



# Navigating Conflict in Neurodivergent Relationships

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# Relationships are critical to our quality of life.

Healthy relationships reduce adversity's impact, improve longevity, and help us foster self-worth and self-esteem.

However, research indicates that **individuals with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are likelier to experience short-lived and high-conflict relationships.** In this workshop, we will discuss common relationship struggles, interventions, and practical strategies for navigating conflict when it arises.

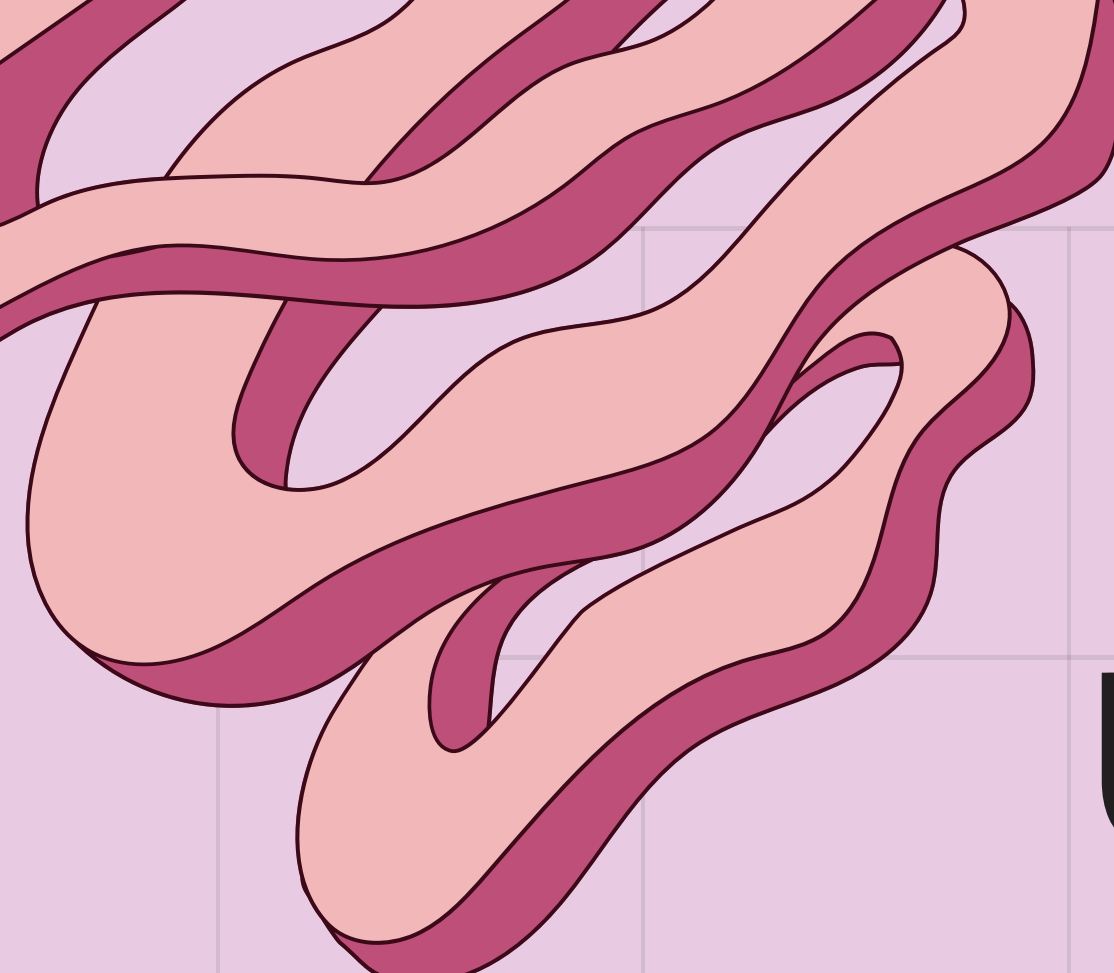
Whether you're neurotypical or neurodivergent, this presentation offers tools to **enhance communication, deepen understanding, and build stronger bonds.**

**Healthy relationships are especially important for people who are more likely to be marginalized by society due to mental illness.**

