Part of what makes you, you!

Information about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

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BC Children's Hospital
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About this Handbook

Who we are

Clinicians who work with kids and families at BC Children's Hospital.

Why we made this handbook

To help children with a new diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder better understand what it means to them.

Who this handbook is for

Any person who has been diagnosed with Autism. It is written for children ages 5 to 12 but is appropriate for all ages.

How to use this handbook

Read this by yourself or with trusted people in your life like your parents, caregivers or teachers.

This handbook is dedicated to autistic children and their families.

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What is Autism?

- Autism is also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD for short).
- You may hear the term autistic person or you may hear person with autism. Many people use the term ASD.
- Autism affects the way a person's brain develops and works.
- People with ASD have lots of strengths and things they may need help with.

Remember: EVERYONE is unique and special!

What is Autism?

There are many people with ASD. Each person has their own abilities, challenges, and ways of being.

People with ASD are *not* all the same.

People with ASD may need a lot of help with some activities and less help with other activities.

What is Autism?

- You may hear people say that autistic people are ‘wired differently’. This means that your brain works in a unique way.

- Different can be *good.* You can have new ideas and ways to do things that other people may miss.

- Different can also be *hard*. You may need more time and energy to share your experiences so other people can understand you.

Did You Know?

People with autism…

Do everything that people without autism do.

Sing, dance, write, act, play sports, make music and art.

Work as engineers, artists, doctors, scientists, software developers, YouTubers, teachers, veterinarians, landscapers, chefs, psychologists and more.

Fall in love, have relationships and get married. They can also have their own children when they grow up.

Attend school, college and university.

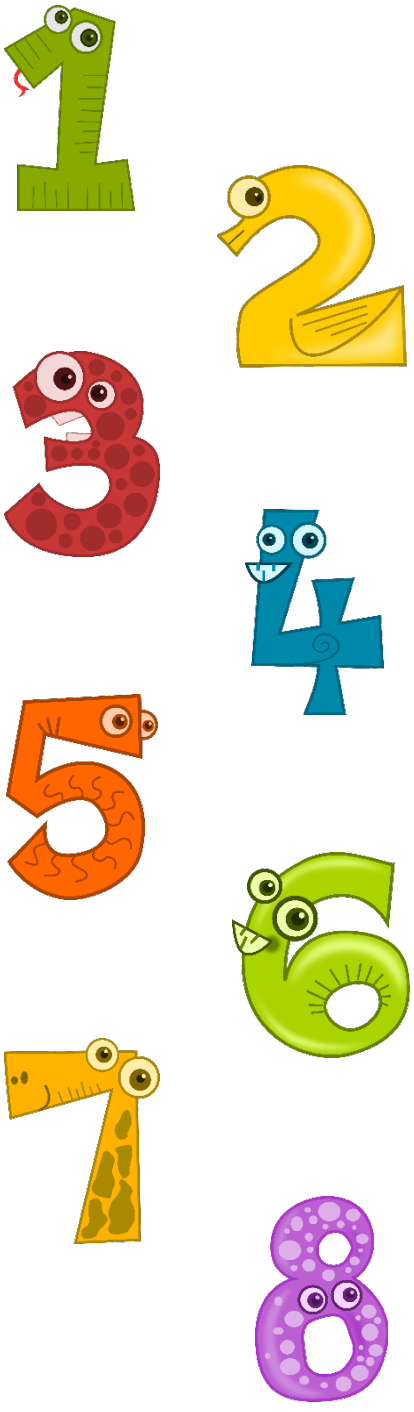
What Causes Autism?

- No one is sure. There may be many reasons, like:
  - Genetics
  - Environment

- Researchers are working hard to figure out what causes ASD so they can better help people.

Who has Autism?

- No one is sure how many people in the world have autism.
- More countries are starting to count the number of people with autism more accurately.
- In 2018, **1 in 66** (1.5%) of children and youth in Canada were diagnosed with ASD.*
- People of all genders have ASD.



*Public Health Agency of Canada (2018)

Is Autism Contagious?

- ASD is **not** contagious. You cannot catch it like a cold or flu.

