

The Neuroaffirming Lens: Foundations, Practices and Impact

Presented by:

Ella Tobin





Foundations

What does it mean?
Where does it come from?
What is its goal?

Practices

What does it look like?
How can I be neuroaffirming?

Positive Impacts

How does it benefit people?
Will its positive impact last?



Owner and Therapist
Specialising in person-centered
and strengths-based support
for neurodivergent individuals

BP sychSci (Hons)
Research projects studying
neuroaffirming supports, neurodiverse
behaviours, and attention





Foundations

Traditional Medical View

Disordered neurodevelopment
characterised by deficits in
daily living skills

- Communication difficulties
- Motor behaviours,
 - Stimming and Fidgeting



Neurodiversity Movement

Natural Variation in individual
cognition and behaviour

{Social Model of Disability}

Only debilitating in a societal context

Brain function exists along a
spectrum



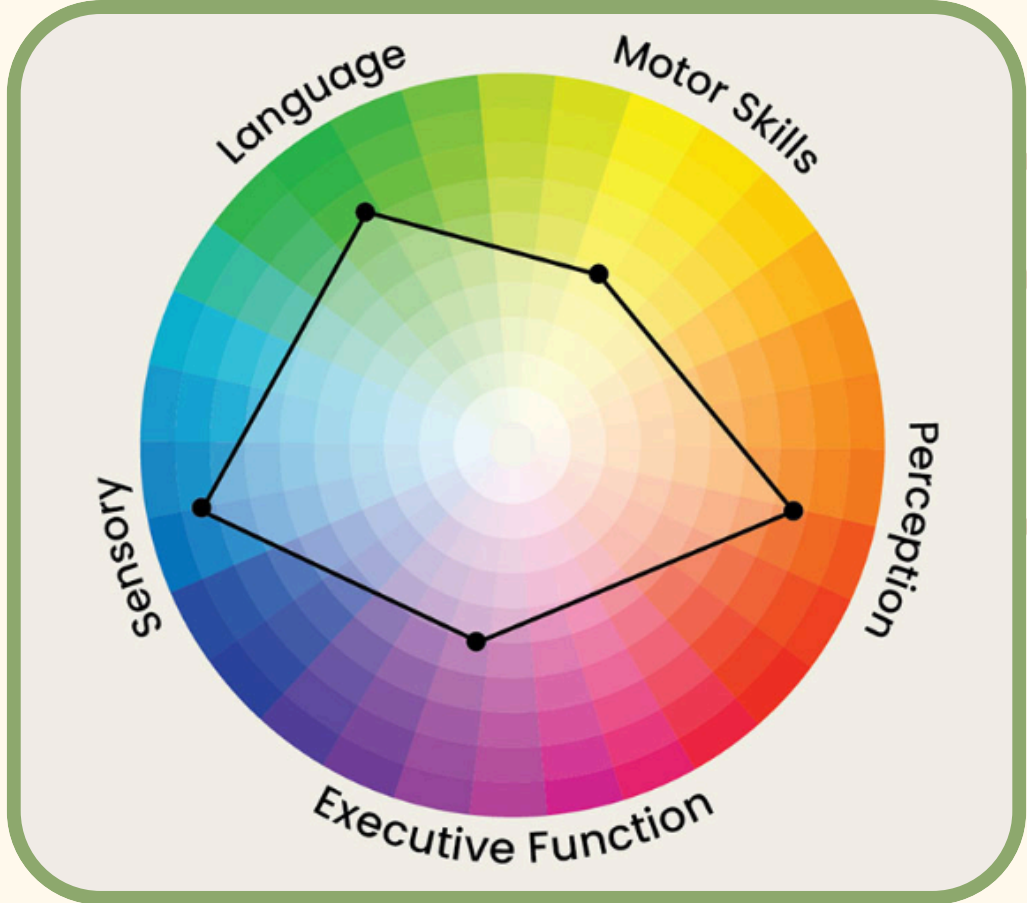
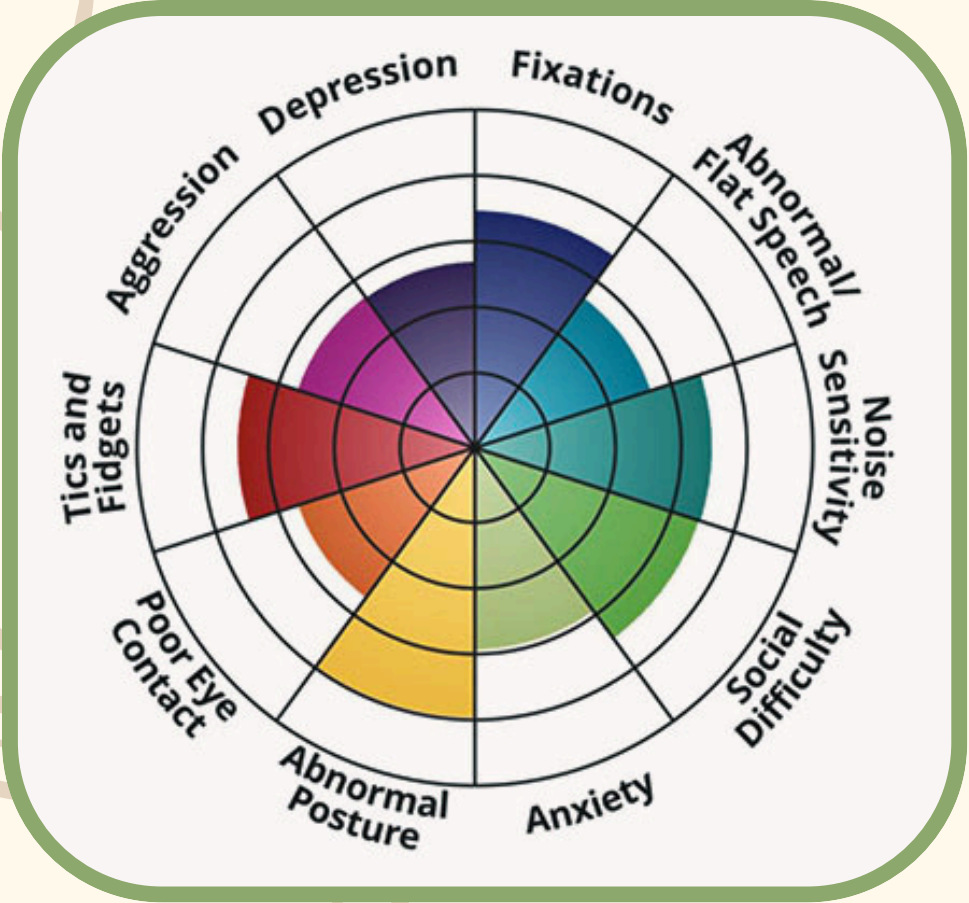
Spectrum Expectations



