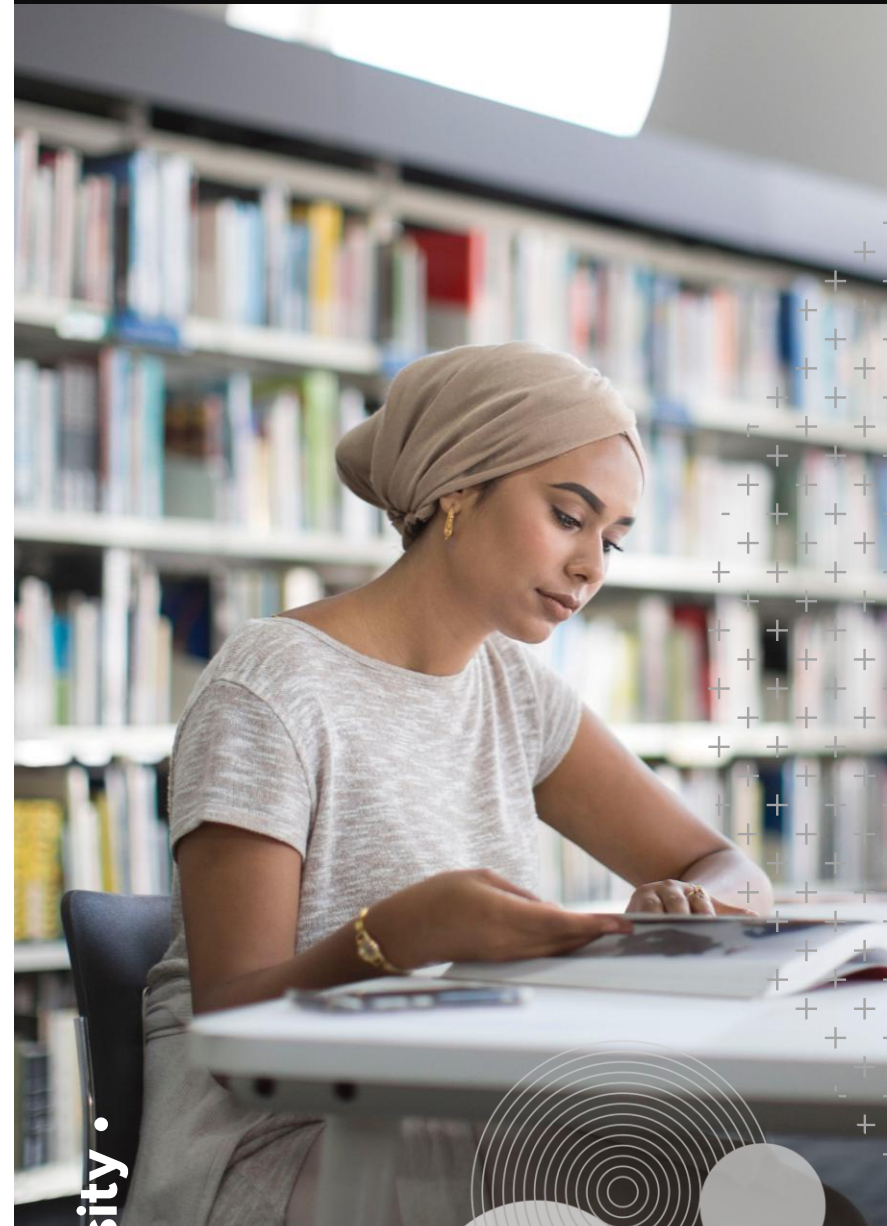


ND&D Nexus

Brought to you by the Learning Support Team



The Hidden Signals Within

Interoception & Alexithymia

Plus

- Flow Theory
- Dyscalculia Deep Dive
- Resources
- Events

Neurodiversity •
Disability •
Learning •

Issue 09.

Sep/Oct 2026

Welcome!



Dear ND&D Readers,

Welcome to the **ninth edition** of Neurodiversity & Disability Nexus! It's our 'back to school' issue as September starts, although technically in the world of apprenticeships we roll month on month; but we still always feel it's kind of a **fresh start** when September comes around!

A huge **welcome to any new apprenticeship learners** in particular; September is often our biggest intake, with many school-leavers starting on various Apprenticeship programmes. If this is you then it's a **delight to have you aboard with QA!** If you're new to Learning Support, interested in all things Neurodiversity and Disability, unsure if you need support on your journey, or just browsing through our Wellbeing offering, then **this publication is for you!**

Packed with **content and articles** from our Learning Support Team, we try and bring you a **range of topics, strategies, recommendations, personal experience, and resources** each issue. You can find our back issues on the Wellbeing Calendar. Any ideas for content or topics you'd like to see included, please get in touch!

from The Learning Support Team

Neurodiversity reminds us there is more than one way to think, learn, create, and succeed.



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100% Human-Curated Content



Built from lived experience, professional expertise, and genuine human insight.

Team News



We've had a **jam-packed summer** here in the Learning Support Team! July and August often feel extra busy as we are navigating learner holidays and often our own time off as well. Despite the summer rush, we've still found time to **welcome new faces, celebrate exciting personal news and continue supporting learners** across the business! We have some really exciting things that are being prepped in the background, and we are looking forward to sharing some exciting developments and new opportunities with our learners very soon!



'Hi, I'm Lucy! I live in East Yorkshire with my husband, our 3-year-old son, and our very spoilt dog. When I'm not working, you will usually find me at the beach, exploring somewhere new or on the hunt for a new coffee spot. I've worked with young people and adults with SEND throughout my career, most recently working for a Local Authority supporting the EHC process and reviewing EHCPs. I'm really excited to be joining the team and getting to know everyone.'



We forgot to take a selfie, so here's Copilot's version of Tracie, Kayleigh, and Sarah at The Autism & ADHD Show in Liverpool!

In July Kayleigh, Sarah, and Tracie attended **The Autism & ADHD Show in Liverpool** (AI photo above as we forgot to take one!). It was a fantastic day with loads of learning (enough to fill a couple of Issues with content, so watch this space!) Read Kayleigh's review [here](#), and check out [page 12](#) for an additional article on one of the exhibitors, Stimz.



We're delighted to announce that **Micha** is **expecting a baby!** We are all incredibly excited for Micha and wish the growing family every happiness as they prepare for this new adventure. We can't wait to meet the newest addition to the Learning Support family and **send our congratulations** and best wishes for the months ahead!

We are **thrilled to introduce** the wonderful **Lucy** who has just joined the QAA Team and who will be covering Micha's mat leave, supporting learners, and engaging on all our ventures!



