

Neurodiversity and Career Planning

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which I live and work.

I pay my respect to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders and Leaders of other First Nations' communities who may be here today.



FACILITATOR AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I also acknowledge the neurodivergent scholars, collaborators, friends, and former students whose insights informed portions of this presentation.


INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the presentation, you should be able to:

1. Describe neurodiversity and neurodivergence
2. Describe common strengths and challenges for neurodivergent individuals
3. Identify factors in the environment that can create extra challenges for neurodivergent workers and learners
4. Identify two practical tools / ideas for how to more effectively support neurodivergent students' career development

WHAT IS NEURODIVERGENCE? DEFINITION AND PREVALENCE

Natural variation in brains that contribute to different patterns of learning, thinking, social behaviour and communication compared to neurotypical or statistical norm



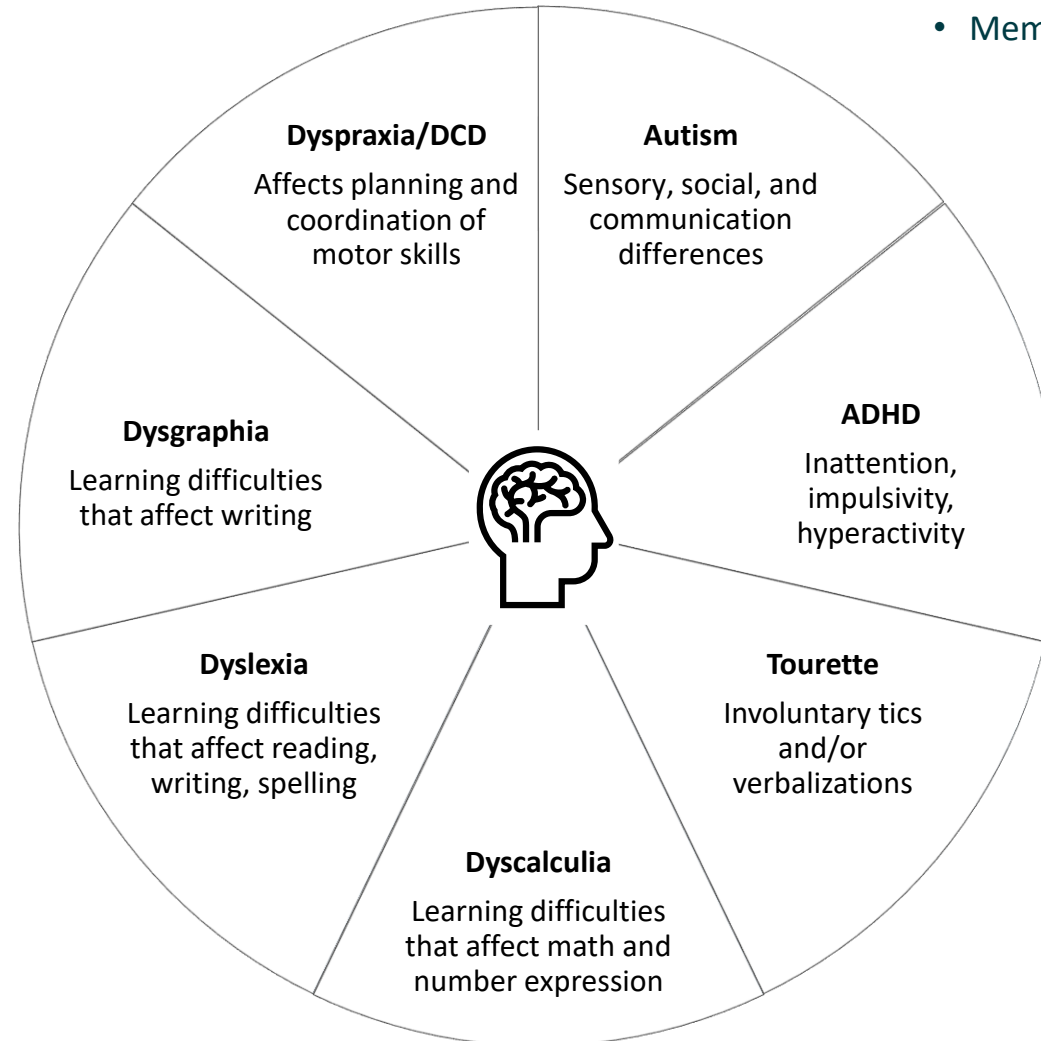
1 in 5 people is
neurodivergent

Many neurodivergent people are undiagnosed or do not disclose

WHAT IS NEURODIVERGENCE? STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Autism: Frequent Strengths

- Concentration
- Fine detail processing
- Memory



ADHD: Frequent Strengths

- Creativity
- Hyper-focus
- Energy and passion

Dyslexia: Frequent Strengths

- Visual thinking
- Creativity
- 3D mechanical skills

IS NEURODIVERGENCE A DISABILITY?

