

Transforming Challenging Behaviors in Neurodivergent Youth Using an Appreciative Inquiry Approach

Presented by:
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The Summit, 2024





Outcomes



Identify and explain the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry and their application in supporting neurodivergent youth with behavioral and emotional challenges.

Demonstrate the integration of evidence-based behavioral interventions with Appreciative Inquiry techniques to foster emotional regulation and positive behavior in neurodivergent youth.

Develop individualized behavior support plans that leverage strengths, past successes, and positive reinforcement, using Appreciative Inquiry to set and achieve meaningful goals.

Applicable in any human interaction, including therapists, educators, and families.



Creating a Common Language



Neurodivergent



Challenging Behaviors

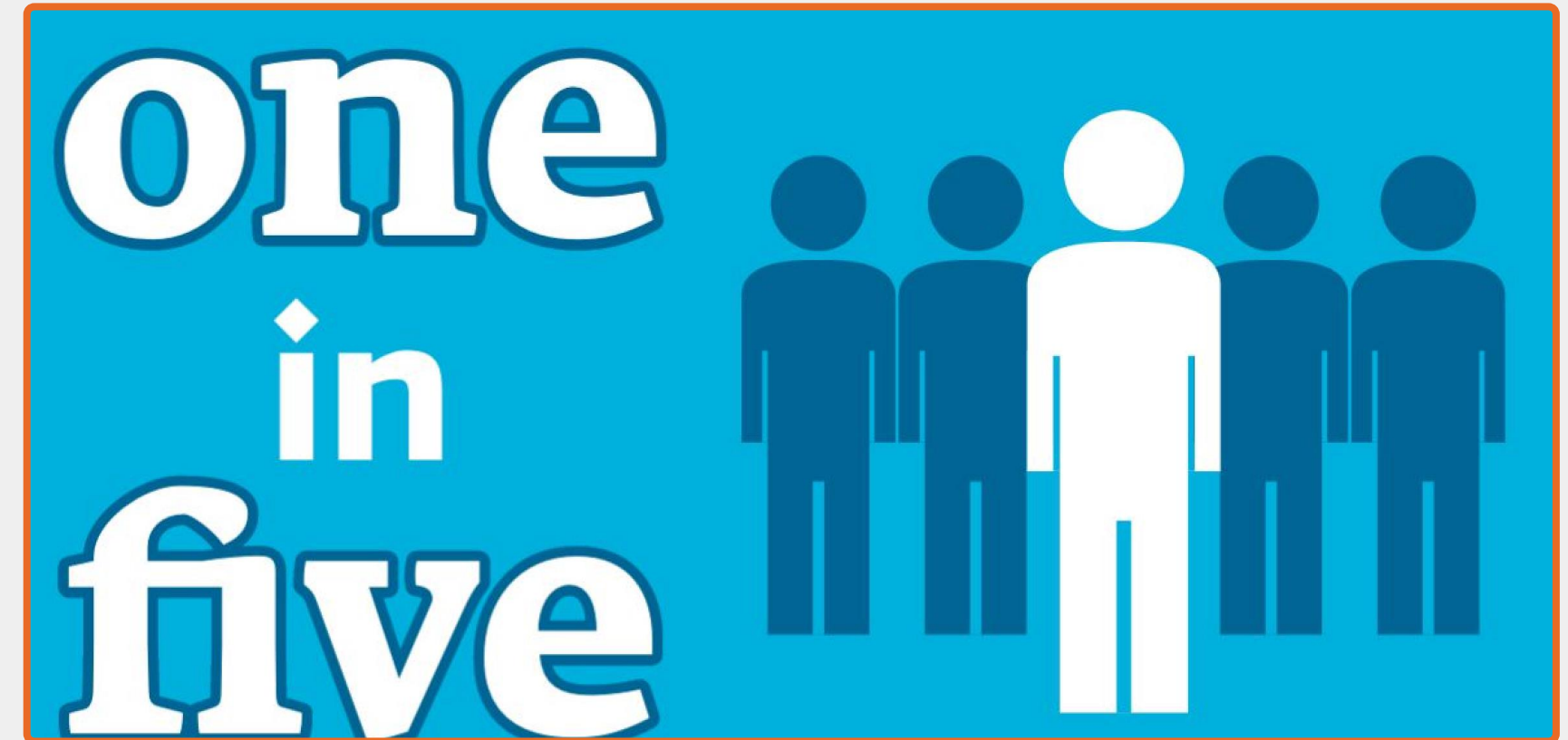


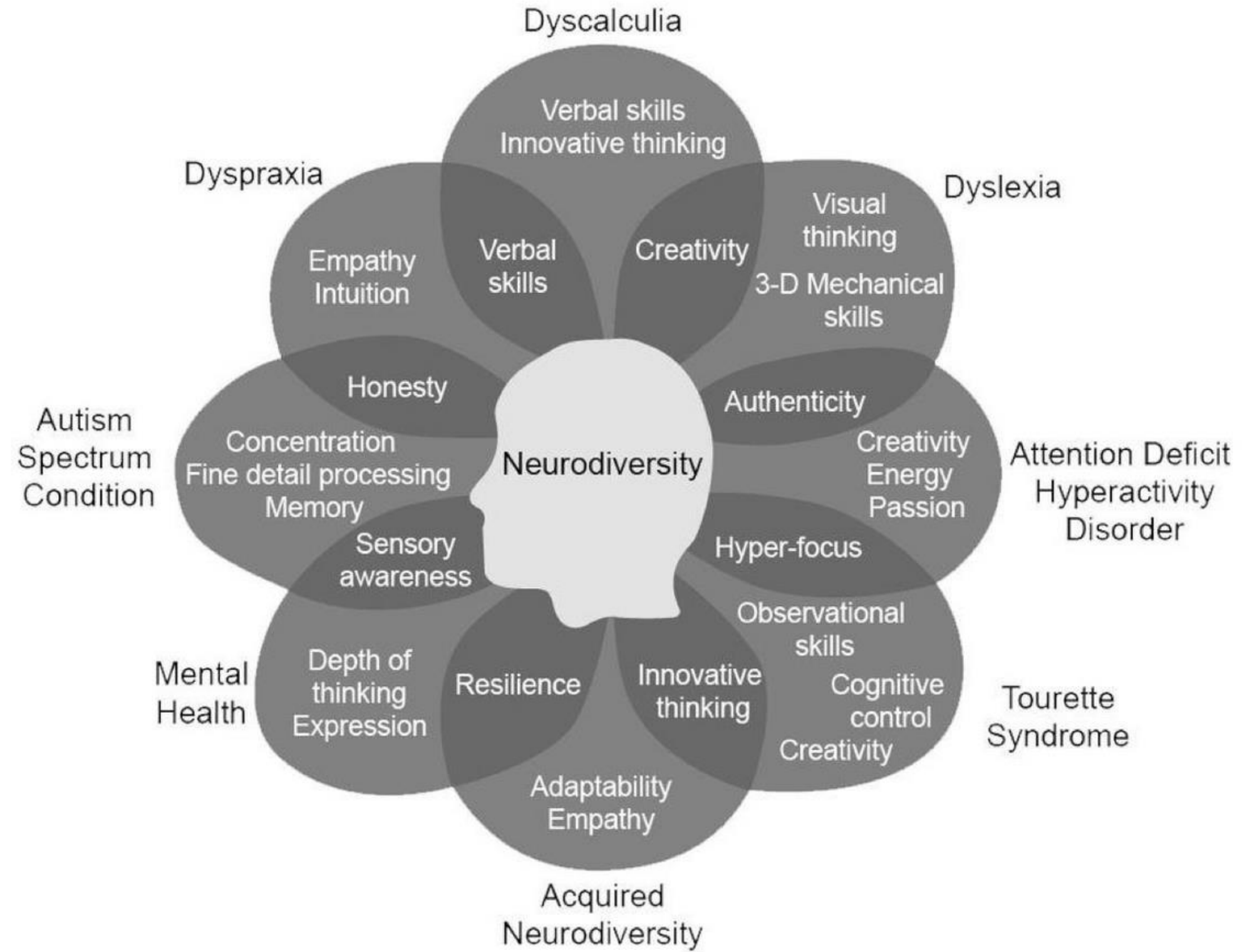
Appreciative Inquiry

- **Creating a Common Language**

Neurodivergent Youth

- Neurodivergence refers to the natural variations in human brain function, encompassing conditions such as Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Anxiety, Depression, and developmental differences such as Tourette's and Down syndrome.
- Prevalence: According to recent studies, approximately 15-20% of the population is considered neurodivergent (Butcher & Lane, 2024).





