

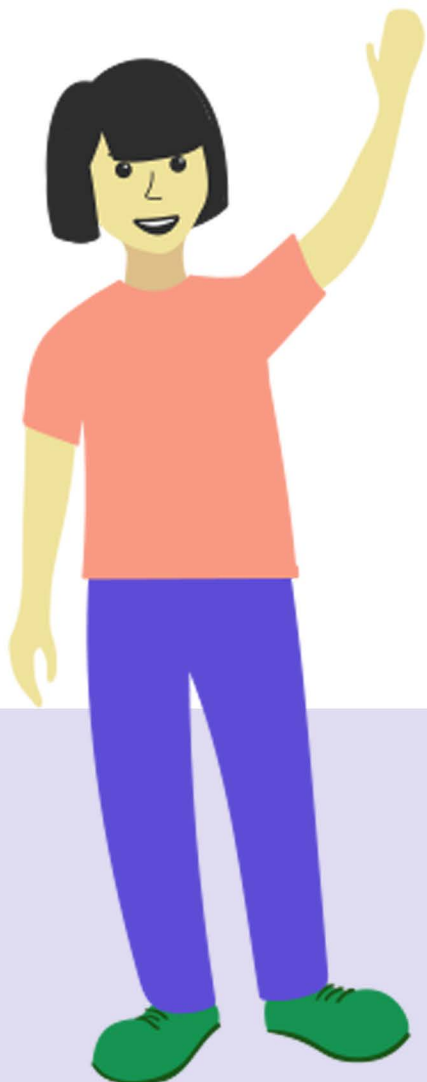
Supporting the Mental Health of Autistic People Living in Rural and Remote Communities

Autistics Edition



Hey fellow autistic person living in a rural or remote community! Life is tough. Life is even tougher when you feel like you are the only one in the small town or village you live in who struggles the same way you do. This can really put a damper on our self-image and mental health, can't it? I am here to tell you that you aren't the only one. Look, there are so many people just like us that I was invited to make a tool kit just for us. I hope this helps you as much as it helps me feel seen, heard, and understood.

- Moira Robertson, Autistic Adult and Co-Author



Welcome

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Language Disclaimer

The use of referential language as it relates to autism is a sensitive, important, and on-going conversation. We recognize that language is powerful, and our goal is to support and advocate alongside autistic people. This toolkit utilizes identity-first language ("autistic person") to reflect the growing body of research showing that autistic people prefer this terminology. It reflects the belief that being autistic is an important part of a person's identity.

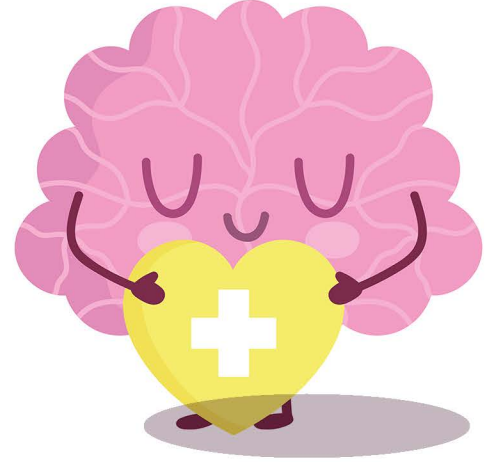
Although the research indicates that most autistic teens and adults prefer the term "autistic person", it is important to understand that each person may have a different preference for how they would like to be identified. Autonomy and self-determination are the most important aspects to consider when talking about autism. It is often best to ask an individual directly how they would prefer to be identified.

For more information on the use of referential language, see the [Autism Ontario Language Statement](#).

Welcome

What is the purpose of this toolkit?

This toolkit aims to promote positive mental health in rural and remote communities. Together with autistic people, parents and caregivers of autistic people, and mental health professionals, we created various activities with information and evidence-informed strategies you can use at any time.



Who should use this toolkit?

This toolkit is designed for **autistic youth** and **adults** who may be struggling with their mental health or who are looking for tools and strategies they can try at any time.

What are the limitations of this toolkit?

This toolkit is not meant to replace mental health therapy or support from a health care provider. It is intended to **educate** and **support** mental health in addition to, or while awaiting, appropriate mental health services.

While we have compiled these resources promoting positive mental health for autistic people, this is not a resource suitable for individuals experiencing mental health crisis. Mental health crisis is any situation where a person may feel, act, or behave in a way that may result in them hurting themselves or other people.



We know that the risk of experiencing a mental health crisis is high, and likely you are aware of this. By opening this toolkit and reading this, we also understand that it means that you are wanting to engage in a conversation about your mental health and be in a healthy place. Good job for taking this step, it is really hard, and you deserve credit for it! We hope that this will help you to know you are not alone and give you some tools that might be useful. You can do this!



Emergency Resources

If you, or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, please call any of the following:

- **9-1-1 Emergency Response: 9-1-1**

Offers emergency response services including police, fire, and ambulance. Service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If you are having an emergency, when you call 9-1-1 be prepared to answer questions about the following:

- The location of the emergency, including the street address
- The phone number you are calling from
- The nature of the emergency (e.g., feelings of suicide or self-harm)
- Details about the emergency (i.e., information on who is having the mental health crisis, where are they, who is with them, and details about a potential plan)

**** If your community does not have access to 9-1-1, please contact your local emergency services number. ****

- **9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline: 9-8-8**

Offers trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support to people in Canada who are thinking about suicide. Service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- **Talk Suicide: 1-833-456-4566 or <http://988.ca>**

Offers toll-free support to people in Canada who have concerns about suicide.

