Life Hacks for the Neurodivergent (and Their Colleagues)

By Dr. Candin Garner of Matern OT
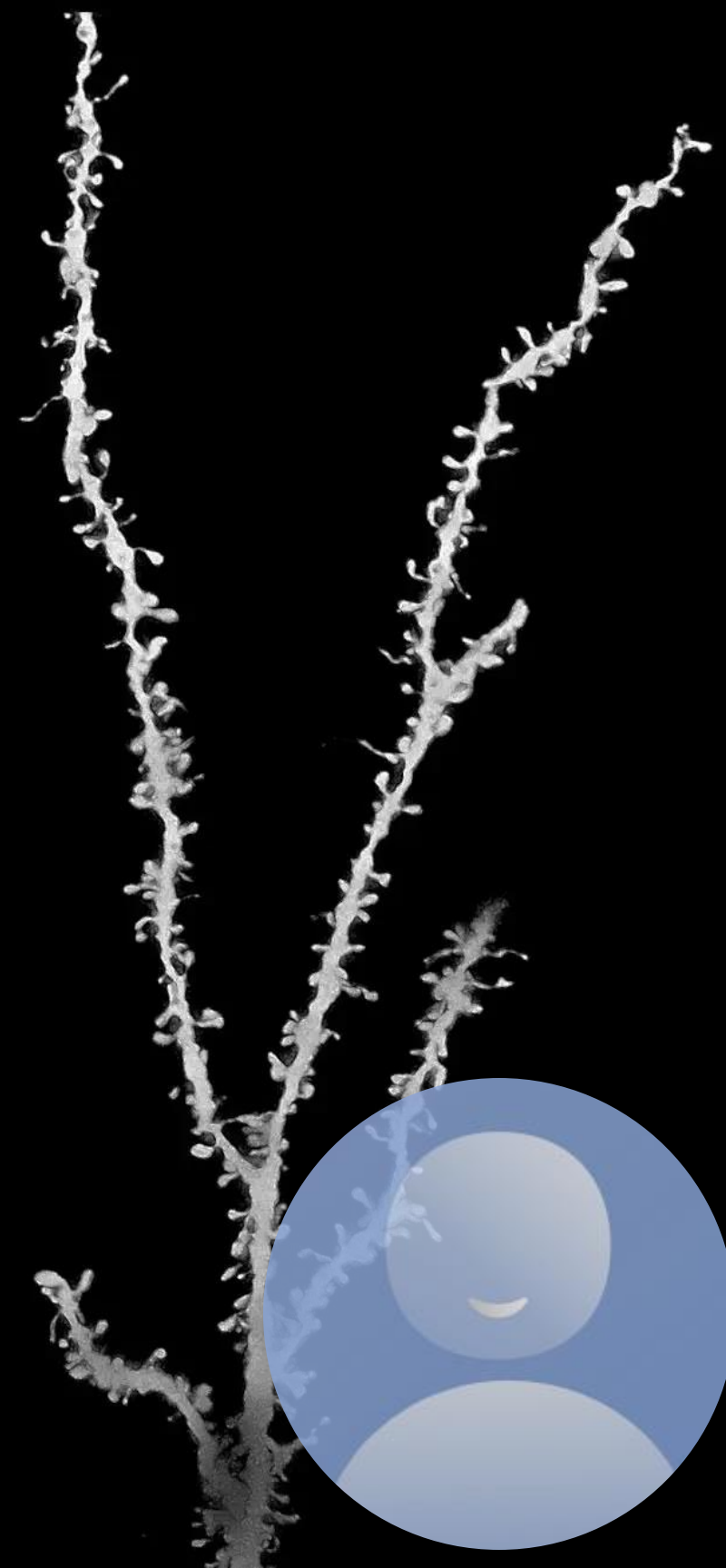
Agenda