● CREATING A COMMON LANGUAGE

Common Challenging Behaviors



Behavioral Challenge	Can be misinterpreted as
Emotional Regulation	Outbursts Defiance or misconduct
Communication Barriers	Limited or Unique Communication Styles Can lead to Frustration, Aggression, or Withdrawal
Sensory Sensitivities	Overreacting Underreacting Anxiety, Withdrawal, Outbursts
Executive Functioning	Unorganized Impulsive Forgetful

Origins of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)



Developed in the 1980s: AI was first conceptualized by Dr. David Cooperrider and his advisor, Dr. Suresh Srivastva, at Case Western Reserve University as part of organizational development research.

Initial Purpose: Designed as a response to traditional problem-solving models, AI aimed to shift the focus to identifying and amplifying what works well within organizations and systems.

First Applications: Early studies were conducted in corporate settings to improve organizational culture, employee engagement, and leadership practices.

Key Research Milestones

Cooperrider & Whitney (2005):

Expanded the 4D Model (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny), which has become the cornerstone of AI methodology, supporting change processes in various fields.

Bushe (2013): Examined AI's transformative potential and found that its generative approach leads to significant cultural and behavioral shifts.

Lewis & Hardison (2019): Applied AI in educational settings and reported enhanced student engagement and behavior management.

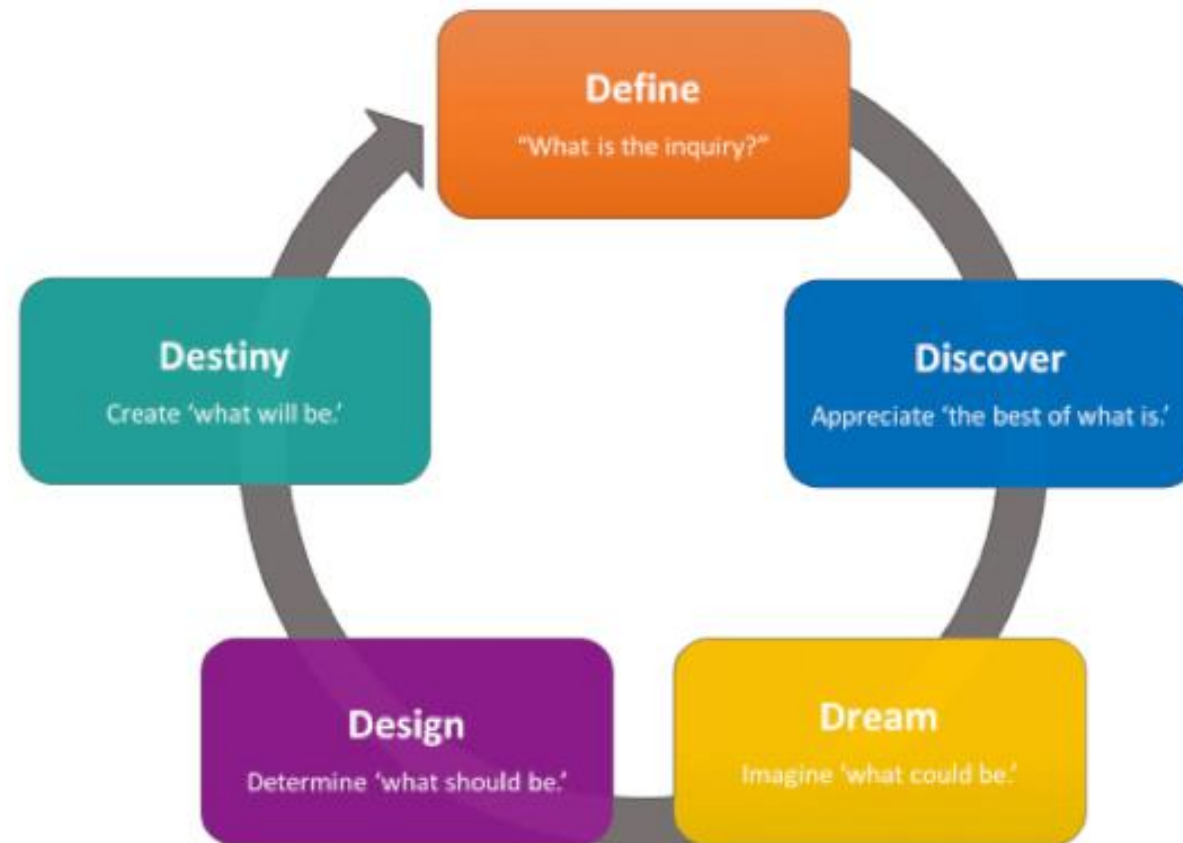
Horan (2018): Extended current theories to create generative questions in change of thinking, generative discourse in dialogue to cultivate powerful relationships, and co-created narratives to transform learning behaviors.

- CREATING A COMMON LANGUAGE



Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry- 5-D Cycle



Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a **strengths-based, collaborative change management approach** that focuses on identifying and leveraging what works well within an organization, community, or individual to drive positive change.

THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Constructionist Principle

We co-create our reality through conversations with one another
(Relationship Reality)

Principle of Simultaneity

The questions we ask and words we speak ignite change the
moment they are spoken.

Anticipatory Principle

Images of what we want inspire and stimulate our actions and
move us closer to our preferred future.

Poetic Principle

There are endless stories being told, and the stories we choose to
focus on make a difference

Positive or Generative Principle

Our emotions influence what we do or think in a situation. Positive
emotions invite positive questions that result in positive change.

