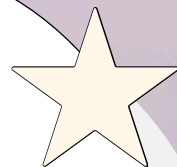




Your Mind, Your Way

A Toolkit for Neurodiverse Young People



Introduction

Your Mind, Your Way



Welcome! This guide is here to help you understand neurodiversity, what it is, how it affects people, and how to support yourself or others who experience the world differently.

You might find this booklet useful if you, or someone close to you, experiences the world in a different way.



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What is Neurodivergence?

In this section you will find information about:

- How Neurodivergent Brains Work
- Supporting Yourself and Others
- Challenges & Strengths
- Practical Tips for Everyday Life
- Gender Differences in Neurodivergence
- Hormones, Puberty, and Neurodivergence
- Intersectionality: Neurodivergence Across Different Identities
- Celebrating Neurodivergent Voices

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What is Neurodivergence?

Neurodivergence includes a range of brain-based differences, such as:

- **Autism** – A different way of experiencing the world, often involving unique patterns in communication, sensory processing, and social interaction. Autistic people may prefer routine, notice detail others miss, and think deeply about topics that matter to them.
- **ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)** – A difference in attention regulation, impulse control, and energy levels. People with ADHD may experience challenges with focus or restlessness, but also bring creativity, spontaneity, and hyperfocus when engaged.
- **Dyslexia** – A specific learning difference that affects reading, spelling, and processing written language. Many people with dyslexia are strong visual thinkers, storytellers, or problem-solvers.
- **Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder)** – A condition that affects motor coordination, planning, and sometimes speech. It can make everyday tasks more effortful, but individuals often develop strong perseverance and adaptive thinking.
- **Tourette Syndrome** – A neurological condition involving involuntary movements or sounds called tics. While tics can be challenging, many people with Tourette's also show strong verbal skills, humour, or resilience.



How Neurodivergent Brains Work

Think of a brain like a phone or a laptop, it has different settings and apps. Some brains process information fast, while others take their time. Some love routines, while others thrive on change.

Here's how neurodivergent people might experience the world:

- **Sensory Differences** – Some are sensitive to loud noises or bright lights, while others don't notice them much.
- **Learning Differences** – Some people learn better with pictures, movement, or listening instead of reading and writing.
- **Social Differences** – Some find conversations tricky or prefer small groups over big gatherings.
- **Emotional Differences** – Big emotions can feel overwhelming, and some people find it hard to express how they feel.

Understanding how your brain works can help you find strategies that make life easier.

Behavioural Differences & Strengths

Neurodivergent people often behave in ways that reflect how they experience the world. This might include:

- Being extra sensitive to noise, lights, or textures.
- Getting super focused on hobbies or topics they love.
- Communicating differently, sometimes using gestures, scripts, or avoiding eye contact.
- Struggling with attention, feeling easily distracted or overwhelmed.

But alongside these differences come amazing strengths!

Neurodivergent young people often have brilliant talents, such as:

- ✦ Incredible creativity
- ✦ Unique problem-solving skills
- ✦ Strong observational abilities
- ✦ A passion for fairness and justice
- ✦ Thinking outside the box

Focusing on strengths is a great way to build confidence and boost self-esteem.



Challenges & Strengths of Neurodivergent Young People

Neurodivergent brains can work differently when it comes to executive function, the brain's "managing system."

This affects things like:

Planning – Figuring out how to start tasks and break them into smaller steps.

Focusing – Staying on one task without getting distracted.

Memory – Remembering instructions or details while working on something.

Switching Between Tasks– Moving from one activity to another without losing track.

These skills can make school, organisation, and routines harder. But neurodivergent young people also have incredible strengths!

☀️ **Deep focus** – Getting super involved in topics they love and becoming an expert.

☀️ **Creative thinking** – Coming up with ideas no one else would think of.

☀️ **Strong observational skills** – Noticing patterns and details that others miss.

☀️ **Fairness & Justice** – Standing up for what's right and questioning unfair rules.

☀️ **Thinking differently** – Finding unconventional solutions to problems.

It's important to celebrate strengths while supporting challenges. That way, you can thrive in your own way!

What is Neurodivergence?

Practical Tips for Everyday Life

There are loads of ways to make daily life smoother and more enjoyable. Small changes like these can make a huge difference.



Use Planners & Checklists

– Writing things down or using apps can help with organisation.



Break Tasks into Small Steps

– Tackle big assignments or chores one bit at a time.



Create a Calm Space – A quiet corner or headphones can help manage sensory overload.



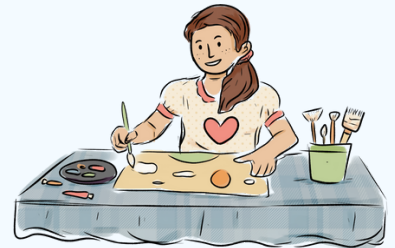
Find the Best Learning Style –

Whether it's listening, moving, or drawing—do what works for you!



Use “Boost Byte” Cards –

If speaking is hard, visual cards can help express needs.



Take Breaks When Overwhelmed –

Pausing helps prevent stress and overwhelm.



Ask for Support When Needed – Teachers, friends, and family can all help in different ways.

Gender Differences in Neurodivergence

Neurodivergence presents differently based on gender, and for a long time, research has focused mostly on boys. This means girls, non-binary people, and gender-diverse individuals are often overlooked, misdiagnosed, or unsupported. Understanding how gender influences neurodivergent experiences is key to making sure everyone gets the right help.

Autism and Gender Differences

Autistic boys tend to show more obvious traits, such as:

- Difficulty with social skills, often struggling in group interactions.
- Clear repetitive behaviours (e.g., spinning objects, lining things up).
- Strong fixations on specific topics, often seen as classic "special interests."