Introduction

- Licensed OT/LMT
- Arizona
- 17 years of intervention
- Mother and Wife
- Intervention, Training, and Education:
    - Neurodiversity
    - Maternal Health
    - Breast Rehabilitation
    - Lymphedema
    - Acute Care
    - Hands
    - Pediatrics
    - Mental Health
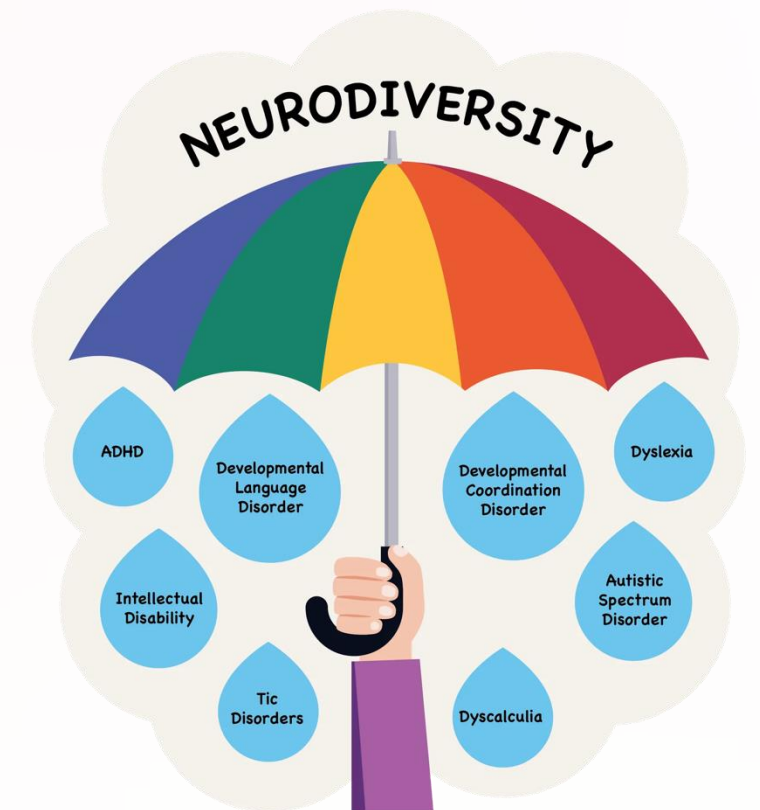
Defining Neurodiversity?

Definition

Natural variation in human brain function and behavioral traits. Refers to the concept that **neurological differences** are normal variations in the human genome rather than deficits.
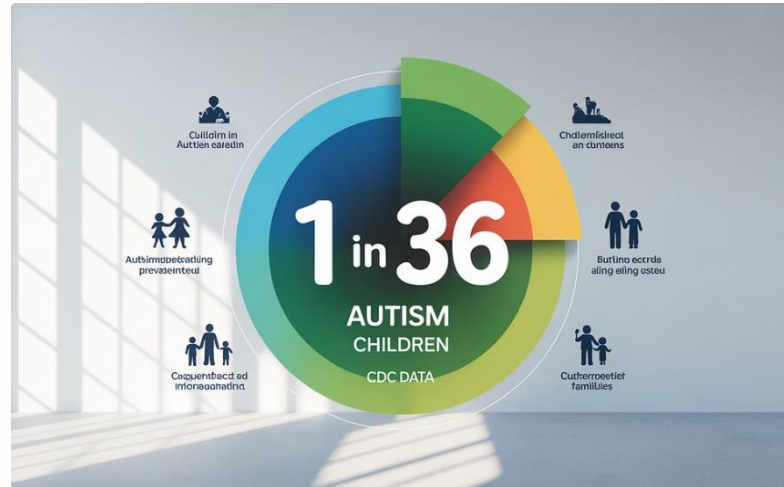
Prevalence

Neurodivergent individuals make up an estimated 15-20% of the global population.
This represents a **significant** portion of humanity with unique cognitive profiles and perspectives.

NEURODIVERSITY

ADHD
Developmental Language Disorder
Developmental Coordination Disorder
Dyslexia
Intellectual Disability
Autistic Spectrum Disorder
Tic Disorders
Dyscalculia

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Prevalence

1 in 36 children in the US (CDC, 2023)

Strengths

- exceptional pattern recognition
- sustained attention to detail
- deep subject expertise
- innovative problem-solving
- unique perspectives

Challenges

- **social communication difficulties**
- challenges with unwritten workplace rules
- need for predictable routines
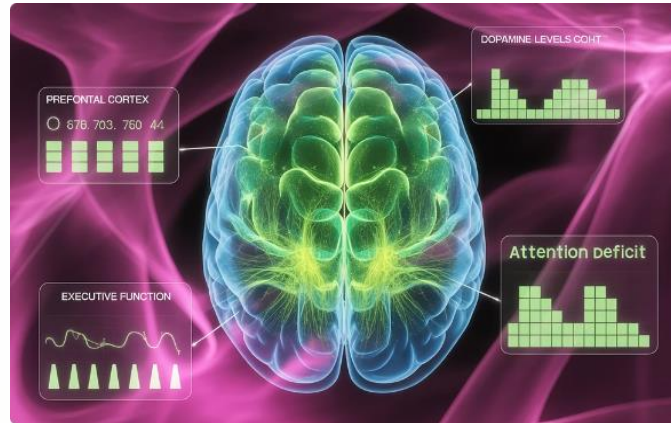- Potential executive functioning differences require clear instructions

Sensory Differences

May experience heightened or reduced **sensitivity to environmental stimuli,** including sound, light, texture, and smell, requiring workplace accommodations for optimal performance.
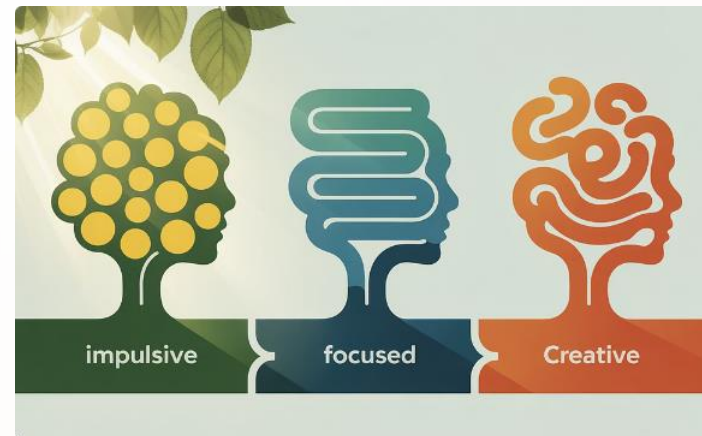
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Prevalence

Approximately 4.4% of US adults are diagnosed with ADHD

Types

- Includes:
  - inattentive
  - hyperactive-impulsive
  - combined presentations

Strengths

- creative
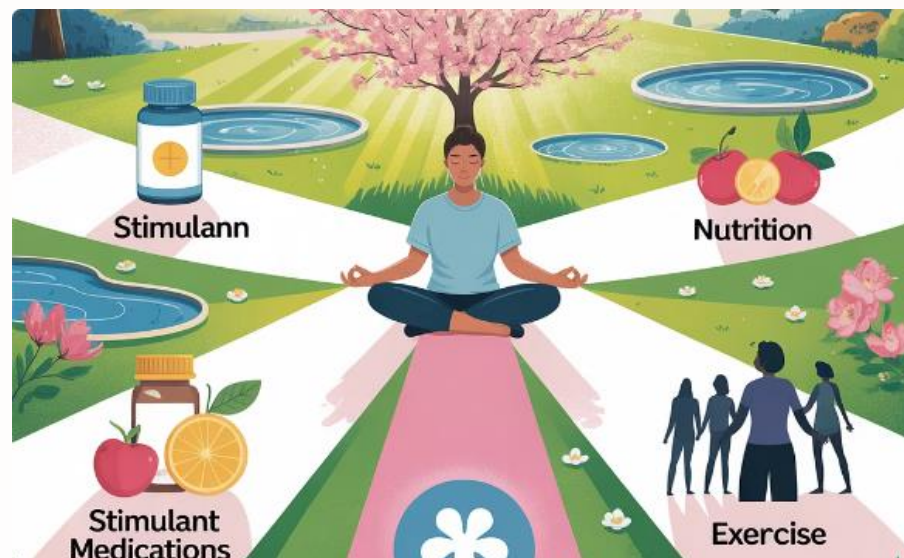- hyper-focused abilities
- innovative thinking

Challenges

- **REGULATING** attention
- organization
- time management

Treatment

Stimulant medications that prevent dopamine reuptake, nutrition, exercise, therapies.

Dyslexia

Definition

A learning difference affecting reading, writing, and language processing. Affects 15-20% of the global population.

Strengths

Enhanced creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. Common among successful entrepreneurs and innovators.

Challenges

Difficulties with text processing, spelling, and written organization. Processing differences, **not intelligence** deficits.

Neurodiversity in the Workplace Workplace

Neurodiversity represents a significant **TALENT** pool, yet 85% of neurodivergent individuals remain unemployed or **underemployed**.

Companies embracing neurodiversity report **30% higher productivity**. Different cognitive styles bring unique perspectives and valuable skills to any organization.

Benefits of Neurodiversity

Diverse thinking styles enhance workplace processes and ultimately benefit all employees.

- **Innovation:** Neurodiverse perspectives lead to breakthrough ideas and unconventional approaches.
- **Problem Solving:** Different thinking styles tackle challenges from multiple angles for more effective soluti
- **Detail Orientation:** Exceptional focus on particulars catches what others might miss.
- **Pattern Recognition:** Ability to see connections and relationships that aren't immediately obvious to othe
- **Productivity:** JPMorgan Chase reported 48% higher productivity from neurodiverse teams.

Neurodiversity Workplace Strategies

Various Learning Modes

Visual Aids:

- Visual Schedules
- Condensed Info
- Charts and Diagrams
- Color Coding
- Whiteboards
- Projectors
- Posters and Signs
- Personalized Desk Items

Hands-On Aids:

- Physical Models and Prototypes
- Interactive Displays
- Manipulatives
- Ergonomic Workstations

Auditory Aids:

- Audio Recordings
- Voice Memos
- Music/White Noise
- Read-Aloud Technology

celebrate neurodiversity

Neurodiversity Workplace Strategies

1

Social Support

- Peer Mentoring
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
- Advocacy
- Sensory-Friendly Workspaces

2

Creating Inclusion

- Flexible Work Arrangements
- Manager Training
- Psychological Safety
- Open Communication

3

Fostering Growth

- Strengths-Based Approaches
- Reasonable Adjustments
- Inclusive Culture

Neurodiversity Workplace Strategies

Rewards & Accolades

- Increased Motivation

- Boosted Confidence

- Positive Reinforcement

- Sense of Accomplishment

- Independence and Self-Reliance

- Improved Social Interaction

- Reduced Anxiety and Stress

Neurodiversity Workplace Strategies

Sensory Considerations

Identifying Sensory Processing Patterns

Understanding individual sensory profiles to create personalized accommodations

Addressing Sensory Challenges

Implementing solutions for common sensory barriers in workplace environments

Managing Sensory Input

Controlling lighting, sounds, scents, and visual clutter to create comfortable spaces