- ASD is caused by differences in how people's brains are wired.
- ASD is no one's fault. It is just one way of being – like being tall, short or having freckles.

How Can Autism Be a Challenge?

Sometimes autism can make things hard because you may:

- **THINK** differently than other people.
- **FEEL** differently than other people your age.
- **ACT** differently than everyone else in a room.

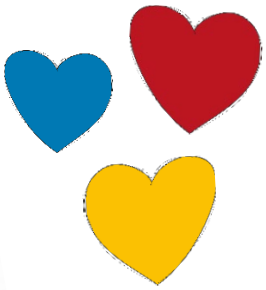
This means:

- People may not understand how you think about things.
- People may not understand how you feel about things.
- People may not understand what you say and do.

How Can Autism Be a Challenge?

Having ASD means you may have difficulty:

Sharing thoughts and feelings.



Making and keeping friends.

Showing expected behaviours.

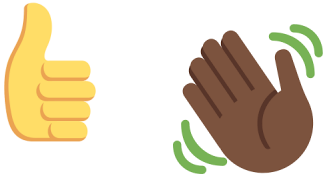
Thinking

Having ASD means you may have difficulty understanding other people's:

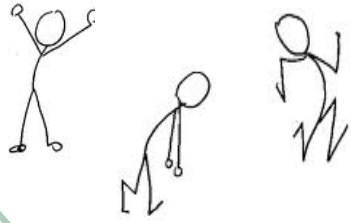
Thoughts

Facial expressions

Gestures



Body language



Words

Feeling

- People with ASD have the same feelings as everyone else.
- It may be hard for you to show how you feel.
- It also may be hard to know how other people feel.
- People have different ways of showing the same feeling.

Sometimes an autistic person feels…

Shy

Left Out

Excited

Focused

Upset

Annoyed

Joy

Alert

Worried

Confused

Ready

Calm

Happy

Frustrated

Sad

Nervous

…just like everyone else!

Behaviours

People with ASD may do things that look different. Some behaviours may include:

- Stimming: a repetitive action or movement that can make you feel better, like rocking or flapping your hands.

- Getting stuck or super focused on toys, objects, and topics.

- Lining up and sorting toys, figurines and other objects.

Behaviours

Having ASD means:

- You may suddenly make sounds or move your body in unexpected ways.
- You may repeat words that you hear in movies or shows.

- You may make less eye contact. You may not like to be touched.
- You may be upset by sounds and lights.

Friendships

Having autism means it may be hard to:

- Make and keep friends.
- Use facial expressions to show interest.
- Join and participate in groups.
- Start and keep conversations going.

Friendships

Having autism means it may be hard to:

- Play and work with others.
- Understand other points of view.
- Problem solve with others.
- Share creative ideas.
- Take turns.

Friendships

Remember

It is okay if you have trouble with friendships now. The good news is you can learn friendship skills with the help of others.

You will have many good friends throughout your lifetime.

Cool Things About ASD

Autistic people have some awesome abilities, such as:

Being really good at art, music or math.

Being really good at puzzles.

Having a really good memory.

Being really good at taking things apart or putting things back together quickly.

Being very loyal and honest.

Knowing a lot about a favourite subject.

Working hard at learning new things.

People with ASD Who Have Done Cool Things

Clay Marzo

Clay Maarzo is from Hawaii and was diagnosed with autism as a child. The documentary, *Just Add Water,* was made about Marzo because he won so many surfing competitions as a teenager. At age 15, he was the first person to receive two Perfect 10s at a national surfing competition. Marzo is now an adult and continues his career as a successful competitive surfer.

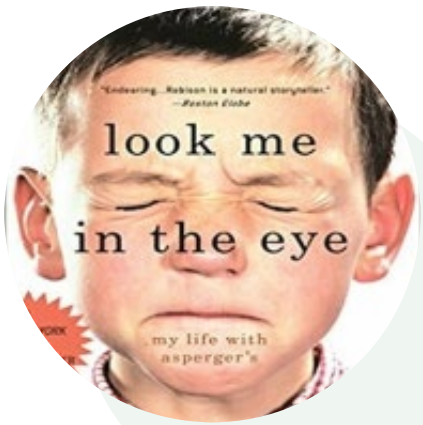
Dan Aykroyd

Dan Aykroyd is a comic actor. He was kicked out of two schools as a child for his behaviour and, in his 30s, diagnosed with autism. In an interview with the Daily Mail, Aykroyd shared that one of his symptoms of ASD was his interest in ghosts and law enforcement. This helped him create the movie *Ghostbusters*.