- **Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868**

Youth mental health support available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- **Hope for Wellness Help Line: 1-855-242-3310**

Offers immediate phone and chat counselling and crisis intervention to all Indigenous peoples across Canada in English, French, Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut.

“

“I can’t always communicate if I’m in crisis. Ward rounds in the hospital would always be awfully stressful for me, having to talk in front of a room of people. So are meetings with my psychiatrist. I feel comfortable with my care coordinator now and she’s learnt to do things like ask me direct questions rather than open ones, but not everyone is so accommodating.”

- Autistic adult ^{xii}

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Introduction to Mental Health

What is mental health?

“Mental health is the ability to feel, think and act in ways that help us to enjoy life and deal with difficulties”ⁱ.

Mental health is not inherently good or bad. It just is. Mental health is something we care for and work towards just the same as physical health. Sometimes all is well and you are feeling great, other times you fall and sprain your ankle and you go to the doctor. It is the same for mental health. However, in a world that feels like it isn't always designed for us autistic people, we may metaphorically "sprain our ankle" a lot more than other people. This means that we have to put a conscious effort into taking care of our mental health. It can feel like a lot of work sometimes, but it is worth it.

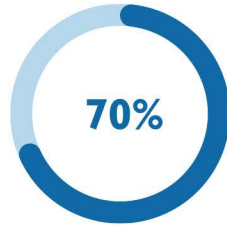


Some of the reasons that it can feel like a lot of work are because masking and burnout are hard, self-regulation is hard, coping with sensory needs are hard, and anxiety and stress feel more intense than they do for the neurotypical people around us ⁱⁱ.

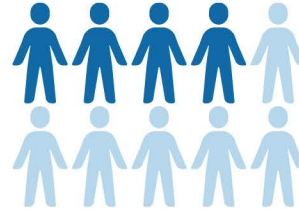
“While these really are just band aid solutions to a much larger multifaceted issue of an inadequate amount of support in rural areas, it is important to recognize that autistic youth are not without support entirely. I know that autistic individuals have immense strength. I know and have heard countless caregivers speak on the kindness and care and understanding our neighbours’ and community members show their loved ones on a daily basis. Our small rural communities are a family of people supporting our autistic members. Autistic youth in rural areas may be lacking in mental health specific support, but with the love and care of their neighbours’, they are not completely without support”

- Moira Robertson, Autistic Adult ^{xii} and Co-Author

Mental Health Concerns in Autistic People



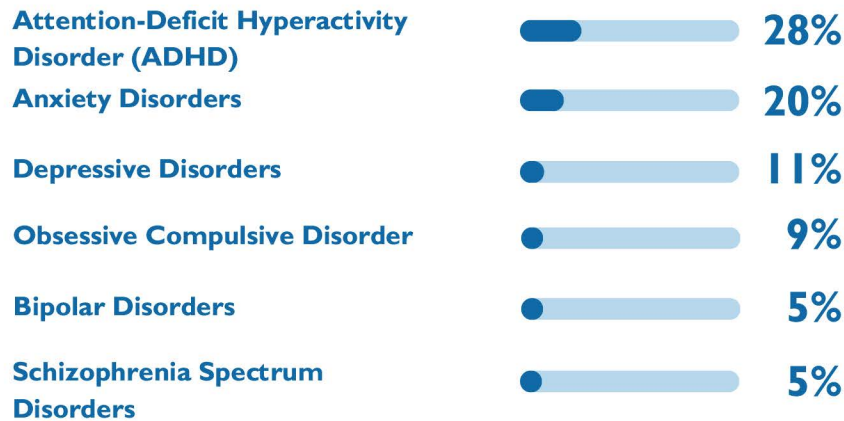
Up to approximately 70% of autistic children, youth, and adults have a co-occurring mental health condition



Approximately 40% of autistic children, youth, and adults have at least two co-occurring mental health conditions

1 2 3 5

Prevalence of Co-occurring Condition in Autistic People



4

“Not everyone is wired the same. And what works for you might not work for me. I just found my way to the other side and you can find yours.”

- Noah (autistic youth)

I have learned that I am not alone, and that this is something to not be ashamed off, but to realize it is real and deserves help.”

- Austin (autistic youth)

To hear more lived experience stories about mental health, visit [POND Youth Digital Stories](#).

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5. Kerns, C. M., Rast, J. E., & Shattuck, P. T. (2020). Prevalence and correlates of caregiver-reported mental health conditions in youth with autism spectrum disorder in the United States. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 82(1) DOI: 10.4088/JCP.20m13242

“Autistic people are continually forced to mask and hide who we are to accommodate a world that generally does not accept our traits, I want people to understand that autistic people are struggling because our needs are just not being met throughout society.”

- Megan Pilatzke, Autistic Adult ^{xi}

“Happy endings are coming, but they take time. Yours is just around the corner”

- Chloé Hayden, Autistic Adult

“The world is not designed for us, everything feels harder because of it. We have to mask, and it makes us tired, it can feel like a fight just to get our needs met, and all of this can be really disheartening.

- Moira Robertson, Autistic Adult and Co-Author

For more information on mental health in autistic adults, access the [Autism Mental Health Literacy Project](#) or various resources and webinars through CAMH and the Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre, [All about Autism and Mental Health](#).

What does mental health look like in rural and remote communities?

Now for the boring research you have all been waiting for.

Rural and remote communities face significant barriers in addressing mental health concerns ^{iv}:

- There are struggles with recruitment and retention of qualified mental health providers.
- Government funding does not account for the large geographical areas that the health care centers are expected to support.
- The population in these communities is diverse and may present with unique considerations.
- The social determinants of health in rural communities play a substantial role in impacting well-being and overall health.