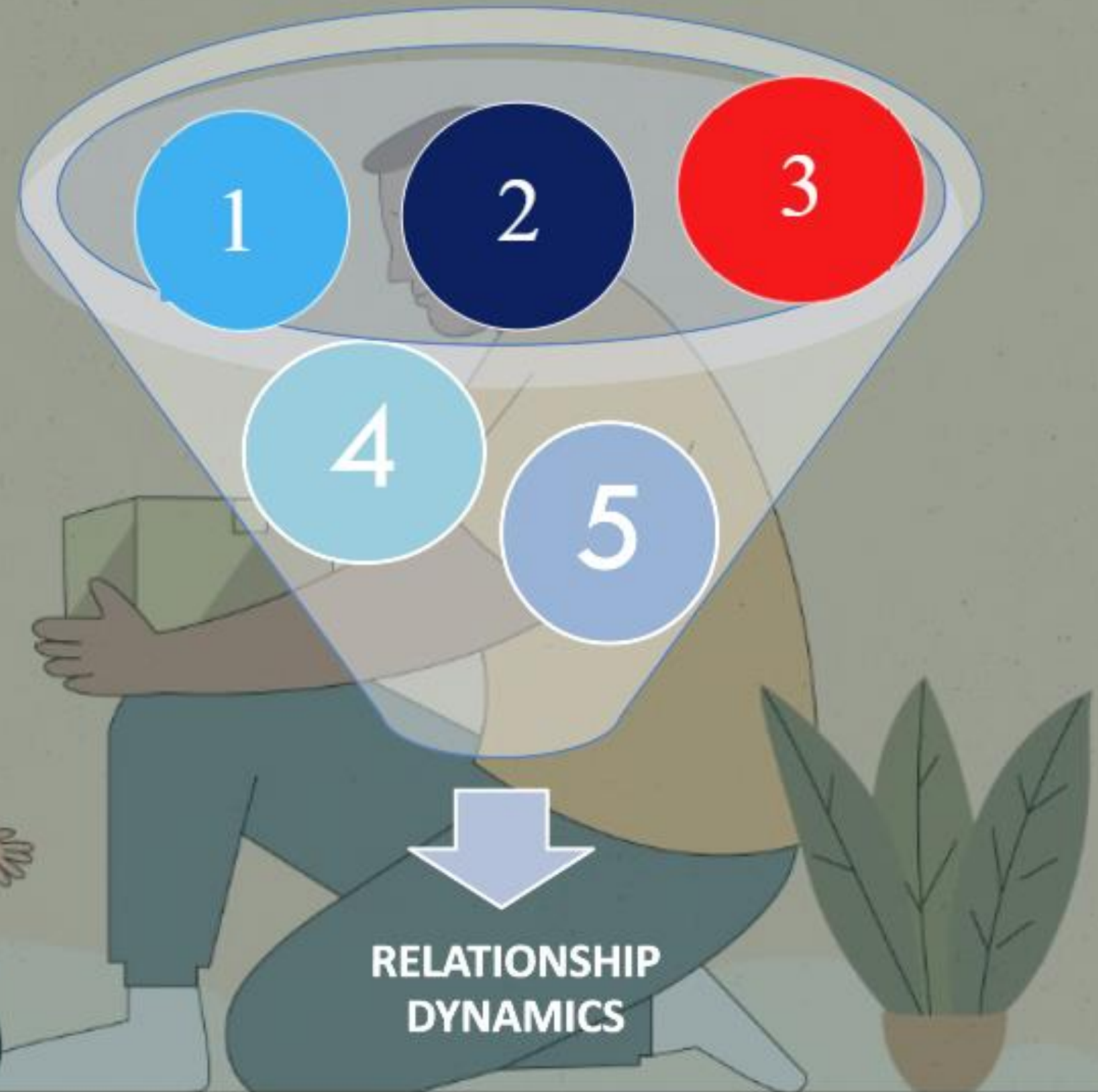
Constructionist Principle

Principle of Simultaneity

Anticipatory Principle

Poetic Principle

Positive or Generative
Principle



What is Appreciative Inquiry?

An opportunity for appreciating the best in yourself, others, and situations!

A method for co-creating and imagining images of an inspiring and desired future!

Co-Evolutionary Process
for Positive change

A path towards designing a plan of action that leads to a desired future!

A process for realizing, utilizing, and sustaining a desired future that has been achieved!

Applications Beyond Organizations



- Broader Contexts:** Research indicates that AI has been effective in educational settings, coaching, therapy practices, and community programs. It has helped foster emotional regulation, resilience, and adaptive behavior among individuals and groups.

- Empirical Evidence:** Studies show that AI's focus on strengths and co-creation leads to increased trust, collaboration, and empowerment.



Task 1: Jot in the Space Below

Examples:

Never in class
Has no motivation
Does not listen
Acts impulsively
Consequences don't matter
Argumentative
Does not think about others
Constantly shouting out
Meltdowns when told "no"
Needs to put forth more effort
Noncompliant
Rigid and Stubborn

Define

Discover

Dream

Design

Deliver

Task 1: Jot in the Space Below

Define

Discover

Dream

Design

Deliver

Your Examples

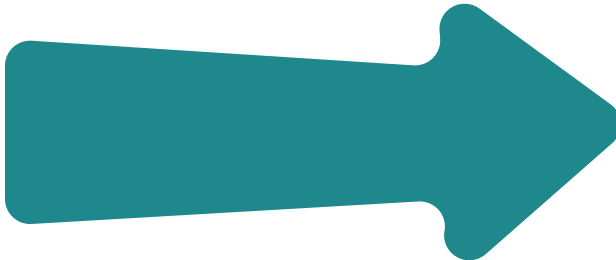


Define

- **Purpose:** To reframe problems into a solution based approach.
- **Key Question:** From your list of challenges, are there similar behaviors? Is one behavior more prevalent? What is the behavior we want to explore and improve?
- **Explanation:** This phase sets the stage for discovering multiple possibilities of how to address behaviors. In this stage, take time to inquire and explore the problems in order to create an affirmative topic of inquiry through questions.



Task 1: Jot in the Space Below



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Define

Examples:

Student struggles to follow classroom routines.
How can we support the student in successfully navigating classroom routines?

Student does not care about school.
How can we use the student's interests to engage them in learning?

Student is rigid and noncompliant.
How might we create an environment where the student experiences success and agency?

Define: Guiding Questions



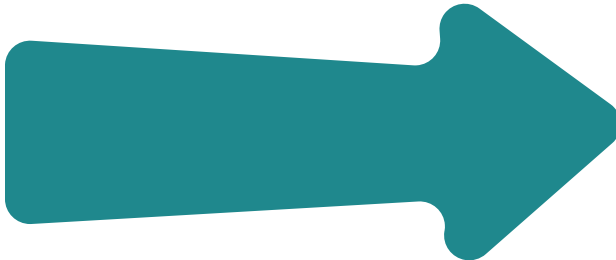
Defining Questions should be generative and affirmative.

- How can we support the social, emotional, and academic needs of a neurodivergent youth?
- How can we promote self-awareness?
- How do we shape behaviors into socially acceptable actions?
- How can we create a neurodivergent affirming environment that allows for student success and agency?

**Do not solve or answer these questions yet. Form the question first.*



Task 1: Jot in the Space Below



Examples:

- Never in class*
- Has no motivation*
- Does not listen*
- Acts impulsively*
- Consequences don't matter*
- Argumentative*
- Does not think about others*
- Constantly shouting out*
- Meltdowns when told "no"*
- Needs to put forth more effort*
- Noncompliant*
- Rigid and Stubborn*

Define

Define the problem.
Create your generative and affirming question.

Discover

Dream

Design

Deliver

Discover



Discover

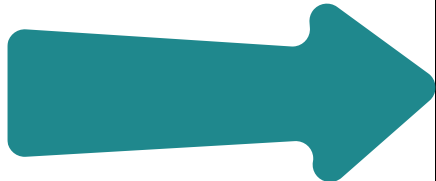
- Purpose: Identify what is working well. This process can have multiple forms: 1:1 or with a team approach.
- Key Question: What are the strengths and successes we can build upon?
- Explanation: The Team or the youth shares stories and experiences that highlight the best of what currently exists. This phase fosters a sense of pride and optimism and sets a positive tone for the process. (Affirming lens)

Discover: Guiding Questions



- What is something that is currently working or has worked in the past?
- What is the individual good at?
- What moments have made the individual feel confident and valued?
- What is something that helps the individual feel calm and regulated?
- Who has a positive connection with the individual?



<div>Task 1: Jot in the Space Below</div> <div></div> <div><p>In the Discover Phase, there are 2 key components. Asking questions that allow for discovery and recording the answers from the discovery phase. This allows you to identify strengths, themes and patterns.</p><p>You want to capture moments where the individual was thriving and discovering “the best of what is” through storytelling. Practice this with a partner.</p><p><i>You know it is working when the interviewer is feeling the same emotion of the person sharing the story.</i></p></div>	<div>Define</div> <div>How can we support the student in successfully navigating classroom routines?</div>
	<div>Discover</div> <div>Tell me about a time when you had a good day at school? What happened? How did you feel? (Record the answers to these questions)</div>
	<div>Dream</div>
	<div>Design</div>
	<div>Deliver</div>

Dream



- Purpose: Envision a future based on the strengths discovered.
- Key Question: What would the ideal situation look like if we expanded on our strengths?
- Explanation: This phase encourages participants to use their imagination and creativity to picture an improved future. It helps align aspirations and builds a collective vision.



Dream: Guiding Questions

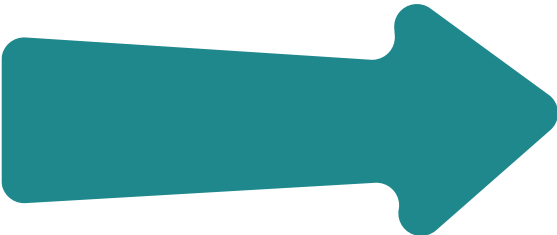


- What would a perfect school day look like for you/the student?
- How would you feel at the end of a “perfect” school day? How would you tell?
- What would an ideal support system for look like if we had unlimited resources?
- If you (youth) could change anything about _____ what would it be?
- If the youth was thriving and managing emotions, what kinds of strategies or tools might they be using?
- When are you at your best? The happiest?