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Ray



Lisa



Kayleigh



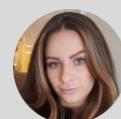
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The Autism & ADHD Show - Liverpool

by Kayleigh



Armed with anti-bac wipes, a hunger for learning, and a positive attitude, we entered the **Autism & ADHD Show** in Liverpool.

The set-up was similar to last year's Neurodiversity Show, with **three lecture halls** and **headphones sets** that you click onto different colours to loop you into the session.

The timetable for the talks was a little confusing to read so I created a more accessible version and coloured-coded it. There were **so many sessions that we each wanted to attend**, the fear of having to swap the headphones for each talk was real, so we just moved from session to session with our first set of headphones (and avoided the stewards!) which meant that we could **stay together** and just tune in to what we wanted.

There were many people trying to sell you their goods and products but some really shone through; I bought a book called "**Poppy's Miracle**" by Michelle Foulia. We then discovered the author was Sarah's old friend, so they enjoyed a catch-up! Her talk wasn't until the Saturday so sadly, we missed it. I'm planning to read the book on holiday so expect a book review from me in the next issue!

We got to **build our own clicker fidgets** from a company called Stimz (read more on [pg.12](#)) - loud clicks for Sarah, so at least we won't lose her, meanwhile no one can find me as I chose the quiet clicker, and then I got too distracted by all the shiny objects running off to the next stall!

Overall Thoughts?

It is more expensive than the Neurodiversity Show (£25-£38 whereas the other show is only £5) but the quality was MUCH higher, and it was definitely **worth the additional cost**. It was more academic, and the topics were broader.

The Neurodiversity Show probably had a better selection of stalls (and freebies!) but there was **no comparison between the two on the talks** - this show wins! Even the credentials of the presenters were much higher, with **specialists, doctors, and working professionals**, as well as those with a **lived experience** giving talks. My favourite were 'Working effectively with students with a PDA Profile', 'Exploring RSD through a neuroaffirming lens', and 'More than procrastination: strategies for navigating time blindness, autistic inertia and ADHD paralysis'.

It was a **great day of learning**, and we would all go again, and would **recommend others attending**, if there is one near you in 2027!

The Unanswerable Question

by Sarah



I'm 25, sat in a small room above a row of shops in Liverpool. **Today is my sixth counselling session**. The counsellor is looking at me expectantly (she blinks twice as often as an average person) as she's just asked me her favourite question: "**How did that make you feel?**" And I have no answer.

At this point in my life, I'd done well in education. I was 'Gifted and Talented' at school, eloquent, articulate, I'd graduated University, and I was **perfectly capable of discussing complex ideas**. Yet every week in therapy we would talk about situations, relationships, problems, and experiences, and she would ask me the same question;

"How did that make you feel?"

"I don't know" was the answer.

But by session six, she'd come prepared. Out came a sheet of A4 paper covered in little faces displaying different emotions. My first thought was honestly: isn't this for children? But remarkably, **it eventually started helping**. Looking across those faces and emotions, something clicked. For the first time I could **start identifying what I was actually feeling**.

I didn't particularly enjoy counselling. I didn't gel with the counsellor, but I persevered. Learning to **recognise and name emotions** became one of the most useful things I took away from those nine months.

At the time I was in what I called my "quarter-life crisis", spanning months of medical investigations that eventually led to a diagnosis of depression by a private doctor. I now know I was undiagnosed AuDHD, so with hindsight, **I can be kinder to 25-year-old me** and the **autistic burnout** no-one identified. I wasn't stupid; I just genuinely didn't know what I was feeling, or how to name my emotions. I couldn't unpick situations and ascertain how I was feeling.



I'm sharing this story because the next two articles explore **alexithymia** and **interoception**, two often overlapping conditions. As well as struggling to unpick feelings, it can mean not noticing I'm thirsty, hungry, or needing the loo until it becomes urgent. Other times, I become hyper-aware of every sensation. I'm generally quite good at noticing how other people might be feeling; I'm just less good at noticing what's happening inside myself.

Even after learning to better recognise and name my emotions, I can still **struggle to emotionally regulate** until it become impossible to ignore, often emotions exploding out of me when not properly dealt with or vented. I've found that if I notice a **change in my behaviour**, that becomes the prompt to look a little deeper and check how I am doing.

So I just wanted to just **share a personal glimpse** of what living with these difficulties can be like, and if this is you and you've ever felt silly not knowing what's going on inside your own head or body - **that's okay**.



Reading the Mind: Understanding Alexithymia

Have you ever been asked, "How are you feeling?" and found yourself completely stuck for an answer? For some people, **identifying and describing emotions** can be genuinely difficult. This is known as **alexithymia**, a trait that affects how someone recognises, interprets, and communicates their **emotional experiences**. While it isn't a diagnosis in itself, alexithymia is more common among neurodivergent people, particularly autistic individuals and those with ADHD.



People with alexithymia **do experience emotions**, but those feelings can seem unclear or difficult to distinguish. Anxiety might feel like a stomach ache. Frustration might be mistaken for tiredness. A person may know that something feels "off" without being able to explain exactly what that feeling is. This can sometimes **create challenges** in relationships, education, and the workplace. Others may assume someone is distant, uninterested, or lacking empathy when, in reality, they are **struggling to identify and express** what they are experiencing internally.

Possible rigid understanding of emotions e.g. crying = sadness

Difficulties linking physical signals to emotions

Affects 1 in 10, but over 50% of autistic people

May recognise if they feel 'good' or 'bad', but not specific emotions

May confuse emotions e.g. anxiety and excitement

Can struggle to recognise other people's emotions

Increased anxiety from confusion and misinterpreting emotions

Difficulty identifying, recognising & describing emotions

Some people **easily identify** how they feel, whilst **others need more time, structure, or support** to understand their internal experiences.

The good news is that **emotional awareness can be developed** over time. Tools such as emotion wheels, mood-tracking apps, journaling, or simply pausing to notice physical sensations can help **build emotional vocabulary** and understanding. It's also important to remember that there is no "correct" way to experience emotions.

Reading the Body: Understanding Interoception



Your **body** is **constantly sending you messages**. But what happens when those messages are difficult to notice? Interoception refers to the ability to **recognise and interpret signals** coming from within the body.

These signals include hunger, thirst, pain, fatigue, temperature, and even the physical sensations associated with emotions. They help us **understand our needs** and **respond appropriately** throughout the day.

