needs and wants might be in each situation.

Examples of Assertive Communication:

"I have been feeling overwhelmed about doing most of the work on our project. I understand that you are busy, but I need help. How can we make this work?"

The speaker takes responsibility for their feelings without blaming and clearly describes what they need.

"I will not be able to come this weekend. I had a really hard week and want to rest"

The speaker respects their own needs and wants by clearly saying "no"

Putting it all together:

Your parent: "I know you wanted to be alone this weekend, but I really want you to come to this wedding with me"

Assertive Response:

Situation: You go out to eat at a restaurant. Your order is brought to you, but it has been made incorrectly. Although you asked for no sauce, it has extra sauce

Assertive Response:

Your friend: "Hey, can I borrow your black sweater. I really like it and I promise to give it back to you. I won't forget this time"

Assertive Response:

Psychologically Flexible

Psychological flexibility is the ability to adapt with challenging things while also remaining true to your values. Building friendships can make us second guess ourselves. Use the following strategies to help manage thoughts and feelings related to social successes and misses.

(1) Acceptance – Embrace your inner experience:

The challenges you try to resist tend to stick around (what is resisted is persistent). Accepting your uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or visualizations can lead to important insights about yourself.

How? The next time you try to push away an uncomfortable thought, feeling, or visualization, allow it to stay. Do you notice anything in your body (e.g., tightening)? What is it like to accept your experience instead of resisting it? If you follow the thoughts, visualizations, or feelings, where do they go?

(2) Detachment – Learn to step back from your thoughts:

Thoughts can be overwhelming. Especially if you believe that your thoughts are always true. In truth, thoughts are often *exaggerated interpretations* of our fears and insecurities more than being a true reflection of reality.

How? When an overwhelming thought comes up, visualize an empty movie theatre with only yourself and a friend or family member in the audience. Picture your thoughts appearing on the screen. Is this story familiar? Have you seen it before? What is it like to see your thoughts on the screen, separated from yourself? Do they feel more or less true? What would your friend or family member say to that thought?

(3) Present-focused – Live in the now:

We live life in the present. We cannot turn back time or fast forward through our experiences, no matter how much we wish we could. All we have is the present moment. Practice being fully present.

How? When lost in a thought, emotion, or visualization, use your senses to return to the present. Take a seat. Notice the feel of your bum on the chair and your feet on the floor. Then, notice two things you can see, two things you can hear, two things you can touch, and two things you can smell in your immediate environment. Was there a shift in how you are feeling?

Psychologically Flexible

Psychological flexibility is the ability to adapt with challenging things while also remaining true to your values. Building friendships can make us second guess ourselves. Use the following strategies to help manage thoughts and feelings related to social successes and misses.

(4) Observing self – Connect with the observing self:

Your “thinking self” analyzes, plans, interprets, and judges your experience. Your “observing self” notices your thoughts, feelings, and actions without getting lost in them

How? Bring attention to your thoughts, feelings, or actions. Ask yourself, “Am I these thoughts or am I the one who is aware of these thoughts?” If the answer is that you are the one who is aware of the thoughts, you are connecting with your observing self

(5) Values clarification – Explore and define your highest values:

What is most important to you in your life? Ask yourself this question and then answer it by deciding what values you want to live by. You can practice this over time as values may change with knowledge and experience

How? Think about people you respect or admire. What qualities do they have? Do they have traits that you would also like to have?

(6) Values enactment – Put your values into action:

Values act like a compass – they try to point you in the right direction (the right direction being the one that reflects what your value), but you have to choose to follow that direction. You can do this by coming up with goals for yourself that reflect your values

How? Choose three values that you would like to embody. Set a goal for each one. For example, if one of your values is friendship, make a point to text or call your friends a few times each week

Friendship building

Once you decide someone is friendship material, you can start building it. The first move is very simple. You need to make one decision: that is to invite them to do something outside of the context in which you see them. If you see them at work [or school], invite them for coffee, to a movie, to lunch off site, etc.

