

A practical approach to neurodiversity-affirming care and support

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Our interactive toolkit contains

Five practical tools designed to support wellbeing, safety and coordinated, consent-based, relational neurodiversity-affirming care.

TOOL 1: Foundational principles, practical guidelines and reflection exercises

TOOL 2: Discussion prompts, planning tools, strategies and action steps

TOOL 3: Care plan template

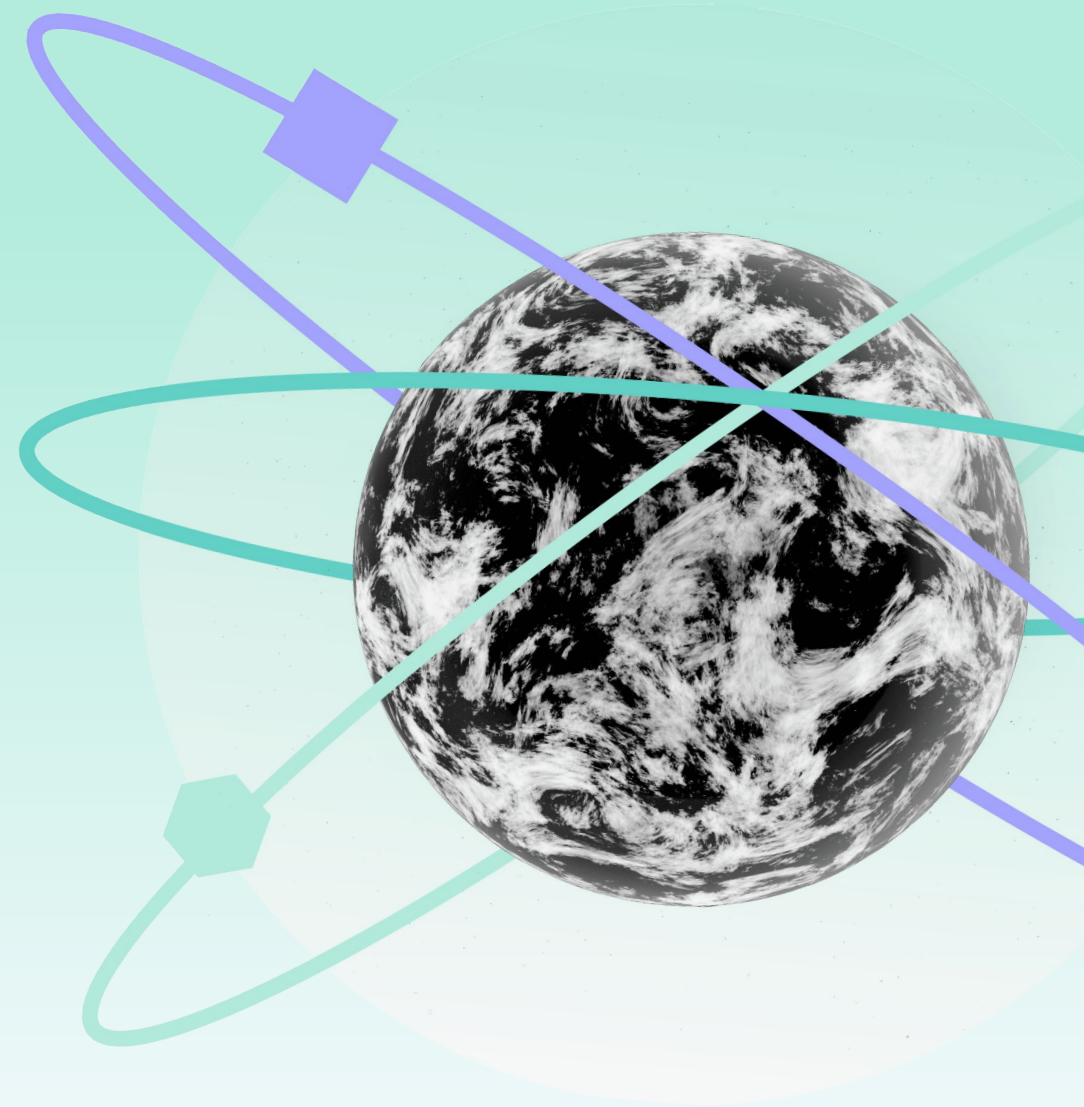
TOOL 4: Safety plan template

TOOL 5: Combined care and safety plan summary template



TOOL 1

Foundational principles, practical guidelines and reflection exercises



Foundational principles underpinning our approach

Our approach to neurodiversity-affirming care and support is built around core principles that centre:

- **Emotional safety**
- **Relational trust**
- **Embodied understanding**
- **Human rights**
- **Internal experience**



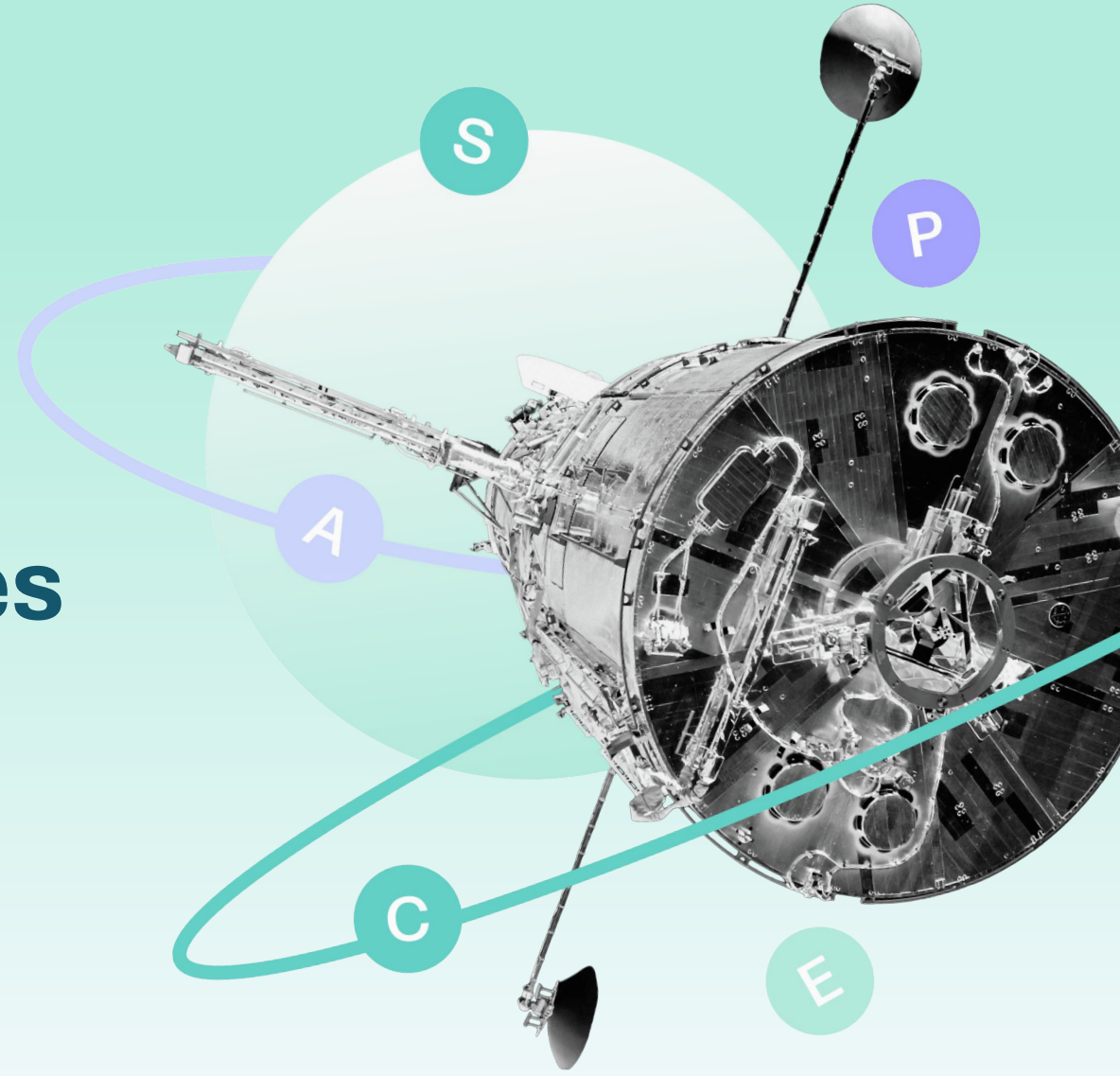
The importance of a relational approach

“ The healing power of relationships is perhaps the single greatest leverage point to fundamentally re-wire a system’s behavior and the outcomes it produces. ”

— Calderon de la Barca et al 2024

TOOL 2

Discussion prompts, planning tools, strategies and action steps



The Autistic SPACE Framework

Doherty M, McCowan S, Shaw SC. Autistic SPACE: a novel framework for meeting the needs of autistic people in healthcare settings. *Br J Hosp Med (Lond)*. 2023 Apr 2;84(4):1-9. doi: 10.12968/hmed.2023.0006. Epub 2023 Apr 17. PMID: 37127416.



Physical space

This involves creating decompressing and calm environments, avoiding overcrowded spaces, as well as ensuring there is adequate distance between people and furniture.



Processing space

This refers to interaction pace, allowing time and silence between questions and avoiding fast-paced questioning, providing agendas in advance, and offering summaries afterwards.



Emotional space

This includes avoiding over-reliance on traditional emotional scaling tools, no-touch policies, and respecting silence, allowing periods of solitude for emotional processing and recovery.

S

Sensory needs

Recognise and support sensory differences and sensory safety

P

Predictability

Reduce uncertainty through routines, structure, and preparation

A

Acceptance

Promote self-acceptance, reduce masking, and affirm Neurodivergence

C

Communication

Honour all communication forms and support safe expression

E

Empathy

Respond with curiosity, not correction; emotions are valid messages

- Prompts for discussion
- Planning tools
- Strategies
- Action steps

S Sensory needs

Supporting physical sensory needs

FOCUS

Explore the sensory environment to identify what feels soothing, safe or triggering.



GOAL

Understand and support the individual's unique sensory profile.



Prompts for discussion

- What sounds, lights, textures or smells feel overwhelming or comforting?
- Where do you seek sensory input, and where do you avoid sensory input? In what ways?
- What sensory tools help you regulate (e.g., headphones, fidgets, weighted items)?

Planning tools

- Sensory checklist
- Sensory map of home, care or work environments

Strategies

- Identify sensitivities and preferences across all sensory domains (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, temperature, proprioception, interoception).
- Reduce environmental stimuli: dim lights, reduce background noise, avoid strong scents.
- Offer sensory aids: sunglasses, ear defenders, weighted blankets, sensory tools.
- Respect sensory regulation strategies (stimming, movement, preferred clothing).
- Allow sensory breaks and access to calming environments.

Action steps

- Create or update a sensory support plan.
- List go-to sensory tools and resources.
- Schedule regular sensory breaks during the day.

TOOL 4

Safety plan template



Co-creation

Using this template to co-create a care plan

This care plan should be co-created by the individual and their supporter, with the individual as an active partner in shaping what feels supportive, safe, and helpful for them. The process is based on shared understanding, respect, and choice, recognising the individual as the expert in their own experiences, needs and preferences.

Sharing the plan

The person retains ownership of their plan and should always receive a copy. Whenever possible, they decide if, when, and with whom the plans are shared. The plan belongs to them and reflects what they identify as helpful, regulating, and supportive, both in everyday care and during times of increased distress or vulnerability.

Storing and updating the plan

Keeping the plan accessible and up-to-date supports smoother transitions and ensures it remains a useful, living document, rather than a one-off form. To support continuity and accessibility, it is helpful to agree together:

- Where the plan will be stored (e.g., a digital copy, printed copy, or shared system)
- Who has access to it
- How updates will be made and communicated.

Support during times of distress

Responsibility for safety should not rest solely on the individual. Instead, safety is understood as a shared, relational process, supported by people, environments, and systems working together. At these times focus is on increasing support and connection, reducing distress and promoting safety, comfort and regulation.

Key people and contacts

The individual may choose to include key people and service contacts in their plans, such as:

- Family members, friends, or trusted people (names, relationships, contact details)
- Preferred staff or support workers (names, roles, and notes about what works well)
- Service contacts (service name, key worker, team, phone or email).

These details can be updated over time as relationships, needs, or services change.

REMINDER

Supporter/practitioner reflection prompts:

- "Am I truly working from an embodied, relational place?"
- "Am I co-regulating, not just managing and 'doing to'?"
- "Am I respecting the pace, presence and needs of the other person and myself?"
- "Am I sharing power?"
- "Am I making space for the person to 'hold the pen', to shape their support in a way that is meaningful for them?"

Early warning signs

PHYSICAL SIGNS

e.g. Increased movement, fidgeting, pacing.

COMMUNICATION SIGNS

e.g. Withdrawing, repeated queries, situational mutism.

EMOTIONAL SIGNS

e.g. Anxiety, irritability, loss of interest.

NERVOUS SYSTEM AND EMBODIED SIGNS

e.g. Fight, flight, freeze, fawn, digestion, heart rate, breathing, temperature.

Preventative strategies

S Sensory needs

e.g. Adjust lighting, provide noise-cancelling headphones, create low-stimulus options.

PREFERENCES

SUPPORT TOOLS AND STRATEGIES:

P Predictability

e.g. Clear routines and agendas in advance, visual schedules.

PREFERENCES

SUPPORT TOOLS AND STRATEGIES:

De-escalation steps

- 01 Support workers/carers have awareness and support their own nervous system and stress response before offering support.
- 02 Reduce sensory input (dim lights, quiet area).
- 03 Speak calmly and sparingly; offer space to recover.
- 04 Avoid unwanted touch; ask before approaching.
- 05 Consent-based gentle check-ins:
 - "Would you like some space?"
 - "Would you like me to sit with you for a while?"
 - "I'm here when you need me - there's no rush"

NOTES

TOOL 5

Care and safety plan summary template



Summary document

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3 Preventative strategies

S SENSORY NEEDS

Preferences:	Strategies/tools:
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

P PREDICTABILITY

Preferences:	Strategies/tools:
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A ACCEPTANCE

Preferences:	Strategies/tools:
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C COMMUNICATION

Preferences:	Strategies/tools:
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E EMPATHY

Preferences:	Strategies/tools:
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4 De-escalation steps

01

02

03

5 Recovery and support

QUIET SPACE/SENSORY SUPPORTS

PREFERRED CHECK-IN APPROACH

TRUSTED CONTACT FOR SUPPORT

6 Emergency plan

CRISIS SIGNS

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (SPACE-BASED)

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Plan reviewed and updated on: / /

Support persons involved:

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Resource library

To support your learning and use of this toolkit, you can explore an extensive range of resources written by Neurodiverse Connection, available on our website's resource library. Including:

- [Co-escalation and Co-regulation: Prompt Sheet](#)
- [Supporting Staff Regulation: Prompt Sheet](#)
- [Neurodiversity-affirming Guide to Trauma Responses in Autistic People](#)

More NdC **Original** resources coming soon to our library:

- Neurodiversity-affirming Guide to Understanding Meltdown and Shutdown
- Neurodiversity-affirming Guide to Autistic Burnout

Browse the full library at
ndconnection.co.uk/resources

