



Special & Intense Interest Map

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Neurodiversity-
Affirming

Play
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Special Interests

Special interests are frequently experienced by neurodivergent children, particularly autistic children. Research suggests that these special interests emerge in early childhood, and as practitioners we should place high regard on that which is important to the child. Interests are unique, and sometimes, we might not "get it" but if the child indicates a special interest, we should take their lead.



Special Interests

An interest may involve collecting items such as postcards or dolls, listening to or playing music in a repetitive way, or focusing intensely on a narrow topic, such as insects.

Special-interest topics may be commonplace — things such as trains, gardening or animals — but autistic children will sometimes gravitate toward more "quirky" fascinations such as keys, the edge of objects or boxes. The possibilities are endless.



Intense **Interests**

Another form for neurodivergent interests are "intense interests". This often happens amongst ADHD'ers and is sustained via their hyperfocus.

These interests can emerge from anywhere and can be all consuming. Withholding opportunities for children to engage in their intense interests can lead to dysregulation, sadness and withdrawing behaviours.



Be Child-Led

Interests are gateways to wellbeing, joy and learning. By following the child's lead, you can use "hooks" along the way to support learning, or simply enjoy being together throughout the play. Try not to assume that seemingly trivial or nonsensical interests hold no value.



Interest Groups

Try to offer opportunities to learn through their interests rather than sending children off to intervention groups or outside the environment.

You have to view a child's play like a map to which you don't yet know the destination, but are wholly prepared to go on the adventure...

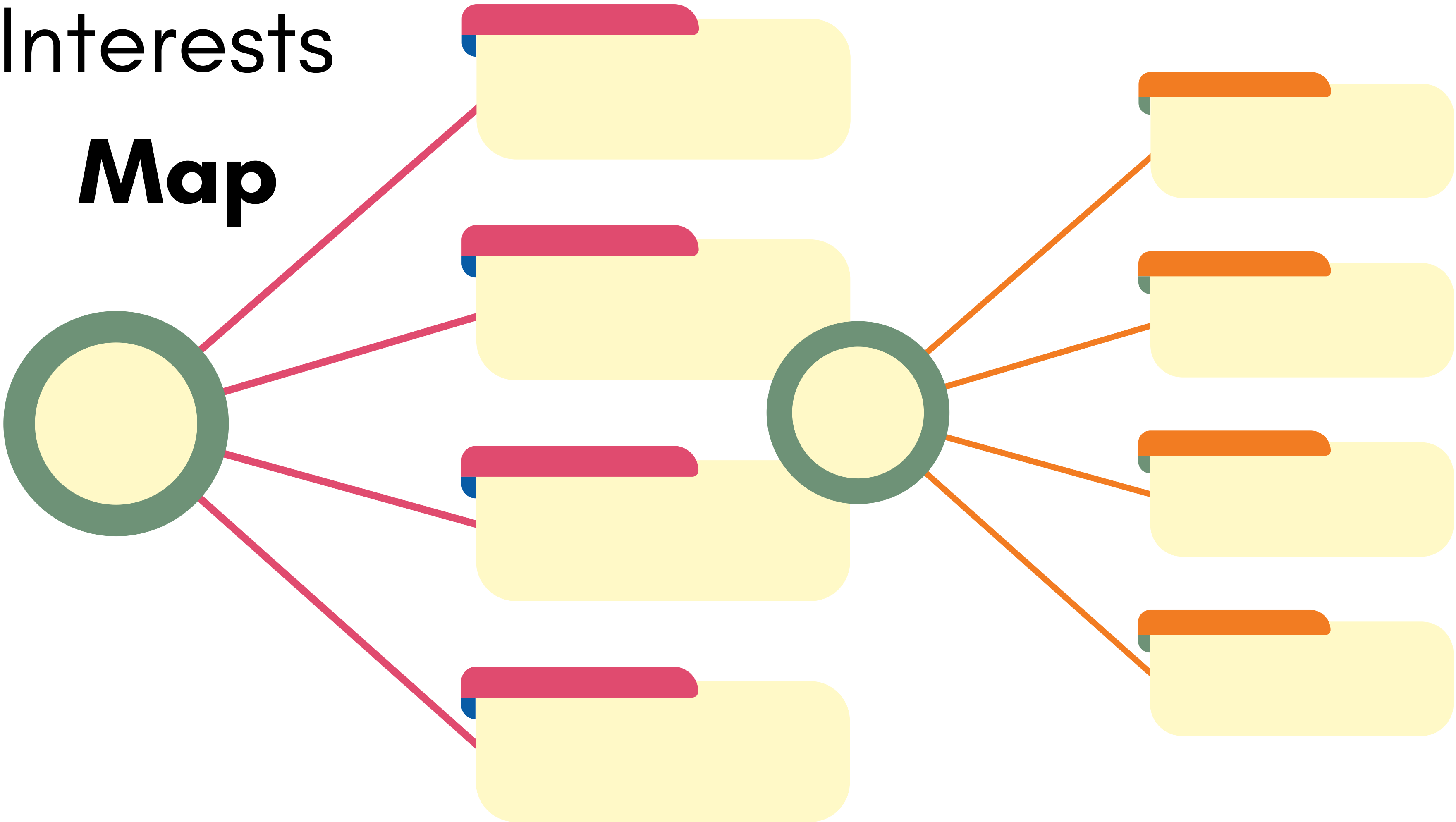


Put yourself in their shoes...

How might you feel if you were continually pulled away from your hobbies or favourite things?

Interests

Map



FURTHER SUPPORT



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