



My Unique Mind

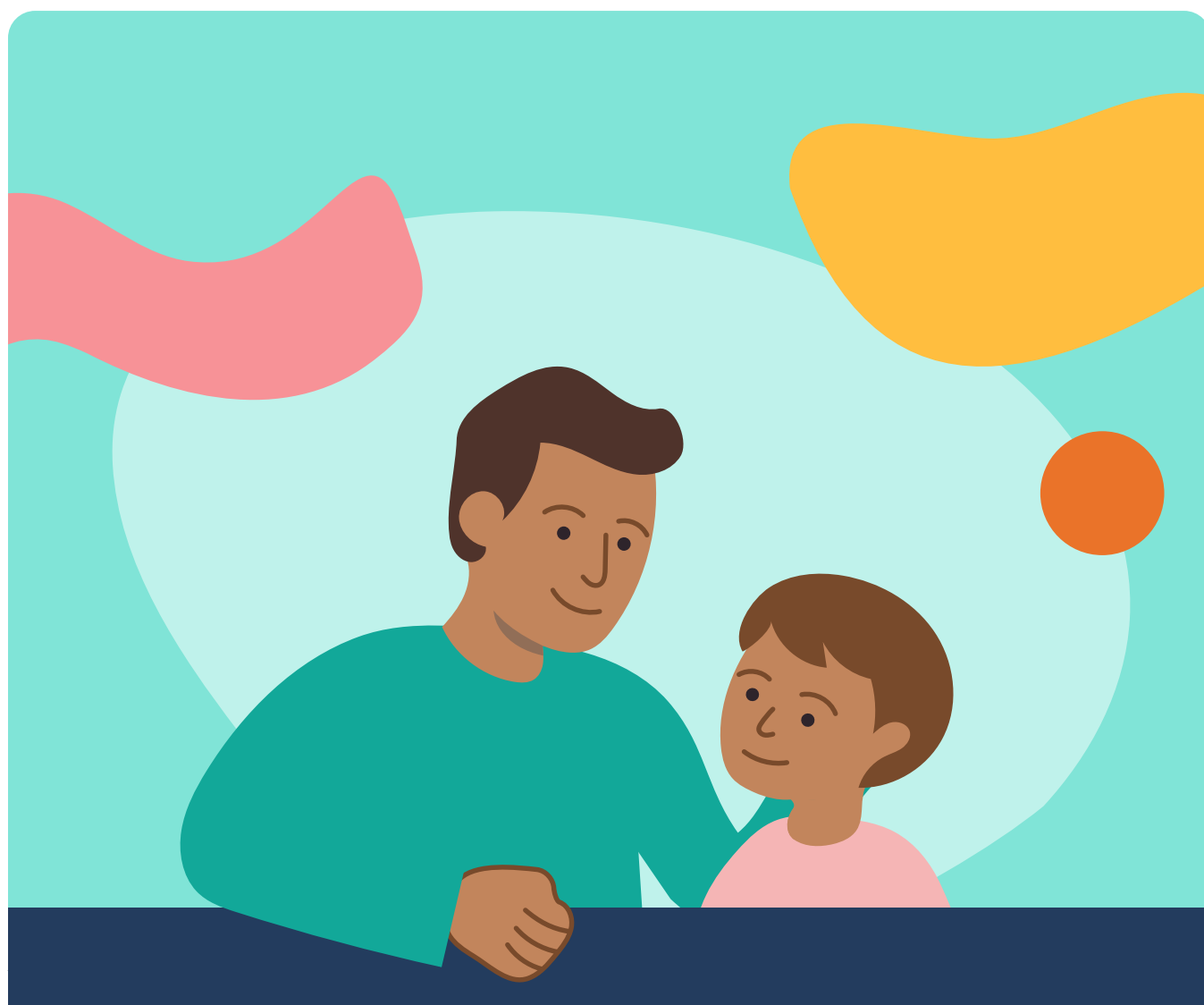
A strengths-based toolkit for neurodivergent
young people and their families

For parents and carers

The following toolkit is designed to help you and your young person explore their strengths, qualities, ways of thinking and learning, and their interests and goals together. It works best as a collaborative process rather than something either of you does alone.