Chose the right activity

Pick an activity that allows you to talk and get to know each other. If you know that you share a common interest, invite them to that. Make sure the activity is something that you are comfortable doing. This is especially important if you are nervous about how the conversation will go – pick a location that is calming and relaxing for you

When you choose an activity and invite the other person to an activity outside your normal context it signals to them that you want to be friends

Now its in their hands

If they say yes, great!

If they say no, it does not mean that they do not want to be your friend. They may be busy or are not interested in that particular activity. A general rule of thumb is that the person has not indicated that they do not want to be your friend until they say no to three invitation

Deeping that friendship

Once you have agreed to hang out, you are now pursing a friendship. This works best if done at a steady rate. A good rule of thumb for asking someone to hang out is at least once a month and no more than once a week. This is a guideline. If you find that you both really enjoy spending time together, you may hangout more than once/week. It helps to compare how many invitation you make to how many they make

Friendship rituals

In order to grow, friendships need care and attention. Rituals are one way to focus energy into your friendship. Whether you want to send them a meme during your morning meal or as you are chilling on the couch after dinner, you can pick times in your day to focus on your friends

Tips for Friendship Rituals

Keep it simple – it doesn't have to be a big thing – it can be as simple as sending a text

Just be together – go for a walk or grab a drink together

Eliminate distractions – put away your phone and be in the moment together

Make it a priority – protect the time you set aside for your rituals, even if you are busy

Be consistent – make a habit to do the ritual when possible – at least weekly

Reflect

What are some activities that you can turn into rituals?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How frequently would you like to engage in these rituals?

Who would you like to try your ritual(s) with?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Supporting friends

Friends are an important part of our social group. They offer us support and we offer them support as well. Things to remember when offering support:

- Be present with your friend
- Remember that it is not about you. It is about them
- Offer support NOT solutions
- Accept the feelings they are having. Do not tell them how they should feel
- Be calm – try not to panic

Think of a recent situation when a friend needed support. Let's walk through the experience

Briefly describe the situation. What did your friend need support with?

How did you respond then?

What, if anything, could you have done differently?

How can you support yourself during times when you offer support to your friends?

Communicating during conflict

There are times where we will have conversations with people that involve talking about things that have the potential to lead to conflict. Depending on how these conversations begin, they can go well, or they can go poorly. In this way, we can choose to start the conversation one of two ways: soft or harsh

In harsh conversations, a person may use criticism or blame to make their case. These starters often begin with “you never...” or “you always...” These starters can feel like a direct attack to the person you are speaking with

In soft conversations, a person gently approaches a potentially conflicting topic, using “I” statements to avoid criticism and blame. These starters often use “I feel...” or “I need...” These starters allow you to voice your concern and makes it more likely that the other person will listen and less likely that they will feel attacked

General rules of communicating about something that may lead to conflict:

- Try to frame a complaint using “I” statements instead of “you” statements
- Try to avoid using words like always or never
- Try to describe what is happening using facts
- Talk about what you need (rather than what you do not want)

Examples:

Harsh starter: You never do anything around here

Soft starter: I like it when we work together to get things done

Harsh starter: You never listen to me!

Soft starter: I feel upset when I need to talk about something that is bothering me and I do not have the chance to talk about it.

Harsh starter: You are impossible to deal with!

Soft starter: I’m feeling frustrated with how this conversation is going. I would appreciate if we can sit down and talk about it together.

Communicating during conflict

Think of a time in your past where you had a conflict when sharing your concerns. Who was the argument with and what was said?

Let's practice softening up our communicative language.
There are 4 parts:

1. **I** - Use an "I" statement
2. **Feel** – describe how you feel
3. **About** – describe the situation using neutral language; do not criticize
4. **Need** – describe what you need to help things improve

Now think of ways to soften the words you used during the conflict:

- Did this exercise impact how you might approach conversations?
- Did you find this helpful? If yes, how?
- How may you use the softening approach moving forward?

I have survived

This exercise will help you evaluate your own coping skills and the support systems you have drawn on to deal with life's challenges.

Reflect on a very difficult experience that you have been through. Write about what happened, how you felt, and what you found tough about the experience.