Social determinants of health: The conditions in the environments where people live that impact health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes and risks ^v. These factors include access to health care and education, financial stability, access to food and physical activity, racism, discrimination, and violence.

For an in-depth research summary on mental health in rural communities, access the AIDE Canada [Impossible Conference Research collection](#).

What's next?

The rest of this toolkit is dedicated to activities that we believe will support you in promoting positive mental health. The activities will ask you to reflect on yourself and your needs and provide strategies and ideas for improving your mental health and well-being.

This toolkit is not a substitute for mental health counseling but is intended to help fill the gap while you await services, or until you feel ready to pursue that option.

As you read through, it's important to remember that every person is unique, and the strategies that will help you are also unique! Give something a try, and if it's not helpful, try something else!

Neurodiversity Movement

Audience:
Autistic Youth
and Adults



Activity: Understanding How the Neurodiversity Movement Impacts You

Background: The way the world talks about autism can impact how someone feels about being autistic. Historically, the medical model of autism was the most prominent and this model viewed autism as an impairment ^{vi}. Today, the medical model is mostly used by medical professionals to help with diagnosis. This diagnosis is helpful in accessing funding and appropriate services and supports.

The neurodiversity movement is a recent evolution from the medical model of autism that defines autism as a “disorder”. The neurodiversity movement views autism as a “difference” to be accepted and supported and allows for discussion and individuality in supports and accommodations ^{vii viii}.

Many autistic self-advocates say that understanding and participating in the neurodiversity movement can support the mental health of autistic people in your community; however, it’s ultimately up to you how you choose to talk about your autism. If you’re not comfortable talking about your preferences in this way, it can be helpful to ask a trusted person or ally to speak up for you.

Neurodiversity:

Represents the diversity of the human mind ^{ix}.

Neurodiversity Paradigm:

A perspective that emphasizes that there is no “normal” or “healthy” way of thinking or behaving. It encourages people to view neurodiversity as a natural and beneficial human phenomenon ^x.

Neurodivergent:

Describes people who have differences in how their brain works, compared to the dominant, cultural “norm” ^{xi}. This means they have different strengths and challenges compared to people who do not have these differences ^{xii}.

Potential benefits of identifying as neurodivergent and being accepting of an autistic identity ^{xiii xiv}:

- Higher self-esteem
- Less likely to experience mental health concerns
- Positive sense of self
- Better understanding of individual needs and accommodations
- Improved sense of community
- Less likely to “mask”

Activity: Understanding How the Neurodiversity Movement Impacts You

Goal: To understand ways to join the neurodiversity movement to promote your mental health.

Activity Information:

Joining the neurodiversity movement can seem scary and like a lot of work. But it doesn't have to be. No one is expecting you to start a podcast or YouTube account or go attempt public speaking to educate the public about autism. If you want to do that, that's great! But if not, that is ok too! Being a part of the neurodiversity movement means beginning to understand yourself and your experiences differently.

“ Maybe you thought that you were the only one who had to look up every slang word on urban dictionary, being a part of the neurodiversity movement will tell you that nope, so many people have no idea what half the cards in the Cards Against Humanity deck are. There are more people just like you than you'd think.

- Moira Robertson, Autistic adult ^{xii} and Co-Author ”

Some simple, less time-consuming ways of joining the neurodiversity movement could be doing research about how your autism specifically affects you. This toolkit is a great start whether you intended it to be or not. Another way could be watching other autistic people's podcasts, YouTube channels, or TikTok accounts. Or read some books about or written by autistic people, there is a book list for just that.

But the most important and possibly the hardest part; just try being you, all of you. Embrace your stimming, interests, the same pair of pants you should probably wash more often, and you just might learn that it is not as scary as it seems.

Self-Reflection Questions:

1. What is one thing you wish someone who is not autistic knew about your autism?
2. Who do you want to share this with?
3. What is one way you could share this with them?
4. What else would you like to learn about autism? Where could you find this information?
5. Do you follow any other autistic people on social media?
6. Have you seen a character in the media that really resonates with you? Why is that? Are they identified as being autistic?

For other ideas, you can access the [How to be an Ally to the Autistic Community](#) toolkit.

Self-Advocacy

Audience:
Autistic Youth
and Adults



Activity: Understanding Body Cues

Background: Emotions are hard to understand. They get even harder to understand when you are experiencing an intense emotion. Autistic people especially struggle with these intense emotions. Happiness is more intense, and sadness is more intense. When someone asks you in the moment to identify what you are feeling, sometimes your feelings are so strong that all you can say in response is “I don’t know”. This is because sometimes you really don’t know! Trying to tell the difference between them can sometimes make those feelings even more intense.