Allows us to feel hunger, thirst, pain, toilet needs, temperature etc

Linked to alexithymia – difficulties identifying emotions

Awareness of bodily states makes it easier to self-regulate

May need strategies to support e.g. prompts to drink or take a break

Allows us to identify, understand, and respond to our internal state

People with Autism & ADHD can struggle with interoception awareness

Challenges can stop needs being met = irritability, emotional dysregulation

An additional sense inside of our bodies

Interoception acts like an **internal messaging system**, helping us understand what our bodies need and how we are feeling. When these signals are clear, we can respond appropriately. When they are less noticeable, confusing, or overwhelming, it can become harder to manage daily wellbeing. Differences in interoception are common within neurodivergent communities. Some people may **not recognise** hunger until they are extremely hungry, whilst others may be **highly sensitive** to internal sensations and find them distracting or distressing. These differences can affect routines, emotional regulation, energy levels, and self-care.

Developing interoceptive awareness often starts with simple check-ins. Taking a moment to ask questions such as "Am I thirsty?", "How is my energy level?" or "What is my body trying to tell me right now?" can **help strengthen awareness** over time. Interoception and alexithymia are also closely connected. If it is difficult to notice the body's signals, it may also be harder to identify the emotions linked to them. By becoming **more aware of our internal experiences**, we can better understand our needs, regulate our wellbeing, and develop greater self-compassion. Sometimes the most important messages are the ones coming from within.



Key Takeaway

Understanding alexithymia **encourages us to look beyond words** and recognise that difficulties expressing emotions do not mean those emotions aren't there. Sometimes the challenge isn't feeling less, it's **finding the language** to describe what's already being felt.

"It's not that I don't have feelings. It's that I don't always have words for them."



Further Reading:

- [Interoception and Alexithymia](#)
- [Interoception and mental wellbeing in autistic people](#)
- [What Is Alexithymia? Signs, Traits & Test \(Visual Guide\)](#)
- [Interoceptive Awareness and ADHD](#)

In the Zone: Understanding Flow and Focus

by Sarah



One of my worst/best habits is being in a **state of hyperfocus**; it is both a blessing and a curse! As our understanding of ADHD and neurodiversity continues to evolve, hyperfocus is increasingly recognised as a common experience. But is hyperfocus truly an ADHD trait, or **could it be an example of the flow state** described by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi?

I LOVE the theory of flow! Have you ever sat down to just do something "for a few minutes" and then suddenly an hour has flown by? Or you've just found yourself "in the zone" during an activity? The distractions have gone, you get **absorbed in what you're doing**, and things progress naturally; Csíkszentmihályi called this state **flow**.



The **theory of flow** originated from the observation of creatives getting so **absorbed into their work** when it was going well, they often ignored everything else around them, becoming so immersed in a task that hours could pass unnoticed, with **complete concentration** on what they were doing. Why were certain activities capable of producing this unique state of deep engagement and enjoyment?

According to the theory, flow is most likely to occur when there is a **balance between challenge and skill**. If a task is too easy, boredom can set in. If it's too difficult, anxiety and frustration may take over. **Flow sits in the middle**, where the activity is challenging enough to be engaging but not so difficult that it feels overwhelming. This can explain why some activities captivate us while others leave us feeling drained or disengaged.

Flow is **more than just productivity**. Csíkszentmihályi believed these deeply engaging experiences contribute to **wellbeing, fulfilment**, and a sense of **purpose**. When we are fully absorbed in meaningful activities, we often experience some of our most satisfying moments.

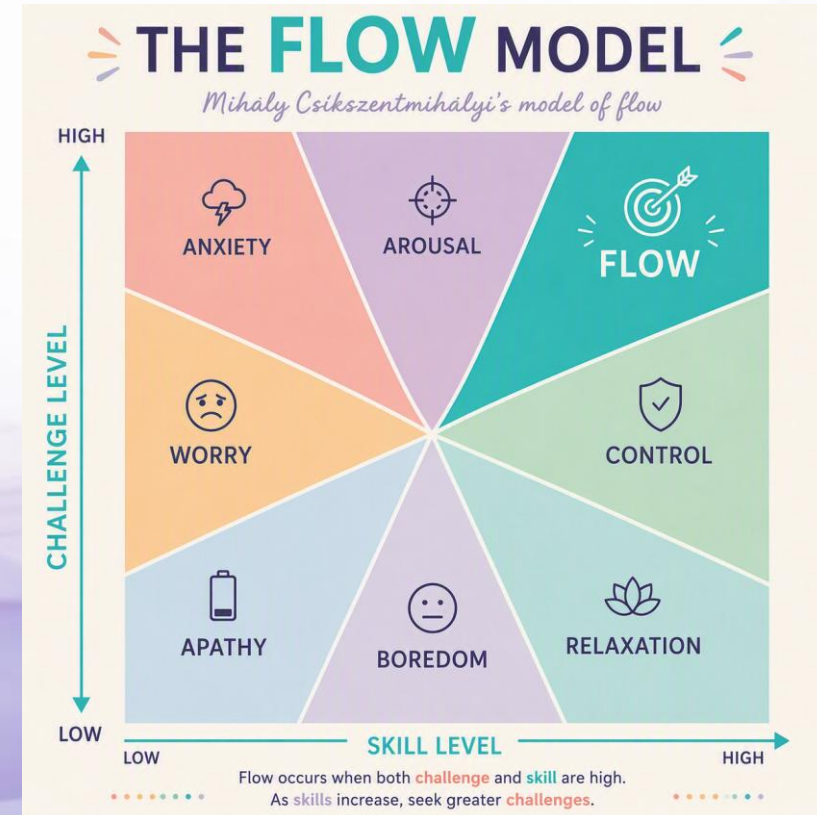
Flow and Neurodivergence

For many people with ADHD and other neurodivergent conditions, the concept of **flow may feel familiar**. Hyperfocus and flow both involve becoming deeply absorbed in an activity, losing track of time, and tuning out distractions. However, there is an **important distinction**.

Flow typically occurs when a person's **skill level is well matched to the challenge** they are undertaking, creating a sense of balance, control and enjoyment. **Hyperfocus**, on the other hand, can be **less predictable** and may occur regardless of whether a task is important, urgent or even enjoyable.

While **both experiences can be highly productive**, hyperfocus can sometimes make it difficult to switch attention, recognise basic needs, or move on to other responsibilities.

Understanding this distinction can help individuals recognise both the benefits and challenges of becoming deeply absorbed in a task.



"People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy."

— Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*

Flow occurs when we are so **absorbed in an activity** that the experience itself becomes rewarding, allowing motivation and focus to arise naturally from the task at hand. Research has shown **benefits** of getting into a state of flow include **creativity, increased productivity**, and a **boost to overall wellbeing**. Regularly experiencing flow and engaging on focused tasks can improve positive emotions and decrease negative emotions such as depression and anxiety.

Ultimately, flow reminds us that some of **our most rewarding experiences** come not from achieving the goal, but from **becoming fully immersed in the journey**.

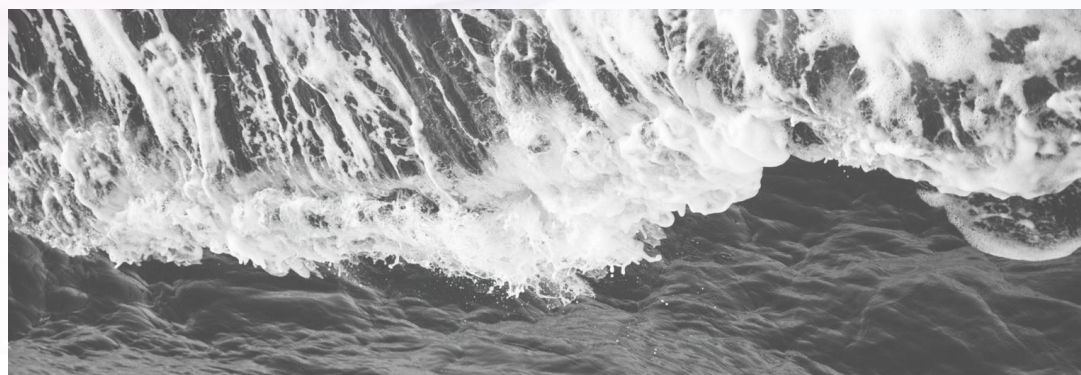
Creating Opportunities

Although **flow cannot be forced**, some conditions make it more likely:

- Choose activities that **genuinely interest you**
- Break large tasks** into smaller, clear goals
- Reduce distractions** where possible
- Match the difficulty** of the task to your current abilities
- Focus on **progress** rather than perfection
- Allow **uninterrupted time** to become immersed in the activity

"...it is when we act freely, for the sake of the action itself rather than for ulterior motives, that we learn to become more than what we were."

— Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*



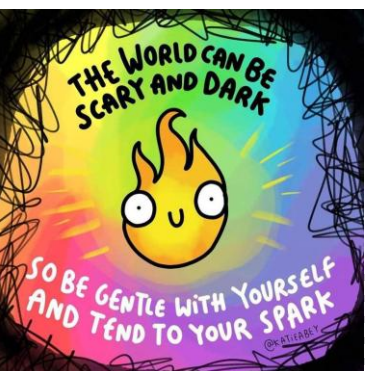
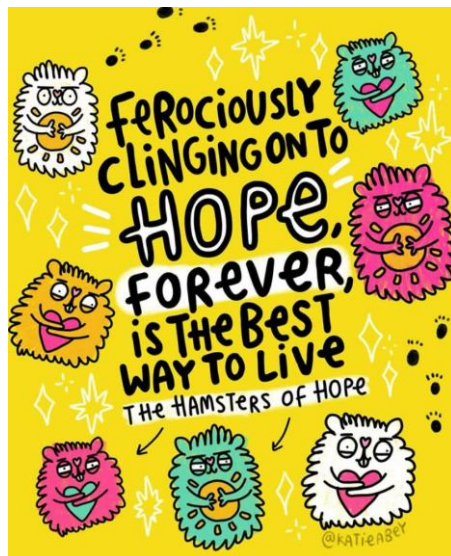
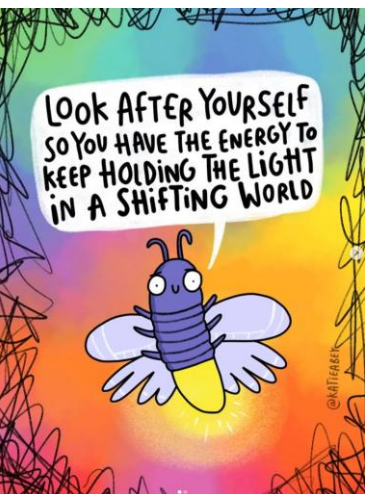
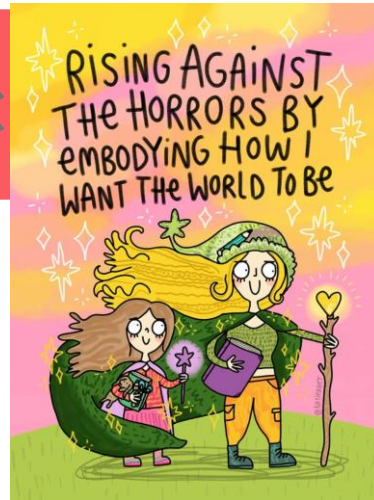
Further Reading:

- [What Is Flow Theory - Science Insights](#)
- [Mihály Csíkszentmihályi: The Father of Flow](#)
- [Towards autistic flow theory \(Heasman, 2024\)](#)
- [Monotropism, meditation and autistic flow - BPS](#)
- [Neurodiversity 101 - LinkedIn](#)
- [Flow Theory - TheoryHub](#)



Creativity Corner: Featured Creator Katie Abey

This issue's inspirational creator is [@katieabey](#). Katie is an award winning illustrator and writer, and we have been enchanted by her stunning artwork!



Creativity Corner: Spark. Explore. Create



The **Big Draw Festival** is a worldwide **celebration of creativity** that encourages everyone to pick up a pencil, pen, paintbrush or marker and start drawing. This year's theme, **Make a Mark**, focuses on the **joy of creating, exploring and expressing yourself** through marks, shapes and lines.

Drawing isn't about perfection. It's about curiosity, imagination and giving your ideas space to grow. Whether you doodle, sketch, pattern, or create something completely unique, **every mark tells a story** - visit [The Big Draw](#) and why not give mark making a go?

"Mark making transforms creativity into action."

— The Big Draw

Inspiration Seed

What if a single line became something unexpected?

Start with one mark on the page and see where it leads. Turn it into a landscape, a creature, a pattern, a feeling, or something nobody else would recognise. There's no wrong direction.

A Mark Becomes...



Every creative idea starts with a single mark.

"A drawing is simply a line going for a walk."

— Paul Klee

Activity Prompt

The Big Draw's theme this year is **Making a Mark**.

Create **three simple marks on a page**: one straight, one curved and one completely random.

Look at them closely.

What do they remind you of? Could they become a place, a creature, a feeling or the start of a story?

More Than Just a Fidget - How Stimz is Rethinking Sensory Support

When most people think of **sensory tools**, they picture fidget spinners, stress balls, or objects designed simply to keep hands busy. At the [Autism & ADHD Show](#), however, one exhibitor challenged that idea completely, and we were hooked!

Stimz has developed a range of products that **blend sensory support with creativity**, problem solving and everyday practicality. Rather than focusing on a single type of sensory input, many of the products combine tactile exploration, visual appeal and **opportunities for personalisation**. The result is a collection of tools that feel more like engaging activities than traditional sensory aids.

What stood out the most was the thought that had gone into the designs. The products were **colourful, durable** and **appealing** without feeling childish, making them suitable for a wide range of ages. Many of the **items encouraged interaction through texture, movement and manipulation**, but in a way that felt purposeful and considered.

For neurodivergent people, sensory tools are often misunderstood as what may **look like a distraction** to someone else can actually **support concentration, self-regulation** and **emotional wellbeing**. Having access to the right sensory input can make it easier to focus, manage stress and remain engaged in learning or work activities.

Kayleigh went for **quiet clicks**, with **contrasting colours** in a lilac casing, including a cat (obviously!) whereas Sarah went for a **rainbow casing** (again, obviously!) with 3 coloured texture blocks, and loud clicks! We had the choice of a keyring or a wrist loop, and had help putting them together from the staff.



Sometimes the smallest tools make the biggest difference.

Seeing these beautiful products in person (and **so much more online!**) was a reminder that **sensory support has evolved significantly** over the years. Today's sensory tools are no longer simply about keeping hands occupied. Increasingly, they are being **designed to help people understand their sensory needs**, access regulation strategies and create environments in which they can thrive.

So look out for them and check them out online. They have a **fantastic range of products** and as testing customers for this article (we promise this isn't an ad - we paid for our clickers!) we both were just **enchanted by their products**, really impressed with the company, and wanted to **share our approval** with you all!



Oh - and they've just launched a **brand new range** (which we had a preview of at the Show) where you can now **turn your own pet into a customised clicker!!!**

www.stimz.com



Pfft! We Didn't Need Fidgets in the 90s! (Or did we..?)

There has been a flurry of **social media posts** recently about how in the 80s and 90s we didn't need the vast array of fidget toys that kids today enjoy, before exploring all the **things we used instead!** There may not have been as many diagnoses in the 80s and 90s, but there were enough of us undiagnosed neurodivergent going through school **creating our own forms of sensory regulation**.

Behaviours such as spinning on chairs, stretching elastic bands, doodling, chewing pen lids and playing with Blu Tack often provided vestibular, proprioceptive, tactile, oral or visual sensory input. While they may have looked like distraction to others, they were often **helping us maintain focus, regulate attention** and **meet sensory needs** so that we were able to successfully engage in our learning.

Clicking a Pen

Sensory areas: Auditory, Tactile, Proprioceptive

- Provides predictable auditory feedback through repetitive clicking
- Offers resistance and movement
- Regulating through rhythm and repetition



Doodling

Sensory areas: Visual, Proprioceptive, Tactile

- Keeps hands active while listening or thinking
- Provides continuous fine-motor movement and hand feedback
- Can support concentration by giving the brain a secondary point of focus



Stretching an Elastic Band

Sensory areas: Visual, Tactile, Proprioceptive

- Provides resistance against muscles and joints
- Offers satisfying stretch-and-release feedback through the hands
- The movement and shape changes can also be visually engaging



Picking off PVA

Sensory areas: Tactile, Proprioceptive

- Provides satisfying texture and peeling sensations
- Repetitive finger movements can feel calming and regulating
- Combines touch exploration with fine-motor control



Sensory Stimulation

Spinning on a Chair

Sensory areas: Vestibular, Proprioceptive

- Craving movement input and changes in position
- Provides vestibular stimulation through spinning and balance
- Can help increase alertness, focus and body awareness



Blu Tack

Sensory areas: Tactile, Proprioceptive

- Squishing, rolling and stretching provides rich tactile input
- Applying pressure through fingers and hands offers calming proprioceptive feedback
- A classic homemade fidget before dedicated sensory tools existed



Poking an Eraser

Sensory areas: Visual, Tactile, Proprioceptive

- Provides resistance and pressure through fingers and hands
- Creates repetitive, rhythmic movements that many people find regulating
- Produces a visible pattern or result, adding visual feedback



Chewing a Pen Lid

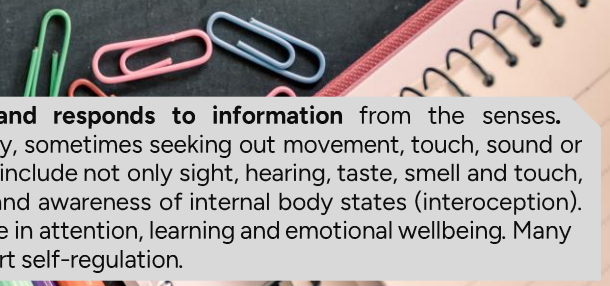
Sensory areas: Oral Sensory, Proprioceptive

- Delivers sensory input through the mouth and jaw
- Jaw pressure can be regulating and grounding
- The unofficial ancestor of modern chewable sensory aids



Neurocrafted: The Science

Sensory processing is how the brain **receives, organises and responds to information** from the senses. Many neurodivergent people experience sensory input differently, sometimes seeking out movement, touch, sound or pressure to help regulate attention and focus. **Sensory systems** include not only sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, but also balance (vestibular), body awareness (proprioception) and awareness of internal body states (interoception). Research suggests that sensory regulation plays an important role in attention, learning and emotional wellbeing. Many sensory-seeking behaviours are **adaptive strategies** that support self-regulation.



When Your ADHD Brain Suddenly Hits a Wall

by Mitzi



Do you ever wake up and know **it's going to be one of those unproductive days**? You can't pinpoint why; yesterday you were full of energy, purposeful and motivated but today even getting out of bed feels difficult.

Our first inclination is often to **scan for a reason** why and then the **thoughts start to cascade**; Did I do something wrong? Am I lazy? Am I falling behind? Why can't I motivate myself? The truth is that **this feeling is not a reflection of your ability, effort, or character**.



It can be helpful to remember that the **brains** of those of us with ADHD **often process the brain's chemicals differently** (such as dopamine, noradrenaline and other neurotransmitters) and the connections between different brain areas can vary from a 'neurotypical' brain. The same brain that can become deeply engaged, creative and productive can also become **mentally exhausted** after periods of intense effort.

However, while knowing this might make it feel less like we are failing, **we should be realistic** and accept that not every day has to be a high performance day. Just like an athlete after intense physical training, we should **recognise the need for rest**.

This **feeling of depletion** often occurs after **particularly busy days** with lots of socialising, hyper focusing on tasks, or coping with stress. The **mental exhaustion** that follows can then cause our motivation to disappear, **make emotions feel much bigger** and even **simple tasks feel overwhelming**. But much of this mental and emotional overwhelm is often the result of **physical exhaustion**.



Why Does It Feel So Personal?

A difficult part of ADHD is that **the drop can feel emotional rather than physical**. Instead of recognising "I'm tired", your brain might tell you: "I'm failing," "I'm not good enough," "everyone else can cope," or "I should be doing more."

We may assume we've lost motivation, become lazy, or somehow fallen behind, but **ADHD requires an enormous amount of mental effort**. Concentrating, switching between tasks, regulating emotions, filtering distractions and managing everyday responsibilities can all **draw on the same limited energy reserves**.

The **challenge** is that **mental fatigue is invisible**.

We would rarely judge ourselves for needing to rest after running a marathon, yet many of us criticise ourselves when our brains need the same opportunity to recover. Recognising the **signs of depletion** can help us **respond with self-compassion rather than self-criticism**.

Practicing kindness to ourselves, prioritising our wellbeing, planning in time for rest, and doing things that bring us joy can be so beneficial.

Sometimes, the **problem isn't a lack of ability or effort**. Sometimes, your **brain simply needs time to recharge**.



**You're not failing.
You're just running
on empty.**

Think of your
brain as like a
battery.



Rest, Recharge, Refuel.

Hitting a wall doesn't mean you've failed, lost motivation or suddenly become lazy. Sometimes **your brain is simply running on empty**.

Just as we need **rest after physical exertion**, our **minds need time to recover** from sustained focus, emotional regulation and everyday demands. The good news is that **small, intentional actions** can help you **recharge and restore your energy**.

Here are some simple activities to try, to help you rest your brain.



MOVE

A short walk, stretching, or a few minutes outside can help boost energy and regulate mood without demanding too much effort.



REFUEL

Try not to skip meals. Regular food, hydration and protein can help support energy levels and concentration.

REDUCE

Ask yourself: "What is the minimum I need to do today?" Not every day has to be a high-performance day.



COMFORT

Watch a favourite programme, listen to familiar music, read a comfort book, or spend time with people who help you feel safe and understood.



REST

Rest is not a reward for being productive. Rest is part of being productive.



SLEEP

Many ADHD energy crashes are made worse by poor sleep. An early night can sometimes make a bigger difference than pushing through.

PERMISSION TO PAUSE

Perhaps the most important thing is to **give yourself permission to recover**. If you are not feeling it today, don't be too hard on yourself. **Rest** is not a reward for being productive; it is **part of being productive**. Your productivity will return, but it may just take a little time.

Rest is not a reward for being productive; it is part of being productive.



Neurocrafted: The Science

Dopamine plays an important role in **motivation**, reward anticipation and sustaining effort towards a goal. **Noradrenaline** helps **regulate attention**, alertness and working memory. **Differences** in these neurotransmitter systems are thought to contribute to many of the **challenges associated with ADHD**.

When the brain is repeatedly required to focus, switch tasks, inhibit impulses, manage emotions and filter sensory information, **cognitive resources can become depleted**. This may lead to **mental fatigue**, reduced **executive functioning**, **slower processing**, and increased **emotional sensitivity**. Rest and recovery allows these cognitive resources to be replenished.

Review - QA Apprenticeship Neurodiversity Network



Perhaps the most encouraging takeaway was the reminder that **many challenges** experienced by people are often **widely shared**. Whether discussing difficulties with memory, burnout, procrastination, sensory struggles, or workplace pressures, there was a **sense of understanding** within the room. People **expressed reassurance** in hearing that others faced similar experiences, and there was value in a real **sense of connection, validation** and **community** within the room. Book for our next session [here](#).



Our latest Network Session was on 19th August with the topic **'Summer Skills Share'**. The session explored a wide range of topics, from executive functioning and workplace wellbeing to burnout prevention and self-care, the most **powerful message** was that there is no single approach that works for everyone. Participants were encouraged to **share strategies** that helped them navigate daily challenges, and support studies and the workplace, speaking openly about the realities of living and working with different neurodivergent experiences.

Conversations touched on perfectionism, stress, energy management, overthinking, and the pressure people can place on themselves to keep going even when **capacity is running low**. Throughout the session, members reflected on the **importance of recognising personal limits, adapting environments** to individual needs, and showing themselves the same compassion they would to others.

What works well with the format of this session is that it encourages people to **learn from lived experience**. The forum provided an opportunity for people to ask questions, **exchange ideas** and discover approaches they may not have previously considered. The **openness of the dialogue** and chat from everyone who joined in help forge an environment where people felt heard, understood and supported.

There were some fantastic **hints, tips**, and **resources** shared; you can read a summary on the following page.

"The dual option of speaking or using the chat made the session inclusive and allowed for you to engage through your preferred medium"

"everyone is open about what they struggle with and how they use techniques to share"

"it exceeded my expectations - thank you!"

"I did feel safe and in a relaxed and safe environment"

"Great engagement and conversation with others, nice to chat to like-minded people and support each other"

"I did feel very safe speaking and did a lot of discussing"



Summer Skills Share – Top Takeaways

Here are some of the key themes and highlights from our August Network Session. It was great to discuss, share, and look at some strategies and top tips together!



Managing Basic Needs

Participants shared practical ways to support hydration, medication, hygiene and daily routines. Strategies included visual reminders, habit tracking, sensory incentives and self-care activities to existing routines making them easier to maintain.

Keywords: Hydration • Habit Tracking • Medication • Hygiene



Workplace Strategies

Several practical workplace adjustments were highlighted as effective ways to reduce stress.6 Discussions focused on setting boundaries, communicating capacity, task prioritisation, and recognising when enthusiasm can become overload.

Keywords: Boundaries • Delegation • Priorities • Communication



Executive Functioning

Practical strategies centred on planning, organisation and task initiation to support cognition. Discussions focused on reducing cognitive load and finding tools to make everyday tasks more manageable.

Keywords: Prioritisation • Goblin Tools • Dopamine Menus • Decision Fatigue



Emotional Regulation & Self-Awareness

Understanding emotions and energy levels was a recurring theme. Discussions explored spoon theory, emotion wheels and journaling as tools for recognising patterns, supporting wellbeing and communicating needs.

Keywords: Emotion Wheels • Journaling • Spoon Theory • Self-Awareness



Burnout Patterns

Several common burnout patterns emerged throughout the discussion. Themes included overcommitment, masking, difficulty resting and cycles of hyperfocus that can lead to exhaustion when energy needs go unrecognised.

Keywords: Hyperfocus • Masking • Exhaustion • Overcommitment

Common Threads

Learning From the Room

The strongest takeaway from the session was the value of experimentation and shared learning. Small, compassionate adjustments and community knowledge can help individuals build strategies that work for their unique needs.

Keywords: Community • Adaptation • Learning • Compassion

"We learn differently, but we learn better together."

Thank you to everyone who attended, shared strategies, listened, and encouraged others! Our Network would not be what it is without you guys! We look forward to seeing you at our next session - if you've never been before why not give it a try? Book [here](#).