Autistic girls, on the other hand, often:

- Mask their traits to fit in, copying social behaviours even if it's exhausting.
- Have deep friendships, but find social interactions mentally draining.
- Display different repetitive behaviours, such as immersing themselves in books, storytelling, or imaginary worlds.
- Are less likely to have meltdowns but may instead shut down emotionally when overwhelmed.

Because autistic girls and gender-diverse people present differently, they are often overlooked until much later in life—sometimes adulthood—causing years of confusion and self-doubt.

Example: Amy, an autistic teenager, is deeply passionate about space science and writes pages of notes about different planets. Instead of having obvious sensory difficulties, she finds conversations draining and needs time alone after socialising. For years, she was misdiagnosed with anxiety and told she was "too sensitive," but her real challenge was how much effort she put into masking her autism.

Gender Differences in Neurodivergence – continued

ADHD and Gender Differences

ADHD traits in boys tend to be more physical and obvious, such as:

- Hyperactivity (e.g., constantly moving, tapping, running around).
- Impulsive behaviour, often interrupting conversations or struggling with patience.
- Difficulty focusing, leading to disruptive behaviour at school.

ADHD in girls often looks different:

- Inattentive ADHD – instead of being hyperactive, girls with ADHD are more likely to daydream, stare into space, or seem “off in their own world.”
- Struggles with organisation – they may forget things, lose homework, or feel overwhelmed with responsibilities.
- Masking difficulties – many ADHD girls copy their peers’ study habits and work extra hard to stay organised, making their struggles less obvious to teachers.
- Misdiagnosed as anxious or emotional – rather than recognising ADHD, some professionals label girls as being “too sensitive” or “not paying attention.”

Example: Sam, a non-binary teen with ADHD, has trouble focusing in lessons but is an incredible musician. They hyperfocus for hours on writing songs but struggle to finish school assignments. Because they aren't disruptive in class, their ADHD wasn't recognised for years.

Hormones, Puberty, and Neurodivergence

Neurodivergent traits can shift and change during puberty and throughout hormonal cycles.

- Autistic people may find their sensory sensitivities get stronger during puberty. Things like clothing textures, loud sounds, or strong smells can become even harder to tolerate.
- ADHD symptoms often fluctuate with hormones. Some people feel their focus improves at certain times of the month while being extra forgetful at other times.
- Emotional regulation changes can be more intense for neurodivergent girls and gender-diverse people, leading to stronger mood swings, burnout, or shutdowns.

Understanding how hormones impact neurodivergence can help young people prepare for changes and find strategies to manage their emotions better.



What is Neurodivergence?

Intersectionality: Neurodivergence Across Different Identities

Neurodivergent experiences are also shaped by other factors, such as culture, race, and LGBTQ+ identity.

- Black and ethnic minority neurodivergent people are often misdiagnosed or overlooked because of cultural biases in medical assessments.
- LGBTQ+ neurodivergent people often struggle with identity overlap, such as figuring out whether they're masking social struggles due to autism, or because they feel pressured to conform to gender expectations.
- Girls and gender-diverse people are more likely to be diagnosed later in life, sometimes only after experiencing mental health struggles, such as anxiety or depression.

The way gender, race, and neurodivergence overlap is rarely researched, meaning many young people are left unsupported. It's important to challenge stereotypes and push for better understanding so everyone—regardless of their background—can get the help they need.

Because girls, non-binary people, and gender-diverse individuals experience neurodivergence differently, they often go undiagnosed, misunderstood, or unsupported.

Everyone deserves access to understanding and support—no matter how their neurodivergence presents.

Masking is exhausting, and young people shouldn't feel pressured to hide who they are. Celebrating strengths and challenging stereotypes will help everyone thrive in their own way.



What is Neurodivergence?

Celebrating Neurodivergent Voices

Many successful neurodivergent people across different genders are changing how the world sees neurodivergence.

Recognising the brilliance of neurodivergent people—across all genders—can help you feel empowered rather than ashamed of any differences.



★ **Hannah Gadsby** (Autistic, Gender-Nonconforming) – A comedian who uses their neurodivergent perspective to break barriers in entertainment.



★ **Alex Walton** (Alexthedoodler) An autistic artist who transforms his unique way of seeing the world into bright, creative doodles that celebrate neurodiversity and positivity.



★ **Lauren Gilbert** (@neurodiversitywithlozza) A young autistic and disabled influencer who uses social media to share honest, funny, and empowering stories about life, identity, and inclusion.



★ **Charlie Michael Baker**: A teenage author and advocate who turned his experiences of being autistic and gay into a platform to help others feel seen and proud of who they are.



★ **Florence Welch** (ADHD, Female) – The lead singer of Florence + The Machine, who uses music and movement to manage emotions.

What is Neurodivergence?

Celebrating Neurodivergent Voices

LIVE •
**BE YOU.
THAT'S MORE
THAN
ENOUGH.**

**Rest is part
of the
journey**

DIFFERENT IS
Powerful

**YOUR
DIFFERENCE
IS YOUR
STRENGTH**

No mask.
Just magic



GO YOUR OWN WAY
YOUR PACE
YOUR PATH

Embracing Your Unique Learning Style

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How Learning is Impacted by Neurodivergence

Learning isn't one-size-fits-all. Everyone absorbs information differently, but for neurodivergent people, traditional methods might not always work best. That doesn't mean learning is harder—it just means it needs to be tailored to what works for each person.

Here are different ways neurodivergent people might learn:

Visual



They understand things better through pictures, diagrams, and charts. Drawing ideas can help make information clearer.

Auditory



These learners process information best by listening and speaking. They might enjoy discussing ideas or learning through stories and songs.

Kinaesthetic



Hands-on activities are their favourite way to learn. They thrive when they can move, build, and interact with objects while learning.

Reading/Writing



These young people prefer reading books, writing notes, or journaling their thoughts to absorb new information.

Traditional classrooms can sometimes be overwhelming, but small adjustments can make a big difference. Using planners, visual aids, and alternative learning strategies can create an environment that feels more supportive and less stressful.

