Neurodiversity in the Workplace

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Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Opportunity
Michigan Rehabilitation Services

Sharlene Organ, ADAC, CBSP
organs1@michigan.gov
616-240-1993

OBJECTIVES

- Increase knowledge related to Individuals with Disabilities (IDW)
- Additional insight specific to neurodiversity in the workplace
- Understand essentials, strategies, and considerations for and accessibility for all abilities
- Strengthen connections with diverse groups through collaborative relationships with external partners

MRS





MRS - Business Network Division

MA in Counseling Psychology

ADA Certified

Small business owner

Guard, Case Worker, Therapist, Counselor, Consultant

ID as PWD, Child with Disability, Daughter of Disabled Vet

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Why Neurodiversity?

Advocates for inclusive and nonjudgmental language

Natural variation in brain function

Communication styles and social understanding differ

Interacting with the world in different ways of thinking, learning and behaving

Neurodiverse Basics

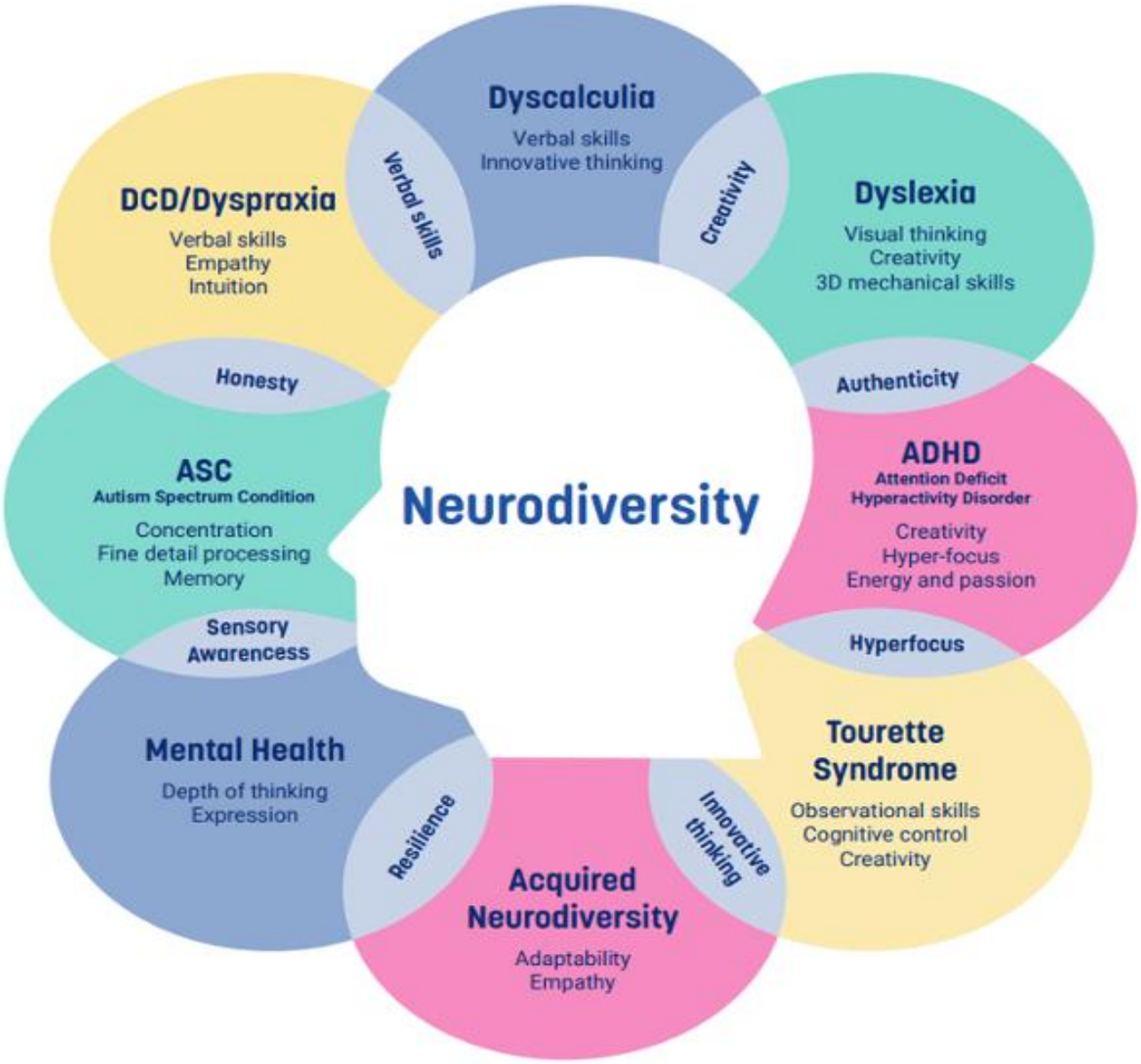
Neuro – Nerves, Brain

Diversity – Condition of having or being composed of different elements

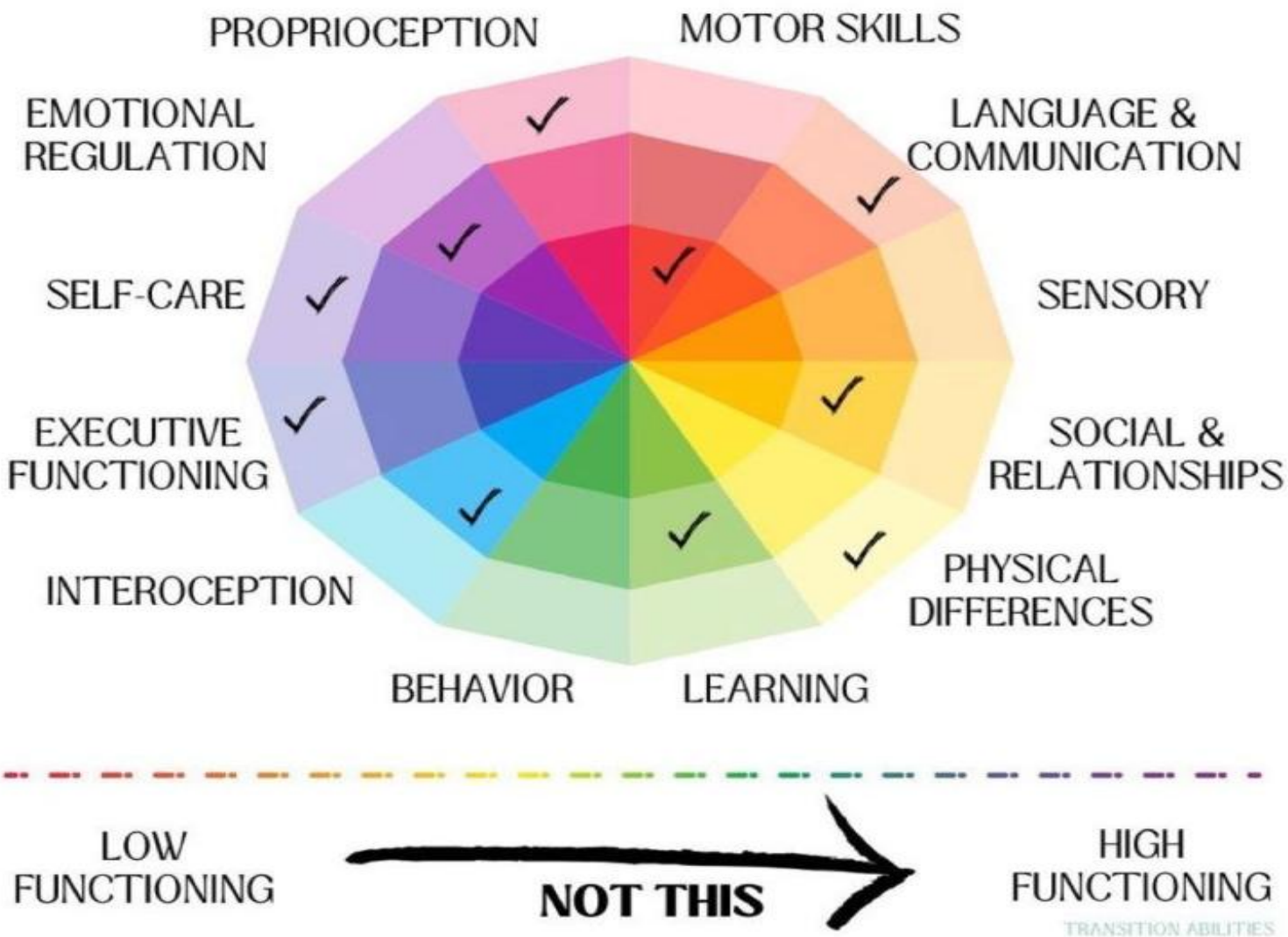
Neuro Typical

Neuro Divergent

Get to know the person first

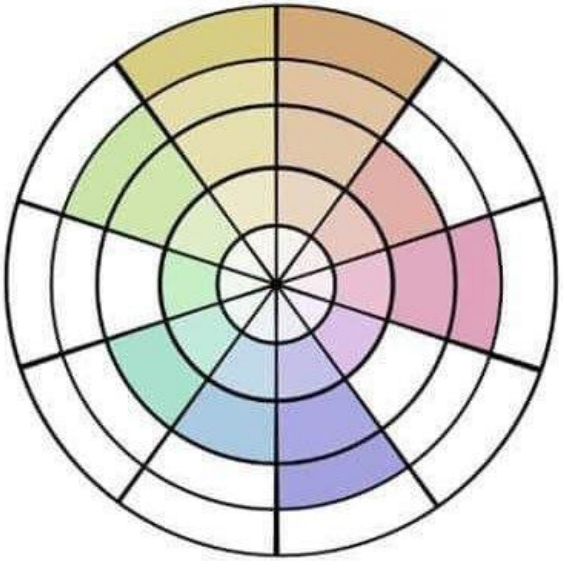


What is Neurodiversity?

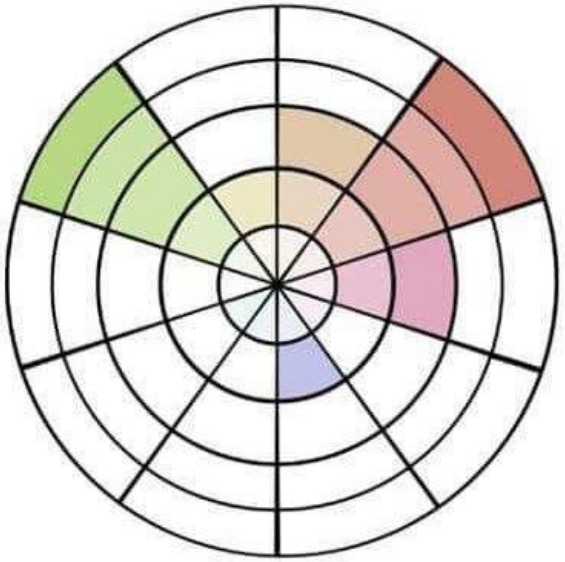


“If you’ve met one person with autism, you have met one person with autism.” Dr. Stephen Shore

One person with Autism



Another person with Autism



Same amount of autism, but different characteristics.

Focus on the persons strengths for success in the workplace.

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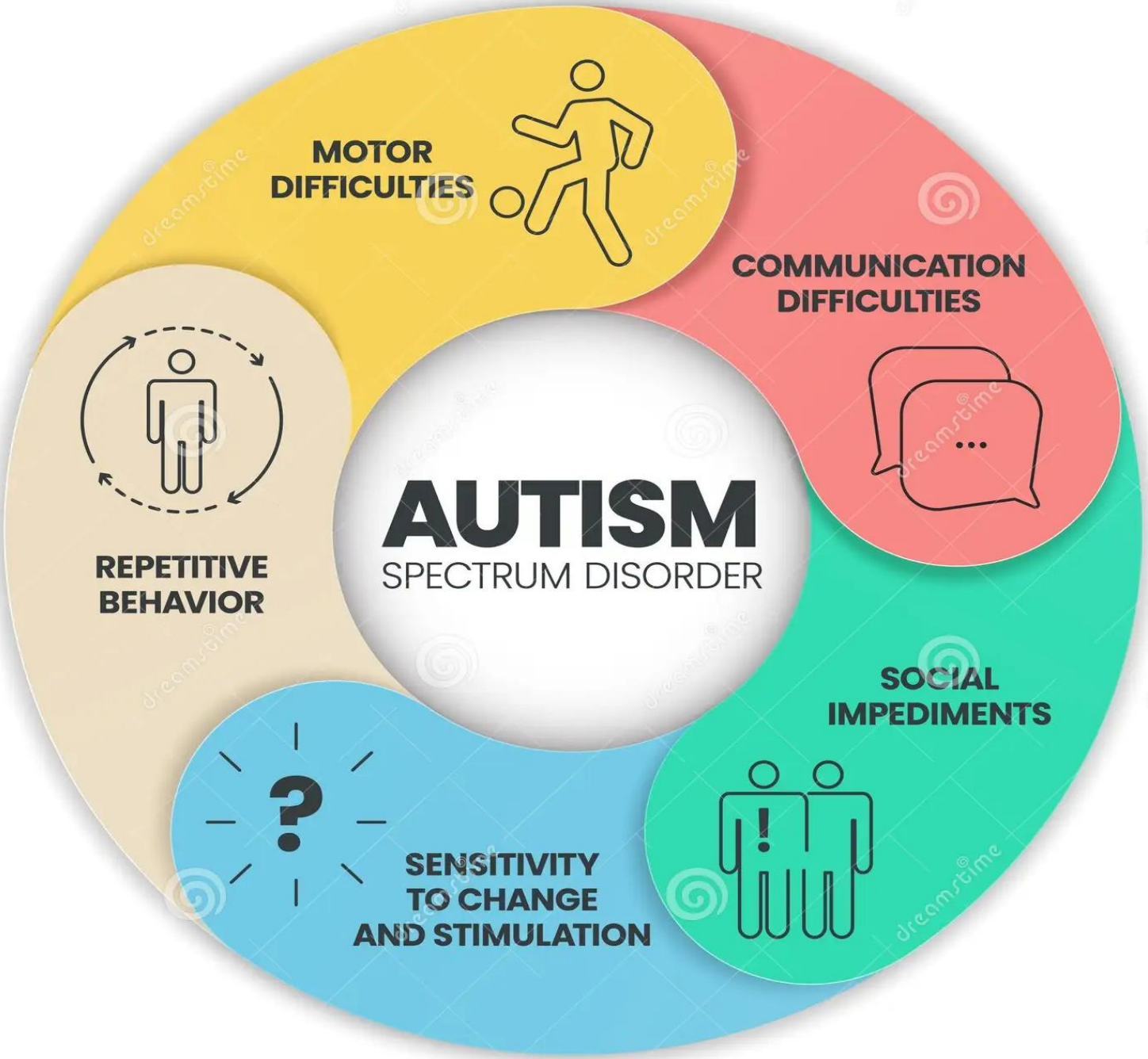
MOTOR DIFFICULTIES
COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES
AUTISM
SPECTRUM DISORDER
REPETITIVE BEHAVIOR
SOCIAL IMPEDIMENTS
SENSITIVITY TO CHANGE AND STIMULATION

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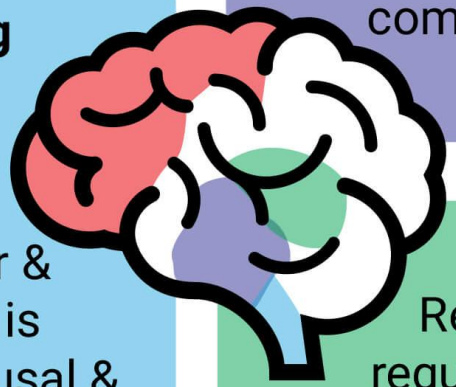
ADHD

How ADHD Affects The Brain

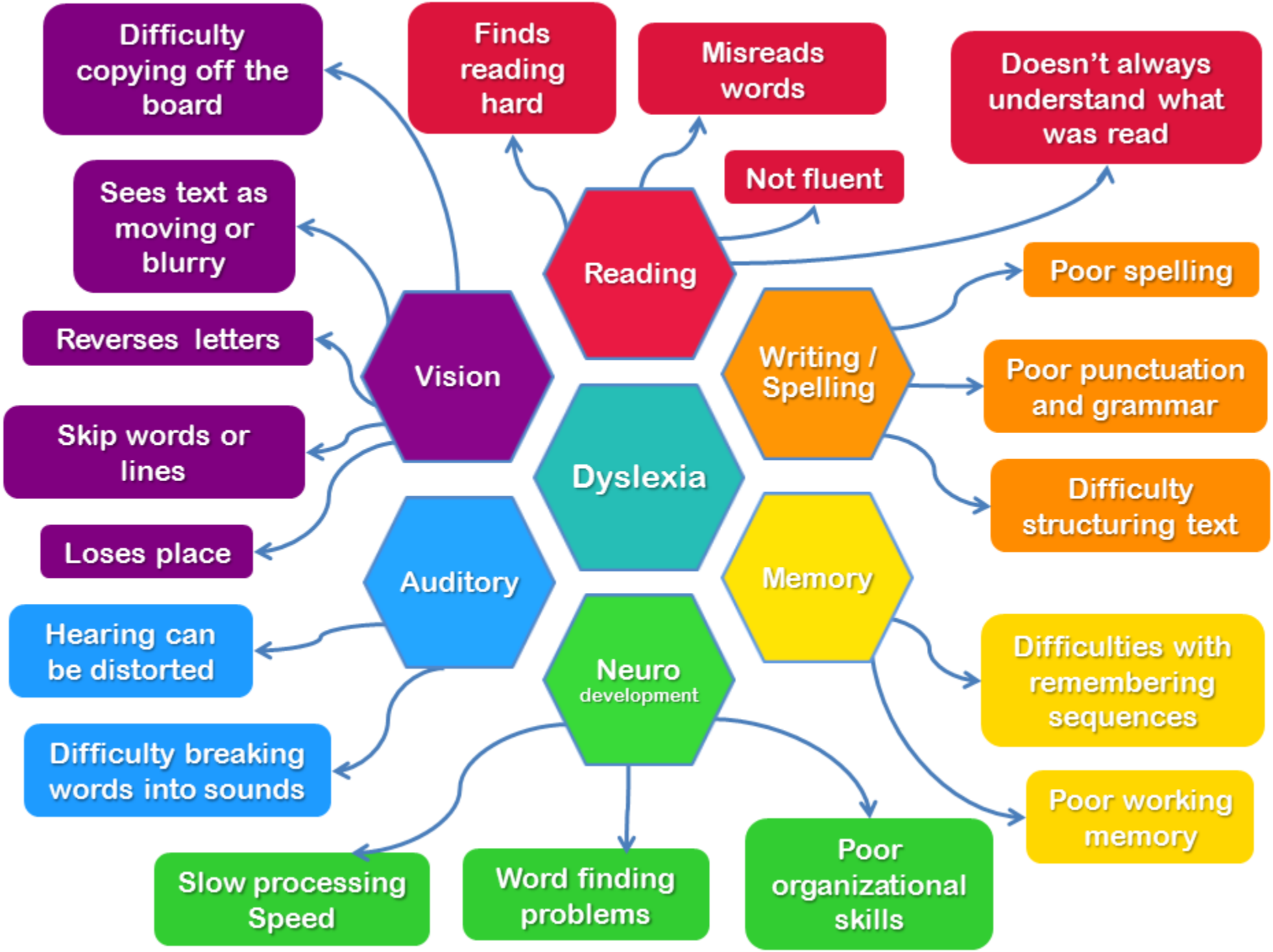
Prefrontal Cortex:
Responsible for organization, cognitive flexibility, self-control, & maintaining attention.

Basal Ganglia:
Helps regulate communication within the brain. Responsible for motor control, facilitating movement, and inhibiting competing movements.

Reticular Activating System:
Major relay system among the many pathways that enter & leave the brain that is responsible for arousal & consciousness.
A deficiency in this region can cause inattention, impulsivity, or hyperactivity.



Limbic System:
Responsible for regulating emotions.
A deficiency in this region might result in restlessness, inattention, or emotional volatility.

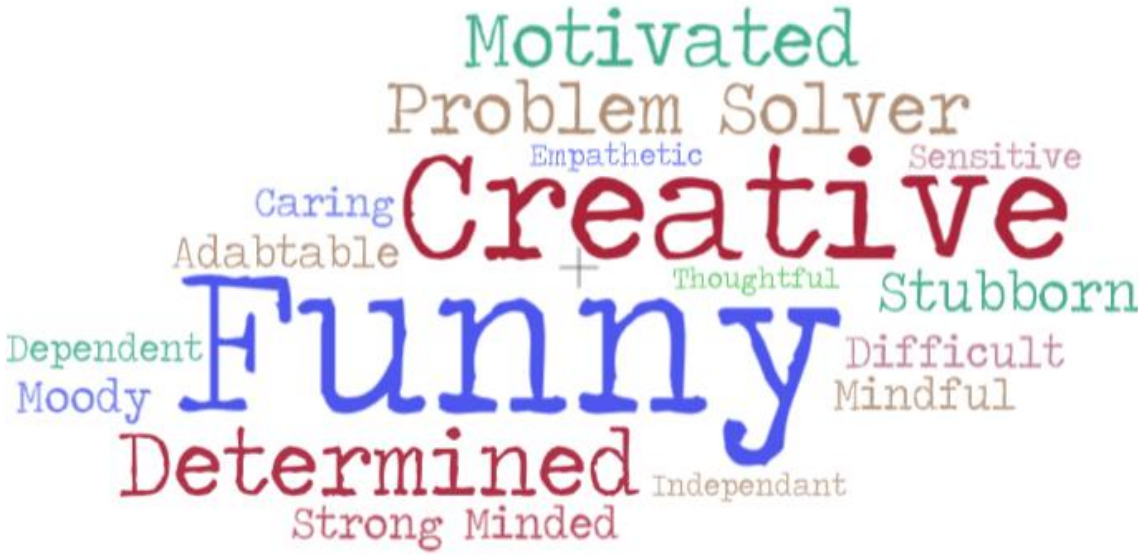

Dyslexia
Reading
Finds reading hard
Misreads words
Not fluent
Doesn't always understand what was read
Writing / Spelling
Poor spelling
Poor punctuation and grammar
Difficulty structuring text
Memory
Difficulties with remembering sequences
Poor working memory
Poor organizational skills
Neuro development
Word finding problems
Slow processing Speed
Auditory
Difficulty breaking words into sounds
Hearing can be distorted
Vision
Loses place
Skip words or lines
Reverses letters
Sees text as moving or blurry
Difficulty copying off the board

Share Your Story at Your Table

- Your name
- Your role
- Place of work
- A person you may know who maybe neurodiverse
- One word description




Coworker
Cousin
Uncle
Sister
Nephew
Coach
Dad
Mom
Grandma
Pastor
Aunt
Grandpa
Friend
Son
Neice
Neighbor
Boss
Brother
Daughter


Motivated
Problem Solver
Empathetic
Sensitive
Caring
Creative
Adabtable
Thoughtful
Stubborn
Funny
Dependent
Difficult
Moody
Mindful
Determined
Independant
Strong Minded

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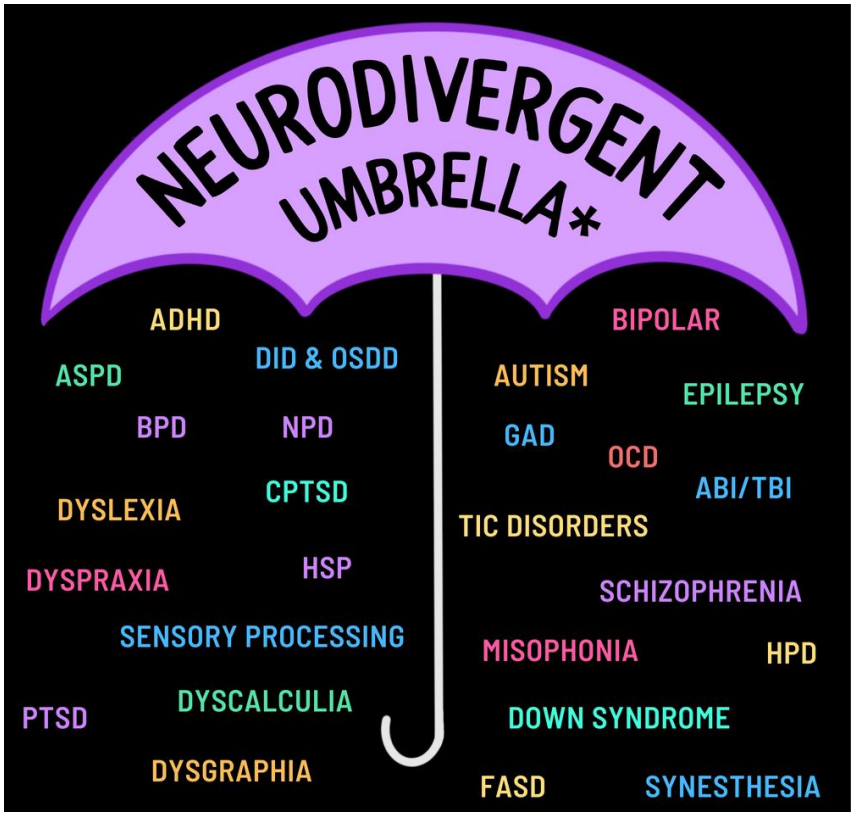
Umbrella of Neurodiversity
Universal Inclusion





Inclusive Communication Toolbox

Use	**Explicit instructions and timeframes**
Avoid	Figure of speech, slang, sarcasm and euphemism
Offer	**Written summaries, notes before meeting**
Normalize	Clarification questions
Use	**Feedback loops to confirm understanding**

Strategies for Success

- Stay focused in your conversation
- Facts before feelings
- Clearly define target/goals/priorities (put in writing)
- Give due date, clearly define time & effort
- Provide boundaries, explain work culture & norms
- Organizational Chart – who to go to for what
- Use different colors for different projects, parts, customer appointments, meetings for team and/or self

Say This Instead of That

Vague → Clear

“Soon” → “By 3 p.m. today”

“Be professional” → “Wear business casual”

“Touch base later” → “Let’s meet at 2 p.m.”

“Don’t cut corners” → “Do it the proper way.”

“Check in when you get here” → “You start at 9 am, check in at 9 am.”

Case Study

Context:
Jordan is a software developer who is autistic. They rely heavily on routines and clear written instructions to navigate daily work. Jordan was recently told during a team meeting not to push code to production without manager approval, the process was not updated in the instructions.

What Happens:
Jordan, working on their assigned task, completes a bug fix and pushes it to production—believing they're being proactive and helpful, as they've done before. Jordan doesn't remember the verbal update from the meeting where lots of information was shared and nothing was physically updated.

What do you think was the managers reaction?

Case Study

Manager's Reaction:

The manager sees the unauthorized update, storms over, and says loudly:

“We just talked about this! Why do you keep ignoring the rules?!

Jordan freezes, becomes visibly distressed, and doesn’t respond—leading the manager to interpret the silence as defiance.

What do you think was Jordan’s reaction?

Case Study

Jordan's Reaction

Jordan didn't ignore the rule intentionally he didn't fully process or remember the verbal instruction. There was a lot of information presented at the meeting with no written instruction.

Being yelled at in a high-stimulation environment caused Jordan to shutdown, create anxiety, and self doubt. How many other procedures are not fully written?

How could this have been done differently?

How often do you think this happens in the workplace?

Business Benefits for hiring the Neurodiverse

Higher retention rates and lower turnover

Increased attendance, morale and team culture

Stronger customer connections

Increased engagement, productivity and performance

More innovation due to diverse perspectives

Improved problem solving and creativity

Increased revenue

- 1.6 times more revenue, 2.6 net income, 2x higher profit and outperform industry peers in productivity by 25% compared to those with less inclusive practices

Citation: Business.com (2025) Forbes, Minnesota DEED; Australian Human Rights Commission”



QUESTIONS
COMMENTS
CONCERNS

RESOURCES

- **Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS)** – https://www.michigan.gov/leo/bureaus-agencies/mrs
- **Jobs Accommodations Network** – askjan.org/
- **Great Lakes ADA –** ADA Great Lakes Center
- **Autism Alliance of Michigan –** Autism Alliance of Michigan - Help. Hope. Answers. Today.
- **Michigan Autism Council –** www.Michigan.gov/autism/council
- LEO-Employer-Resources – EMAIL: LEO-Employer-Resources@michigan.gov

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

Sharlene Organ

Organs1@michigan.gov

616-240-1993

Facebook **MichTalent**

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