Now, write what you did to get through this challenge. What actions did you take? What internal and external resources did you draw on? Did you seek out help? What helped you overcome the challenge? What did not help? What personal traits were especially useful?

I have survived

This exercise will help you evaluate your own coping skills and the support systems you have drawn on to deal with life's challenges.

Reflect on a meaningful goal, wish, or ambition that is important to you. Write about it here.

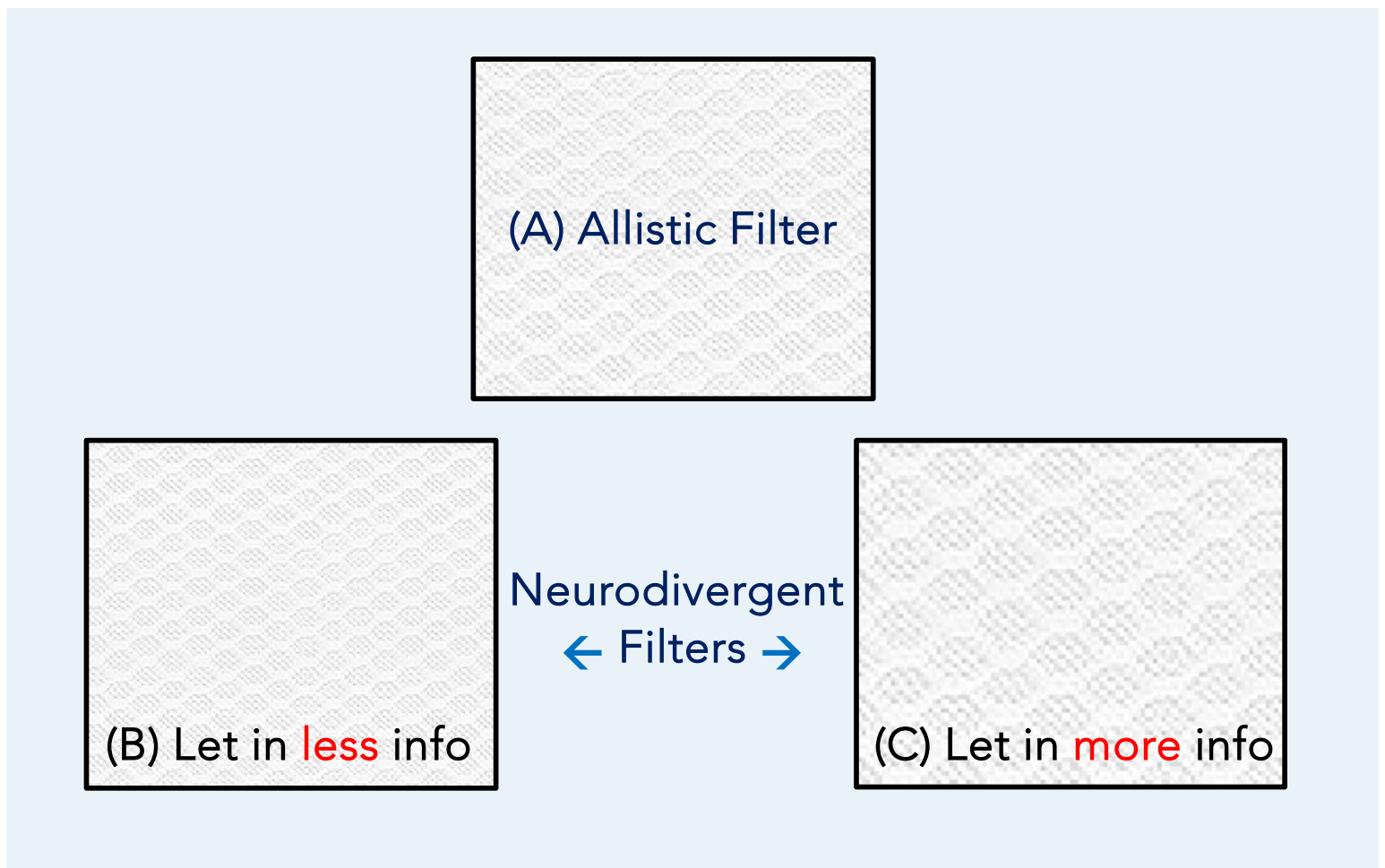
Now, reflect on a past compliment that you have received that relates to this goal or desire. Who gave you that compliment? Did they point out any particular strengths or traits you possess? Did any peers, friends, or family members tell you they admired your capabilities?

