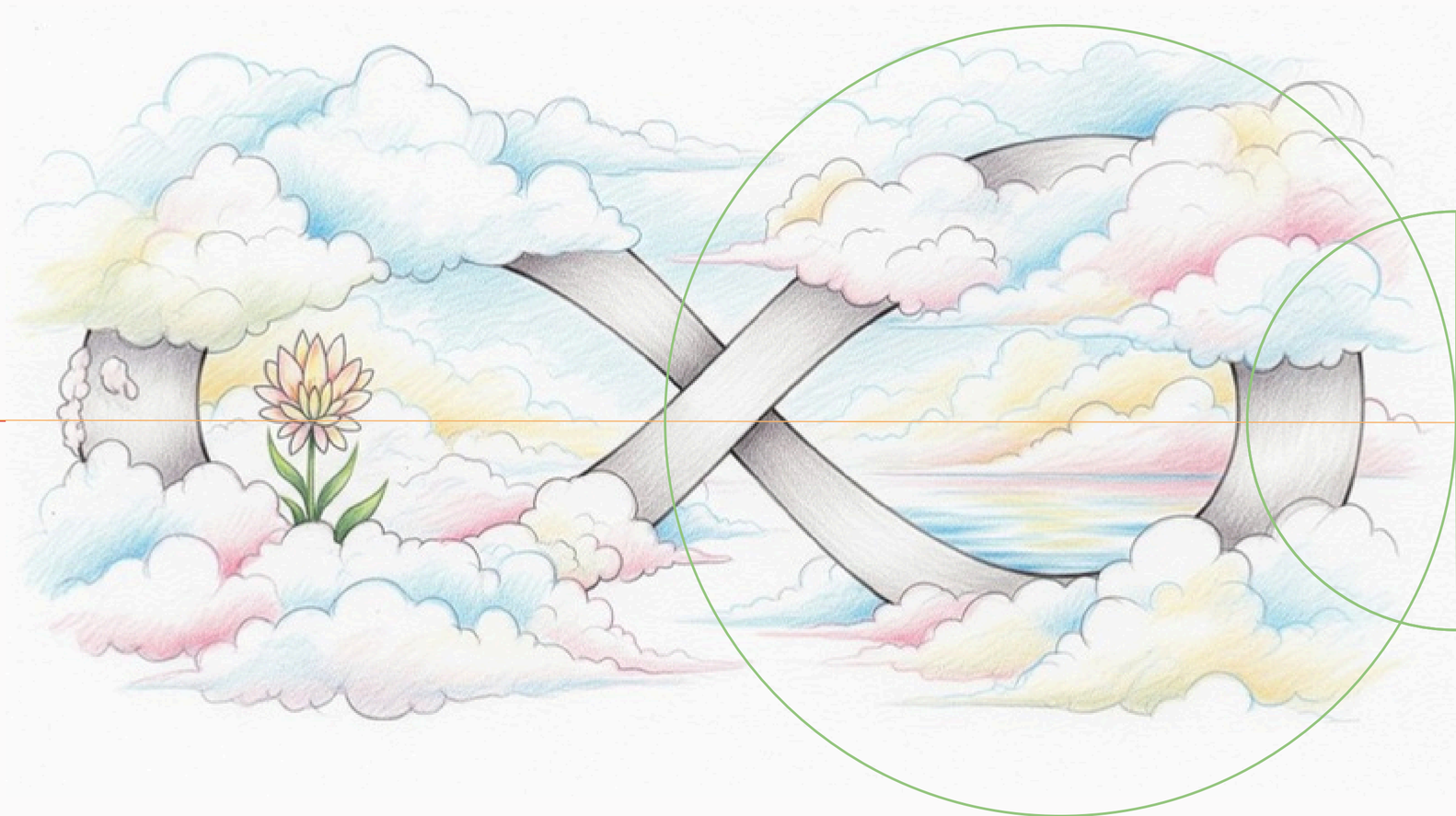
Emotion regulation
in neurodivergent people

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Youth and adult psychiatrist



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Who am I

- Curator: helping to point out what actually works
- Translator
  - Literally
  - Between different kinds of brains
  - Between different areas of life
- Researcher @KU Leuven
- Helping to build communities and connection
  - Actually, you are not here today for me or the other speakers – you are here for yourselves

BRAINSPARK

ADHD - Autism - Trauma & Attachment

What can help with emotion regulation: a checklist

- Foundation: connecting, (learning to) be a safe space for the other person
- Foundation: an ND-friendly approach
- Spotlight: building on strengths
- Spotlight: diagnostic assessment
- Medication? See the talk later today
- Two therapeutic exercises:
  - Mapping triggers and coping in a signalling plan
  - The battery: insight into sensory processing and energy costs

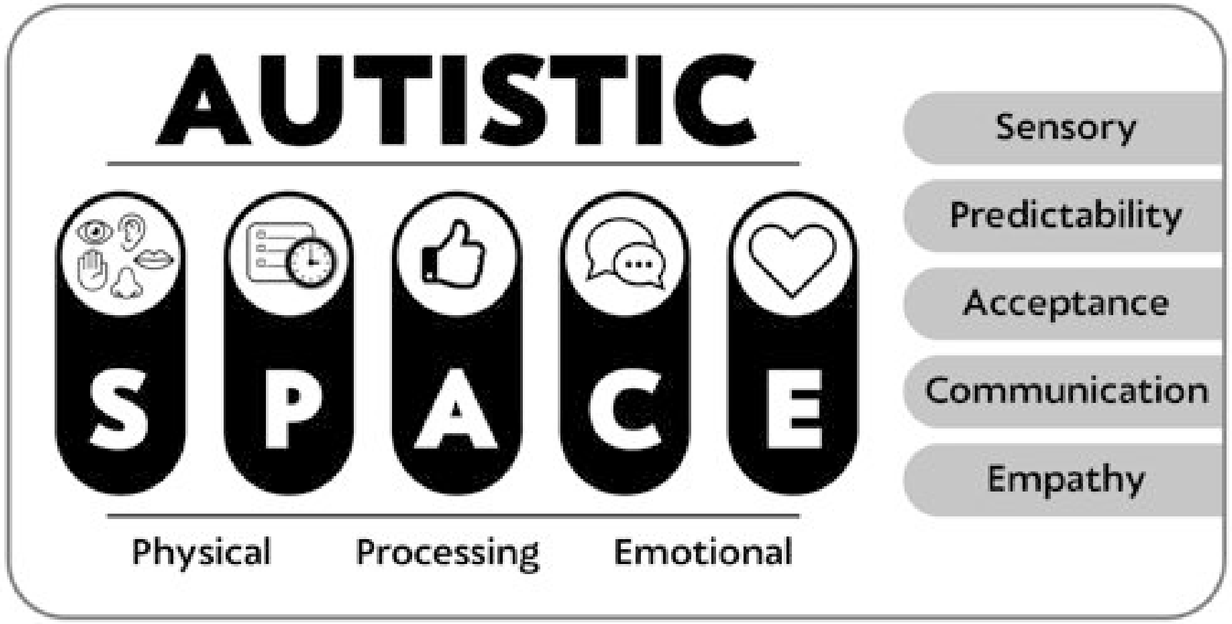
An invalidating environment
= “A rejection of the valid”
Fruzzetti et al. 2005

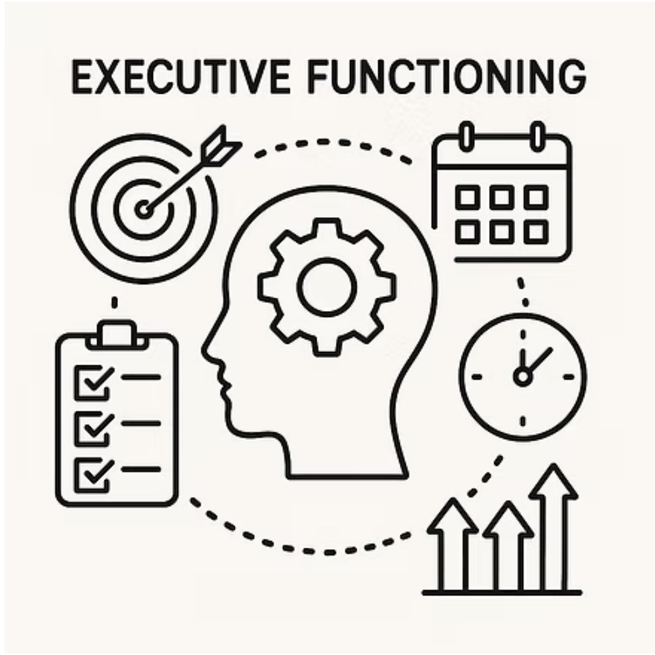
= a poor fit between the person’s needs and the environment’s response

Includes any actions or inactions that communicate to an individual that their responses do not make sense, and are not understandable within their current life context or situation
Linehan, 1993

Explicit or implicit communication that internal experiences are insignificant, incorrect, inappropriate or unacceptable
Fruzzetti et al. 2004; Sloan et al. 2017

Connecting, validating, being a safe space





A neurodiversity-friendly approach

Building on strengths

Lampinen, L. A., Singer, J., Wang, X., VanHook, B., Wilkinson, E., & Bal, V. H. (2025). Self-reported strengths and talents of autistic adults. *Autism*

Cognitive/Executive Functioning		**77 (61%)**
Logical thinking	*I am talented at logical problem-solving*	28 (22%)
Attention to detail	*analyzing the details to make sense of the whole*	23 (18%)
Intelligence	*I am a very intelligent person*	18 (14%)
Organization	*I am very organized*	14 (11%)
Focus and concentration	*hyperfocus- delving into things deeply and staying focused on that thing*	11 (9%)
Pattern recognition	*I can find patterns in things that most people don't*	8 (6%)
Cognitive/Executive Functioning-Other	*Visualization/spatialization- I can see what I am thinking about and think in pictures; I can sort large amounts of complex data into a usable format*	31 (24%)
Character		**70 (55%)**
Goodwill	*friendly, caring and do anything to help*	29 (23%)
Determination	*working hard & persisting*	15 (12%)
Humor	*Making people laugh*	14 (11%)
Patience	*Patient*	8 (6%)
Independence	*not really needing much guidance on something new*	6 (5%)
Flexibility	*Flexibility*	6 (5%)
Character Strengths-Other	*The desire to learn new things; Introspective; Humbleness; Willpower*	36 (28%)
Creative/Artistic		**66 (52%)**
Music	*I can play music by ear well enough my band mates noticed*	23 (18%)
Drawing, Painting, & Sculpting	*I try a bunch of forms of art. I mainly sketch on paper, but I like sculpting clay*	12 (10%)
Crafting	*many handicrafts (such as crochet)*	12 (10%)
Creative writing	*I love to write creatively*	8 (6%)
Creativity/Artistic-Other	*Creativity; Create different designs daily*	37 (29%)

Good diagnostic assessment

IQ testing, attachment and personality, strengths?

Impact of an autism/ADHD diagnosis
- giving permission to use ADHD and autism strategies

Impact of a somatic diagnosis

Have we missed something?
- Sometimes only clear years later: dare to question yourself

The signalling plan as a working document

How do I recognise how I feel?

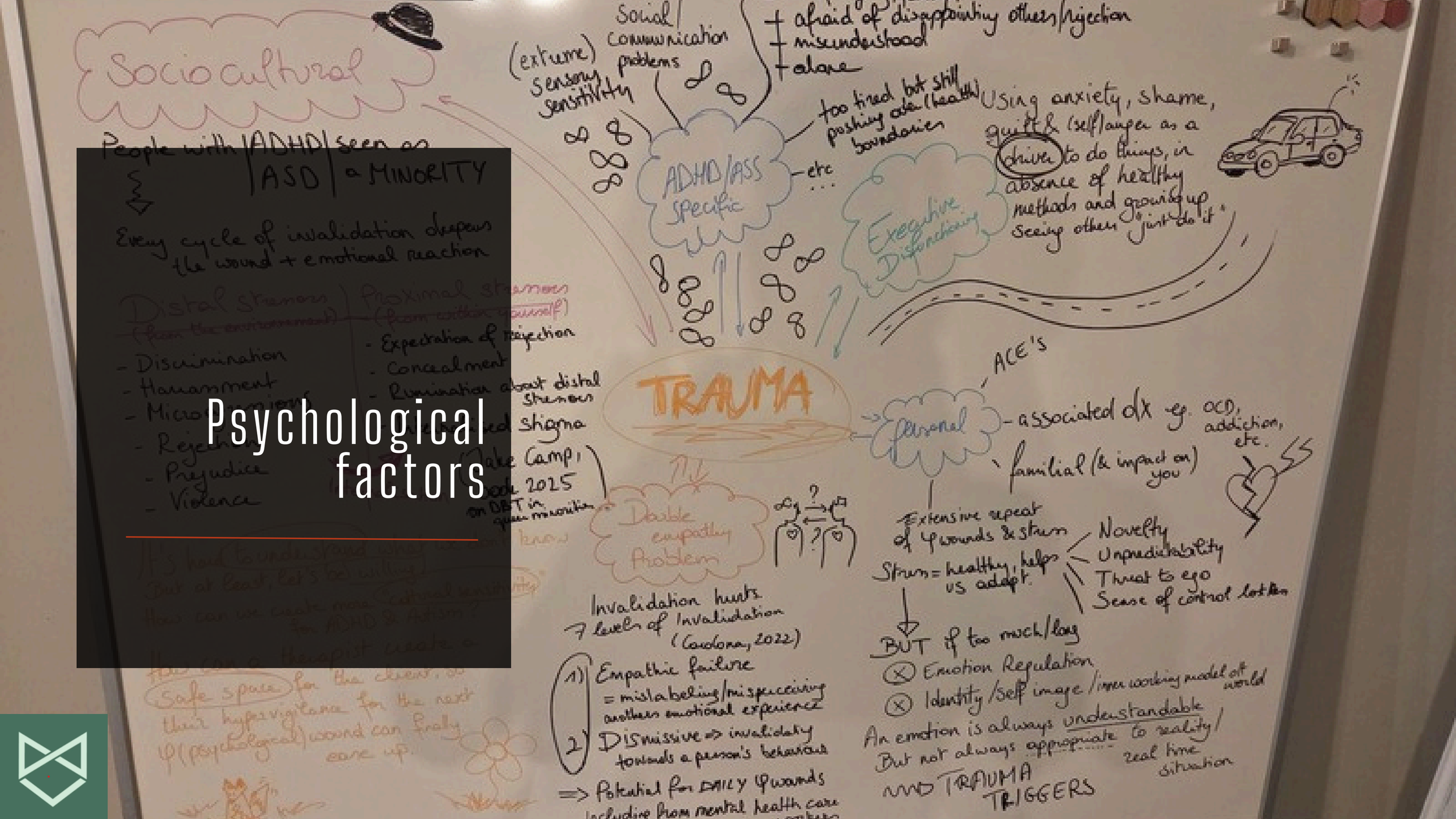
What are my triggers?

How do I cope?

Consider these factors:

- Biological
- Basic self-care
- Social
- **Psychological**

Psychological factors



(Invisible) Minority Stress Theory

Distal stressors: come from the environment

- Discrimination
- Harassment
- Microaggressions
- Prejudice
- Violence
- Rejection

Proximal stressors: come from our identity

- Expectations of rejection
- Camouflaging, masking
- Rumination about the distal stressors
- Internalized stigma

Table 1

Levels of Invalidation (Adapted From Fruzzetti & Vijay, 2020; Pierson et al., 2021)

Level	Label	Description	Example
1	Empathic failure	Misperceiving or mislabeling another's emotional experience, resulting in mismatched responding; may be intended as loving	Pressuring somebody to disclose their identity; "You don't even look trans!"
2	Dismissive	One person invalidates a person's specific behavior	"This is just a phase, you'll grow out of it;" "There are only two genders"
3	Stigmatizing	One person or small number of people invalidate a person's specific behavior(s) or experience	Pathologizing gender nonconformity or LGBTQ identities; insults or exclusion; "Acting on your same-sex attraction is sinful"
4	Blaming or gaslighting	Maintains that the person deserves or caused mistreatment; accuses person of misperceiving	"Why would you dress like that in public if you didn't want the attention?"; "That's not what happened, you just love playing the victim"
5	Internalized	Beliefs, actions, behaviors collude with invalidation (e.g., internalized homonegativity, internalized transnegativity)	"I am defective;" "If I act straight, people will like me better"
6	Abusive	Invalidation threatens safety, may include intimidation and harm	Interpersonal violence; hate crimes; conversion therapy; bullying
7	Systemic	Many people in the person's community, social institutions, culture, or governing bodies invalidate their essential worth, value, legitimacy	Anti-LGBTQ legislation; denial of healthcare or services; lack of inclusive sex education; anti-LGBTQ rhetoric from politicians and leaders; definitions of marriage that specify "one man and one woman"

The battery

A framework for understanding limits, recovery and energy in autistic people

I see people make progress in self-insight, emotion regulation, recovery from depression/burnout and preventing further decline.

Are the demands too high?

- Support plan service (Dienst Ondersteuningsplan, DOP)
- FOD (Federal Public Service, disability recognition)
- A professional network is needed to provide a counterweight to society/their system

Bring it together, and give it time

Hungry for more?

- www.brainspark.be
- National Autism Congress (Nationaal Autisme Congres), the Netherlands: Friday 13 March 2026
- @lets.brainspark on Instagram