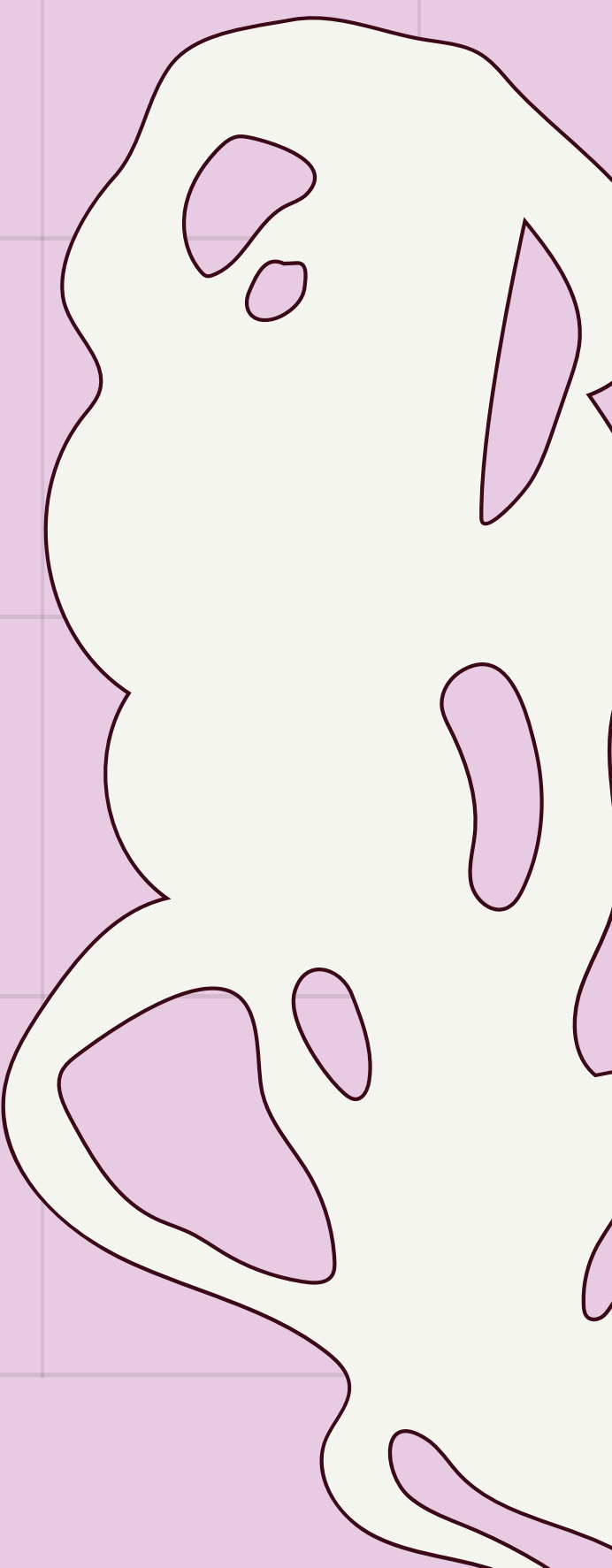
Individuals with mental illness are more likely to become **victims of abuse.**

Studies suggest that children on the spectrum are up to **3x as likely** as their neurotypical peers to be targets of bullying and abuse.