People with ASD Who Have Done Cool Things

Satoshi Tajiri

Satoshi Tajiri is the creator of Pokémon and has high functioning autism. Tajiri chooses not to talk about his autism in public. He prefers for his many accomplishments to speak for themselves.



John Elder Robison

John Elder Robison is the best-selling author of *Look Me in the Eyes* and *Be Different: Adventures of a Free-Range Aspergian*. Robison was diagnosed with autism as an adult and has said, “It took some time, and a lot of hard work, but the knowledge of how and why I am different transformed my life”. He is an autistic self-advocate who takes part in autism research and decision-making with many groups.

People with ASD Who Have Done Cool Things

Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg is a Swedish climate activist who is known around the world for her call to action to solve climate change. Thunberg sailed across the Atlantic Ocean by herself when she was 16 years old because it was better for the environment than flying. Thunberg calls autism her “superpower”.

Dr. Temple Grandin

Dr. Grandin did not talk until she was three and a half years old. Her teachers taught her how to wait and take turns when playing board games. In school, she discovered her love of science. She became an author and speaker on both autism and animal behaviour. She currently is a professor of Animal Science. Many articles have been written about Dr. Grandin and a movie was made about her life.

What People with ASD Say About Themselves

Which statements match you?

- I am great with details.
- I have super observational skills.
- I am methodical. I can spot patterns well.
- I have unique ways of thinking about things.
- I can solve problems creatively.
- I am loyal and super honest.
- When I make a commitment, I stick to it.
- I have a great imagination.
- I am resilient.

Other Thoughts

- Hearing the word autism may be upsetting or confusing for you and that's okay.
- You may worry about how ASD will affect your future.

- Sometimes you may worry about how your family will deal with it.
- You may wonder what your friends, neighbours or others think about you having ASD.

- At times, you will need to talk about how having ASD affects you. It is a good idea to find a trusted family member, teacher, or friend who you can be open and honest with about your questions and feelings.

Remember

Autism is a part of who you are and what makes you, YOU!

Every day is another opportunity to learn more about yourself.

As you learn more about having autism, you can share with others what you want them to know.

A lot of amazing people have autism just like you!

A Story About You

My name is _____.

I am _____ years old.

I live with _____

_____.
(include family and pets)

I like to _____,

_____

and _____.

I was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) on _____, 20_____.

This is what I knew about autism before my diagnosis:

_____

This is what I know about autism now:

_____

To me, autism means:

_____

True or *False:* I want my friends to know I have autism.

True or *False:* I want my classmates to know I have autism.

True or *False*: I want help telling my friends and family about my autism.

A Story About You

Some things that bother me are _____,

_____, _____.

Some things that make me laugh are _____,

_____, _____.

I am good at _____.

I need help with _____.

When I was younger, I liked: _____

_____.

Now that I am older, I like:_____

_____.

My favorite places to be are:

_____ and_____.

When I am upset:

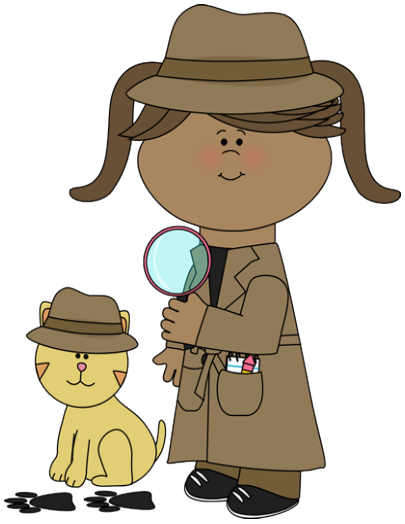
_____ I like people to come near me.

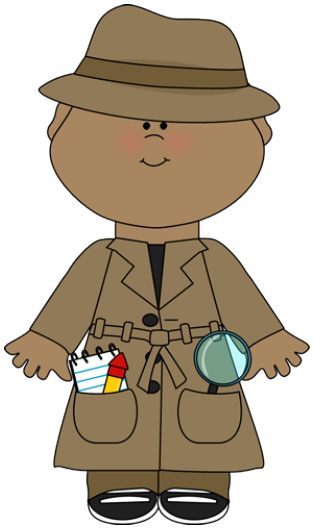
_____ I like people to stay away from me.

_____ I like people to be kind of far from me but in the same room.

A Story About Learning

I am learning so much about ME. Some things I like and some things I would like to change. One thing is for sure: the more I know about me, the more I like myself and learn how to make my life easier.





I am learning so much about OTHER PEOPLE, too. They do not always think, feel or act the way I do. This is okay. The more I know about others, the more I understand them.

Resources for You: Books

- *All My Stripes: A Story For Children With Autism*
  2015 | Shaina Rudolph & Danielle Royer

- *I See Things Differently: A First Look at Autism*
  2014 | Pat Thomas

- *Uniquely Wired: A Book About Autism and its Gifts*
  2018 | Julia Cook

- *The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin.*
  2019 | Julia Finley Mosca

- *The Survival Guide for Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorders (and Their Parents)*
  2012 | Elizabeth Verdick & Elizabeth Reeve

- *My Autism Book: A Child's Guide to their Autism Spectrum Diagnosis*
  2013 | Tamar Levi & Gloria Dura-Vila

Resources for You: Online

- Amazing Things Happen (video)

  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JdCY-cdgkI

  This uplifting animation introduces autism to non-autistic viewers, especially children aged 7-11. It shows how people with ASD have a unique perspective on the world, and how to be a good friend to a person with autism. Created by animator Alex Amelines.

- I Am Autistic Social Story (PDF)

  https://drive.google.com/file/d/18BCcQVIfwcGkS1S_x7ZWCQXsxBDb5R1o/view

  Social stories are short stories that explore social situations and socially expected behaviours. Often, you can personalize the stories. This story can help prepare you to explain autism to others. Written by ASD and Hyperlexia advocate Dyan Robson.

- Amazing Kids - Autistic Spectrum Condition (Video) https://amazingthingshappen.tv/?project=amazing-kids-autistic-spectrum-condition

  In this video, children with ASD talk about how they experience the world. Animator Alex Amelines illustrated these audio excerpts, bringing these children's perspectives to life.

- Pablo - Quiet Sounds | Cartoons for Kids

  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZexYscXuv58

  Pablo is a cartoon series that stars a 5-year-old boy with ASD. All of the main characters are also on the spectrum. In this episode, Pablo helps his friend Mouse to feel better in a bright, loud grocery store.

Resources for Your Family: Online

- Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre
  https://keltymentalhealth.ca/
  Part of BC Children's Hospital, Kelty helps families across BC navigate the mental health system. You can also connect with peer support, and access tools and resources like articles, videos and podcasts.

- Pacific Autism Family Network (PAFN)
  https://pacificautismfamily.com/
  This organization acts as an in-person and virtual knowledge hub for people with ASD and their families in BC. Connect with medical, dental and allied health service organizations, education and support services. PAFN also offers bursaries to help with program costs.

- Autism Community Training (ACT)
  https://www.actcommunity.ca/
  This BC-based organization offers evidence-informed resources for the ASD and special needs community. ACT holds live events and training sessions. Watch videos for parents and professionals, search for free multilingual resources in the Autism Information Database and learn about special events through their calendar.

Resources for Your Family: Online

- Autism BC | https://www.autismbc.ca
  This provincial organization works to support people with autism and their families. They offer workshops for parents, community training, and opportunities to connect through community events, social clubs and support groups across BC.

- Autism Information Services (AIS)
  http://autisminfo.gov.bc.ca/
  Connect with an Autism Support Specialist by phone, email or in person. Specialists offer general information, and can help you access funding and support. Available in English, Chinese, Punjabi, Tagalog and Vietnamese, with interpreters in over 50 languages.

- Autism Canada | https://autismcanada.org/
  Learn about what an autism diagnosis means and connect with peer and professional supports for your family. This website features videos, podcasts, and information about activities and supports to engage your child with ASD.

Questions?

_____?

_____?

_____?

_____?

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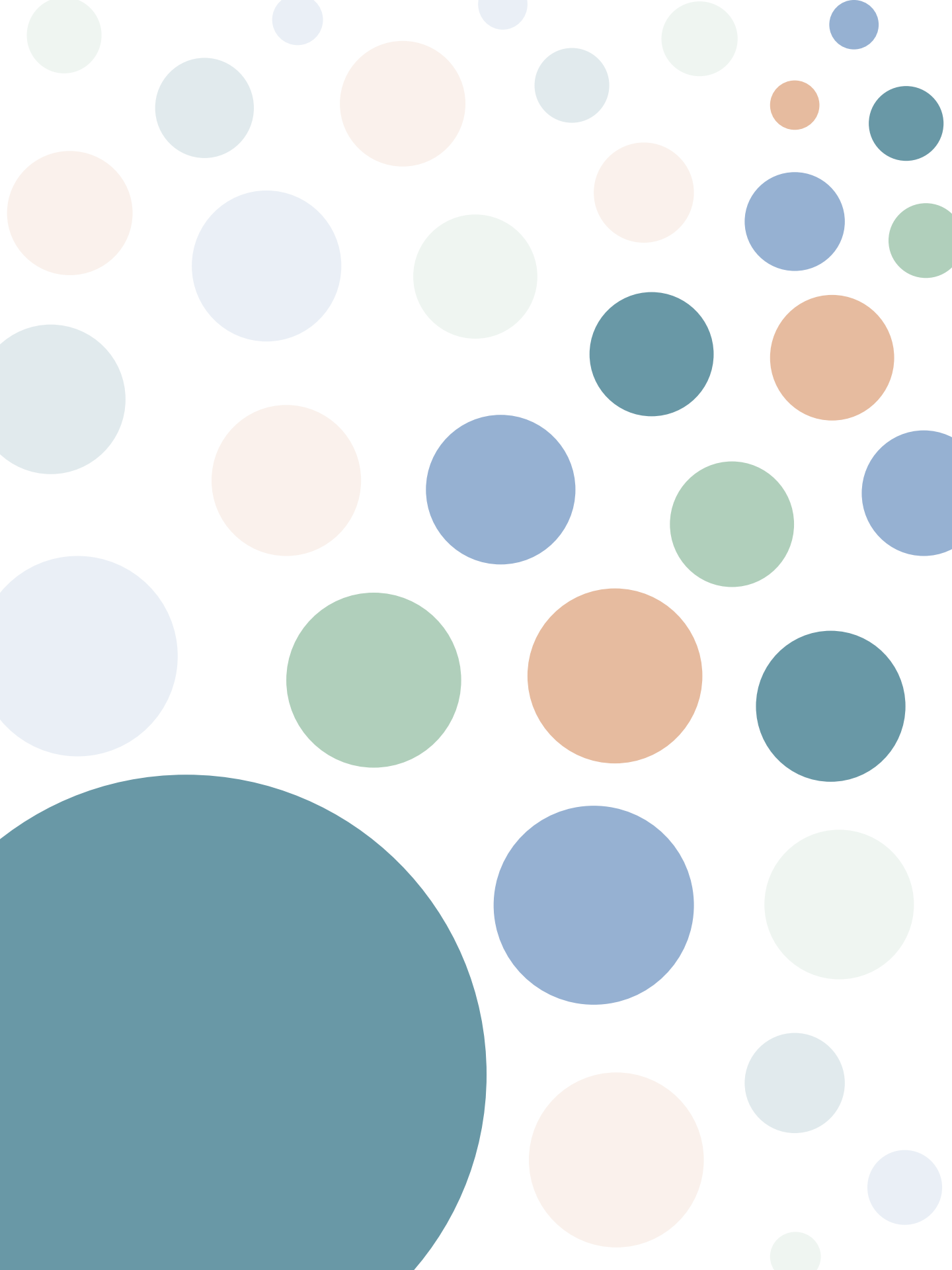
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