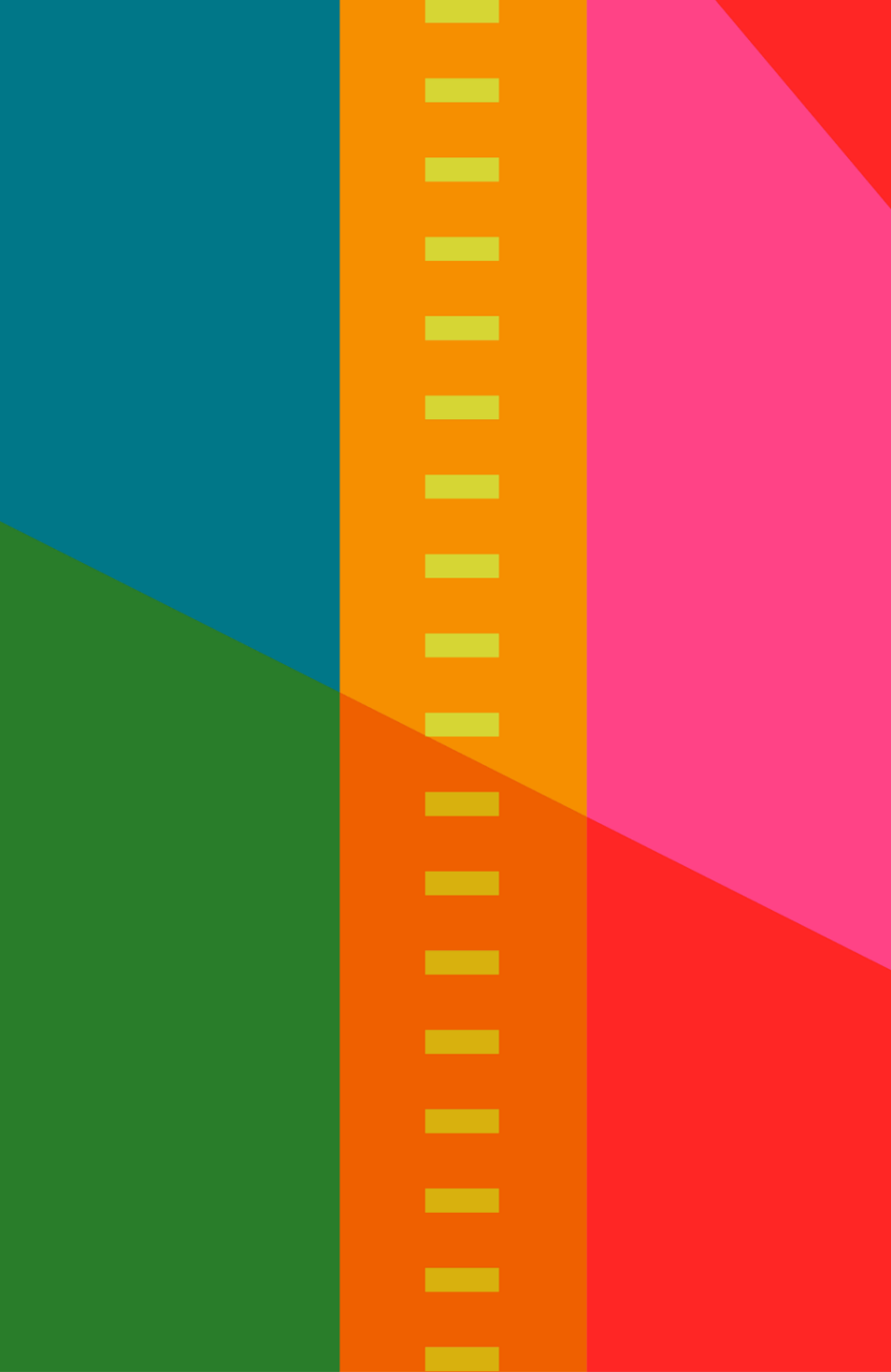




FY 25-26 Training Series

Being aware of Neurodiversity
and how to Cultivate a more
Inclusive Perspective

*In partnership with
Pajaro Valley Prevention and
Student Assistance, Inc.*

Presented by:
Oscar Flores, M. Ed., ACC, CMT-P, IFEC-TMHP
www.respondmindfully.com

Disclaimer about Training & Meditation Practices

- I am a coach and educator, not a mental health therapist. I am trauma and healing-informed practitioner. This workshop is therapeutic in nature, but not therapy.
- Stop any practice if it's not helpful to you.
- Education can be an important complement to medical care; however, it is never a substitute for diagnosis, treatment, or care of disease by a medical provider.