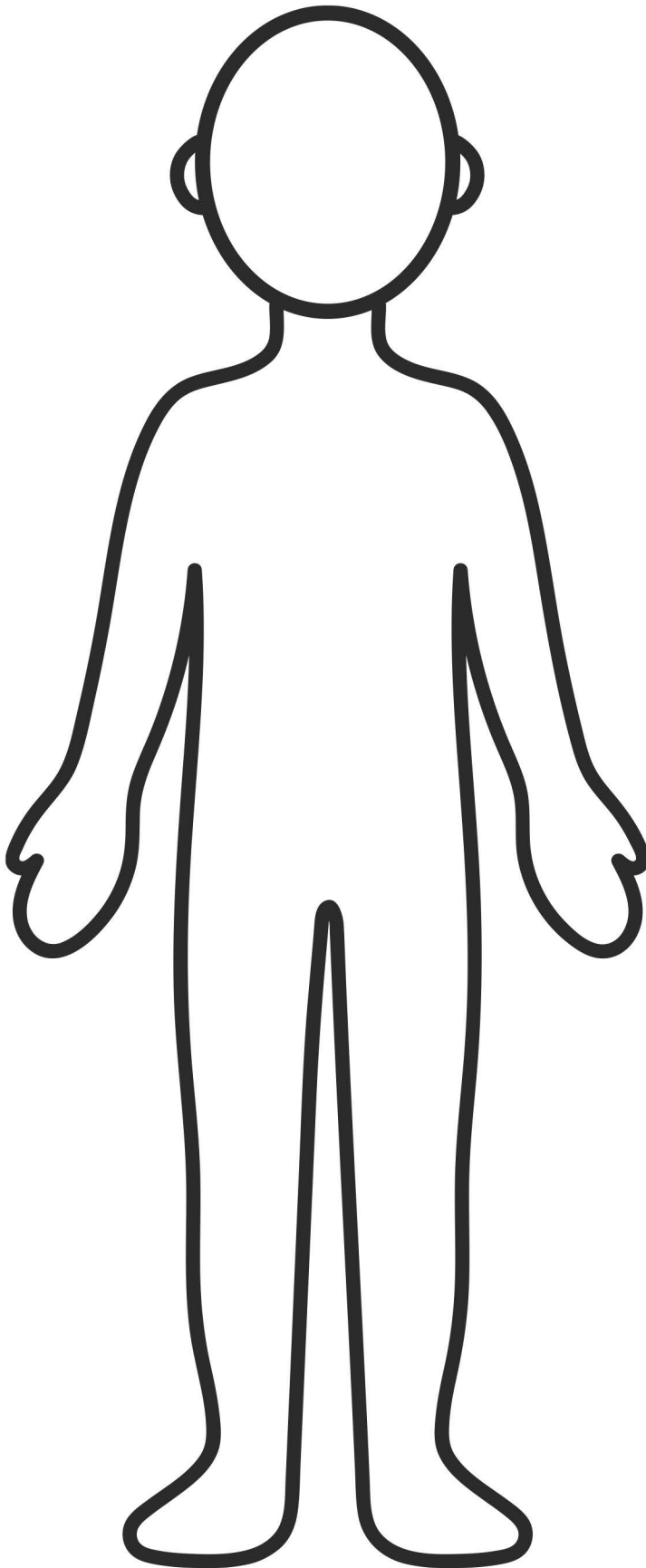
One way that you can start to learn what is going on and what you are feeling is through this thing called ‘body cues’. Body cues are hints your body gives you on what emotion you might be feeling in a moment. Understanding these and their corresponding emotions can help build a strong foundation for self-regulation. It eliminates the uncertainty of what is happening.

Goal: To understand your personal body cues for each emotion to begin identifying and developing strategies you can use to support intense emotions in a positive manner.

Activity Information:

1. Draw a picture of a person or print the attached picture of a person.
2. Make a list of emotions and assign them each a colour.
3. For ideas on different emotions you can access the [Everyday Speech- Bingo](#) game.
4. On the picture of the person, label or colour where in your body you feel that emotion and what it feels like. For example, your palms are sweaty when you are angry so you may put red lines or circles on the person’s hands.
5. Continue with each emotion you listed.
6. Post your picture somewhere visible to you or put it somewhere you can find it easily for when you need a reminder.

Activity: Understanding Body Cues



Example:

HAPPY

Colour

Emotion







Activity: Understanding Body Cues

Hints to Ensure Success:

- Use as many unique ways of describing feelings as you would like. Your emotions and how you feel them are as unique as you are. There is no right or wrong answer for how you are feeling.
- It's ok to not know the name of an emotion, or how it makes your physical body feel. This is a way to start learning.
- Once you make a body outline, put it in easily accessible places so you can reference it. Put it up in your bedroom or a space you spend a lot of time in. You could maybe take some photos and make a widget on your phone or tablet!

Possible Variations:

- If drawing isn't something accessible or interesting to you, you could talk or think about each emotion and the associated part of your body, rather than labeling a picture.
- You could also try an actual picture of yourself that you can label instead of a blank drawing or outline.

Self-Reflection Questions:

For each emotion you identify, think about:

1. What are some things that might happen before you feel this way?
2. What is one thing you can do when you feel this way?
3. Is there anyone who you can talk to when you feel this way? Who is that person? How will you reach out to them to talk to them? (i.e., social media? Phone? Email? In person?)
4. Is it possible to feel that physical feeling in your body when you are not feeling that specific emotion? What else might cause you to feel that way? Are there other emotions that might cause the same feeling in your body?

For more information and access to a virtual mental health promotion course based on the fundamentals of cognitive behaviour therapy, access the [Living Life to the Full](#) course adapted for autistic adults.

Activity: Creating a Sensory Support Profile

Background: Autistic people have sensory differences including over- or under-responsiveness to sensory input.^{xv} Service providers like Occupational Therapists may suggest strategies and supports to help with sensory differences that may cause discomfort and/or affect someone's ability to participate in daily activities.^{xvi} Self-advocates and other autistics may also offer suggestions about what helps them with sensory needs.

Definitions:

Over-responsiveness (“hyper-responsive”) means that someone experiences sensations MORE than others. They may become easily overwhelmed with sounds, lights, smells, touch, tastes, and thus may **avoid** sensory input. For example, someone may be a picky eater and avoid certain textures or tastes, they may be sensitive to certain fabrics or tags on their clothing, or they may become overstimulated by loud sounds or bright lights in their environment.

