BRIDGING NEURODIVERSITY DIVIDES: AUTISM & ADHD

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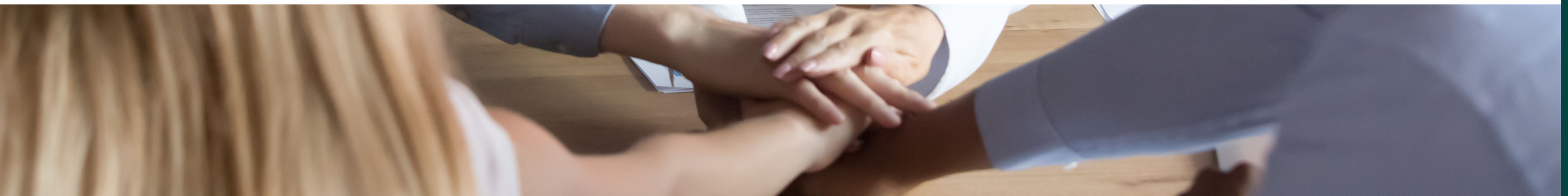
Inspire 2026

PRESENTATION OVERVIEW



“It seems interesting that the first principles the Lord Jesus Christ chose to teach His newly called Apostles were those that center around the *way we treat each other* .

And then, what did He emphasize during the brief period He spent with the Nephites on this continent?

Basically, the same message.

Could this be because the way we treat each other is the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ?”

Elder Marvin J. Ashton, “ The Tongue Can Be a Sharp Sword, ” Ensign, May 1992.

INTRODUCTION

Taking time to understand myself and those around me.

Recognizing Neurodivergence in Ourselves & Others

Addressing differences in communication style, social expectations, sensory activities, and cognitive processing.

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

Neurodiversity is a framework for understanding human brain function that recognizes the diversity of human cognition as a biological fact.

- Neurodiversity= natural part of human diversity.
- Typical is not better.
- Our environment affects our abilities.
- Create place where everyone can flourish.

- **NEURODIVERGENT: Someone whose brain works differently from the societal norm, affecting how a person thinks, feels, learns, or experiences the world.**
- **NEUROTYPICAL: Someone whose brain functions in the way expected by society.**

Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurodiversityile:///C:/Users/11068454/OneDrive/Presentations/Autism%20Research/Presentations/Archives/APA%20neurodiversity-slides.pdf

THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

What causes a disability?

Disability is not caused by a condition.
It is caused when society fails to accommodate the needs of that condition.
Society automatically meets the typical needs, but people with less typical needs get left out.

WHAT IS AUTISM?

A neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by markedly impaired social interactions and verbal and nonverbal communication; narrow interests; and repetitive behavior.

"Bottom-up processing delves into the minute details, meticulously piecing them together to construct a comprehensive understanding… Autistic people are actually deep processors." -- Dr. Megan Anna Neff

https://dictionary.apa.org, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism -spectrum -disorders -asd

Cutting Edge Research: July 2025

Publication date & source: July 9, 2025, in *Nature Genetics*
Sample size: Over 5,000 autistic children, ages 4–18
Data source: SPARK cohort, one of the largest autism research databases
Methodology: Person-centered computational model
Data analyzed: 230+ traits per child, including:

- Social behaviors
- Developmental milestones
- Co-occurring conditions
- Additional behavioral and clinical measures

Outcome: Identification of four biologically and clinically distinct autism subtypes

Subtype	% of Sample	Key Features	Genetic Pattern
Social & Behavioral Challenges	~37%	Strong social communication and repetitive behavior issues; milestones on time; frequent ADHD/anxiety/depression	Common psychiatric-linked variants; genes active postnatally
Moderate Challenges	~34%	Milder autism traits; milestones on time; few psychiatric comorbidities	Lower overall genetic burden; no standout rare variants
Mixed ASD with Developmental Delay	~19%	Early delays in language/motor skills; autism traits vary; fewer mental health conditions	Combination of inherited rare variants and de novo mutations
Broadly Affected	~10%	Severe developmental delays; major communication and behavioral challenges; psychiatric comorbidities	Highest load of de novo, high-impact neurodevelopmental mutations

Troyanskaya, O. G., Litman, A., Sauerwald, N., Park, C. Y., Hao, Y., Green Snyder, L. A., Foss-Feig, J., Theesfeld, C. L., Dinstein, I., & others. (2025, July 9). Four biologically and clinically distinct subtypes of autism spectrum disorders identified through person-centered computational modeling. *Nature Genetics*.