Why should you consider sensory information?

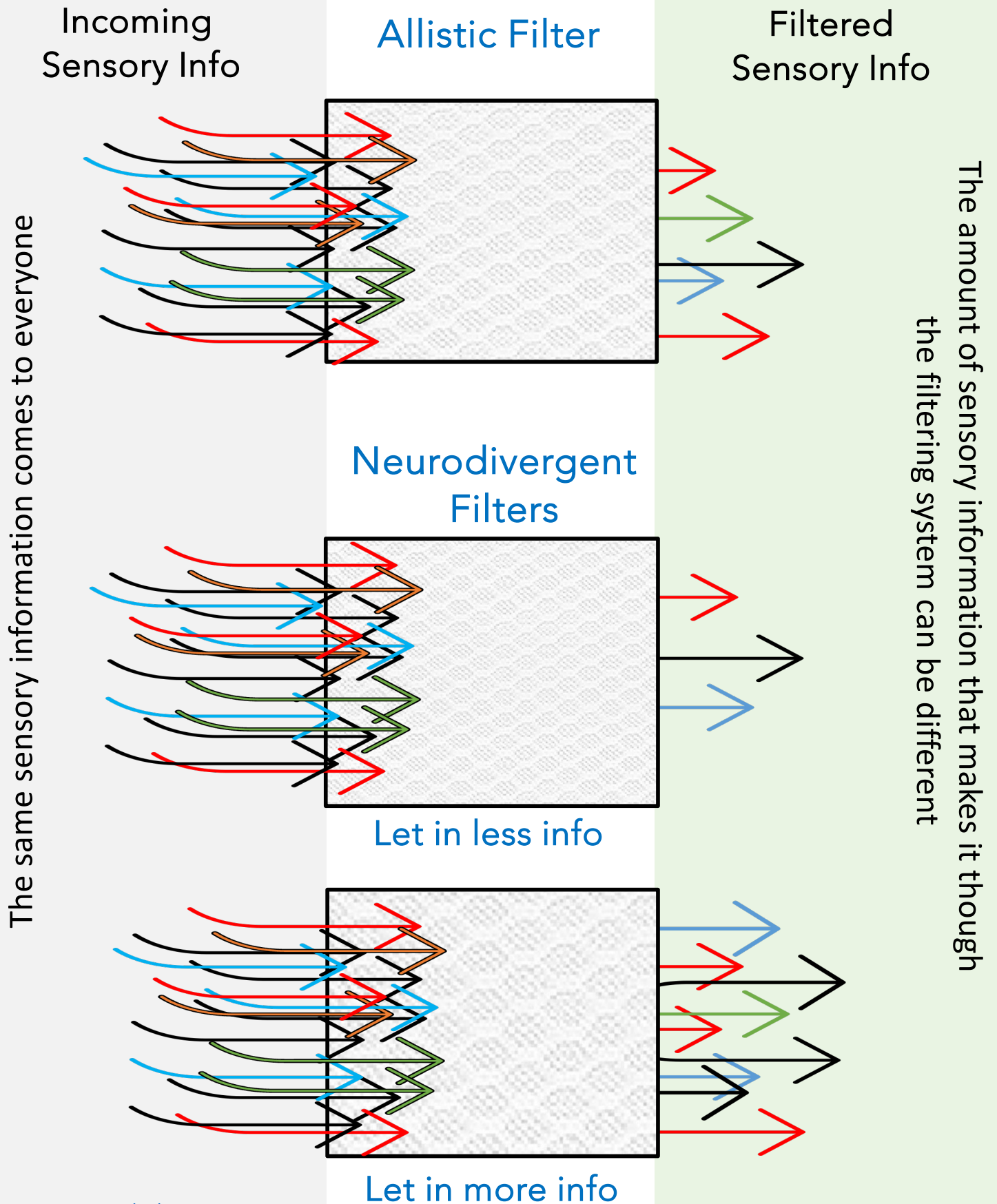
All information our brain takes in is sensory in nature. If our brain attended to 100% of the information coming in, we would be constantly overwhelmed. Because of this, humans come with filtering systems to decrease the amount of information coming in. The filtering system of neurodivergent brains can be similar to those of allistic people or they can be different from allistic brains in two ways:

1. The filter lets in comparatively **more** sensory information
2. The filter lets in comparatively **less** sensory information

We can think of this like a mesh screen. The screen in the allistic filter lets in a predetermined amount of sensory info (A). The neurodivergent screen is finer (smaller holes, lets in less info; B) or coarser (larger holes, lets in more info; C)



Visual representation of incoming sensory information



Hypo versus Hyper

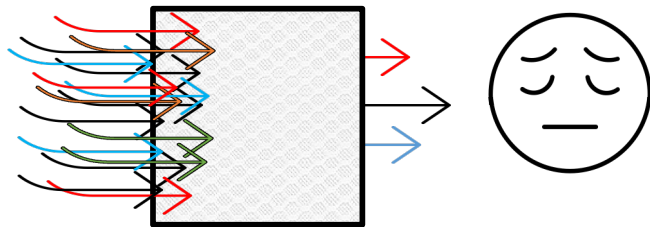
The filtering systems have been classified as hypo and hyper

1. The filter lets in **less** sensory information = **hyposensitive**
2. The filter that lets in **more** sensory information = **hypersensitive**

What do these filtering systems look like? Let's use the auditory (sounds) system to illustrate:

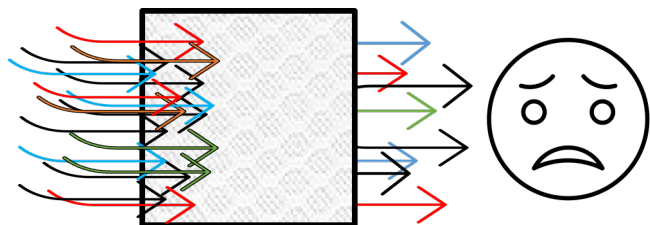
Hyposensitive filters look like

1. Less aware of sensory info (e.g., may not hear noise)
2. Needs more sensory info (e.g., need louder or repetitive noises)
3. Does not or is slower to respond to info (e.g., may need more prompts)
4. May seek out sensory info (e.g., make noises)



Hypersensitive filters look like

1. A small amount of info is activating (e.g., may hear noises others cannot)
2. May go into fight or flight mode (e.g., overwhelmed or 'meltdown')
3. Ongoing info may be uncomfortable (e.g., repetitive noise is grating)
4. May avoid out sensory info (e.g., stay away from areas with certain noises)