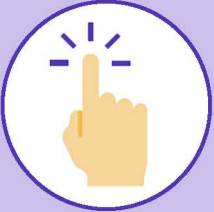
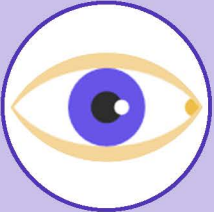
Under-responsiveness (“hypo-responsive”) means that someone experiences sensations LESS than others. They may not respond the way we might expect to things like pain or temperature or other sensations. Often, people who are “under-responsive” may **seek out** sensory input. For example, someone may “stim” in different ways such as making noises or spinning. They may seek visual input by lining things up or looking at different things from different angles.

Goal: To create a sensory support profile that you can share with your workplace, teacher, community setting, volunteer supervisor, family member, friend, or anyone else who may benefit from understanding more about you and your sensory needs.

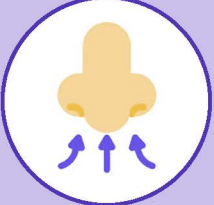
Activity: Creating a Sensory Support Profile

Activity Information:

1. Read about different strategies that might support each of your sensory needs.

Sense	Supports for “Hyper” responsive (suggestions for those who experience sensation MORE than others)	Supports for “Hypo” responsive (suggestions for those who experience sensation LESS than others)
 Taste	• Low-taste foods like crackers or bread • Small variety of foods and similar meals • Ask your Doctor about Nutrition drinks/ supplements to provide adequate nutrition	• Having spicy foods for meals • Having a large variety of food • Having flavored chewelry to help with eating non-food items
 Touch	• Remove tags from clothing. • Purchase the same items of clothes in different colors. • Use tactile stim tools (fidget cubes, sensory boards, stress balls) • Wash hands regularly • Wear gloves or use tools to limit direct contact with textures that may cause discomfort. • Look for alternative products: for example, shampoo bars over liquid shampoo.	• Use tactile stim tools (fidget cubes, sensory boards, stress balls) • Wash hands regularly
 Sight	• Sunglasses • Turn off overhead lights and use ‘fairy’/ holiday lights • Sleep mask • Blackout curtains	• Glasses • Bright colorful lights • Watching TV or YouTube • Lava lamps

Activity: Creating a Sensory Support Profile

Sense	Supports for “Hyper” responsive (suggestions for those who experience sensation MORE than others)	Supports for “Hypo” responsive (suggestions for those who experience sensation LESS than others)
 Smell	• Scent-free zones	• Scented candles / essential oils
 Hearing	• Earplugs or noise-canceling headphones • Provide notice before using loud objects like blenders	• Listening to the same song loudly on repeat • Using technology such as an Fm system in school to filter out background noise • Listening to videos or audio books in the background
Proprioception (sense that helps your brain understand your body’s muscle and joint movements):	• Light blankets for sleeping • Soft surfaces • Pillows on chairs	• Weighted blankets/ lap pads / stuffed animals • Pencils grips • Use of computer/keyboard for writing/recording - Walking aids
Vestibular (sense that helps your body understand where it is in space, including balance, movement, gravity, and head position):	• Rocking chairs • Swings	• Rocking chairs • Swings
Interoception (sense of body’s awareness of internal symptoms, including knowing when you’re hungry, tired, etc.):	• Specific bathroom and eating times • Meal plans	• Phone notifications and day Calendars • Specific bathroom and eating times • Dressing in lots of layers to help with temperature regulation

Activity: Creating a Sensory Support Profile

2. Create your own sensory profile:
 - a. Fill out the below template with strategies that you think would help you in each of the sections.
 - b. Screenshot or print off the page to have with you when you need it.
3. Share sensory support profile with anyone who may benefit from learning more about your sensory needs.

Possible Variations:

- Create your own chart to match your personality and needs directly.
- Maybe decorate or colour it.
- Make it as a widget on your phone or tablet.
- You don't have to fill in every section if you don't understand what you need for that section, that is ok!

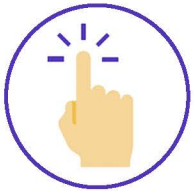
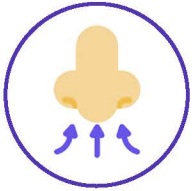
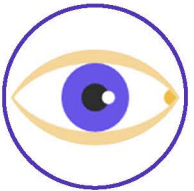
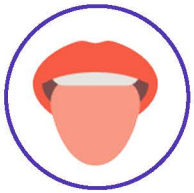
Self-Reflection Questions:

1. What is something that you currently do to support your sensory needs?
2. What is one person you think you could share your sensory profile with?
3. Do you have a sensory space set up in your own space to accommodate your needs in your own space?

Activity: Creating a Sensory Support Profile

My Sensory Profile

What sensory strategies are helpful for you?



Other senses:

- Proprioception
- Vestibular
- Interoception

Activity: Creating a 'One-Page Profile'

Background: When people talk about 'All About Me' documents or forms, we often think that this is only relevant for children. However, more and more organizations and programs are encouraging people to create one-page profiles that outline what they may need in different settings (for example in a workplace). The idea is to support a culture that focuses on the individual person and what makes sense in their life.

Goal: To create a one-page profile that you can share with your workplace, employer, teacher, community setting, volunteer supervisor, or anyone else that may benefit from understanding more about you and your needs.

Activity Information:

1. Decide which titles/questions you would like your one-page profile to answer.
2. Use a computer, device (i.e. smartphone or tablet) or a pen and paper to write out the answers to these questions.
3. Input your questions and answers into this template:

AutismONTARIO

Identifying Information:



Name:



Preferred Name/Nickname:

What are your preferred pronouns (eg. he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.): _____

How do you like to be greeted? (Check all that apply)

☐

Verbal

☐

Hand shake

☐

Sign language

☐

Other: _____

Communication:

How do you like to communicate? (Check all that apply)

☐

Verbal

☐

Written

☐

Sign language

☐

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Any additional information you'd like to share: _____

How do you like to receive information and instructions? (Check all that apply)

☐

Verbal

☐

Written

☐

Visuals/Pictures

☐

Small chunks of information

☐

Digital media

☐

Speak at a slower pace

☐

One step at a time

☐

Pause between each step/instruction

Any additional information you'd like to share: _____

Strengths and Needs:

What are you good at?