The Brain: Making Sense of Information

1. Different development in the anterior cingulate cortex (regulates attention, decision making, impulse control, and emotional processing).
2. Neurons activate easily
3. More neural attention on particular details rather than the whole (global).

Overall: Some brain regions remain hyperconnected and others may be under-connected.
Autism is highly heritable, clustering in families with strong genetics.

"My body is often a place of too-muchness and not-enoughness… sensory overload, fog, discomfort, and body alienation… To be Autistic is to frequently be intruded upon by the world." Dr. Megan Anna Neff

https://www.autismspeaks.org/sensory -issuest

Common Signs of Autism

- Taking things very literally – for example, you may not understand sarcasm or phrases like "break a leg"
- Finding it hard to understand what others are thinking or feeling
- Getting very anxious about social situations
- Finding it hard to make friends or preferring to be on your own
- Seeming blunt, rude or not interested in others without meaning to
- Finding it hard to say how you feel
- Having the same routine every day and getting anxious if it changes

•Highly sensitive to small stimuli

•Difficulty filtering what to ignore vs. attend to

•Focuses on details over the big picture

•Very analytical and deliberate

•Relies on logic, not gut instincts

•Decisions take more time and effort

18 January 2016

the original on 1 June 2023. Retrieved 4 November 2021.

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SELECT SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Conflict usually involves differences that matter to one or more people.

Communication Styles

Logic & reason, bottom-up processing, & deliberative decision-making processes.

Anger Management/Meltdowns

An uncontrollable response to overwhelming feelings; physically overwhelmed brain.

Demand Avoidance

Intense, pervasive drive for autonomy w/ heightened sensitivity to autonomy threats.

https://reframingautism.org.au/all-about-autistic-meltdowns-a-guide-for-allies/#:~:text=Meltdowns%20are%20common%20for%20Autistic,intolerance%20and%20emotional%20regulation%20issues.Bridging Divides

COMMUNICATION STYLES

Where do neurotypicals and autistic people misunderstand each other when communicating?

- Direct and Logical Approaches
- Differing Concepts of Empathy Expression
- Misinterpretation of Non-Verbal Cues

COMMON AUTISTIC COMMXN NEEDS

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

- **Be specific (time/place/details).**
- **Give a clear yes/no.**
- **Share agenda/materials ahead.**
- **Give step-by-step directions.**
- **Set measurable goals.**

EXPLICIT MESSAGING

- Don’t rely on facial or vocal cues.
- Explain emotions directly.
- Respect boundaries.
- Avoid unspoken expectations.
- Ask clarifying questions.

REDUCED SENSORY/SOCIAL OVERLOAD

- **Don’t require eye contact.**
- **Talk while doing activities.**
- **Allow written expression.**
- **Offer breaks and quiet space**

ANGER MANAGEMENT AND MELTDOWNS

A meltdown is an involuntary physical response to an overwhelmed brain.

General Triggers

- Stress
- Communication breakdowns
- Sensory overload
- Routine disruption
- Sleep loss
- Life or health changes
- Medication or hormonal shifts
- Loss of control

Sensory Triggers

- Sound (noise, voices, music)
- Touch (textures, physical contact)
- Sight (bright lights, busy visuals)
- Smell (food, perfume)
- Taste (foods, medicines)
- Movement (too fast or intense

Warning Signs of Meltdown

- Increased anxiety or restlessness
- Communication difficulties
- Heightened sensory sensitivity
- Irritability or frustration
- Social or activity withdrawal
- More repetitive behaviors

Ahttps://reframingautism.org.au/all -about -autistic -meltdowns -a-guide -for -allies/#:~:text=Meltdowns%20are%20common%20for%20Autist ic,intolerance%20and%20emotional%20regulation%20issues.dd a little bit of body text

WHAT HELPS DURING A MELTDOWN?