Thanks for signing the electronic waiver.

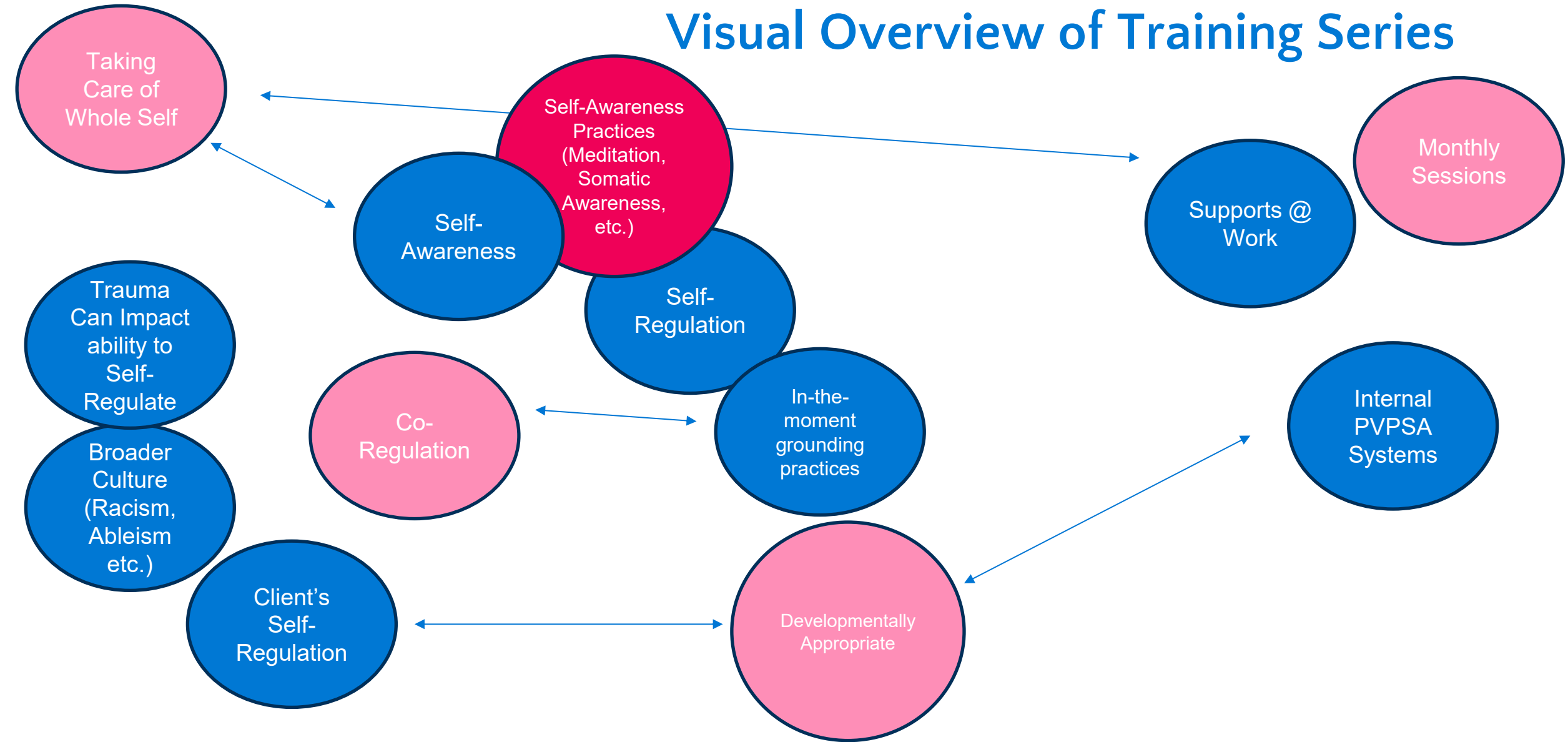


Community Vibe and Learning Space

Any new folks?