My Study Planner

What type of environment do I need?



Bright, clear lighting



Warm, dim lighting



Clear desk with a comfortable chair



Calming, music



Comfy space - blankets, cushions



Silence - no distractions

What tools can help me?



Pen and pencils



Laptop or computer



Music/ Headphones



Bottle of water



Turn off or silence my phone

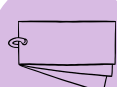


Study snacks

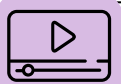
How do I like to learn?



Writing notes and highlighting



Creating study cards



Watching videos



Listening to instructions



Hands-on activities



Reading information

Learning Passport

What do you need to optimise your learning?

Complete the learning passport and share this with teachers or support staff.

There are 3 parts to the passport

Brain Functioning Differences

Impact on Learning



Directions

Additional instructions or things that help with processes

Emotional and Sensory Processing



Destination

Changes to my environment and surroundings

Behavioural Differences



Passengers

Other people that can support me and what that might look like

Learning Passport

You can cut and stick the examples below, or write them in your passport.



Directions

- A clear plan for the day
- A plan for what to do when I'm struggling
- Knowing what I will be doing in advance
- Breaking things down into smaller tasks
- Clear, simplified instructions
- The opportunity to choose what I do



Passengers

- Someone to help me with tasks
- Someone to explain things to me
- Someone to check in with how I'm feeling
- Work on a task with someone else



Destination

- Somewhere where I can chill out when needed
- Breaks where I can spend some quiet time
- Lights turned down or off
- Less noise or a quieter space
- Time with a fidget toy

Accommodations, Modifications
& Support

Name:

MY LEARNING PASSPORT



Passengers



Destination



Directions

Understanding Your Emotions

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Emotional and Sensory Processing

Many neurodivergent young people experience emotions in a unique way. Some feel things more intensely, while others struggle to identify emotions at all. Some might be highly sensitive to sounds and textures, while others seek out strong sensory experiences.

If emotions feel overwhelming, it helps to have calming strategies ready, such as:

- 🧘 Deep breathing exercises
- 🎧 Listening to music
- 🚶 Going for a walk or getting fresh air
- 💡 Using fidget toys to stay grounded
- 🌿 Spending time in a quiet, safe space

Creating a 'Zone Plan' helps track emotions and find ways to manage them. Some people also experience alexithymia, which makes it harder to recognise and describe feelings. If this happens, having tools like emotion charts and check-ins can help make sense of emotions.



Energy Zone Check in

What can it help with?

Understanding emotions and creating coping strategies.

Draw four coloured circles representing different energy zones or use the template on the next page:

-  Red (Overwhelmed, Angry, Stressed)
-  Yellow (Excited, Anxious, Silly)
-  Blue (Tired, Sad, Unmotivated)
-  Green (Calm, Happy, Focused)

Each day, check in and mark where your energy is.

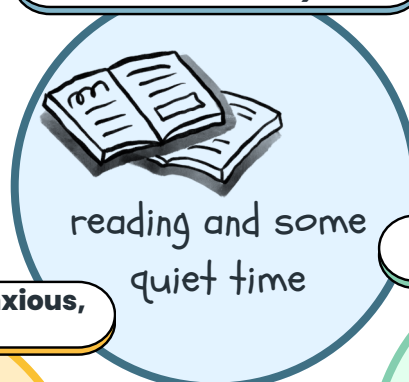
Write down or draw strategies that help in each zone.

- Red Zone? Deep breaths
- Blue Zone? Music or movement
- Yellow Zone? Fidget tools
- Green Zone? Keep doing what works

Red (Overwhelmed, Angry, Stressed)



Blue (Tired, Sad, Unmotivated)



Yellow (Excited, Anxious, Silly)

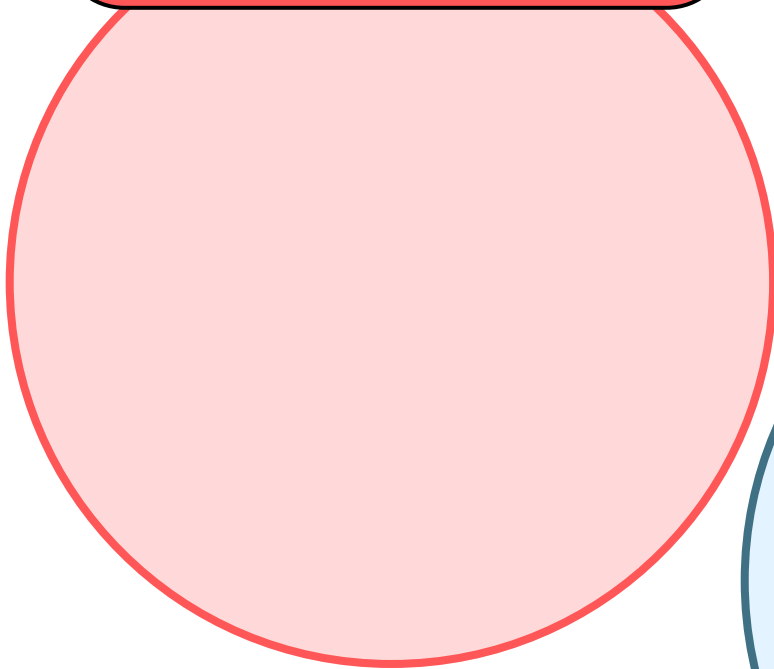


Green (Calm, Happy, Focused)

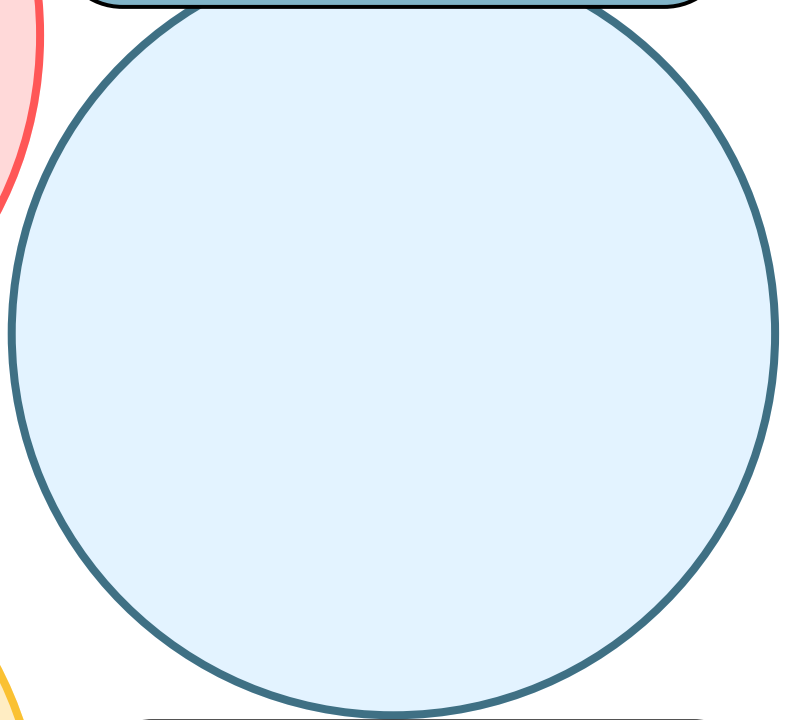


Energy Zone Check in

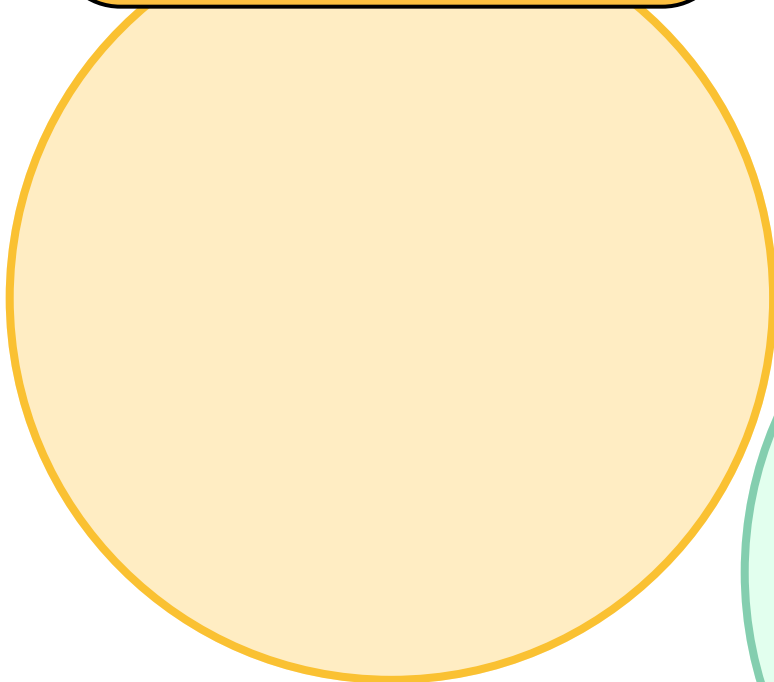
Red (Overwhelmed, Angry, Stressed)



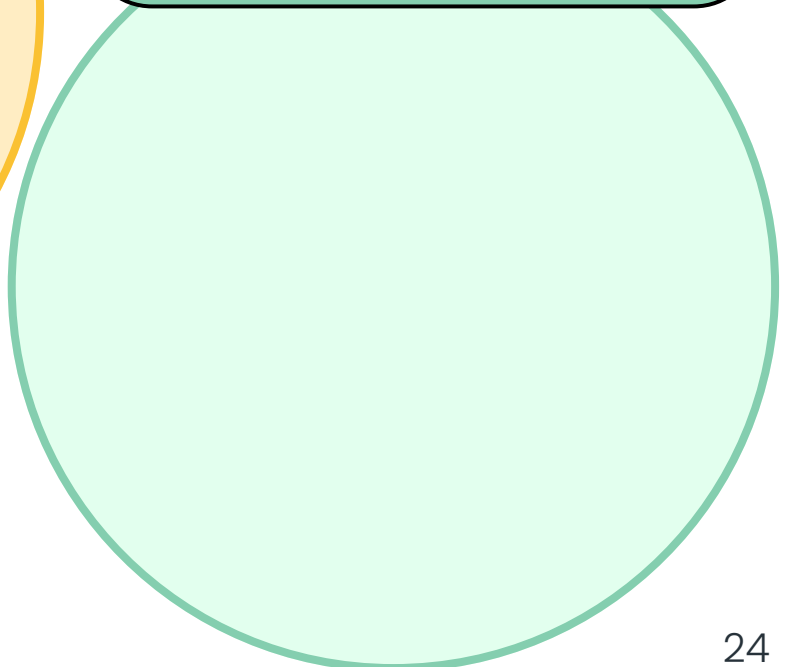
Blue (Tired, Sad, Unmotivated)



Yellow (Excited, Anxious, Silly)



Green (Calm, Happy, Focused)



Understanding your Strengths

3 Steps to Building Strengths

Step 1 – Familiarise yourself with the ‘Character Strengths’

Step 2 – Choose your top 5 strengths

Step 3 – Create your own ‘Strengths Shield’ to display them

Once you know your strengths, you can challenge yourself to boost them.

For example you could say ‘Today I am going to be more grateful, I’ll write down 3 things that happened today that I’m grateful for’



Appreciation



I notice and enjoy the good things around me.

Bravery



I face my fears and try even when things are hard.

Creativity



I come up with new ideas and think differently.

Curiosity



I love learning and exploring new things.

Fairness



I believe everyone should be treated equally.

Forgiveness



I let go of past hurts and move on.

Gratitude



I'm thankful for the good things in my life.

Honesty



I tell the truth and show who I really am.

Hopefulness



I believe in a bright future and good things ahead.

Humility



I'm proud of what I can do but stay modest.

Humour



I enjoy laughing and making others laugh.

Judgement



I think carefully before making decisions.

Kindness



I help others and do nice things without expecting anything back.

Leadership



I help others be their best and stay organised.

Love



I care about my friends and family deeply.

Love of Learning



I enjoy discovering new things and getting better.

Perseverance



I keep going even when things get tough.

Perspective



I see things from different points of view.

Prudence



I think before I act and avoid risky choices.

Regulation



I manage my emotions and reactions.

Social Sense



I understand my feelings and others' feelings too.

Spirituality



I believe in something bigger than myself.

Team Player



I work well with others and share tasks.

Optimism



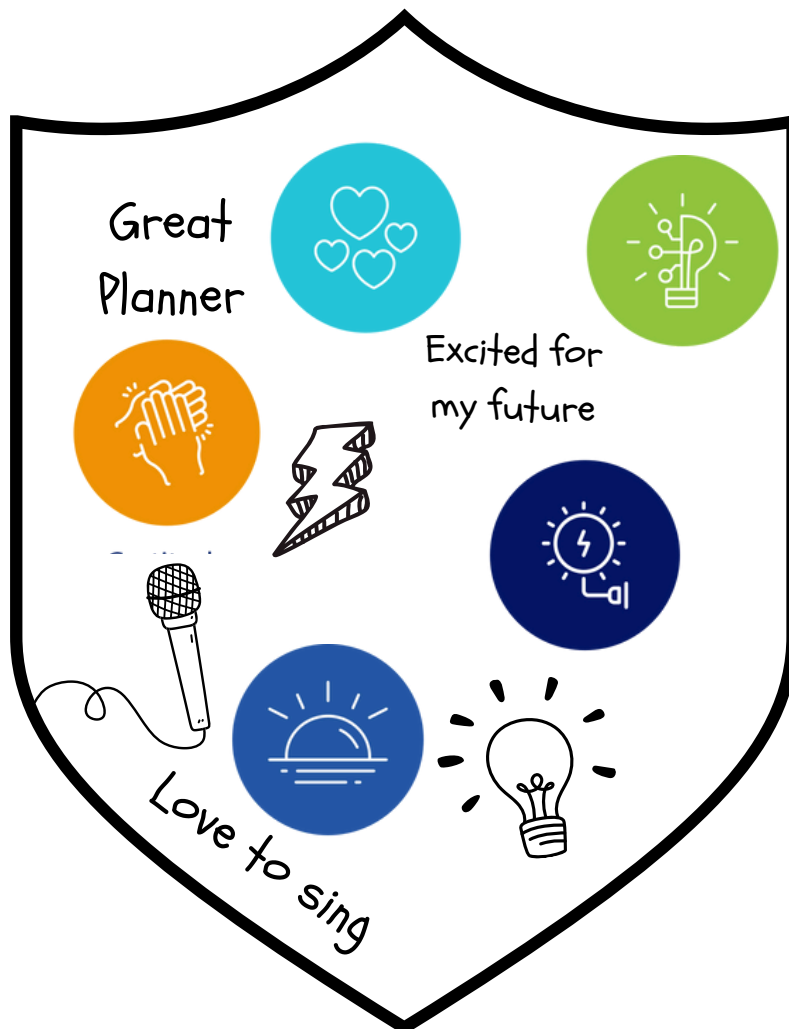
I feel excited and full of energy about life.

Strengths Shield

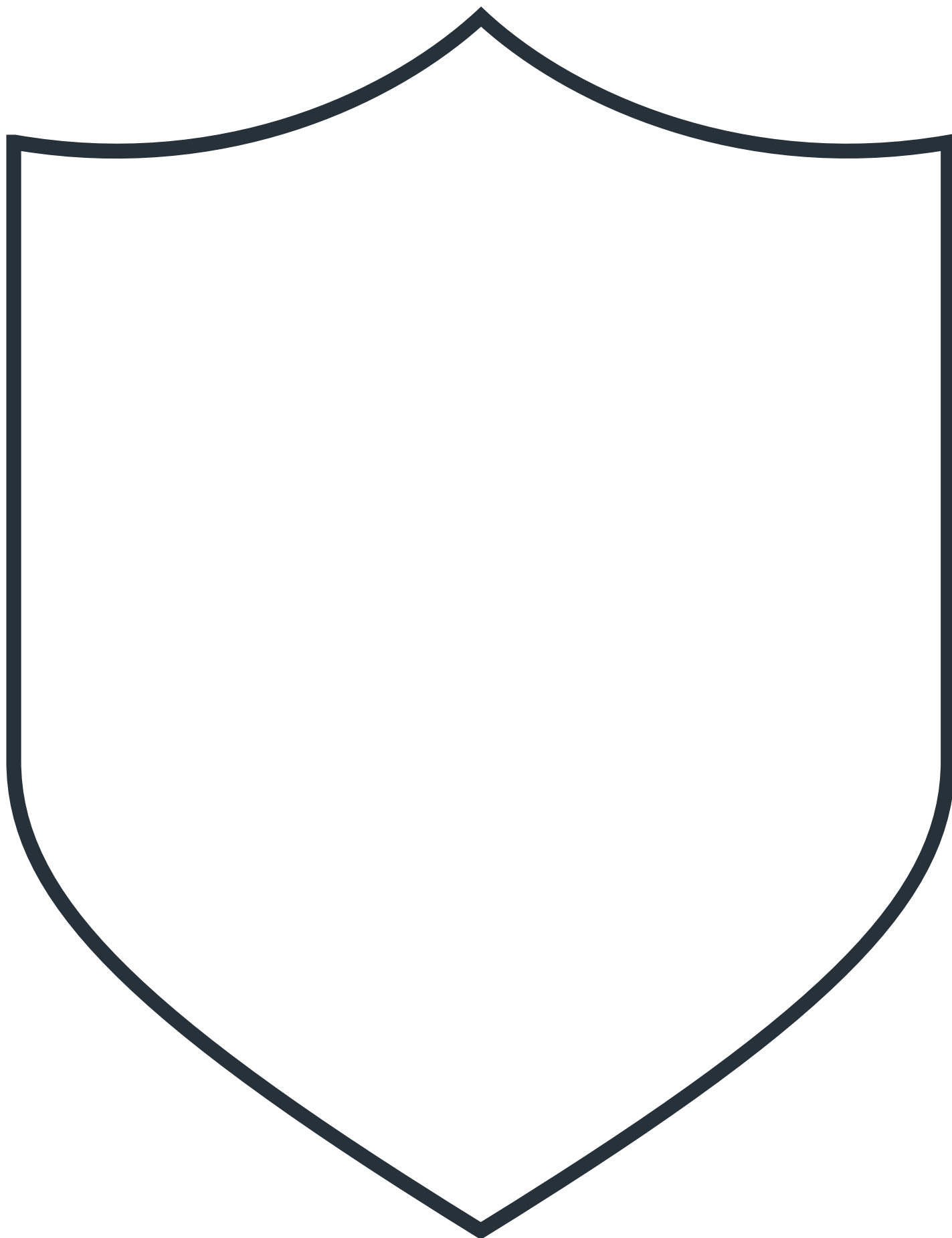
What can it help with?

Boosts confidence and encourages self-acceptance.

- Draw a shield on a piece of paper or use the printable template.
- Think about your strengths—what are you naturally good at? What do your friends say you're great at?
- Choose 5–7 Strengths and write or draw them inside the shield. You can also draw the symbols.
- Decorate your shield with colours, doodles, or symbols that represent YOU. It might look something like the example below:



Strengths Shield



Managing Sensory Experiences

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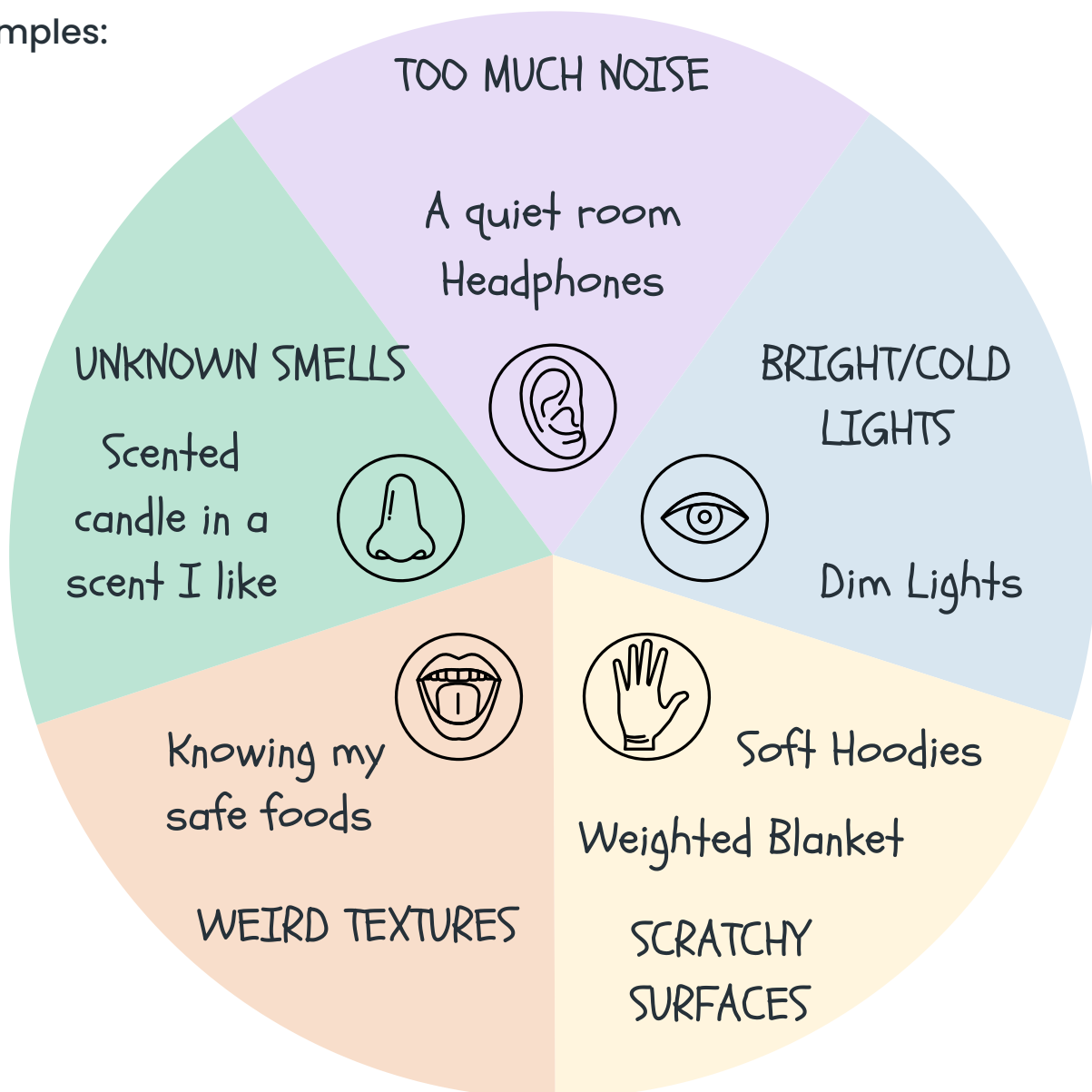
Sensory Circle

What can it help with? Supports self-awareness and emotional regulation.

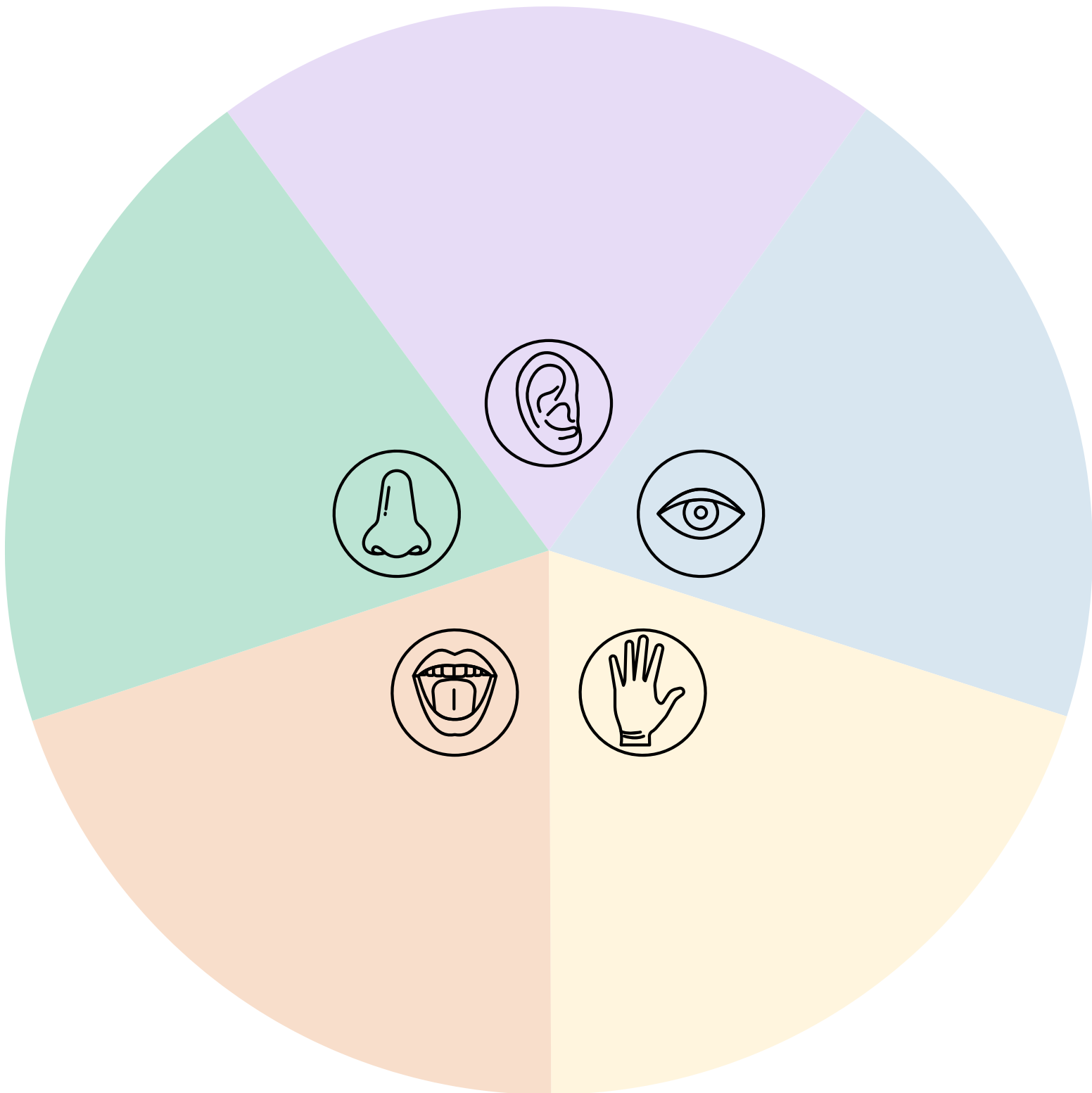
Identify sensory needs and create a personal toolkit.

- Draw a circle and divide it into sections (Touch, Sound, Light, Smell, Taste) or use the template.
- Fill in each section by writing what helps you feel calm and what causes sensory overload.

Examples:



Sensory Circle



Social Connections and You

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Social Script & Boost Bytez

Use the following exercise to reduce social anxiety and make communication easier.

- Write down situations that might feel tricky (group conversations, asking for help, making new friends).
- Create a script for each situation – use the template to help.

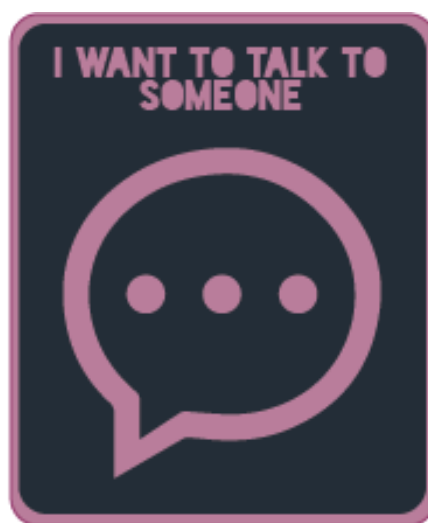
What's the situation?

New social situations
– meeting new people

The Script

"Hey, I find it hard to jump into conversations. If I seem quiet, I still want to be included!"

You can use "Boost Byte" cards as visual aids to communicate needs.



Social Script & Boost Bytez

What's the situation?

Asking
someone for
help

The Script

What's the situation?

Being in a
group with
new people

The Script

What's the situation?

The Script

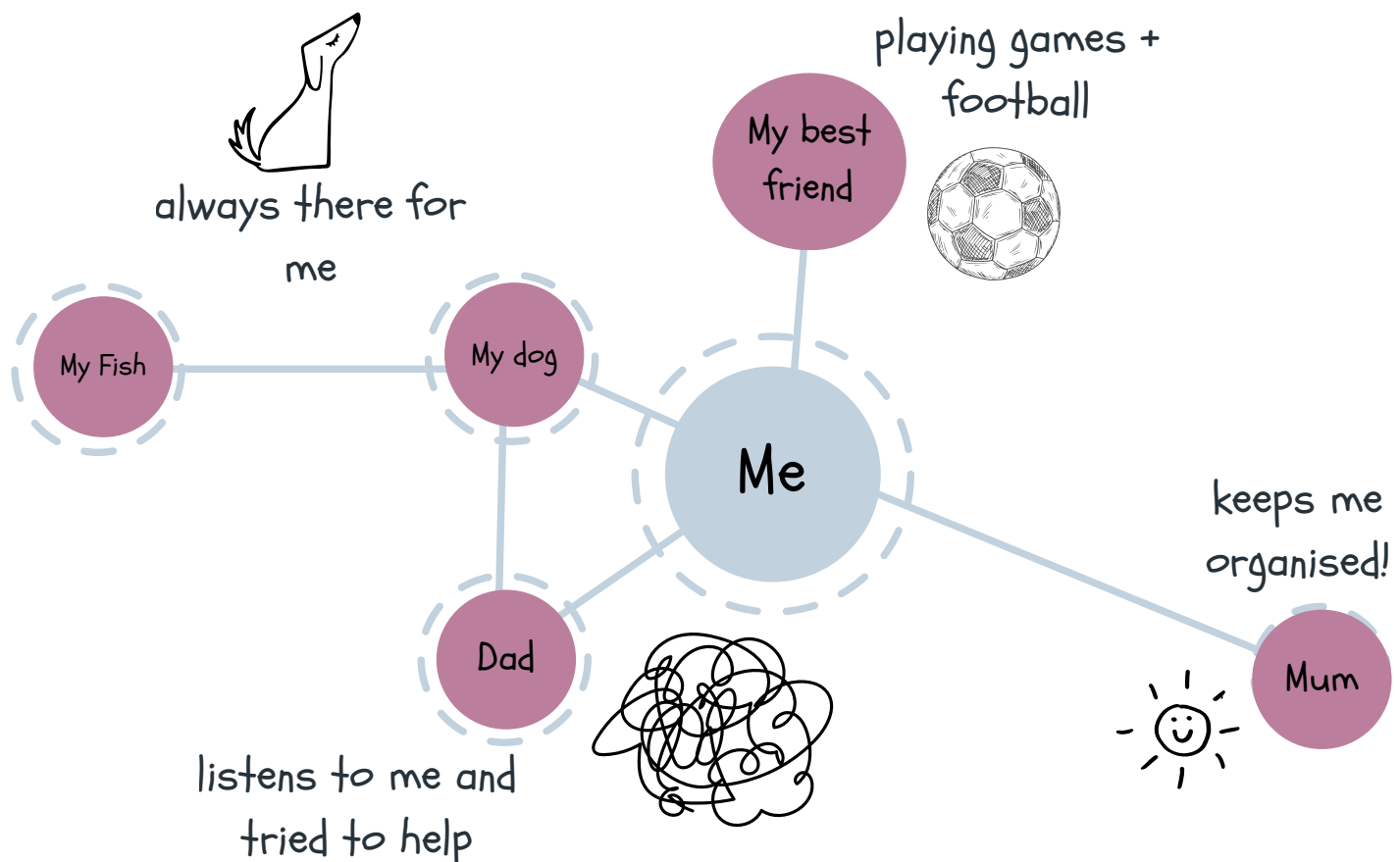
What's the situation?

The Script

Connection Map

What can it help with? Helps to reflect on the people you have in your life, strengthen bonds, and reduce social stress.

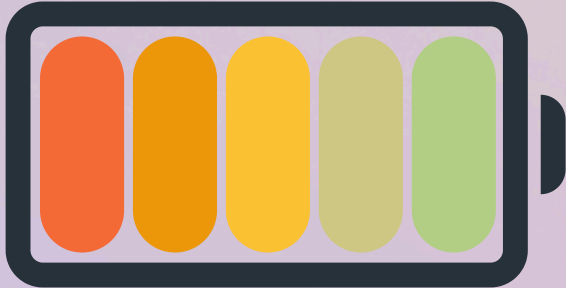
1. Draw a map of people in your life, starting with those closest in the centre nearest to you. You can also add others you have in your life, like family or pets.
2. Around each person, write or doodle things that make your connection strong (e.g., kindness, shared interests, fun conversations).
3. Add 'connection pathways' – some people might be good for deep chats, others for fun activities. Recognising this helps manage expectations.
4. If there are challenges, brainstorm ways to improve (e.g., setting boundaries, practising conversation scripts, making time for connections).



Charging your Battery

Imagine you start each day with a full battery...

What depletes your energy?



How much energy?



5 - very high energy use

4 - high energy use

3 - medium energy use

2 - low energy use

1 - very low energy use

Name of task	How much energy? Colour in or mark 1-5	How can I use less charge?

Visual Aids

You can cut out these images out and stick into the various activities instead of drawing or writing.



school bag



listen to music



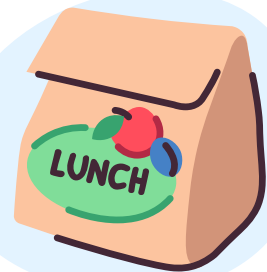
put my shoes on



books



arts and crafts



lunch



P.E



bus



computer

Visual Aids

You can cut out these images out and stick into the various activities instead of drawing or writing.



my pet



I don't know



friends



unwell



too much noise



I need help



I need space



eating



exercise

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