Calm, Quiet, & Slow Approach

- Stay calm and quiet.
- Move slowly.
- Give space.
- Don’t touch without consent.

Calming Gestures

•Water or cool compress
•Comfort items (soft/weighted)
•Rocking or movement
•Headphones or calming music
•Soothing scents or sounds
•Dim lights, quiet space

https://reframingautism.org.au/all -about -autistic -meltdowns -a-guide -for -allies/#:~:text=Meltdowns%20are%20common%20for%20Autisti c,intolerance%20and%20emotional%20regulation%20issues.

WHAT IS DEMAND AVOIDANCE?

An intense drive to avoid demands to protect autonomy and control.

6 Core Characteristics of Demand Avoidance

1. Resistance to demands.
2. Need for control.
3. Social avoidance strategies.
4. Superficial social abilities.
5. Obsessive behavior due to anxiety.
6. Preference for role play.

https://reframingautism.org.au/pathological -demand -avoidance -pda -and -autism -guide -for -allies/little bit of body text

HOW TO RESPOND TO PDA

Work on building a strong relationship rooted in trust.

Avoid demand words

Depersonalize requests.

Remain calm, and don't take it personally

Give indirect praise.

Be consistent

Be flexible (within reason)

WHAT IS ADHD?

ADHD, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent patterns of **inattention**, **hyperactivity**, and **impulsivity** that can affect daily functioning and development.

Three Main Types:

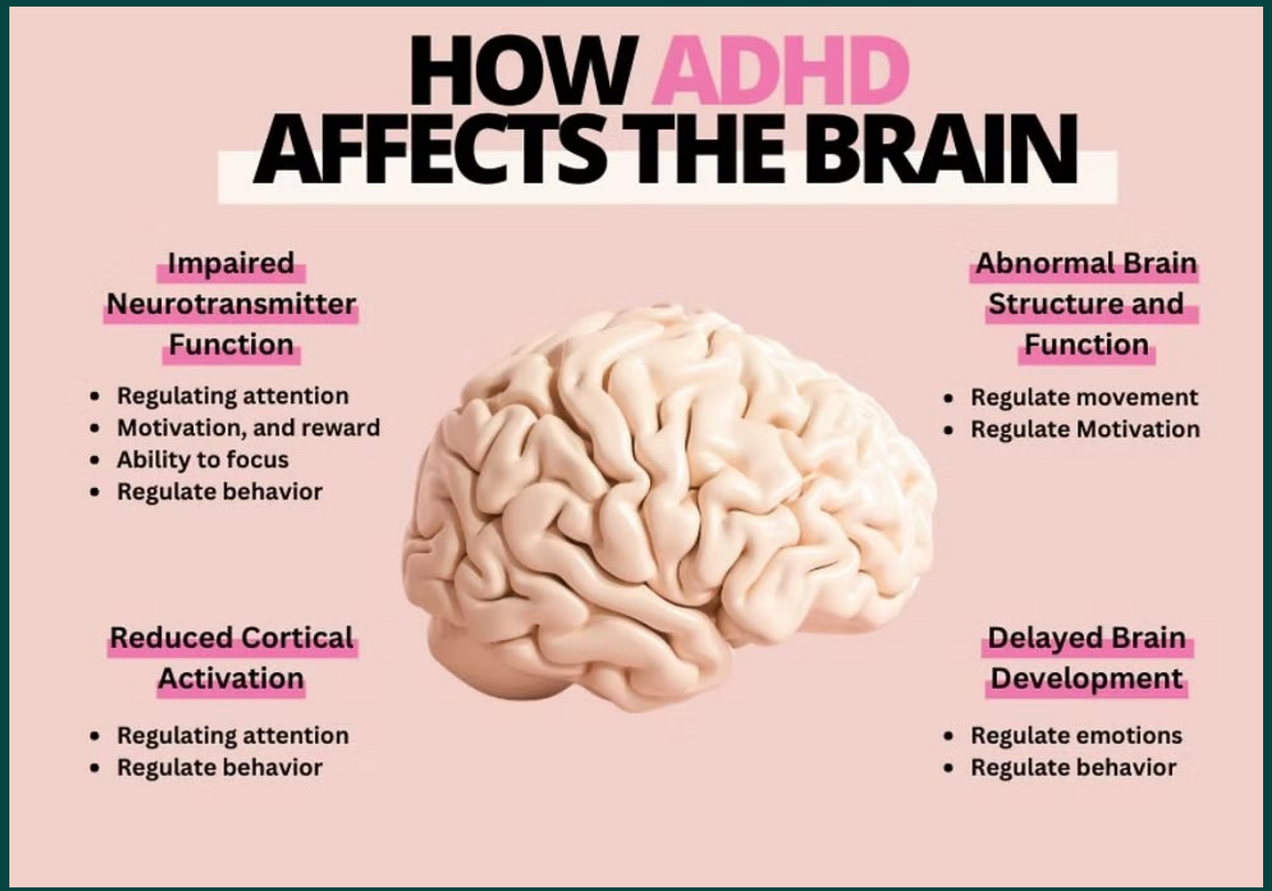
Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation (ADHD-HI)

Predominantly Inattentive Presentation (ADHD-I)

Combined Presentation (ADHD-C)

The ADHD Brain

Differences in brain structure, function & development



1. **Emotional Dysregulation**

   Trouble managing emotions; big reactions to small stressors

2. **Low Frustration Tolerance**

   Gets upset quickly; gives up easily

3. **Sleep Problems**

   Difficulty falling or staying asleep

4. **Poor Time Management**

   Loses track of time; chronic lateness

5. **Rejection Sensitivity (RSD)**

   Strong emotional reactions to criticism or rejection

Add more text

ADHD in the United States

•**9.4% of U.S. children (6.1M)** have ADHD—over double adults (4.4%); boys diagnosed more often.

•**~90%** receive school support; **75%** get medication, therapy, or both.

•**~10%** develop substance use issues; bipolar disorder **6×** more common in adults with ADHD.

•**33%** drop out of high school; **15%** earn a four-year degree; trade school attendance **2×** typical.

•Drivers with ADHD have a **47%** higher accident risk.

•Up to **20%** of young children diagnosed may not actually have ADHD.

https://www.crossrivertherapy.com/adhd-statistics

POTENTIAL AREAS OF CONFLICT

Conflict usually involves differences that matter to one or more people.

1. Impulsivity vs. Thoughtful Processing

2. Emotional Dysregulation vs. Emotional Stability

3. Dopamine -Seeking Behavior vs. Conflict Avoidance

4. Executive Function Challenges with Planning

5. Different Communication Styles

6. Sensory Overload vs. Social Norms

IMPULSIVITY

May interrupt, blurt out thoughts, or make snap decisions.

Neurotypical Perspective

May perceive this as rude, reckless, or disrespectful.

Constructive Response

- Seek to understand the ADHD Brain (i.e. study and learn about)
- Recognize that behaviors like interrupting, forgetfulness, and emotional outbursts are symptoms --not character flaws.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION CHALLENGES

Struggles with planning, time management, and follow-through

Neurotypical Perspective

May expect punctuality, reliability, and organization

Constructive Response

ADHD Individuals lose track of verbal exchanges.

Use whiteboards, shared notes, or speech -to-text tools to stay focused.

EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION

Experiences intense emotional reactions and slower recovery from emotional triggers.

Neurotypical Perspective

May expect quicker emotional regulation and view emotional intensity as overreaction.

Constructive Response

Practice the STAR Method

(1) Stop: Pause the conversation, (2) Think: Reflect on what's happening,

(3) Act: Choose a constructive response, (4) Recover: Allow time to heal emotionally

DOPAMINE -SEEKING BEHAVIOR VS. CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

May unconsciously seek stimulation through arguments or drama due to low dopamine

Neurotypical Perspective

May avoid conflict and prefer calm, predictable interactions

Constructive Responses

- Define acceptable behavior during conflict (e.g., no yelling).
- Collaborate on how to handle disagreements constructively.

TAKE BREAKS DURING HEATED MOMENTS b/c

ADHD brains flood with emotion quickly.

REJECTION SENSITIVITY

May experience Rejection Sensitive Dyspohoria (RSD), reacting strongly to perceived criticism

Neurotypical Perspective

May offer direct feedback without realizing its emotional impact.

Constructive Responses

ADHD individuals may react strongly to perceived criticism.

Avoid sarcasm, vague feedback, or emotionally -loaded language.

DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION STYLES

May prefer fast-paced, emotionally aggressive dialogue.

Neurotypical Perspective

May prefer calm, linear, and logical conversation.

Constructive Responses

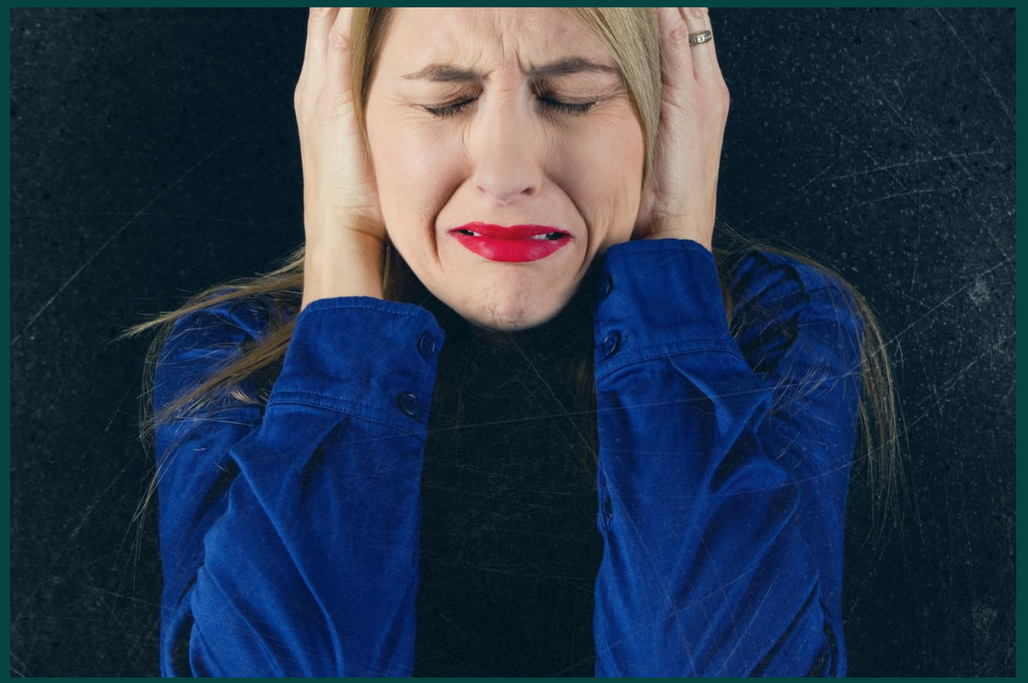
Repeat back what the other person said to confirm understanding.
Example: “What I hear you saying is...Did I get that right?”

USE SCRIPTS THAT ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE:

“I feel _____when _____because I need _____.

SENSORY OVERLOAD

May be overwhelmed by noise, crowds, or multi-tasking



Neurotypical Perspective

May not recognize sensory triggers and expect typical social behavior.

Constructive Responses

VALIDATE EMOTIONS WITHOUT JUDGMENT:

Say: “I can see why you feel that way,” even if you disagree.
This builds trust and reduces emotional escalation.
Respect when individuals need to step away to regain calm.

CREATING CONNECTION

SEEK TO UNDERSTAND

Both sides get educated about each other.

BE MINDFUL OF SENSORY OVERLOAD

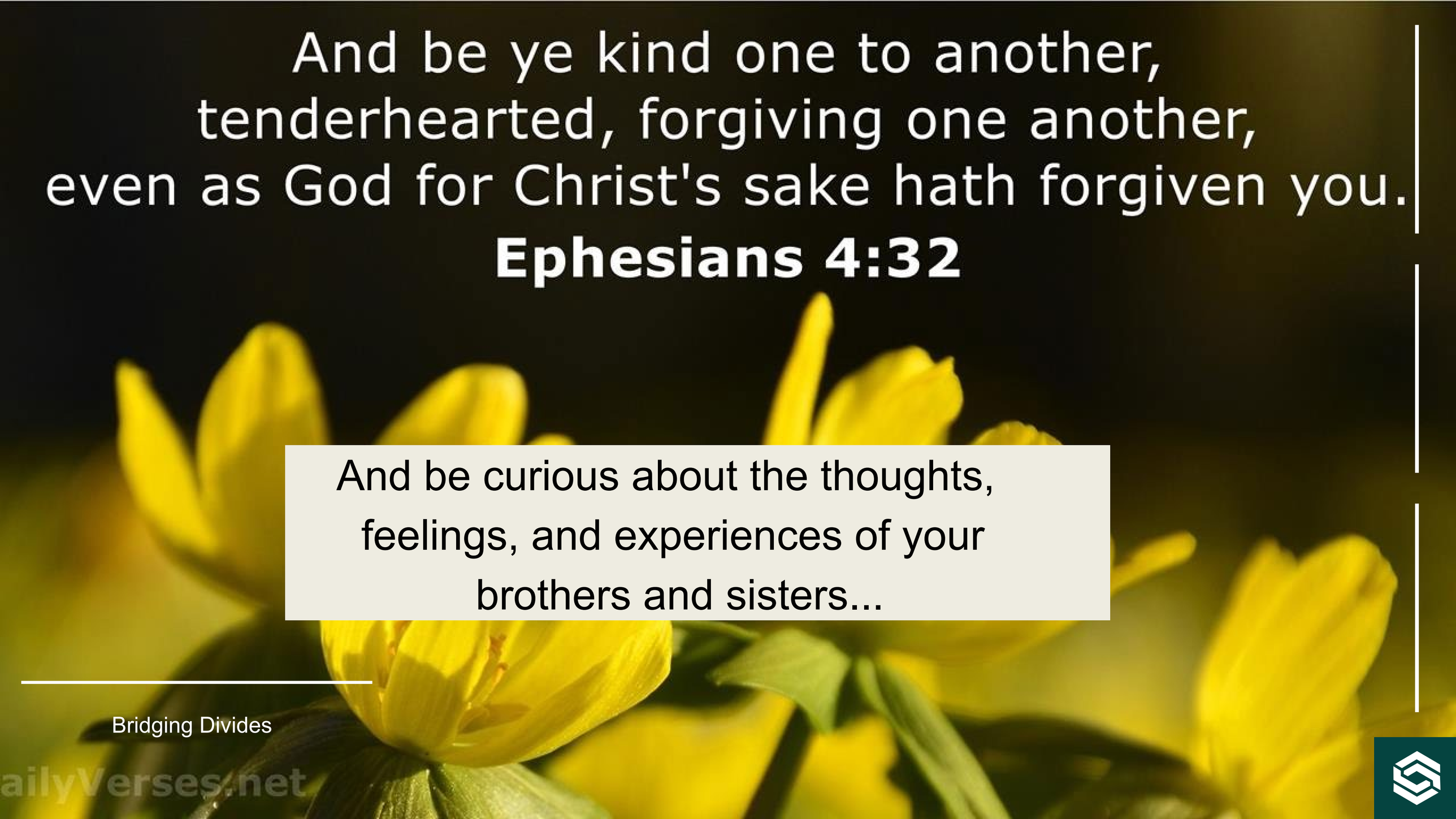
Don’t be Offended

PRACTICE CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Set clear expectations but allow for flexibility

LEVERAGE STRENGTHS

Pair creativity with structured framework


And be ye kind one to another,
tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.
Ephesians 4:32
And be curious about the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of your brothers and sisters...
ailyVerses.net

Connecting with Me

Websites

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