With Learning Difficulties

Without Learning Difficulties

VS



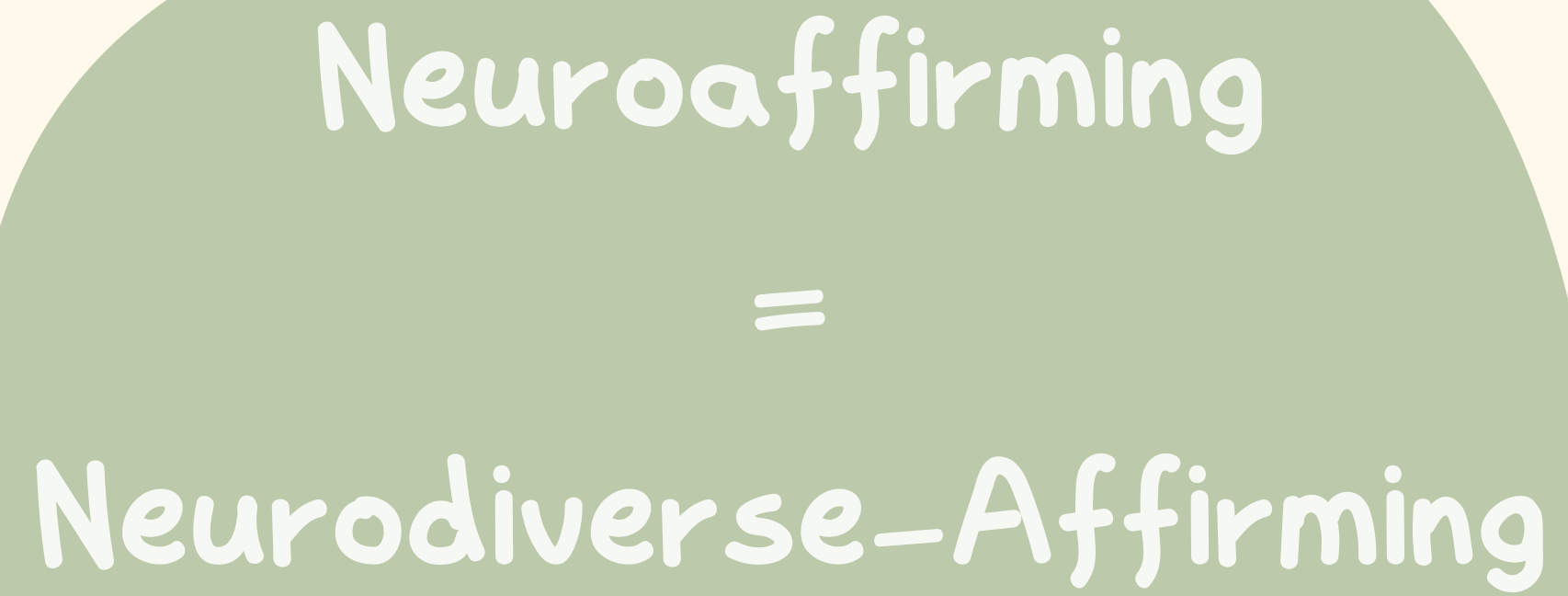
The Neurodiversity Movement's Message



To fix or cure
neurodivergent individuals



Accept neurodivergent
individuals for who they are



Neuroaffirming
=
Neurodiverse-Affirming



Main Goal of the
Neurodiversity
Movement

The Neurodiversity Movement

Social and Political Movement

Led by neurodivergent
individuals and advocacy
groups

The 'What'

Neuroaffirming

Real-World Application and Action

How we actually empower
and support neurodivergent
individuals

The 'How'

A stylized illustration of a plant with several thin stems and elongated, pointed leaves. The plant is rendered in a light brown or tan color. It is positioned on the left and right sides of the page, framing the central text. The leaves are simple line drawings with some internal vein details.

Supporting Neurodivergent People

AS THEY ARE

Empowerment

Inclusion

Safety



Practices

Self-Understanding

Individual
Support

Self-Advocacy

Self-Regulation

Self-Understanding

Recognising personal sensory, emotional and cognitive needs without judgement

Noticing how environments, tasks and interactions make you feel

Accepting behaviours and responses as valid rather than something to change or suppress

Allowing more authentic expressions instead of suppressing natural behaviours



Self-Regulation

Allowing movement, stimming, taking breaks or using sensory tools

Developing routines and supports for executive functioning

Supports emotional balance and manages stress, energy and sensory input in a way that works best for them





Self-Advocacy

Communicating needs, boundaries and preferences clearly

MAKE SURE YOUR VOICE IS HEARD!

Social Support

Communication

Empowerment

Expectations

Communication

Validating lived experience and understanding other people's perspectives

Respecting communication differences: Non-verbal, Verbal or use of communication devices

