

DIVERSITY IS A REALITY THAT NATURALLY EXISTS:  
INCLUSION IS A REALITY YOU INTENTIONALLY  
CREATE

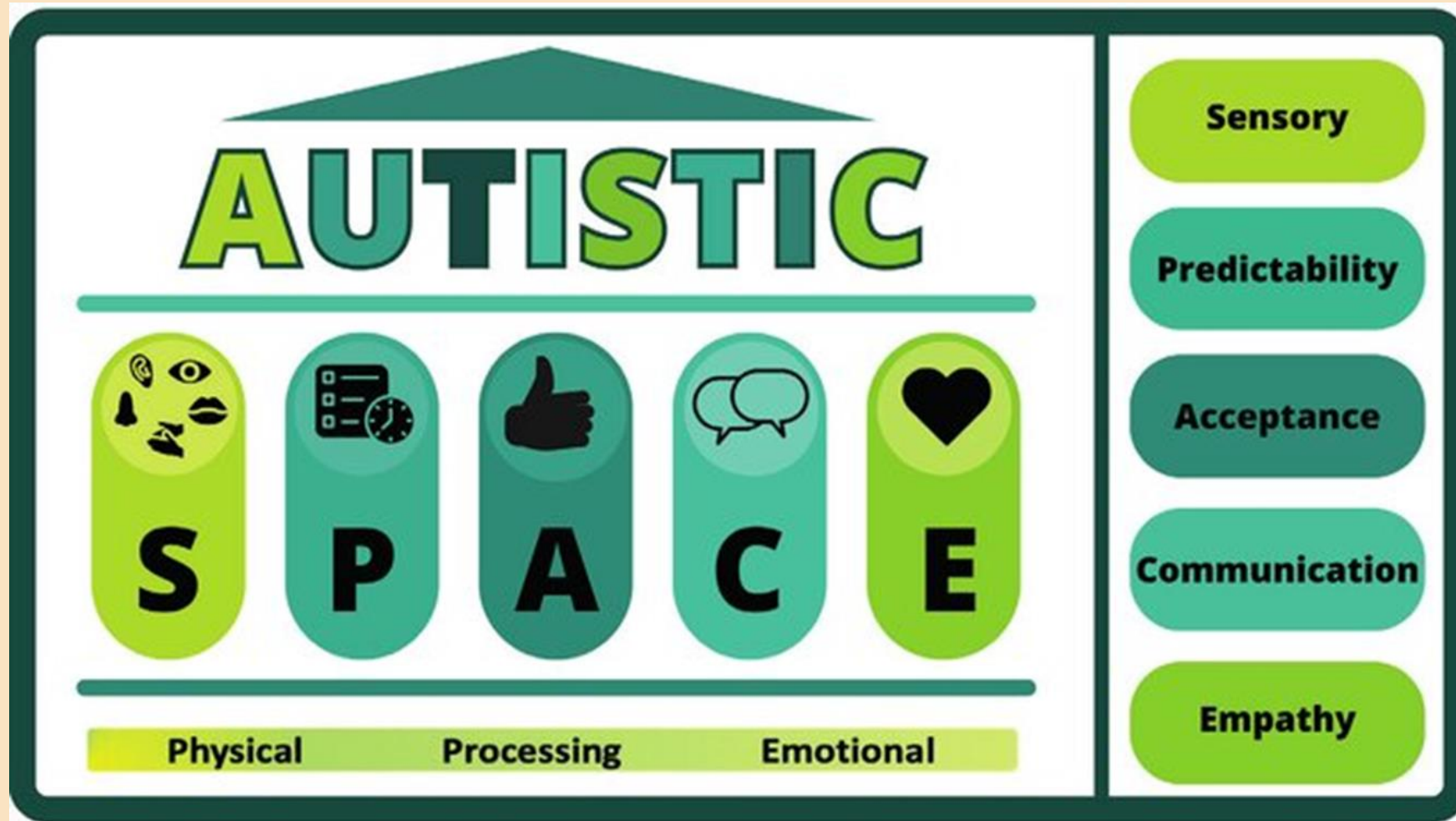
## Autistic SPACES in Social Work

Jenni Guthrie

CONTROLLED



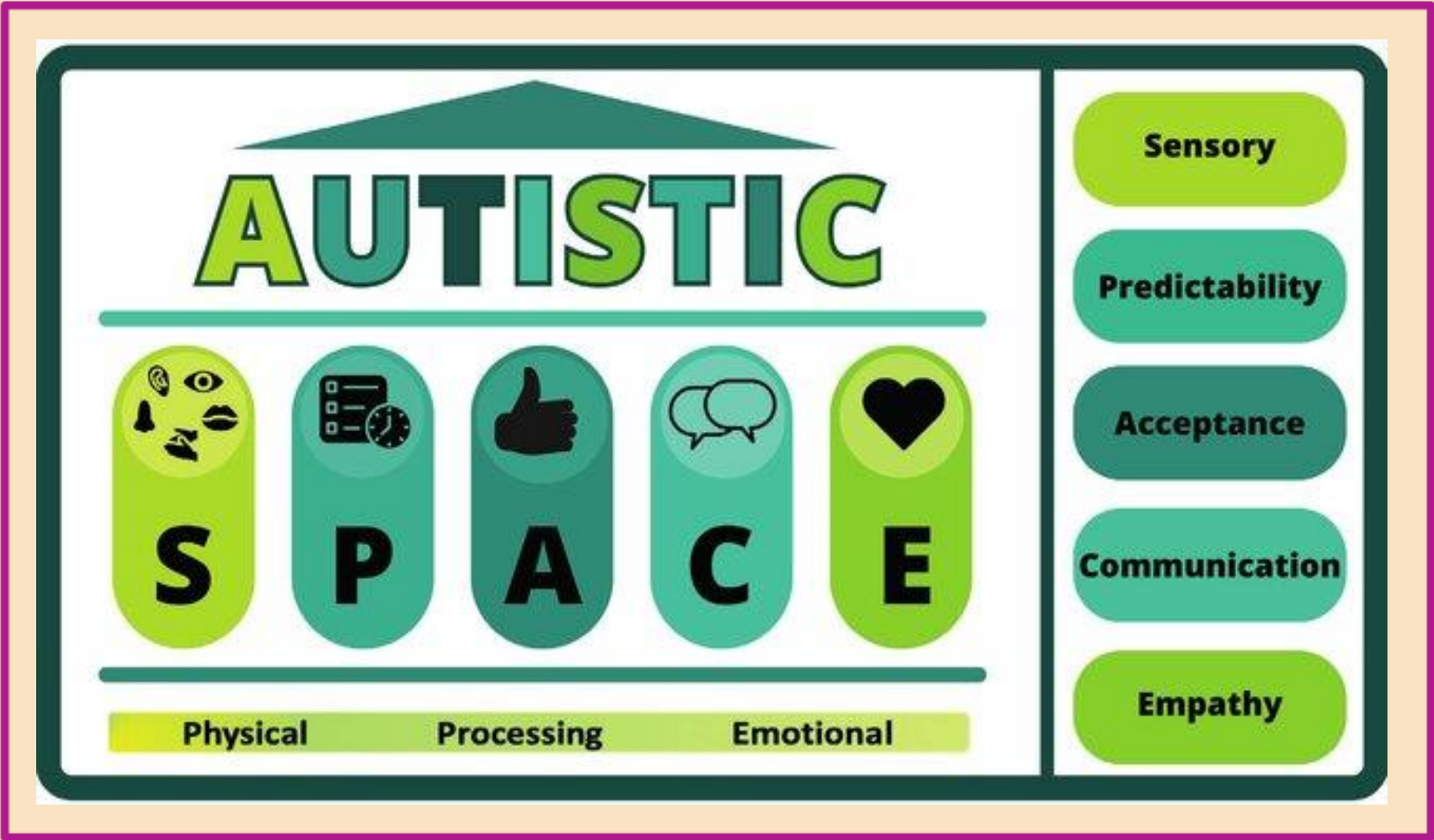
# Autistic SPACE (Doherty et al, 2023)



# SPACE(S) in Social Work (Guthrie et al 2024)



Social



Safety



# Stigma



**Impact**

- mental health/self-worth
- Exclusion/discrimination
- harm and abuse
- voice
- life chances

**Influence**

- Research
- social media
- socio-political
- experience



# Autistic SPACES (Guthrie et al, 2024)



Social



Safety



# Sensory profiles

Think beyond  
the “famous  
five”

Do not assume

Complexity  
requires  
specialist  
knowledge

Get creative  
with space and  
place!

# Environmental Mapping

Identify aspects of the environment that increase or reduce energy demand.

