THE NEURODIVERSITY *Playbook*

BY RYAN ANGOUW

Magna Minds

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** indicates must read for both parents and educators

FOREWORD

When I started MagnaMinds, my goal was simple: to make life better for kids and families who face challenges many of us don't see every day. I may not share their experiences, but I care deeply about listening, learning, and helping in any way I can.

At the learning centre I volunteered in, I joined as a peer, reading, solving problems, and discovering new things together. Those moments showed me that diligence matters, but compassion matters most.

I'm only 14, but I believe age shouldn't stop anyone from making a difference. If MagnaMinds helps even one child feel supported, one parent feel less alone, or one teacher find new ways to connect, then it's already worth it.

This book is part of that journey. May it inspire you as much as the kids have inspired me.

RYAN ANGOUW

FOUNDER, MAGNAMINDS

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY

1.1 IN A GIST

Neurodiversity is not actually a medical term; it's a social concept. Neurodiversity is the idea that differences in how people's brains work are not deficits or problems; they're differences that occur naturally in an individual's birth or development.

WHAT DOES NEURODIVERGENT MEAN?

A person whose brain works differently from what is considered 'typical' is neurodivergent. This includes people with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and more. A neurodivergent person experiences the world in a different way from a neurotypical person.

DISABILITY OR NOT?

Many people label neurodivergent individuals with titles like "differently abled" or "special." While these titles aren't necessarily false, they run the risk of undermining the challenges neurodivergent people face. It is important to acknowledge that these conditions ARE disabilities that, in most cases, significantly negatively impact people's lives. However, it is also important to know that having a disability is okay, and people should never be persecuted for being disabled.

1.2 COMMON TYPES

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

Includes a very wide range/spectrum of developmental differences affecting social interaction, communication, and behavior. Often associated with unique strengths in pattern recognition, focus, and creative problem-solving.

ASD is unique because the commonalities are not as specific as other types of neurodiversity. Two people with the same diagnosis may behave very differently. It's likely that people with ASD may have neurological comorbidity, which means they possess multiple neurological conditions simultaneously (e.g. ASD and ADHD at the same time).

PROFOUND AUTISM

Profound autism is a type of ASD that is found in 1 of every 4 diagnoses. An officially autism diagnosed person has profound autism if they exhibit these by age 8:

- An IQ under 50 (difficulty in performing and learning simpler tasks).
- Communication difficulties (Nonverbal or limited vocabulary).
- In need of 24/7 supervision likely for the rest of their life.

ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

Involves differences in attention, impulse control, and energy regulation. Many people with ADHD are highly energetic, spontaneous, and innovative thinkers

DYSLEXIA

A learning difference that primarily affects reading, spelling, and language processing. Often linked with strong visual thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

DYSPRAXIA (DEVELOPMENTAL COORDINATION DISORDER, DCD)

Affects motor skills (possible struggles in writing, running, jumping, etc.). People with dyspraxia may excel in creative or strategic thinking despite motor challenges.

DYSCALCULIA

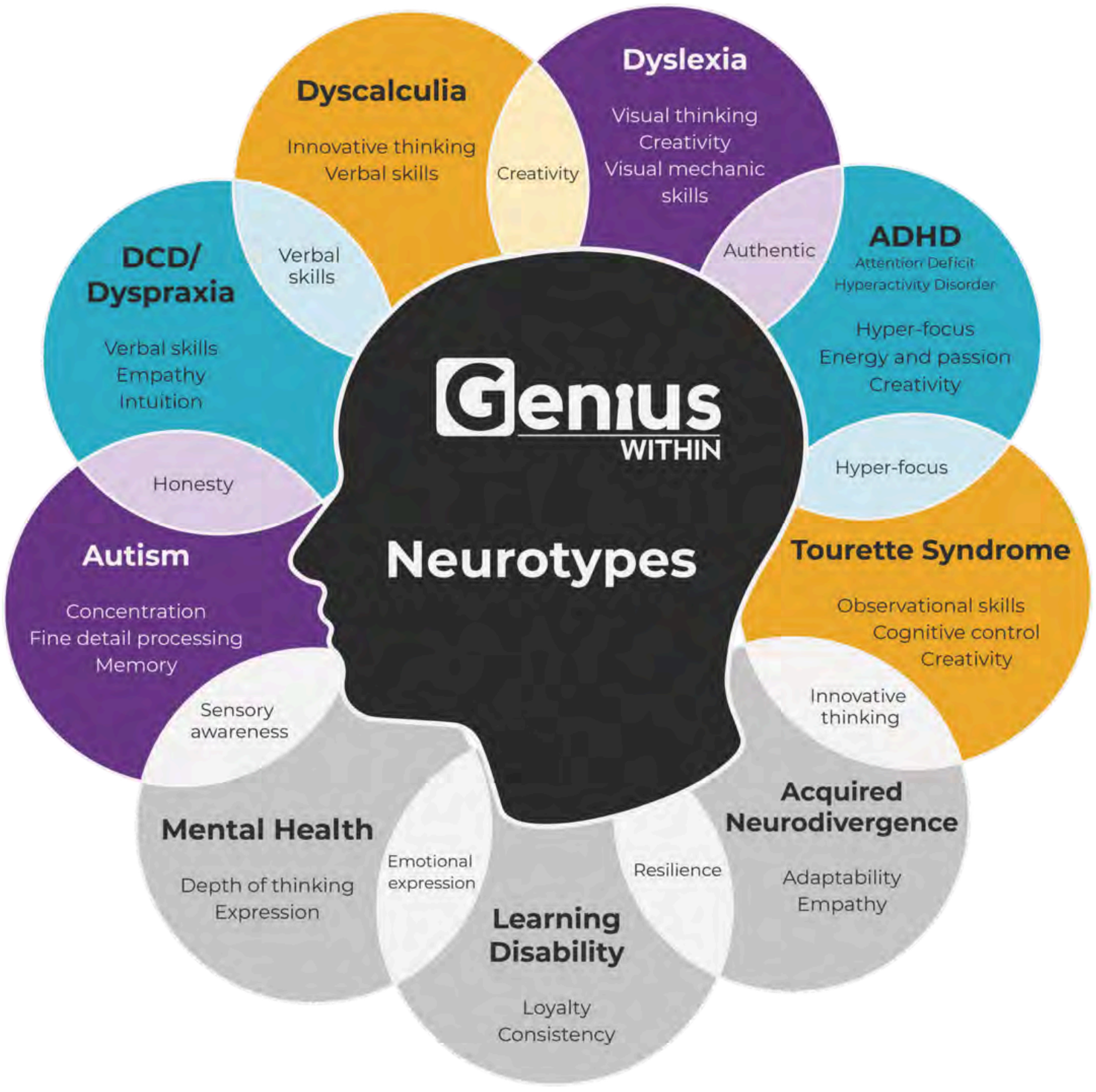
Involves difficulties with numbers, math concepts, and spatial reasoning. Individuals may have strong abilities in non-mathematical areas such as storytelling or art.