There is no single right way to use it. Some families may want to work through it together over several sessions. Others might prefer their young person to look through it first on their own, then come together to discuss it. Some parents and carers may find it more useful as inspiration for casual conversations over time rather than a structured activity. Talk with your young person about what would work best for them before you start.

This toolkit is a companion to a parent resource on asynchronous development, which explains why neurodivergent young people often develop differently to their peers and why understanding your young person's unique profile, and who they are as a person, matters. This process is best when conversations with your young person can move beyond the surface level and one-word answers. This is hard for many people, so to support parents and carers with this, the parent resource also includes practical guidance and conversation tips that can help.



For young people

Part of growing up is figuring out who you are, including the things you are good at, the way your mind works, and what matters to you. Some of this you might have worked out on your own. But it can be hard to fully believe it or know what's true without the trusted adults like parents or carers sharing what they see about you too. They might not always get it right, or have missed important things before, but when they do understand you, you'll know, because it feels really good.

That's what this toolkit is for. It's designed to help you and an important adult in your life explore your unique mind together, so you can better understand yourself and they can better understand you too.

Before you start, talk with them about how you'd like to use it. You might like to:

- Work through it together from the start
- Fill it in on your own first, then discuss it together
- Let them use it as inspiration for conversations with you over time

This is meant to be a positive experience, not homework. If it ever feels too much, or upsetting, take a break or come back to it another time. You can also just do the parts of the toolkit that feel most helpful to you.

Why understanding your unique mind matters

Neurodivergent young people often have a big range between their areas of strength and their areas of challenge. This is called a **zigzag profile**, and it can make it harder for you and the adults in your life to fully understand who you are and what you need. To learn more about zigzag profiles, see our infographic [here](#).

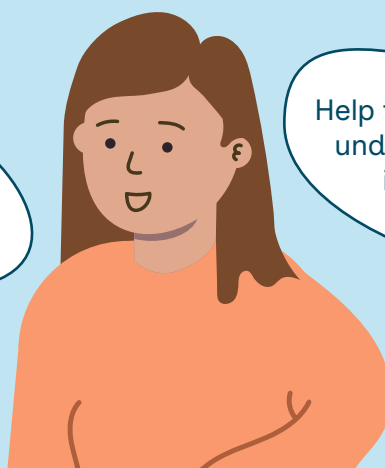
Knowing your strengths and how you learn best can help you:

Find ways to approach schoolwork and learning new things that actually work for your brain

Understand yourself as a person, which is an important part of growing up and good for your long-term wellbeing

Ask for and get the support and accommodations you need, at school and at home

Help the important adults in your life understand you better, which can improve your relationships with them



My strengths and personal qualities

Personal qualities describe the kind of person you are. They are not good or bad, they are just you. They include the ways you most commonly think, feel and behave. For example, you might be someone who is full of energy, or someone who thinks very logically.

Personal strengths are the things you are best at, compared to other things you do. This includes skills you have learned. It is not about comparing yourself to other people, and you do not need to be the best at something, or always able to do it perfectly, for it to be a strength.

Strengths and personal qualities are often connected. A personal quality can become a real strength when it is in the right situation. For example, being talkative is a personal quality. That might sometimes feel like a challenge for a talkative person, if it's hard to stay quiet when required to, in class. But it can be a genuine strength in other situations, like on a debate team, or when it comes to making friends.

One way to start working out your strengths and personal qualities is to think about past experiences. The following questions can help you do that. There is an example already filled out to give you a better idea of what to do.

EXAMPLE

Something I have made or created that I'm proud of or liked doing...

Young Person



The massive marble track I built that circled around my bedroom

Parent/Carer



The cake you baked for your sister's birthday.

Together: What strengths and personal qualities do these examples show?