Task 1: Jot in the Space Below

Define
Discover
Dream
Design
Deliver

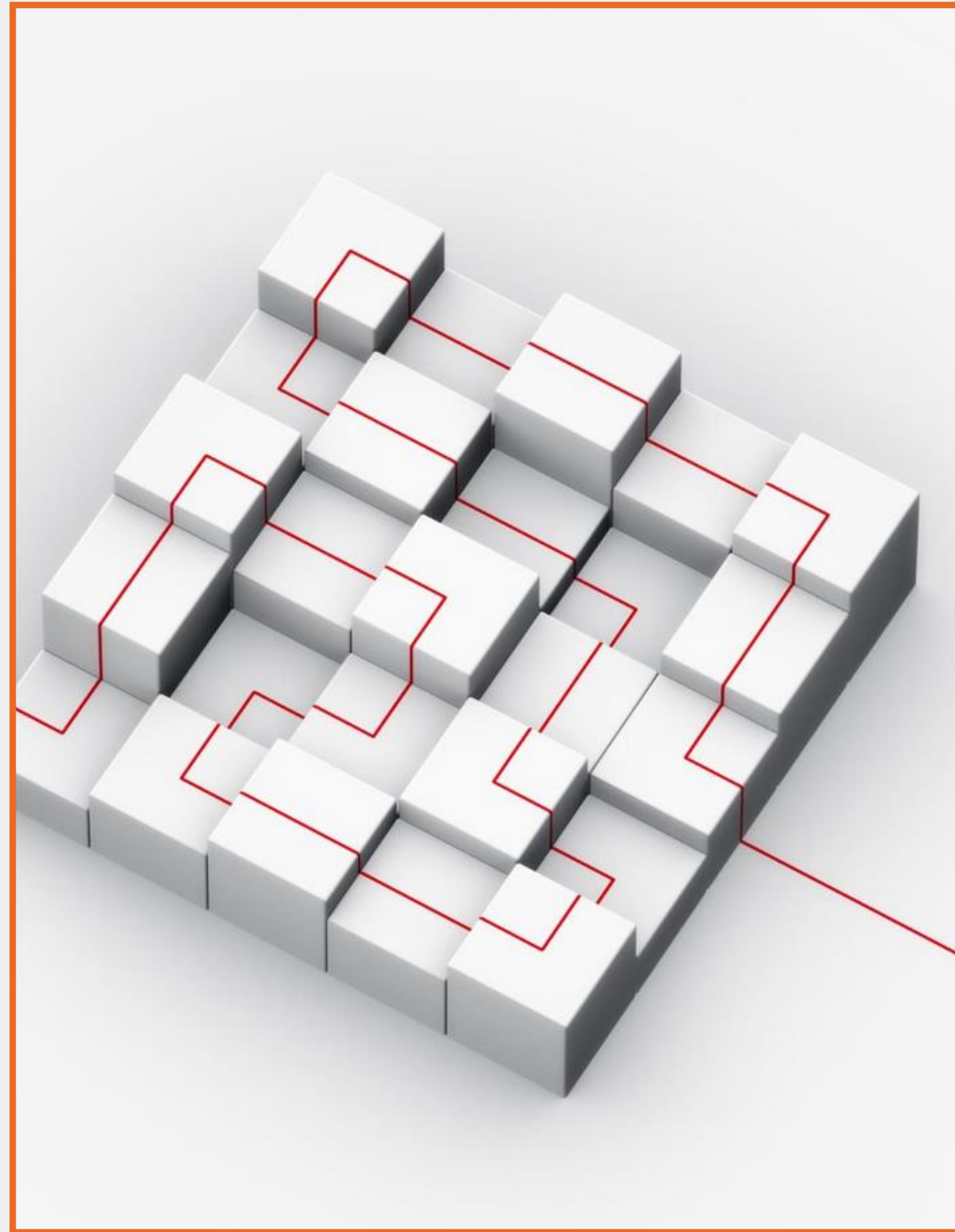


You want to ask your partner to dream
about “the best of what could be.”

Encourage them to dream big, without
limitations, and imagine.

Record their answers.

Design



- **Purpose:** Co-create action plans and strategies to move toward the vision.
- **Key Question:** How do we design systems, structures, and processes that will support our strengths and our dreams?
- **Explanation:** Take “**The Best of What Is**” and “**The Best of What Could Be**” to design “**The Best of What Should Be.**”



Highlight the strengths from the **Discovery Phase**, and the wishes from the **Dream Phase**, to create **Possibility Statements** of “**What Should Be.**”

What are ideas that can bring us closer to our desired reality? Create 3-5 statements.

Example:

Dr. Horan’s Student Teacher

To help a child identify their feelings, utilizing their passion for animation, we will allow the youth to create sketches of emotions in a digital format.

(Reference the Define Stage, Describe the need in an affirmative statement, utilize the strengths and dreams, to create the possibilities.



	Define
	Discover
	Dream
	Design
	Deliver

Delivery



- Purpose: Implement and sustain the new strategies and practices.
- Key Question: How do we make the vision a reality and maintain momentum?
- Explanation: This phase focuses on action, empowerment, and maintaining the momentum of change. It involves ongoing reflection, adjustment, and celebration of successes as the new systems are put into practice.



Delivery: Guiding Questions



- How will we begin implementing these strategies in a way that feels manageable and consistent?
- What specific steps will we take each day to put these strategies into action?
- How can we ensure everyone involved has what they need to support this plan from the start?
- What signs will indicate that a strategy is working well, or that adjustments may be needed? (*Revisit the Define and Dream Phase*)
- What small, regular celebrations can we incorporate to keep momentum and enthusiasm high?
- What can we do to foster a sense of self-motivation and independence as the plan is implemented?



Task 1: Jot in the Space Below

Define

Discover

Dream

Design

Deliver

Create an action plan, based on your **Possibility
Statements** to deliver on
“What Will Be.”