DYSGRAPHIA

A learning difference that affects handwriting, spelling, and organizing written expression. People with dysgraphia may be strong verbal communicators or creative thinkers.

TOURETTES SYNDROME

A neurological condition characterised by involuntary tics (movements or sounds). Tics are caused by disruptions in the nervous system, causing the brain to be unable to suppress unwanted actions. Often accompanied by creativity, humor, and resilience.



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

IN A GIST

Inclusive Education is a system of education where individuals with different physical, social, and academic capabilities learn together, with appropriate support from supervisors provided to those who need it.

WHY IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

In inclusive education systems, neurotypical students develop lifelong values such as compassion and empathy while also acquiring useful skills, including effective communication and collaboration, as they interact and work with diverse perspectives.

For neurodivergent students, inclusive education helps them hone their abilities to adapt and remain comfortable in otherwise challenging situations, thereby improving their social skills and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, common stigmas that exist against neurodiversity is reduced through increased interaction between the students. With appropriate support, inclusive education can help improve the academic progress of these students.

Overall, inclusive education helps prepare all students for real-world situations where respectful and collaborative interaction is necessary between neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals, and under the right circumstances, it can set everyone in the classroom up for success.

IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION RIGHT FOR EVERYONE?

Yes and no. 100% inclusive education may not always be the right option, depending on the level of familiarity the students have with it. Without the right preparation, neurodivergent students may feel isolated, and neurotypical students may feel uncomfortable. Inclusive education should be something that educators and parents work towards with their students.

Therefore, integration of inclusive education is necessary to introduce neurodivergent students to their neurotypical classmates, and vice versa. Methods to do so will be discussed in depth in this toolkit.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION VS SPECIAL EDUCATION

Although both methods are beneficial for neurodivergent learning, there is a big difference between the two methods. Special education is a system of using a different curriculum for neurodivergent students that is tailored to their exact needs to accelerate their learning. At MagnaMinds, we believe that special education is essential, but that it should be (though not 100% of the time) an ***important but temporary*** stepping stone in a neurodivergent child's learning.

HOW WILL MAGNAMINDS HELP?

3.1. OUR VISION

We aim to contribute to a fully integrated, 100% inclusive education, where both neurotypical and neurodiverse students can learn and socialise safely and happily in the same institutions. A society where neurodiversity is seen as a difference, not a weakness, with a higher willingness to support and accept neurodiverse people with unique skillsets for employment, higher education, and other opportunities where neurodivergent individuals can find and pursue their life goals.

OUR MISSION

Magnaminds aims to address infrastructural education issues in local communities by providing alternative, integrative, and inclusive education for neurodivergent youth with limited resources and educational opportunities. Furthermore, we aim to break and reinvent common negative stigmas through advocacy efforts, including social media and community outreach events. Lastly, we aim to facilitate collaboration with local NGOs, governments, and professionals through regional symposia to develop and implement new, useful, and innovative solutions to address these issues.

3.2. CORE PILLARS OF SUPPORT

I. CREATING COMFORTABLE, INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A safe living and learning environment is the number one thing that calms us down as humans, and that feeling is amplified in neurodivergent individuals. How are people expected to learn and concentrate in places where they don't feel comfortable? Incorporating calming spaces and sensory friendly decor (pastel colours) are seemingly small, but essential steps in establishing an optimal and safe environment.

II. TAILORING TO THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS

Each child is different and has different needs. Necessary accommodations, such as AAC devices for students with limited communication skills can be a great way in helping students feel heard and belonged, as well as providing them with what is necessary to communicate their needs, inquiries, and wants.

III. EARLY INTERVENTION AND THERAPY

Early screening for neurodiversity is not discouraged, and the earlier something is known, the better. Earlier intervention and appropriate therapy can significantly help advance an individual's learning speed and capabilities in the future.

IV. FOSTERING COLLABORATION AND INTERACTION ACROSS NEUROTYPES

Interaction between neurodivergent and neurotypical students is the most effective way to integrate students into real-world situations and achieve a truly inclusive environment. Normalising interaction is a must, but it must be supervised for the safety of the **students involved.**

V. PARENT/EDUCATOR RESILIENCE AND SUPPORT

In any circumstance, being the parent or educator of any number of children is mentally and physically draining. In a situation where children are truly reliant on their supervisors and need 24/7 support, their support system disappears when their parents/educators burn out. Supporting the people who help your children is equally important for the children's success as supporting them.

3.3. OUR ROLE WITH PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

PARENTS

MagnaMinds' aims for parents is to transform them into their children's primary therapist. This toolkit's goal is to empower **you** with practical, accessible, low-cost, but effective tools to support you and your children. These tools come in a wide range, from adjusting your environment suited to the children's needs, to equipping your children with the tools necessary to communicate.

Through the inclusive education principles outlined in Chapter 1 and MagnaMinds' Pillars of Support outlined in this chapter, we aim to support and educate you so that you can help your children physically and mentally support themselves as much as possible. As mentioned before, the priority is NOT K-12 education. We don't want to help you "fix" your children, we want to help you become their lifelong **companions** (not caregivers), so that your family has a healthy, sustainable wellbeing.

EDUCATORS

We understand that you face unique challenges in Jakarta. There's limited education, a lack of specialised resources, irregular class sizes, and less advanced educational infrastructure. So, our goal is to fill in those gaps as much as possible. We aim to provide you with the training you need to best support your students. This toolkit will cover the materials you need to become a behavior analyst and therapist for your students.

Just like with parents, our goal is to guide you by providing low-cost, effective solutions that suit your school or organisation's capabilities. There are so many adjustments you can make that don't break the bank to help aid your students that, while small, will add up in combination with many other adjustments. Throughout this toolkit, we will provide inspiration and guidance on designing your students' learning environment, supervising your students, and selecting the type of curriculum you can teach, among other topics. Overall, the information in this toolkit can be a valuable asset if implemented and used correctly.

