

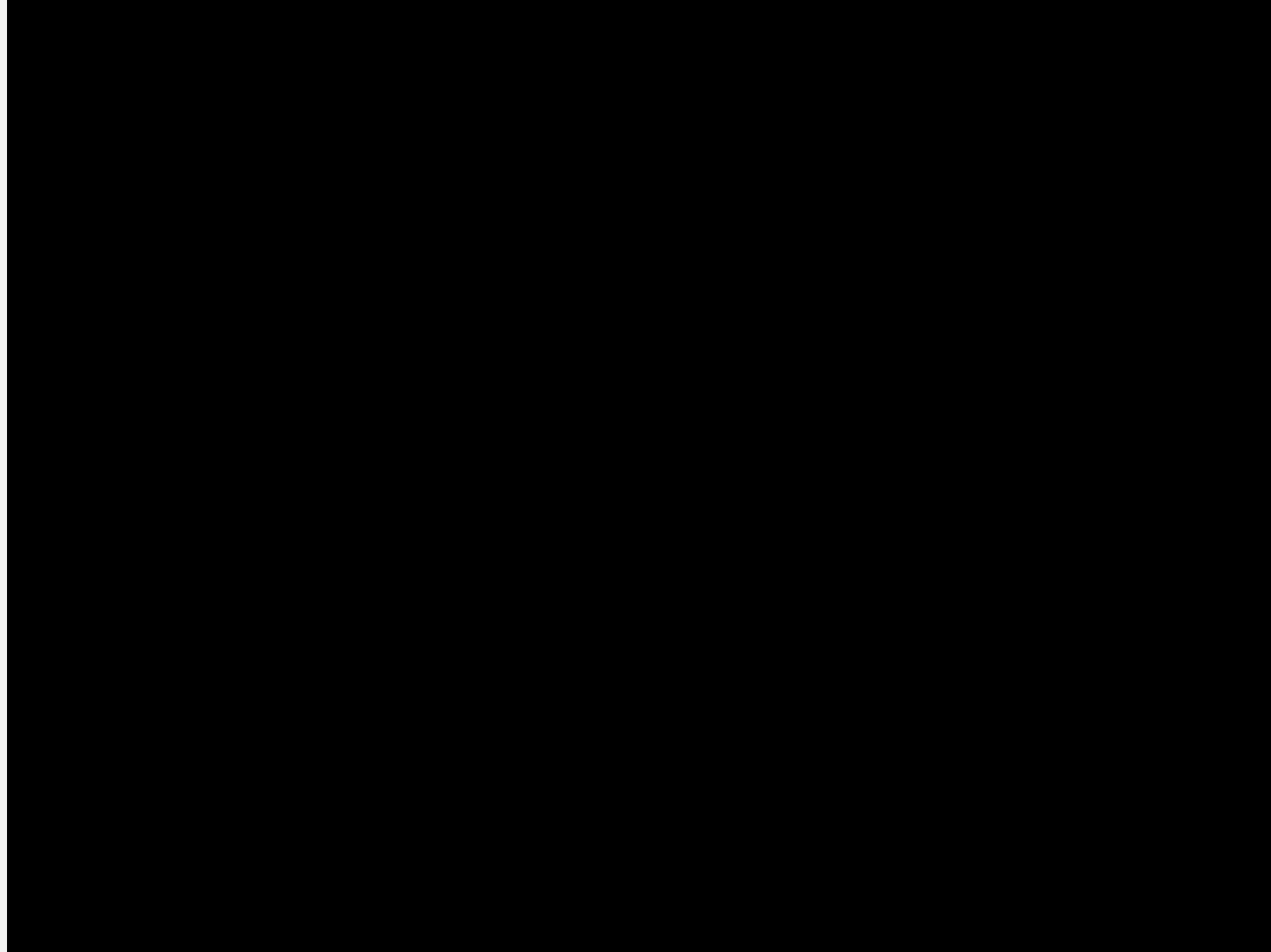
**HOW TO SUPPORT  
YOUR  
NEURODIVERGENT  
CASTMATE**

**ORDER OF THE GOLDEN NEEDLE**

# INTRODUCTIONS

- Name
- Pronouns
- Cast/Fair Affiliation

# WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?



# NEURODIVERGENCE IS A SPECTRUM

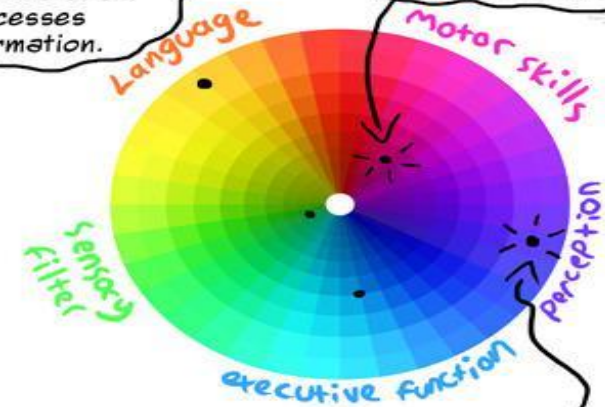
The truth is though, someone who is neurodiverse in some areas of their brain, will also be no different to your average person in other areas of their brain.



You see, the autistic spectrum looks something more like this.

The spectrum consists of many different 'traits', or ways in which the brain processes information.

Some traits create difficulties in every day life. (hence being diagnosed)



But also many traits are useful in every day life.



Each person with autism will have a set of traits all in different areas of the spectrum. The areas where they don't have a trait will function no differently to a neurotypical brain, but may be affected by circumstances. In example, I am good at making conversation (language). But I get sensory overload in loud and crowded spaces, which then makes conversation very hard for me.

## **NEURODIVERGENTS CAN EXCEL**

### **AT:**

- Patterns, memorization, logic, and repetitive activities.
- Extremely acute sensory observations
- Highly specialized and in-depth knowledge of specific subjects (special interests)
- Hyperfocus

## **NEURODIVERGENTS CAN STRUGGLE WITH:**

- Social interpretation and communication
  - Body language
  - subtext/tone
  - Implied knowledge or content
  - Social cues
- Sensory overstimulation that can be extremely uncomfortable and debilitating
- Simultaneous multiple sensory input

# **GENERALLY!**

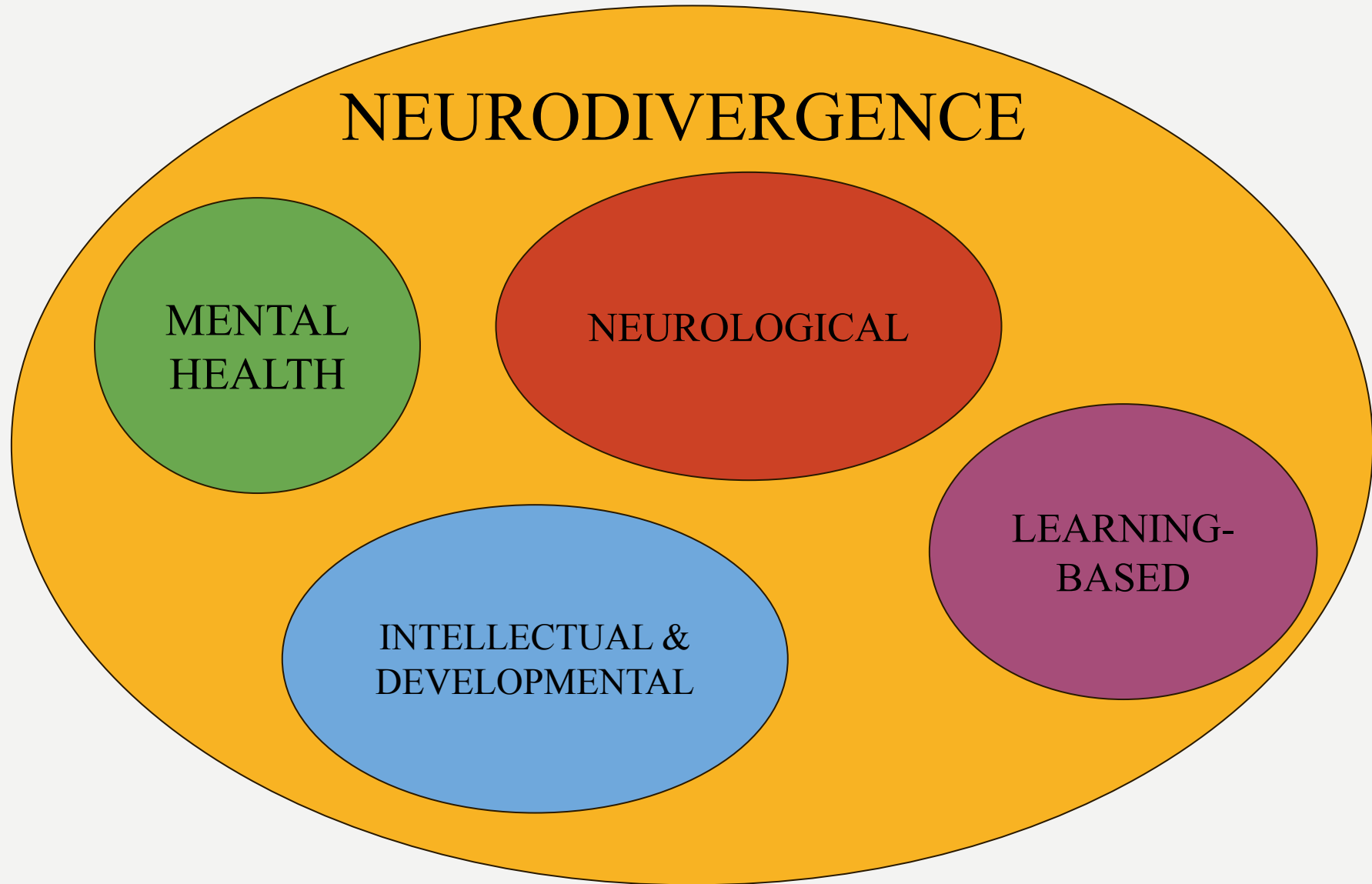
## PATHOLOGICAL MODEL

1. There is one “right,” “normal,” or “healthy” way for human brains and human minds to be configured and to function (or one relatively narrow “normal” range into which the configuration and functioning of human brains and minds ought to fall).
2. If your neurological configuration and functioning (and, as a result, your ways of thinking and behaving) diverge substantially from the dominant standard of “normal,” then there is Something Wrong With You.

## NEURODIVERSITY MODEL

1. Neurodiversity – the diversity of brains and minds – is a natural, healthy, and valuable form of human diversity.
2. There is no “normal” or “right” style of human brain or human mind, any more than there is one “normal” or “right” ethnicity, gender, or culture.
3. The social dynamics that manifest in regard to neurodiversity are similar to the social dynamics that manifest in regard to other forms of human diversity... These dynamics include the dynamics of social power relations... social inequality, privilege, and oppression – as well as the dynamics by which diversity, when embraced, acts as a source of creative potential within a group or society.

# NEURODIVERGENCE OR MENTAL ILLNESS?





# NEURODIVERGENCE AT DICKENS



# WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

- **CROWDS!**
- **Sensory overload**
  - Smells/lighting/sounds
- **Social dynamics**
  - Personal vs. in-character
- **Loss of senses/language**
  - Difficulty exiting space
- **Meltdowns**



# SENSORY OVERLOAD & MELTDOWNS

- **Meltdowns:** a state of sensory overstimulation sends an neurodivergent person into acute distress
  - Can result in emotional outbursts ranging from shutting down to crying jags to extreme rage
- **Meltdowns are not: random, deliberate, voluntary.**
- When someone loses sensory or language capacities, it is critical to **remove them from that environment immediately** and provide them with a low-sensory place and a means of **destimulating (de-stimming)**



**WHAT CAN YOU DO  
TO HELP?**

# COMMUNICATE!

- There is no “one size fits all” neurodivergence; ask your castmate what challenges they face and how they want to be helped.
- **FIRST YEAR PARTICIPANTS:** put in touch with the Order so that they can access community and support services

# How to assist someone in sensory overload/meltdown

1. If you are performing, find a reason in-character to get them backstage or to a designated quiet area as soon as possible
2. Minimize verbal communication (hand-signalling or writing are good alternatives)
3. Know the quickest route from where you are to the nearest quiet area.

# What does the OGN do to help?

- Sensory support: de-stim locations, mapping, and supplies
- Internal support network: advice and community with other Needles
  - Two formal meetups in a season: one lunch during Workshops, one gathering for tea during Fair
- Our badges!
  - Not all Needles advocate in the same way; do not assume that they can/will give you all the info



# MORE INFO:

- <http://autisticadvocacy.org/>
- <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/myth-normal-brain-embracing-neurodiversity/2015-04>
- <https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions/>



**QUESTIONS?**





# Neurodiversity in Organizations

**or, how to both supervise/direct AND support your  
neurodivergent castmates**

# SCHEDULING & STRUCTURE

- Organization helps prevent disorientation:
  - Gigs: Who/what/when/where/how
  - Shifts: What's the (rough) plan for a given period of time?
- “Chain of command”
  - Who do they report to?
  - Who can they get information from?
  - Ideal setup: **buddy system!** (Needle/Neurotypical teamup)
- Changes Are Hard
  - Notify ASAP
  - Contingency plans
- COMMUNICATE!




# GIVING FEEDBACK

Direct, Honest, Specific, Timely, Flexible, Open



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**THANK YOU!**