

Session 02: BIMS / PDA  
October 20, 2025

# **BOTTOM-UP EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING**

# Jigsaw pieces



I'm going to talk about a lot of different things that may seem unrelated to each other. Please be patient with me. I will connect the pieces at the end.

# 6 Month Project: Before and After

- Think of a project you would like to see completed in the next 6 months by end of March 2026.
- Rate how hard this project feels to you. Rating of perceived exertion (RPE).

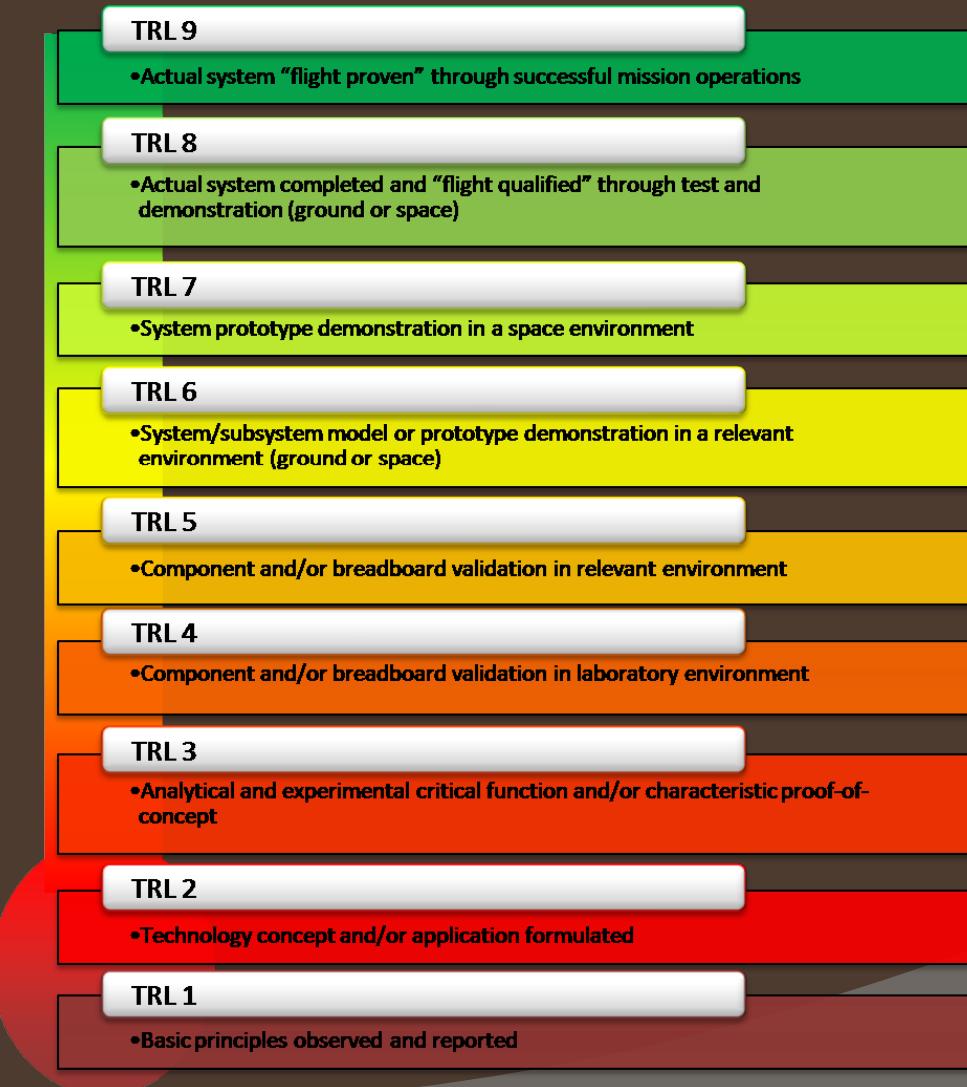
# TRL (Tech Readiness Levels)

Finished product in the world

Experiment. Gather data.



Exciting inspiration in the mind



The brain you actually will have to work with

Experiment. Gather data.



The brain you imagine you want

# Clay vs Seed?

Top-Down



Bottom-Up



TRL. Gather data. Experiment.  
Not to mold yourself into a sculpture.  
Provide the best conditions for your seed to grow.

# What conditions does your seedling need?



# User Manual



- “My Executive Functioning User Manual”
- Start writing down observations on how your brain works. Notice patterns.
  - “My limit for interacting with people is 2 hours max.”
- Write down examples, data for the patterns.
  - “Last time I hung out with a friend for 5 hours, I could not do ANYTHING the next day.”

# Safety, Love, and Attunement

- ◉ Too woo. Too touchy-feely. Too abstract.
- ◉ Many autistic brains like to think of mechanisms rather than feelings
- ◉ I will offer non-woo discussions this session.

BIMS / PDA

# Machine breakdowns

# Machine breakdowns



# Blue Screen of Death

A problem has been detected and windows has been shut down to prevent damage to your computer.

## MEMORY\_MANAGEMENT

If this is the first time you've seen this stop error screen, restart your computer. If this screen appears again, follow these steps:

Check to make sure any new hardware or software is properly installed. If this is a new installation, ask your hardware or software manufacturer for any Windows updates you might need.

If problems continue, disable or remove any newly installed hardware or software. Disable BIOS memory options such as caching or shadowing. If you need to use Safe Mode to remove or disable components, restart your computer, press F8 to select Advanced Startup Options, and then select Safe Mode.

## Technical information:

\*\*\* STOP: 0x0000001A (0x00041287, 0x035D8000, 0x00000000, 0x00000000)

Collecting data for crash dump ...  
Initializing disk for crash dump ...  
Beginning dump of physical memory.  
Dumping physical memory to disk: 95

## Windows

An error has occurred. To continue:

Press Enter to return to Windows, or

Press CTRL+ALT+DEL to restart your computer. If you do this, you will lose any unsaved information in all open applications.

Error: 0E : 016F : BFF9B3D4

Press any key to continue ...



Your device ran into a problem and needs to restart. We're just collecting some error info, and then we'll restart for you.

61% complete



For more information about this issue and possible fixes, visit <https://www.windows.com/errorcode>

If you call a support person, give them this info:

Stop code: IRQL\_01\_0200\_AT\_SYSTEM\_SERVICE



Your device ran into a problem and needs to restart. We're just collecting some error info, and then we'll restart for you.

25% complete



For more information about this issue and possible fixes, visit <https://www.windows.com/errorcode>

If you call a support person, give them this info:

Stop code: IRQL\_01\_0200\_AT\_SYSTEM\_SERVICE

Your device ran into a problem and needs to restart.

0% complete

Stop code: IRQL\_01\_0200\_AT\_SYSTEM\_SERVICE (0x4)

Confidential. Please do not share.

# I love my KitchenAid



I am careful to not overheat it.

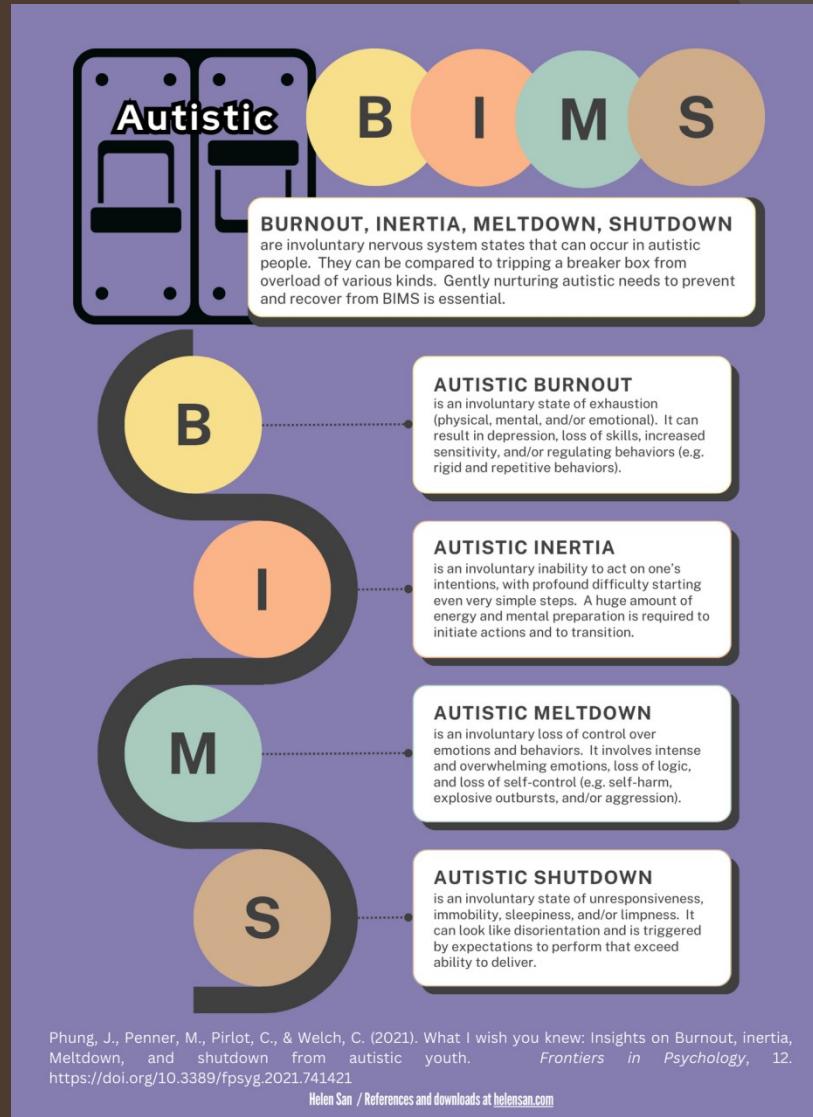
I am more careful with it than I am with myself.

- When I run this machine, I refuse to overload it.
- I put my hand on the unit to check the temperature fairly often.
- If it feels hot, I stop it immediately.



# BIMS

- Burnout
- Inertia
- Meltdown
- Shutdown



# Burnout

- ◉ An involuntary state of exhaustion (physical, mental, and/or emotional).
- ◉ It can result in depression, loss of skills, increased sensitivity, and/or regulating behaviors (e.g. rigid and repetitive behaviors).

# The Autistic Burnout Symptom Checklist (ABSC)

## Dr. Alice Nicholls

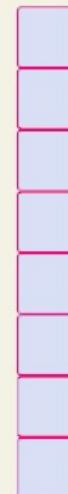
### **Physical Symptoms**

- Feeling physically exhausted (not due to illness)
- Feeling as if all of your internal resources have been used up
- Feeling depleted
- Needing to sleep more
- Finding it hard to get out of bed in the morning



### **Cognitive Symptoms**

- Feeling mentally exhausted
- Slowed down thinking
- Finding it hard to think
- Decreased ability to solve problems
- Finding it hard to find the right words
- Memory problems
- Needing longer than usual to understand spoken language
- Loss or deterioration of work based skills

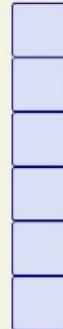


# The Autistic Burnout Symptom Checklist (ABSC)

## Dr. Alice Nicholls

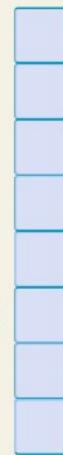
### **Executive Functioning Symptoms**

- Difficulty with changes in routine
- Struggling to plan your day
- Finding it hard to start planned activities
- Losing focus easily
- Difficulty switching between tasks
- Finding it hard to make decisions



### **Social Symptoms**

- Difficulty or discomfort when trying to socialise
- Difficulty or discomfort when trying to communicate
- Avoiding social situations
- Talking to people feels like too much effort
- Difficulty thinking of how to respond when people talk to me
- Difficulty selecting the 'right' facial expression when interacting
- Discomfort associated with eye contact
- Not knowing how and when to make eye contact

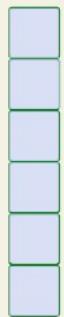


# The Autistic Burnout Symptom Checklist (ABSC)

## Dr. Alice Nicholls

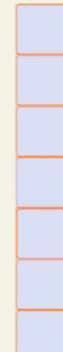
### **Emotional Symptoms**

- Difficulty managing emotions
- Easily overwhelmed by my emotions
- Mood swings
- Increased number of meltdowns or shut downs
- Increased intensity of meltdowns or shutdowns
- Feeling at increased risk of having meltdowns or shutdowns



### **Sensory Symptoms**

- Engaging in more stimming (sensory input seeking behaviour)
- Finding it hard to suppress stimming
- Being bothered by everyday noises
- Finding everyday sensations difficult to tolerate
- Finding everyday smells difficult to tolerate
- Finding every day sights difficult to tolerate
- Finding certain foods difficult to tolerate



<https://www.dralicenicholls.com/>

# How does burnout show up in your life?



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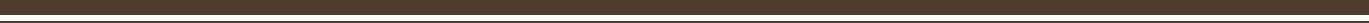


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# Inertia

- ◉ An involuntary inability to act on one's intentions, with profound difficulty starting even very simple steps.
- ◉ A huge amount of energy and mental preparation is required to initiate actions and to transition.

# How does inertia show up in your life?



# Meltdown

- An involuntary loss of control over emotions and behaviors.
- It involves intense and overwhelming emotions, loss of logic, and loss of self-control (e.g. self-harm, explosive outbursts, and / or aggression).

# How does meltdown show up in your life?



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# Shutdown

- An involuntary state of unresponsiveness, immobility, sleepiness, and/or limpness.
- It can look like disorientation and is triggered by expectations to perform that exceed ability to deliver.

# How does shutdown show up in your life?



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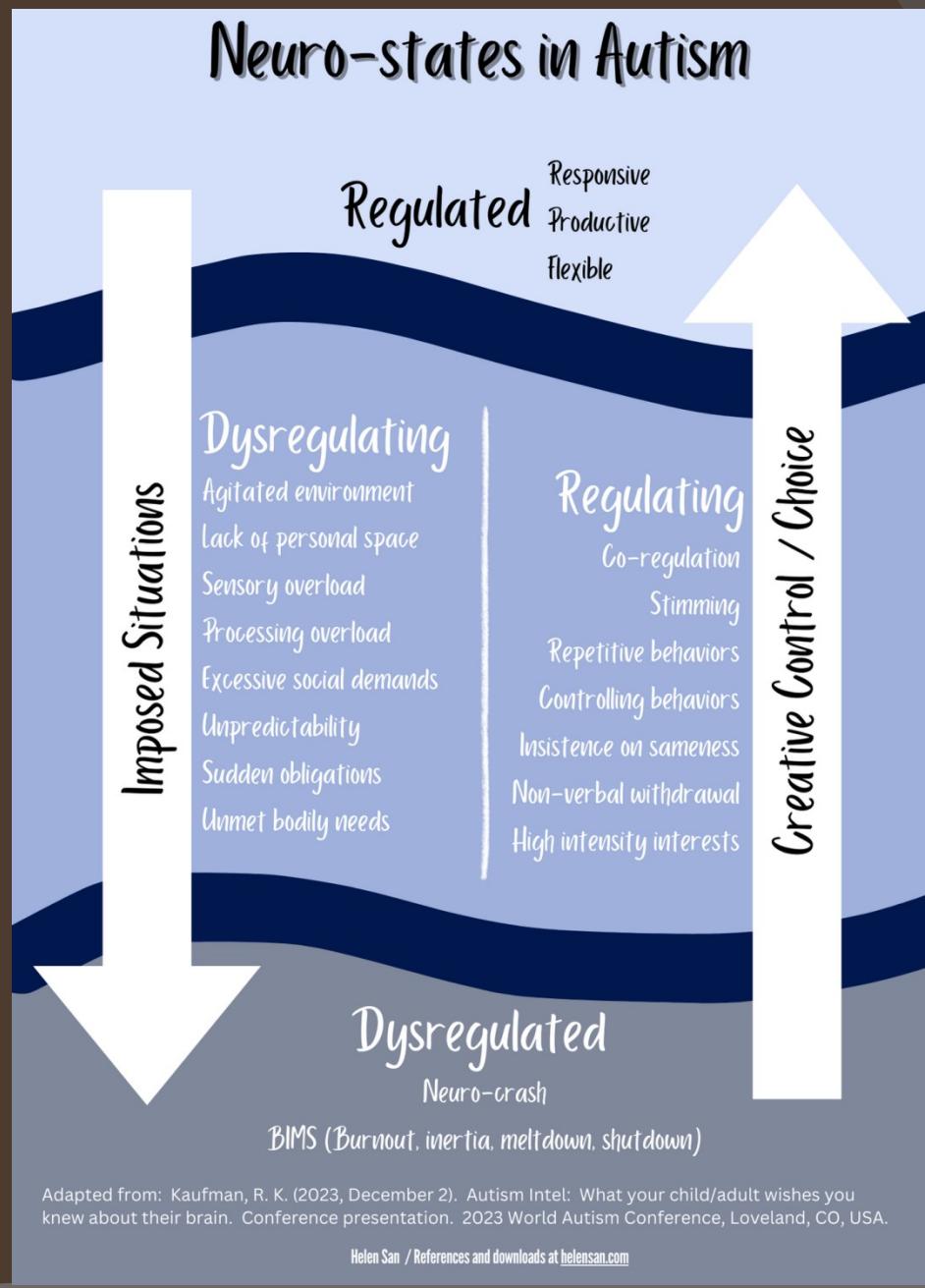


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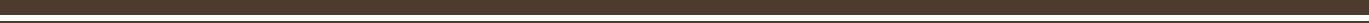
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# Neuro-states by Raun Kaufman

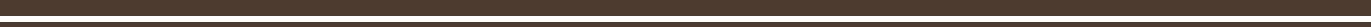


# Impostions dysregulate us.

## Why?



# Choice / autonomy / agency regulates us. Why?



# “Chinese Water Torture”

- Cold water slowly dripped onto forehead.
- Mythbusters tested it. They got an email afterwards about randomizing the drip.

1. Restraint
2. Unpredictability

- Drop of water not physically dangerous.
- Psychologically painful to the point of “torture.”

# PDA

- Pathological Demand Avoidance
- Pervasive Drive for Autonomy
- Power Difference Allergy

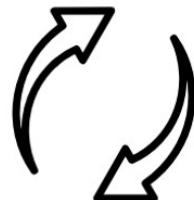
  

1. Chronic state of nervous system dysregulation: fight or flight or frozen
2. Need for choice, aversion to impositions

# Stuck in the cycle of not having a choice

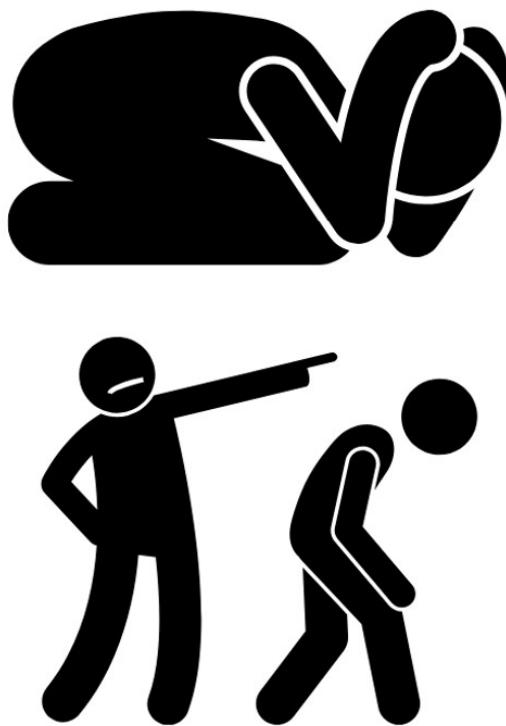
1

Chronic state of nervous system dysregulation, stuck in fight or flight or frozen.



2

Sensitive to impositions from others, especially from people who assume power over them.



# Orders and Commands

- ◉ There is an inherent condescension in orders and commands.
- ◉ It implies that person receiving the order does not know how to think of it themselves, or would not think of it themselves.
- ◉ It implies lack of trust.
- ◉ Same when orders are given to yourself.
- ◉ PDA with your own commands

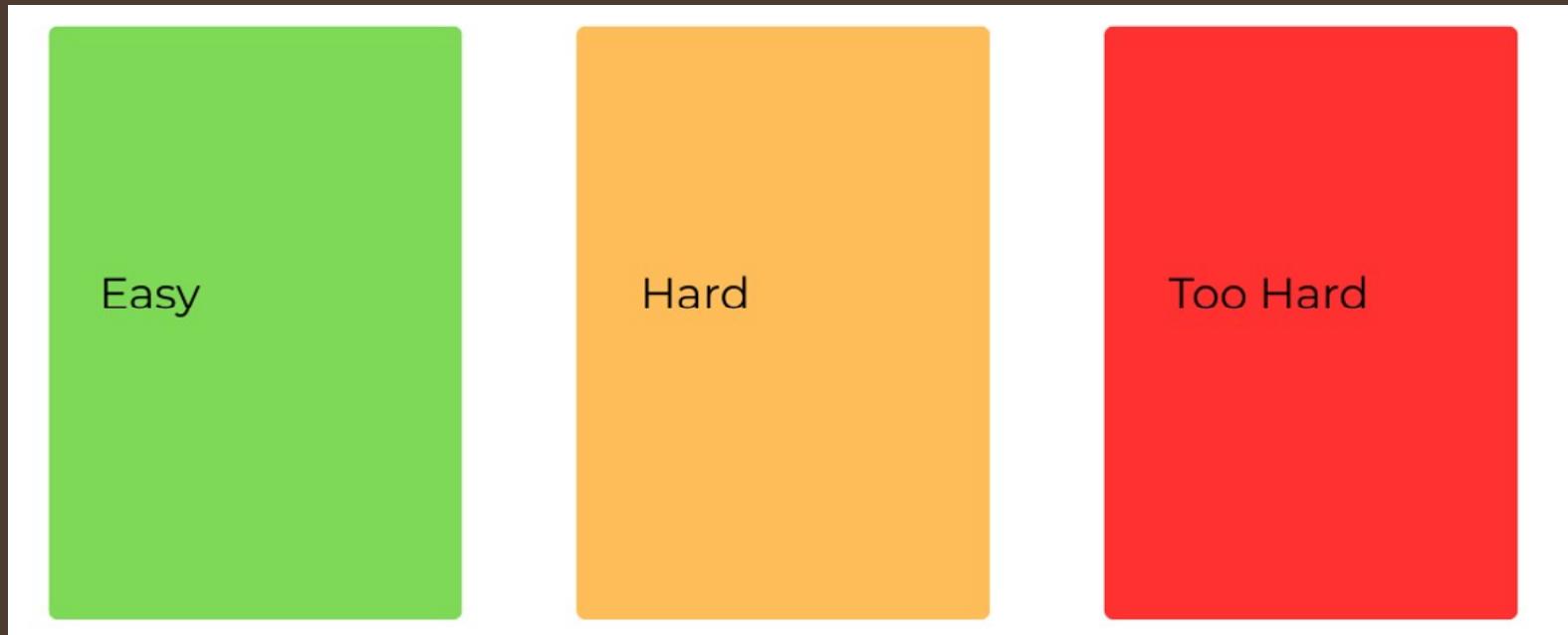
# What PDA'ers need:

- To be treated as equals, like a colleague you respect--not someone who is inferior
- To be talked to the way you would talk to a stranger when you want to be kind and polite--without assuming they owe you any obligation or debt
- To be connected as human beings in an authentic way--not as objects that produce outcomes for others

- ◉ To be respected, to be treated with dignity, to be valued.
- ◉ To be trusted.
- ◉ No obligations (No “You owe me.”)
- ◉ Motivated by human connection and mutual trust.
- ◉ Motivated by equal trade

# Easy, Hard, and Too Hard

## Amanda Diekman



# PDA World



- Some “hard” things can’t be started because they are anticipated to become “too hard.”

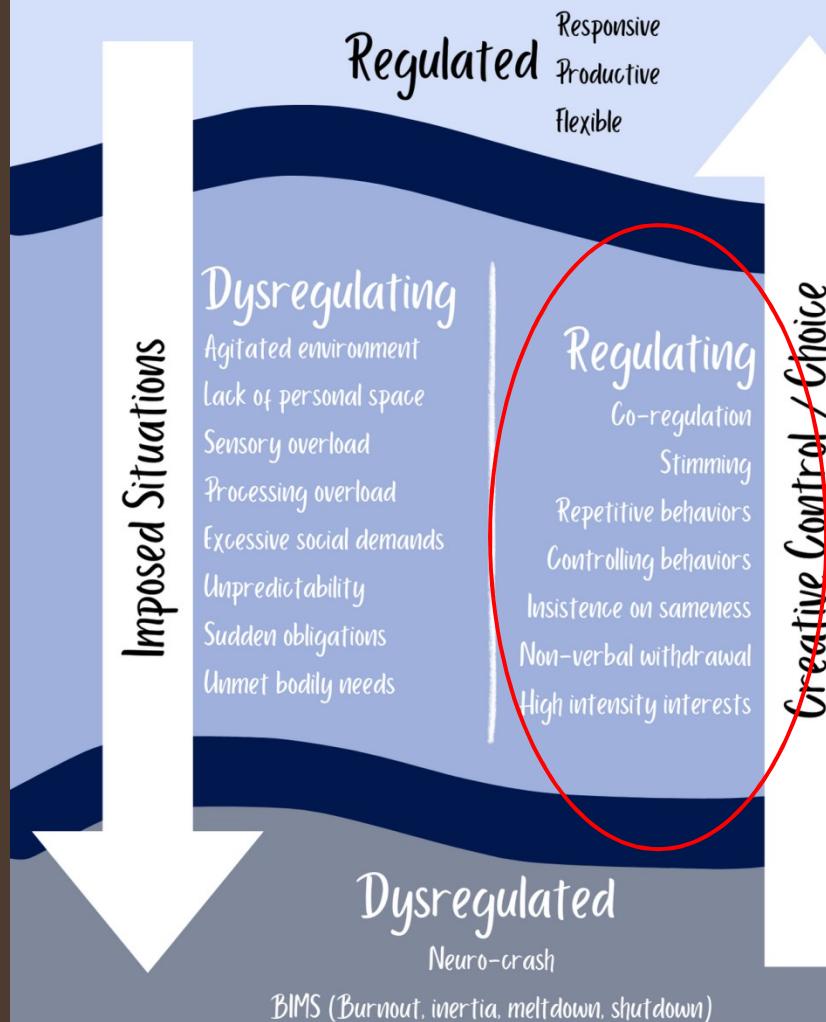
# Imposed Situations



## Sign of Dysregulation: Regulating Behaviors



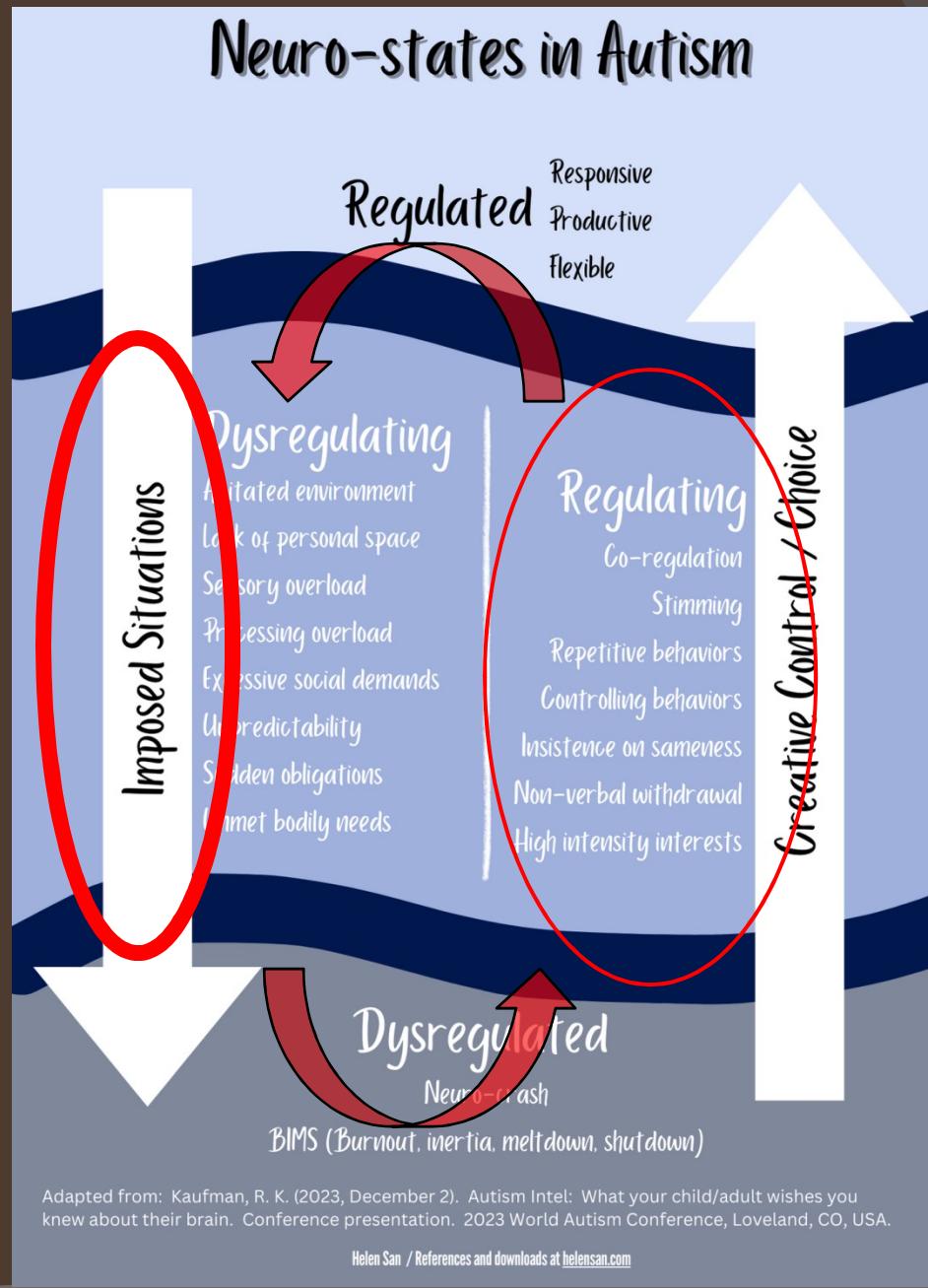
## Neuro-states in Autism



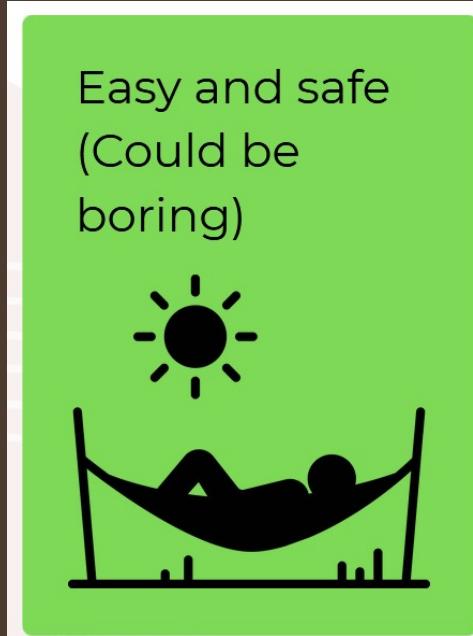
Adapted from: Kaufman, R. K. (2023, December 2). Autism Intel: What your child/adult wishes you knew about their brain. Conference presentation. 2023 World Autism Conference, Loveland, CO, USA.

Helen San / References and downloads at [helensan.com](http://helensan.com)

# Cycle



# What PDA'ers need to create:



- Safety when things are hard.
- Effort and challenge can be rewarding.
- Turn “work” into “play.”  
(I’m not talking about gamification.)

# The Occupplaytional Therapist

occupplaytional.com

- ◉ I feel capable.
- ◉ I feel interested.
- ◉ I feel connected.
- ◉ Imagine if you had an occupplaytion instead of an occupation.

# Reduce the load.

## It matters why type of load.



- ◉ Reduce loads that make you feel:  
not capable  
not interested  
not connected

# What is PLAY?

## Redefine play.

- Playing an instrument
- Playing a sport



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# Safety when things are hard:

- ◉ Acknowledge and lower risk.
- ◉ Capable. Interested. Connected.
- ◉ Creative freedom.
- ◉ Choice. I choose to be here.

# Redefine love.

- Know yourself.
- Trust yourself.
- Care for yourself.
- You know what it needs.
- You trust it will thrive when the conditions are right. When things go wrong, you don't look for character flaws.
- You make the effort to care for it, to make the conditions right for it to thrive.



# PDA as a reaction to:

- ◉ Orders that don't know you (wrong orders)
- ◉ Orders that don't trust you (judgmental)
- ◉ Orders that don't care for you (effort)
- ◉ We can PDA ourselves.
- ◉ We can be this guy:



# How to identify the red zone



- ◉ Energy is precious. Don't waste energy.
- ◉ Future session on attunement

# Summary

- Neuro-states
- BIMS
- PDA
- Play, growth, and flow state
- Capable, interested, connected.
- Reduce the load. It matters what type of load.
- Redefine safety (more concrete, less abstract).
- Redefine love (more concrete, less abstract).