FOR EDUCATORS

4.1. CREATING NEUROFRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

THE PROBLEM

As the teacher of neurodivergent children, you've probably heard of the term "sensory" before. Perhaps your student is facing sensory problems. Regardless, it is important to adapt the environment every child stays in so that they have a comfortable experience learning and that they have an environment suitable for them.

A person facing sensory issues simply means that their brain struggles to process information that enters through the 5 senses (taste, touch, smell, sight, hearing)

It's not just sensory problems; neurodivergent individuals can come off as difficult to understand at first, and they may react to situations aggressively, angrily, and unpredictably. Putting measures in place, such as calming corners, spaces, or rooms, can greatly help in assisting the child to calm down, making the environment more friendly and suited to them.

HOW DO I IMPLEMENT THIS?

When it comes to the unique sensitivity in neurodivergent individuals, those affected fall under two terms.

Hypersensitivity - Highly sensitive to sight, sounds, touch, smells, and tastes
Hyposensitivity - Less sensitive than usual to sight, sounds, touch, smells, or tastes

It happens because these individuals' sections of the brain used for sensory input are developed differently, causing differences in sensitivity. Although hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity are the two main categories, some students may be hypersensitive in one sense and hypo-sensitive in the other. This might mean that they prefer vibrant colours in their activities due to visual hyposensitivity, but they also may prefer or require earmuffs because of auditory hypersensitivity. These are things you should take into account when renovating or redesigning classrooms.

It's not easy. Different classes will require different adaptations to their learning environment. However, small differences are better than no differences at all.

HERE ARE SOME STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE YOUR INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

FLEXIBLE CLASSROOMS

Due to the diversity in requirements your students have, it is worth considering keeping your classroom completely empty before students arrive at school and using a different classroom design, layout, and decor for each class.

To improve convenience and efficiency, using light, easily movable equipment is a practical way to prep your classrooms for the benefit of each student.
Remember to research your students' needs **before** designing your learning space. Inclusive education often employs a case-by-case approach, so maintaining flexibility is crucial.

ENVIRONMENTAL MODIFICATION

There's a variety of small adjustments you can make. **Visually**, using natural lighting, dimmer LEDs and less harsh lighting can be a great help in reducing distraction and discomfort in the classroom. When it comes to colour tones, there is no universal preference; however, softer, more muted tones are generally preferred for individuals with hypersensitivity. Sticking to pastel colors is a good go-to.

Audibly, providing technology such as noise-cancelling headphones is not the most accessible option. A good alternative is earplugs, which significantly reduce the decibel level. For individuals using earplugs, providing different mediums of education, like visual or physical representations, can be a viable option in teaching them the class content (this will be further discussed in a future section). Furthermore, using sound-absorbing materials such as carpet or foam can be effective in reducing echoes and loud noises.

Tactilely, students may feel uncomfortable with hard, stiff chairs; therefore, providing flexible seating options, such as sofa desks, beanbags, or even standing desks, may be preferred by some students. The carpet and foam used to address auditory issues can also double as a good way to help students with tactile sensitivity, as these materials are usually softer and more comforting

These are the three main senses that you can really make a difference with. By improving the living and learning environment of your students, you automatically eliminate a series of issues and insecurities experienced by millions of neurodivergent children worldwide. School is a child's second home, so it is necessary to make these adjustments to further support and improve their learning capabilities.

YOUR GUIDE TO CALMING SPACES

Calming spaces are beneficial for both non-sensitive and sensitive individuals. For people who struggle with sensitivity, it serves as a “haven” for them, with all of their concerns completely gone. It gives them a chance to unwind when they feel overwhelmed and offers a nice break from the stress and emotions they’ve accumulated throughout their day. For non-sensitive or neurotypical students, although they may not be overwhelmed sensually, it can serve the latter purpose for them as well.

However, it is important that your calming space is not a “timeout space”, it should be a refuge space. If you just leave the child in the calming space when they show challenging behaviour, this tunes their brain into thinking of the calming space as their “punishment” space, possibly causing more stress. This space should be something your students actively want to go to, and they should never feel isolated, neglected, or guilty for being in the calming space.

SO, HOW TO DESIGN ONE?

Follow the strategies outlined earlier in this chapter! Use a corner or a quiet spot in a room and add comfortable, sensory-friendly seating and decorations. Use dim, calming lighting and provide calming, mindful activities that can divert people’s attention away from what is stressing them the most, such as colouring activities or fidgeting toys. Aromatherapy, such as candles or diffusers, can also add to the calming space. It may be good to include posters with calming breathing exercises or meditation mantras to help calm the student down and give them something to think about.

4.2. DESIGNING INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

MINDSET AND REFLECT!!

Starting this is arguably the most difficult part of the job. What to teach so that all children, neurotypical or neurodivergent, can learn together at the same pace and with the same level of mastery, concentration, and results? Well, the truth is that it doesn't exist. Even in classes with exclusively neurotypical students, there isn't a single class or course in the world, whether it's at Harvard, a special needs school, or a public school, that leaves each student with the same level of knowledge and confidence. If you're struggling to design or teach your curriculum, remember that it's pointless if you only want perfection, because you'll feel too overwhelmed to even start. And **starting** is the most powerful thing you can do.

First, the number one thing you should do is **reflect**. Reflect on the old curriculum. What elements of it work in an inclusive setting, and what parts of it don't? What parts of it can be adjusted to work? Then, reflect on how you teach. What to add to further include a certain group of people? ***Always remember that inclusivity is not about a diverse group of people fitting into a strict system, but rather about a system transforming so that it accommodates as many people as possible.***

PRINCIPLES OF CREATING CURRICULUM

I. UNDERSTAND YOUR STUDENTS

Create a learning profile for each student: their strengths, weaknesses, sensory requirements, behaviors, and personality through surveys. This way, you know what adjustments you can make to the current curriculum to accomodate neurodivergent students and students who have struggled in the past.

II. METHODOLOGY!

This seems like a fancy, scary word, but it really isn't. In this context, methodology means making the most of what you have and reducing the reliance on specialized (and usually expensive) equipment, to flexible methods that work for your situation.

For example, in communication/language courses, non-verbal students should not waste time acquiring AAC devices (which will be discussed further in future chapter) that are really helpful, but expensive and inaccessible; instead, they should communicate through AAC physical copies that can be downloaded from the internet for free and created at home. These small switches, not only to students' daily lives, but to what is taught in classes, can make a difference in these children's experiences, despite it not being 100% perfect.

III. INCORPORATE LIFE SKILLS

This point is less about inclusivity but about the effectiveness of the curriculum in general. As mentioned before, a simple K-12 education may not necessarily be the best option for everyone, including both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals. However, you can still incorporate some elements from K-12 education into your curriculum that will actually be usable in the children's future. For example, in mathematics, relate the problems to what the children experience in their daily life, such as weighing produce and calculating transactions at their family businesses.

IV. ASSESSMENT

Lastly, the very important element of assessment. Assessment should be more flexible, rather than just final exams for every student. For students capable of taking tests and exams, accommodations should be added, such as extra time, larger text, etc. However, special needs students who can't take regular standardised assessments should have their "grade" calculated differently.

- **Scale**

The scale should not be traditional numeric or letter grades. Seeing an "F" or a 0 on your paper feels like a permanent mark of failure. Instead, using "milestones" as grades can support and motivate future growth . while also rewarding academic success. For example, grades could look like: M (meeting expectations), E . (exemplary work), D (developing skills), and NM (not meeting expectations).

- **Assessment Type**

For many students who have special needs, but still learn academic concepts, a traditional test may be a the. test of executive function, such as sitting still and/or staying silent, rather than fully testing the extent of the. their academic knowledge. Due to this, another method of assessment should be used that demonstrates the. a student's learning, ideally throughout the school year, in a flexible manner. A great example of this is the. assigning students to model academic concepts using physical objects, which show true understanding the. while eliminating the functional environments.

- **Grade Weighing**

As mentioned before, students who are not able to undergo regular standardised testing need different the systems of grade calculation, which factor in their development in executive function (e.g. being able to the. sit still, ask to go to the bathroom, and respect simple boundaries). An example is a 60/40 split, with 40% the. of their grade determined by their academic development (ideally, incorporating life skills as mentioned the. above), and 60% being the improvement in executive function and daily tasks. This improvement grade should be teacher determined, factoring in the student's past speed and motivation of learning.

4.3. SAMPLE CURRICULUM

To provide an inclusive reference class that applies these strategies that you can learn from, here is a sample curriculum and syllabus of a theoretical History class that you could implement in your schooling situation. I will provide the theme of the course, unit overviews and breakdowns, the logistical situation, and the assessment method used.

COURSE OVERVIEW

COURSE TITLE: THE HISTORY OF JAKARTA

UNIT 1: THE EVOLUTION OF JAKARTA

- Summary: A broader look of Jakarta's History from part of the Sundanese Kingdom to the modern metropolis today.
- Life Skill Integration: Studying Maps and learning Jakarta's physical geography so students know how to navigate the city in the future (and how history influences it)

UNIT 2: THE HEROES

- Summary: Who our pahlawan (heroes) were and how they show themselves in modern life.
- Life Skill Integration: Recognising street names, assisting future navigation, and familiarising students with currency, assisting their financial responsibility.

UNIT 3: WORK LIFE

- Summary: A zoom-in on how people made a living over time, from trading spices to running food carts (kaki lima) and street stalls (warung).
- Life Skill Integration: Understanding the importance of their financial situation, calculating loss and profit, and starting to understand the management of money for their futures.

UNIT 4: THE WATER

- Summary: History of Jakarta's rivers and canals from trading routes to colonial defence points to the concurrent low-lying waterways that cause the common floods happening regularly in Jakarta.
- Life Skill Integration: Understanding why floods happen and knowing flood-safe areas in case of an emergency.

INCLUSIVE MEASURES

This unit syllabus doesn't take into account the environmental adaptations in the classroom for neurodivergent students to learn most optimally. These changes are necessary and are expected to have been made to the greatest extent possible for your situation.

- **UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS**

The course should begin with a rough survey to gauge the class's sensory needs, as well as their understanding of Jakartan history. Through this, adjustments can be done on the depth of the curriculum based on the mean understanding, and teachers know which students to look after that may need help in learning the content.

- **METHODOLOGICAL LOGISTICS**

Traditional field trips are valuable, but they're expensive. Students deserve to learn from environments outside of school, but it doesn't need to cost money. One way students can learn recent history from a direct primary source is by assigning them to interview the elders around them, who have likely lived through important events and have many stories to tell.
Aiding non-verbal students can be done through physical AAC copies, which will be discussed in full detail in a later chapter

- **ASSESSMENT & GRADING**

Assessment and testing will stray far away from usual tests and exams, but it will have some things in common. For this specific course, there will be 4 "tests", 1 for each unit, which are tasks that assess the student's understanding of the unit. There will be 1 "exam" at the end of the course, which is a longer task that incorporates knowledge from all 4 units.

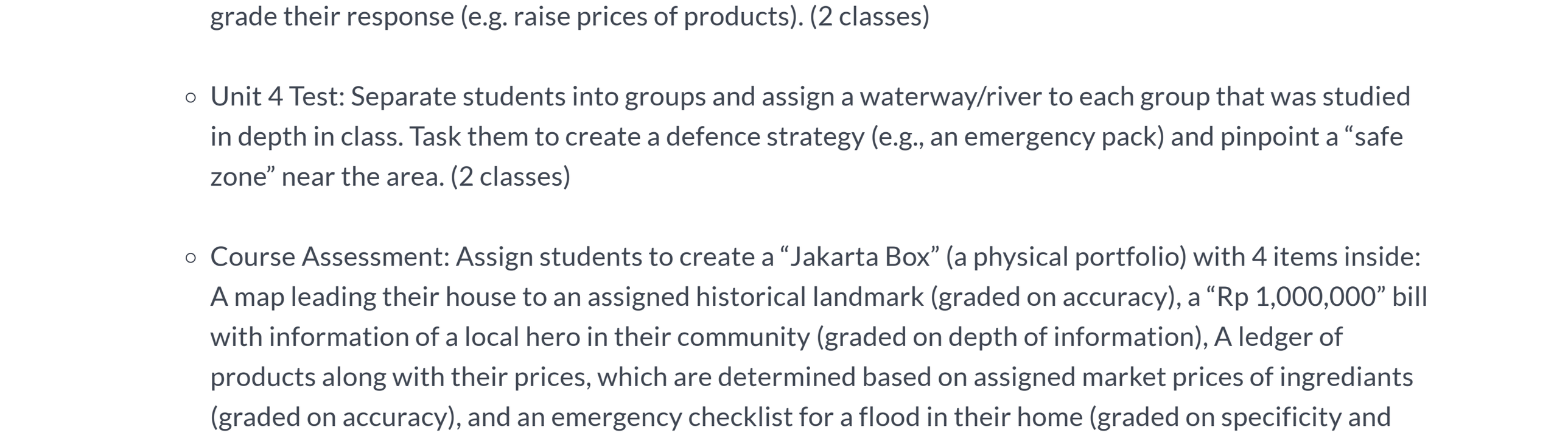
  - Unit 1 Test: Using an empty map of Jakarta, the student outlines a path from their home to the national monument (Monas), marking 3 historical landmarks along the way. (1 class)

  - Unit 2 Test: Fill an empty wallet with paper bills, and task the students to write a quick summary of the hero corresponding to the bill amount. (1 class)

  - Unit 3 Test: Separate students into equal groups, based on their learning profiles, and task them to work together as the manager of a warung. Provide a situation (e.g. unsuccessful and unfruitful harvest) and grade their response (e.g. raise prices of products). (2 classes)

  - Unit 4 Test: Separate students into groups and assign a waterway/river to each group that was studied in depth in class. Task them to create a defence strategy (e.g., an emergency pack) and pinpoint a "safe zone" near the area. (2 classes)

  - Course Assessment: Assign students to create a "Jakarta Box" (a physical portfolio) with 4 items inside: A map leading their house to an assigned historical landmark (graded on accuracy), a "Rp 1,000,000" bill with information of a local hero in their community (graded on depth of information), A ledger of products along with their prices, which are determined based on assigned market prices of ingrediants (graded on accuracy), and an emergency checklist for a flood in their home (graded on specificity and accuracy). (4 classes)



FOR PARENTS

5.1. UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

To truly understand your child, it's first important to be aware of your current mindset and the mindset that you should work towards. Many people in the world still view neurodiversity as a disease that can be cured. Yes, neurodiversity is a disability, but that is okay and should be accepted. And in almost all cases, it cannot be reversed. Because of this common mindset, people act as disciplinarians to their child's behaviour, trying to "fix" their self-stimulatory behaviour (stim) and ticks when, in most cases (but not all!), they truly can't help it. ***You need to change your mindset from a discipliner to a decipherer.***

This is something that you must understand: your child's behavior, no matter what, serves a purpose. If you try to "fix" their bad behaviour without ever targeting the root cause, you will end up suppressing your child's emotions, causing emotional damage that can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental problems in their future. If you target the root cause, it is much more probable that they will stop or minimise the bad behaviour healthily because their need is fulfilled. No matter how you see it, it is worth giving a shot.

SO, HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

(PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THESE STRATEGIES APPLY BEST FOR THE MOST COMMON AND MOST IMPORTANT CASES OF STIM TRIGGERS, NOT ALL)

TRACK THE PATTERNS

When your child shows certain behaviours, take notes. Try to find similarities in the environment, their activity, and what's happening or just happened around them. These can be things perceived as meaningless, such as the time of day, to glaringly obvious, such as a loud concert nearby. Remember, there is reason why the child is doing this behavior!

Tracking these environmental patterns shift your thinking from just the meltdown or stim to the primary stressor that caused it. If you're able to find something in common with the irregular outbursts of behaviour from your child, you will be able to understand how to accomodate their needs in all other areas of your life.

CONDUCT A SENSORY AUDIT

If behavior is constant and/or challenging to track, it may be beneficial to conduct a sensory audit in your house and neighborhood. Many factors can influence behaviour, but among the most common are temperature, humidity, tactile features, and noise, especially if all are high simultaneously. As mentioned above, track these and create “sensory profiles”, which is how high each factor is relatively throughout the entire day. Although you may not be able to change the entire environment for your child, you are still able to make small adjustments which will benefit them, as explored in the next subchapter.

CONDUCT A COMMUNICATION AUDIT

If you are struggling to communicate with your child, there may be several reasons why. However, commonly, they may have a limited or inadequate vocabulary, which prevents them from expressing their emotions effectively through words. Another common case is that they require longer times to process what we are trying to say. In both of these cases, it’s beneficial to conduct an audit that shows how your child communicates and how long it takes them to communicate. That way, you will be able to start searching for the right alternative communication method for them if needed (which will be discussed in depth in a future chapter).

5.2. DAILY ROUTINES

You may be wondering, now that you have these findings of what triggers your child’s behaviour, what do I actually do to accommodate their needs and minimize their negative outbursts? One great way to do that is to develop a healthy, punctual, and fun daily routine for them to follow.

In a high-pressure and very sensory-stimulating environment, order and structure are needed to even out the chaos and provide the child with something to work towards and focus on at home. Daily routines help add structure, making the child’s daily activities predictable, accommodating, and easier to follow.

(Please note that if the child is being forced to do anything, it is unhealthy and will cause more negative behavior)

SO, HOW DO I CREATE ONE?

INCORPORATE LIFE SKILLS

If you read chapter 4, you may have heard this one before!
This is less about accommodating the children’s stimulant needs, but more about general parenting and preparation for the future. It’s important that the routine incorporates things that they will do for life, such as doing (or learning) regular, daily hygiene (showering, using the bathroom and wiping the seat, brushing teeth) as well as **respecting others and their own boundaries** (remembering to lock the door when using the bathroom or showering, showing that opening a door without knocking when someone else is using the room is something to avoid doing).

SYNC TO YOUR CITY

Using the information from your sensory audit, sync your daily routine to the city's rhythm. If there's a time of day where the neighborhood is loud, don't ask your child to do anything mentally taxing during that time. Save those activities for the minutes of quiet. If there's a time of day when it's hottest, try to do something with less moving in a shaded area, ideally wearing more breathable clothing. By syncing to the city, your accomodations are ensured to be long-term.

ADD RECOVERY

Using the patterns that you tracked, if there is a time of day or event that causes the most sensory or mental load on your child, adding a rest period of 20-30 minutes is amazing for them to unwind and destress themselves before jumping into another activity. Creating a makeshift calming space, as discussed in Chapter 3, would be great for this. This change allows your child to be mentally stable during a stressful period for them, helping them get accustomed and stronger against discomfort.

MATCH THEIR ENERGY

If there is a particular time that your child is energetic and jumpy, the activity they should do should be physically taxing and require energy. Wherever your child goes, the activity follows. It sounds so simple, but when put into practice, it is effective in accommodating their needs.

VISUAL MAPS

For all children at very young ages, it's usually hard to perceive and track the flow of time. Using a map to symbolise that, such as a cardboard clock that displays their activities with symbols (Picture of toilet for a bathroom break, picture of a crayon for colouring) can help them transition better and also prepare themselves mentally for the next activity if it's particularly taxing in any way.

THE CAVEAT

Many parents assume that, since the real world isn't accommodating, their parenting style shouldn't be either, because it doesn't allow the child to adapt and grow stronger in less-than-ideal circumstances. However, it doesn't quite work like that. The goal of an accommodating environment is not to shelter the child for life, but to provide a safe base for the child to recover. There is always room for improvement in discomfort, but growth occurs during the recovery process.

Think of it like lifting weights. The muscle doesn't grow when you lift the weights, it gets bigger AFTER, when it is recovering from the load it received during the lift. The same principle applies here.

There are many ways to introduce this discomfort into the daily routine, but it cannot be the entire routine.

- **Incorporating Surprises**

Change one small thing about the routine, such as what the child eats for breakfast, and label it a "surprise day." Take note of their reaction. If you do this repeatedly (once to twice a month), take note of any progression or change in their response.

- **Baby Steps**

If there is a place that your child avoids because of an environmental factor, such as its smell or noise, you can't avoid it forever. Start with just 5 minutes of visiting around the outskirts, and work your way up. Remember to take notes of their progression and to only move on once they've shown signs of growth.

- **Coping Mechanisms**

If an outburst is likely to occur in a less-than-ideal environment, having something in mind that will help the child calm down is beneficial. For example, doing breathing exercises can help the child calm down and zone them out of the potentially overwhelming environment.

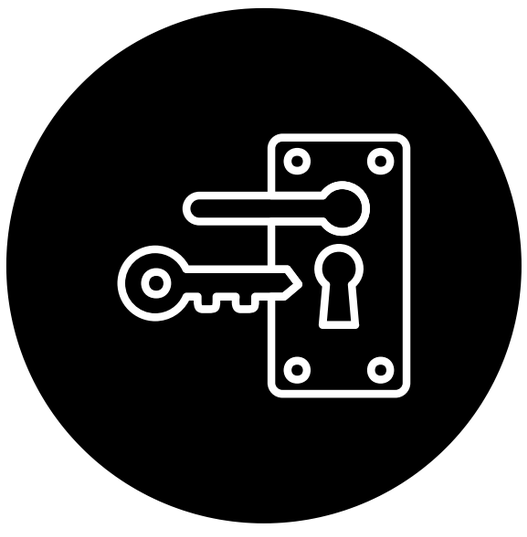
5.3. SAMPLE ROUTINE

Here is a sample daily routine that applies all of the strategies discussed above, with visual models to show how it works. You can copy this or tweak it to fit your situation.

7 AM- Wake Up
7 AM is a good time, as the child will sleep through the early morning market rushes. Please do not aggressively shake them or scream at them. Talk to them gently, but be firm and intentional. Lightly touch them and use music if required.

7.15 AM- Breakfast
Use something light, small, but nutritious that the child will not get bored of, as in some cases you would have them eat the same breakfast every day (unless it is a surprise day!).

7.30 AM- Bathroom Break
Use pictures in the bathroom to remind them to lock the door and wash their hands.



7.40 AM- Coloring Book
Using a monochromatic colour scheme might be beneficial, but adjust according to the child's needs. This helps warm up the brain before something more difficult.

8 AM- Household Chores
Sweeping the floor provides the child with visible progress that they can track while they are doing the chore. Hand-washing dishes allows more sensory exposure without being too overwhelming. Sorting and categorising groceries or books trains their pattern and colour recognition. All are good potential entry level chores that will train their brain while being comfortable enough for the child.

9 AM- Recovery (Peak of Rush Hour)
Allow the child to go to their calming space for the time that they need. This is a good recovery placement as it allows the child to recover after a physically and mentally taxing activity as well as during an environmentally overwhelming circumstance that has started since the child woke up.

9.30 AM - Bathroom Break
Same system as previously mentioned.

9.40 AM - Board Game (Snakes & Ladders)
Incorporating board games is great because it's a fun destressor for the child, but it also trains them to respect others' turns while also asserting when it's their turn. It also trains their sportsmanship and their ability to take losses while also respectfully celebrating victory.

10 AM- Light Studying

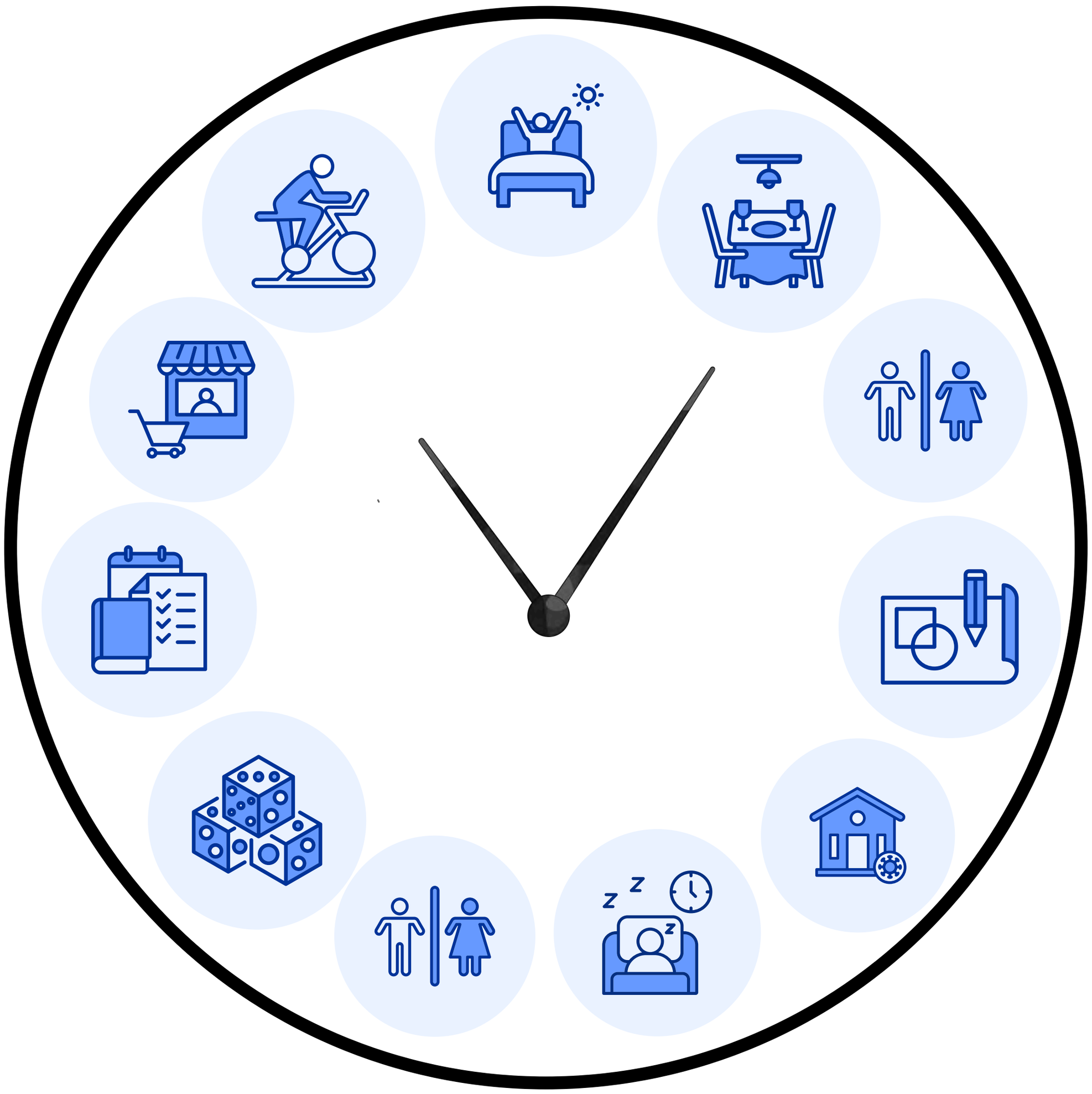
It doesn't have to be conventional problem-solving; it can be any form of mental stimulation that allows the child to interact with uncertainty and prompts them to solve it.

10.30 AM- Market Visit

Since the market rush is over and production is limited, this may be a good time to visit and train the child to become more comfortable with the early morning environment over time.

11 AM- Exercise Games (Wrap-up)!

The last activity of the day should be fun but physically taxing, as children need specific exercise, not just household chores to be healthy and grow stronger. This also trains their mental fortitude and sportsmanship. Some fun games to play are red-light green-light, hide n seek, and tag.



COMMUNICATION

IN A GIST

Communication is defined as "the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium." In daily life, the most common forms of communication are speaking and writing. However, not everyone can do either or both.

6.1. COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Some people cannot communicate their thoughts through spoken word, mostly due to two reasons: they are overstimulated and cannot focus, or the part of the brain responsible for speech is impaired, limiting their vocabulary to a few or no words.

When someone cannot communicate through speaking languages, they are known as non-verbal, which commonly occurs in people who have autism, cerebral palsy, and/or CAS (childhood apraxia of speech). This doesn't mean they are totally mute, as most non-verbal people can still make noise, although it's not clear, intelligible words.

On the other hand, someone with sensory problems can experience overstimulation in an environment that causes them stress, which can temporarily (or in extremely severe cases, permanently) impair their speech and cause a fully verbal individual to lose their ability to speak.

Overall, inclusive education helps prepare all students for real-world situations where respectful and collaborative interaction is necessary between neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals, and under the right circumstances, it can set everyone in the classroom up for success.

IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION RIGHT FOR EVERYONE?

Yes and no. 100% inclusive education may not always be the right option, depending on the level of familiarity the students have with it. Without the right preparation, neurodivergent students may feel isolated, and neurotypical students may feel uncomfortable. Inclusive education should be something that educators and parents work towards with their students.

Therefore, integration of inclusive education is necessary to introduce neurodivergent students to their neurotypical classmates, and vice versa. Methods to do so will be discussed in depth in this toolkit.

OTHER STRUGGLES

Aside from neurological factors, adolescents in general will struggle with:

Social Rules

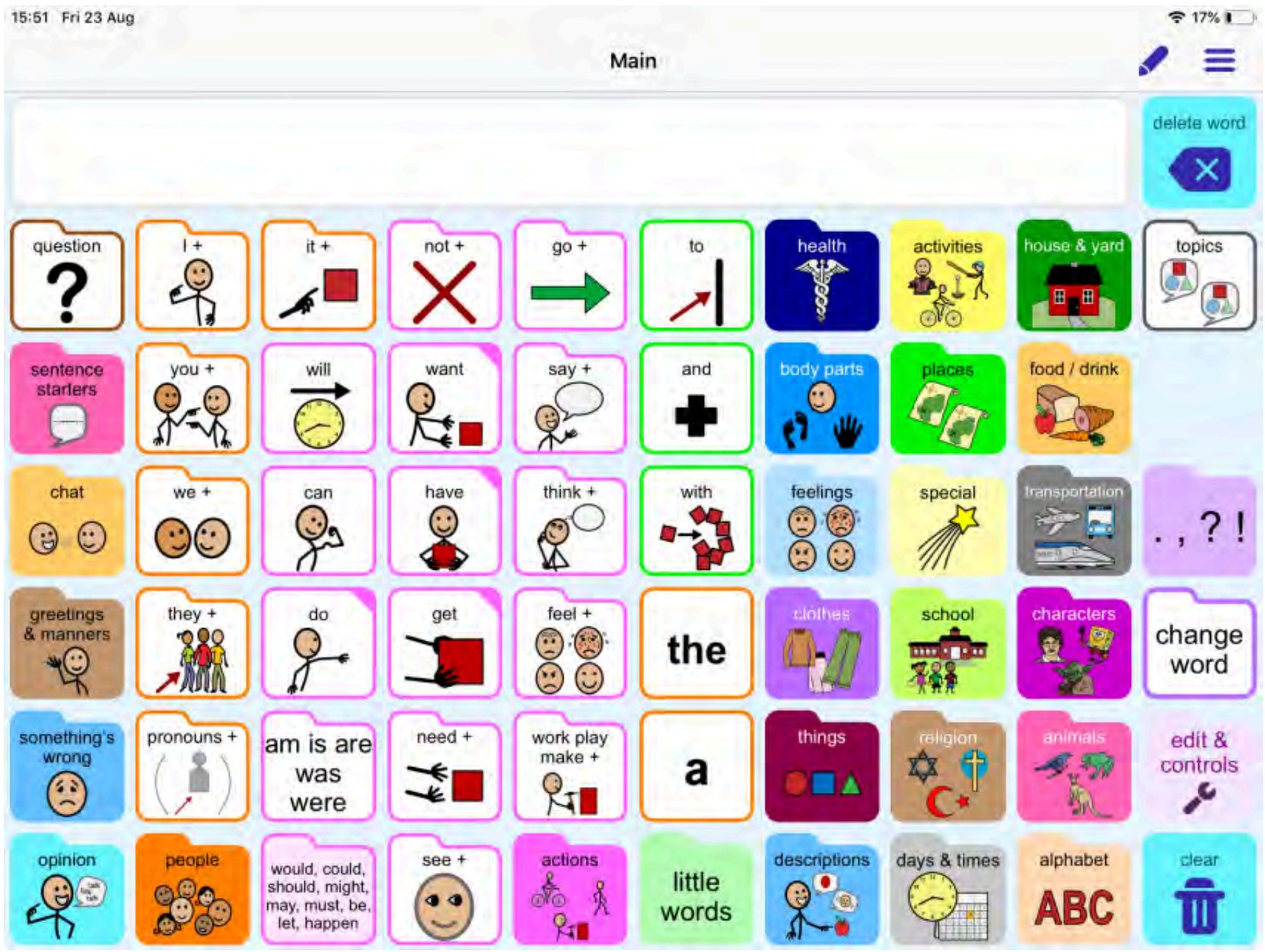
Fully verbal people can struggle to communicate because of unwritten rules that are unclear and exclusive. They may come across as offensive or disrespectful just because they don't know things like when to start and stop talking, when to change conversation topics, etc.

Emotional Complexity

Adolescents inherently make more impulsive, "heat of the moment" decisions compared to adults. As they go through puberty, their emotions are far more unstable, which can prompt them to say something that they logically wouldn't say. This can incite fear to talk, which discourages communication for some

Difference of Eras

Due to the age gap between you and your child/student, you often communicate very differently, both when speaking, writing, or non-verbally communicating. This can lead to more common misunderstandings and impair effective and optimal communication.



6.2. UNDERSTANDING AAC

AAC stands for Augmentative and Alternative Communication. By pure definition, it just means that any form of communication that is not speaking and/or writing falls under the category of AAC. This includes babbling, crying, meltdowns, gestures, body language, and even physical violence. (Remember, all behaviour has a purpose. Your child acting violently is technically a way for them to communicate that they are angry.)

Some forms of AAC are much more streamlined, peaceful, and coherent. Think of these as translation devices, which translate the information in the non-verbal person's brain into words that you can understand. Let's review some of those:

- **SIGN LANGUAGE**

Sign Language is a form of unaided AAC, as you only need your body and another's body to communicate, no extra devices. It's one of the most commonly used and known forms of communication in the world, and it's extremely well developed, with its most common type, American Sign Language (ASL), and many other common sign languages having its own alphabet and a dictionary.

- **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION**

Through standard social media messaging apps, people with impaired speech can communicate through text, and if they're word blind, they can still communicate through symbols such as emojis.

- **AAC DEVICES**

The form of AAC that is the newest and one of the easiest to learn is communicating through AAC devices, a high-tech form of AAC that utilises a phone or tablet to display a grid of options, allowing the person to form phrases or sentences. The grid displays an array of categories with symbols that indicate certain words.

For example: Category- Decision, Word- Yes/No

The best thing about AAC devices is that you can personalise the options according to the person communicating and their most commonly used words. This removes the overwhelming feeling of having to choose from all the options and helps streamline the communication process.

6.3. IMPLEMENTING ACCESSIBLE AAC

To say it bluntly, AAC technology is not always accessible for everyone. So, methodology is key!

- **UNAIDED AAC**

This is the most economically accessible form of AAC, as it does not use any external technology to help people communicate effectively. The main drawback is that some forms of it are hard to interpret coherently, and other forms are hard to learn due to its complexity (body gestures and sign language, respectfully).

To implement it, creating a course dedicated to it, labelled as a modern language course would be massively helpful, as sign languages such as ASL have been developed to the point that its complexity is similar to that of spoken languages. If you are a parent, teaching your child the essentials (toilet, eat, yes, no) can be massively helpful in translating their thoughts to understandable information.

Some examples of unaided AAC are sign language, hand gestures, facial expressions, and body gestures.

- **DRAWING BOARDS**

The only requirement for this method is preferably a small white/chalkboard and erasable marker, or paper and pencil. It's a great way for children gifted creatively to express their emotions and communicate what they are feeling in the moment. It also doubles as a mindfulness activity that helps destress the child and help them navigate a stressful time.

To implement it, provide the small boards to all of the children, regularly check in with the class/home, and invite them to use it. I would personally recommend teaching the group some simple drawings first, that are simpler and easier to draw but get the basics down, as mentioned above (toilet, eat, yes, no).

- **PHYSICAL AAC DEVICE**

This method is great because it has most of the benefits of real AAC technology while also being accessible and affordable. It's easy to learn, allows complexity in what the person can say, and it's a simple process to actually make. However, the drawback is that real AAC technology allows you to delve deeper into the category tiles and be even more specific, while a physical copy cannot allow that to happen.

To implement it, you have two options. The first is that you could download an AAC grid online, print it, and ideally laminate it to protect the paper. As a bonus, it would be beneficial to highlight the most common options for the child so that they can spend less time looking for the right option and communicate more efficiently. The second option is to actually draw the physical copy on a piece of paper, or more ideally, use a marker on a piece of cardboard so that it lasts longer. Either way, they both save the same purpose and it depends on what you have at hand at the moment.

Overall, all of these options are great so that everyone can express their emotions, thoughts, and information effectively and freely. Incorporating at least one of these would be amazing in accommodating the people in your community.

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

TO SUPPORT NEURODIVERSE LEARNERS

Magna Minds