Creativity, problem solving while building something, understanding instructions of a recipe, practical life skills (cooking), caring and considerate of sister



Something I have made or created that I'm proud of or liked doing...

Young Person



Parent/Carer



Together: What strengths and personal qualities do these examples show?



A time I was helpful to others (e.g. friends, family, classmates)...

Young Person



Parent/Carer



Together: What strengths and personal qualities do these examples show?



A time I learnt something new...

Young Person



Parent/Carer



Together: What strengths and personal qualities do these examples show?



A time I got through, or did something very hard...

Young Person



Parent/Carer



Together: What strengths and personal qualities do these examples show?



List of potential strengths and personal qualities

Another way to identify your strengths and personal qualities is to look through a list of examples and think about whether any of them might apply to you. This list doesn't cover everything, and you likely have strengths and qualities that aren't included, but it can help you get started. Think of each strength as a broad area or topic. You don't need to relate to every example listed under it for it to be one of your strengths. For example, someone might have a great memory for facts but not for names, so their strength is remembering facts.

Go through the list and tick any strengths or qualities that seem like they describe something about you, or that your parent or carer thinks applies to you. There is space at the end of each table to add any that are missing from the list. Then, in the **Reflecting Further** section, write down which strengths or qualities you identified and add some details about how they specifically apply to you, or examples of when you or your parent or carer have noticed them.

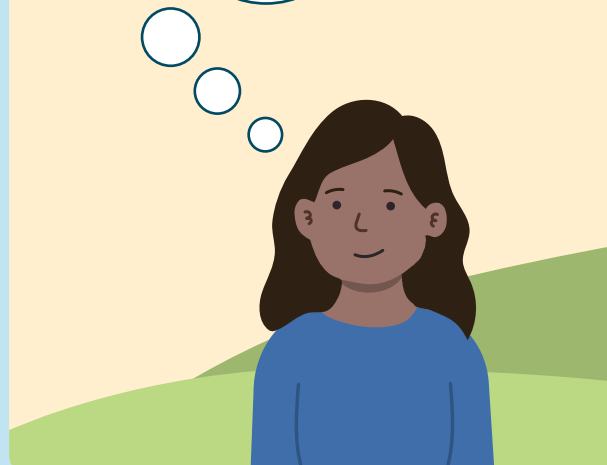


There are a lot of things on these lists because **everyone is different** so it helps to give a lot of examples. But most young people will only identify with a few things on the lists and that's normal and ok!

I'm good at **noticing details and remembering where things are**.
If someone in my family loses something they come to me as I often will know where it is! I'm also **really honest** so **people trust what I say**.



I'm good at **remembering people's names**, I try really hard at school and **to help my friends** when they need it and **I have a lot of energy** so like doing things like sport.



Ways of thinking

**Personal
quality/strength**

Examples of what this might include

This is me
(tick what applies,
even if only partially)

Seeing details

Noticing someone has a new haircut, or seeing spelling mistakes in writing, focusing on the details of situations or tasks

☐

Seeing the big picture

Being able to identify what is most important without getting lost in details.

☐

Being organised

Being tidy, good at planning, organising information

☐

Seeing and solving problems

Identifying when there is a problem or seeing better ways of doing things

☐

Memory

Having a good memory. There are different kinds of memory, e.g. remembering facts, conversations, experiences, what things look like, how to get to places, or things related to your interests

☐

Creativity

Artistic, musical, building things, dance, creative problem solving, writing, coming up with new ideas

☐

Logical thinking and rules

Thinking things through logically e.g. cause and effect, following rules and/or being able to see things in a logical way that is less impacted by biases.

☐

Seeing connections between different things

Being able to see how ideas or things connect, and using those connections to understand things or come up with new ideas

☐

Curious

Being someone that wants to understand things and learn things

☐

Multitasking

Being able to focus on more than one thing at a time.