Neurodiversity Workplace Strategies

Schedule Flexibility & Location

📅 Time Accommodations

Assistive Technology

Calendar Blocking

Multiformat Information

Various Work Settings

Expanded Work Hours/Days

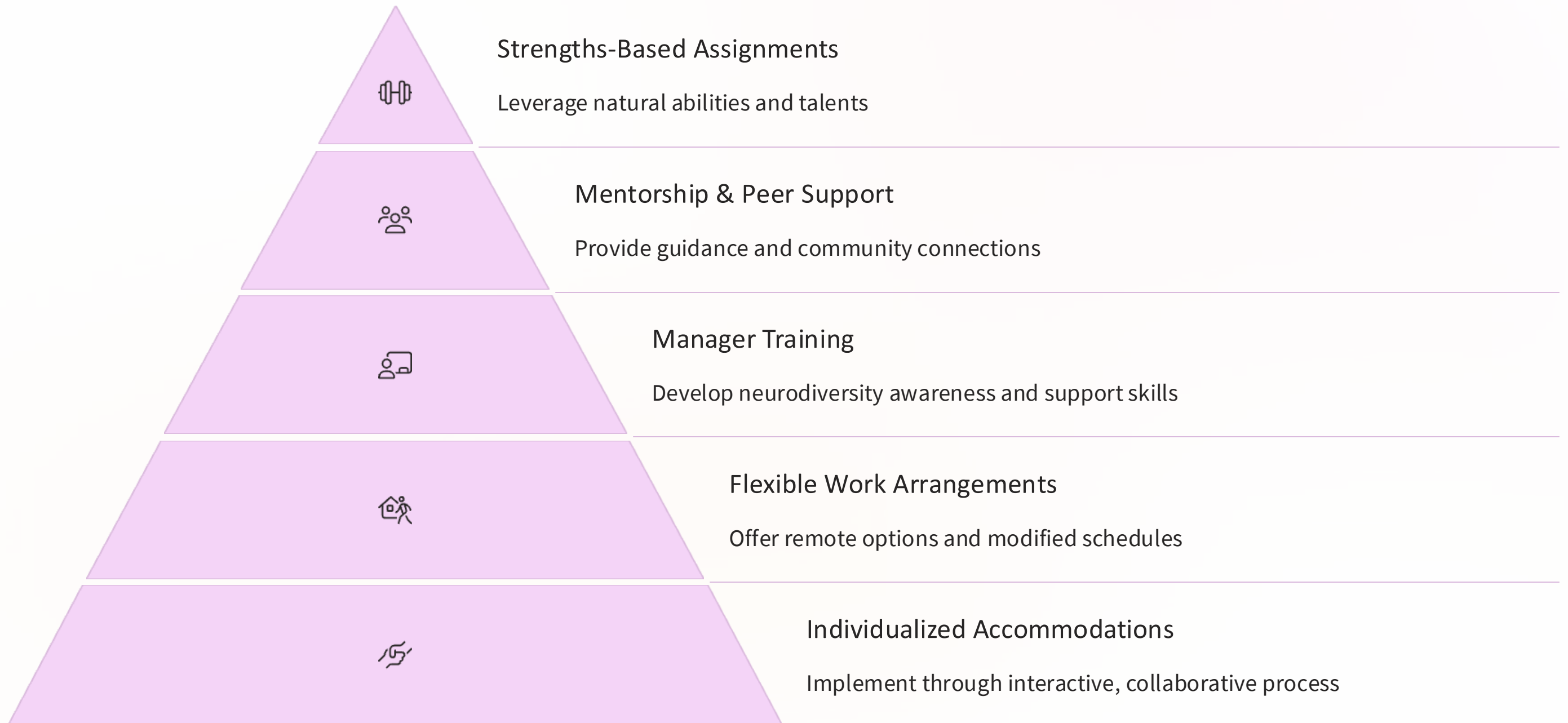Work-Life Balance

Neurodiversity Workplace Strategies

Inclusive Communication

1   Training and Awareness

2   Clear Communication

3   Mentoring and Support Networks

4   Feedback and Check-ins

Employer Support Strategies

Strengths-Based Assignments

Leverage natural abilities and talents

Mentorship & Peer Support

Provide guidance and community connections

Manager Training

Develop neurodiversity awareness and support skills

Flexible Work Arrangements

Offer remote options and modified schedules

Individualized Accommodations

Implement through interactive, collaborative process

Creating Inclusive Environments

Apply Universal Design

Implement principles that benefit everyone, not just specific groups.

Optimize Physical Space

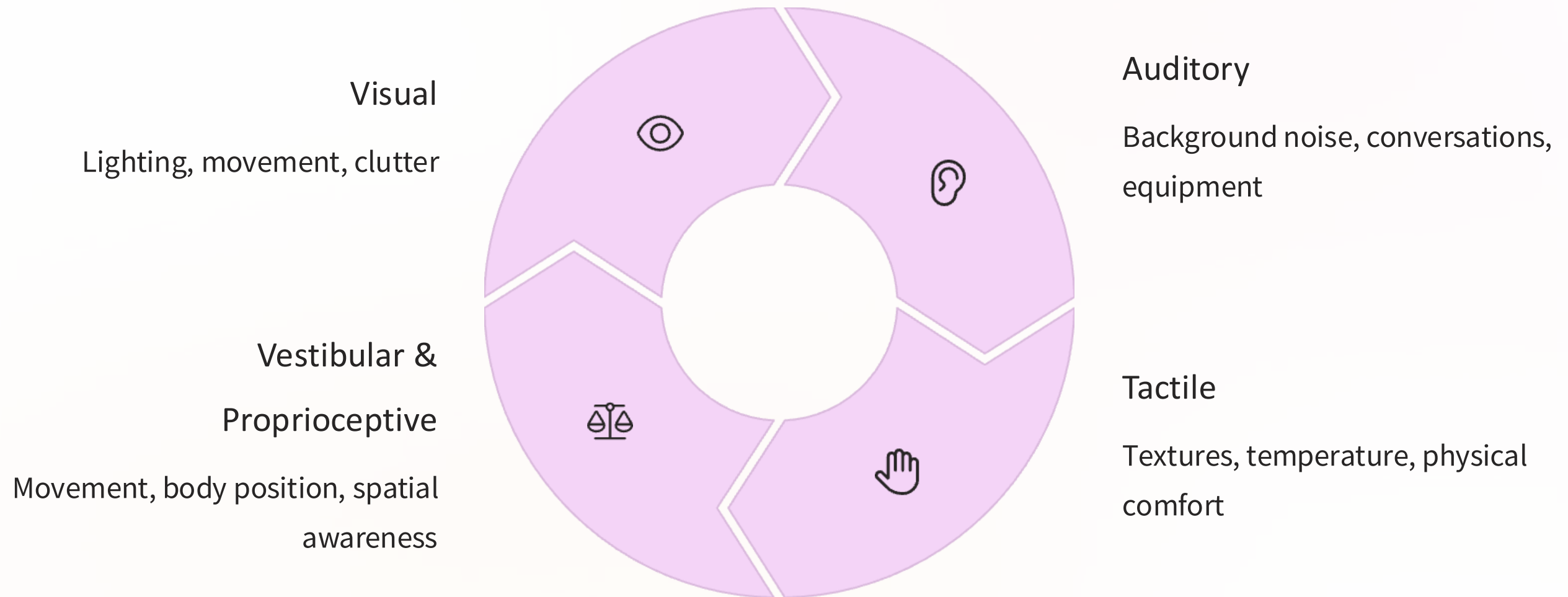Reduce open office noise and create distraction-free zones.

Diversify Communication

Provide multiple channels for information sharing and feedback.