Medical Model

Disability reflects deficits or impairments that are treated

Social-relational Model

Disability reflects individual impairments in environments that are not supportive

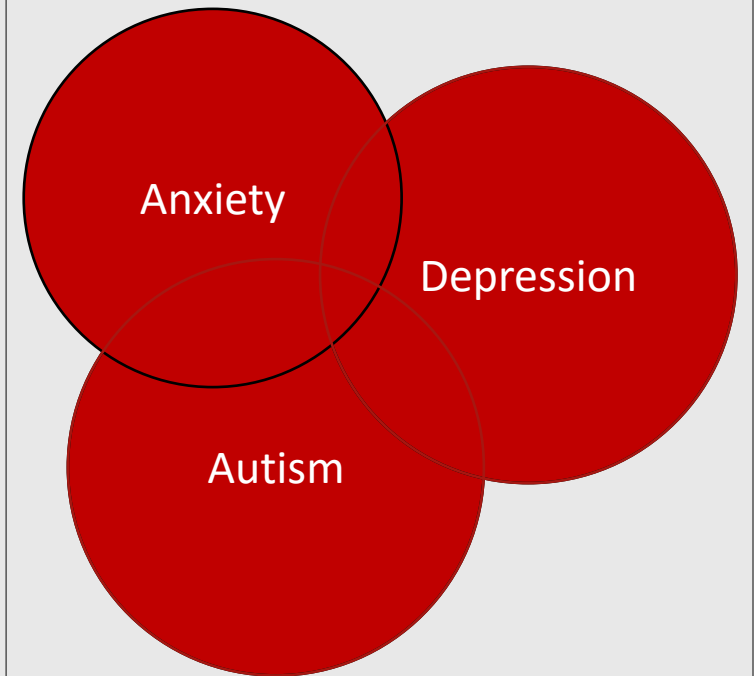
Some of us see society as being disabled rather than us being disabled. This simply means that society often fails to accept and include us, and instead pushes us to the margins.

Some of us view ourselves as disabled and want society to understand the struggles we may have on a daily basis, especially with co-occurring conditions that often accompany autism.

Neurodivergent people are more likely than typically-developing individuals to qualify for many other diagnoses such as

- Other neurodivergent conditions
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Sleep problems
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Eating disorders
- Intellectual disability
- And more

“Autism Pure” vs.
“Autism Plus”



HOW TO TALK ABOUT NEURODIVERGENCE?

Not every neurodivergent person has the same language preferences.
It is important to ask what is acceptable to them.

