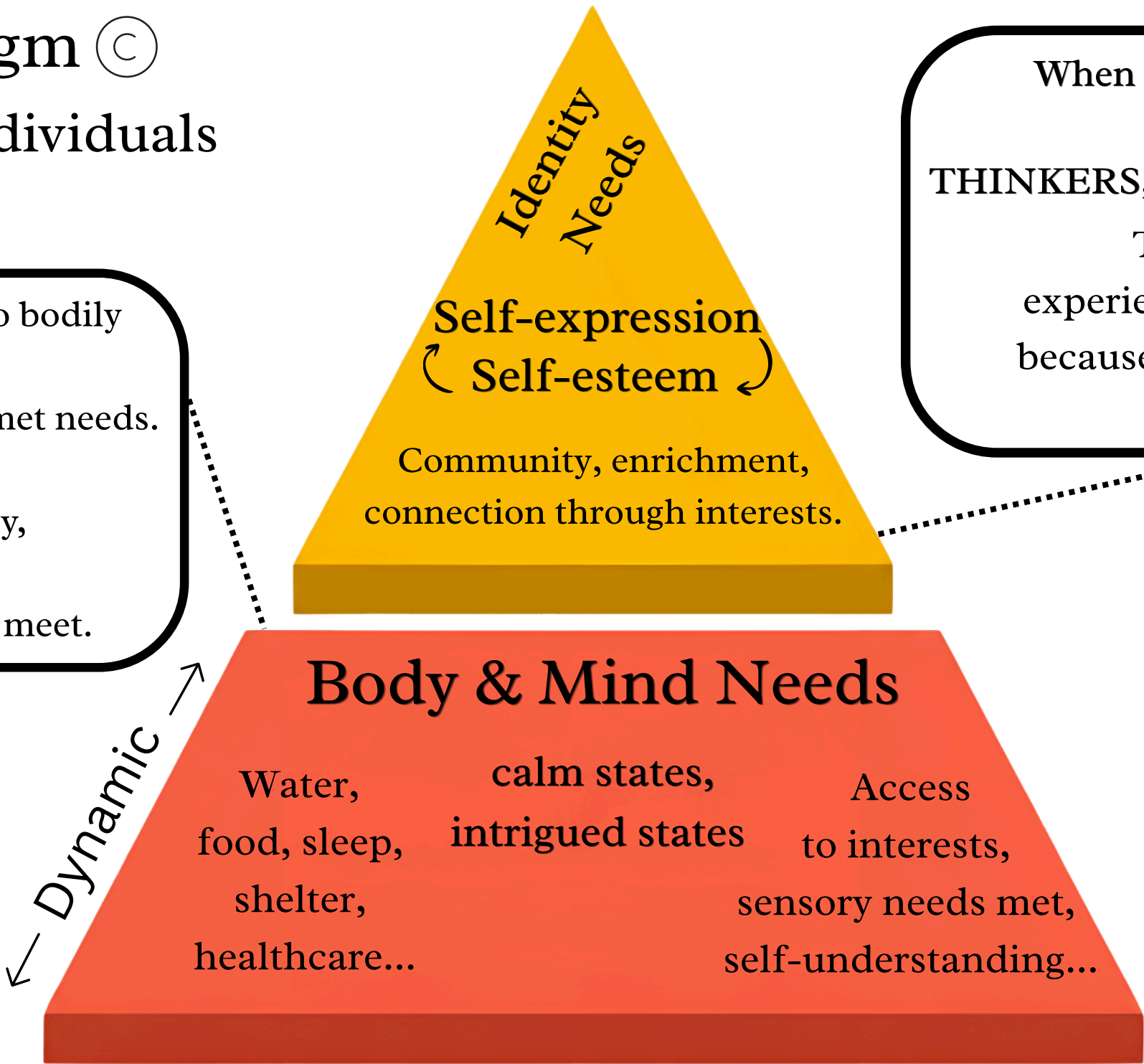


Relational Paradigm © for Supporting Autistic Individuals

For some individuals, attending to bodily needs feels inaccessible due to nuanced (often invisible) unmet needs.

For perhaps a larger majority, mind /emotional state needs are more difficult to meet.



When needs are met, we are freer to become:
THINKERS, DREAMERS, MAKERS, DOERS.

This is the full human experience - we crave and need this because humans are color and light and wind and magic.

Self-expression and self-esteem have a bidirectional relationship.

Safety is ground zero, but it is not cued by a roof or walls, nor access to food and water, nor by clothes or supplies. It is cued by safety around others.

Cultural considerations are highly relevant here.

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Using Safety Cues to Facilitate Holistic Support

This paradigm reflects the point-of-view of many (perhaps even all) Autistic individuals in conceptualizing the importance of *felt* safety as an absolute base need. It is a primary prevention model to use for helping an individual move into a space of holistically met needs: **relational, body and mind, and identity**. It can be adapted easily into a treatment model.

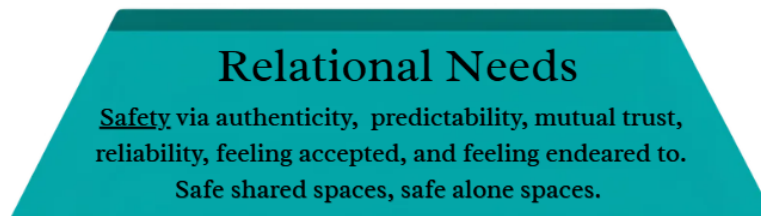
You have probably heard the term, “If you have met one Autistic person, you have met one Autistic person.” This is a true statement, and its intent is to speak to the diversity we see within autism (despite what stereotypes might portray).