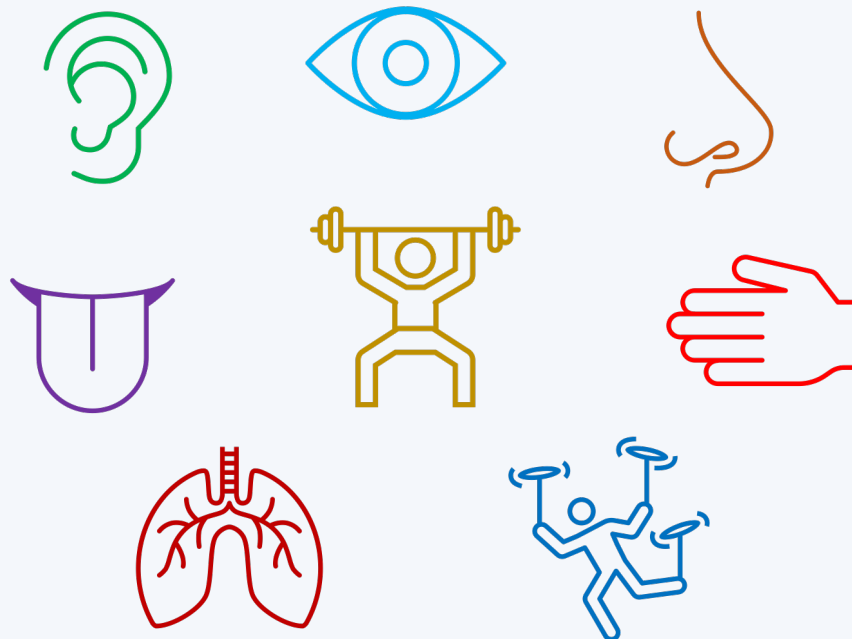
Hypo versus Hyper

YET, there is more complexity at work here. Each sensory system may have its own filter. So, one could be either hyper- or hypo-sensitive across each domain.

When we think of sensory systems, the 5 senses come to mind: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Yet, the number of sensory systems we have is higher, with some arguing that we have 8, 21, or even 53 different senses. That's complex!

The 5 we are taught in elementary school was first described by Aristotle (in *De Anima*) but most neurologists suggest there are 8 senses.

The additional 3 senses include interoception (sense of internal systems, e.g., hunger), vestibular (sense of balance), and proprioception (sense of body awareness). The senses can be even further categorized if you like all the differences and details (for example, within interoception, we could break that down into senses of hunger, thirst, temperature, pain)¹.



Let's explore how each of these sensory systems can be impacted by a hyper- or hypo-sensitive filter



Visual system

Below are a list of potential impacts of hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity on the visual system. Check off all that apply to you

Hyposensitive :

- ☐ Can struggle to find people in crowded place (e.g., school yard)
- ☐ Can struggle to find something in busy backgrounds (e.g., messy room)
- ☐ Can struggle to keep track of where they are when reading (e.g., next line)
- ☐ May like watching things move across their visual field (e.g., flicking fingers in front of eyes)
- ☐ May like flashing lights or other repetitive visual stimuli (e.g., lava lamp)
- ☐ May have poor depth perception
- ☐ Other: _____

Hypersensitive:

- ☐ Sensitive to bright light, fluorescent lights, sunlight, or certain colours
- ☐ Prefer dimly light spaces
- ☐ Overwhelmed by visual changes in environment (e.g., moving furniture around)
- ☐ May use peripheral vision to look at things (limits amount of visual info coming in)
- ☐ May blink a lot
- ☐ May need complete darkness while trying to sleep
- ☐ Other: _____



Auditory system

Below are a list of potential impacts of hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity on the auditory system. Check off all that apply to you

Hyposensitive :

- ☐ May not respond to name or instructions
- ☐ May zone out (e.g., look like they are daydreaming)
- ☐ Can struggle to remember what was said (e.g., may say 'what' a lot)
- ☐ May not be able to tell the difference between similar sounds
- ☐ May make noises (be loud, bang objects together, hum, or sing)
- ☐ May tap or bang things to hear the sound
- ☐ May turn TV or music up very loudly
- ☐ Other: _____

Hypersensitive:

- ☐ May have difficulty ignoring sounds in the background (e.g., talking in another room)
- ☐ May hear sounds that others cannot hear (e.g., high or low frequencies)
- ☐ May may own sounds to block out sounds they do not like
- ☐ May struggle in rooms with a lot of people or sound and want to leave
- ☐ May startle when hear sudden or loud noises
- ☐ Other: _____



Tactile system

Below are a list of potential impacts of hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity on the tactile system. Check off all that apply to you

Hyposensitive :

- ☐ May be unaware of light touches (e.g., need firm pressure to 'feel' touch)
- ☐ May be more aggressive in the physical contact with others
- ☐ May drop items due to differences in holding (e.g., may hold too lightly)
- ☐ May use mouth to explore objects (e.g., holding things in mouth)
- ☐ May enjoy messy play (e.g., painting, clay)
- ☐ May seek out certain textures (e.g., rough or smooth)
- ☐ May like tight clothing
- ☐ Other: _____