Book [here](#).

ND&D In Focus: Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a **neurological difference** affecting **writing skills**. Dysgraphia can affect handwriting, spelling, sentence structure, organising your ideas, and handwriting. Most of us take **the act of writing** for granted, but for people with dysgraphia it can be a **huge challenge**. Every person's experience is different, with some finding typing easier than handwriting, while others struggle with both.



Messy or difficult to read handwriting

Inconsistent spelling

Struggling to take notes while listening

Difficulty organising thoughts on paper

Slow writing speed

Hand fatigue or discomfort when writing

Missing words or letters when writing

Spending longer on written tasks than peers

Dysgraphia doesn't affect intelligence. It affects the route ideas take from the mind to the page.

The Hidden Impact

Writing is such a central part of education and work, so dysgraphia can **affect confidence** as much as **performance**.

Imagine knowing exactly what you want to say but watching the words disappear from your mind as soon as you pick up a pen. Or spending **so much effort forming letters** that there is **little energy left** for thinking about the content.

Many people with dysgraphia are **unfairly labelled** as careless, lazy, or disorganised, when the reality is they are often **working much harder** than others to achieve the same result.

Helpful Strategies

The good news is that **support can make a significant difference**. Strategies which may help include:

- Voice-to-text software
- Recording lectures or meetings
- Receiving slides in advance
- Using a laptop instead of handwriting
- Breaking large writing tasks into smaller steps
- Mind mapping before writing
- Extra time for written assessments
- Spell-checking and grammar support tools



Strengths Beyond Writing

People with dysgraphia often spend years developing alternative ways to communicate and share ideas. As a result, many become **skilled problem solvers**, **creative thinkers**, and **strong verbal communicators**.

Finding workarounds for everyday challenges can build resilience, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Many people also **develop strengths** in visual thinking, creativity, practical learning, storytelling, discussion, and big-picture thinking.

Writing may not come easily, but that **doesn't mean the ideas aren't there**. The challenge lies in **getting thoughts onto paper**, not in intelligence, effort, creativity, or potential.

Dysgraphia affects the writing process, not intellect, creativity, or potential.



Further Reading:

- [What Is Dysgraphia? \(ADDitude Magazine\)](#)
- [Dysgraphia: What It Is](#)
- [Understanding Dysgraphia - International Dyslexia Association](#)
- [What Is Dysgraphia? \(YouTube\)](#)



App Spotlight

MindMup
Mindmup
£ free plan available

MindMup is a **visual mind-mapping tool** that helps users organise ideas, **connect information**, and plan written work.

Instead of facing a blank page, thoughts can be captured as branches, making it easier to see **relationships between topics** and **build a clear structure** before writing.

For those who find it difficult to organise thoughts, mind mapping can provide a more **visual and flexible way** to explore ideas, plan, revise key concepts, and break large projects into manageable sections. The **simple interface** makes it easy to capture ideas as they arise and develop them into a coherent plan.

Whether you're preparing for an assignment, taking notes, or untangling a busy mind, MindMup can help organise thoughts and link ideas in a **visual format**.

Black Neurodivergent & Disabled Voices

Representation, Identity, and Being Seen

When we picture autism, ADHD or dyslexia, the image that comes to mind is often **shaped by stereotypes**. For many Black neurodivergent and disabled people, this can mean **facing additional barriers** to understanding, diagnosis and support. October marks **Black History Month** provides an opportunity not only to **celebrate history and achievement**, but also to **recognise the voices and experiences** that are sometimes missing from conversations about disability and neurodiversity. This year's theme, **Honouring Our Communities**, reminds us that **our apprentice community is strongest when every voice, experience and identity is recognised, respected and valued.**

"When people who are intersectional in society are talking about intersectional identities it puts more oppression on people with different characteristics or identities. If you're a Black woman who is a wheelchair user or disabled, you have extra layers of oppression, not only from being a disabled person but also from being Black."

- Iyiola Olafimiha

Black neurodivergent and disabled people bring a rich diversity of experiences that are not always reflected in mainstream conversations.

Misconceptions, cultural barriers and a lack of representation can make it harder to access diagnosis, support or understanding. Yet across individuals, advocates, communities, and organisations are challenging these barriers, sharing their stories and driving positive change.

Greater representation helps challenge assumptions and ensure that support services, workplaces and educational settings better reflect the needs of diverse communities. Visibility matters because people are more likely to seek support when they can see themselves reflected in the conversation.

Their voices help broaden our understanding of disability and neurodiversity, reminding us that representation is not just about visibility, but about belonging.

Voices to Explore



Dr Khadija Owusu
(researcher and advocate)

[Dr Khadija Owusu](#)
Challenging barriers and amplify underrepresented voices



Iyiola Olafimiha
(Disability advocate)

[Inclusive Spaces Interview](#)
Advocating for accessible and inclusive environments



Black SEN Mamas
(Advocacy network)

[@blacksenmamas_uk](#) [Black SEN Mamas](#)
Supporting Black SEND families via advocacy



Morénike Giwa Onaiwu
(Autism advocate)

[Autism and the Complexities of Intersectionality - A Podcast](#)
Exploring autism and intersectionality through lived experience

"Representation will create medicine that saves lives" - Dr Khadija Owusu

Our learning community is strengthened when every voice, experience and identity is recognised and valued.

Find Out More

- [Black History Month](#)
- [Black Disabled Leaders Shaping an Inclusive Future](#)
- [Neurodivergence in the Community](#)

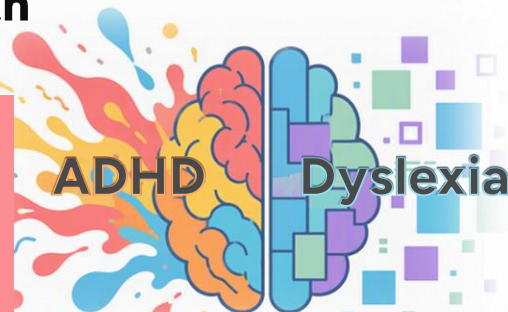
Visibility Matters

Different Ways of Thinking

Celebrating ADHD Awareness Month & Dyslexia Awareness Week

This October celebrates two neurodivergent conditions: 5-11th October is **Dyslexia Awareness Week**, whilst the whole month is focused on **ADHD Awareness**. Many of our apprentices (and staff!) are formally diagnosed or have lived experience of ADHD and/or dyslexia.

Whilst ADHD and dyslexia are often discussed separately, **many people experience both**, each shaping how they learn, work and navigate daily life. This feature explores **different ways of thinking**, including a personal story of the **dual diagnosis** experience.