Understanding Sensory Processing

Visual

Lighting, movement, clutter

Auditory

Background noise, conversations, equipment

Vestibular & Proprioceptive

Movement, body position, spatial awareness

Tactile

Textures, temperature, physical comfort

90% of neurodivergent individuals have **atypical sensory processing patterns**. Understanding these differences helps create supportive environments.
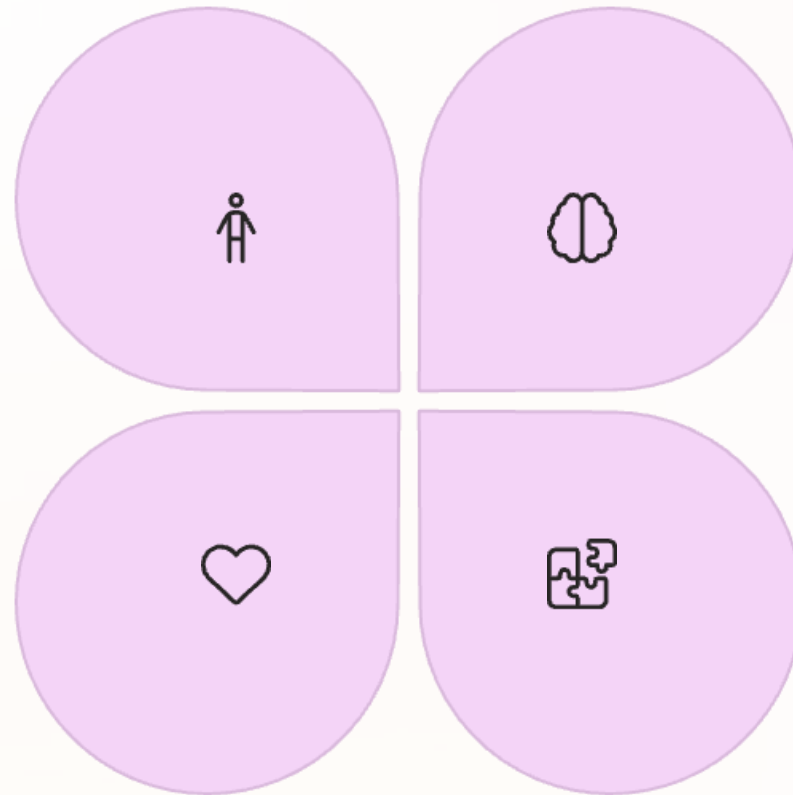
What are sensory processing patterns?

Everyone Has a Profile

All individuals have unique sensory preferences and thresholds.

Explains Behavior

Helps understand reactions to environmental stimuli.

Promotes Well-being

Facilitates self-regulation and emotional balance.

Supports Inclusion

Enables creation of accessible environments for diverse needs.
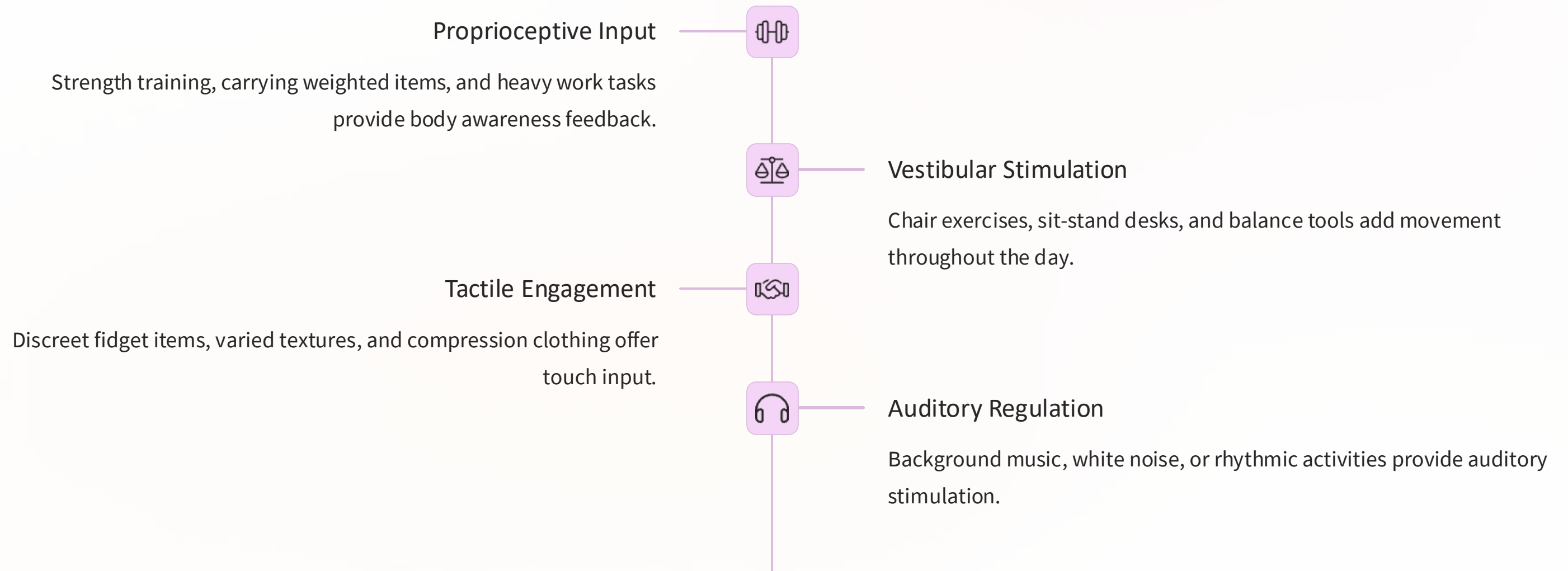
Sensory Seeking

High Threshold + Active Response

- Actively crave and pursue sensory input

- Creating stimulation

- In constant motion

  - touching, chewing, fidgeting,

Strategies for Sensory-Seeking

Adults with sensory-seeking patterns benefit from strategies that provide appropriate sensory input in socially...

