WORKPLACE EMOTIONAL REGULATION:

The Science of Staying Cool with ADHD

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Hello!

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QUICK POLL:

Have you ever been told, directly or indirectly, that your emotional reactions at work were "too much," "too big" or "unprofessional"?

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EMOTIONAL REGULATION ON THE JOB: THE STATS

70%

Up to 70% of adults with ADHD struggle with emotional dysregulation enough that it impacts their life [1]

employees with ADHD experience significantly higher levels of job burnout than employees without ADHD [2]

ADHD emotion dysregulation is associated with greater impairment in occupational domains [3]

1. Shaw et. al. 2014
2. Turjeman-Levi et al. 2024
3. Soler-Gutiérrez, et al, 2023

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Where we're going today

Meet Sanjay

Nuerology of ADHD Emotions

How to Calm down faster at Work

How to Stay Calm

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THE ADHD EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

ADHD brains tend to zoom right past the "expected range" in their seemingly instantaneous switch from fine to very not fine

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Meet Sanjay

- 32 y.o. 3rd generation Indian American cisgender male
- Brilliant Graphic Designer
- Prized at his company for being creative, a problem solver, and enthusiastic
- Came to treatment because of large emotional outbursts that had been "an issue" throughout his life
- Impacting work and family relationships

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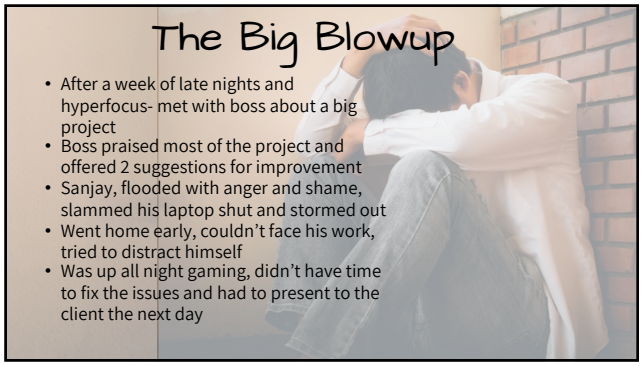

The Big Blowup

- After a week of late nights and hyperfocus- met with boss about a big project
- Boss praised most of the project and offered 2 suggestions for improvement
- Sanjay, flooded with anger and shame, slammed his laptop shut and stormed out
- Went home early, couldn't face his work, tried to distract himself
- Was up all night gaming, didn't have time to fix the issues and had to present to the client the next day

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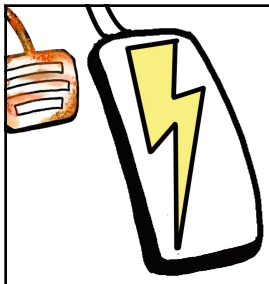

ADHD Emotional Processing

LIGHTENING FAST EMOTIONAL ACCELERATION
feelings heat up fast

SLOW, EFFORTFUL DECELRATION
its takes extra time and effort to cool down

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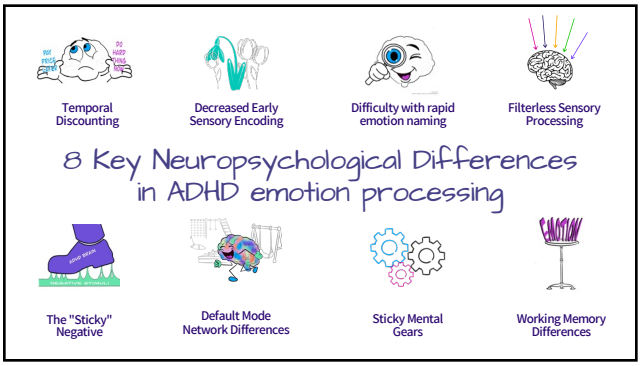

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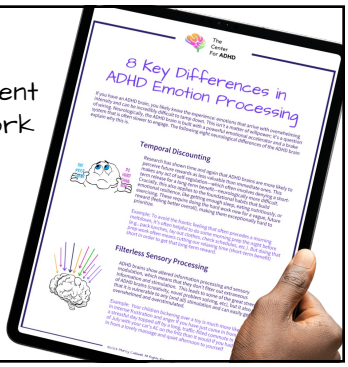
The 3 Most Prominent Differences at Work

- Filterless Processing
- Uneven Encoding
- Sticky Negative



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Filterless Processing

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Neurotypical Brain

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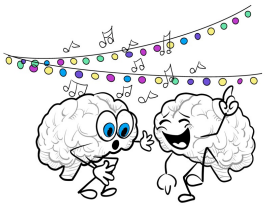
Neurotypical Brain



ADHD Brain

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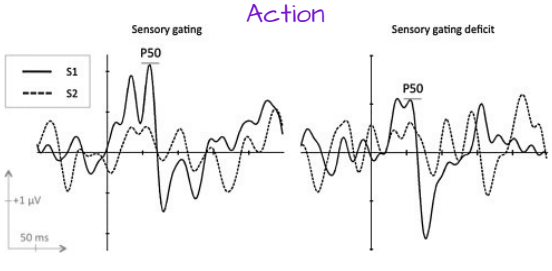
ADHD Sensory Gating In Action



Micoulaud-Franchi et al. (2015)

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Filterless Processing = Constant Stimuli Assault

- Activates the amygdala (the brain's alarm system)
  - Heightens emotional reactions
  - Increases stress response
- At work:
  - highly stimulating environment → increased stress and emotional reactions

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Decreased Early Sensory Encoding

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Early Sensory Encoding

Amplifies the processing of emotional stimuli giving it greater importance and significance

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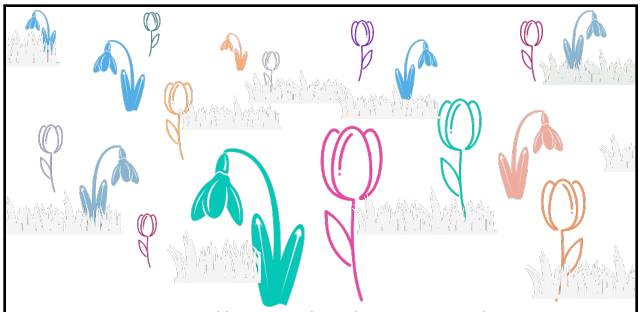

Neurotypical brains apply early sensory encoding to both positive and negative stimuli

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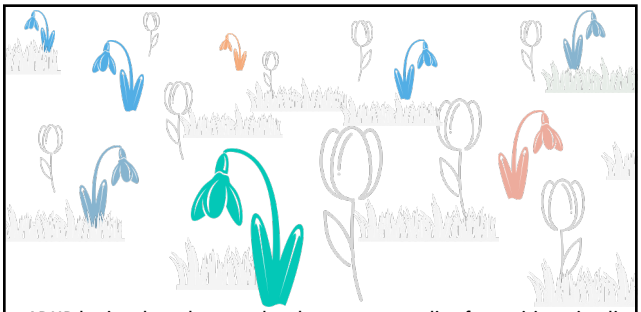

ADHD brains show decreased early sensory encoding for positive stimuli

(Williams et. al, 2008, Du et. al. 2006)

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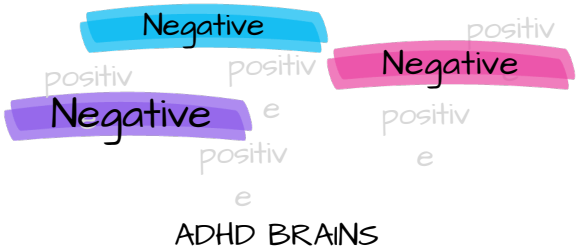

ADHD BRAINS

decreased early sensory encoding for the positive → negative stimuli feel more significant and meaningful

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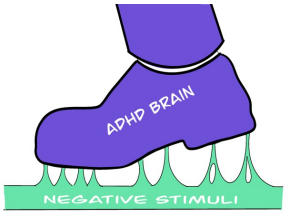

Sticky Negative

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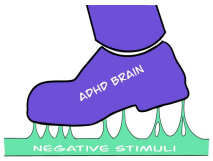
Sticky Negative



ADHD brains struggle to pull their attention away from negative emotion

- makes regulation strategies like healthy distraction and cognitive reappraisal difficult
- can lead to significant rumination

Soler-Gutiérrez S, Fernández-Antón M, Servera-Barceló M. (2023)

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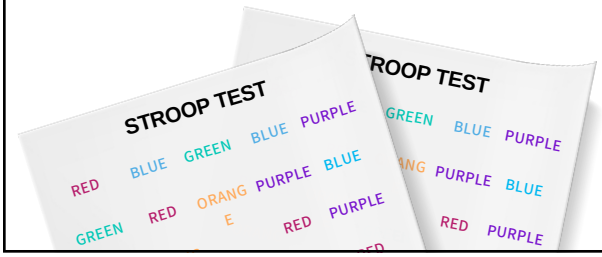
STROOP TEST:
Classic measure of selective attention



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HATE SNAKE SHAME LATE

DEAD POOR MURDER LAZY

GLOOM BOMB KILL GUILT

DEATH UGLY

POX HATE

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GATE COMB POOL BUSH

DEAR BOX GATE COMB

POOL BUSH SHAKE TABLE

SHAKE FILE COMB CARD

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How'd You Do?

CONDITION 1
EMOTION WORDS

CONDITION 2
NUETRAL WORDS

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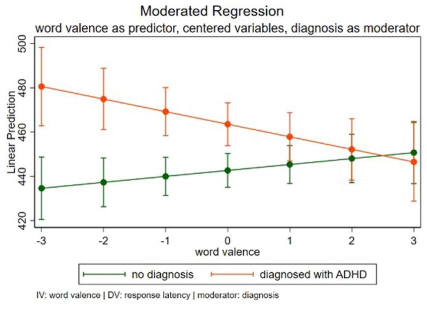

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THE ACCELERATOR

- FILTERLESS PROCESSING: Overstimulation of open-plan, busy office space put his system on high alert
- SENSORY ENCODING: His brain only applied early sensory encoding to the negative feedback making it feel like all there was

SLOW EFFORTFUL BRAKES

- STICKY NEGATIVE: Sanjay's brain couldn't pull away from the negative emotion, couldn't get back to work, and instead fled Into avoidance

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What do we do?

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How to Speed up our Brakes

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#1

Get Space

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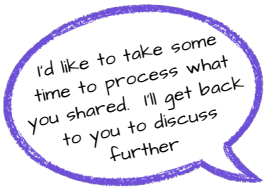
#1 Getting Space



Physical distance from the trigger

- Creates Safety
  - amygdala activity is reduced, blood pressure decreases, and the startle response decreases, etc.
- Protects us and the people around us from our SNS reaction

Powers & LaBar, 2019

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When you can't get space

- "I've got to run to the bathroom, I'll be right back."
- If you can't:
  - grounding exercises
    - 5-4-3-2-1
  - psychological distancing
    - visualization

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#2

Calm our Bodies

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INTENSITY

CALM

Sympathetic Nervous System
- A major component of our emotional gas pedal
- Involved in fight/flight

Parasympathetic Nervous System
- Essential component In emotional brakes
- Calms our physiological system down
- "rest and digest"

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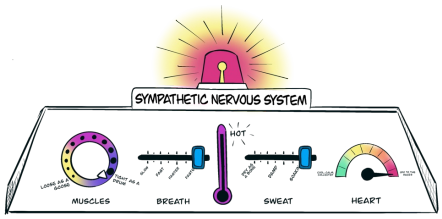

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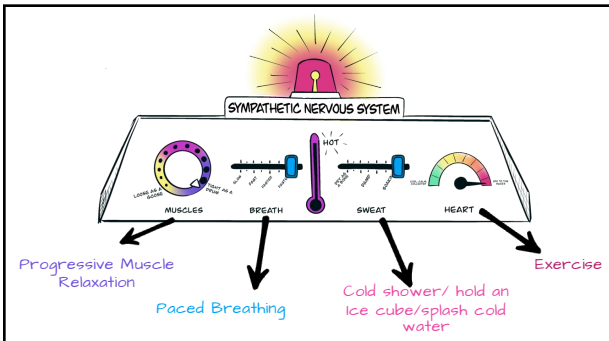

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Paced Breathing

The Power of a Long Exhale

Inhale: SNS activator

Exhale: PNS activator

Many strategies: box breathing, roller coaster breathing, cyclic sighing, 4-7-8.

CYCLIC SIGH:

Most effective at rapid SNS deceleration

- inhale slowly until ½ full
- pause
- take second deeper Inhale
- release a low slow audible sigh until air Is gone

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Work Modifications for Body Calming

Breathing
- Quiet space for cyclic sigh
- Alternate strategy- longer exhale than Inhale

Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Seated, self-led PMR

Exercise
- bathroom squats, jumping jacks, speed walk around the block, push-ups behind your desk

Cold
- splash of cold water
- hold an Ice cube

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#3

Get our Brain Back on Board

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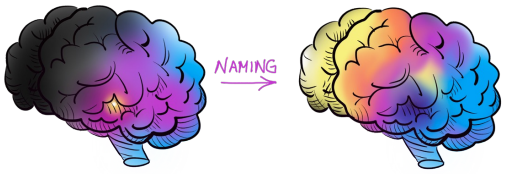
The Power of Naming



naming our emotions decreases amygdala activation and increases ventrolateral prefrontal cortex activation

Lieberman, et al, 2007

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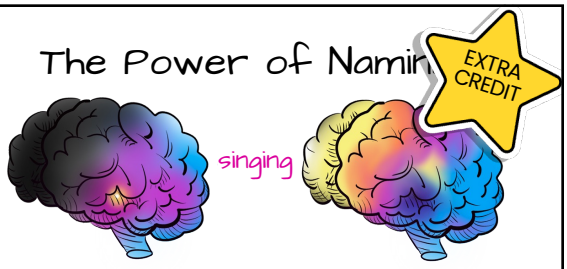
The Power of Naming



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Keeping the Accelerator In Check

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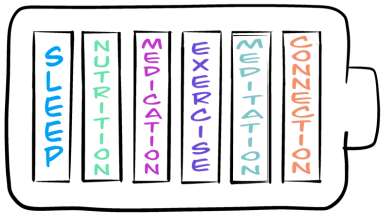
REGULATORY FILL UPS



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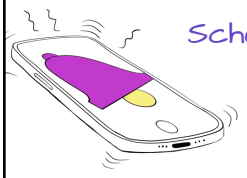

Scheduled Battery Checks

ADHD brains struggle with Interoception (registering Internal cues), which can mean that the brain's battery can drain completely before we sense a cue

- Several alarm-based cues throughout the day to check your brain battery:
  - am I hungry/ thirsty?
  - do I need to move?
  - do I need some sunshine?
  - do I need to connect with others?
  - do I need to go to bed early?

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ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT

Helps reduce the onslaught of filterless processing

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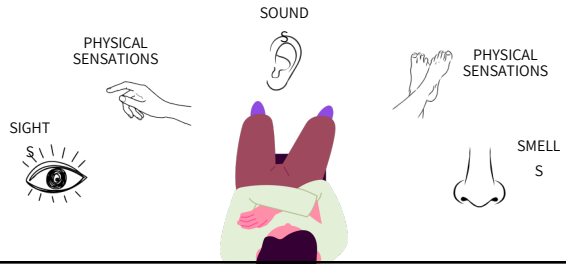
ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT



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Managing the Chronic Load

BURNOUT BINGO

ADHD brains are more prone to burnout *

- Burnout bingo: If you cover more than 5 squares in a week, you choose at least 1 micro-recovery
- Bingo Card can be personalized to each client

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Gas Pedal

BRAIN DIFFERENCES
FILTERLESS PROCESSING
Decreased Early Sensory Encoding
Working Memory Differences
Temporal Discounting

HOW TO AVOID THE GAS
Regulatory Fillers
Environmental Audits
Burnout Bingo
Written Feedback
Done Lists

Brakes

BRAIN DIFFERENCES
STICKY NEGATIVE
Sticky Mental Gears
Default Mode Network Difference
Emotional Naming Delays

HOW TO PRESS OUR BRAKES
Get Space
Calm your Body
Name/Sing the Feeling

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Find out more

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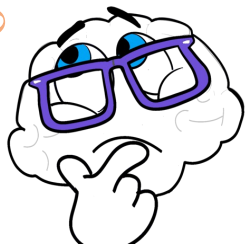
Questions?



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