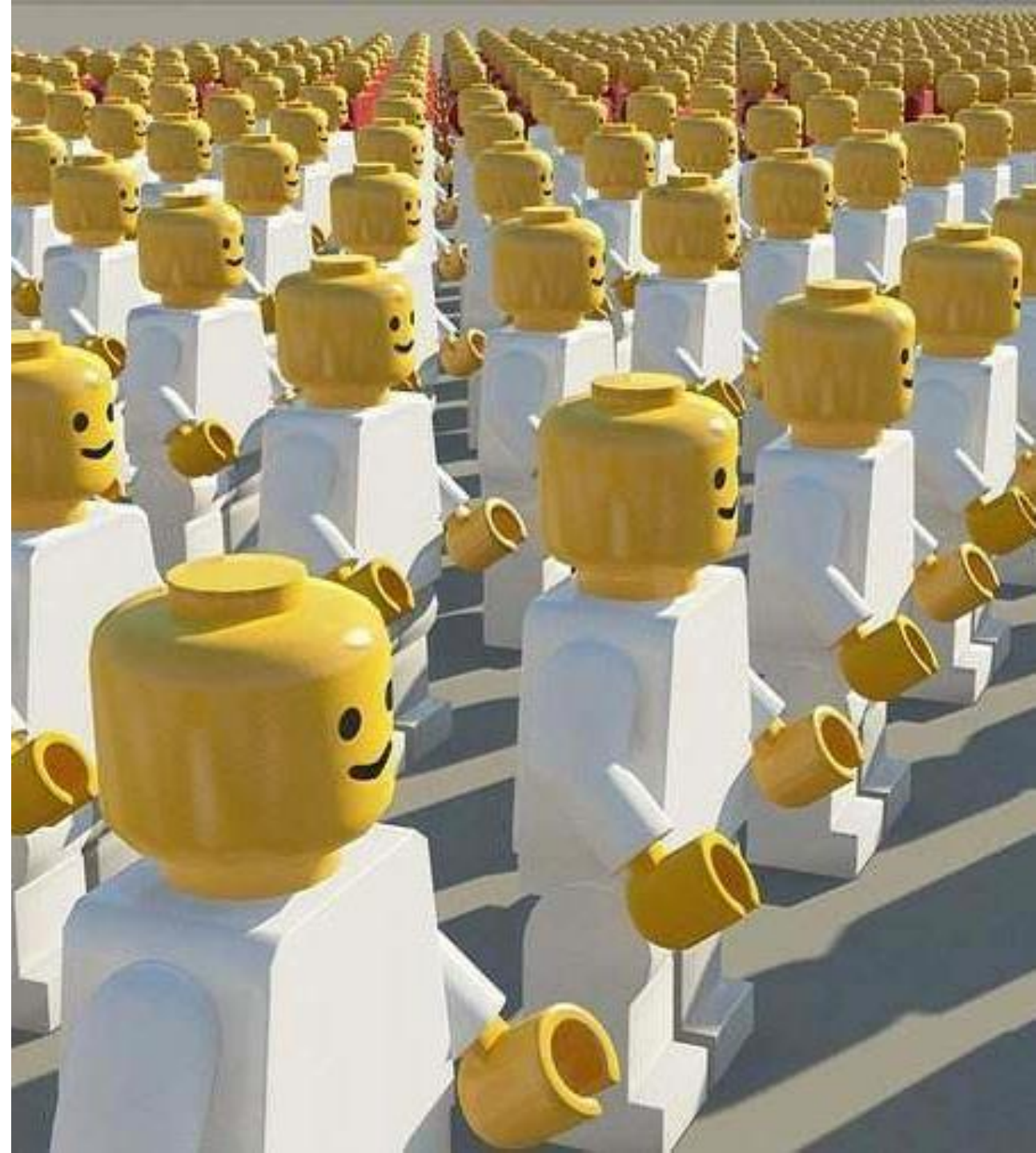


- ✓ Neurodivergent, neurodistinct, neuroatypical, neurominority
- ✓ Specific neurotype: Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, AuDHD
- ✓ Person-First (e.g., person with ADHD, person on the autism spectrum)
- ✓ Identity-First (e.g., autistic person; dyslexic person)
- ⚠ Neurodiverse – best used to refer to a group of people of different neurotypes
- ⊘ High functioning or low functioning

Majority of work and learning environments were built by neurotypical people for neurotypical people.

Neurodivergent individuals may struggle to 'fit' into these environments, evidenced by (on average):

- Poorer academic performance, higher dropout rates
- Higher rates of under-employment and unemployment
- Bullying, stigma, and discrimination





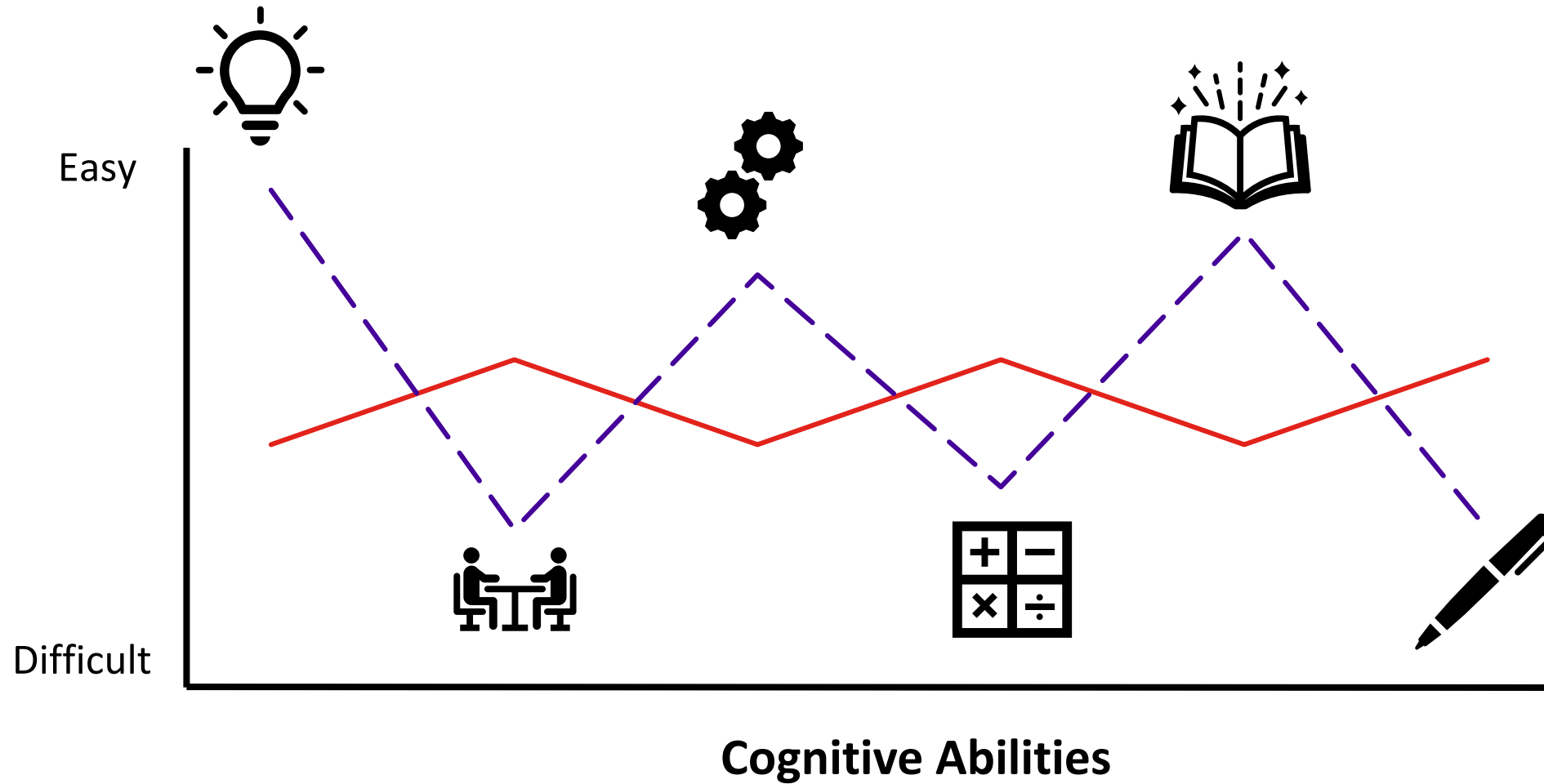
Neurodivergent Differences

Spiky profiles
Sensory Sensitivities
Direct Communication

Neurotypical Learning and Work Environments

Standardized Demands
Shared Environments
Indirect Communication

NEURODIVERGENCE – SPIKY PROFILE

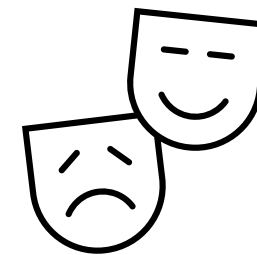


NEURODIVERGENCE – EXECUTIVE FUNCTION AND MASKING

Many neurodivergent people will have challenges with executive function

- Set of cognitive processes and mental skills that help individual plan, monitor, and successfully execute their goals

Masking, or concealing neurodivergent traits to avoid negative outcomes, is also common



THE DOUBLE EMPATHY PROBLEM



Neurodivergent people may struggle to understand non-neurotypical people's thoughts and perspectives

But neurotypical people also struggle to see the neurodivergent point of view

- This is called the double empathy problem

Neurotypical people need to make intentional effort to see things from the neurodivergent point of view



SUPPORTING CAREER PLANNING WITH NEURODIVERGENT YOUNG PEOPLE

I left high school early and received no job readiness skills, career guidance, or awareness of my strengths.

Because of this, I spent years feeling pretty awful about myself, assuming that work was just about getting by rather than finding something aligned with my abilities.

I ended up in a career that I didn't really love, but at the time, it felt like the only options were work or school, and school clearly wasn't working for me.

I had no framework to explore alternative pathways, strengths-based roles, or workplaces that could accommodate my needs.

INCLUSIVE CAREER PLANNING SUPPORTS

Schools can assist students with inclusive career planning through:

- Inclusive Careers Benchmarking – tools and a community of practice to help schools evaluate their approach to career support (<https://ceav.vic.edu.au/services/inclusivecareerdevelopment/>)
- My Career Insights – career matching tool with a modified version for students with disability (<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/career-education/my-career-insights>)
- myWay Employability – Evidence-based career planning resource designed with autistic community (<https://mywayemployability.au/>)

CAREER PLANNING



Get to know the person and how the disability or neurodivergence affects them

How will the proposed placement, job, career fit their individual profile of neurodivergent traits (e.g., sensory, interpersonal)?

Many neurodivergent people mask or camouflage, or have 'typical' interests

Some may need more time to acclimate to a new environment and experience, reflect, and recover from it

Be person-centred

STRENGTHS FOCUS

Help to identify underlying strengths

Connect strengths to learnt skills

Help to align potential careers with strengths and aspects of diagnosis

Self-awareness of strengths and connections to their diagnosis can help them build toward a strengths-based disclosure

The self-discovery process and that was just more around finding out what the interests, strengths, skills, and values were and how they could potentially apply that to a job.

I think that would have been really helpful for me at that time, particularly being so young.

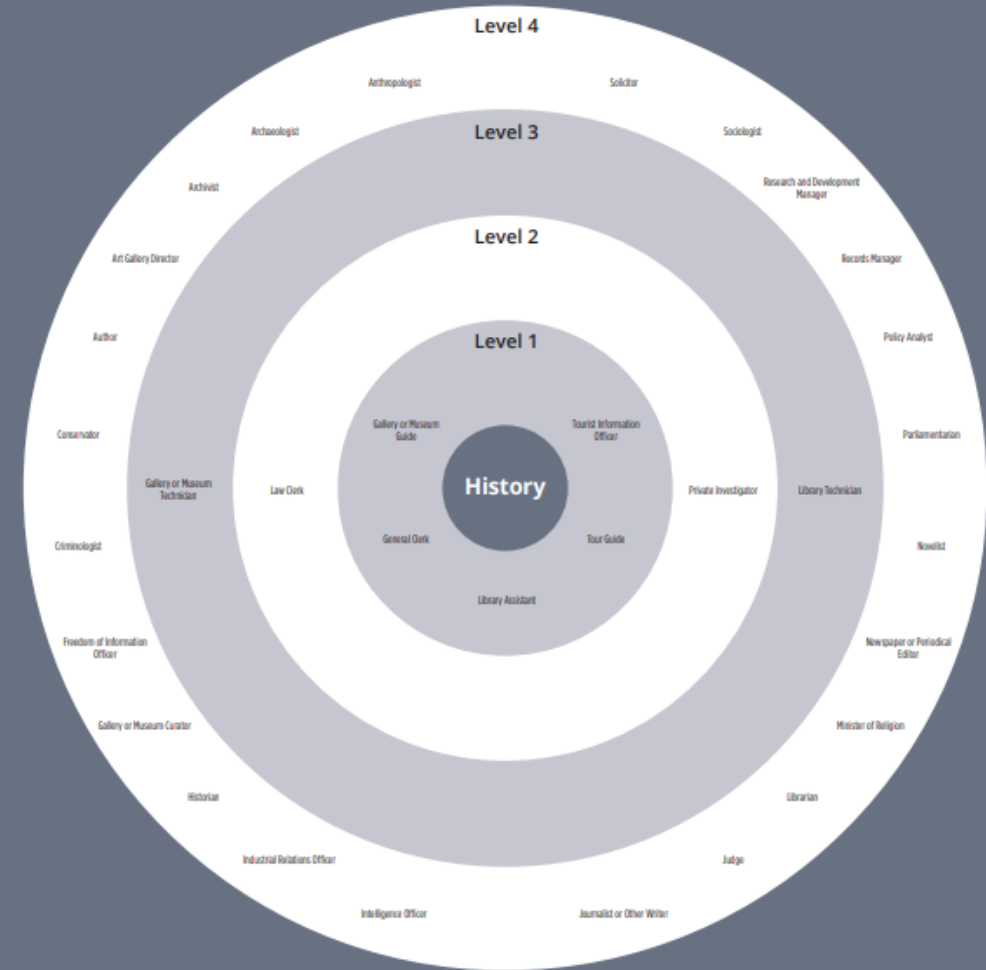
INTERESTS

It would have been helpful to have conversations about the things we enjoy doing both in school and out of school, and talking about the different industries those interests can align with.

We focused a lot on our skills instead of interests. No one ever said to consider the things I enjoy, which would have helped me apply the things I'm good at to different careers options.

Follow their passions, but also help to understand how to channel the passions into something society is willing to pay them for.

Do you enjoy or are you good at **History**?



Training levels and requirements

Level 1
Usually has a skill level equal to the completion of Year 10, a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education, Certificate I or II. Australian Apprenticeships may be offered at this level.

Level 2
Usually has a skill level equal to a Certificate III or IV, or at least three years relevant experience. Australian Apprenticeships may be offered at this level.

Level 3
Usually requires a level of skill equal to a Diploma or Advanced Diploma. Study is often undertaken through TAFEs or Registered Training Organisations. Some universities offer studies at this level.

Level 4
Usually requires a level of skill equal to a Bachelor Degree or higher qualification. Study is often undertaken at a university.

This chart shows a selection of occupations that have some relation to the subject of **History**. The four education and training levels are to be used as a guide only. These levels indicate the most common education and/or entry requirements for these jobs.

For further information, visit:
www.myfuture.edu.au



EXPLICIT AND STRUCTURED

Draw the links and the path explicitly

Break steps to a career or to complete job into specific tasks

Repetition

Different communication modes

- Written forms often best for autistic people

My careers program was very structured and that was fantastic because of the structure.

And one of the other things which I think was really helpful is we were taught that it's part of the process essentially that once you have the interview, even if you weren't successful, ask for feedback.

We were even given a little script. I mean it was so useful.

LIFE SKILLS AND WORK SKILLS

Most neurotypical people will have had more social experiences that are like a job interview or have used the same social skills. Neurodivergent people will often have had less time in formal social groups. So doing stuff to remove the angst and uncertainty would be great.

Hopefully they're building financial literacy and basic life skills.

Like if someone has a work placement but needs to take a tram to get there, they need to feel confident about how to take the tram and use the myki. And just basic budgeting and saving stuff.

DIRECT EXPERIENCE

- Work experience
- Site visits
- Open days

- Body doubling –using the presence of others to start and stay focused
- Lived experience mentors and buddies

One of the best things I did in high school was an excursion to a research lab, where we got to speak to professionals about their work. Seeing this environment in person was a lot more insightful than reading about jobs online. It wasn't until I spoke to different industry professionals that I could see myself in careers I was interested in.

Career discussions felt hypothetical. I needed to actually see things for myself to then visualise my own career path.

WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM FOR AUTISTIC YOUTH

Run by Aspergers Victoria (AV)

Open to autistic teen secondary school
students age 15-18

<https://aspergersvic.org.au/Teens-Work-Know-How-Program>

Teens Work Know-How Program



Program Highlights:

- **Job Readiness Workshops:** Covering key topics to prepare for the workforce.
- **Coaching Sessions:** Strengths assessments and discussions with experienced coaches.
- **Supported Work Placement:** Employers are briefed and supported by AV to host your teen.
- **Self-understanding:** We can build connection due to our lived experience Project Manager and team.

→ Info here : <https://aspergersvic.org.au/Teens-Work-Know-How-Program>

EMPLOYER SUPPORT

Resources for organisations and managers to increase their readiness

- External training programs and providers (e.g., OTARC, Aspergers Victoria, Yellow Lady Bugs, AMAZE)
- Online resources
- [Neurodiversity employment toolkit - https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-capability-leadership-and-management/neurodiversity-employment-toolkit/](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-capability-leadership-and-management/neurodiversity-employment-toolkit/)
- [OTARC resources - https://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/resources-about-autism/for-adults](https://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/resources-about-autism/for-adults)
- [Autism in the workplace worksheets - https://opal.latrobe.edu.au/articles/composition/Autism_the_workplace/21225737/1](https://opal.latrobe.edu.au/articles/composition/Autism_the_workplace/21225737/1)
- [Neurodiversity at La Trobe - https://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/support/wellbeing/resource-hub/Neurodiversity](https://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/support/wellbeing/resource-hub/Neurodiversity)



THANK YOU

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