What activities or situations do you find challenging?

What sensory experiences or sensations (smell, touch, hear, taste, see) do you enjoy?

What sensory experiences or sensations (smell, touch, hear, taste, see) do you avoid?

When you are feeling overstimulated (i.e., irritable, drained, upset)? What helps you to feel better?

How can other people help you when you feel overwhelmed? (e.g., give you space, bring you water, be present with you but not talking, etc.)

Is there anything else you want people to know about you? (e.g., values, beliefs, preferences, special interests, etc.)

Trusted Person Contact Information:



Name:



Telephone number:

Activity: Creating a 'One-Page Profile'

Hints to Ensure Success:

- Take your time: Sometimes we can feel “stuck” answering questions about ourselves and our needs. It’s important to slow down and make sure the information that we choose to share is helpful for others, and feels comfortable to share.
- Be creative: If a written template doesn’t feel right for you, you can voice record it, or put together a PowerPoint or video to share this information in a different way.

Possible Variations:

- You may need help to answer these questions and that’s okay! You can ask a family member, friend, neighbour, or community support to help you explore what information you want to include. They can even do the writing for you.
- You may not want to answer all these questions, and that’s okay too! You can choose the ones that you think help you best represent yourself.

Self-Reflection Questions:

1. Was this a helpful exercise? How did it feel to identify your strengths and needs in this way?
2. Who do you want to share this profile with? Who do you not want to share this with?

Promoting Positive Relationships

Audience:
Autistic Youth
and Adults



Activity: Relationship Stoplight Game

Background: Understanding and navigating relationships can be hard for autistic people and positive relationships are important to supporting positive mental health. It is difficult to understand when a relationship is good for you, bad for you, or you aren't quite sure either way. The purpose of this activity is to identify some scenarios that you may encounter while navigating relationships that might help you identify how you feel about each one. This activity will look at boundaries, one-sided relationships, friendship skills, and relationship cycles.

Goal: To gain insight into what relationships situations may be positive or negative.

Activity Information:

1. Use the template provided to create scenario cards. Notice that some of the scenario cards have been left blank to give you a place to add your own personal scenarios.
2. Read each scenario.
3. Sort the scenarios into what you feel are red light [STOP] relationships, yellow light [PROCEED WITH CAUTION] relationships, and green light [GO] relationships.
4. Discuss with someone or think about why you placed the relationship scenarios in each pile.
5. Identify some examples of relationships in your own life that fit into each pile. These can be past or present relationships.

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INSTRUCTIONS:

Print and cut out these cards. Sort the situations into comfortable and safe (green light), ones that are a bit more worrisome or you want to talk more about (yellow light), and ones that make you feel uncomfortable and unsafe (red light).

**You're afraid
when you
disagree with
the person.**

**The person
criticizes you
and people you
care about.**

**The person
threatens to
hurt you.**

**The person
hurts you
emotionally or
physically.**

**The person
pressures you
to do things
you don't want
to do.**

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You're nervous to tell the person things because you're worried that they will tell other people what you said.

The person makes fun of you.

The person doesn't make plans to spend time with you.

When you ask to spend time with the person, they always make excuses not to.

You feel happy when you're with the person.

The person respects and cares about your feelings.

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**The person
doesn't care
about your
opinions.**

**The person tells
you about their
feelings.**

**The person only
wants to talk
about
themselves.**

**The person is
excited about
things that you
are excited
about.**

**The person
makes all
decisions for
you when
you're with
them.**

**The person
doesn't respect
your
boundaries.**

Activity: Relationship Stoplight Game

**The person
embarrasses
you on purpose.**

**The person gets
jealous when
you spend time
with other
people.**

**The person
always needs to
know where
you are and
what you're
doing.**

**The person
trusts you.**

**The person
admits their
mistakes.**

**The person
accepts
responsibility
for their
actions.**

Activity: Relationship Stoplight Game

The person encourages you to follow your dreams.

The person is honest with you and doesn't keep secrets from you.

The person makes you feel safe and important.

The person keeps their promises.

The person is curious about your thoughts and opinions.

You share interests.

Activity: Relationship Stoplight Game

The person makes you feel uncomfortable.

The person gets mad when you don't respond right away.

You help each other grow as people.

The person forces you to change things about yourself.

The person compliments you.

The person is willing to talk to you about any conflict you might have had with them.

Activity: Relationship Stoplight Game

Something just feels wrong.

The person isn't interested in your traditions.

The person makes you feel guilty.

GREEN

Comfortable and safe situations.