☐

↓ Add your own ↓

☐
☐

Ways of feeling and being

**Personal
quality/strength**

Examples of what this might include

This is me
(tick what applies,
even if only partially)

Positivity

Being able to see positives in situations

☐

Energetic

Having a lot of energy. This might involve moving your body a lot, having a lot of ideas, being very talkative etc

☐

Empathy,
understanding
others, social
perceptiveness

Understanding or feeling the feelings of other people or what other people might need or why they do things. Picking up on things others might miss in social situations.

☐

Caring about
fairness, justice
and equality

Noticing when things aren't fair, standing up for others, caring about how people are treated

☐

Persistence

Being someone that keeps trying for a long time even when things are hard

☐

Honesty

Being someone who tells the truth and says what you mean

☐

Humour

Being funny, making people laugh, seeing the funny side of things

☐

Self-sufficiency

Being able to do a lot of things on your own.

☐

Having strong
sense of what is
right or wrong

Knowing what is right or wrong according to your personal values. Making choices based on these even when that might sometimes be hard.

☐

Cultural identity,
community and
family

Connection to your culture and community and family which may include language, traditions and others who share these with you. This may also include connection to family or the Neurodivergent communities and culture.

☐

↓ Add your own ↓

☐
☐

Skills

**Personal
quality/strength**

Examples of what this might include

This is me
(tick what applies,
even if only partially)

Spoken
communication

Being good at communicating in conversation. This might be with just individual people or in groups of people. Being good at public speaking or explaining your ideas in conversation.

☐

Responsibility
and reliability

Being someone others can count on to do what they said they would, like completing chores or showing up when you've committed to something.

☐

Leadership

Being someone good at guiding and inspiring

☐

Making things
that are detailed
with your hands

Doing things that require a lot of control and accuracy with your hands. Like drawing, building with mini blocks etc

☐

Physical
movement

Sport, dance, physical tasks like moving heavy things

☐

Listening

Being a good listener when others are speaking

☐

Using and
understanding
technology

Being good with computers, devices, software or technology generally, including things like gaming, coding or troubleshooting.

☐

Research

Being good at finding and making sense of information, whether for school, personal interests or solving problems

☐

Managing
routines and
schedules

Being good at creating and sticking to routines

☐

Vocabulary

Understanding a broad range of words which help explain complex ideas clearly and accurately.

☐

↓ Add your own ↓

☐
☐

Reflecting further

EXAMPLE

Personal quality/strength

This is me in these ways

Personal care & life skills



I'm good at managing money and saving for big things I'd like. Also I can make my own breakfast and am good at using my visual reminder to know what to pack for school.



Write the **qualities and strengths** you ticked in here

Describe how it applies to you here

How I learn best

Another part of who we are is how we learn best. Everyone has particular ways of learning that work well for their brain. No way of learning is better than another, and most of us will have several approaches that work really well, some that are just okay, and others that are really difficult. Learning often involves a combination of approaches too. For example, you might learn about something through a story you are listening to, which combines storytelling and listening.

It can also help to think about different types of learning, because you might find that some approaches work better for certain types than others. Three types of learning are:

Things you do: practical skills and processes, like learning to use a computer program, how to bake a cake, how to catch a train, or what is okay or not okay to do in a library.

Facts and information: remembering or memorising things, like facts about your favourite animal or tv show, people's names, what happened in a historical event, scientific terms or words in another language.

Understanding things: understanding ideas, systems or people. This is less about what to do and more about why things happen, or what a concept like democracy or friendship means.

Knowing how you learn best, and which approaches are harder for you, can help in a lot of situations. It can help when you need to learn something new, study for exams, or learn things for your own interests. It can also help parents, carers and teachers adapt how they teach you, and where needed, advocate for accommodations at school.

To help identify your best ways of learning, there are some questions on the next page about past experiences. Try to think about how you went about learning each time. Did you read about it, watch a video, have someone show you, or figure it out by trying? Discussing these with your parent or carer can help too, as they may have noticed things about how you learn that you haven't. After the questions, there is a table of different learning approaches where you can rate how easy or difficult each one is for you.

My experiences of learning things

A time I learned how to do something practical that felt easy...