- **No advice giving from others (*we are here to primary learn about ourselves*). *If you want advice, please ask. If you want to comment, pause.***
- Speak up or take a step back.
- What is said here, stays here. Learning can move beyond this space.
- Expect non-closure. Good news: we have monthly sessions!
- Keep in mind that there is a difference “knowing” something and following through with a new habit or practice. Approach this training from a curiosity stance, and with humility.
- **As it relates to self-awareness and mindfulness, it’s learned best by practicing and modeling – we’ll get more into that later. Notice if you are trying to over-intellectualize.**
- This is your training. Your experience is more important than slides; *I will move us forward, if needed.*

Visual Overview of Training Series



Monthly Session Overview FY 25–26

Session Topics

- Mindful Communication
- Equity, Ableism and Neurodivergence
- Conflict and Difficult Conversations
- Expanded Skills in Meditation
- Somatic Awareness
- Developmentally Appropriate Practice and Mindfulness: Middle Childhood
- Developmentally Appropriate and Mindfulness: Teens
- Proactive Self-Care to Prevent Burnout
- Trauma-Informed Mindfulness

Flow

- Arrival Meditation & Reflection
- Shared Approach Review:
 - Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation and Self-Care (SSS)
- What feels alive? From last session or from your work?
- Session Topic
- Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation Practices
- Closing Reflection

Self-Awareness & Self-Regulation Practice:

Listen to sounds that arise with curiosity.

When you are distracted, anchor in one area of your body and focus on it.

Respond flexibly as distractions occur.

You have options, including leading yourself in what helps you stay grounded.

What did you notice? How was that experienced?



Context and Terms

- "Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits." [Harvard Health](#).
- Neurodiversity is not the same as neurodivergent. Neurodivergence emphasizes "difference" from most others, particularly those whom society often refers to "normal."
- (For context) Neurodivergence: "Neurodivergent simply means that a person's brain works in a way that is not expected. It is commonly used when the behavior or response diverges from what is expected socially, physically, or verbally. Neurodivergence can be innate (e.g., ADHD, autism, depression, dyslexia, obsessive compulsive disorder, etc.) or due to a brain-altering event (e.g., PTSD, head trauma, medicines, drug use, etc.)." - [UMass](#)

My Educator Approach to Neurodiversity

Inclusion-Centered

Our work, especially those who may not be impacted by neurodiversity, to be open to other ways of interacting in the world, and be open growing in our ability to shift our ways thinking, relating, behaving and connecting.

Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation (aka Mindfulness) are Indispensable to be Allies

Being aware of what one thinks, feels, and senses is critical to shifting how you respond in ways that support neurodiversity. Without self-awareness, shifting is difficult. Without self-awareness, we don't notice what the "norm" is, how we perpetuate it, and how we exclude others.

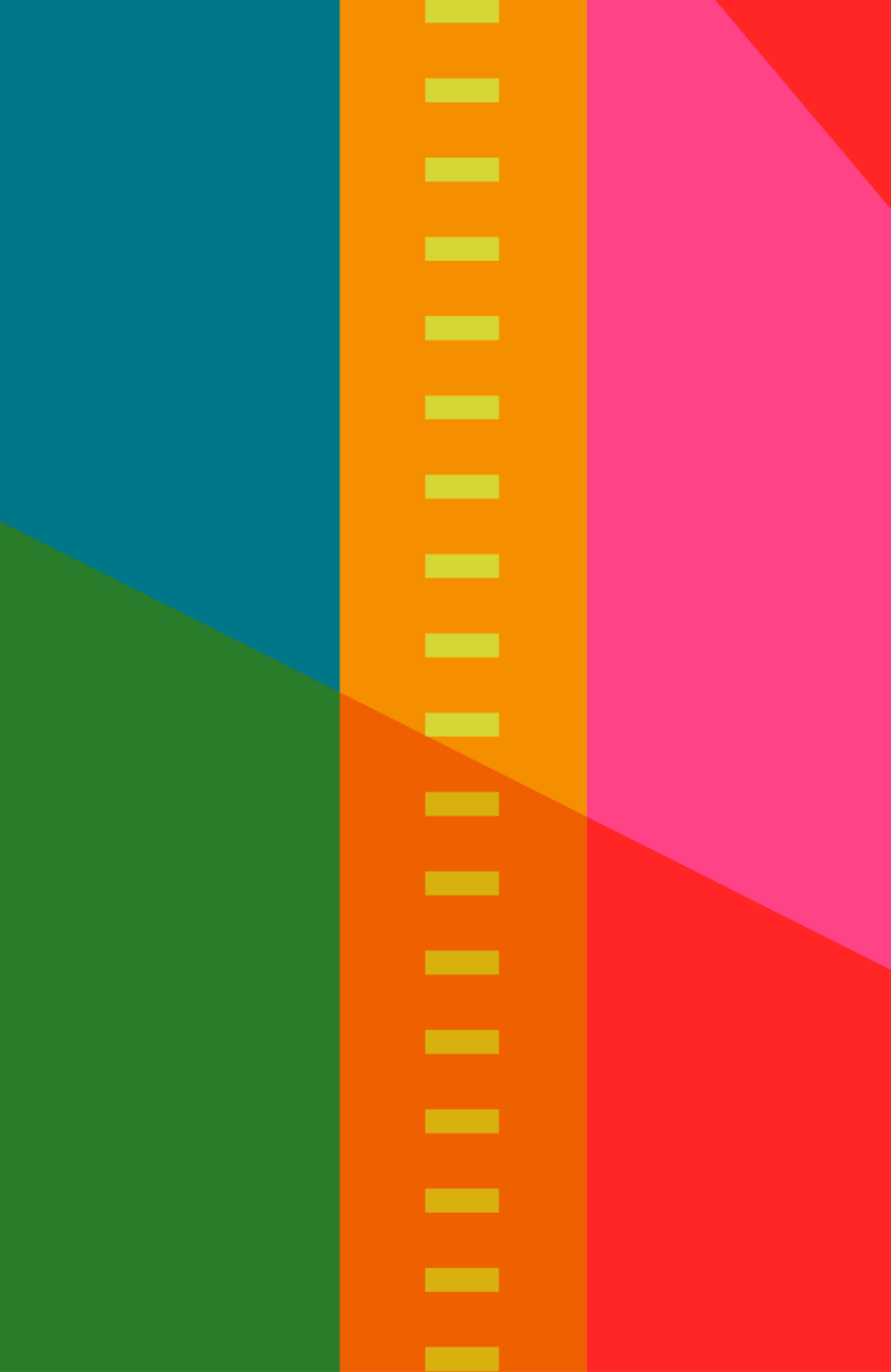
Responding in Helpful Ways requires Curiosity

My work is grounded in developmental education and psychology. The more I know, the more curious I am. The more curious, the more I understand. The more I understand, the better I am at responding with attunement and connection.

Nurture impacts Nature

How environments are developed and how other people respond to neurodiversity can impact the felt sense the person has and influences the cognitive and social-emotional development of the person. How we respond to others has the power to shift their own sense of self and behavior.





Without self-awareness, we react...

- Our reactions to behaviors that are unfamiliar to us may be inflexible and rigid (*fixed mindset*)
- We quickly blame others without first noticing how we are contributing to the situation
- We disempower ourselves by not coming from a growth mindset.
- We don't notice what we are feeling, needing, what we are thinking or what emotions are present. We may be reacting from our dominant perspectives, ideas and behaviors (influenced by society, family, culture/s, systems, etc.)
- We default to stereotypes or ideas that are not grounded in science and consistent with our lived-experience and values.

Cultivating Self-Awareness

Medical Model

- Disability as a consequence of a health condition, disease or caused by a trauma
- Disrupt the functioning of a person in a physiological or cognitive way

Functional Model

- Disability is caused by physical, medical or cognitive deficits
- Limits functioning or the ability to perform functional activities

Social Model

- A person's activities are limited not by the impairment or condition but by environment
- Barriers are consequences of a lack of social organization

Honest Reflection: When you think of people with neural differences, what 'model' out of these three is most sticky for you? What is the one that has most grip in society? What is the one that has most grip on others in your community? Which one has most potential to help with healing and growth as it relates to neurodiversity?