YELLOW

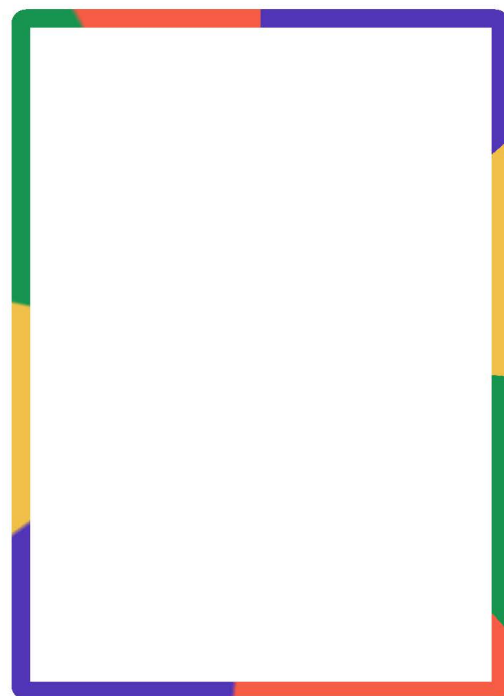
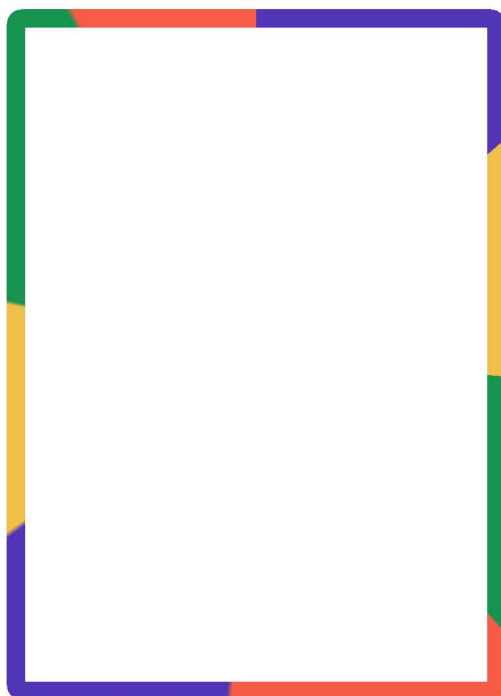
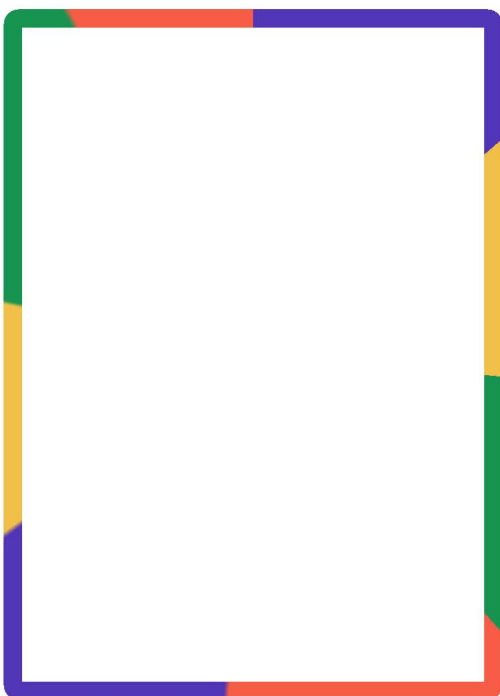
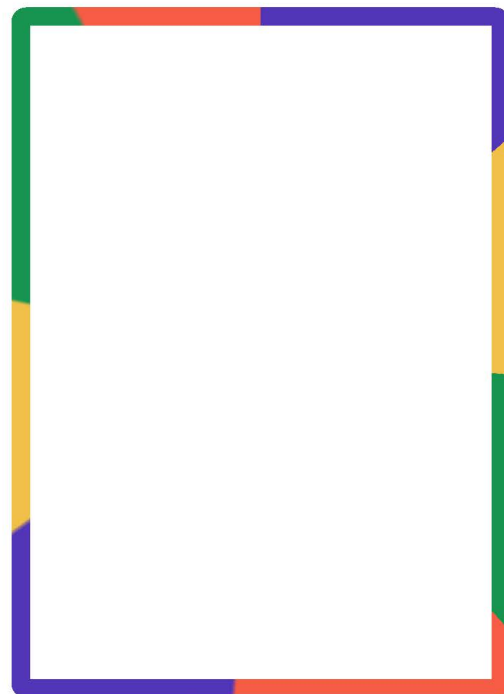
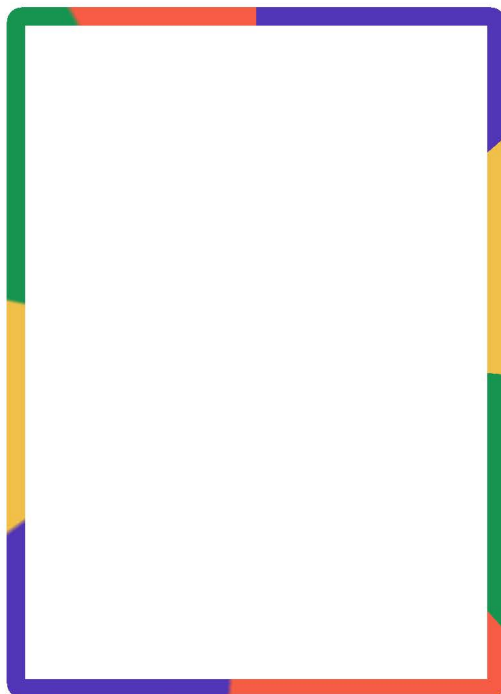
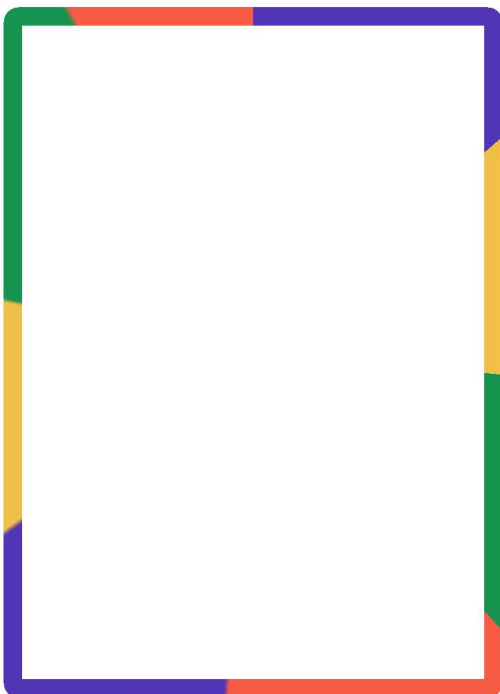
Worriesome situations.