Relational needs are perhaps the one area of consistency between diverse individual presentations.

For many Autistic folx, the absence of immediate relational danger is not enough. Felt safety - true safety - around others gives the capacity to stabilize and bring additional needs into reach.

Many of us clinicians, educators, and support personnel have been shouting the same message to the world, “Be a safe base!” We all came to the conclusion of these needs through our individual learning experiences, which married together with our collective experiences.

This paradigm is modeled from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, but dissents in the hierarchical order of needs, and sees a dynamic and bidirectional nature of the different hierarchies. .



Relational Needs

To reiterate, relational needs are not simply the lack of relational danger. They are needs that ask for intentionality, warmth, and realness.

Authenticity can cue safety in both the short and the long terms. Predictability and reliability tie to authenticity and cue safety by consistent expectation and experience. Mutual trust is crucial - this is especially pertinent when we are supporting children. Children with differences in executive function and social skills are highly likely to be seen in a negative lens by the adults who surround them. Adults often ask for or presume the trust of children but do not often offer

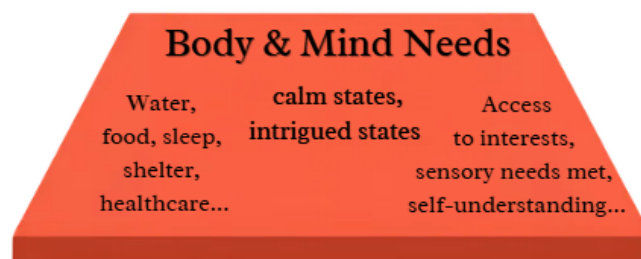
back their own. In this model, trust is a choice and exists on the presumption that Autistic individuals are often not only doing their best, but do much better when properly supported.

Acceptance must be absolute, but being endeared to is even higher a need. A spot isn't just left at the table as a token - the presence of the individual is appreciated, and their absence is missed.

Shared spaces can often be unintentionally activating to sensitive individuals, so we remain aware of sensory and space needs. Additionally, we provide the option of alone space that is cultivated to provide respite, not isolation.

Cultural considerations are significant here and should be considered when adapting this model to exist within established frameworks. Flexible interpretation of relational needs may be helpful. Additionally, socioeconomic status can also impact implementation and the milieu is a relevant focal point.

These relational needs are somewhat in the eye of the beholder, nuanced as they are. We focus on this collection of concepts as targeted areas upon which to build connection, knowing that the constellation of needs is likely to be as unique as the individual is.



Body and Mind Needs

While blanket assumptions pervade many pieces of advice ("They'll eat when they're hungry!"), these assumptions can be highly costly to Autistic individuals who can experience myriad complexities in meeting bodily needs.

For other individuals, accessing non-activated states can be difficult. Relational needs predict an Autistic individual's capacity for moving into regulated states, which are broadly defined as calm or intrigued. Both states experience a much lower, or lack of, state of hypervigilance.

Autistic Burnout is known anecdotally by many but less so empirically. Burnout can remove an Autistic person's access to special interests, which very frequently removes scaffolding upon which they are supported. Special interests are a non-negotiable mind need for Autistic individuals.

Sensory needs (avoidance of input, seeking of input, impact by presence and lack of internal input, and in-between) are body and mind needs, and are inextricable from well-being. Asking an Autistic individual to disregard their sensory body is akin to an act of cruelty. Presuming blanket sensory experience can also significantly reduce need-meeting.

Self-understanding is the bud of developing identity. A basic sense of who an Autistic person is creates a foundation of identity development upon which to build. This is shaped, in part, by knowing that their differences are not something to be modified but accommodated. Some differences are even to be celebrated.



Identity Needs

What makes a human a human? Who they are, what they do, what they create, what they contribute. Holistic needs don't just require identity needs, they are contingent upon the capacity to engage in human-specific experiences and activities.

Self-expression is a core feature of humankind, and a crucial emotional and psychic need. Self-esteem is also a crucial emotional and psychic need. These two constructs have an interplay with each other. Elevated self-esteem allows for greater self-expression. In turn, self-expression feeds into and elevates self-esteem.

Accessing and connecting to a community of other humans who share interests is a crucial social identity need, and in so many ways is the foundation of Autistic connection.

Identity needs are especially crucial to the population of PDA Autistic individuals who often have rich, deep, and intense psychic energy and do best when identifying outlets that fit their idiosyncratic needs. Without an outlet, this energy has a way of turning inward to the self and outward to others with less efficient processing and can often fuel and perpetuate burnout.

The Relational Paradigm for Supporting Autistic Individuals ©
is the core feature of a new program:



Burnout Aftercare™ uses a relational hierarchical approach to support Autistic individuals in the aftermath of burnout. It is especially geared toward supporting PDA Autistic individuals.

As a primary prevention model,
it also serves as a long-term model of care to help prevent future burnout.

COMING 10/15/26: Burnout Aftercare for Parents

Burnout Aftercare has also been adapted as training for mental health professionals, medical providers, and educational professionals.

For more information on **training**, please click the link below to send a message.

For more information, please visit:
www.velarispsych.com/aftercare

For information about booking Megan for training in your organization,
please contact:
info@velarispsych.com

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