

Making Space Neurodiversity Toolkit



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Definitions

Neurodiversity

Is the natural **variation** in how human brains work, learn, and experience the world.

Neurotypical

Refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning **align** with what is socially and medically considered the norm.

Neurodivergent

Refers to an individual whose brain functions **differently** from the societal standard.

Neurodiverse

Describes a **group** of people with a **range** of different ways of thinking, learning and processing information.

What is the Project?

Commissioned by the PCC and MVRP.

- To support neurodivergent individuals to better understand the processes of the criminal justice system.
- To support professionals with practical, usable resources.
- To improve understanding, communication, and engagement in 1:1 work.

Why the Project Matters?

- Complex, language-heavy system
- Hidden neurodivergence
- Impact on engagement and recall
- **Small adjustments = big difference**

Building the Toolkit

- Co-produced 66 practical resources
- Over 100 best-practice resources reviewed and collated
- Informed by input from professionals and individuals with lived experience

Why design matters?

Many of our resources for the clients are made with:

- An average reading age of 8
- A light-yellow background and dark grey font
- Pictures
- Examples

Why a toolkit?

- Consistency across all staff and services
- Supports staff at all levels
- Turns good practice into standard practice
- Flexible, not rigid
- Benefits everyone

Toolkit Value

Inclusive and Informed

- Co-designed with professionals
- Prioritises lived experience
- Needs-based approach

Comprehensive and Practical

- Centralised resources
- Breaks down isolation
- Facilitates information sharing

Types of Resources

- Easy read
- Leaflets
- Posters
- Worksheets
- Visual resources
- Appointment tools
- Guides for more information
- Communication aids

Accessing the Toolkit

Merseyside
Violence
Reduction
Partnership





Home • Resources • Neurodiversity toolkit

Neurodiversity toolkit



 Hide site



Families and supporters resources

[Download here](#)



Prison resources

[Download here](#)



Probation resources

[Download here](#)



Youth justice resources

[Download here](#)



Accessing the Toolkit

Name	Type
 1. Easy Read Resources	File folder
 2. Complete with Clients (Tools and Worksheets)	File folder
 3. Resources for Clients	File folder
 4. Leaflets	File folder
 5. Posters	File folder
 6. Information Sheets and Guides	File folder
 Youth Justice Services Index	Microsoft Edge PDF Docu...
 Youth Justice Services Resources Diagram	Microsoft Edge PDF Docu...

Evaluation Report



Collaborative evaluation

LJMU, Making Space and expert by
experience co-researcher



Evaluation Aims

- Explore implementation, accessibility, usefulness, and impact
- How and where the toolkit is used
- Explore whether it:
 - Improves understanding of neurodivergence
 - Supports reasonable adjustments and neuroinclusive practice
- Identify barriers and facilitators
- Inform future rollout, embedding, and sustainability

Evaluation Methods

- Mixed-methods evaluation (LJMU, Making Space, expert by experience co-researcher)
 - Interviews and focus group with stakeholders
 - Focus group and interview with people with lived experience
 - Training surveys (pre, post, 6-week follow-up)
 - Existing feedback, training materials, monitoring data

Evaluation Key Findings

- Neurodivergent people are overrepresented, often undiagnosed, and experience trauma and system barriers
- Criminal justice processes are complex, inaccessible, and not neuroinclusive

The Toolkit improves:

- Clarity and understanding
- Communication and engagement
- Staff confidence and consistency
- Acts as a preventative tool

Barriers to impact

- Capacity and time pressures
- Inconsistent wider training
- Cultural attitudes
- Poor information sharing

- Toolkit meets a clear need and shows positive impact
- Embedding into routine practice and system-level support is essential for sustained change

Examples

3. How do you know if you can have an AA supporting you?

If you are:

- Under 18 years old

Or

- You are a 'vulnerable' person.

If someone is 'vulnerable' it means there is a chance they **could be hurt** or **badly treated** by someone else.

A person might be 'vulnerable' because they have a **mental health condition, learning disability, brain injury** or other types of **neurodivergence** (e.g. autism, ADHD, dyslexia).

Police staff will **decide** if a person is 'vulnerable'. The **custody officer** will ask you about any **health problems** or **disabilities** you might have.

6. Other important information about AA:

The Appropriate Adult should **make sure** that the police respect **your rights**.

The Appropriate Adult is **not a solicitor** and **cannot** give you **legal advice**.

If you have been arrested, you have the **right** to a **solicitor**.

A **solicitor** can give you **advice** about the **law** and the **Criminal Justice System** and also help to protect your **rights**.

Your **Appropriate Adult** can also **ask** for a **solicitor** for you.

You can **speak** to your **solicitor without** your **Appropriate Adult** in the room if you want to.

References

National Appropriate Adult Network (2018). *A quick guide for appropriate adults*.
https://www.appropriateadult.org.uk/phocadownload/PublicInformation/2018_NAAN_AA_guide_quick.pdf

National Appropriate Adult Network and KeyRing Living Support Network (n.d.) *What is an 'Appropriate Adult'? How can they help me?*
https://www.appropriateadult.org.uk/images/pdf/2014_essay_read_for_AAs.pdf

Information about Appropriate Adults

This leaflet provides information for **people detained** in police custody who may need someone to support them and take the role of an **Appropriate Adult**. It provides a simple overview of the role and responsibilities of the Appropriate Adult.

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Examples

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1

People You Might Meet at the Police Station as a Suspect

Police Officer



Police officers respond to incidents, investigate crimes and work closely with communities to keep them safe.

Custody Officer



A member of the police working in the custody suite.

They are responsible for your welfare and care while you are in custody.

Appropriate Adult



A person who supports people in custody if they are under 18 or have a learning disability, developmental disability, a mental health condition or substance misuse problems.

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2

Investigating Officer



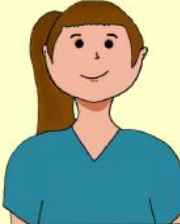
The Police Officer assigned to the case.

Review Officer



These are senior police officers. They review whether the person in custody should be held at the police station.

Forensic Medical Examiner



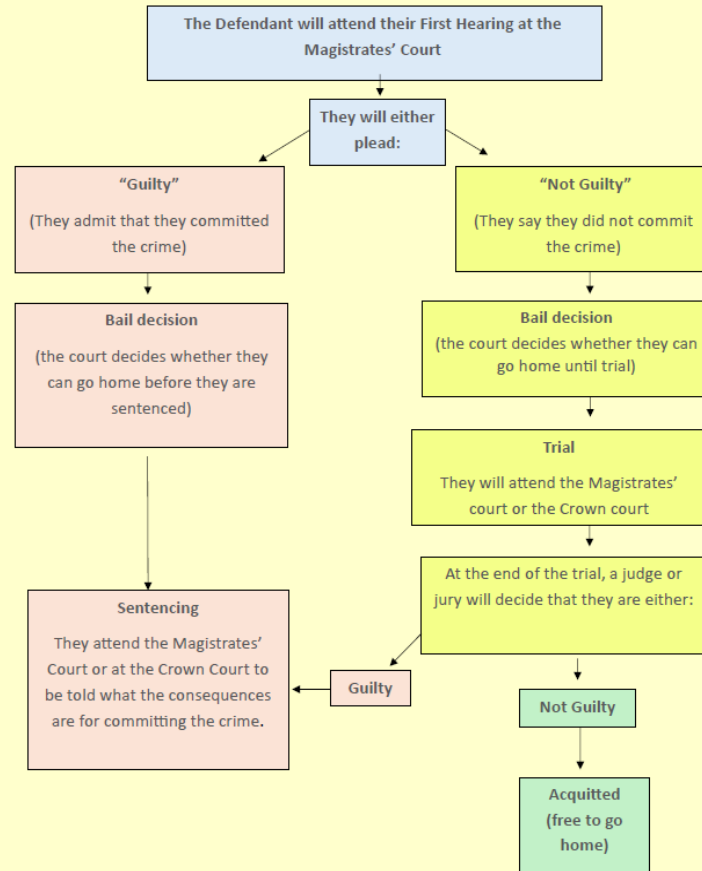
Doctors who work for the police force.

Examples

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1

What Happens after someone is charged with a crime and the role of a Witness/Victim



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2

The Magistrates' Court

The Magistrates' Court is where people go when they are charged with a crime that is less serious.

There are three magistrates (ordinary people who have been trained) or a district judge. They listen to the case and make decisions.

If the crime is more serious, the case is moved to a bigger court called the Crown Court.

Magistrates are likely to deal with crimes that result in lower sentences such as:

- Driving offences like speeding.
- Common assault where there is no significant injury.
- Criminal damage where the property damaged cost less than £5,000.
- Minor theft.
- Possession of a small number of drugs.



Examples

What are Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs)?

This booklet will help you understand Independent Custody Visitors.

It explains who they are, what they check, and what will happen if they speak to you.

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1. Who are Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs)?

ICVs are volunteers who visit custody suites.

They are **not the police** and do not work for the police.

They wear **plain clothes** and are there to **check on your welfare**.

2. Why ICVs visit Custody Suites?

ICVs visit custody suites to make sure **you are being treated properly**.

They check that your **rights and entitlements** are being followed.

They also look at the **conditions in the custody suite**, such as **cleanliness, food, water, and supplies**.

Examples

What happens if you break the rules of your probation?

You could have to go back to court or prison if you break any of the rules of your probation.

For example, if you:

1. Do something that your sentence bans you from doing
2. Commit another crime
3. Miss meetings and appointments without a good reason
4. Behave in an aggressive or unacceptable way at a meeting or appointment

If you have been taken back to prison but think you should be released on probation again, you can speak to your Offender Supervisor in prison.

Your request must be in writing within 2 weeks of being told why you are being recalled to prison. This is called “making representations.”

A family member, friend or legal advisor can write to the prison for you, if you would prefer.

Your request will be reviewed, and a decision will be made soon after to either accept or decline your appeal.

Reference
Government Digital Service. (2018, May 10). *Probation*. GOV.UK.
<https://www.gov.uk/guide-to-probation>

Probation

What is probation?

Why might you be on probation?

What should you expect if you are on probation?

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Examples

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1

People You Might Meet in Prison

Prison Officer



Prison staff who supports prisoners.

Key Worker



A prison officer who is assigned to a prisoner to help them and prepares reports about their progress.

Prison Offender Manager



Works in the probation service and works with prisoners to develop their sentence plan while they are in prison.

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2

Prison Governor



Prison staff who manages different parts of the prison.
Handles minor offences.

Independent Adjudicator or District Judge



Runs hearings if a prisoner breaks prison rules.
Decides the consequences for the prisoner.

Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) Member



Members of the public who volunteer. They gather feedback and look around the prison to ensure that the prisoners are being treated fairly and that the prison is running as it should.

Examples



Neurodiversity Affirming Language Choices

Instead of...	Try...
"Normal" person	Neurotypical person
Sensory issues / Sensory problems	Sensory differences
People with ADHD	ADHD-ers
Unusual movements	Stimming*
Slow / Unresponsive Communication	Needs more time to process
Comorbid conditions / Suffering from...	Co-occurring conditions
People with Autism	Autistic person
Symptoms	Traits or Characteristics
Deficits	Differences

*self-stimulating behaviours that some people do to regulate their senses or emotions (e.g., hand-flapping, rocking)

Examples

Interviewing Guide	
Do 1. Talk calmy¹ 2. Use every day language¹ 3. Ask direct and literal questions e.g. "Where did you see the suspect?" instead of "What did you see?"¹ 4. Provide clear instructions¹ 5. Suggest one idea per sentence e.g. "We are going to go to a different room now." instead of "We'll go sit somewhere and speak about what happened and what you saw."¹ 6. Be consistent with words¹ 7. Use visual aids¹ 8. Pace your sentences¹ 9. Allow extra time¹ 10. Check understanding e.g. "What does that mean to you?" or "Can you explain this in your own words?"¹ 11. Use their name¹ 12. Offer frequent breaks¹ 13. Ask explicitly if they have any diagnoses²	Avoid 1. Long sentences¹ 2. Metaphors: e.g. "Break the ice"¹ 3. Irony and sarcasm¹ 4. Double negatives: e.g. "He doesn't know nothing"¹ 5. Jargon and acronyms¹ 6. Unnecessary words: e.g. "To be honest"¹ 7. Passive sentences e.g. "Details of what happened will be written down" instead of "We will write down details of what happened"¹

Examples

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1

Change in my Life worksheet

I want to change (One change in your life)

Example: Reduce drug use

I want to change this because (think of the positives/benefits of making this change)

Example: If I reduce drugs use, my health will improve

I can change this because (Think of the skills you have)

Example: I have done this before

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1

Risky Emotions

1. A Risky emotion for me is.....
Or circle the below



Anger/
Pissed off



Sad



Upset



Stressed



Worried

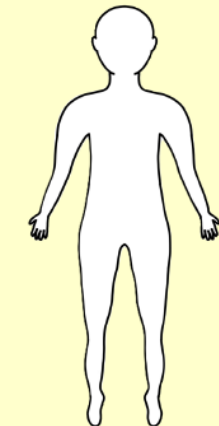
Other

2. The last time I felt like this was when:

3. How strong was this emotion at the time (circle): 1-----5-----10

4. Feelings I had in my body

Examples: heart racing, knot in stomach



Examples

Ask for “Fleur”

Ask an officer if you can speak to “Fleur” if you need a feminine hygiene/menopause pack.

This code-phrase is a discreet way to tell the officer that you need a pack.



“Can I speak to Fleur, please?”

Packs include:

- Lip balm
- Deodorant wipes
- Handheld fan
- Spray bottle
- Cleaning wipes



You may not be given all items, depending on availability and your risk assessment.

Examples

1

Nonspeaking individuals in contact with the police

This purpose of this information sheet is to **help professionals** in the criminal justice system to understand what **being nonspeaking means**.

Some neurodivergent individuals, such as some autistic individuals, do not rely on communicating through verbal speech. You may have heard of the term "nonverbal" before to describe individuals who do not speak.

⇒ Use the term "nonspeaking" ✓ instead of "nonverbal" ✗.

⇒ Or use "person who cannot rely on speech to be understood".

You may also hear individuals use: "non-vocal", "non-oral" or "minimally-speaking".

Nonspeaking is the term that is preferred by many autistic people.

Nonverbal can imply that the individual is not able to understand or use language which is inaccurate.

Being nonspeaking does **NOT** mean that the person is unable to communicate or understand you.

What is Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)?

This refers to any method of communication which is used to supplement or take the place of verbal speech.

Autistic people may use communication methods, such as:

- Makaton symbols and signing
- Gesturing
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCA)
- Communication books
- Electronic communication aids, such as Go Talk

Information for police officers:

- Do not misinterpret no response from an autistic or nonspeaking individual as a failure to cooperate.
- Nonspeaking individuals in police custody should be offered an Appropriate Adult (AA) and victims or witnesses should be offered a Registered Intermediary.
- Seek advice from a professional who specialises in autism if needed.

More information:

For more information on using AAC in the Criminal Justice System, please see:
https://www.theadvocatesgateway.org/files/ugd/1074f0_f5d07af401574f289401e2c0df981c4d.pdf

For more information on planning to question someone with autism, please see:
 Resource 4b. The Advocates Gateway - Planning to Question Someone Autistic in Interview in Custody – Information Sheets and Guides.

For more information on autism for police officers and staff, please see:
 Resource 2a. NAS - Autism Guide for Police Officers and Staff in Interview in Custody – Information Sheets and Guides.

For free training on speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in the criminal justice system, please see:
<https://www.rcslt.org/learning/the-box-training/>

For support and more information:
<https://www.autism.org.uk/>

For more information on Makaton, please see:
<https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/ways-of-communicating/makaton/>
 and
<https://www.makaton.org/>

Examples

6. Areas of Neurodivergence

a. Acquired Brain Injury

Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) is any brain injury sustained since birth, such as traumatic brain injury, stroke, infection, oxygen deprivation. ABI affects emotion regulation, memory, energy, behaviour, information processing abilities and at times one’s sense of identity and self-awareness.

Characteristics and Support Strategies

Potential Areas of Difficulty	Characteristics
Emotion regulation	- Impulsivity and difficulties with self-control. - Verbal and physical outbursts. - Confusion and frustration.
Memory and concentration	- Difficulties with recalling old and memorising new information. - Finding it difficult to remember and follow rules and regulations. - May experience headaches.
Communication	- Takes longer to process information. - Finding it difficult to communicate own needs to others.
Executive functioning	- Planning, organisation skills and problem-solving difficulties. - Fatigue that may impact day-to-day functioning. - May be vulnerable to exploitation by others.
Support Area	Support Strategies
Emotion regulation	- Offer short breaks when the person is becoming emotionally dysregulated. - Discuss with the individual what helps them cope.
Memory and concentration	- Encourage writing important information down to refer to later when needed.

e. Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is considered a specific learning difficulty characterised by persistent challenges in understanding numbers and performing mathematical tasks such as:

- **Subitising:** Difficulty recognizing the quantity of objects without counting.
- **Magnitude Comparison:** Challenges in determining which of two numbers is larger.
- **Ordering:** Struggles with arranging numbers in ascending or descending order.

Dyscalculia can be inherent or acquired due to brain injuries or conditions like stroke or dementia.

Characteristics and Support Strategies

Potential Areas of Difficulty	Characteristics
Time management	- Often late - Difficulties telling time - Difficulties managing own time – underestimates time needed for an activity - Poor memory for dates and times
Daily Living	- Difficulties with keeping track of finances and handling money - Loses belongings often - Difficulties with names - Difficulties estimating quantity of products needed - Difficulties remembering timetables
Support Area	Support Strategies
Daily Living	- Encourage the use of a calculator - Save or write down important telephone numbers

Examples

Communication and Environmental Adjustments Checklist

Instructions: Complete this with the individual during the initial sessions. Once you get to know them, check with them periodically if the information contained below is still relevant or if they would like to make any changes.

Name of client:

Diagnoses (if relevant):

Date:

Professional completing form:

Reasonable adjustment	Tick if yes
I do not like eye contact	
I need you to use short, clear sentences	
I need one clear question at a time	
I need you to pause and wait for me to respond	
I need you to use my name when you want a response	
I need to: sit at a table	
have no table between us	
I need to: sit opposite you	
sit at an angle to you	
I need something to: fidget with (specify what:)	
focus on (specify what:.....)	
do whilst we talk, e.g. colouring, word puzzle, etc. (specify what:.....)	
hold something to comfort myself e.g. my favourite bag (specify what:.....)	
I need to move around the room whilst we talk	

I need:	brighter lighting	
	dimmer lighting	
I need a quiet room away from busy areas		
I need written / easy read (material that includes pictures, simple information broken down in chunks) or visual (e.g. pictures) prompts to help me understand you		
I need you to offer me regular breaks		
I need as few people in the room as possible		
I need an uncluttered room with plain walls		
I need to have support from someone in the session (e.g. family member, advocate)		
If yes, specify who:.....		
I need you to write down the main discussion points of the session and give the paper to me or a supporting person		
If yes, specify who:.....		
I need you to check if I have understood what you told me by asking me to repeat what you said in my own words		
Other adjustment (not included above):		
Other adjustment (not included above):		

Examples

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1

What Autism is

This easy read document includes information about Autism to help autistic individuals; individuals referred for an assessment or others supporting them to learn more about Autism.



Autism is a 'spectrum condition' which means it affects people in different ways.

For some people, autism is a type of disability.



You cannot always tell that someone is autistic just by looking at them.

Autism lasts for all the person's life. But they can still do a lot of things and learn a lot of skills.



Autistic people may find it difficult to tell people what they need, and how they feel.



Autistic people may find it difficult to meet other people and to make new friends.

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2



Autistic people may find it difficult to understand what other people think.

What could cause Autism



No one knows why some people are autistic, and others are not.



An autistic person might have family members who are also autistic, like their mum, dad, brothers or grandparents.

How you could get a diagnosis of Autism



A doctor will come to see you and interview you about what you find easy and hard.



The doctor may also speak to your family or others who know you well and ask them questions about you, to decide if you are autistic.

Examples

2. Their rights

When someone is taken to a police station, they should be given a **copy of their rights** (they can ask for an easy read).

These rights can be used at any time whilst at the police station. Their **Appropriate Adult** can also ask for them.

- The right to **speak to a solicitor** – this is free.
- The right to have someone **told about the arrest** – the custody officer can try to phone up to 3 people (if someone does not answer).
- The right to see the police **code of practice**. This is a book about the rules that the police have to follow.
- The right to **medical help**.
- The right to **stay silent**.
- The right to know **why** they have been arrested and **how long** they will be kept at the station.
- The right to help with **communication** and understand what is happening.
- The right to **see the evidence** against them if they go to court.

5. Resources

At the Police Station Booklet by SAFER-IDD

https://research.kent.ac.uk/safer-idd/wp-content/uploads/sites/2418/2021/04/Police-Booklet_SAFER-IDD.pdf

CPS – How a criminal case works

www.cps.gov.uk/about-cps/how-a-criminal-case-works

Your rights if you're arrested

www.gov.uk/arrested-your-rights/print

Information about being an Appropriate Adult <https://www.appropriateadult.org.uk>

References

Bath, C. (n.d.). *About Appropriate Adults - National Appropriate Adult Network*. <https://www.appropriateadult.org.uk/information/what-is-an-appropriate-adult>

Brady, S. & Murphy, G. (n.d.). *What to expect if your son/daughter with a learning disability has to go to court*. https://research.kent.ac.uk/safer-idd/wp-content/uploads/sites/2418/2021/04/Court-booklet_SAFER-IDD.pdf

Crown Prosecution Service. (n.d.). *How a criminal case works*. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/about-cps/how-a-criminal-case-works>

Government Digital Service. (2025, January 23). *Being arrested: your rights*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/arrested-your-rights>

How to support someone who is a suspect of a crime?

This leaflet provides information about what happens when someone is accused of a crime, the support that they can access, their rights, and how you can support them during police procedures.

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Examples

Communication Support Requirements		
	Yes	No
Needs simple, clear sentences		
Needs semi-specific, direct questions		
Needs context to questions - ensure information is connected		
Give time for understanding and responding		
Check your understanding		
Check their understanding		
Doesn't like eye contact		
Doesn't pick up on unspoken information		
Allow the person to move whilst talking		

Known Triggers
Time-based - e.g. special events, specific season, weather
Person-based - e.g. authority figures, perceived rejection by loved ones, arguments
Unpredictability, changes, disrupted routine
Thought-based - e.g. not understanding, lack of control, unexplained requests, too much new information
Body-based - e.g. hunger, thirst, pain, medication effects

Sensory Triggers		
	Yes	No
Crowded or busy spaces		
Lack of personal space or close proximity of others		
Unpredictable changes		
Strong or overwhelming scents and smells		
Bright, coloured or flashing lights		
Direct sunlight		
Unexpected changes in lighting		
Fast or unexpected movements		
Being unable to move		
Being too hot		
Being too cold		
Light touch		
Firm touch		
Extended eye contact		
Busy visual environments (lots going on making it hard to concentrate)		
Small talk and social chit chat		
Loud noises or voices		
Unexpected noises		
Background noise which makes it hard to concentrate		
Repetitive sounds such as a clicking pen		

Possible De-escalators
E.g. Specific phrases, items they might want, calm presence, removal of triggers, a walk, specific stims

Questions



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