Hypersensitive:

- ☐ May not like being touched, especially if unexpected
- ☐ Hair brushing may be uncomfortable
- ☐ May not like certain fabrics or tags on skin
- ☐ May not like getting dirty (e.g., sticky or muddy)
- ☐ May walk on toes or refuse to walk on certain surfaces
- ☐ May not like certain food textures
- ☐ May not like wet textures (including face washing)
- ☐ Other: _____



Smell system

Below are a list of potential impacts of hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity on the smell system. Check off all that apply to you

Hyposensitive :

- ☐ May not notice smells
- ☐ May prefer strong smells and tastes
- ☐ May like to smell everything
- ☐ May seek out strong smells
- ☐ Other: _____

Hypersensitive:

- ☐ May have a strong smell intolerance
- ☐ May avoid foods with certain smells
- ☐ May prefer tasteless foods
- ☐ May gag or become upset at strong smells
- ☐ May have a restricted diet
- ☐ Other: _____



Taste system

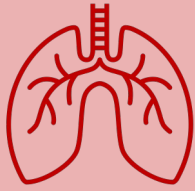
Below are a list of potential impacts of hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity on the taste system. Check off all that apply to you

Hyposensitive :

- ☐ May like to put things in their mouth
- ☐ May seek out strong flavours
- ☐ May lick things
- ☐ May crave certain flavors
- ☐ Other: _____

Hypersensitive:

- ☐ May not like certain textures to tastes
- ☐ May prefer a predictable diet
- ☐ May prefer foods that are the same each time (e.g., crackers over fruit)
- ☐ May find flavourful food overwhelming
- ☐ Other: _____



Interoception system

Below are a list of potential impacts of hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity on the interoception system. Check off all that apply to you

Hyposensitive :

- ☐ May have little reaction to pain
- ☐ May not notice changes in temperature
- ☐ May not feel hunger or thirst
- ☐ May find it difficult to understand what they are feeling
- ☐ Other: _____

Hypersensitive:

- ☐ May dislike certain temperatures (too warm or too cold?)
- ☐ May notice small changes in physiological system (changes in heartbeat or breathing)
- ☐ May feel pain deeply
- ☐ May feel emotions deeply (e.g., "too sensitive")
- ☐ Other: _____



Vestibular system

Below are a list of potential impacts of hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity on the vestibular system. Check off all that apply to you

Hyposensitive :

- ☐ May seek out movement (e.g., spinning, bouncing, shake head, etc.)
- ☐ May be a thrill seeker (e.g., love amusement park rides)
- ☐ May not get dizzy
- ☐ May like hanging upside down
- ☐ May like to rock back and forth
- ☐ Other: _____

Hypersensitive:

- ☐ May avoid swinging, spinning, or sliding
- ☐ May have a fear of heights
- ☐ May get motion sickness
- ☐ May lose balance
- ☐ Other: _____



Proprioceptive system

Below are a list of potential impacts of hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity on the proprioception system. Check off all that apply to you

Hyposensitive:

- ☐ May appear clumsy (e.g., tripping over things or banging into objects)
- ☐ May move around a lot
- ☐ May like to be wrapped up in blankets or tucked tightly in bed
- ☐ May fidget quite a bit
- ☐ May have trouble balancing
- ☐ May prefer tight clothes
- ☐ Other: _____

Hypersensitive:

- ☐ May prefer to remain seated
- ☐ May lean against things or people
- ☐ May have difficulty with fine motor skills (e.g., holding a pencil, picking up small items)
- ☐ Other: _____

Role of senses in overwhelm

When considering how the 8 senses play a role in making our way through the world, we can see how being hyper-sensitive to even one sense can cause distress in one's life. Imagine if you were hypersensitive to two or more senses, and how they additive effects may lead to overwhelming feelings, meltdowns, or burnouts

Based on the information on the previous pages, did you identify as hypo- or hyper-sensitive to any of the eight sensory systems?

