

BOUNDARIES

The above are supports & accommodations. Boundaries come into play when your needs are ignored or disrespected once communicated. Stand your ground & don't allow others to shame you for your needs. Even if they are unprecedented.

CONFLICTING ACCESS NEEDS

Sometimes individuals have conflicting needs. There's no simple solution here, but traditional "compromise" usually leaves one neurodivergent individual in distress. These situations call for problem solving that considers the wellbeing of both individuals. It may be that one or both need breaks or sensory supports.

OPTING OUT

If you find that you've communicated your needs & they are mocked or disrespected you are well within reason to turn down future events. Or you may simply not have bandwidth for all of the events you are invited to. You can say no for any reason to protect your capacity and wellbeing.

AFTERMATH

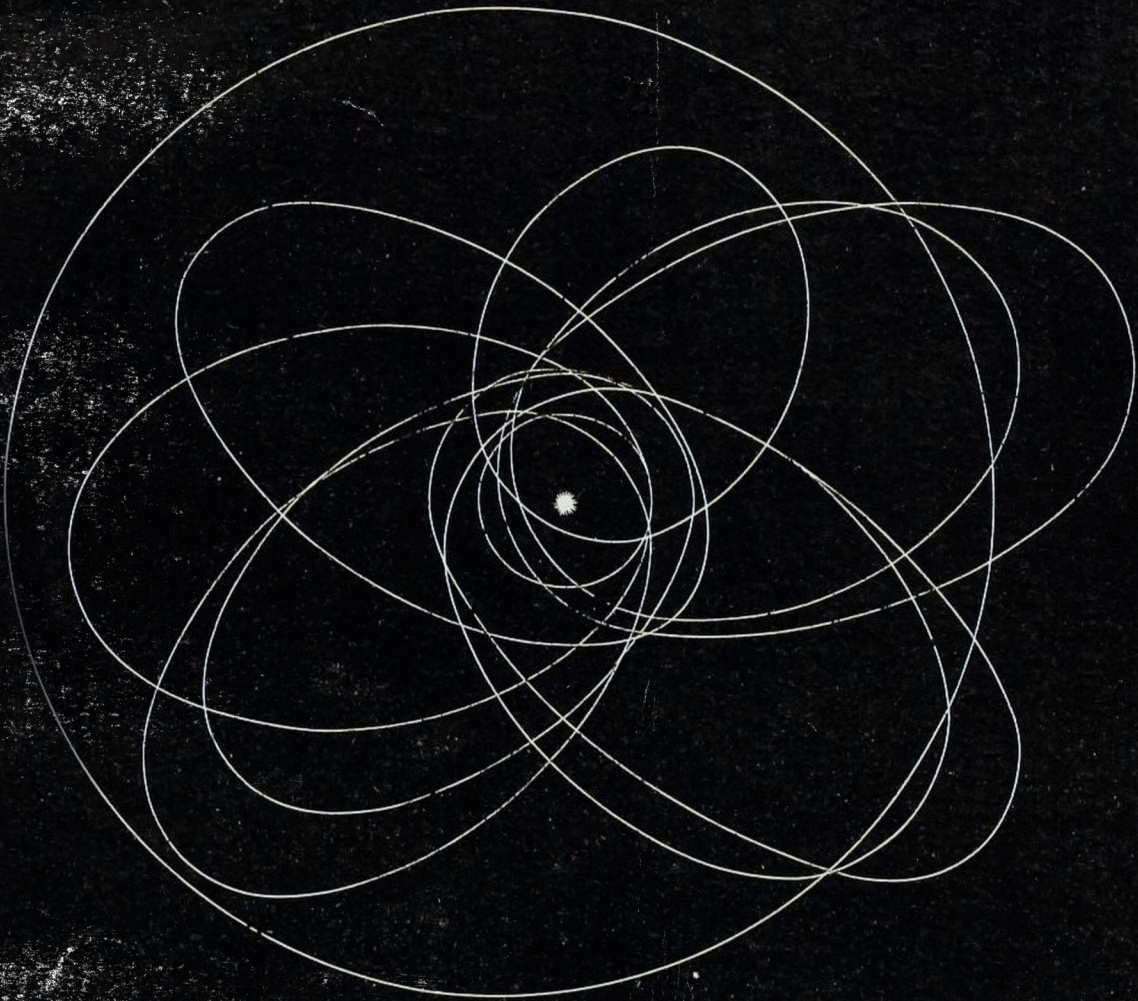
Even after the best supported gatherings I often find I need to reset & recharge afterwards. Planning for this and having a safe cocoon to retreat to is essential after care. Be as kind to yourself as possible. Struggling in social situations is not a character flaw and is simply how some brains are wired. For a hypersensitive soul every sound, color, texture, taste, and expression can be taken in as a high res & multilayered data set. You are simply processing more information than most.

I hope you find this helpful. Drawing clear boundaries with extended family around social events & implementing supports during visits has been one of the most powerful things I have done to protect my mental health. It may be hard, but I am cheering for you.

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My experience as a late diagnosed autistic adult has been a lifetime of internalizing my needs as unreasonable. Only after having an autistic child could I see that our needs are just as valid as everyone else's.

I began to ask for accommodations & draw boundaries that supported our wellbeing (rather than pushing myself to endure sensory pain & overstimulation by ignoring my own needs.)

ASSUME YOUR NEEDS ARE REASONABLE

Here are some considerations for anyone who has been ignoring their own wellbeing and needs to draw boundaries to take better care of themselves. I hope this is especially helpful to high masking autistic or neurodivergent humans who are in distress or burn out.

SENSORY SUPPORTS

This is a good place to start because it is within your control. Instead of dressing to impress (or fit in) wear comfortable clothing that does not contribute to sensory distress or overstimulation. Consider bringing or wearing fidgets or jewelry that can be fidgeted with for self-regulation. Bring headphones, sunglasses, comfort items (anything from a book to a soft toy), and snacks in case you need them. Then practice actually using supports as needed. You could also bring a basket of regulatory tools for all to share.

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

I find these accommodations harder (with more pushback) but powerful & worth any awkwardness. First, allow yourself to communicate in ways that you find most accessible. I struggle with auditory processing and use texts or emails to plan events. You may also find smaller groups easier to navigate and prefer multiple holiday celebrations over one big one. Next is allowing (or even scheduling) breaks & downtime to recharge & regulate your nervous system.

ENVIRONMENT

Is the place suitable for your inclusion? Is there a quiet place you can use to reset? How many voices & noises will be overlapping at once? Is the lighting harsh & painful? Sometimes you can use supports (fidgets or headphones) and other times a different environment or smaller gathering will be more accessible.

STRUCTURE

If you need certain levels of structure and others are more improvisational you may have to plan it yourself. You're allowed to set your own times to leave. Having a gameplan for the day that addresses hunger, sensory reset & exit plan can be incredibly helpful.