RED

Uncomfortable and unsafe situations.

Activity: Relationship Stoplight Game

Use these blank cards to add your own personal scenarios.



Activity: Relationship Stoplight Game

Hints to Ensure Success:

- It's okay to move the scenarios to a different pile after you discuss them. Relationships are always evolving and changing and what might be a [GO] relationship one day, may change to a [STOP] relationship if something changes.

Possible Variations:

- Change it from a stoplight to a different system that makes sense to you. If the stop light is too complicated of a concept, change it to "Yes/No/Maybe" or to "Is this something that would make me feel good?"
- Modify the cards to be more specific. For example, "likes to ask me questions about Pokemon" or "invites me to sit with them in class".
- Role play the scenarios and identify emotions when involved in the scenario.

Discussion and/or Self-Reflection Questions:

- What made it difficult to identify which scenarios were [STOP], [PROCEED WITH CAUTION], or [GO]?
- What made you put certain scenarios into which pile?
- What events or actions might happen in the relationship to allow some of those red lights to switch to yellow lights or green lights?
- What events or actions might happen in the relationship to cause some of those green lights to switch to yellow lights or red lights?
- How do the green light relationships make you feel about yourself? How do these relationships support your mental health?



I use games like Cards Against Humanity and Exploding Kittens to bridge gaps in connection with friends and with new people. What's an activity, game, or event you can use to bridge connections?

Smartphone “Apps” Supporting Mental Health in Adults

App Name	App Description
Headspace	Reviews meditation and mindfulness exercises that will help reduce feelings of stress.
Self-Help Anxiety Management	A range of self-help methods that work to reduce anxiety by challenging anxiety provoking thoughts and incorporating relaxation techniques.
MoodTools- Depression Aid	Uses CBT strategies to challenge the inaccurate thoughts and provides information on behaviours that may work to reduce the intensity of distress.
Woebot	Uses CBT to deliver scripted responses to users. It is a ‘chat’ program that offers insights and skills to help the client grow into their best self.
Calm	Soothing bedtime stories, meditation, and relaxation to promote sleep.
Molehill Mountain	App that helps autistic people to understand and self-manage anxiety.
Finch Care	Daily self-care activities used to promote the health of your digital “pet”.



Want to try something new and maybe a little different to help with sleep? Check out the Pokemon Sleep app and try to “catch em all.”

Other Self-Guided Mental Health Supports

Self-Guided Workbooks Supporting Mental Health in Adults

- Mind Over Mood: Change How you Feel by Changing the Way You Think by Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky
- Calming the Emotional Storm: Using Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills to Manage Your Emotions and Balance Your Life by Sheri Van Dijk
- The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety: A Guide to Breaking Free from Anxiety, Phobias, and Worry Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy by John Forsyth
- Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Self-Guided Workbooks Supporting Mental Health in Children and Youth

- What to Do When you Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety by Dawn Huebner
- Mindfulness for Teen Anxiety: A Workbook for Overcoming Anxiety at Home, at School, and Everywhere Else by Christopher Willard
- The Anxiety Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help you Deal with Anxiety and Worry by Lisa M. Schab
- The ACT Workbook for Teens with OCD: Unhook Yourself and Live Life to the Full by Patricia Zurita

Books for Autistic Youth about Autism

- Different Not Less by Chloe Hayden *
- The Spectrum Girls Survival Guide by Siena Castellon *
- The Awesome Autistic Go To Guide by Yenn Purkis* and Tanya Masterman***
- A Different Kind of Normal by Abigail Balfe *

*Story was written by an autistic person

**Story was written by the caregiver of an autistic person.

For book ideas for children and youth, check out the Children's Book Gift Guide 2023 [here](#).



Books for Autistic Adults about Autism

- Neuroqueer Heresies by Nick Walker *
- Funny, You Don't Look Autistic: A Comedian's Guide to Life on the Spectrum by Michael McCreary *
- Can't Read, Can't Write, Here is My Book by Michael Jacques *
- What I Mean When I Say I'm Autistic by Annie Kotowicz*
- I Overcame My Autism and All I Got Was This Lousy Anxiety Disorder by Sarah Kurchak*
- Pretending to Be Normal by Leanne Holliday Willey*
- Be Different by John Elder Robison*
- Looking after your Autistic Self: A Personalized Self-Care Approach to Managing Your Sensory and Emotional-Wellbeing by Niamh Garvey*

Fiction for Autistic Adults and Teens

- A Kind of Spark by Elle McNicoll*
- The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Nighttime by Mark Haddon
- Shouting at the Rain by Lynda Mullaly Hunt



To find out if these books are available to be borrowed, you may want to consider the [AIDE Canada Library](#), a free service for all Canadians. Their goal is to provide credible, high-quality information on autism and related disabilities.

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Resources

Autism Ontario Webinars and Resources:

- [Living Life to the Full](#)
- [Strong Minds Through Active Bodies - Online Course](#)

Other Online Resources:

- [Mental Health Literacy Guide for Autism](#)
- [CAMH - Patient and Family Learning Centre](#)
- [All About Autism and Mental Health - Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre](#)
- [Everyday Speech - Emotions Bingo](#)

AIDE Canada Resources

- [Impossible Conference - Research Collection](#)
- [Peer Advice Video Series](#)

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