Example: SMART Goal
Specific
Measurable
Actionable
Relevant
Timely

*How? Who? When? For How Long?
When to revisit?*



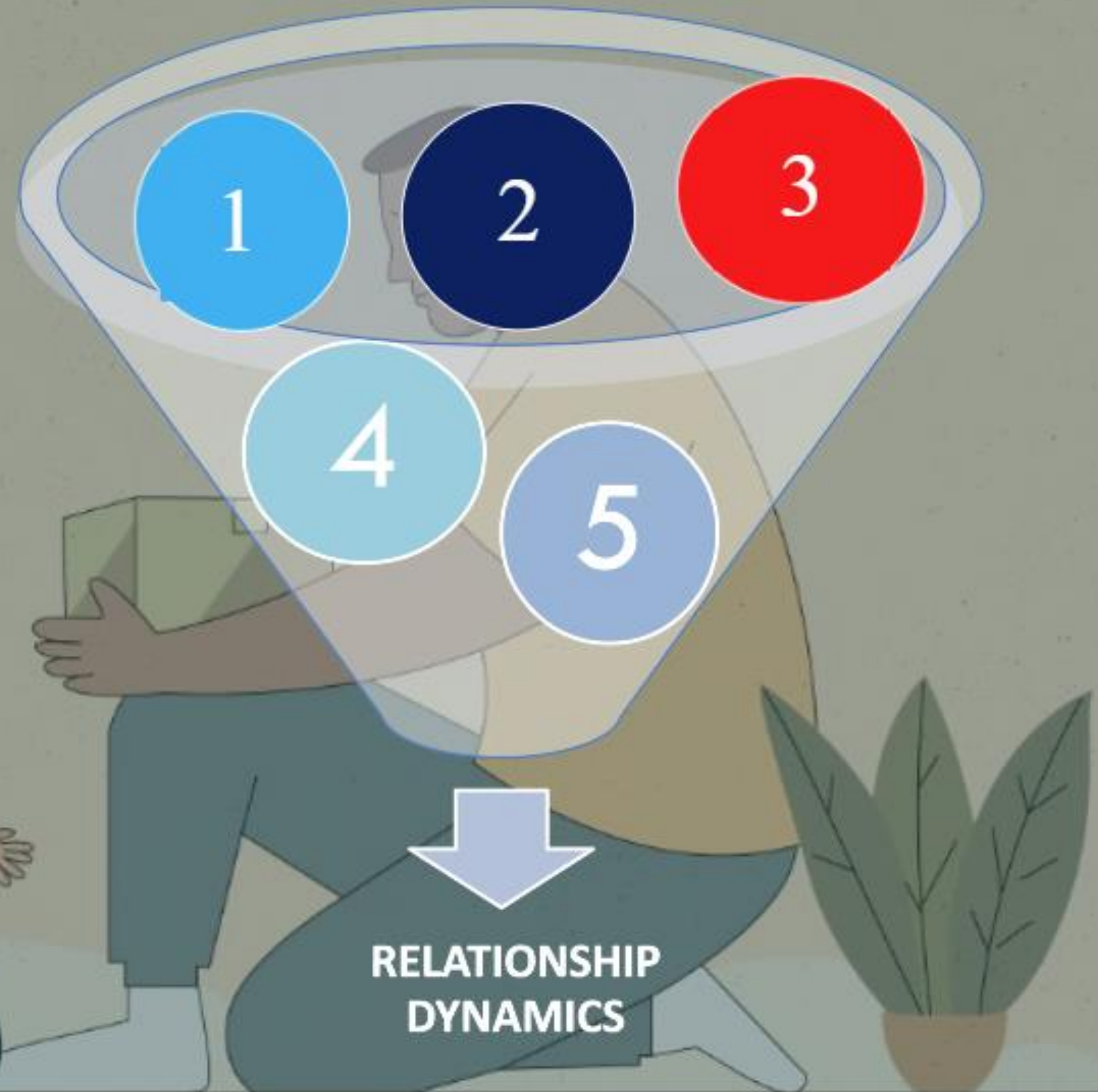
Constructionist Principle

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How AI is Effective in Transforming Challenging Behaviors in Neurodivergent Youth

Fosters Positive Relationships: AI builds trust between students and educators/therapists/adults, creating an environment where students feel valued.

Empowers Youth: By focusing on strengths, youth gain confidence and ownership over their behavior.

Reinforces Resilience: AI shifts the narrative from problem-focused to potential-focused, which strengthens emotional resilience.

Research Aligned with Utilizing Appreciative Inquiry to Support Neurodivergent Youth

Integrating positive psychology with behavioral interventions in education is beneficial in enhancing student engagement and emotional regulation. (Seligman)

Individualized behavior support plans that are based on student strengths improve the self-efficacy and motivation of students. (Bandura)

Positive emotions broaden an individual's awareness and encourage new, exploratory thoughts and actions. This approach contrasts with negative emotions that narrow focus and hinder problem-solving. (Fredrickson)

Key Takeaways and Implications for Transforming Challenging Behaviors with Neurodivergent Youth

Strengths-Based Approach:

- Focusing on strengths builds confidence and resilience.
- Helps neurodivergent youth feel valued and capable by shifting the narrative from deficit-based to potential-based support.

Collaboration and Consistency:

- Unified strategies between parents, therapists, and educators foster consistency.
- Reduces anxiety and promotes a stable, supportive environment.

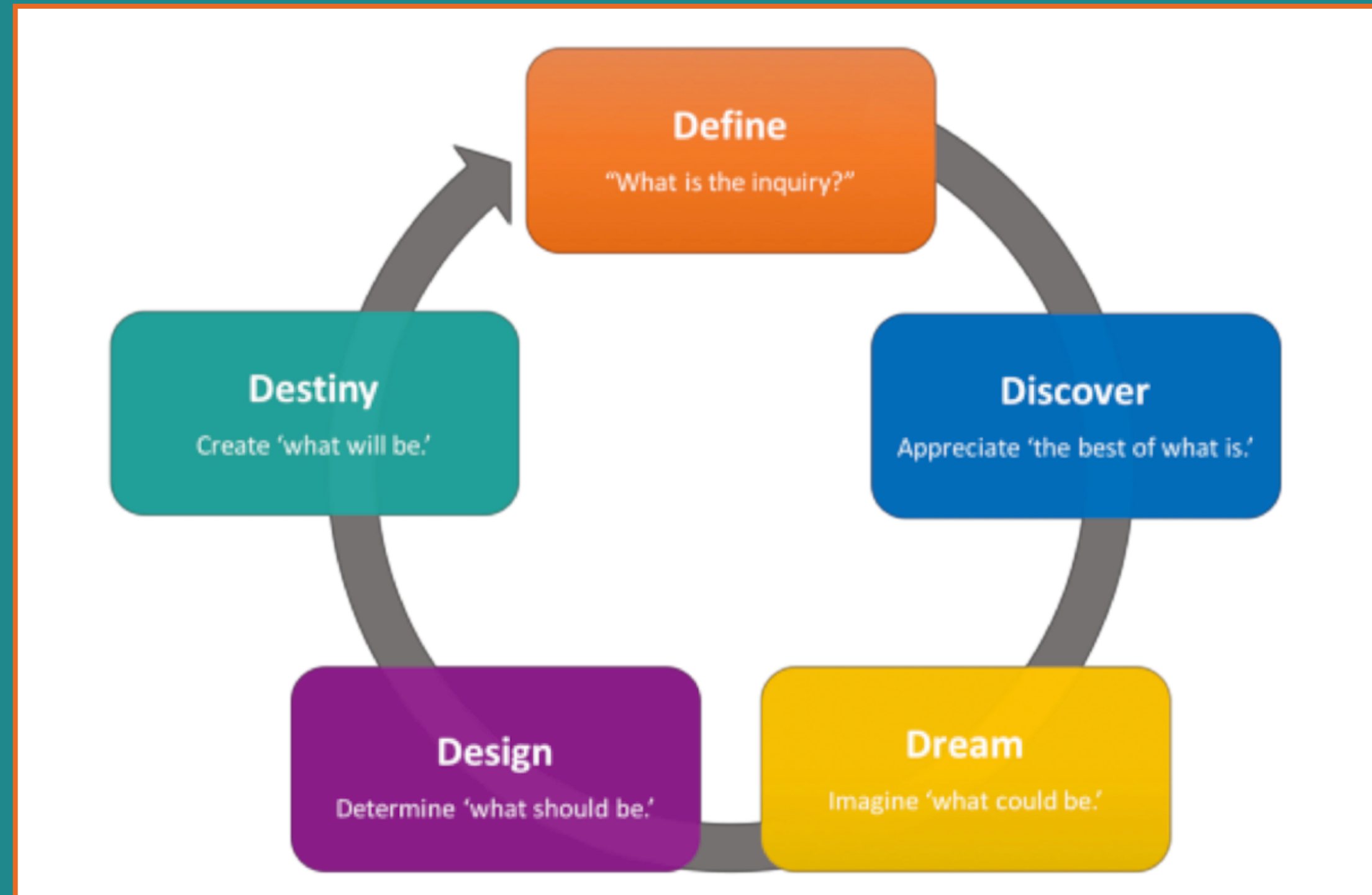
Youth Engagement:

- Involving youth in the process enhances ownership and self-regulation.
- Neurodivergent youth develop a stronger sense of agency and self-awareness.

Sustainability and Adaptation:

- Ongoing review ensures strategies remain effective and responsive.
- Promotes long-term success and resilience as needs evolve.

Appreciative Inquiry 5-D Cycle



Presented by:
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Director of Student Support and
Intervention

The Help Group is one of the nation's leading nonprofits dedicated to serving children, adolescents, and adults with autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, ADHD, developmental delays, abuse, and emotional challenges.





Thank You!