Identity-First Language

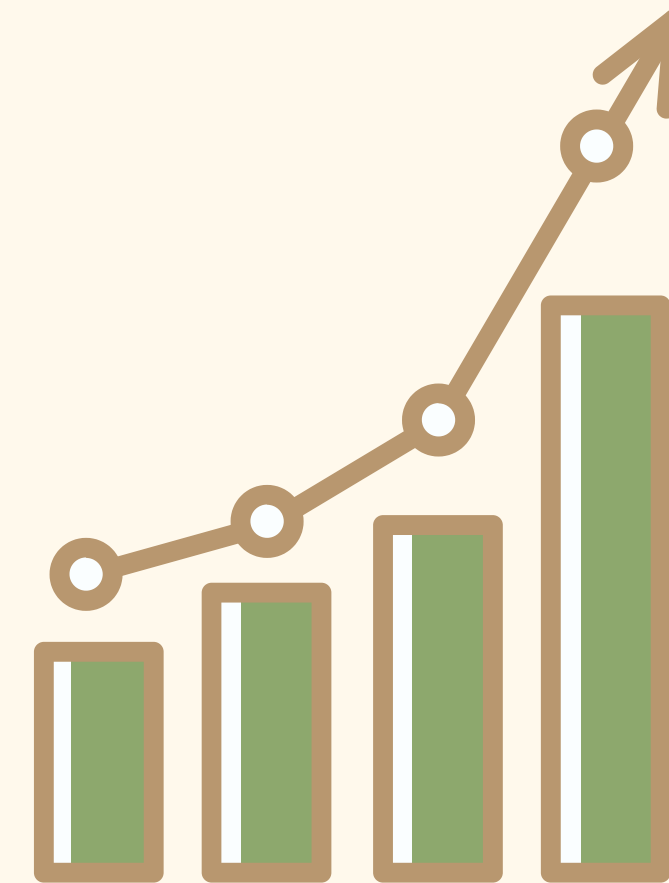
Recognising a being neurodivergent is a part of who we are, not a condition we carry



Expectations

Understanding that people are capable and that differences in ability are not indicators of incompetence

Avoiding expectations around certain behaviours

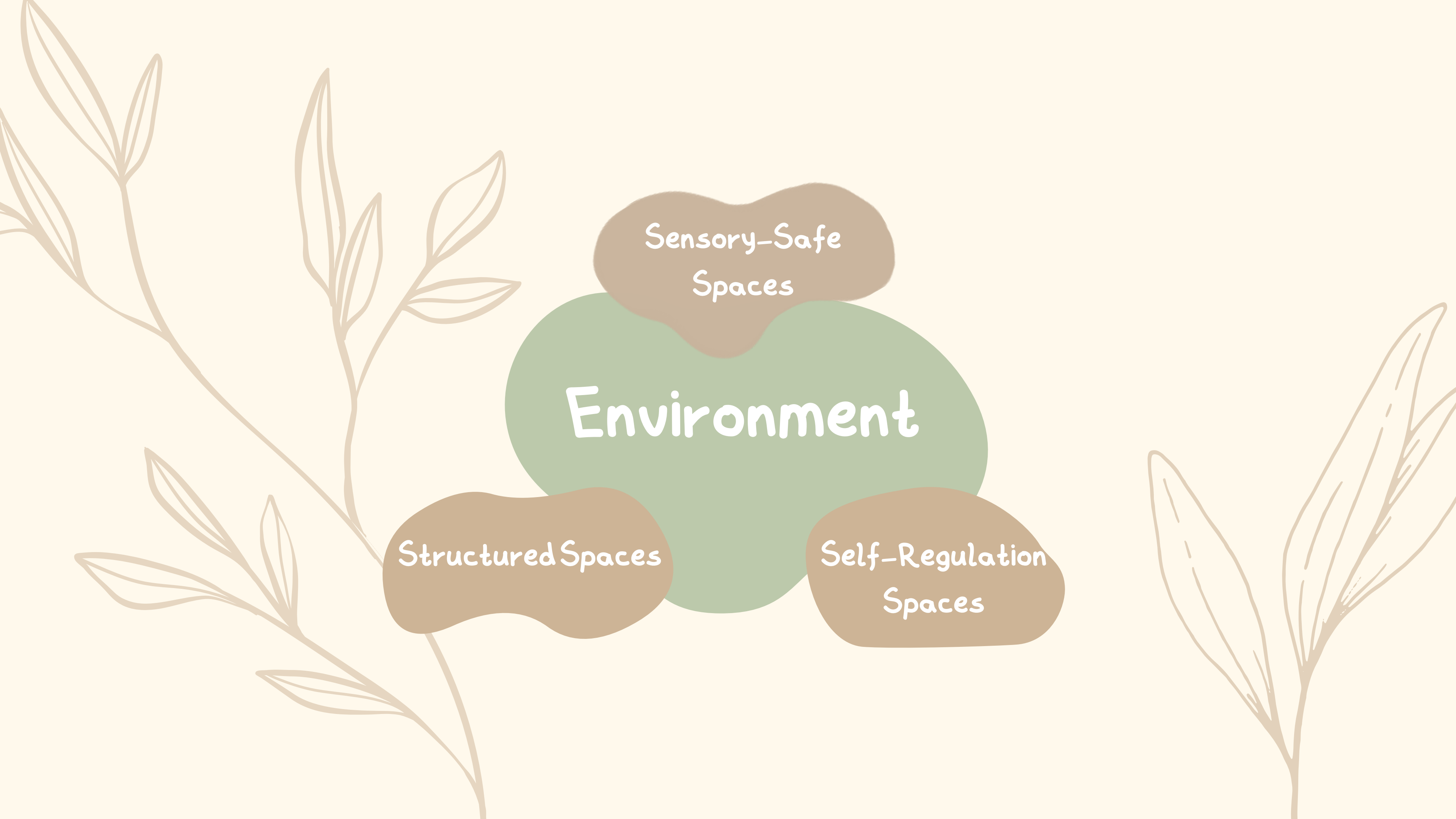


Empowerment

Reminding and encouraging other people's strengths

Offering genuine choice rather than directing or controlling decisions

YOU CAN
DO IT! ✨



Sensory-Safe
Spaces

Environment

Structured Spaces

Self-Regulation
Spaces

Sensory-Safe Spaces

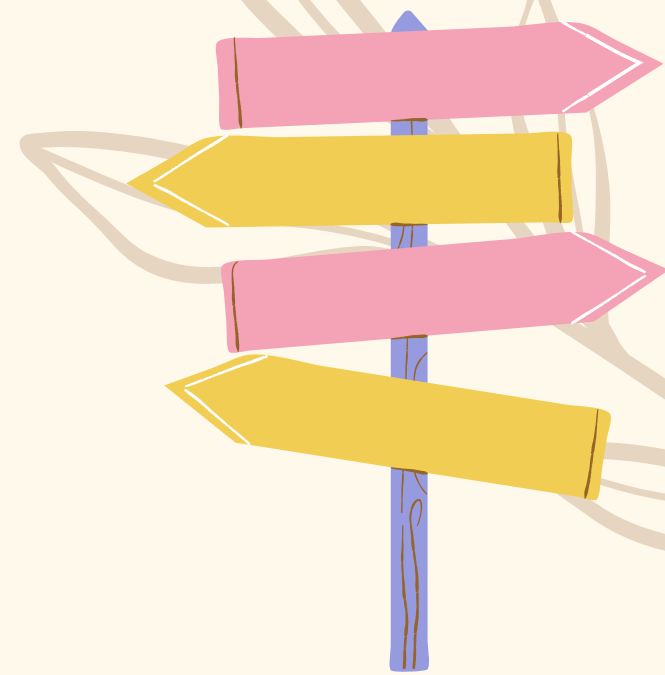
Spaces that can be easily navigated and expectations are clear

Creating spaces where individuals can regulate in ways that work best for them

Allowing time for individuals to access sensory-safe spaces and providing additional support when overwhelmed

Structured Spaces

Self-Regul Spaces



Policy Changes

Systemic

Removing Barriers

Neurodivergent
Voices

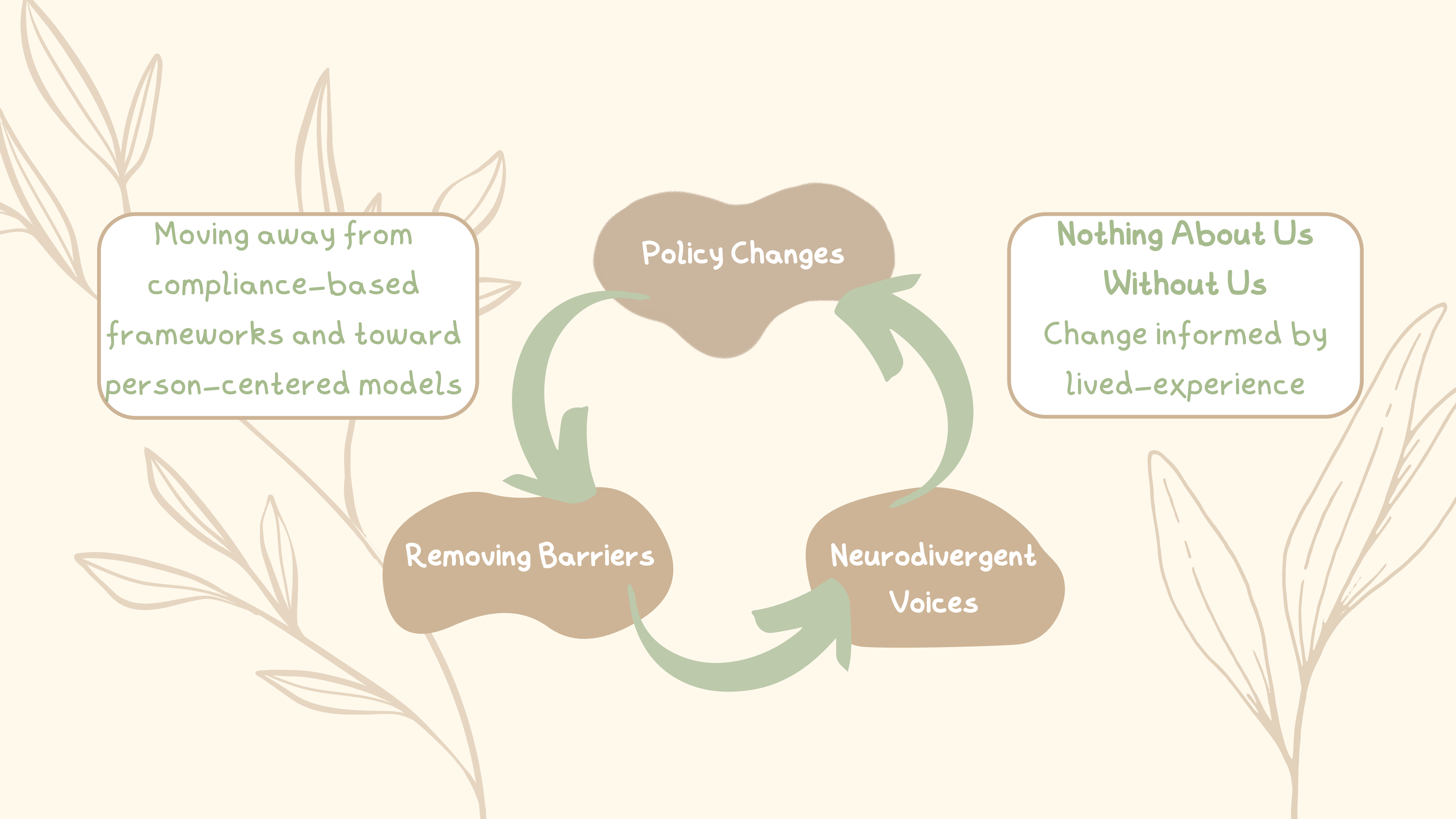
Moving away from compliance-based frameworks and toward person-centered models

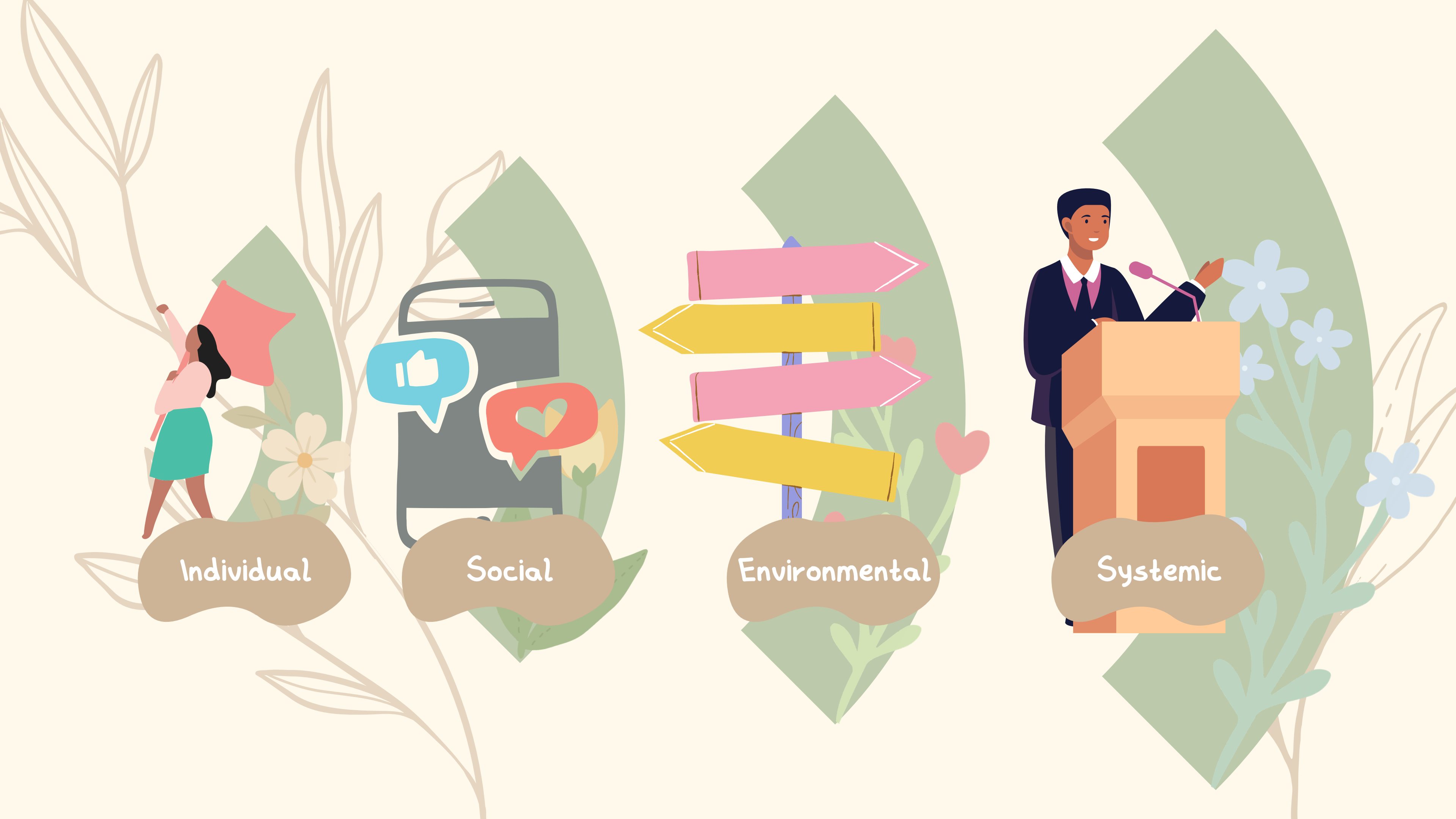
Policy Changes

Nothing About Us Without Us
Change informed by lived-experience

Removing Barriers

Neurodivergent Voices





Individual

Social

Environmental

Systemic



Positive
Impacts

Health and Wellbeing

Focus shifts from suppression to
regulation

Reducing chronic stress, anxiety
and burnout

Better able to understand and
manage their emotions



Individual

Authenticity

Gain confidence in genuine
expression

Reducing the need for masking
allowing for a stronger sense
of identity

Growth in self-advocacy
skills



Individual

Stronger Connections

Fosters greater mutual
understanding and respect
Reducing pressure to 'fit in'
allows for genuine and
trusting relationships
Fewer misunderstandings or
conflicts



Social

Community Participation

More likely to engage in work,
school and social settings
Collaborative and person-
centered environments
creates space for shared
decision making
Everyone's ideas and needs
are heard



Environmental

Prioritising Wellbeing

Wellbeing rather than
conformity leads to better
long-term outcomes
Implementing supports that
are tailored instead of
standardised
Support aligned with who you
are



Systemic

Greater Inclusion

Voices heard leads to voices
served

Removing barriers to entry
and developing systems that
are both more inclusive, and
also more effective and
relevant



Systemic

Neuroaffirming Practices

Improve individual
outcomes

+

Reshape systems to be
more inclusive, effective
and sustainable

Thank You!

Presented by:

Ella Tobin