Honest Self Reflection

What assumptions do I make about people's abilities based on their appearance or difference?
In what ways do I see disability as a natural and valuable part of human diversity?
In what ways do I treat differences as a social/societal construct rather than an inherent deficit?
When do I use ableist language like "lame," "dumb," or "crazy"?
How do I act with pity or condescension towards people with visible and invisible differences?
When do I make judgments about the worth or value of people based on their abilities?
How do I recognize and challenge my own ableist thoughts and behaviors?

Adapted from Survey [from Oregon Dept of Education](#)

Knowledge is Good, *Self-Awareness with Compassion Action is Best*

Potential Reaction (Medical Model Influenced)

My friend also struggles with ADHD.

But I also experienced difficulties in my life.

Why don't they fix the issue?

**Any other examples from our group,
especially those with lived-experience?**

Response (Social Model Influenced)

I know my biases well.

I have an inclination to put everyone into "boxes."

I try to be curious.

I can be curious and ask: What is this like for you?
What can I do to help?



Your Story of the
Person, any
'Differences', and
Situation is Important,
but Not Really

Neurodiversity, especially if you
navigate fairly well in the
systems in our society,
requires you to listen to what
it must be like for the other
person.



The Key to Listening is Presence (*we need self-awareness and self-regulation to cultivate*)

Others feel your presence.

Presence creates safety.

Safety allows the other person to analyze and reflect.

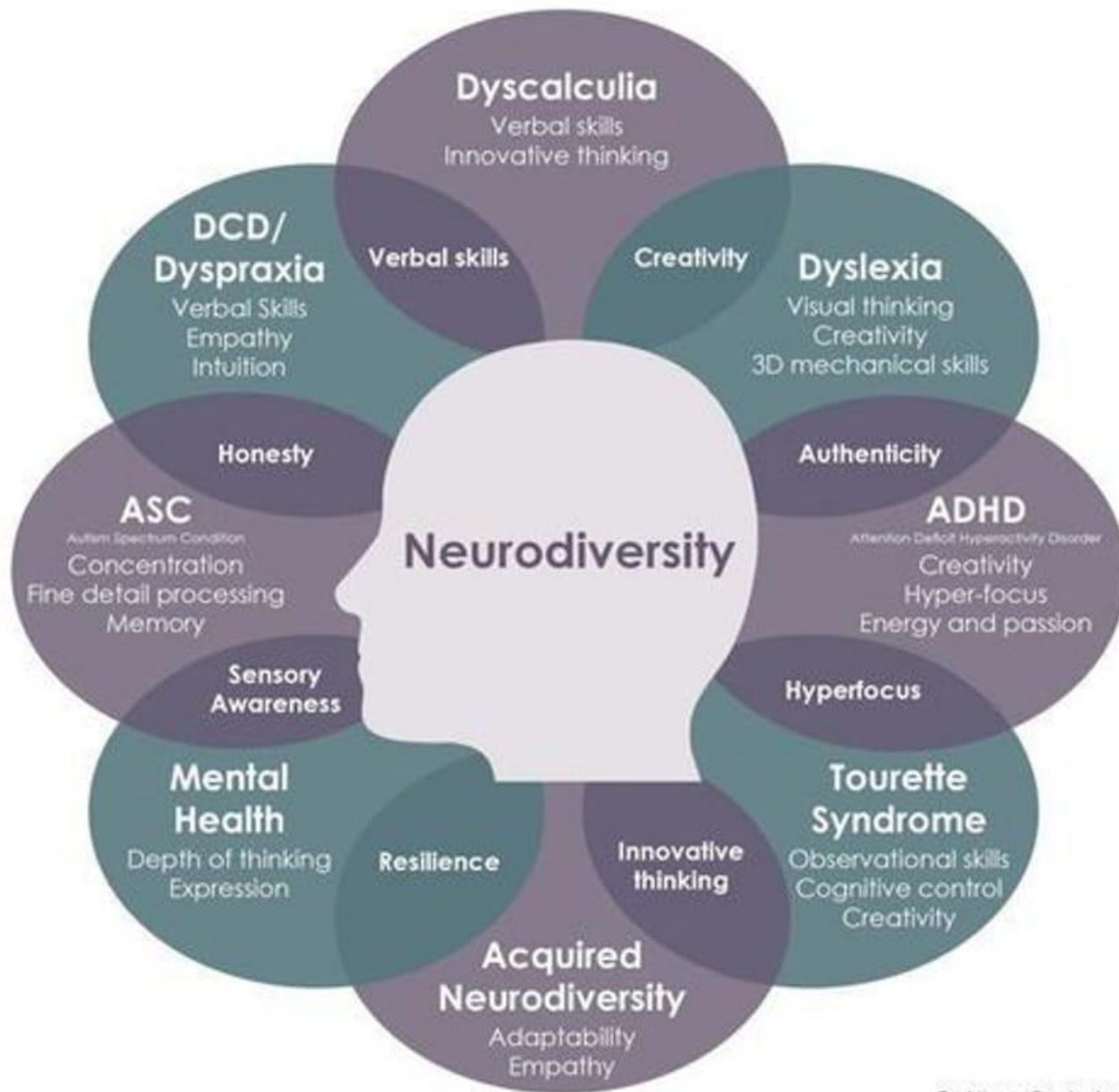
The opposite creates fear, disconnection, and shut down.