Additional Resources

Resources

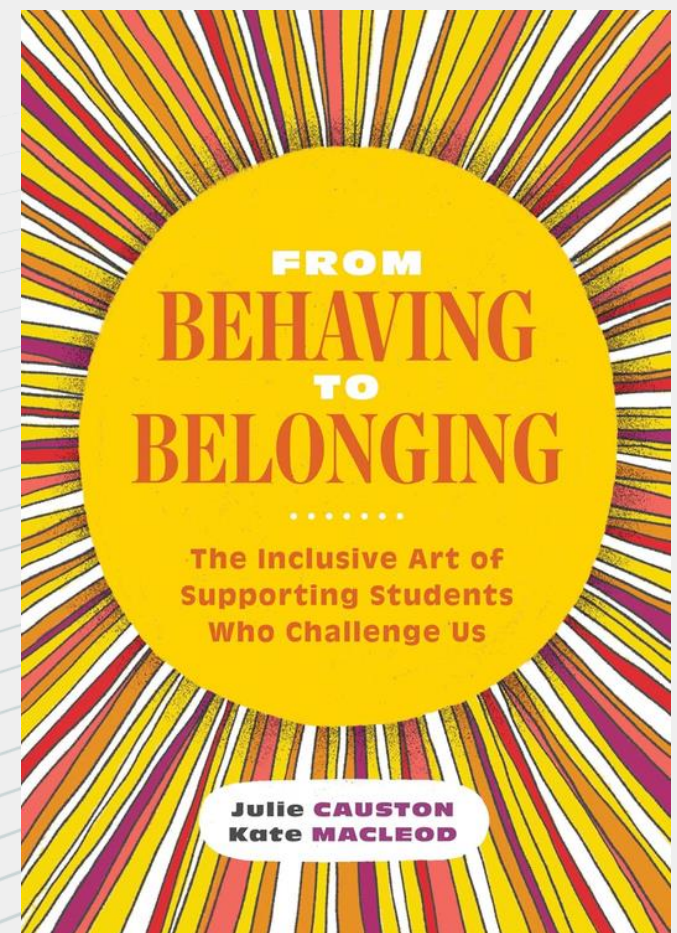
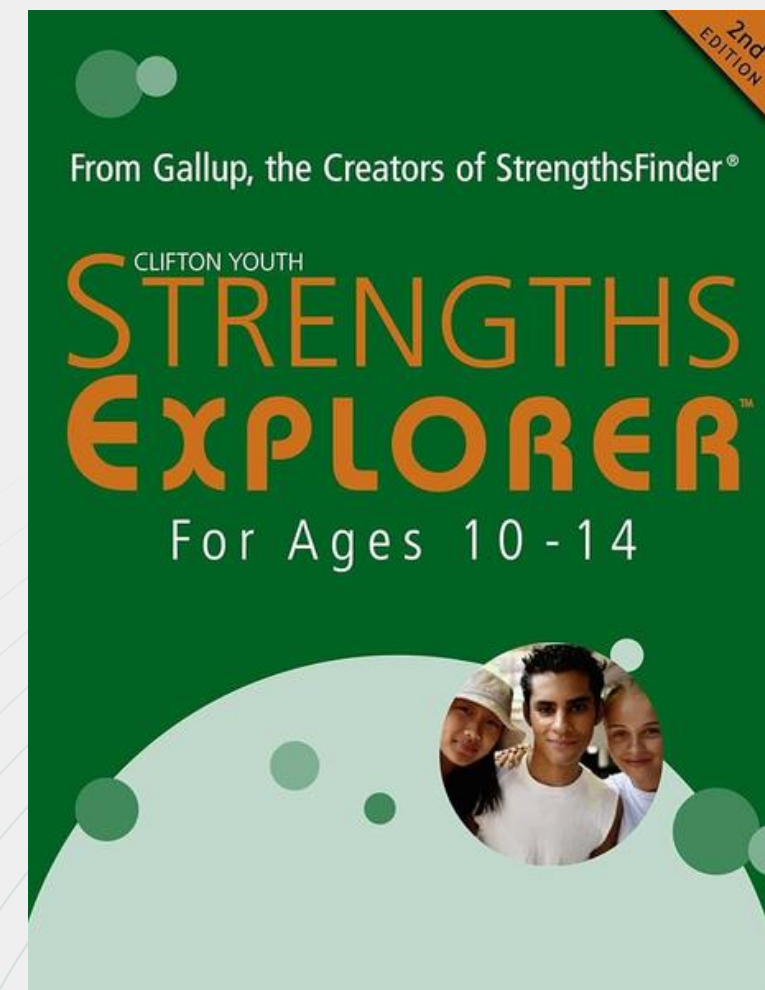
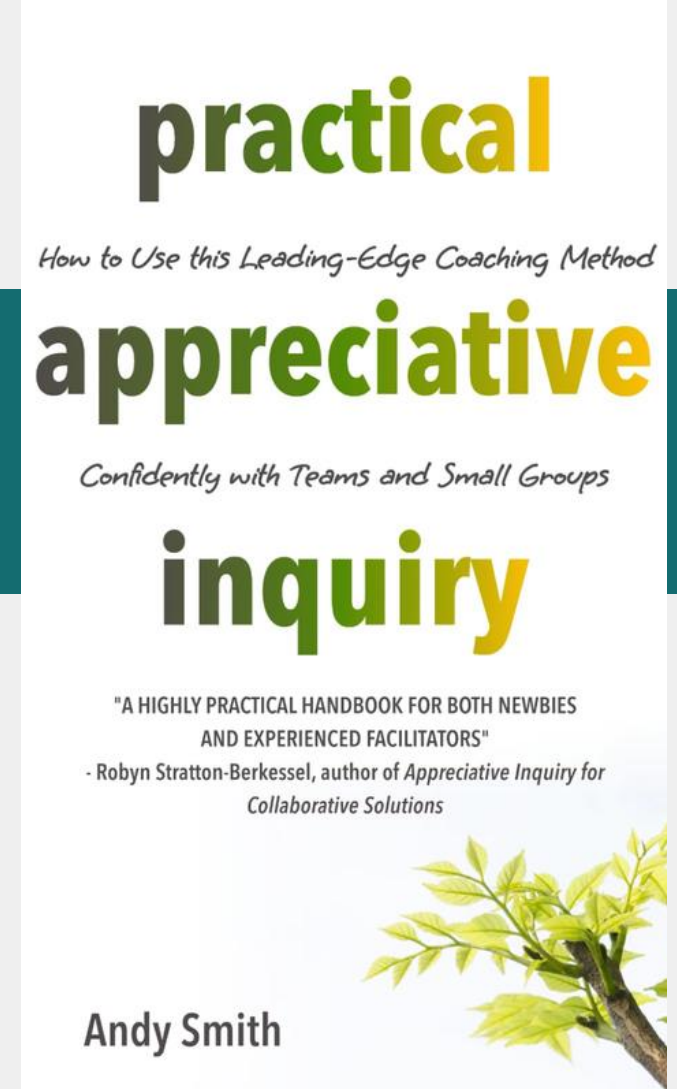
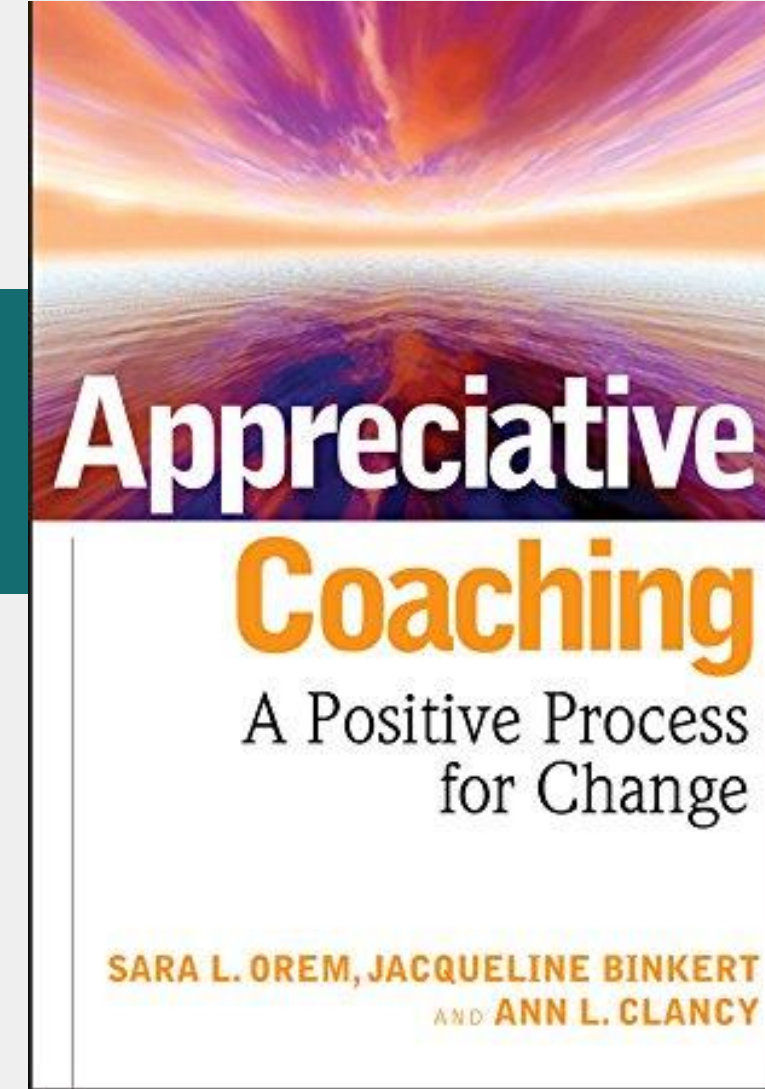
Practical Appreciative Inquiry: How to Use This Leading-Edge Coaching Method Confidently with Teams and Small Groups

Appreciative Coaching: A Positive Process for Change

Clifton Strengths Explorer- Gallup:
<https://www.strengths-explorer.com/home.aspx>

From Behaving to Belonging: The Inclusive Art of Supporting Students Who Challenge Us

Who Moved My Cheese? for Kids
Who Moved My Cheese? for Teens





Additional Guiding Prompts and Strategies

Definition Phase



Goal: Establish the focus and scope of the inquiry with the youth. Clarify what behavior or situations you want to explore or improve.

Guiding Questions:

- “What would you like us to focus on improving together?”
- “Why do you think working on this is important for you?”
- “What positive things do you hope we can achieve by working on this together?”
- “What would success look like to you in this area?”
- “Who do you think can help us or be involved as we work on this?”





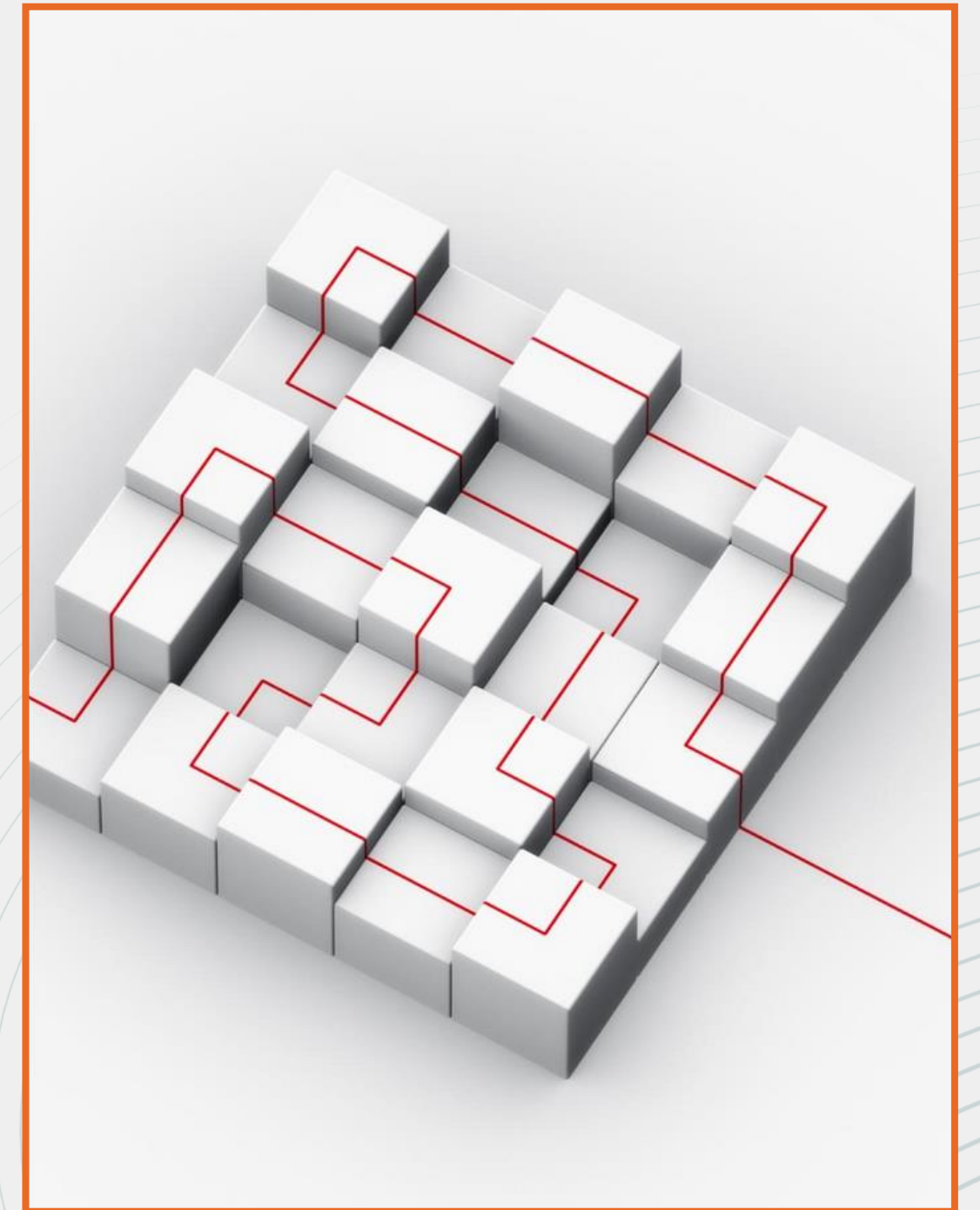
Guiding Questions: Discovery

- “Can you tell me about a time when things went really well for you in school/activities?”
- “What do you think are your biggest strengths when you handle tough situations?”
- “What strategies have worked for you before when things got difficult?”
- “Who do you rely on for support, and how do they help you?”
- “What do you enjoy doing that makes you feel confident and capable?”



The Design Phase: Guiding Prompts

- “What steps do you think we can take to make your best day happen more often?”
- “How can we use the things you are good at to help you when things get hard?”
- “What tools or support do you think you need to make this plan work?”
- “Who else should we involve to help you reach these goals?”
- “What small habits or routines can we start that would make this easier for you?”



The Dream Phase: Guiding Prompts

- “If everything went perfectly, what would your best day look like?”
- “What would make you feel really happy and proud during a challenging task?”
- “What would you be doing, and how would others around you react if things were going well?”
- “What kind of changes would you like to see that would help you succeed?”
- “What new things would you try if you knew they would go well?”



Strategies for Implementation



DISCOVERY

Engage in Conversations: Ask open-ended questions like, “Can you tell me about a time you felt proud of your work?”

Gather Insights: Collect stories from parents, peers, and the student to build a picture of strengths.

Application Tip: Therapists can guide these discussions through storytelling prompts during sessions, while educators might use reflective journaling activities.

