



Rest Spaces

and places

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD



- **The Early Childhood Neurodiversity Affirming Collective**
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Sensory Rest

Active Rest

Mental Rest

Community Rest

Spiritual Rest

Playful Rest

Sleep

Creative Rest

Social Rest

Embody Rest

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Early childhood settings and schools can be powerful spaces for **exercising self-regulation** and energy awareness. Yet, they can also be environments where children experience stress, dysregulation and overwhelm, due to the many social, physical, emotional, cognitive, and sensory demands. It is important that children learn they are **entitled to different kinds of rest**. Embedding rest spaces and practices within daily routines is essential, not only for **wellbeing**, but for **well-doing**.

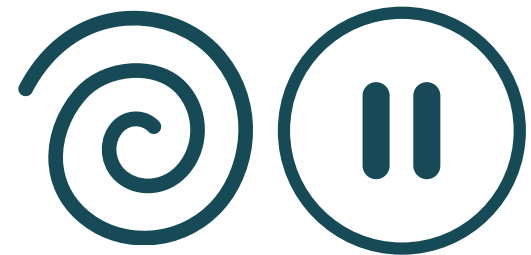


What type of rest do you need?



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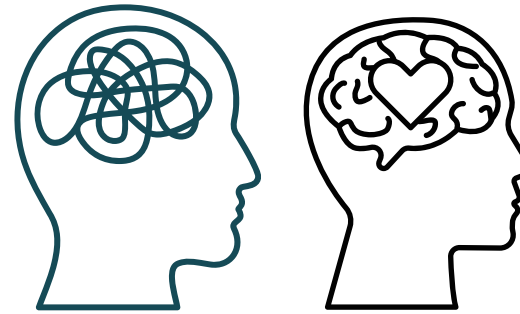
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Sensory Rest



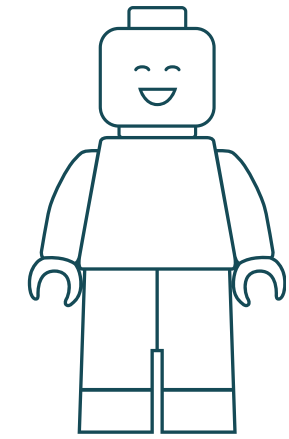
Sleep



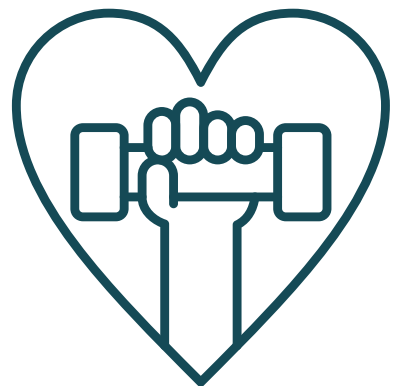
Mental Rest



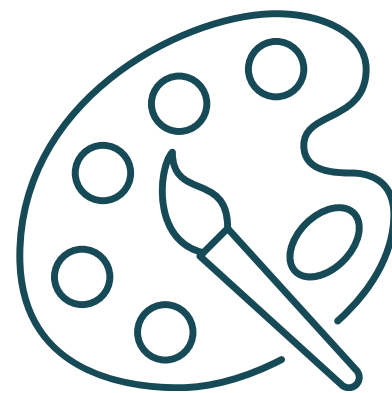
Social Rest



Playful Rest



Active Rest



Creative Rest



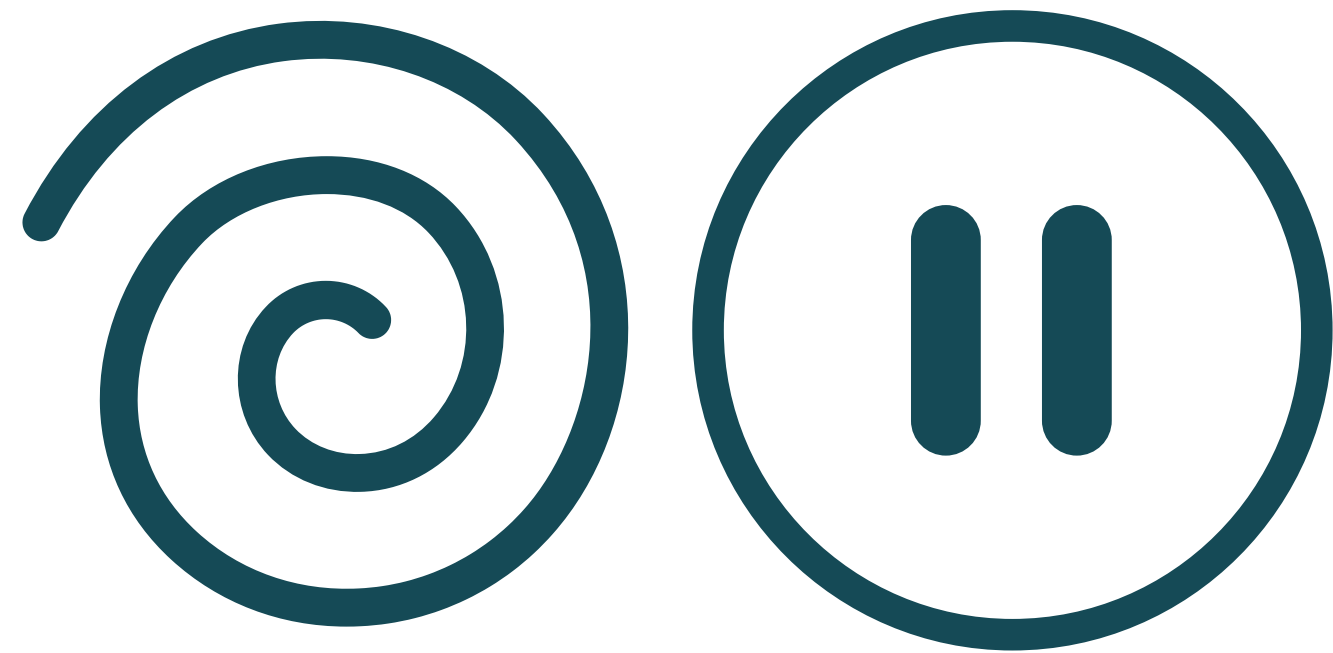
Emotional Rest



Spiritual Rest



Embodiment Rest



Sensory Rest

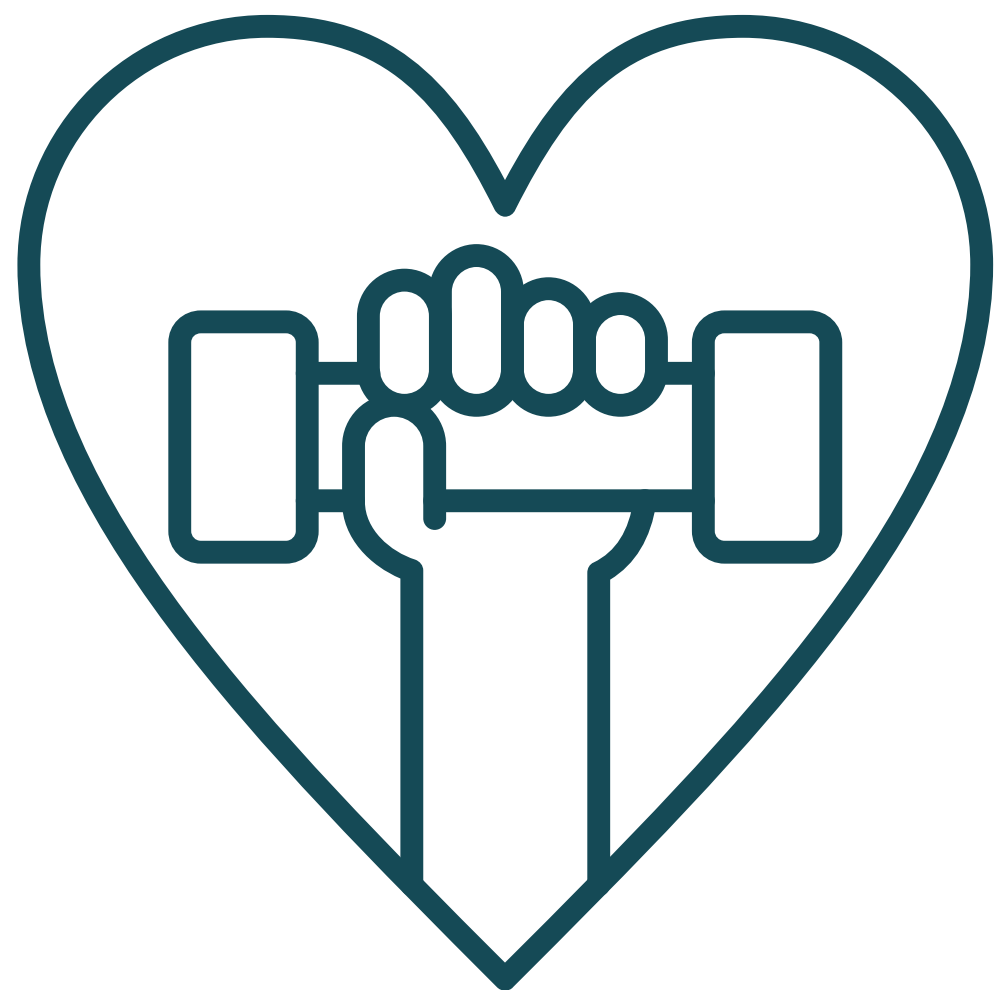


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You could try:

- turning the “big lights” off
- Accessing natural lighting and nature
- Turning off background noise
- Reducing clutter or visual “noise”
- Reducing and limiting language
- Accessing your sensory glimmers
- Listening to low-demand tunes or chill out music
- Sensory dulling such as noise cancelling headphones or resting eyes

Add your own ideas...



Active Rest

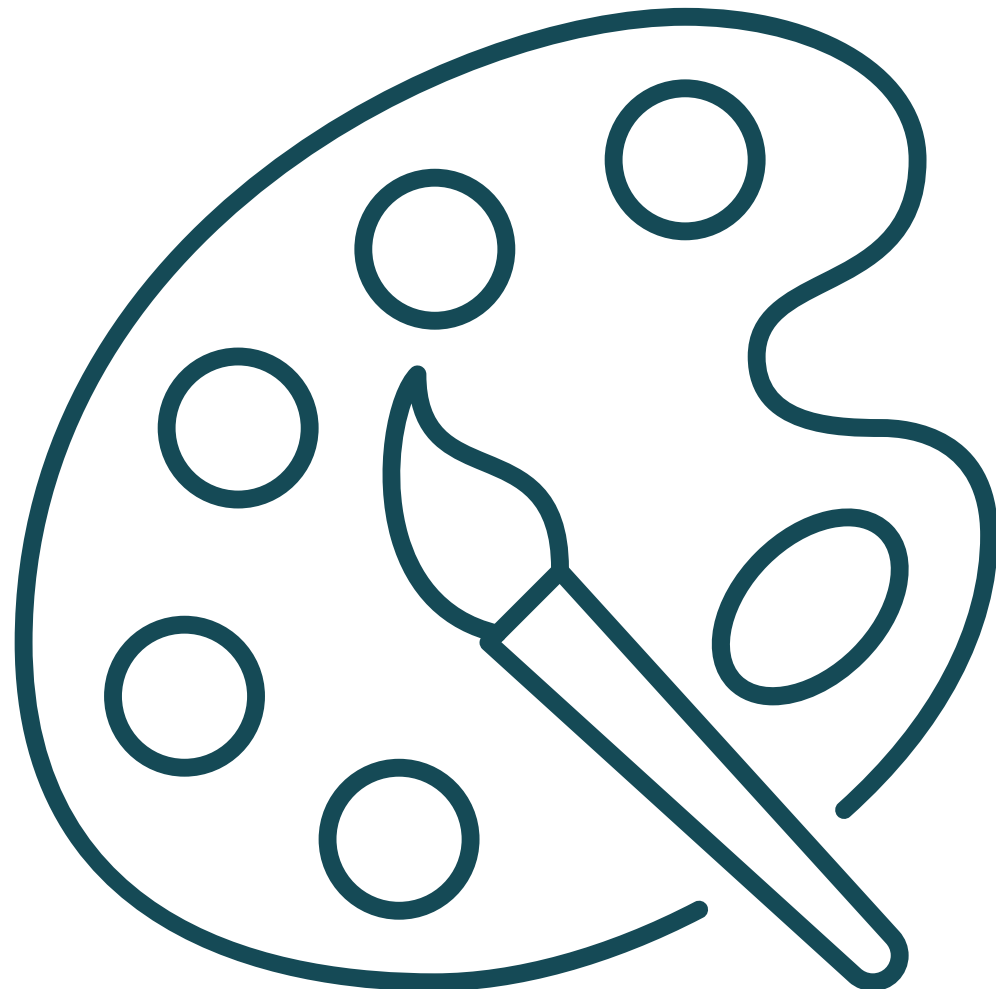


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You could try:

- Being outside in open spaces
- Engaging in heavy work activities
- Dancing
- Listening to high energy tunes
- Doing stretches
- Doing chores that activate proprioception and vestibular sense
- Play
- Repetitive or rhythmic actions

Add your own ideas...



Creative Rest



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You could try:

- Painting
- Sharing a story together
- Engaging with sensory materials in a low demand way, such as rolling play dough
- Story Drawing
- Looking at art books
- Engaging with special interests
- Singing together
- Baking

Add your own ideas...

Z z z z Z Z z z

Sleep

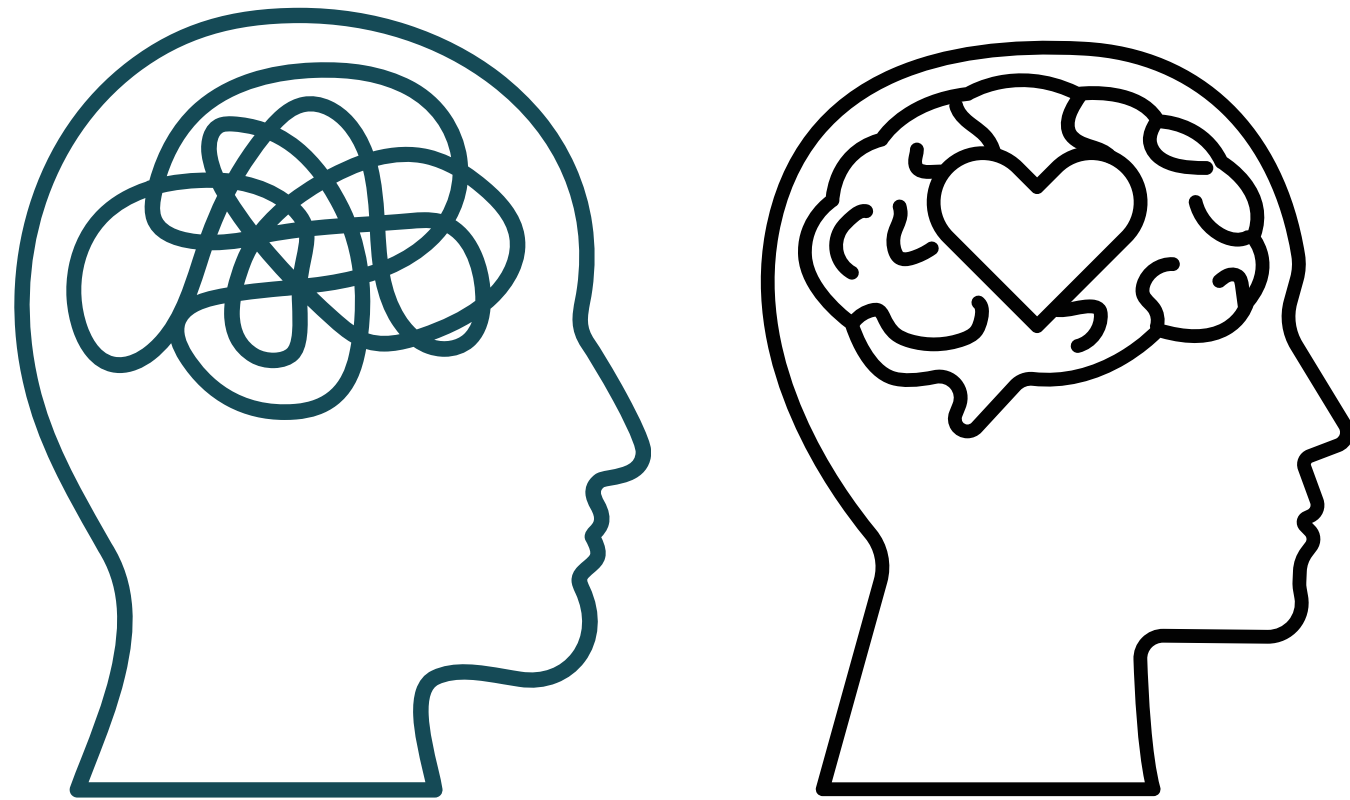


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You could try:

- Creating a cosy space
- Providing comforters
- Providing a low demand environment
- Singing lullabies
- Engaging in deep breathing
- Engaging sleep hygiene such as removing distractions, or providing a regulating down routine

Add your own ideas...



Mental Rest



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You could try:

- Limiting language
- Reducing demands and instructions
- Providing self-directed play
- Sensitive scaffolding or visuals to take the pressure off
- Reduce sensory input where possible
- Reduce direct questioning, and try declarative statements instead

Add your own ideas...



Emotional Rest



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You could try:

- Hugging a soft toy or cuddle up with a blanket
- Sit quietly with someone you trust
- Listen to a soothing song or gentle music
- Having a “quiet moment” in a safe, cosy spot
- Reading a story that makes you feel safe
- Wrapping yourself like a burrito and take a deep breath

Add your own ideas...



Social Rest



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You could try:

- Accessing low demand spaces
- Spending time in a quiet space with no talking
- Wearing headphones or ear defenders
- Browsing picture books
- Taking a break from group activities
- Use a card or signal to show “I need space”
- Sitting with a grown-up without having to talk

Add your own ideas...



Spiritual Rest

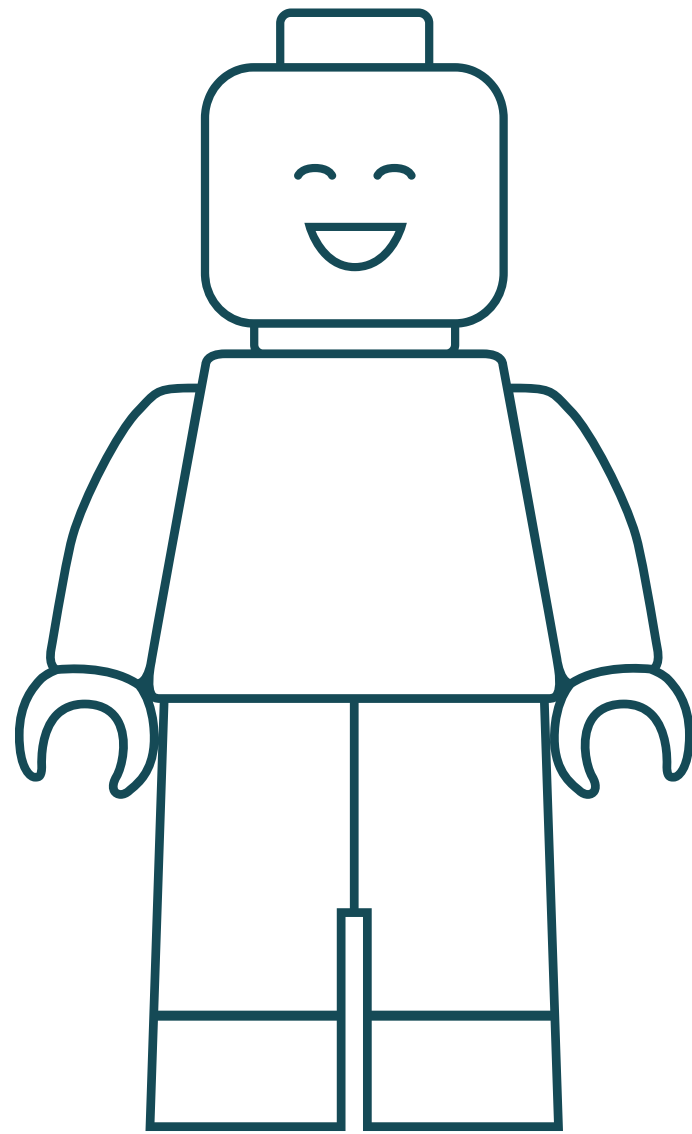


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You could try:

- Listening to quiet music or gentle sounds
- Sitting still and notice your breath going in and out
- Thinking about someone or something that makes you feel loved
- Saying a special word, prayer, or calming phrase
- Spending time in nature or in a quiet garden
- Engaging in rituals that are important

Add your own ideas...



Playful Rest



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You could try:

- Engaging in self-directed play
- Having access to special interests
- Choosing Rhythmic or Repetitive Play
- Engaging in parallel play
- Listening to music
- Spending time outdoors
- Having uninterrupted time

Add your own ideas...



Embody Rest



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You could try:

- Engaging in favourite stims
- Getting into different soothing positions such as hanging upside down, elevating legs, or swinging
- Utilising heavy work place
- Listening to favourite songs
- Stroking different textures
- Dancing

Add your own ideas...

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Rest Goals

With the increasing "**schoolification**" of early years and school environments often centered on productivity and standardised performance, it is crucial to prioritise **rest as a fundamental human need and right**. For neurodivergent and disabled children, there is a significant toll of having to try so much harder to fit into spaces. Therefore **REST goals** must be a non-negotiable in planning.



Examples of Rest Goals

Please note: goals should be personalised to children's strengths, differences and needs. These examples are for reference only and are not structured into measurable outcomes. Rather they are designed to recognise that children have a right to rest in educational spaces.

Type of Rest	Example Goal	Planning Consideration
Sensory Rest	Child can access a low-demand space with soft lighting and quiet when needed by selecting the sensory rest visual.	Ensure sensory zones are available throughout the day, not only at designated times.
Mental Rest	When the child appears to need mental rest, key people will reduce the number of direct questions and demands.	Plan for mental rest periods after high-demand activities such as group time or transitions.
Emotional Rest	Child can keep favourite small plushie with them throughout the day, which supports with transitions and change.	Build in flexible emotional check-ins and offer low-pressure co-regulation moments.
Social Rest	Child will be supported with some scripts to affirm boundaries. When speaking they can say: “I am having quiet time. Maybe later”.	Include 'opt-out' cards or visual supports that allow children to request alone time.
Creative Rest	Child is invited to engage with familiar creative materials without expected outcomes.	Avoid over-directing creative tasks, enable mess, repetition, and open-ended exploration.
Spiritual Rest	Child to be able to access quiet times during the day for prayer which they have shown an interest in.	Incorporate quiet, meaningful rituals or nature-based moments into daily routines.
Playful Rest	Child can access special interests without interruptions daily.	Prioritise uninterrupted play blocks and protect child-led exploration.
Sleep	Child is provided with a predictable rest routine	Respect each child’s unique rest rhythms and

	including comfort items	avoid rushing naptime
Active Rest	Child provided with heavy work opportunities throughout the day to support their movement driven interests.	Offer access to heavy work tools and dance/stretch breaks within indoor/outdoor play.
Embody Rest	Child has access to their stimming space throughout the day (open space for spinning).	Support movement freedom with no pressure to sit still, and affirm diverse body languages.

This Diverse Pathway **Digital Resources** are developed **by the Neurodiversity Affirming Early Childhood Collective.**

Our group includes early childhood educators, specialists, therapists, parents, carers, teachers, and young people with diverse lived experiences.

We came together to create and share new knowledge around neurodiversity-affirming practices in early childhood.

If you're interested in joining the collective, please get in touch:
queries@diversepathways.org.uk

We welcome home, educational, health and therapeutic settings to use these digital tools, and to develop them further. We would welcome acknowledgement of our ideas, and where relevant for primary sources to be cited. For this digital tool, we were inspired by several works:

- Dalton-Smith, S. (2021) The 7 types of rest that every person needs. [online] Ideas.TED.com. Available at: <https://ideas.ted.com/the-7-types-of-rest-that-every-person-needs/>
- Dalton-Smith, S. (2017) Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity. New York: FaithWords.
- Hersey, T. (2022) Rest Is Resistance: Free yourself from grind culture and reclaim your life. London: Octopus Publishing Group (Aster).