What knowledge of neurodivergences can be incredibly helpful to know for those that may not consider themselves neurodivergent?

Please add comments to the box as I know we have a lot of folks with lived experiences with us.





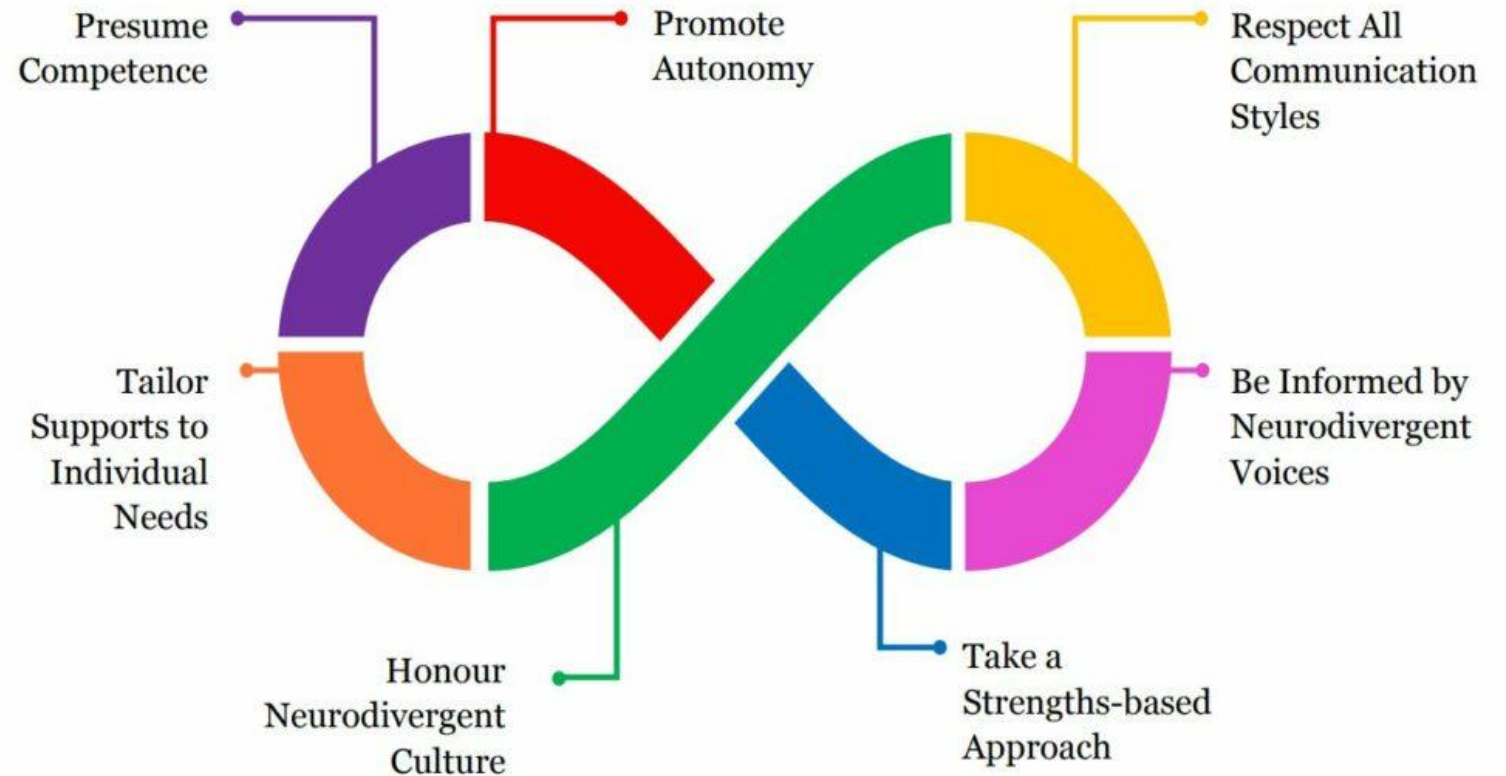
Dr Nancy Doyle, based on the work of Mary Colley

“Implementing sensory-friendly spaces, lighting, noise levels, flexible work hours, and alternative communication methods...” can be helpful to many who navigate the neurodiversity spectrum. -
Understanding Neurodiversity for Everyone

AND, each person is different, and this is why we centered curiosity, attunement to help others respond in ways that are helpful.

*Self-Awareness
shifts us into
Self-Regulation
that Promotes
Responses (less
reactions)*

Neurodiversity Affirming Practice



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Responses Create Attunement and Ease

WHAT IS CO-REGULATION?

A Guide to Nervous System Harmony

The Role of Co-regulation

Co-regulation is a supportive process where one person helps another manage their emotions, behavior, and physical responses through warm, connected interactions.

This shared experience helps individuals gradually develop self-regulation skills, **making it easier to handle life's challenges on their own.**

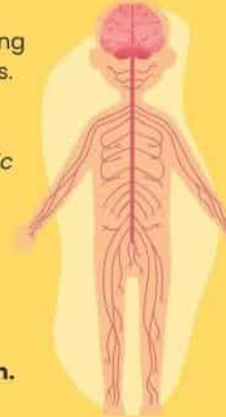


The Science of Co-regulation

The autonomic nervous system is key in regulating our emotional responses.

Co-regulation helps balance our *sympathetic* ("fight or flight") and *parasympathetic* ("rest and digest") systems.

This helps us achieve a state of safety and calm.



Why It Matters

Co-regulation fosters a sense of **safety**, especially for people with attachment challenges or trauma backgrounds.

It provides tools to help us understand and regulate our emotions, which supports overall **emotional resilience.**



A regulated client is **better able to engage** in therapeutic activities and learning, and participate in daily life tasks.

Barriers to Co-regulation and How to Avoid Them



Provider Dysregulation

Use grounding techniques to stay calm when a client is highly dysregulated.



Sensory Overload

Simplify the environment or use soothing sensory tools to ease co-regulation.



Emotional Escalation

Respond to aggressive behavior with empathy and clear boundaries to encourage calm.



Special thanks to Daphne Boucher BA, MScOT, OT Reg.
Visit unyte.com for more educational resources and to learn more about therapeutic tools for nervous system regulation.

What is the other person's experience of their neurodiversity?

- Listen beyond what you hear
- Notice body language
- Develop curiosity
- Ask them what the story they hold about the issues you are confronting.

"At work, high-quality listening reduces burnout and increases well-being, trust, commitment, job knowledge, work performance, job satisfaction, and leadership." [\(Source\)](#)



Transition & Goodbye

What is sticking with you?
What will you try to practice?

Questions: Oscar@RespondMindfully.com

Resources: www.respondmindfully.com/pvpsa