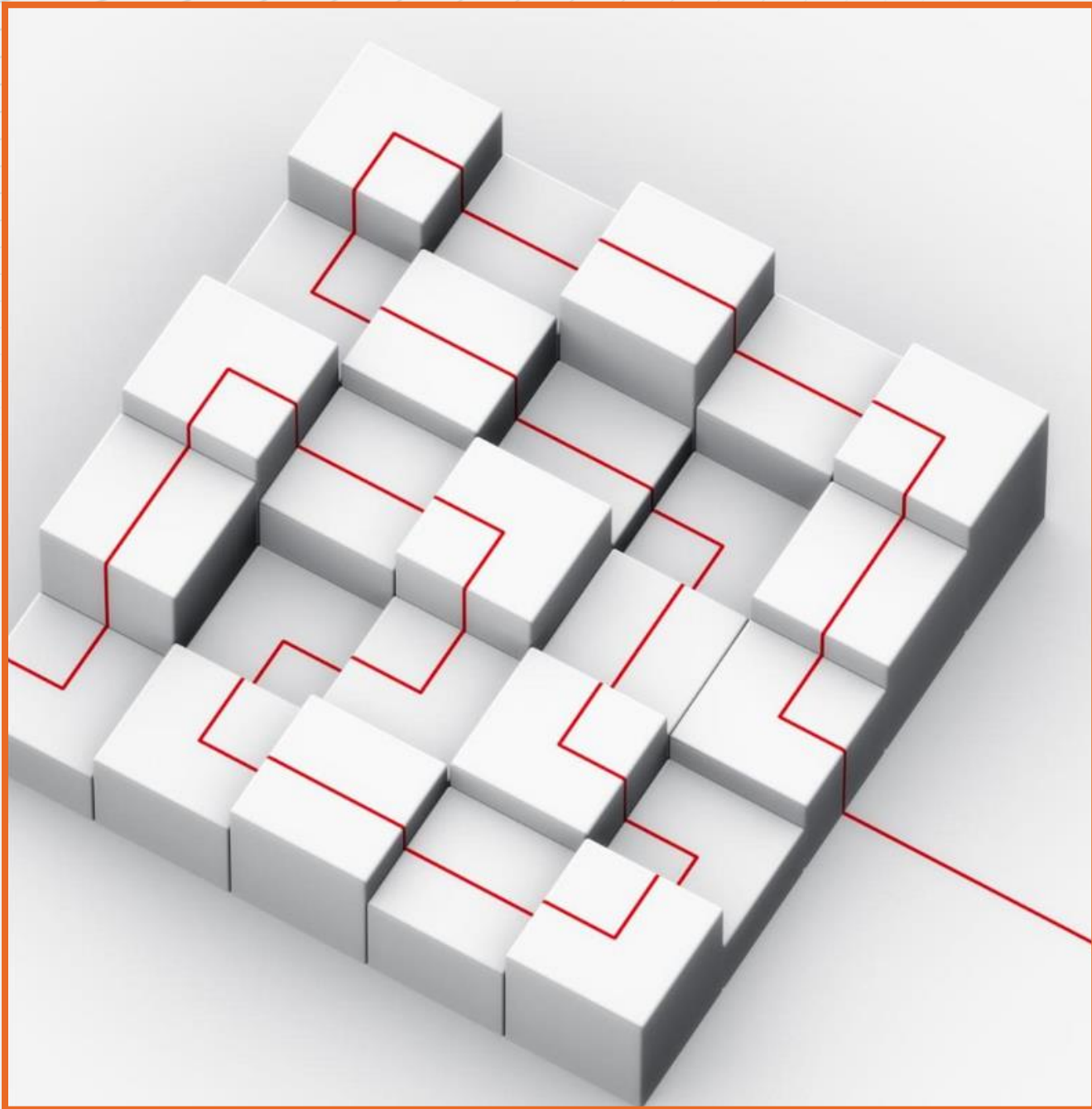
Strategies for Implementation



DREAM PHASE

- **Vision Boards:** Create a collage of words and images representing the student's ideal classroom or session experience.
- **Storytelling Exercise:** "Imagine it's the end of the school year, and you've had a fantastic time. What did that look like?"
- **Therapist Insight:** Use guided visualization to help clients imagine handling difficult situations calmly.

Strategies for Implementation



DESIGN PHASE

- **Brainstorm Strategies:** Work with the youth to design steps that use their strengths to overcome challenges.
- **Develop Behavior Plans:** Incorporate positive reinforcements tailored to the student's preferences
- **Real-World Example:** A student who thrives on creativity could use drawing as a tool to calm down during stressful transitions.

The Delivery Phase



Goal: Implement and sustain the strategies while encouraging ongoing improvement and adaptation.

Guiding Questions:

- “How can we practice these strategies every day to make them work for you?”
- “What will we do to celebrate when you meet your goals or do something really well?”
- “What should we do if something doesn’t go as planned? How can we adjust?”
- “Who do you want to help keep you motivated as you work on this?”
- “How can we build on what you’re already doing well to keep moving forward?”



Scenario



Meet Alex

*Alex is a 10-year-old child known for his exceptional creativity and love for art and storytelling. Whether sketching detailed drawings, inventing imaginative tales, or collaborating on creative projects, Alex thrives when he can express himself artistically. However, Alex struggles with **managing his emotions** and behavior when faced with tasks that challenge him, disrupt his routine, or when he perceives that he is **misunderstood**. This often leads to **verbal outbursts, expressions of frustration, and occasional withdrawal**. These behaviors can be observed across multiple settings, including at home during transitions (e.g., moving from playtime to dinnertime), in therapy sessions that require structured tasks, and in community or educational group activities.*



Definition Phase: Establishing the Focus



Objective: Define the area of focus for Alex's support and improvement.

Guiding Questions:

- What do we want to achieve by supporting Alex in managing his emotional responses?
- Why is it important for Alex to develop skills to handle transitions and situations where he feels misunderstood?
- Alex, what do you think we should work on together to help you feel better when things get tough?
- Why do you think it's important to work on how you feel during transitions or when something doesn't go as you expected?
- What would success look like to you when we work on staying calm and feeling understood?

Approach: Have an open conversation with Alex to identify and agree on the areas that need support.

Focus: Enhance Alex's emotional regulation and ability to manage challenging situations without verbal outbursts, particularly when he perceives being misunderstood or fails to meet his own expectations.

Collaborative Agreement: Parents, therapists, and educators agree on the importance of creating a consistent and supportive approach across all environments.

Discovery Phase: Identifying Strengths and Successes



Objective: Uncover what currently works well for Alex and build on those strengths.

Guiding Questions for Adults:

- Can you share examples when Alex managed his emotions or transitions calmly?
- What activities or moments make Alex feel confident and valued?
- What strategies have worked for Alex when he starts feeling misunderstood?

Guiding Questions for Alex:

- Can you tell me about a time when you felt proud of how you handled something difficult?
- What are some things you like to do that make you feel happy and calm?
- When was the last time you managed a transition without getting frustrated? What helped you do that?
- Who or what helps you feel understood and supported?

Outcome: Identify the strengths that help Alex feel empowered and strategies that have supported his emotional regulation in the past.

Dream Phase: Envisioning an Ideal Future



Objective: Help Alex and his support team create a shared vision of what successful emotional management looks like.

Guiding Questions:

- Alex, if everything went the way you wanted when you feel frustrated or misunderstood, what would that look like?
- What would a day look like when you successfully manage transitions and challenges without feeling overwhelmed?
- How would you like adults around you to respond when you're feeling frustrated?
- If everything went perfectly, how would you want things to go when you start feeling frustrated?
- What would your perfect day look like when you move from one activity to another without getting upset?
- How would you like people around you to help or respond when you're feeling misunderstood?
- What would you be doing to stay calm and happy when things don't go your way?

Outcome: Create a vision where Alex feels supported, understood, and confident during challenging moments.

Design Phase: Collaborative Actionable Strategies



Objective: Develop practical strategies based on the strengths discovered and the vision outlined.

Guiding Steps:

- What could we do together to help you stay calm when you feel frustrated or misunderstood?
- What activities would help you feel better during transitions or difficult moments?
- What reminders or tools would you like to have nearby to help you feel more at ease?
- Who would you like to have involved to make these plans work well for you?

Involvement:

- Parents can practice using specific praise and validation at home.
- Therapists can incorporate art-based coping mechanisms into sessions.
- Educators or group leaders can ensure consistency in using calming strategies and reinforcement.

Outcome: A cohesive plan that aligns with Alex's strengths and engages him in a way that feels natural and supportive.

Delivery Phase: Implementing and Sustaining Change



Objective: Put the strategies into practice and ensure ongoing use and adaptation as needed.

Guiding Questions:

- How do you think we can use these ideas every day to make sure they work for you?”
- What will we do to celebrate when you handle a tough moment really well?
- What do you think we should do if one of our strategies isn’t working as well as we hoped?
- Who can you ask for help if you need extra support with your plans?

Sustainability Plan:

- Ensure that all adults involved continue to communicate and share observations to keep strategies aligned.
- Adapt and refine strategies based on Alex’s feedback and observed progress.



Outcomes for Alex

Create a Vision:

- Establish a “calm corner” with Alex’s favorite art supplies and books that he can access when needed.
- Use visual and verbal cues to prepare Alex for transitions, ensuring he feels prepared and secure.

Supportive Environment: Ensure adults in Alex’s life validate his emotions and acknowledge when he expresses himself, reinforcing that it is okay to feel frustrated.





Outcomes for Alex

Daily Implementation:

- Schedule morning and afternoon check-ins to discuss how Alex feels and set expectations for using calming strategies.

Celebrate Successes:

- Use a sticker chart or verbal praise to recognize when Alex handles transitions or challenges well.

Weekly Reflection:

- Hold reflection sessions to review what strategies worked, what needs adjustment, and celebrate progress with Alex.