Young Person



Parent/Carer



Together: How did you go about learning it? What does this show about how I learn practical things best?



A time I found it easy to learn facts or information about a topic...

Young Person



Parent/Carer



Together: How did you go about learning it? What does this show about how I learn information about things best?



A time I found it easy to understand a concept or idea...

Young Person



Parent/Carer



Together: How did you go about learning it? What does this show about how I learn about concepts or ideas best?



A time I found learning something new very hard because of the way I was trying to learn or it was being taught to me...

Young Person



Parent/Carer



Together: What does this show about ways of learning that are more difficult for me?



Ways of learning and what works best for me

EXAMPLE

Ways of learning

Visual

Learning through images, diagrams etc



How easy or difficult is it to learn this way when I need to:

Learn how to do something practical



Easy



Not easy or difficult
(neutral)



Difficult

Understand new concepts/ideas



Easy



Not easy or difficult
(neutral)



Difficult

Remember facts or information



Easy



Not easy or difficult
(neutral)



Difficult

Examples from my life or other notes

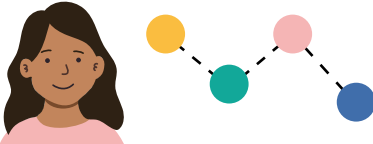
If I'm learning something practical, I really need to see how to do it in real life, a diagram isn't enough. But labelled diagrams of the parts of plants and animals do work really well for me when I need to remember scientific names in biology.

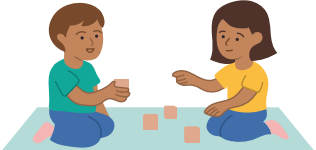
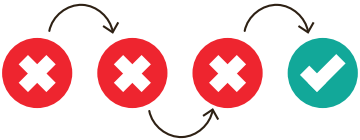
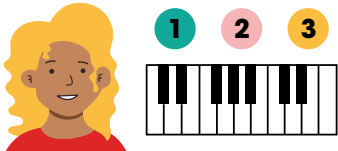


Ways of learning	How easy or difficult is it to learn this way when I need to:			Examples from my life or other notes
	Learn how to do something practical	Understand new concepts/ideas	Remember facts or information	
Visual Learning through images, diagrams etc 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Reading Learning by reading about what you want to learn 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Listening Learning through listening to information or descriptions of how to do things 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	

Ways of learning	How easy or difficult is it to learn this way when I need to:			Examples from my life or other notes
	Learn how to do something practical	Understand new concepts/ideas	Remember facts or information	
Multimedia Learning through video or computer programs that include sound and visuals 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Doing or experiencing Learning by doing or experiencing real-world examples of what you are learning 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Writing Learning by writing as a way to organise your ideas 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	

Ways of learning	How easy or difficult is it to learn this way when I need to:			Examples from my life or other notes
	Learn how to do something practical	Understand new concepts/ideas	Remember facts or information	
Logic Learning through logical thinking, problem solving, and using what you know to work out what you don't. 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Observing others Learning by watching what others do or say 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Conversation Learning through conversations with other people 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	

Ways of learning	How easy or difficult is it to learn this way when I need to:			Examples from my life or other notes
	Learn how to do something practical	Understand new concepts/ideas	Remember facts or information	
Making connections Learning through making connections between ideas and other things you already know 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Independent learning Learning on your own without input from others on what you should do 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Interest based learning Learning by including your interests in the process 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	

Ways of learning	How easy or difficult is it to learn this way when I need to:			Examples from my life or other notes
	Learn how to do something practical	Understand new concepts/ideas	Remember facts or information	
Learning through games When learning is made into a game or competition, like quiz games, board games, or educational apps 	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	
Learning through trial & error Learning by trying something, seeing what happens, and adjusting based on what did or didn't work 	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	
Learning through repetition Learning by doing or going over something many times until you can remember it or get good at it. 	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	Easy Not easy or difficult (neutral) Difficult	

Ways of learning	How easy or difficult is it to learn this way when I need to:			Examples from my life or other notes
	Learn how to do something practical	Understand new concepts/ideas	Remember facts or information	
Learning through stories Learning when information or ideas are presented through a story. This might be fictional or based on real life. 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Learning through exploration Learning by trying something, seeing what happens, and adjusting based on what did or didn't work 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	
Anything else? 	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	😊 Easy 😐 Not easy or difficult (neutral) 😞 Difficult	

Bringing it all together

These questions can help you bring together what you now know about yourself. They can also help you think about changes you could make at home, at school, or in the way you go about learning things. This is also a chance to share what matters most to you and your goals.

List your personal qualities and strengths you have identified:

Are there any ways you could use your strengths to help with challenges you are currently experiencing, or skills you would like to learn?

List the ways of learning that work best for you:

Are there any ways of learning that tend to be harder for you? If so, what are they?

How well do the ways you are taught things at school, at home, or in other places like clubs, fit with what you now know works best for your brain? Are there any situations where the approach being used might not suit how you learn best?

Are there ways you could use your best learning approaches more, whether for schoolwork, studying for exams, or learning other skills like hobbies or life skills?

Are there any ways you could include more of your interests when you need to learn something?

Are there any goals you have, or things you would like to learn, that are important to you?

Are there any ways you could include more of your interests when you need to learn something?

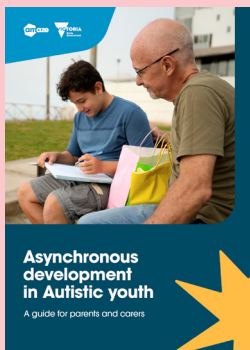
Discuss with your parent or carer ways to work towards these things and how they might be able to support you.

Parent/Carer: What new things have you learned about your young person?

Parent/Carer: Is there anything you might do differently now, or that you might advocate for at school, to better support your young person?

Young person: Is there anything you would like your parent or carer to better understand about you?

For more information on how to make the most of what you have learned in this toolkit, please see the following resources:



Information resource on asynchronous development.



Infographic/poster about zigzag profiles.

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A GUIDE FOR AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE

Zigzag Profiles

Why are some things so easy and others so hard?



Many Autistic young people have a big range between things they are really good at and other things they find more difficult.

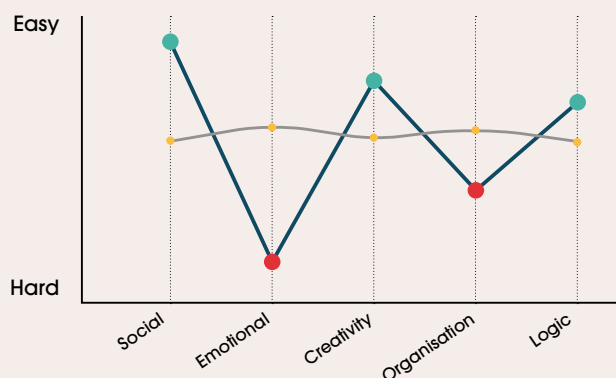
This can be called a zigzag profile.*

Sometimes having a zigzag profile can hide the things you are really good at or the challenges. It can make it hard for others to see the full picture of who you are and what you need.



Skill Profile

— Young person with a zigzag profile
— Average young person



*This is just an example. Every Autistic person has a unique profile across skills.

Being different to other people your age can sometimes be stressful.

You might experience things like:

- ★ Feeling overwhelmed by expectations
- ★ Being bored when things are easy
- ★ Feeling misunderstood

Zigzag profiles can also have benefits.

You may:

- ★ Understand your interests deeply
- ★ Use your strengths to help with challenges
- ★ Have great ideas from thinking differently

Having a zigzag profile doesn't mean there is anything wrong. It is just one way Autistic brains can be different.

Understanding your zigzag profile helps you get the right supports and makes the most of your strengths.



**Zigzag profile is a newer, more affirming term for what has been sometimes called a spiky profile.*

Want to learn more about your zigzag profile and how it makes you unique?

Check out our other resources here:

