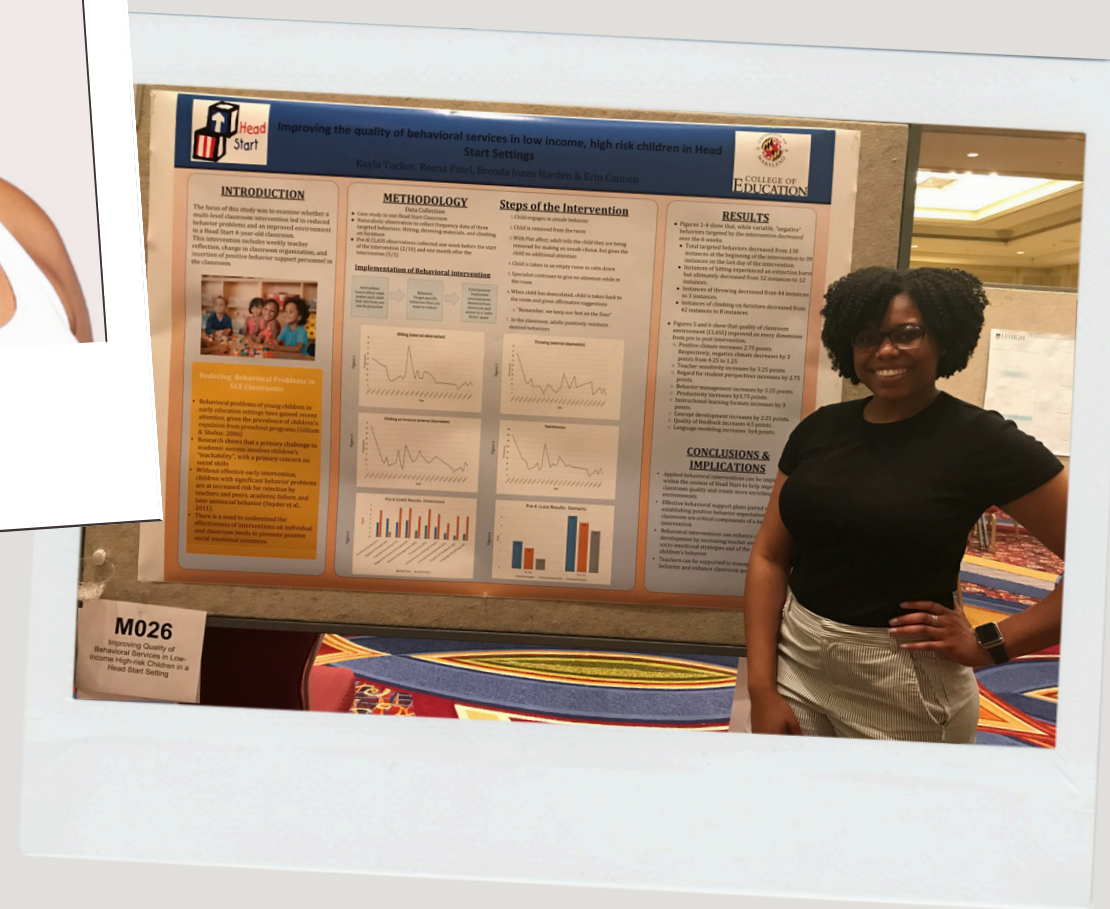
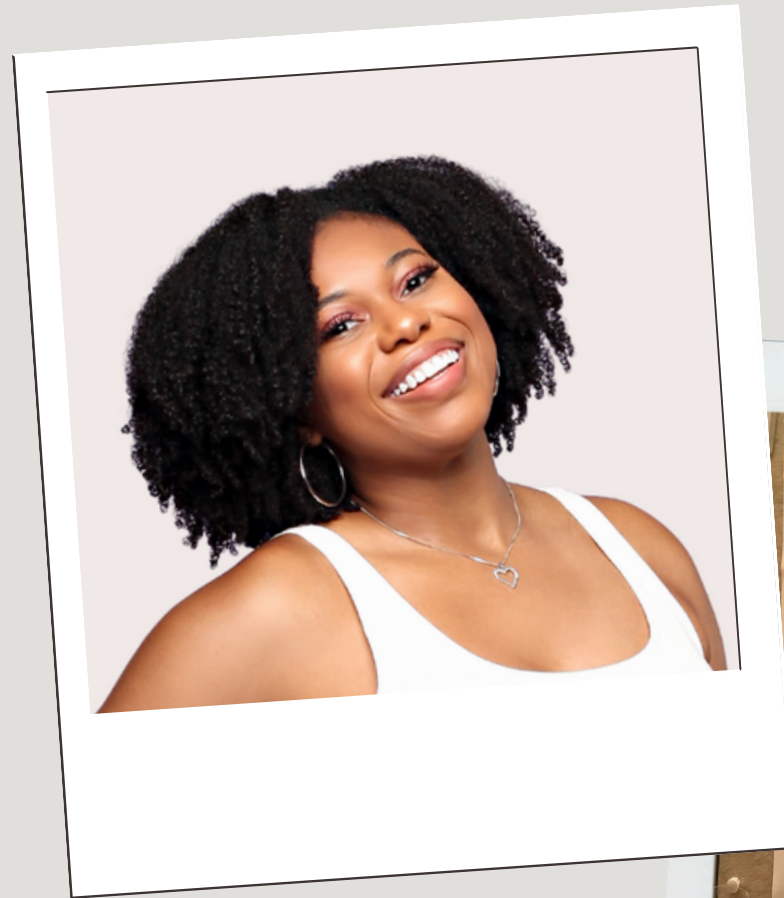


The slide features several abstract line art elements: a large, thin-lined shape in the top left corner; a jagged, zigzag line in the top right corner; a series of connected peaks and valleys in the bottom left corner; and a large, thin-lined shape in the bottom right corner.

Empowering Parents of Neurodivergent Kids: **Tools for Confidence and Clarity in Early Childhood**

KAYLA TUCKER, SSP, NCSP
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST
WHOLE SCHOOL PSYCH

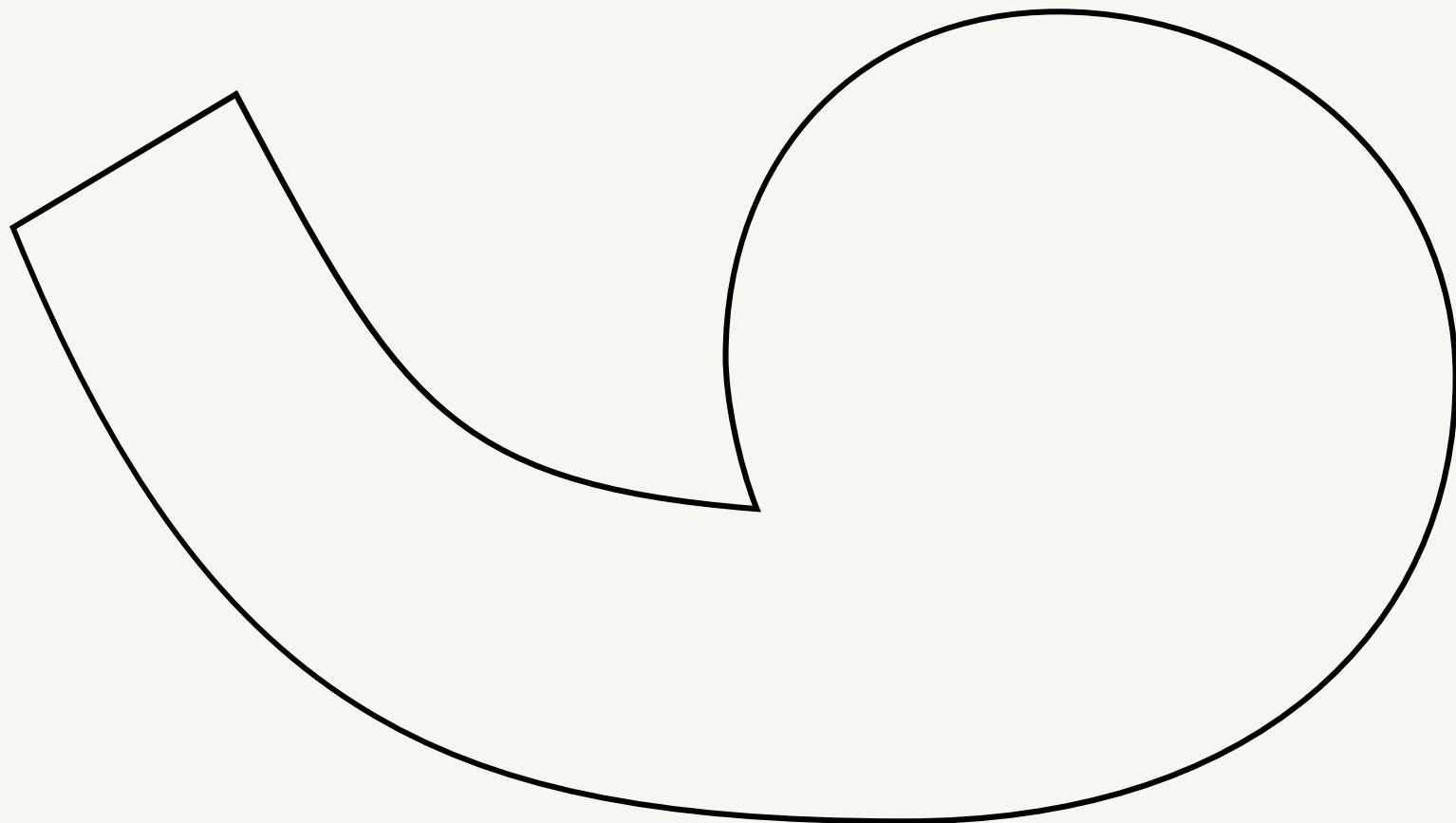
HELLO!



- Nationally Certified School Psychologist
- PG County Native
- Founder of Whole School Psych, a platform dedicated to supporting families of young children with learning and behavior challenges

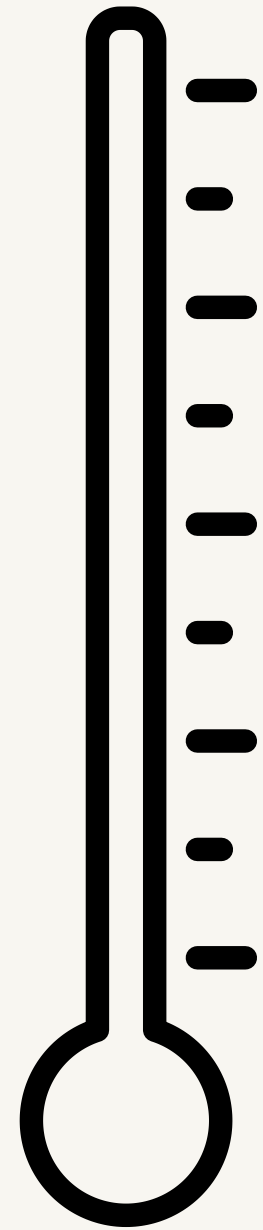


Our agenda



- 01 Intro
- 02 Understanding Early Signs of Neurodivergence
- 03 Practical Tools for Supporting Families
- 04 Bridging the Gap Between Parents and Schools
- 05 Whole School Psych
- 06 Q&A

temp check



On a scale of 1 to 5
(1 being “not
comfortable at all”
and 5 being “super
comfortable”), how
comfortable are you
with supporting
families with
neurodivergent
kids?

What Neurodivergence Looks Like in Early Childhood

- There is no single, “normal” way that the brain functions or develops
- Neurodivergence acknowledges that people’s brains can be wired differently, and these differences are natural variations in human diversity

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Children may show differences in social communication, behavior, and interests.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): Children might have trouble with attention, impulse control, and hyperactivity.

Dyslexia: Affects reading, spelling, and writing abilities due to difficulties with decoding words and recognizing letters and sounds.

Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder): Affects motor skills, coordination, and sometimes speech.

What Neurodivergence Looks Like in Early Childhood

ADHD

Neurodevelopmental disorder that affects a child's ability to focus, control impulses, and regulate their energy levels --> **inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity**

- Difficulty focusing on tasks for more than a short time
- Frequently loses toys, books, or other belongings
- Trouble following directions or completing task
- Often seems not to listen when spoken to directly, even though there's no obvious hearing issue
- Restlessness or fidgeting
- Difficulty playing quietly
- Interrupts others or blurts out answers before questions are finished
- Difficulty waiting their turn in games or conversations

What Neurodivergence Looks Like in Early Childhood

Autism

neurodevelopmental condition characterized by differences in social communication, repetitive behaviors, and restricted interests. The "spectrum" aspect of autism means that it affects individuals to varying degrees, and no two children with autism are alike. Some may need substantial support, while others may function independently.

- Limited eye contact
- Delayed or limited speech
- Repetitive behaviors or restricted interests
- Repetitive movements
- Sensory sensitivities



Common Misconceptions

- How neurodivergence is understood varies widely across cultures. What is seen as a disability in one country may be viewed as a personality trait or strength in another
- Reflection Question: how might these cultural differences affect whether families seek support or accept a diagnosis?

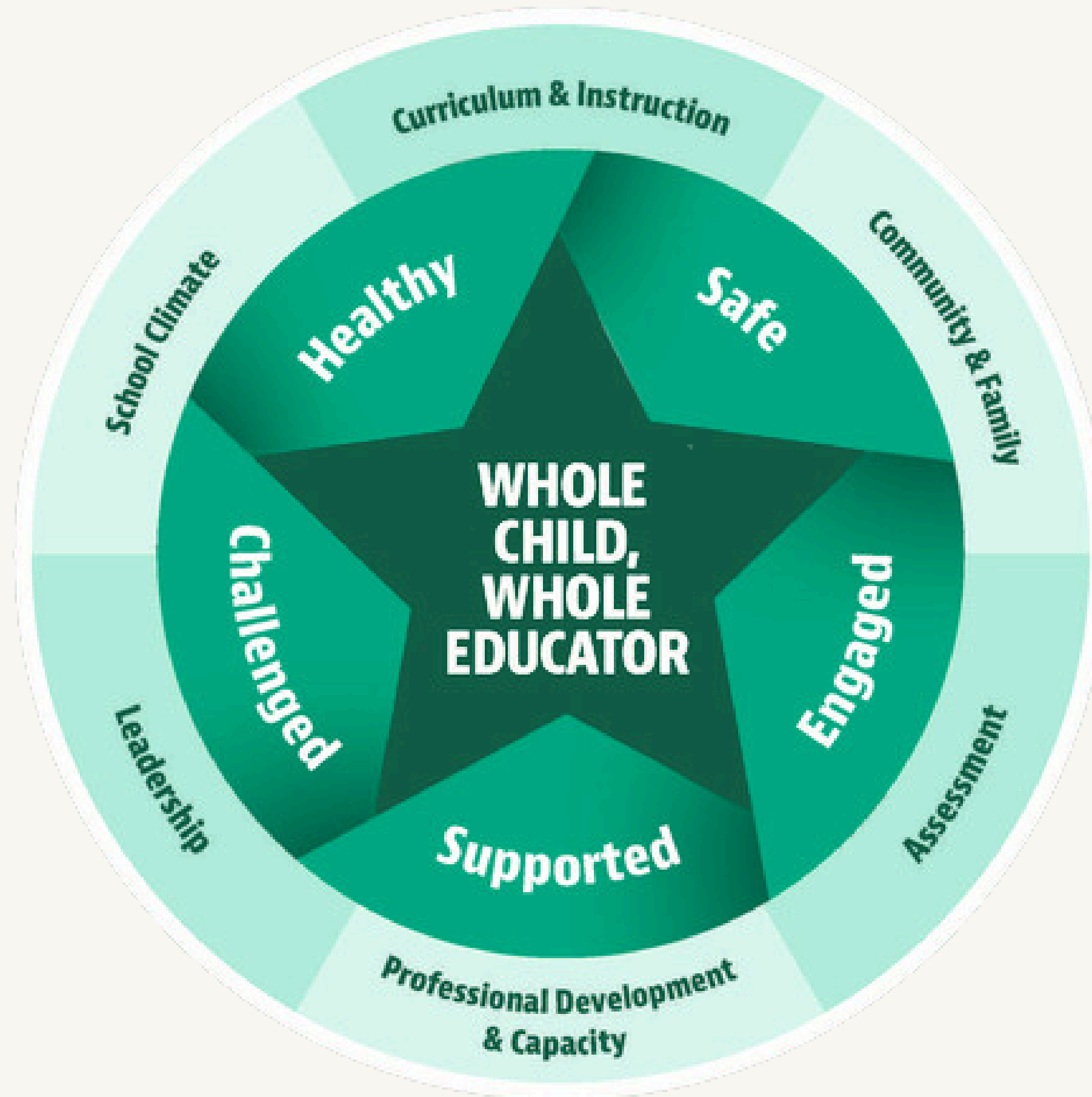


Cultural Barriers to Diagnosis & Support

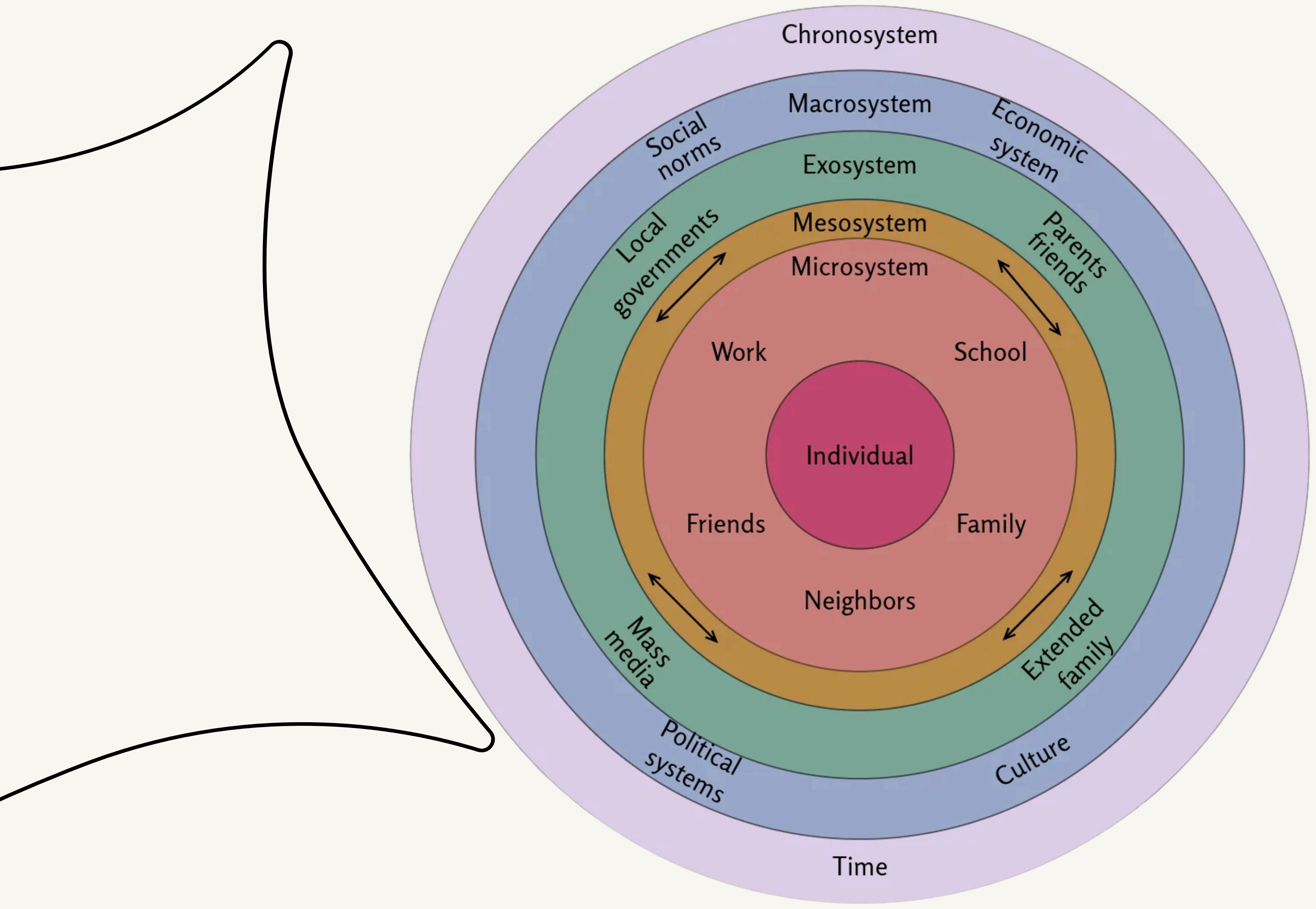
Even when families notice differences in their child, they may avoid seeking services due to stigma, mistrust, or fear of consequences.

- Language barriers
- Mistrust of institutions
- Belief in alternative explanations

ASCD's Whole Child Framework



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory





Who Gets Diagnosed?

Bias in Identification

Race and cultural background can affect which children are diagnosed—and which are overlooked.

Key disparities in identification:

- Black & Caribbean children are over-identified with behavioral issues (ADHD, conduct disorder) but under-identified for autism and learning disabilities
- Asian & Middle Eastern children are half as likely as white children to be diagnosed with autism, likely due to cultural differences in social norms
- Refugee children may be misdiagnosed with ADHD due to hypervigilance from past trauma



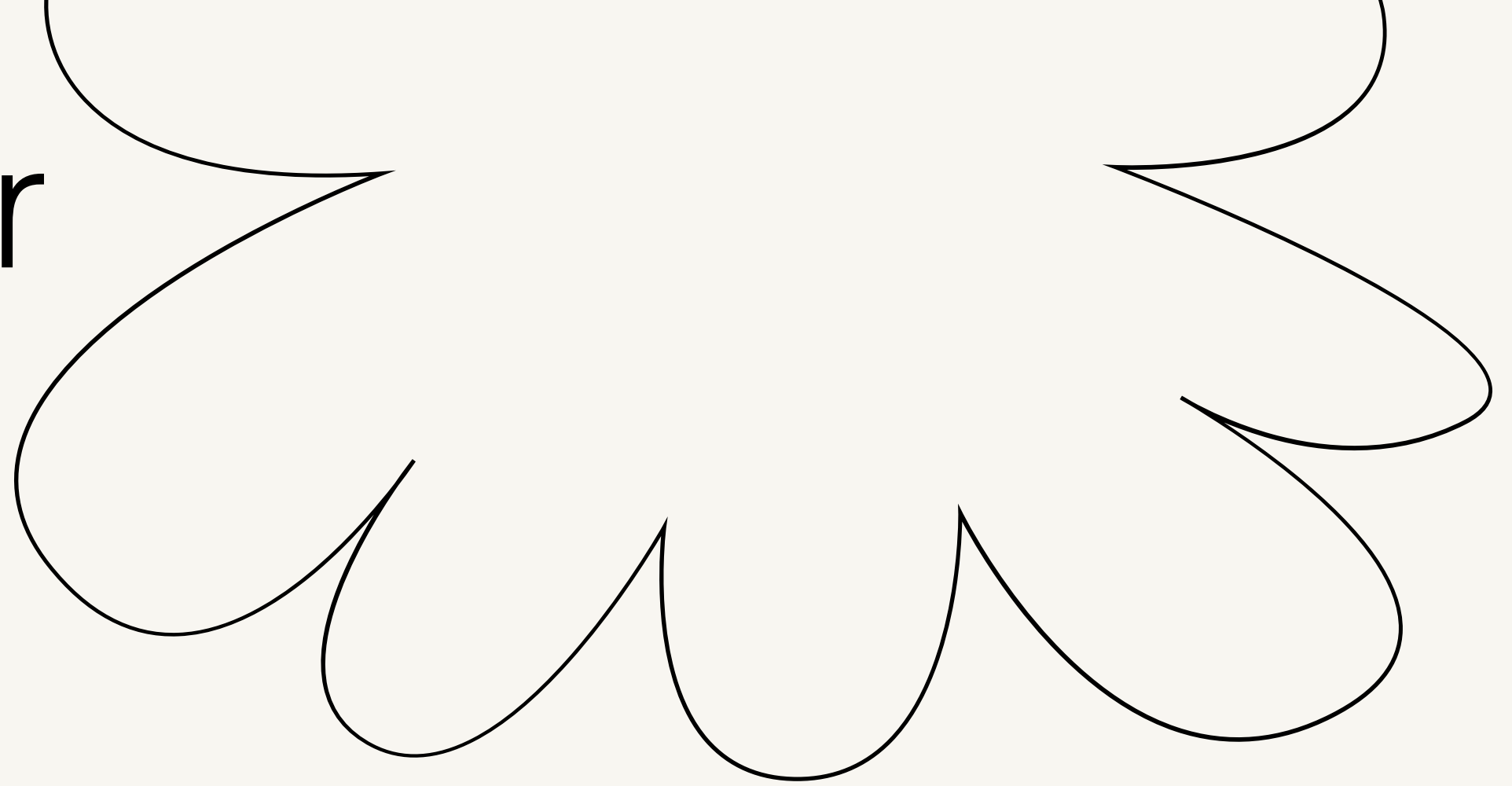
Helping Families Navigate the System

For many immigrant and refugee families, seeking help is not as simple as getting a referral. They need culturally responsive support.

Ways to make services more accessible:

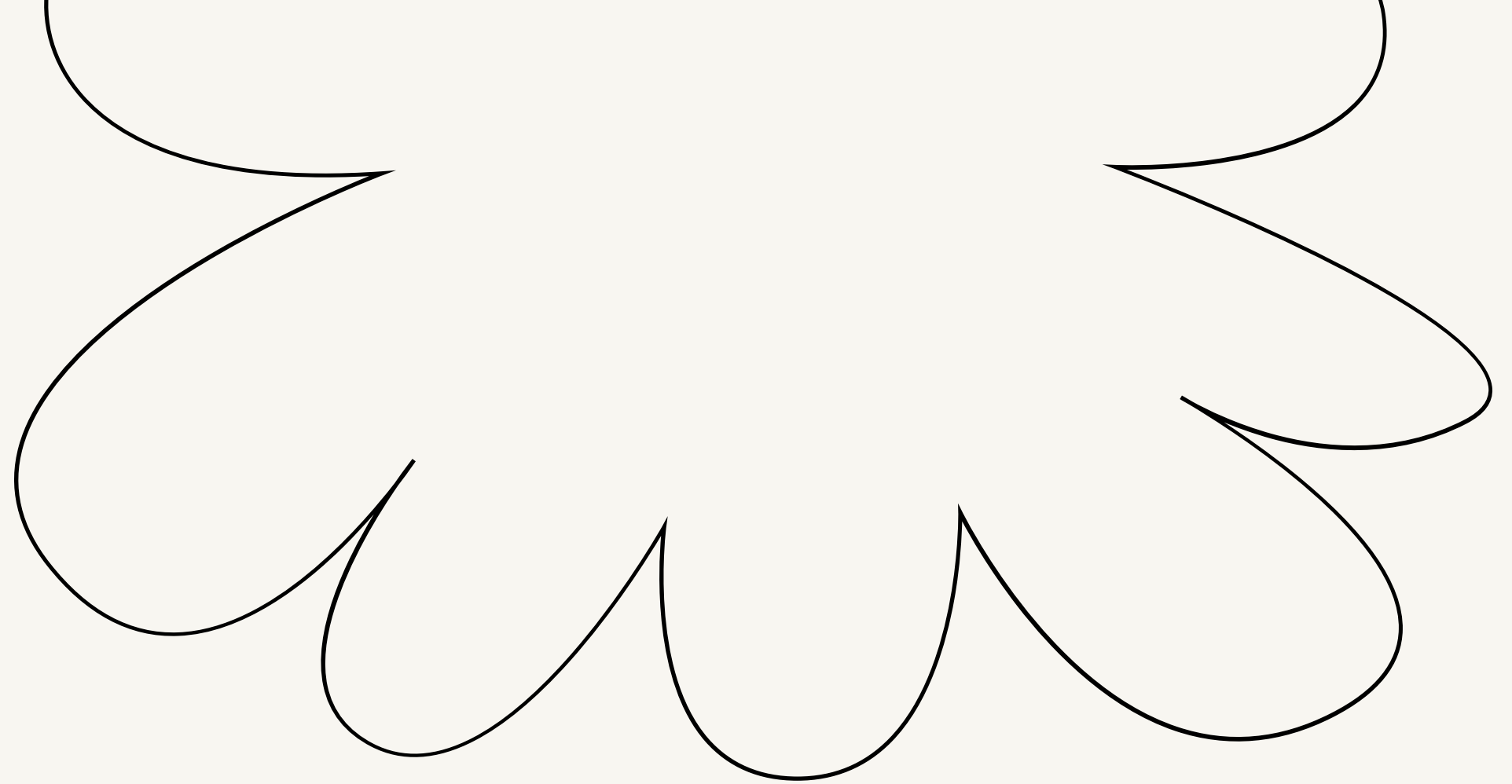
- Use culturally competent interpreters
- Normalize neurodivergence in community settings
- Provide parent education that meets families where they are (e.g., story-based approaches, WhatsApp groups for information sharing)

Practical Tools for Supporting Families



BUILDING ROUTINES AND PREDICTABILITY
UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR AND EMOTION REGULATION
PARENTING WITH STRENGTHS-BASED STRATEGIES

Building Routines and **Predictability**



GUIDING PARENTS IN BUILDING ROUTINES AND STRATEGIES AT HOME

- Visual schedules for routines
- The use of first/then language
- Sensory-friendly strategies (e.g., quiet corners, movement breaks)

Understanding Behavior and Emotion Regulation



THE GROCERY STORE MELTDOWN

A mom tells you her 3-year-old screams and covers their ears in the grocery store, refuses to get into the car seat, and cries if the routine changes. She feels like a bad parent. What would you say? How would you handle this situation?

Parenting with **Strengths-Based Strategies**

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SHIFT THE FOCUS FROM “FIXING” TO “LEVERAGING STRENGTHS”

- Engage in interest-based learning (buy-in is important)
- Engage in co-regulation
- Engage in empowering choice-making (forced choice)



Bridging the Gap Between Parents and Schools

CHALLENGES FAMILIES FACE WHEN TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL-AGE SERVICES

- Mistrust of schools (due to past experiences or stories of others)
- Language and cultural barriers
- Lack of clear guidance on what's available (e.g., IEPs, 504 Plans, early intervention services)



Bridging the Gap Between Parents and Schools



EQUIPPING PARENTS WITH ADVOCACY TOOLS

- Helping parents ask the right questions in meetings
- Encouraging early conversations with teachers
- Recommending trusted community resources



Bridging the Gap Between Parents and Schools



HOW EARLY LEARNING SPECIALISTS CAN STRENGTHEN PARENT-CHILD COLLABORATION

- Model proactive communication strategies for parents to use with schools
- Encourage partnership over placement (help families see themselves as active participants, not just the recipients of services)