Effective strategies include creating personalized sensory routines, incorporating regular movement breaks, and engaging in mind-body practices like yog...

Proprioceptive Input

Strength training, carrying weighted items, and heavy work tasks provide body awareness feedback.

Vestibular Stimulation

Chair exercises, sit-stand desks, and balance tools add movement throughout the day.

Tactile Engagement

Discreet fidget items, varied textures, and compression clothing offer touch input.

Auditory Regulation

Background music, white noise, or rhythmic activities provide auditory stimulation.
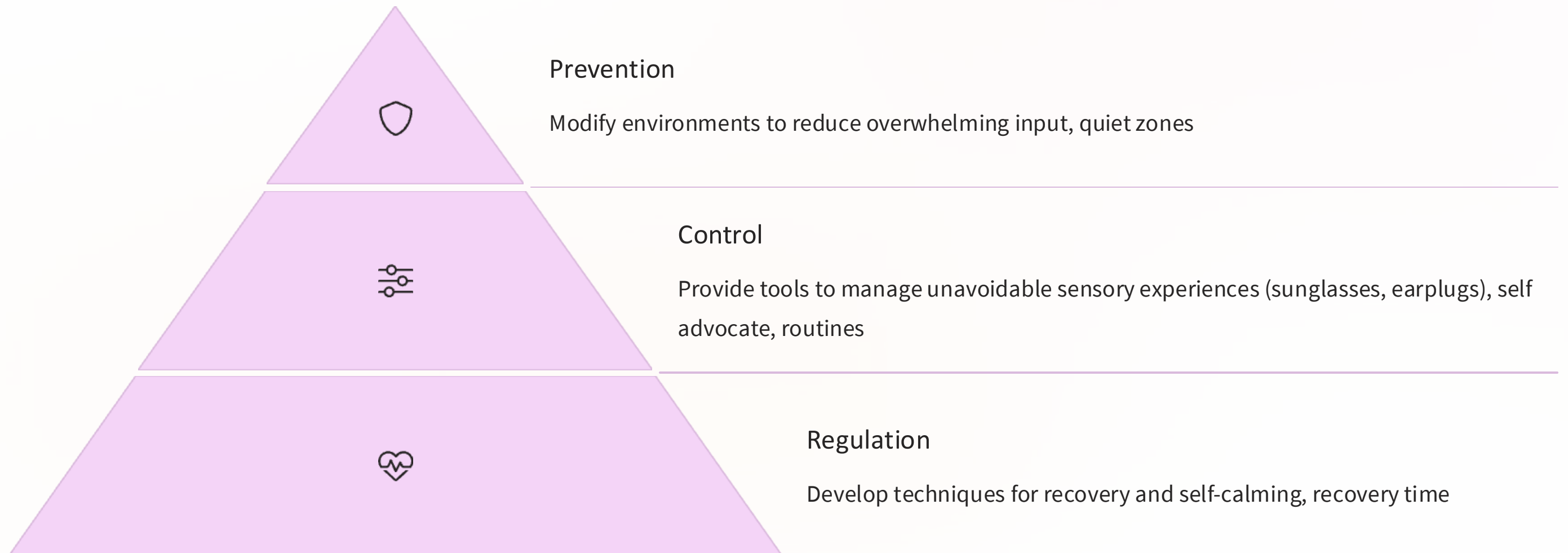
Sensory Avoiding

Low Threshold + Active Response

- Actively avoids sensory input

- Maintains rigid routines

- Dislikes change or transitions

- Avoids crowded spaces

- Refuses certain clothing or food textures

Strategies for Sensory Avoiding

Adults with sensory avoiding patterns actively withdraw from sensory input they find overwhelming or...

Strategies should focus on prevention, control, and regulation to help these individuals navigate their environments successfully and...

Prevention

Modify environments to reduce overwhelming input, quiet zones

Control

Provide tools to manage unavoidable sensory experiences (sunglasses, earplugs), self advocate, routines

Regulation

Develop techniques for recovery and self-calming, recovery time

Sensory Sensitivity

Low Threshold + Passive Response

- Highly aware of surroundings.

- Easily overwhelmed by intense stimuli.

- React but don't actively avoid stimuli.

- Struggle with distractions.

- Exhibit strong startle response.

People with sensory sensitivity have a low threshold for sensory input. They notice everything and can become easily overwhelmed, but don't actively avoid it. This heightened awareness makes busy environments challenging.

Strategies for Sensory-Sensitive

For adults with sensory sensitivity, the environment should minimize overwhelming input...

Creating a calming, predictable, and supportive environment is key to helping them function optimally in work and home...

Visual Ergonomics

Soft lighting, anti-glare screens, neutral colors, minimal clutter

Auditory Ergonomics

Noise-canceling headphones, sound masking, quiet spaces

Tactile Ergonomics

Soft fabrics, ergonomic seating, comfortable textures

Low Registration

High Threshold + Passive Response

- Misses sensory cues

- Appears uninterested

- Slow to respond

- May seem clumsy

- Needs stronger input for engagement

Strategies for Low Registration

Adults with low registration patterns often miss sensory cues that others notice easily. They may seem...

These individuals benefit from more vivid, louder, brighter, and stronger sensory experiences to help them notice and engage with their...

Bright, Contrasting Visuals

Heavy Work Activities
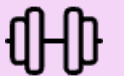
Auditory Reminders/Alerts

Dynamic Movement

Varied Textures

Experts to Follow

Chris Wenger, SLP

Instagram
**Instagram (@speechdu...**
Instagram photos and videos

https://linktr.ee/speechdude
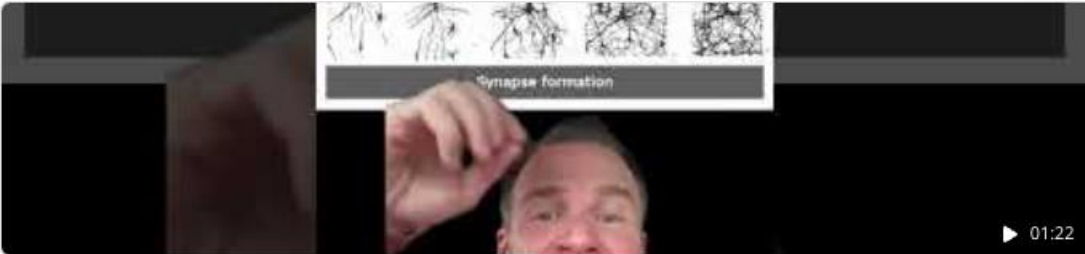
YouTube
Synaptic Pruning & Hyperconnectivity (Autistic Vs Non-Autistic Bra...

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Dr. Ned Hallowell, Psychiatrist

Dr. Hallowell
Home - Dr. Hallo...
[vc_row][vc_column][vc_empty_space height="30px"][/vc_column][/vc_row][vc_row el_class="narrow"][vc_column][vc_column_text el_class="homeintro"] Unwrapping the gifts in all minds We are one of the top facilities in the world for the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD and associated conditions. ... Continue reading

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Ned Hallowell perfectly explains ADHD 🧠 #adhd #neurodiverg...

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Implementation Roadmap

Leadership Education

Secure executive commitment through neurodiversity awareness training.

Workplace Assessment

Evaluate physical environment and identify sensory and structural barriers.

Manager Training

Develop practical skills for supporting neurodivergent team members.

Support Structures

Establish accommodation processes, peer support, and mentoring systems.

Resources & Next Steps

Key Resources

🌐 Online Resources

Begin with the Job Accommodation Network (askjan.org) for comprehensive accommodation guidance and legal information. Explore ADDA (add.org) for ADHD-specific workplace strategies and the Autism Society (autism-society.org) for autism support resources.

📖 Educational Materials

Utilize condition-specific resources for deeper understanding, including the "Neurodiversity at Work" toolkit by CIPD and "Empowering Neurodiversity in the Workplace" guidebook. Subscribe to research journals focusing on workplace inclusion.

👤 Community Support

Connect with professional networks like Neurodiversity in Business (NiB) and EARN (Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion) to share best practices and learn from industry leaders.

Implementation Steps

Assessment

Conduct organizational readiness assessment and sensory environment evaluations. Identify existing barriers and opportunities within your workplace.

Implementation

Roll out training programs for managers and staff. Create accommodation processes with clear documentation and support channels.

Planning

Develop a comprehensive inclusion strategy with measurable goals. Establish Employee Resource Groups focused on neurodiversity support and advocacy.

Evaluation

Regularly assess program effectiveness through feedback mechanisms. Adjust strategies based on outcomes and emerging best practices.

For sustained success, consider **partnering with neurodiversity consultants** who can provide specialized guidance tailored to your organization's specific needs and ch