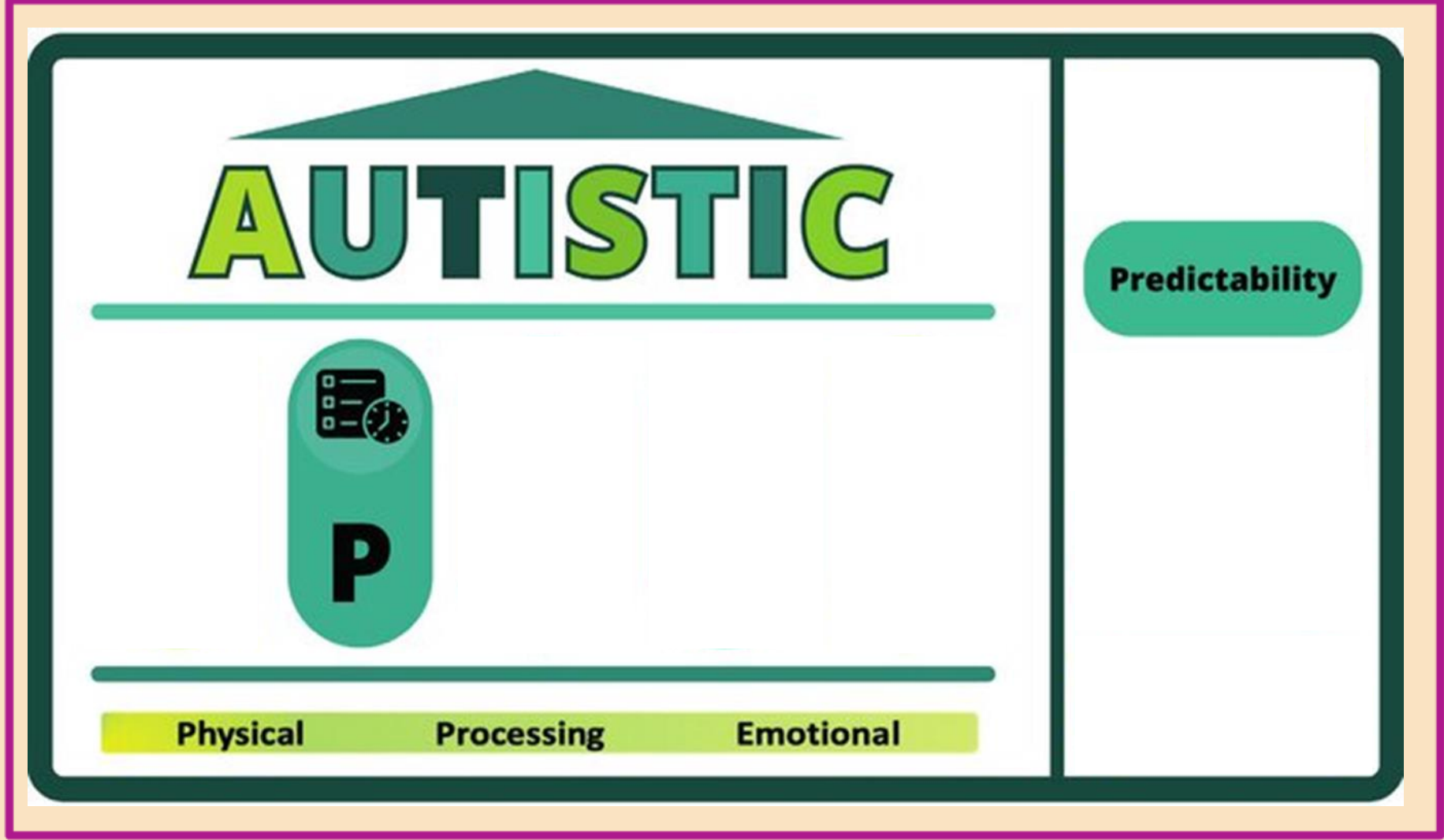
Environment	Demand on Energy	Adjustment to reduce demand on young person
Physical environment (e.g. noise, lighting, temperature, workspace stability):		
Digital environment (e.g. systems, notifications, multitasking requirements):		
Social environment (e.g. meetings, informal interaction, communication norms):		



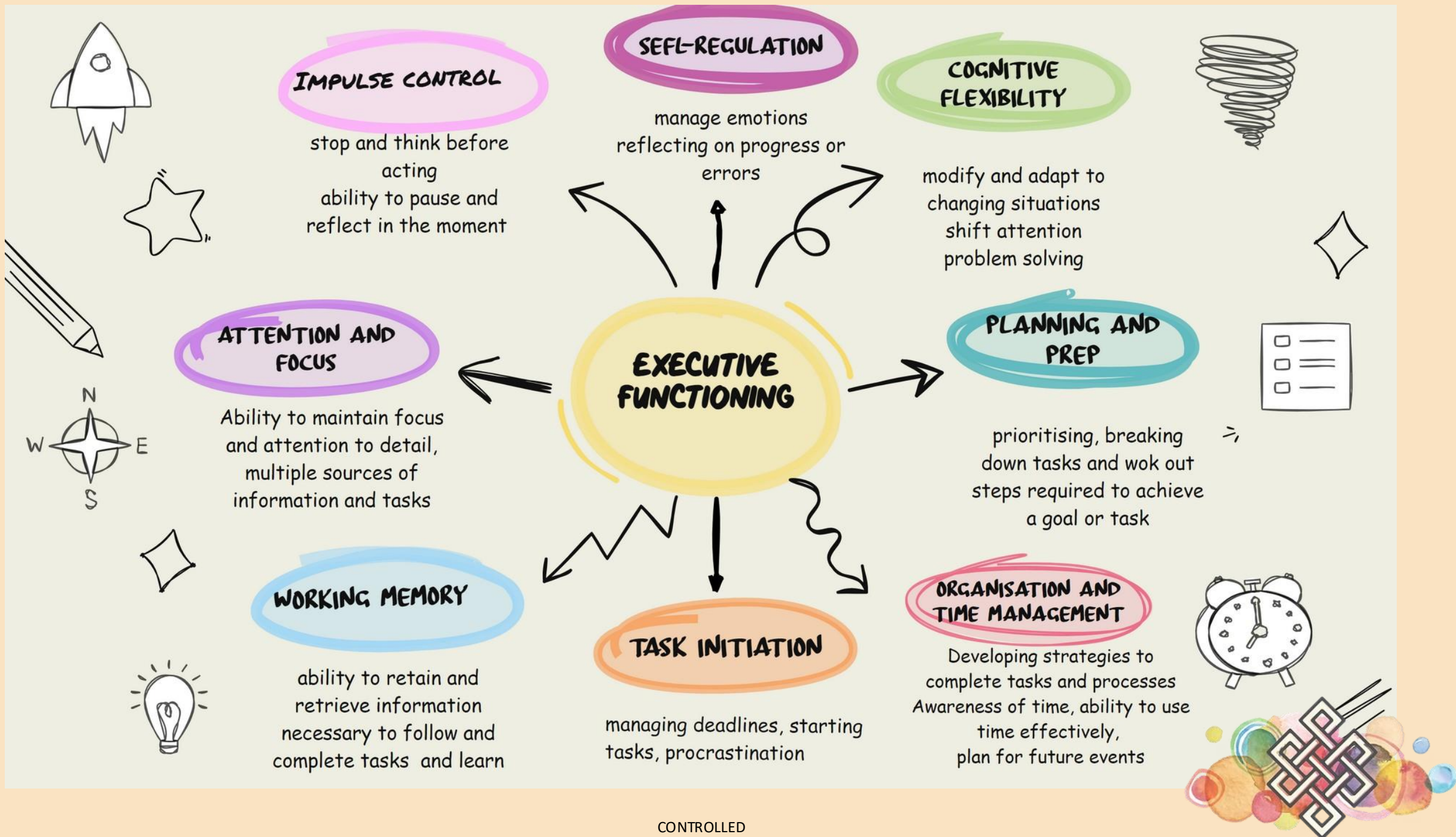
# Autistic SPACES (Guthrie et al, 2024)



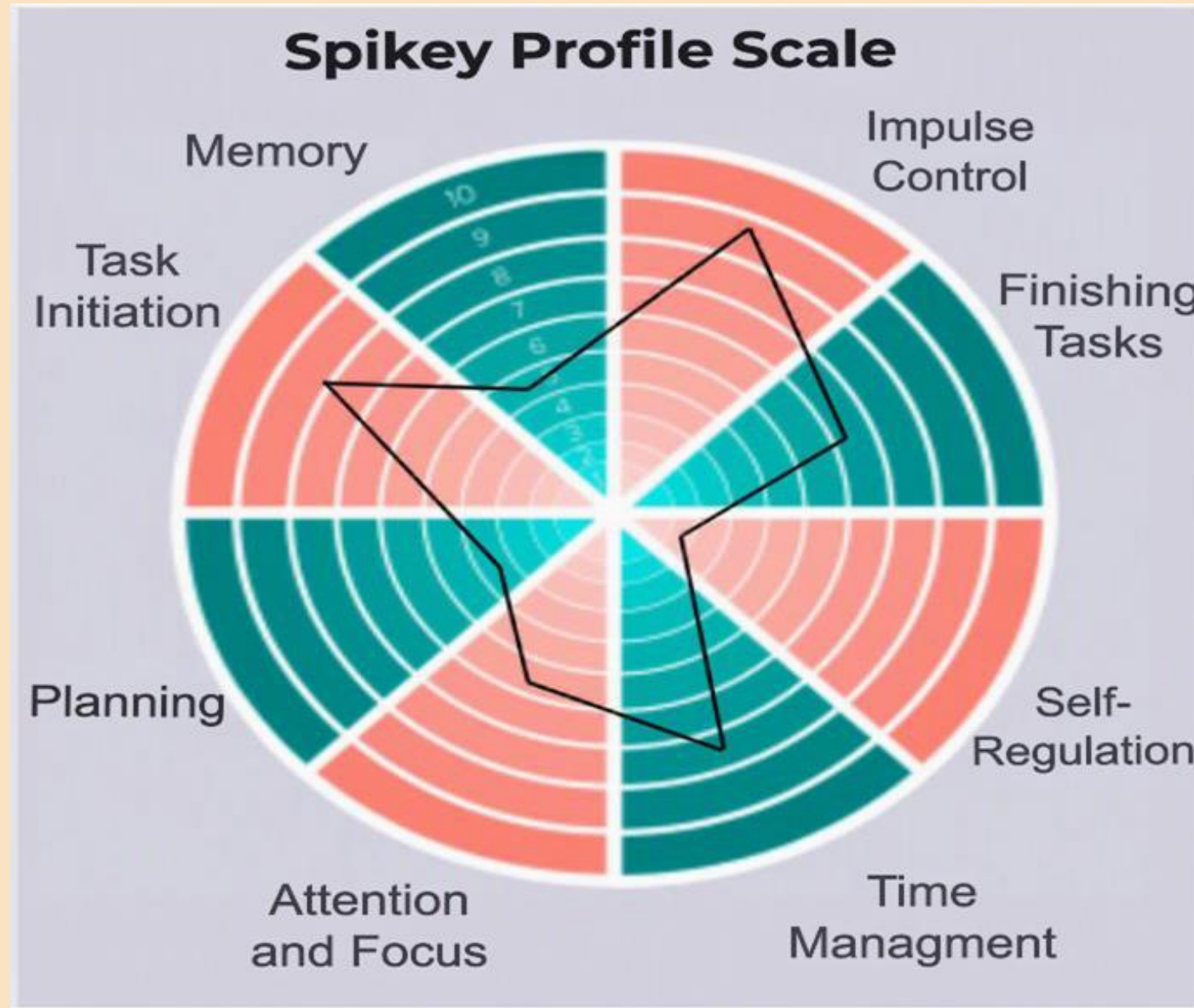
Social



Safety



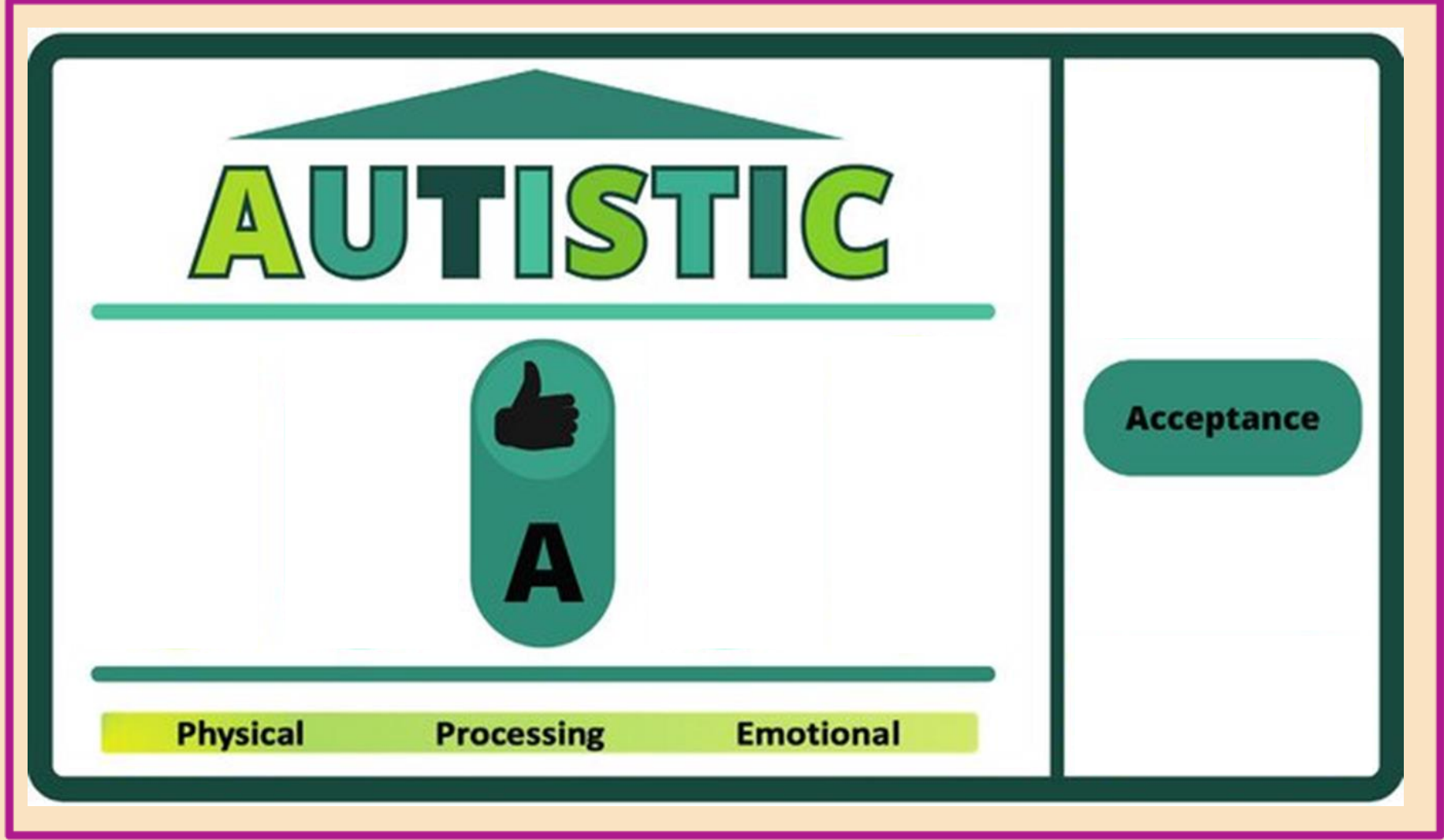
# Spiky Profile



# Autistic SPACES (Guthrie et al, 2024)



Social



Safety



We don't hug. But when my child sits in the same room as me or comes up to me and talks at length about something they have found, or have read, I know this is done with love. They have chosen to share something special to them, with me. That is special. Even if it is just being in the same space. Another of my children constantly wants to touch me by tapping, to show their affection and communicate. Sometimes I forget that others don't understand what we are saying to each other, and I need to translate.'

(Autistic parent)

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language  
reactions  
behaviour  
clothing

reducing stims  
minimising sensory impacts  
own interests  
emotions

### Suppressing

conversations  
stock phrases

### Scripting



self-monitoring  
avoidance  
questions

can be conscious or unconscious

### Mimicking

facial expressions  
eye contact  
tone of voice

### Mirroring

But.....you don't look autistic.....

### Outcome (+ve)

avoids stigma  
"fit in"  
identity management

### Hypervigilance

people-pleasing  
ignoring own needs

### Fawning



**Impact (-ve)**

mental and physical health  
burnout  
diagnosis  
support  
stigma

have you considered double discrimination?

applies to other neurodivergences

# Epistemic Justice



Fairness in how people are treated as knowers  
(Fricker, 2007)

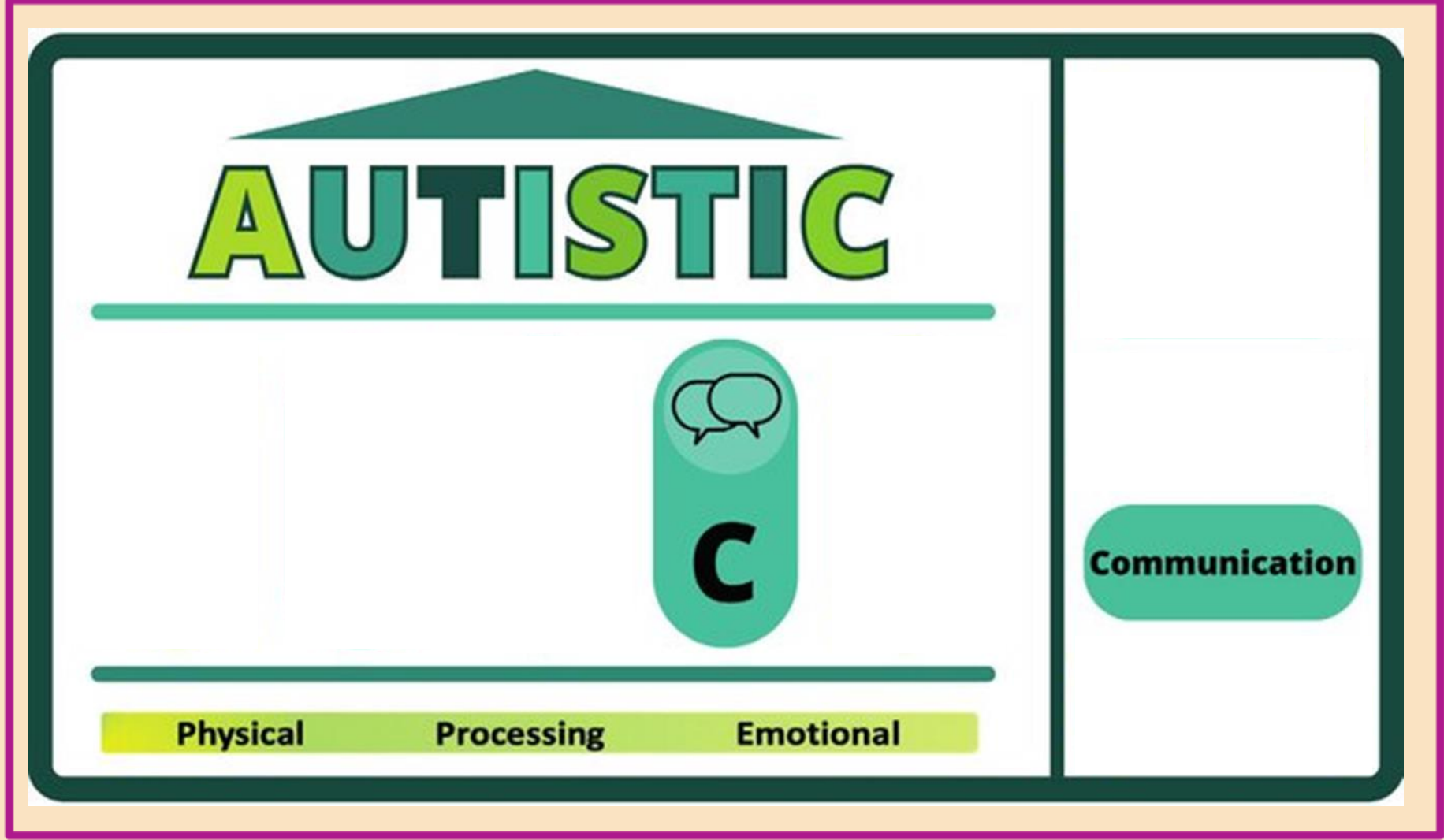
- Testimonial injustice – discredited due to bias or prejudice
- Hermeneutical injustice – cannot be understood due to lack of shared concepts or frameworks (gaps in collective understanding of marginalised identities )

Connections with power, prejudice and participation

# Autistic SPACES (Guthrie et al, 2024)



Social



Safety

# Communication mapping



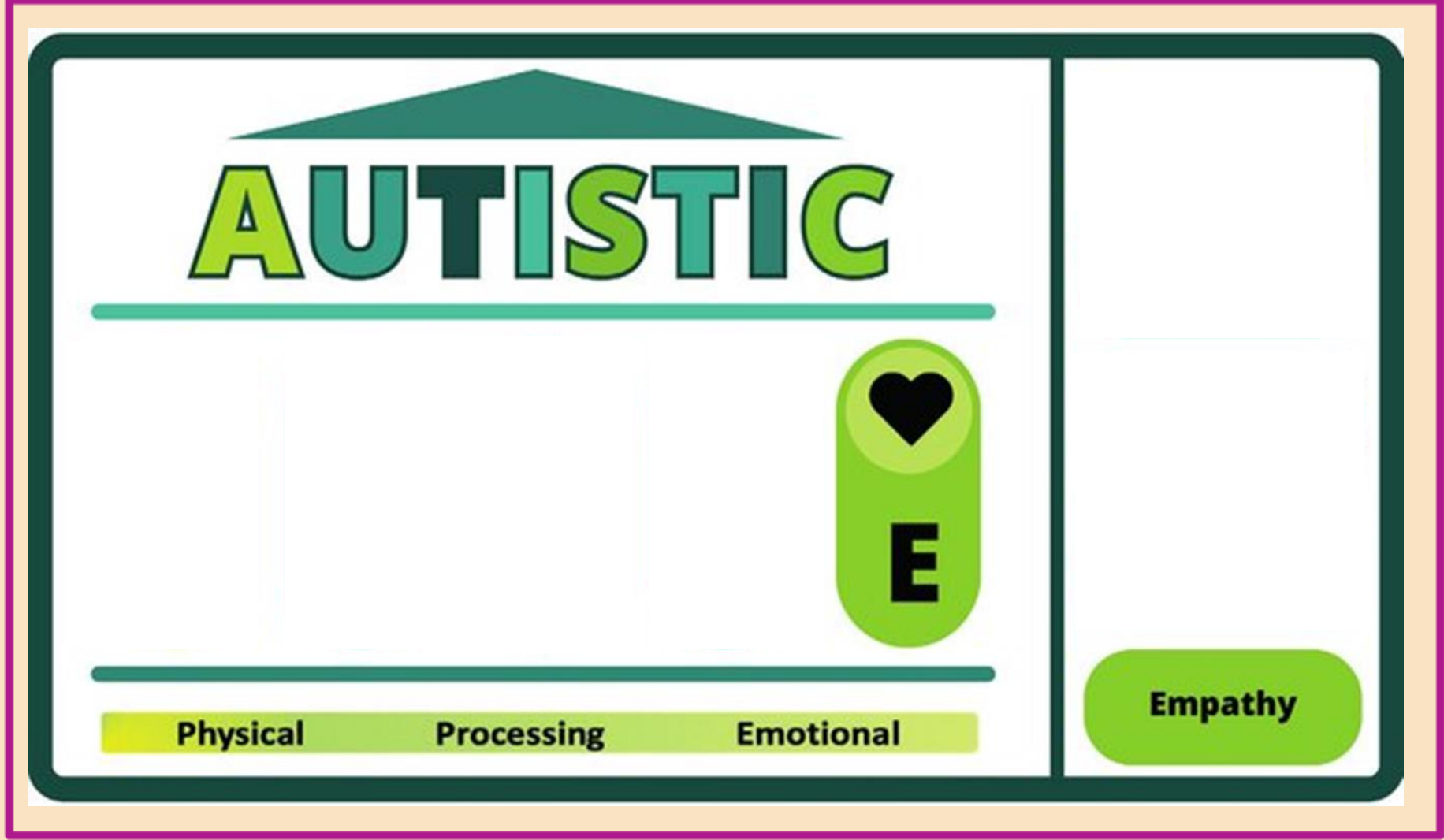
To help identify and critically examine the implicit communication norms operating within the home, community or educational environment.

<b>Communication Norm</b>	<b>Privilege/Impact</b>	<b>Alternative/Adjustment</b>
Calling people without prior warning	Verbal communication  People who can think on the spot  cognitive flexibility  do not need to script phone calls	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. text before calling – informing of the phone call, time of phone call and why you are calling.</li><li>2. Messaging or emailing instead of phoning.</li><li>3. Agree regular check ins which are predictable and pre-agreed.</li></ol>
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# Autistic SPACES (Guthrie et al, 2024)



Social



Safety



Assumptions



Behaviours



Cultural Humility

# ABC Reflexive model



# Connection

- Trauma-informed
- Cultural humility and curiosity are key!
- Strengths–based approach – presume competence
- Trust
- Shared meaning and understanding



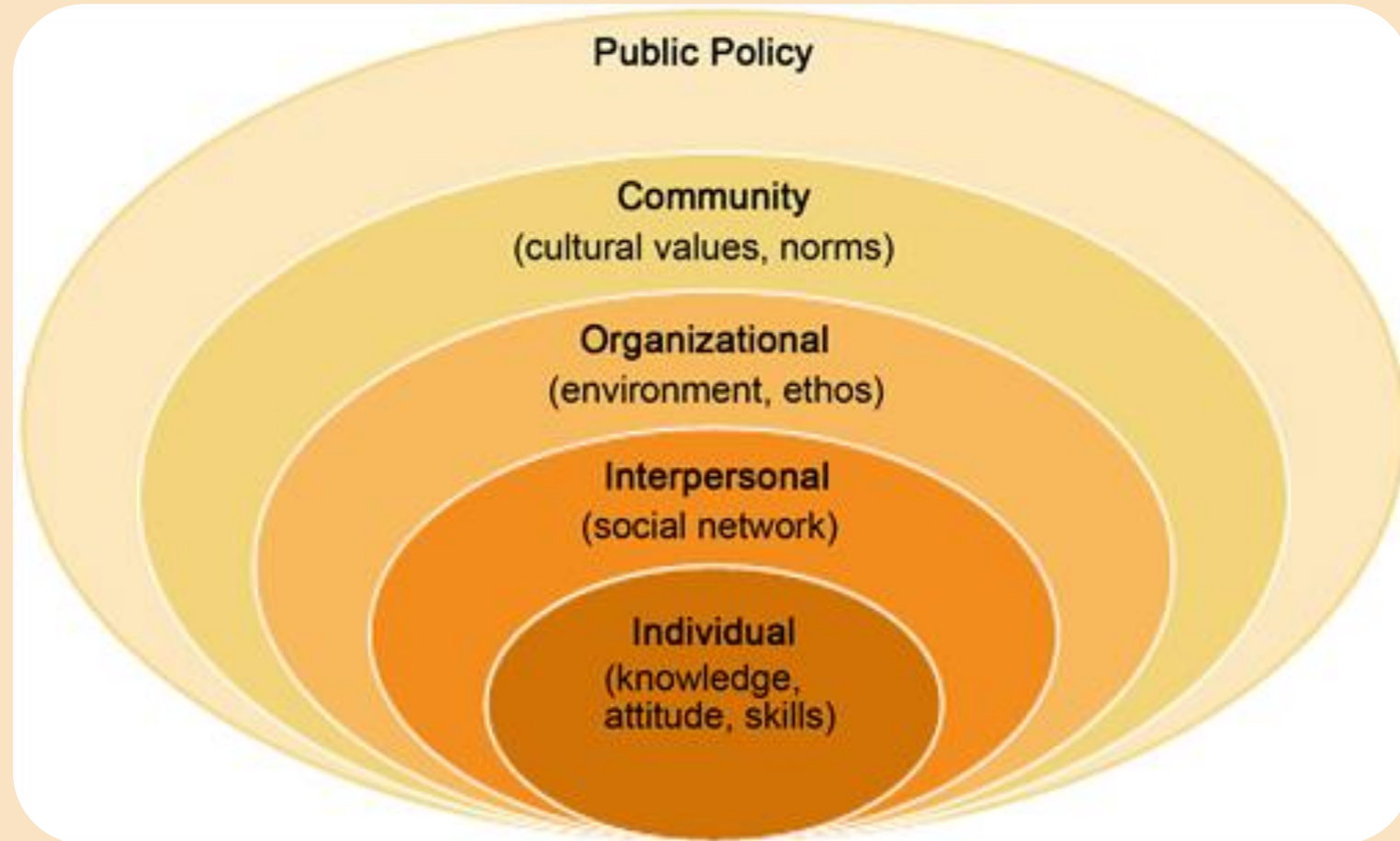
- Avoid acronyms and metaphors – but analogies can be helpful
- Use examples, but only if culturally and contextually relevant
- Ditch the demand for eye contact
- Be mindful of trauma responses – and act



# Safe havens within choppy waters

## Epistemic trust

- Trustworthiness
- Relevance
- Generalisability



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<https://www.autisticparentsuk.org/>

Thank  
You!





Guthrie., J. (2026). *Neuroinclusive practice with Autistic parents*. National Children's Bureau: Research in Practice.