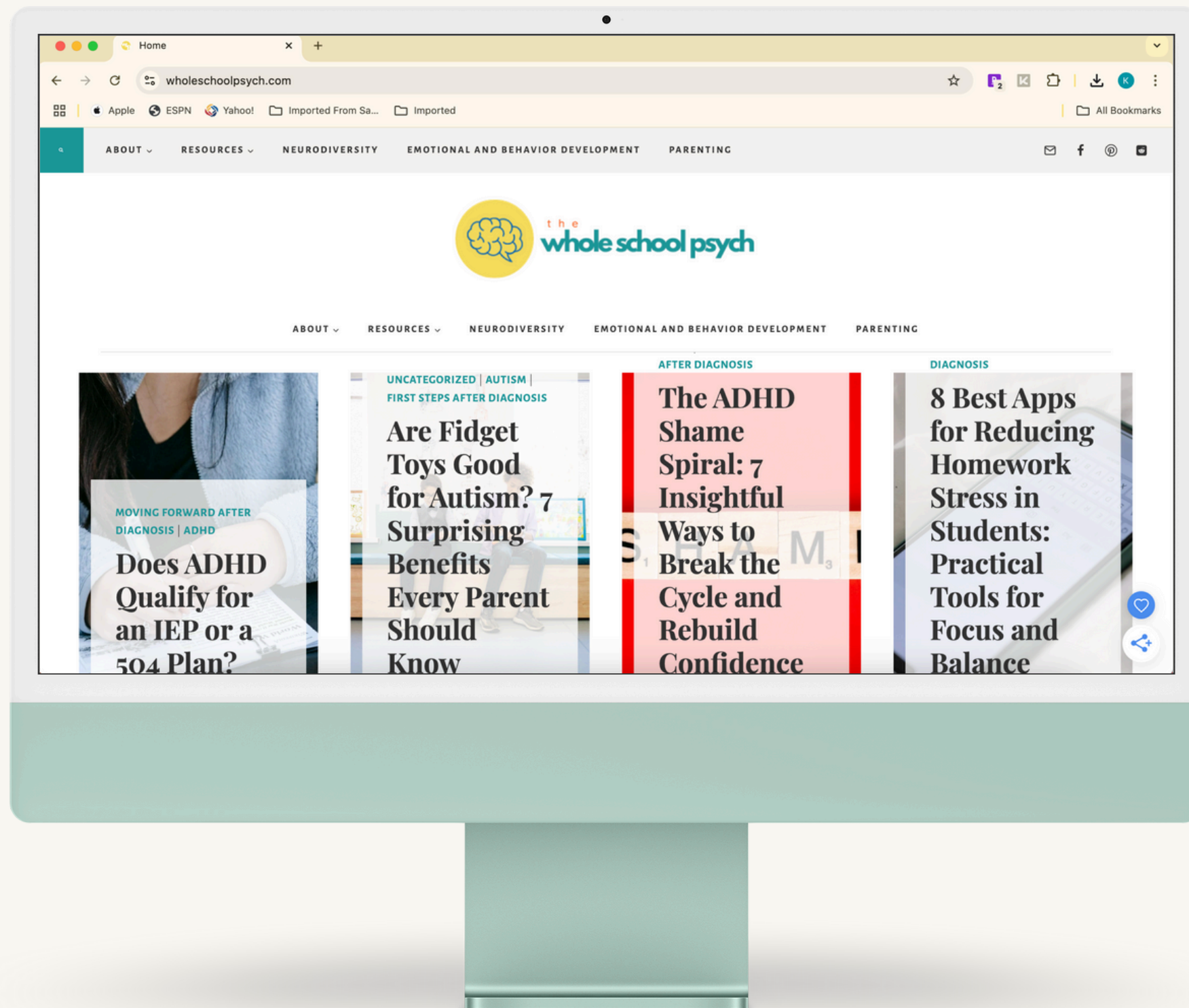


BLOG

For Kids Who Don't Fit the Mold

Schools provide support, but parents are often left trying to fill in the gaps at home.

Whole School Psych bridges that divide, providing clear, practical insights from a school psychologist. With a focus on ADHD, autism, learning disabilities, and behavior challenges, the blog translates school-based strategies into actionable guidance families can actually use.






free guides

 STEP 1

THE PARENT'S Clarity Guide:

Understanding
and Supporting
Your Unique Child




hello@wholeschoolpsych.com
www.wholeschoolpsych.com

 STEP 2

FIRST STEPS AFTER Diagnosis:

A Guide for
Parents



hello@wholeschoolpsych.com
www.wholeschoolpsych.com

 STEP 3



FEELING STUCK After Diagnosis:

A Parent's Guide
to Moving
Forward

Kayla Tucker, SSP, NCSP

hello@wholeschoolpsych.com
www.wholeschoolpsych.com



WHAT WE OFFER FOR FAMILIES

- 1:1 coaching for parents who want help understanding their child's learning and behavior needs and implementing effective strategies at home

WHAT WE OFFER FOR ORGANIZATIONS

- Consulting and training for organizations that want to improve how they support families—through better systems, stronger staff capacity, and clearer communication

Keep in Touch!

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