**Different Minds.
Endless Potential.**

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning difference that primarily affects **reading, spelling and writing**. It is one of the most common neurodivergent profiles, influencing how people **absorb, organise and communicate information**.

Many dyslexic people also demonstrate strengths in areas such as **creativity, problem-solving, big-picture thinking** and **visual reasoning**. Dyslexia is not linked to intelligence. It simply reflects a different way of processing language and information.

Common experiences:

- Slower reading speed
- Difficulties with spelling and written accuracy
- Challenges remembering sequences or instructions
- Memory and recall
- Increased mental effort when processing text



**Understanding
your brain can
change
everything.**

What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental difference that affects how the brain **regulates attention, motivation and self-management**. ADHD can also impact organisation, memory, emotional regulation and time management.

Many people with ADHD are **creative, adaptable problem-solvers** who thrive when working with their strengths, the right support and an environment that **values different ways of thinking**.

Common experiences:

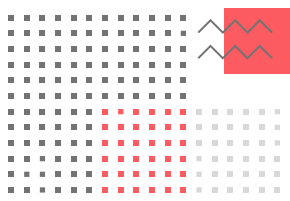
- Difficulty finishing tasks
- Forgetfulness losing track
- Time blindness
- Procrastination
- Hyperfocus
- Impulsivity
- Emotional intensity
- Rejection sensitivity dysphoria



- [ADHD Awareness Month](#)
- [Dyslexia Awareness Week](#)

Life Through a New Lens

Reflecting on life before and after a dyslexia and ADHD diagnosis *with Vix*



Up until last year Vix was a central part of the Learning Support Team so is a returning member to the pages of the Nexus. Vix left us to **join the Safeguarding Team**, and supports learners across all our apprenticeship programmes, continuing to advocate for our neurodivergent learners. Vix was **diagnosed with Dyslexia** in University in 2004, and then received a **more recent diagnosis of ADHD** in 2025. We caught up with Vix for a **unique perspective** on her neurodivergent experience and dual diagnosis.

Before your diagnoses, did you ever feel that your brain worked differently from other people's?

Yes! I felt this in a variety of ways, in school I saw other people understand and remember things more easily than me. I had to put a lot of effort into my work. I didn't always get communication correct, lots of info dumping, no 'inside' voice, and fidgeting in my seat.

Looking back now, are there things from school or early life that make more sense to you?

Yes, I can now understand why school-age-me struggled the way I did. I was a school refuser all the way from nursery! I had daily arguments with my mum about going to school. It was only when I got to 6th form that I started to engage better with learning. The irony that I work in education is not lost on me!

If you could tell your younger self one thing, what would it be?

"Stop comparing yourself to others, don't be afraid to just be you."

— Vix

What led you to seek an ADHD assessment?

Menopause! It felt like my brain stopped working; I had no executive functioning and my memory and organisation skills really suffered. Strategies I had used to cope before weren't working.

How do ADHD and dyslexia show up differently in your day-to-day life?

They are both always present, dyslexia isn't just there when I read and write. Both ADHD and dyslexia impact my organisation, time management and working memory. Everything must be written down and I have constant Alexa reminders to do things! ADHD means I am more impulsive with decision making and look for quick dopamine hits.

Do the two overlap in ways people might not expect?

Yes, very much with organisation, time management and working memory. Also with procrastination; if the task doesn't set my brain on fire or has lots of reading, it will get put off. My husband always knew when I had an assignment due as I would Hoover the stairs, just to avoid it!

For years you lived without these labels. Now that you have them, what has changed, and what hasn't?

I always had labels but often they weren't nice i.e. thick, slow, useless. Having these formal labels helps others understand me and my behaviour better. They have helped me be kinder to myself as I have a better understanding of how my brain works.

ADHD Monsters

That No-one Talks About

(just in time for Halloween!)

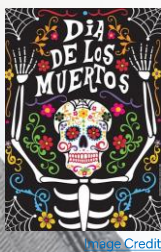


[Image Credit](#)

Upcoming Events

We have more great sessions on the calendar for September and October, check them out on the [Wellbeing Calendar](#).

- Join us for our **Introduction to Neurodiversity** session, aimed at those new to neurodiversity but anyone is welcome! – **September 17th**
- We would love to see you at our next **QA Apprenticeship Neurodiversity Network** session on **21st October** for **Growing Up Neurodivergent**. An intergenerational conversation about childhood, education, diagnosis (or lack of it), and how early experiences shape adult life.
- Join our Safeguarding Team for their **Safeguarding Introduction** sessions – **September 25th** and **October 23rd**
- **Take Control: Practical Strategies for Stress and Wellbeing** - Join Tina, our Safeguarding Specialist and qualified Person-Centred Therapist, in this live session to learn more about **managing these emotions** and **developing practical strategies to support your wellbeing**. Discover useful tools to build resilience, improve focus, and feel more in control when life becomes challenging – **September 24th**
- **Prevent: Could You Spot the Signs?** – Join Jaspreet our Prevent Lead. Through live polls, videos, quizzes, and case studies, this **interactive session** will help you **understand radicalisation**, **recognise vulnerabilities**, and explore how **early intervention** can make a difference.



Association of Apprentices

With your AoA membership you can attend all their events including these upcoming sessions:

- Money Matters: Practical Finance for Apprentices – **September 22nd**
- Skills Workshop: Know Yourself to Grow Yourself – **September 24th**
- Masterclass: Kickstart Your Future – **September 25th**
- Mastering Me: Awareness & Self-Control with our very own Mark Soady – **October 16th**



Book Your Place

- Check out all our **QA** upcoming events on the Wellbeing Calendar. **Book onto all our sessions [here](#).**
- For **AoA sessions** and book [here](#) on their website.

Do You Need Support?

Support is available whether you have a diagnosis, are exploring a possible condition, or simply feel something is affecting your learning. We're here to help you find the right next step.



You may benefit from support if:

- You find it difficult to organise your studies
- You struggle with time management
- A disability or health condition affects your learning
- You think you may be neurodivergent
- You need exam adjustments
- You need specialist software or assistive technology



1. Self-Refer

2. Explore Your Needs

3. Access Support & Resources

QAA Learning Support
([Levels 3-6](#))

DA Learning Support
([Levels 4-7](#))

Other Support Avenues:



Apprentice Learner's Portal

Information, support and resources to help you succeed throughout your apprenticeship – check them out [here](#)



Association of Apprentices

Free networking, resources and professional development for QA apprentices – check them out [here](#)



Safeguarding Team

Wellbeing, mental health support, mentoring and crisis intervention – check them out [here](#)



ACE (For Degree Apprentices)

Workshops, resources, and 1:1 academic support on all elements of academic writing – check them out [here](#)