Vision	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hyposensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Neither
Auditory	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hyposensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Neither
Tactile	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hyposensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Neither
Smell	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hyposensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Neither
Taste	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hyposensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Neither
Interoceptive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hyposensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Neither
Vestibular	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hyposensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Neither
Proprioceptive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hyposensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Neither

Accommodating sensory needs

Now that you have a good understanding of how your senses may be different from neurotypicals, you can make accommodations to help yourself be more comfortable. Look at the sensory systems below and provide some examples of things you could do to make your social experiences more comfortable by accommodating your sensory differences

Visual System

Hypersensitive

Ex. Choose places that use dim lighting or lamps

Hyposensitive

Ex. Choose places that have visually stimulating decor

Auditory System

Hypersensitive

Ex. Bring your noise cancelling ear plugs (e.g., loops) or headphones

Hyposensitive

Ex. Choose places that play a genre of music you like

Accommodating sensory needs

Tactile System

Hypersensitive

Ex. Choose places where you are unlikely to be touched

Hyposensitive

Ex. Choose places where you can use your hands (e.g., pottery)

Taste System

Hypersensitive

Ex. Choose places that sell your preferred food and drinks

Hyposensitive

Ex. Choose a place that meets your needs (e.g., ice cream shop)

Smell System

Hypersensitive

Ex. Choose a place with low odors

Hyposensitive

Ex. Choose places that have lots of smells (soap shop, flower shop)

Accommodating sensory needs

Interoceptive System

Hypersensitive

Ex. Choose a place with a comfortable and steady temperature

Hyposensitive

Ex. Choose a place with readily available washrooms and drinks

Vestibular System

Hypersensitive

Ex. Choose places where you can sit in a still position

Hyposensitive

Ex. Choose places with a lot of movement (e.g., swings, bike ride)

Proprioceptive System

Hypersensitive

Ex. Choose places where fine motor skills are not required (e.g., no chop sticks or puzzles)

Hyposensitive

Ex. Choose places where its ok to fidget or move around

Bonus: Relationship rituals

In order to grow, relationships need care and attention. Rituals are one way to focus energy into your relationship. Whether it is a shared coffee every morning or a 10-minute check in before bed, rituals are a special time to connect with your partner and be present.

Tips for Relationship Rituals

Just be together – spend quality time together, uninterrupted, even for 5 minutes
Keep it simple – a ritual doesn't have to be a big thing, it can be as simple as a coffee
Eliminate distractions – turn off the TV, silence your phone, and be near each other
Make it a priority – protect the time you set aside for your ritual even when life is busy
Be completely present – focus on your partner and the experience you are sharing
Do it consistently – make it a habit and do it as often as possible – at least weekly

Ideas for Relationship Rituals

Arrivals and Departures

When leaving for the day or returning home, connect with your partner for a few moments. Discuss plans for the day, share an embrace, or talk about something that's on your mind. Have a mindful interaction, rather than a rushed goodbye.

Evening Walk

Take a walk around your neighborhood after dinner. Be mindful, paying attention to the sights, sounds, and smells outside that you would normally overlook. After a few minutes, take turns sharing what you noticed.

Share a Meal

Choose a meal to share every day, whether it's a bowl of cereal or a fancy dinner. Avoid big distractions such as phones or TV.

Mini Date

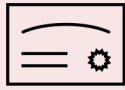
Choose a day and time to have a short date each week. Practice a hobby together, play a boardgame, go out for coffee, or dance to music. Do whatever you like, as long as you are consistent, together, and in the moment.

Get Moving

Create an exercise ritual with your partner. Try going for a run, practice yoga, or join a gym. Get into the routine of exercising together at the same time every day, or on certain days each week.

Book Club for Two

Choose a book or other media to share. You can read or listen separately but come together to discuss. For example, listen to a podcast on your commute, and discuss it with your partner that evening.



You Made It!



You have made it to the end of this social skills playbook. Awesome job! I knew you could do it. Take some time to consider your experiences as you made your way through the exercises and material.

If someone asked you what you learned from completing this playbook, what would you say?

What exercises did you find most useful?

What exercises were lame?

How was the sensory sensitivities information and exercises?

What would you want to spend more time learning about?