**Understanding  
reduces  
resentment.**



# Common causes of misunderstandings:

**Differing ways to achieve focus**

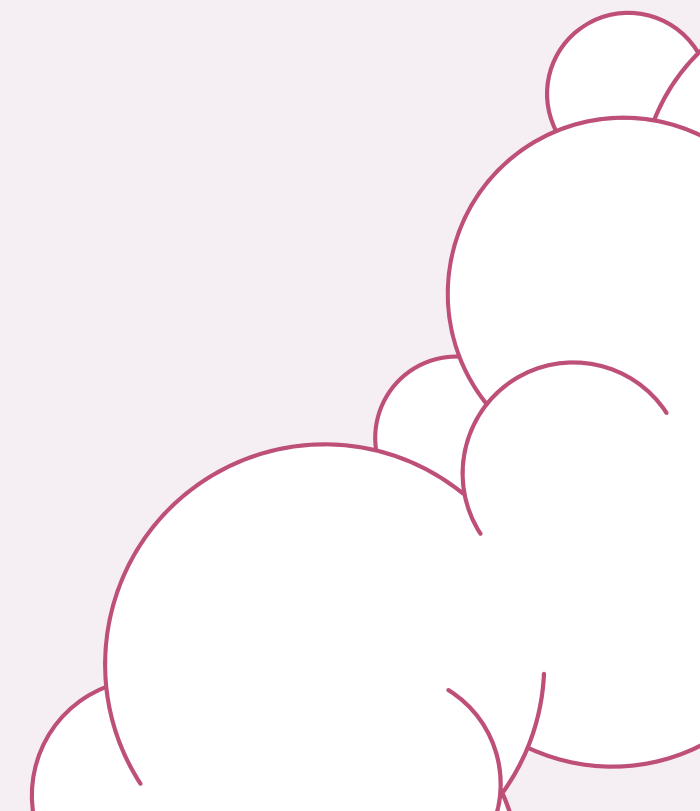
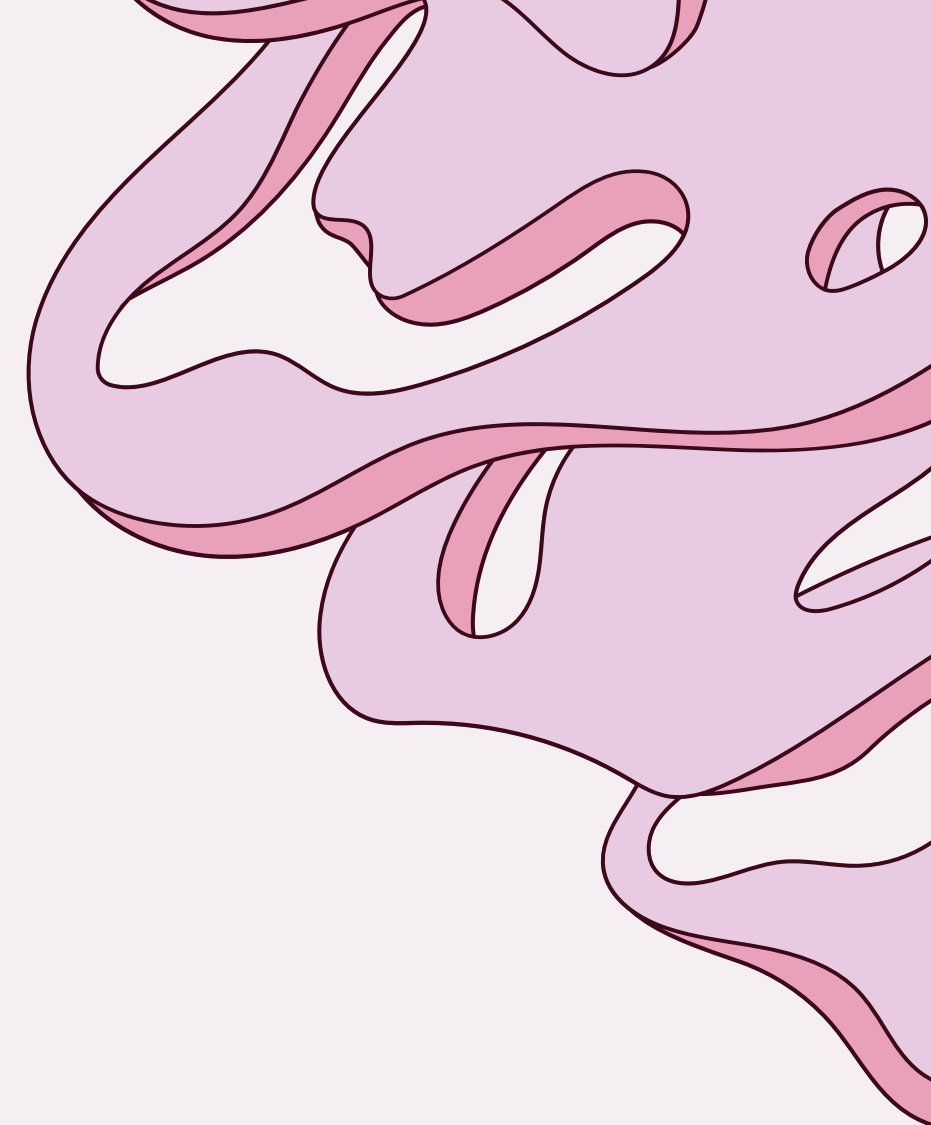
**Misunderstood needs for emotional regulation**


**Time management and routines**

**Household tasks and responsibilities**

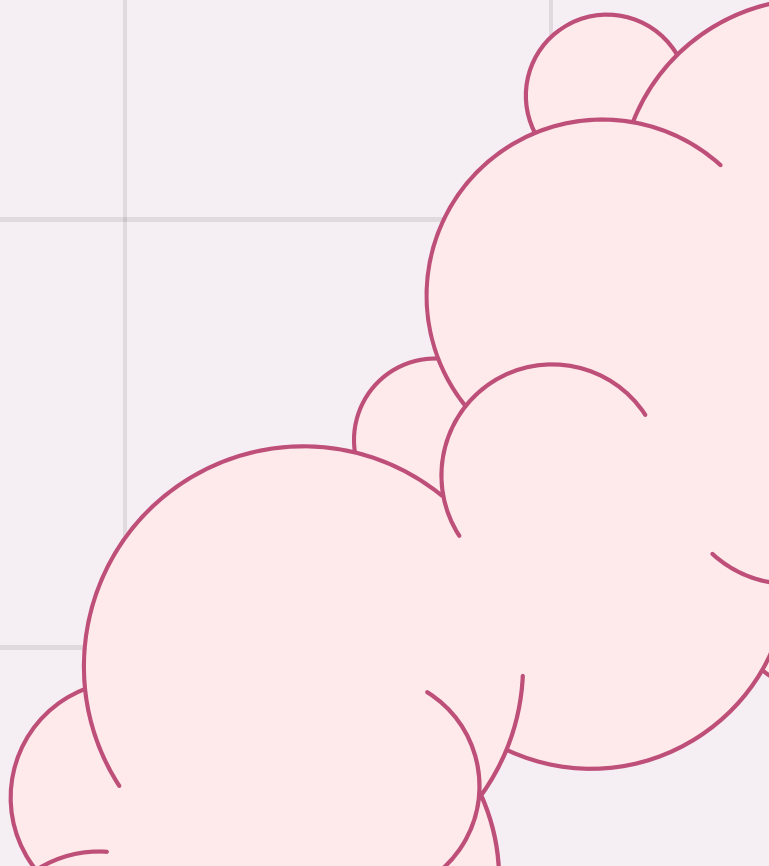
**Different interpretations of verbal and nonverbal cues**

**Understanding affective vs. cognitive empathy**





**Creating an  
environment of  
mutual respect.**



# **Don't treat others how you would want to be treated.**

**Communicate your wants and needs—and ask your loved one theirs rather than making assumptions based on your own.**

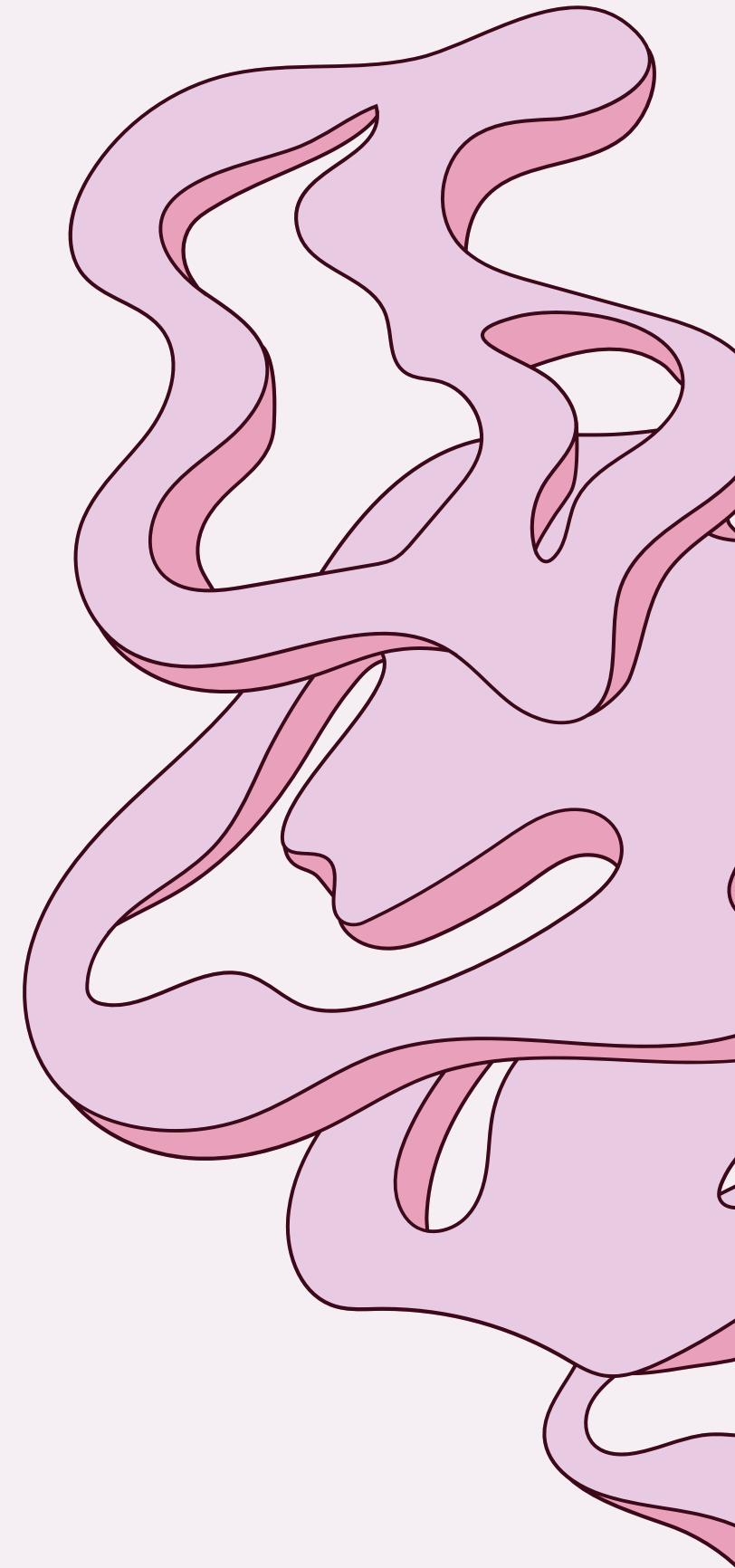
**No two neurodivergent or neurotypical people are the same, so avoid making snap judgments about someone's wants, abilities, or needs without asking.**

# **Collaborate instead of compromising.**


**In a compromise, at least one person must give up something important or meaningful.**

**In a collaborative environment, both parties come together to develop a mutually beneficial solution.**

**Ex: eye contact can equate to respect for some people and discomfort for others. A solution might be having the conversation over the phone so no one is uncomfortable.**







**Stop conflict before  
it starts with the  
HALT method.**

# Use the HALT method.

**HALT has two physical states (hungry and tired) and two emotional states (angry and lonely).**

**Check in with yourself periodically and ask how you're feeling in these four categories.**


**This helps you identify and use healthier coping mechanisms whenever one of these four areas is threatened.**

# Use the HALT method.

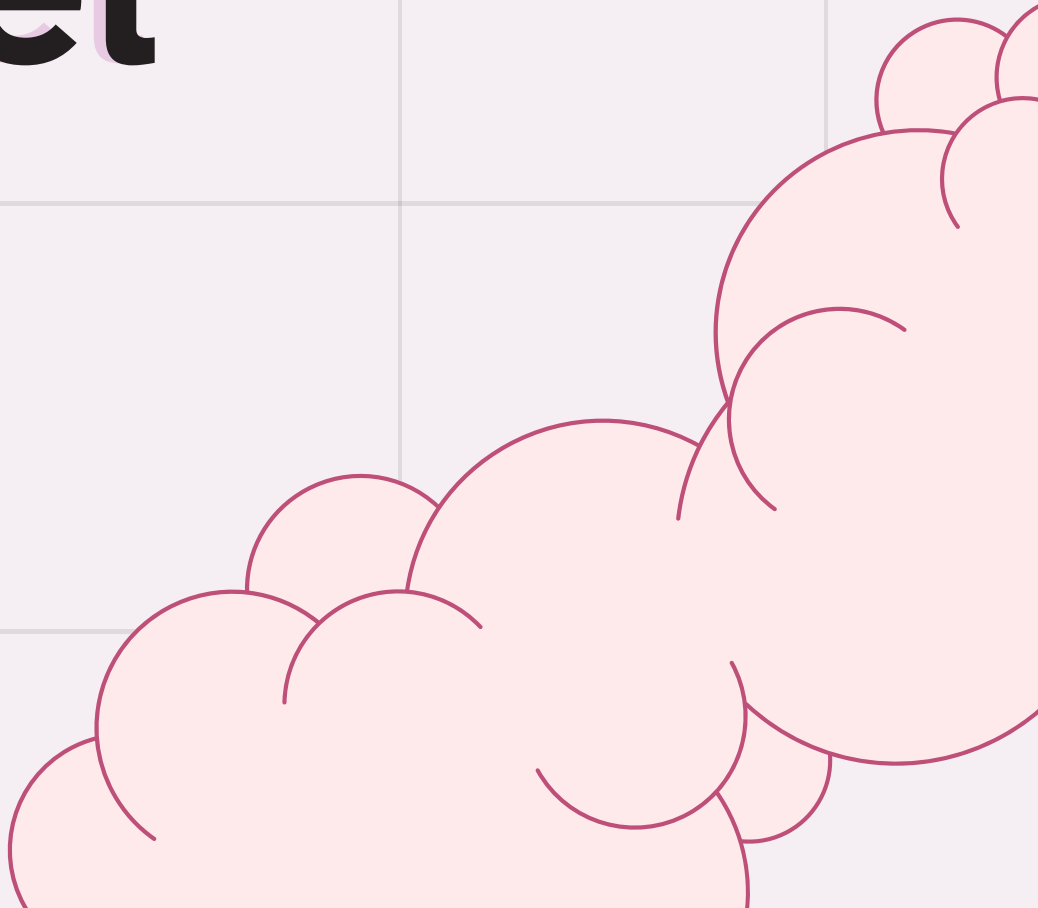
The HALT method improves your relationships and helps you strengthen your relationship with yourself.

This helps you pause (halt) and get to the root of how you're feeling and why more consistently, especially when you're stressed and unsure of the trigger.

Check-ins can occur daily or hourly; how often you use the HALT method is up to you.



**Take space  
preemptively when  
things start to feel  
heated.**



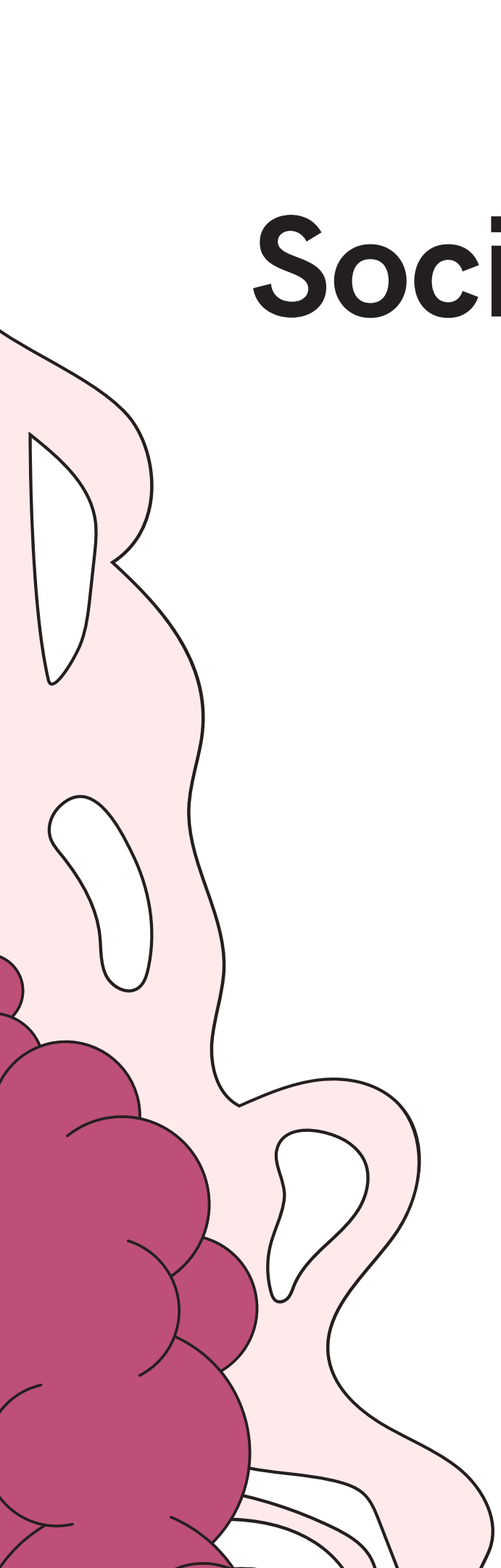
# In-the-moment self-regulation activities:

- Moving to an environment where you feel safer or more at peace
- Cold exposure
- Breathwork
- Singing or listening to music
- Journaling
- Exercise
- Calling a friend
- Giving yourself and your loved ones time to regulate

# Self-care for neurodivergent people:

- Acceptance and access to social support
- Formal supports:
  - Therapy or coaching specific to your needs
  - Advocating for accommodations
  - Taking time off from work or school when needed
- Caring for your body via exercise and nutrition
- Exploring your unique strengths and interests
- Write or download social scripts in advance for conflict, saying no to plans, asking for more information, etc.

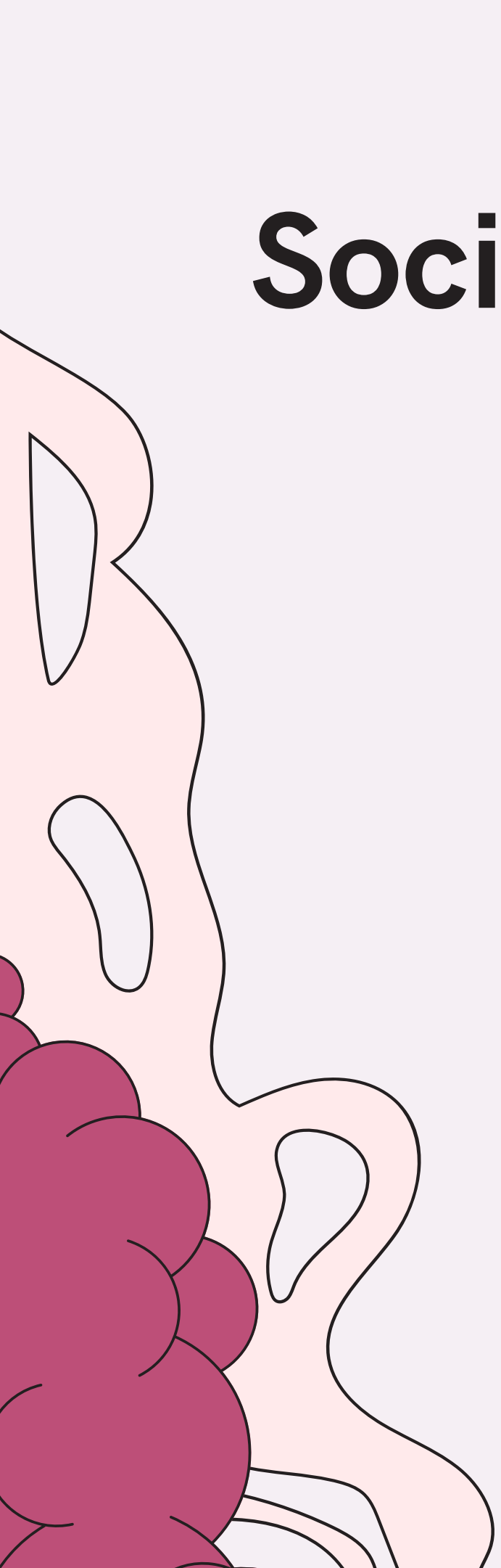
# Social Scripts: Meltdowns



**Simple:** Hey, I'm experiencing a meltdown/not feeling well, so I can't talk right now.

**Addendum for loved ones:** During an autistic meltdown, everything gets louder and painfully bright. I become hyperaware of sensations, and it's so uncomfortable. It feels like I've been holding a bucket of overwhelm, filling until everything explodes. This can result in an inability to speak and I become less aware of my surroundings. It feels exhausting, and I need to separate myself when this happens so we can communicate later.

# Social Scripts: Direct Communication



**Saying no:** Thanks for thinking of me! I can't make it to this, but I really appreciate the invite and hope I can see you soon.

**Needing more details:** Thanks for the invite! I have some chronic health stuff, so I have a couple of questions before I can commit. (How many people do you think will be there? How long will we be out? What kind of lighting or food does X place have?)



# Key Takeaways

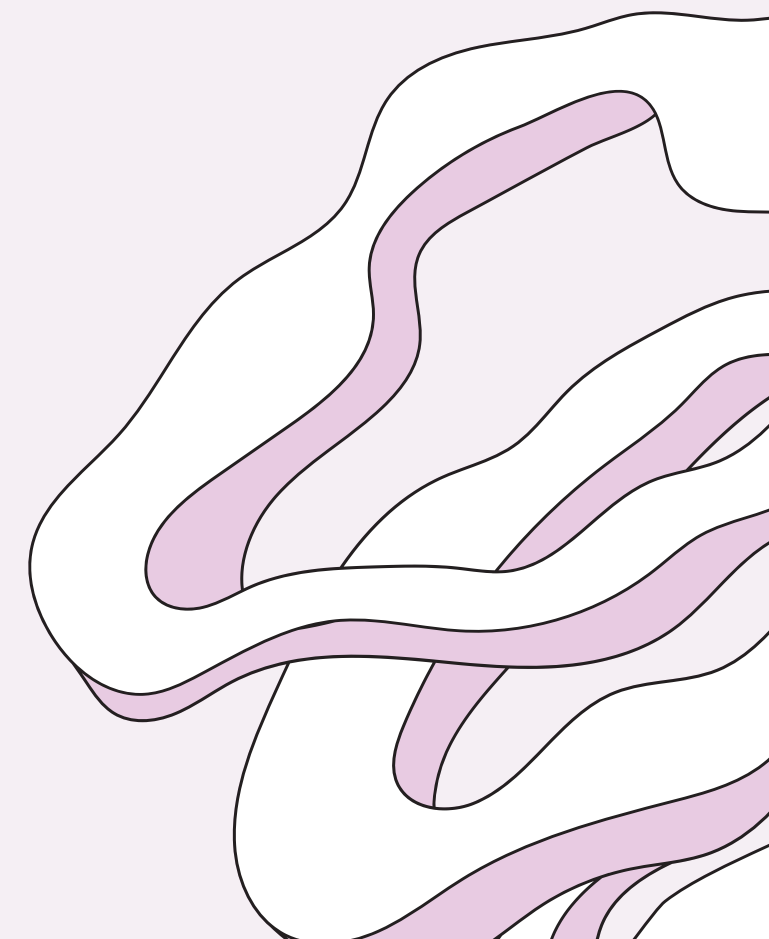
Be open to your loved one's unique experience; understanding reduces resentment.

Create an environment where everyone feels respected, and discuss *why* something isn't working.

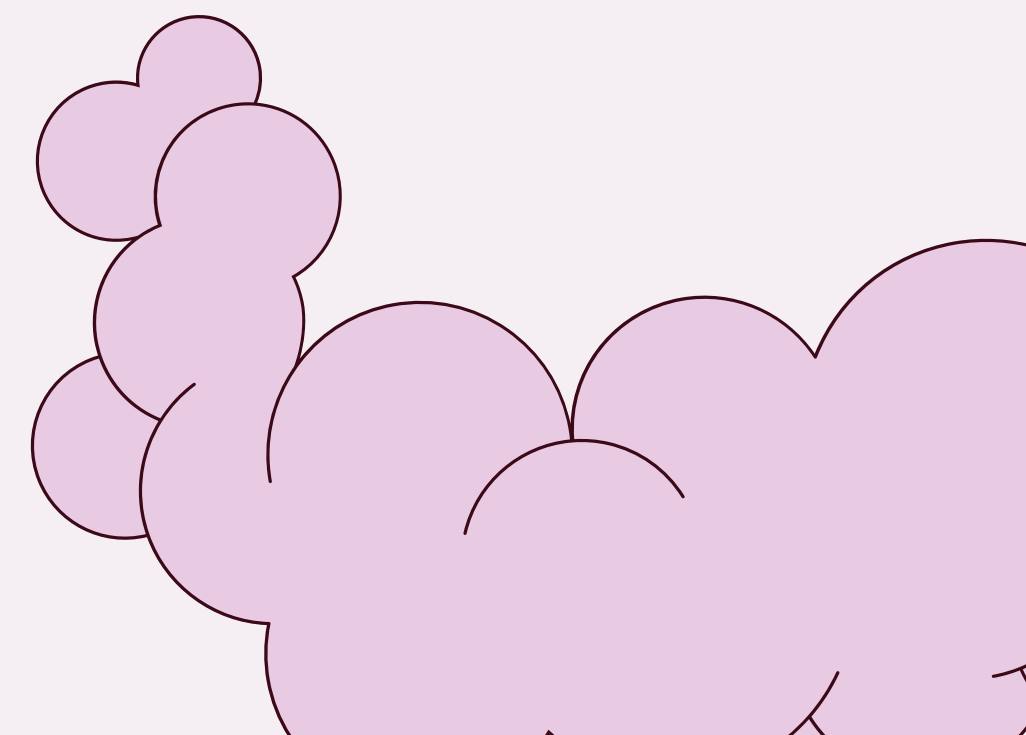
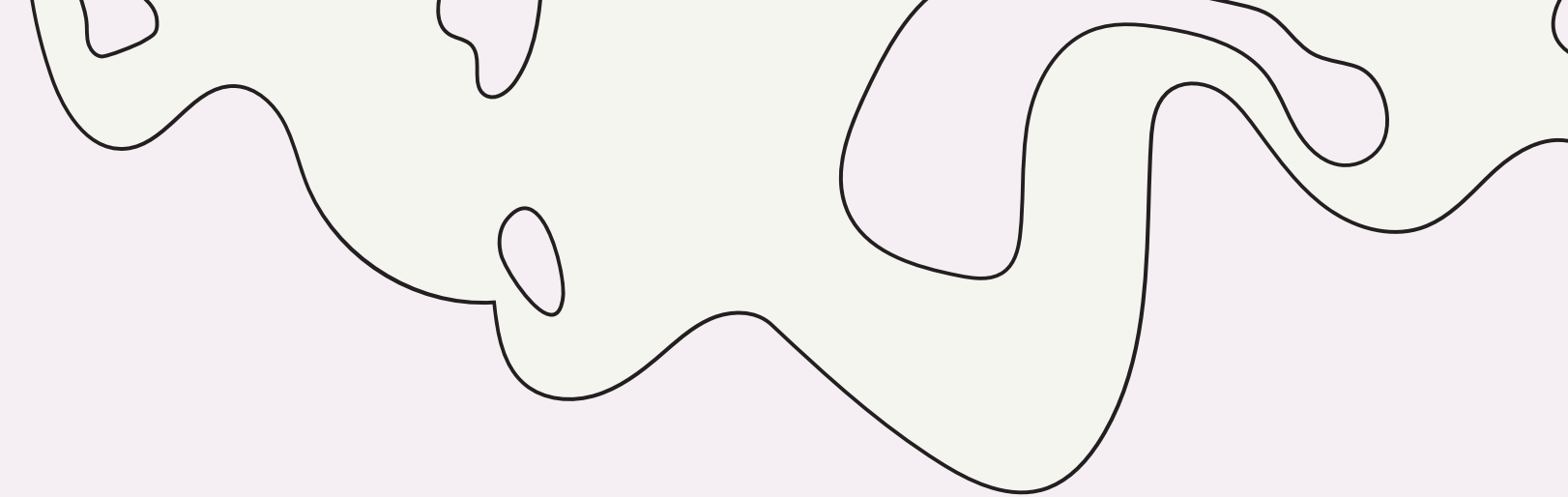
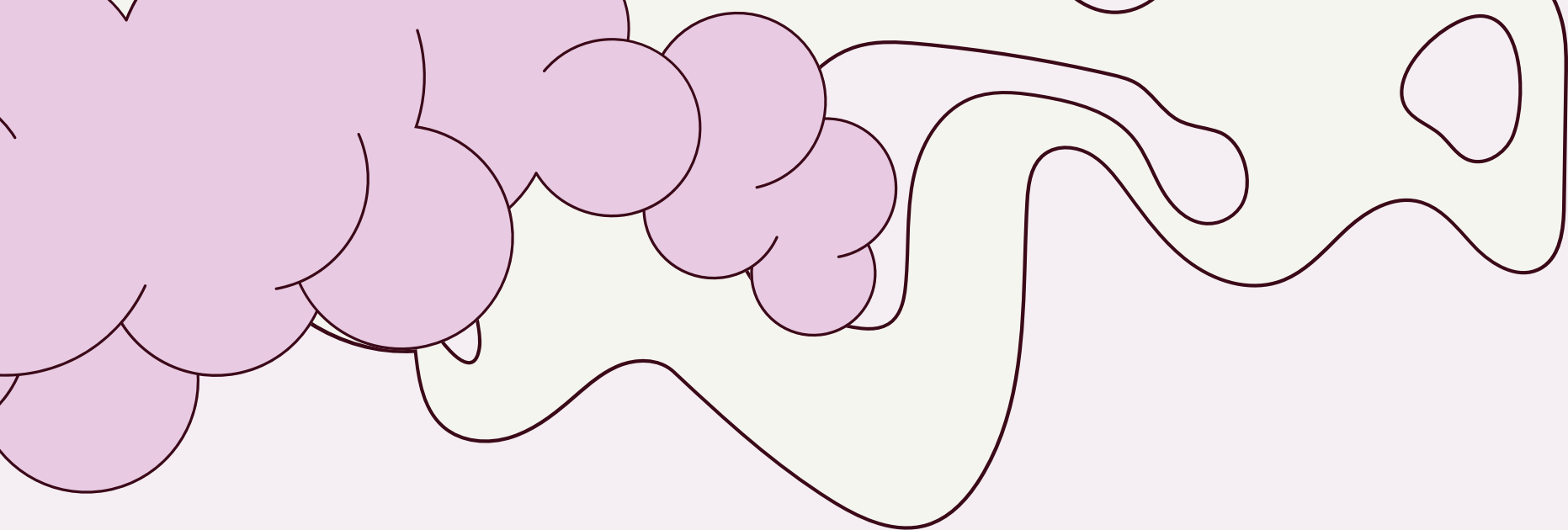
Find win-win solutions when issues arise rather than compromises.

Most general conflict resolution tools can be helpful, but the context might differ in neurodivergent relationships.

Develop and use social scripts for when you feel overwhelmed or not yet ready to discuss a certain topic.



# Q&A



# References:

