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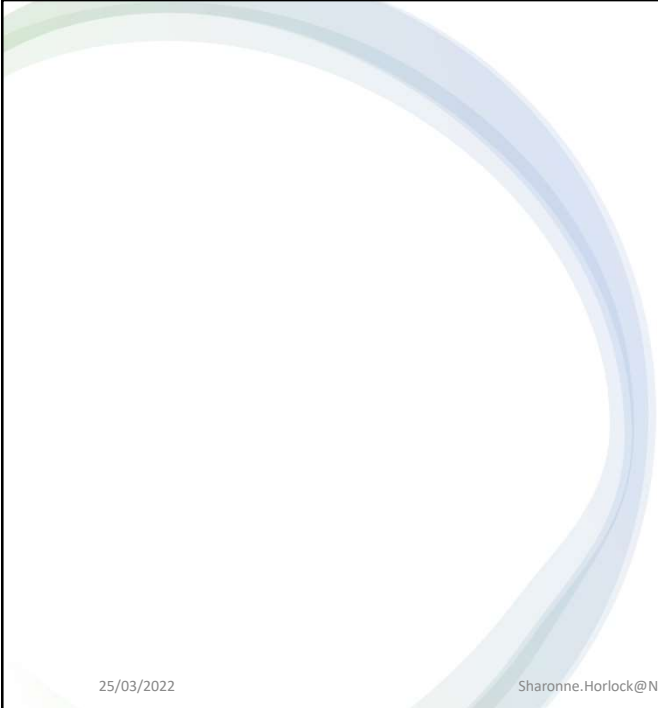
Pleased to meet you.

Hello, My name is Sharonne. I am a researcher, but before changing direction I taught for over 30 years. I have been incredibly fortunate because I have worked in different settings (mainstream and specialist) with wonderful students, amazing families, and inspirational colleagues. Every morning when I drove to work, I asked myself the question (especially on those cold dark wintery mornings stuck in traffic) 'Why am I doing this?' The answer was always the same. It just popped into my head, 'To make a (good) difference'. Gradually, I began to think there was another way I could make a better difference – listen, hear, and genuinely respond kindly to the students I worked alongside.

25/03/2022

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Identifying key issues for autistic girls at school and providing practical school-based support strategies

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My last position had a fancy title, 'Strategic Leader of SEND' for an academy trust.

As a SENCo, every day involved challenging conversations about participation, inclusion, and independence. Special educational needs appeared (to me) to increasingly involve daily misunderstanding, lack of communication and/or a minimal understanding that often meant missed diagnosis, missed opportunities and, missing students. This seemed to be especially true for girls; particularly those with autism. The lack of understanding should be surprising but even now after several years of growing awareness that autistic girls do not necessarily demonstrate the same characteristics as boys progress is still slow.

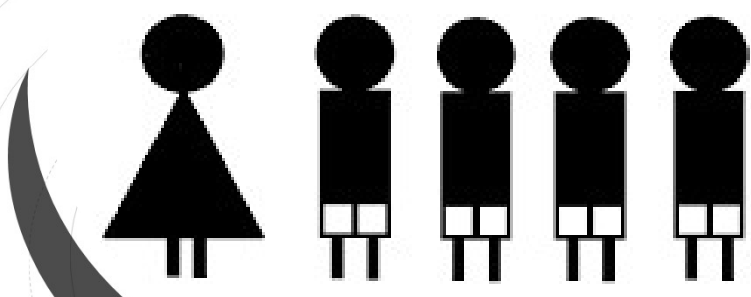
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Autism.



for every four boys diagnosed

How do the differences between autistic girls and boys present in the school environment?

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- Quirky
- Friendships
- Interests
- Alone

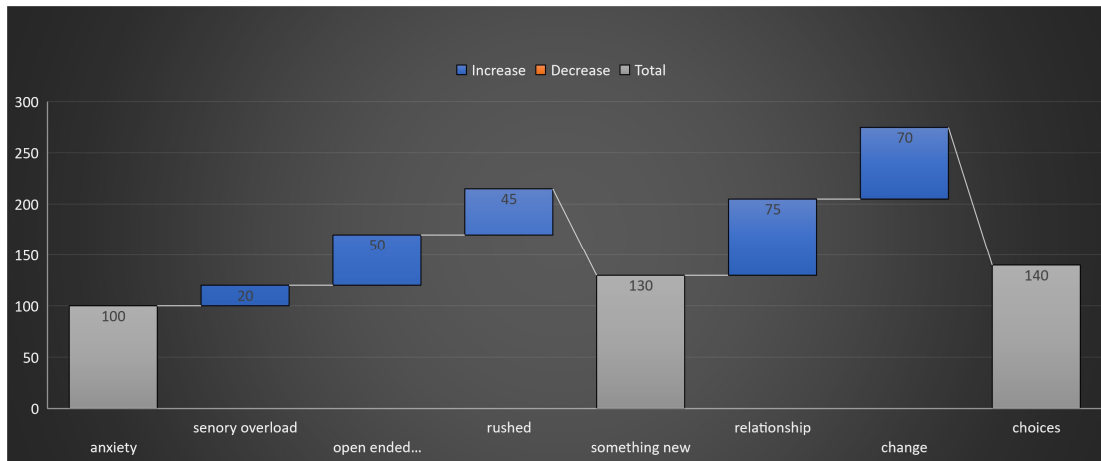


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Overload



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- Participation
- Behaviours

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Relationships



- friendship
- conversation
- social hierarchy
- Mum

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What are the
unique
challenges that
autistic girls
face at school?



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National Institute for
Health and Care Excellence

Assessment and diagnosis of autism: what to expect

A quick guide for young people and their families

Information

Support

Advice



"It was so relieved when I got my
diagnosis. It [gave me] recognition"
(Oliver, a person with autism)

March 2022

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- Prevalence
- Stereotypical perspective
- Presentation
- Recognition
- Assessment tools

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Compensation

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A colorful comic book illustration. It shows a close-up of a person's face, focusing on their mouth and eyes. A finger is pressed against their lips in a 'shh' gesture. Above the face, a yellow speech bubble contains the text "PSSST...!". The person has blue hair and a large, detailed blue eye.

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Whole-school approaches to supporting autistic girls



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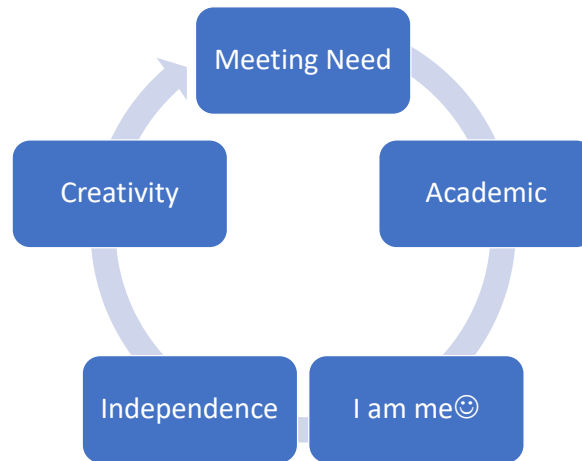
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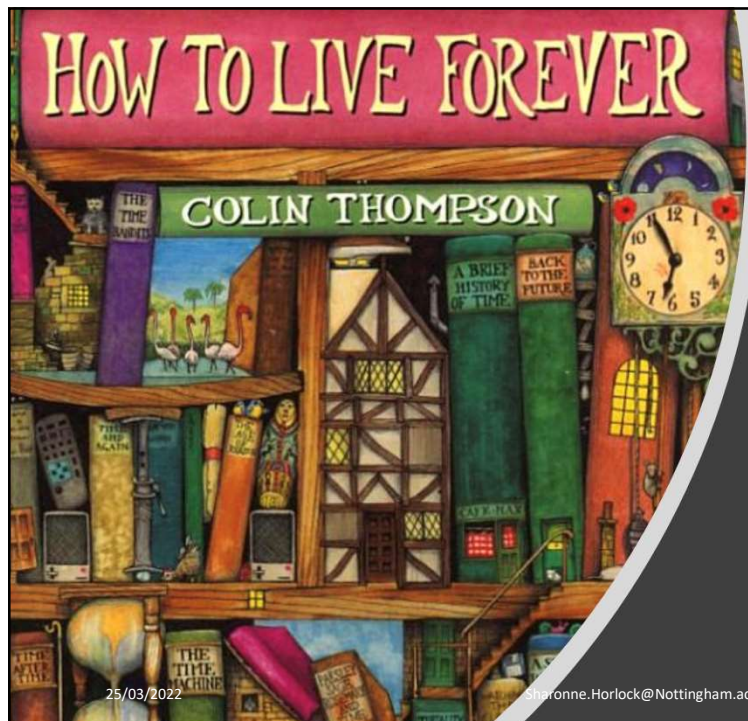
Curriculum: Expectations



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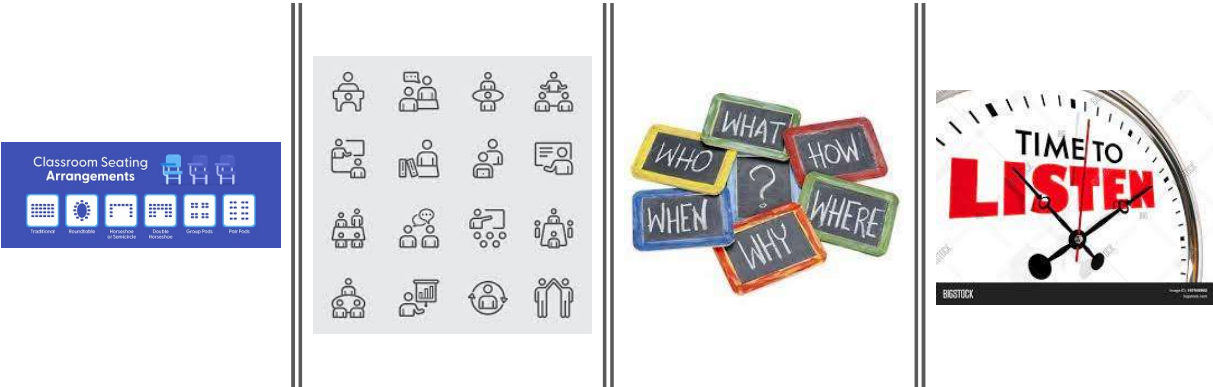


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Differentiation

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Classroom Seating Arrangements

Traditional Roundtable Encouraging Participation Double Seating Group Pods Free Pods

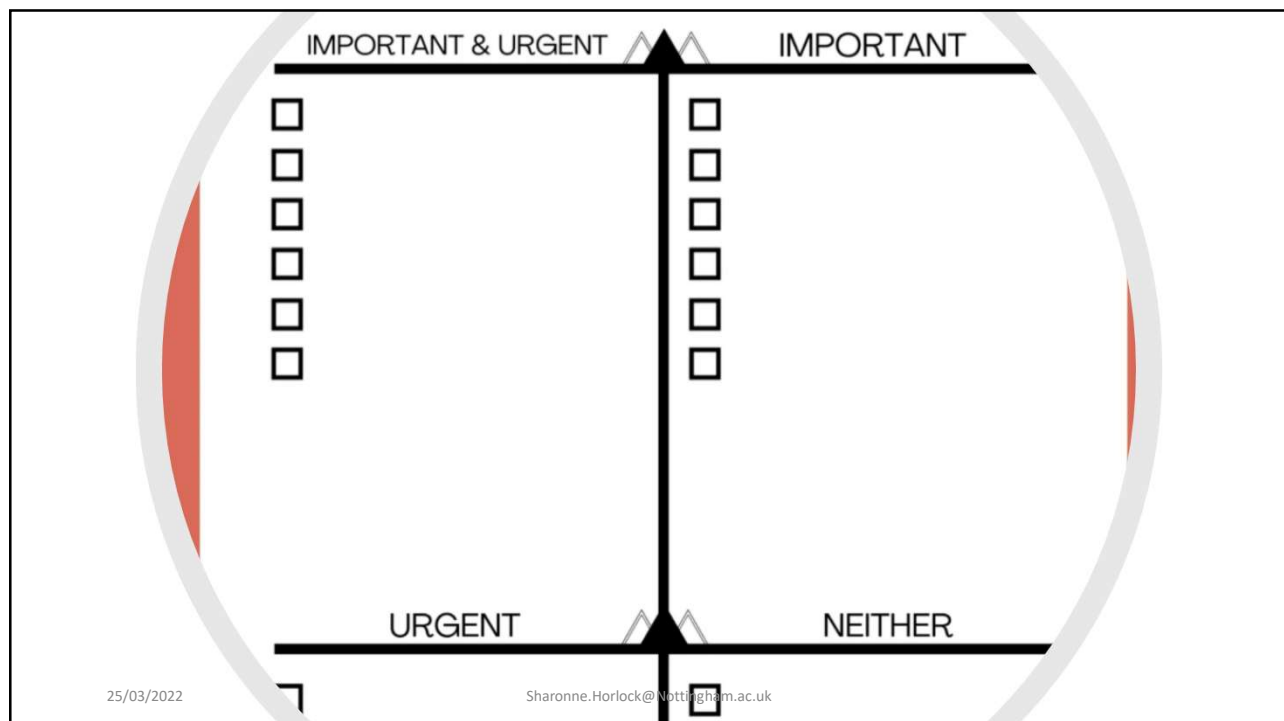
WHAT WHO WHEN WHY HOW WHERE

TIME TO LISTEN

Adjusting classroom teaching strategies and communication to support girls on the autism spectrum

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School Ethos

Kindness

Fulfilling and Fun

Proud

Relationship

Wellbeing

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Framing the Research: #actuallyautisticgirls

• Autism is 'a lifelong, neurodevelopmental disability' (National Autistic Society 2019), that is behaviourally assessed and diagnosed by medical doctors. Autistic individuals experience challenges in social interactions and communication, and narrow and repetitive interests and activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2019;). This research explores the becoming identity of adolescent autistic girls within the context of an English mainstream secondary school. Historically autism was recognised as a predominantly male condition. Previously therefore, much research has utilized male samples. Recognition of autistic girls continues to increase although this is not straightforward. The journey to achieving a diagnosis is complex and may be influenced by for example, differential gender presentation, biological and environmental factors, gender-specific behavioural expectations, theoretical perspectives and myths that expound 'maleness' of the phenomenon and, the diagnostic assessment tools used. An increasing awareness of female autism has led to greater participation in research. However, many centre on aetiology, prevalence, screening tools and diagnosis and sex differences. Those studies that consider school contexts often use primary school aged children, explore interventions that will increase desirable behaviours or focus on parent/carer/teacher perspective. There is a need for intelligent sympathetic research that listens, hears, and gives voice. This qualitative research invites autistic girls aged between 13 and 18 who have experienced English mainstream education as a female to use creative methods to answer the question, 'Who am I?' A subsequent conversation with me will be an opportunity to explore these responses, experiences, perspectives and ideas about mainstream school. It will be used to understand how school has contributed to the becoming autistic identity.

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The Lived Experiences of Autistic Girls

#actuallyautisticgirls

PURPOSE: I am very interested to understand your secondary school experiences and who you are as an autistic girl.

I am seeking autistic girls aged 14-17 years old with;

Experience of mainstream secondary school

Access to a smartphone, laptop or computer

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

- You will answer the question, 'Who Am I?' using creative methods of your choice (for example, storyboards, paintings, photography, sewing, writing, the list is endless)
- Firstly, we will meet online to introduce one another and discuss the project, brainstorm ideas and agree time frames.
- After you have answered the question, 'Who Am I?' you will have a conversation with the researcher explore your responses.

For more information, please contact Sharonne.Horlock@Nottingham.ac.uk

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Thank you for listening

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