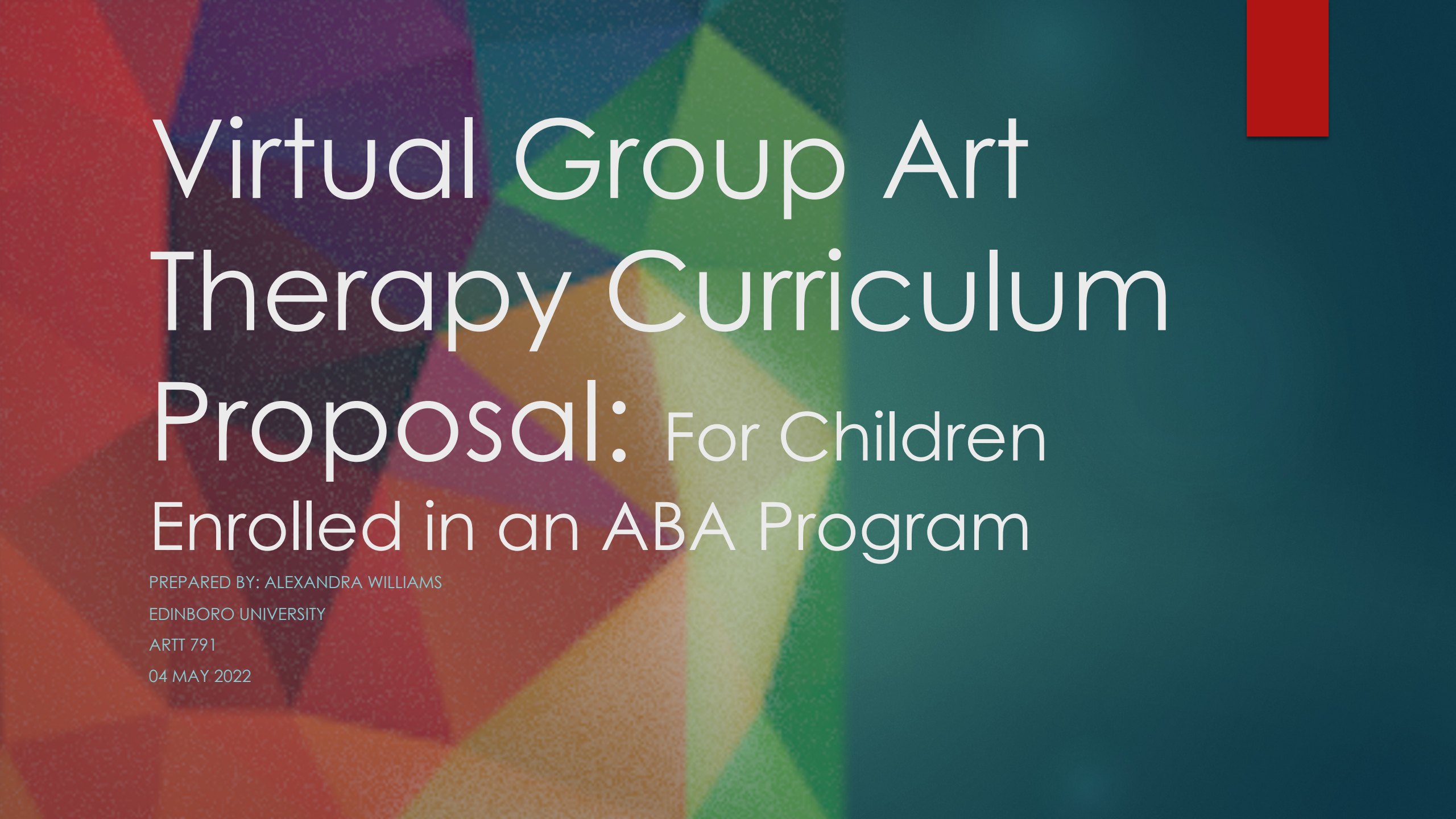




Virtual Group Art Therapy Curriculum Proposal: For Children Enrolled in an ABA Program

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ARTT 791

04 MAY 2022

Introduction





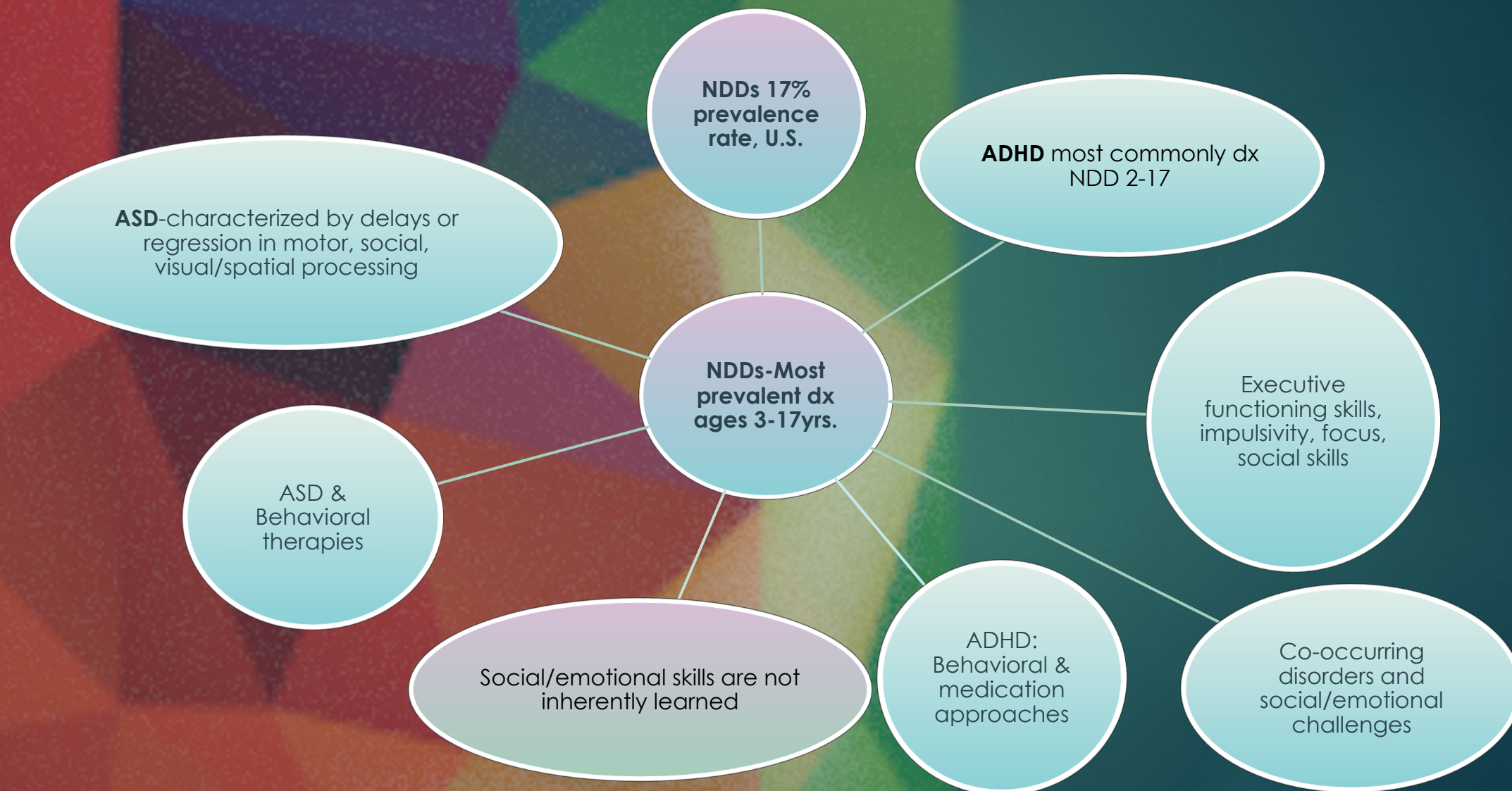
PURPOSE STATEMENT

To develop a curriculum for a virtual art therapy group with children ages 7-11, diagnosed with neurodevelopmental disorder(s) (NDDs) and currently enrolled in ABA therapy.

- ❖ Incorporate familiar ABA terminology and visual models to discuss emotional regulation.
- ❖ Art therapy interventions and techniques for their purpose of providing focus to enhancing social skills and emotional regulation.



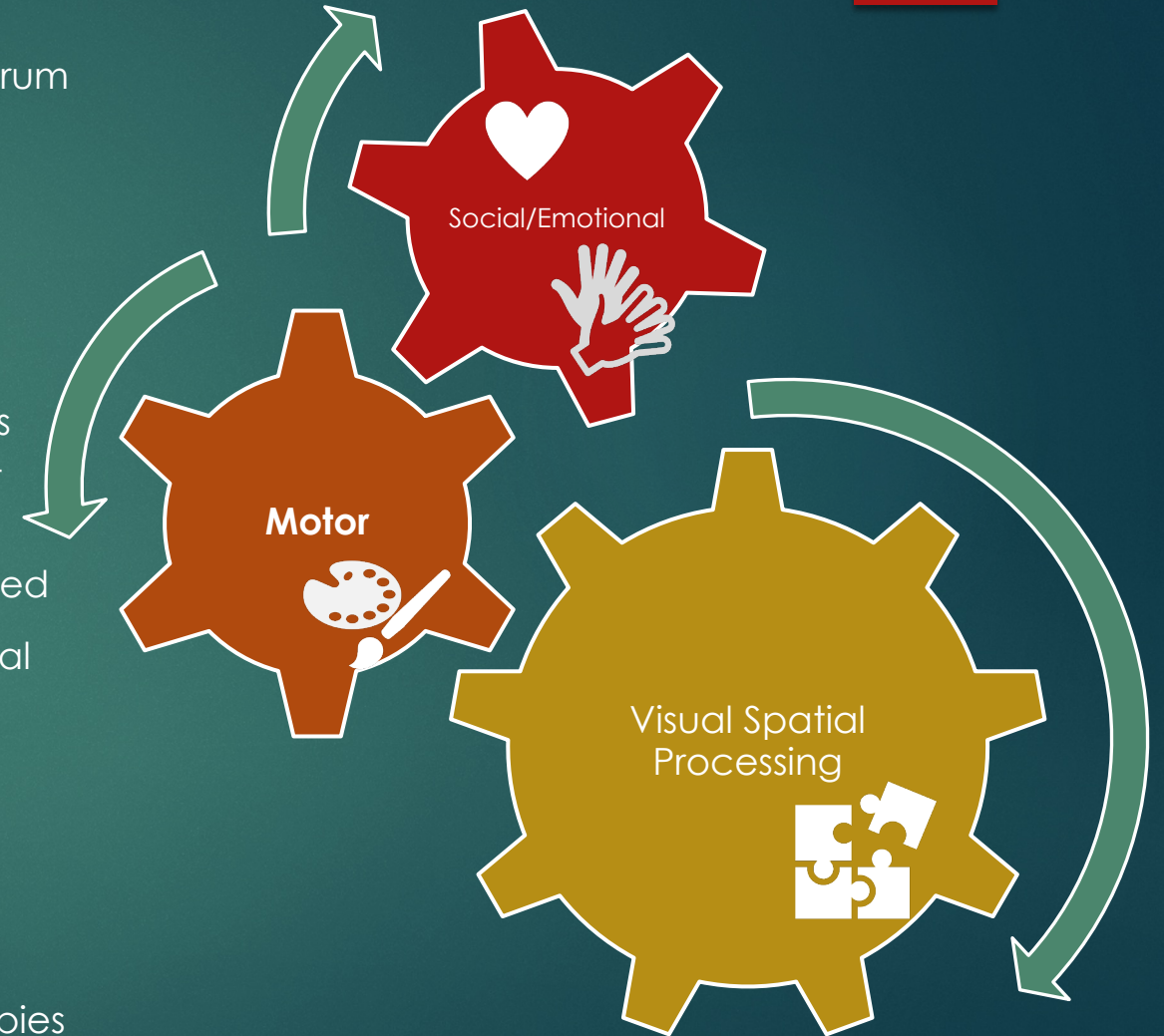
Justification



Justification



- ❖ Prevalence rates of ASD are 1 in 44 children (NIMH "autism spectrum disorder (ASD) n.d.)
- ❖ Developing a curriculum for virtual group art therapy can
 - ❖ Space to assess and enhance social skills and emotional regulation & attend to nonverbal, sensory, and psychoemotional needs (Durrani, 2019)
 - ❖ A virtual group can be rewarding for participants as it shows real-life applicability and can increase self-esteem and self-confidence in social exchanges (Ali et al., 2018)
 - ❖ Allows for a different modality from which skills can be learned
 - ❖ Curriculum incorporating ABA terminology may be beneficial to providing consistency and continuity between service modalities
 - ❖ Platform for fostering discussions and referrals from Board Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBA) for virtual group art therapy
- ❖ Lack of literature about virtual group art therapy for children diagnosed with autism or other NDDs and enrolled in other therapies such as ABA



TERMS



A-H

- ❖ Art Therapy
- ❖ Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ❖ Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)
- ❖ Emotion Regulation

I-Q

- ❖ Intraverbal Operant
- ❖ Intraverbal Repertoire Development
- ❖ Mand/Manding
- ❖ Operant
- ❖ Punishment

R-Z

- ❖ Registered Behavior Technician (RBT)
- ❖ Reinforcement
- ❖ Synchronous Telehealth
- ❖ Telehealth
- ❖ Zones of Emotional Regulation



Research Question

This curriculum seeks to address what elements and techniques from ABA might be best paired with art therapy and synchronous Telehealth to develop an effective open virtual group for children diagnosed with ASD or other NDD(s), ages 7-11





LITERATURE REVIEW: INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The following literature review supports the need for further research to examine the effects of virtual group art therapy with children ages 7-11, diagnosed NDD(s) and currently enrolled in ABA therapy.
- ❖ The researchers included in the full literature review embarked on journeys to explore and understand the benefits of group therapy, art therapy, and Telehealth through qualitative and quantitative means. Their results support the effectiveness of each approach for strengthening social skills and emotional regulation in children and adolescents with NDDs such as ASD. The results support and relate to the purpose of this proposal for curriculum development for Telehealth group art therapy for strengthening social skills and emotional regulation in children diagnosed with ASD and enrolled in ABA.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Neurodevelopmental Disorders (NDDs)

- ❖ Intellectual disabilities, communication disorders, ASD, ADHD, specific learning disorders, motor disorders, tic disorders, and other or unspecified NDDs (APA, 2013)
- ❖ Challenges in social and occupational areas of functioning are common
- ❖ Goals for increased social-emotional skills, social skills, communication skills, and emotional regulation are common

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- ❖ Frequently treated NDD characterized by regression or delayed development in social skills, motor skills, and visual and spatial processing (Autism Speaks, n.d.)
- ❖ Lifelong condition that presents on a continuum from high to low functioning (Van Lith, Stallings, Harris, 2017)
- ❖ Standard treatment includes early intervention services, ABA Therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy (motor skills, speech and verbal communication development)
- ❖ Social skill and emotional regulation deficits are areas that an individual would not organically develop over time. Without interventions and techniques for teaching these skills, symptoms and behaviors may negatively impact individuals throughout their life (Morris-Rosendahl, 2020)



LITERATURE REVIEW

❖ Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)

- ❖ Commonly utilized treatment for autism (Kress & Paylo, 2019)
 - ❖ Data-driven, evidence-based practice
 - ❖ long-term approach to treatment
- ❖ Uses behavioral techniques and principles such as Skinner's operant conditioning and reinforcements to teach social skills, emotional regulation, and daily living skills, among other benefits.
- ❖ Used in the treatment of autism since the 1960s
- ❖ Controversies
 - ❖ Cost of services
 - ❖ Number of external variables to successful treatment
 - ❖ Viewed as “abusive” as emotional and mental health needs are not addressed, with the sole focus on behavior.
 - ❖ Adheres to behaviorist theories and uses behavioral-focused lens, neglecting internal constructs such as thoughts and emotions (Morris, Smith, & Altus, 2005) (Sandoval-Norton et al., 2021)



LITERATURE REVIEW

❖ Art Therapy

- ❖ Art therapy is a practical approach for engaging individuals of nearly any age in nonverbal creative expression (American Art Therapy Association, n.d.; Art Therapy Credentials Board Inc, n.d.)
- ❖ Qualitative study conducted by Giampaolo (2013) indicated that art therapy can help strengthen communication, social skills, and skills in abstract thinking in children diagnosed with ASD



LITERATURE REVIEW

❖ Benefits of Art therapy

- ❖ Attends to nonverbal, sensory, and psychoemotional needs. Medical or behavioral models may not address psychoemotional needs like art therapy might (Durrani, 2019).
- ❖ Relational art-making incorporating reciprocal cueing, attuning to the child, and mirroring to reflect feelings, may be beneficial for helping an individual with ASD learn to express themselves and communicate with others more effectively (Durrani, 2019).
- ❖ Art materials may provide a flexible platform for self-expression
 - ❖ Materials exist on a continuum from fluid to resistive --viscosity and the fluidity of the emotional response they may provoke (Lusebrink, 2016)
 - ❖ Attends to sensory needs-- the variety of traditional and nontraditional art materials offers choice in creative expression, allowing the therapist and child to change and use materials to meet their needs. Sensory considerations are important for the population. Some children may exhibit behaviors consistent with regression or be overly stimulated by using fluid materials or processes such as fingerpainting, acrylic paint, watercolor, or wet clay with water (Weinapple, 2017).
 - ❖ Tool selection and material choice can move individuals throughout the expressive therapies continuum (ETC), mediating left-hemispheric and right-hemispheric brain processing (Lusebrink, 2016)
 - ❖ Facilitate a safe space for helping children communicate with the world, maybe in a way they have not before



LITERATURE REVIEW

- ❖ Benefits of Group Art Therapy
 - ❖ Practical approach for teaching new social skills
 - ❖ Safe, constructive environment to practice social skills
 - ❖ Natural opportunities vs. individual sessions utilizing techniques such as role-play to practice new social skills.
 - ❖ Facilitation of social skill development may be encouraged through turn-taking and sharing in a safe space
 - ❖ Practicing introductions, asking others questions, using eye contact, and engaging in back-and-forth exchanges, can be encouraged during group. Group participants' ability to cooperate, communicate, problem-solve, and self-reflect on behaviors improves in a group setting (D'Amico, 2017).
 - ❖ Effective communication skills may be strengthened through nonverbal creative expression using unconventional methods and facilitating sensory experiences through art materials (D'Amico, 2017).
 - ❖ Creative expression can contribute to new or existing neural pathways for processing visual information (Gussak & Rosal, 2016).



LITERATURE REVIEW

❖ Telehealth Groups

- ❖ Telehealth is an area of growing interest and research
 - ❖ Used in practice over the past decade (Solomon & Soares, 2020)
 - ❖ COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 facilitated a shift in how Telehealth is conceptualized, utilized, and incorporated into standard clinical practice
- ❖ May be beneficial given the general lack of providers
 - ❖ Bridging the “detection gap” in diagnoses evidenced between rural and urban communities
- ❖ Barriers such as provider discomfort with synchronous or asynchronous Telehealth modalities and worry of liability, perhaps in part due to decreased environmental controls (Solomon & Soares, 2020)



LITERATURE REVIEW

❖ Benefits of Telehealth & Telehealth Groups

- ❖ Synchronous Telehealth models may push subtle shifts in art therapy's traditionally triangular relationship of therapist/client/artwork. The client/artwork relationship is highlighted when the therapist is physically separated through an online model (Zubala, 2021).
 - ❖ Strengthened third relationship between client/artwork may suggest that art therapy services may be less impacted by the different locations and distance between therapist and client than other therapies
- ❖ Findings from remote art therapy sessions, such as those that have been conducted with Veterans in remote areas, were positive, with reports of increased confidence, improved communication, and understanding, as well as expressed appreciation for the online platform (Zubala, 2021).
- ❖ Means of engagement when transportation and distance are barriers
- ❖ Unique materials may still be provided to group members using methods such as the postal service given they meet the set requirements or standards for shipping. Materials might be sent in advance with instructions not to open the package until the day of the group.
- ❖ Recognized as an efficient and effective tool for improving access to services (Gajarawala & Pelkowski, 2021)
- ❖ Still much research to be done



LITERATURE REVIEW:

Conclusion

- ❖ Telehealth group art therapy may be a beneficial approach for strengthening social skills and emotional regulation in the treatment of NDDs, such as ASD, in conjunction with other services for treatment. Additional services may include ABA therapy, speech therapy, or occupational therapy, among others.
- ❖ Group art therapy may be a beneficial addition to traditional treatment approaches as it engages psychoemotional needs and provides an outlet for communication through creative expression. Group art therapy can also be a safe environment for practicing new social skills with peers and increasing targeted social skill behaviors such as increased eye contact, while decreasing hyperactivity and inappropriate behaviors.
- ❖ Telehealth group art therapy provided through a consistent, synchronous model may help increase access to participants who may not have attended in-person.
- ❖ The effectiveness of each therapeutic model supported by the research findings presented in this review supports the need for further research into a triadic model wherein all three are incorporated into one service.
- ❖ Curriculum development for a virtual art therapy group for children diagnosed with autism may provide a structure for future research.
- ❖ Group art therapy through a Telehealth model may be a beneficial avenue for strengthening social skills and emotional regulation skills in children diagnosed with a neurodevelopment disorder, given that they are developmentally and cognitively able to participate in a remote group setting.



Appendix A: Curriculum

Virtual group art therapy with children ages 7-11 and enrolled in ABA

- ❖ Primary goal: Promote social skills and emotional regulation using art therapy interventions and techniques
 - Social skills: greetings, back-and-forth exchanges in group, increased ease of turn-taking, & practicing asking others questions
 - Emotional regulation: strengthening emotion identification and regulation, & increased coping skills





PROJECT

- ❖ Intended for synchronous Telehealth group art therapy services
- ❖ Designed to be lead by an art therapist or art therapy intern receiving supervision
- ❖ Intended as a tool for strengthening social skills and emotional regulation
- ❖ Group settings offer a safe place to practice developing social skills
 - ❖ Group rituals and opportunities for supported sharing and discussion
- ❖ The full curriculum (see Appendix A in the proposal) presents 12 interventions, covering the course of the group for one year. This frequency aligns with the current site schedule where the curriculum is to be introduced.
 - ❖ Once per month for 60-minutes
 - ❖ Introduction/discussion, suggested processing prompts, warm-up activities, & closing suggestions

GROUP I: Mindfulness Mandalas

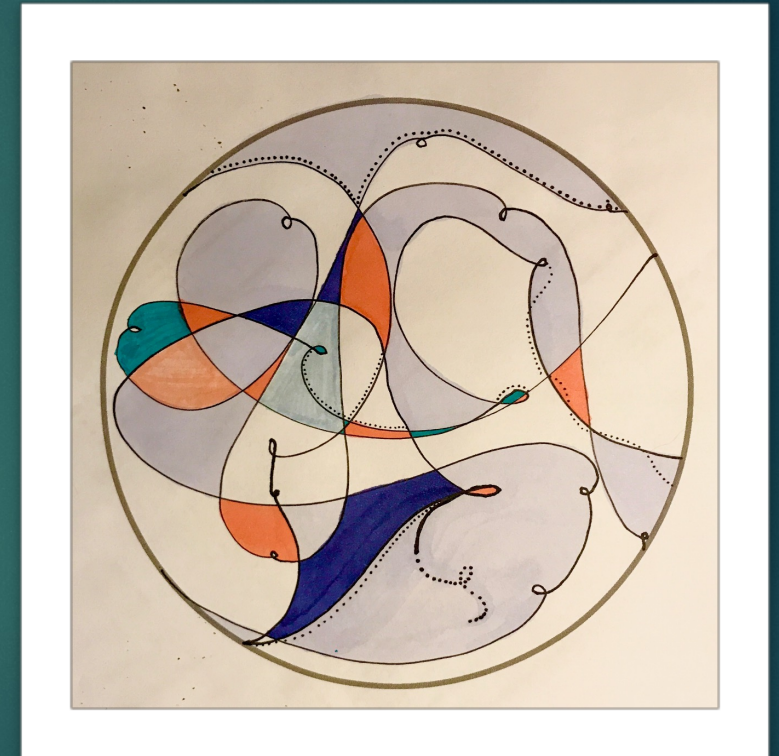
❖ **Discussion:** Mindfulness

- ❖ Introduce mindfulness techniques
- ❖ Brief discussion on the history and meaning of the mandala in a language that is understood by the group with a variety of visual images for examples

❖ **Goals:**

- ❖ Facilitate emotion regulation.
- ❖ Increase participants' "toolkit" with a new strategy for regulation
- ❖ Strengthen social skills in group ritual introductions, sharing, and discussions

- ❖ **Objective:** Introduce mandalas and mindfulness as tools for emotional regulation. Encourage but do not force group sharing and model social skills.



GROUP II: Animal Me

❖ **Discussion:** Self-reflection

- ❖ Ways of practicing self-reflection (meditation, journaling, or writing it out another way, making art, deep breathing, or taking a walk to think)
- ❖ Benefits of practicing self-reflection
 - ❖ Helping us learn from ourselves and our experiences
 - ❖ Helping our memory grow stronger
 - ❖ Helps us to understand what we are thinking or feeling
 - ❖ Helps us to explain and share our experiences with others

❖ **Goals:**

- ❖ Encourage self-reflection to promote emotion regulation
- ❖ Increase social skills through sharing and discussion

- ❖ **Objective:** Invite participants to engage in clay work to promote self-reflection and emotional regulation.



GROUP III: Strengths and Likes Collage

- ❖ **Discussion:** Self-esteem and confidence
 - ❖ 6 1/2-minute short titled *Wellbeing for Children: Confidence and Self-Esteem* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdjaXs4ME2A>)

- ❖ **Goals:**

- ❖ Increase self-esteem through strengths-based reflection
- ❖ Identify positive self-talk and confidence as ways to increase overall wellbeing and strategies to “get to green ” (i.e., regulated in the zones of regulation)
- ❖ Strengthening social skills through sharing and discussion

- ❖ **Objective:** Engage participants in collage-making to reflect on and identify strengths without concern for drawing skill. Participants are invited but not forced to share their image during discussion. Sharing is encouraged as a way to practice social skills. Group members are invited to focus on their strengths and likes and to identify coping strategies that have worked for them in the past as well as identify one new strategy based on strengths and likes.



GROUP IV: Clay Helpers, Reminders To Go Slow

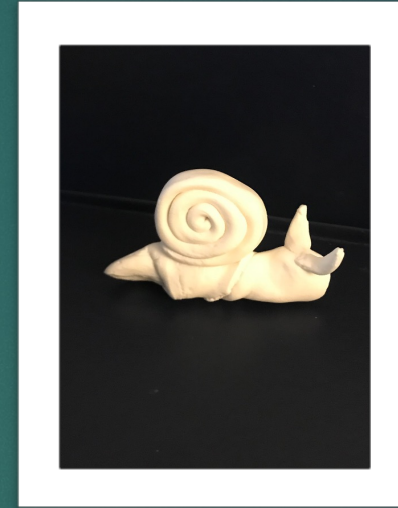
❖ **Discussion:** Mindfulness and Meditation

- ❖ Introduce mindfulness and meditation
 - ❖ What we notice when we slow down; regulation
- ❖ Introduce mindfulness techniques
 - ❖ Deep breathing while imaging a pleasant place, listening to music, blowing bubbles, tossing a ball, making art, etc.

❖ **Goals:**

- ❖ To identify what it feels like in our bodies when we slow our thoughts and actions.
- ❖ To identify coping strategies that help us or remind us to slow down and be mindful of our bodies to increase emotional regulation and decrease impulsivity
- ❖ To increase social skills through sharing and discussion

- ❖ **Objective:** Group members will be able to visually represent a reminder to slow down and use regulation skills.



GROUP V: Flexible Critters

- ❖ **Discussion:** Cognitive rigidity and cognitive flexibility
- ❖ **Goals:**
 - ❖ Increase emotional regulation by identifying strategies for being flexible
 - ❖ Increase social skills through sharing and discussion
- ❖ **Objective:** Group members will be able to identify times they have been flexible and engage in creative expression to promote flexible thinking.



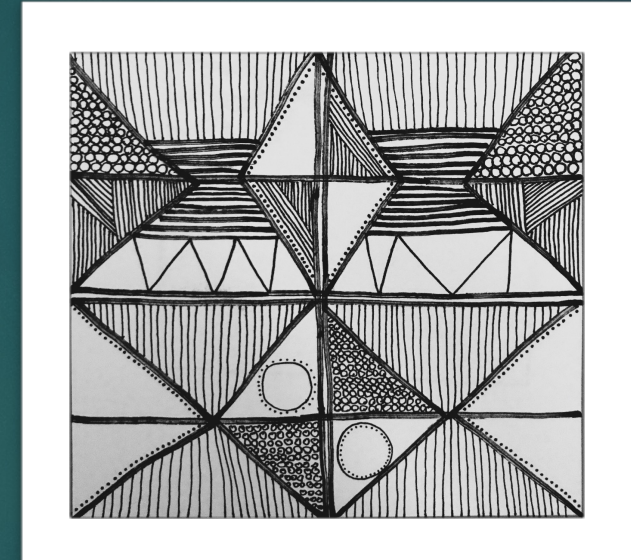
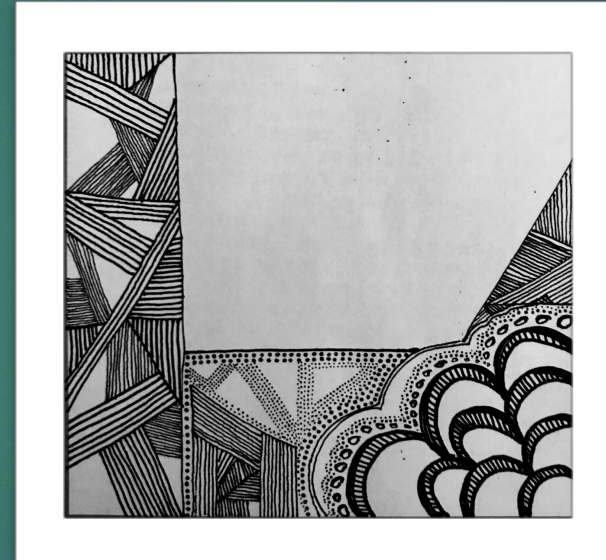
GROUP VI: Calming Collage

- ❖ **Discussion:** Mindfulness and focusing on what it feels like (physically and emotionally) to engage with materials that bring us joy or are calming to touch, see, or smell
- ❖ **Goals:**
 - ❖ Increase self-awareness and emotional regulation through sensory and visual engagement
 - ❖ Increase social skills through sharing and discussion
- ❖ **Objective:** Group members will engage in a present-focused activity to explore and identify materials that are calming to them using sensory materials and calming images and reflect on their experience



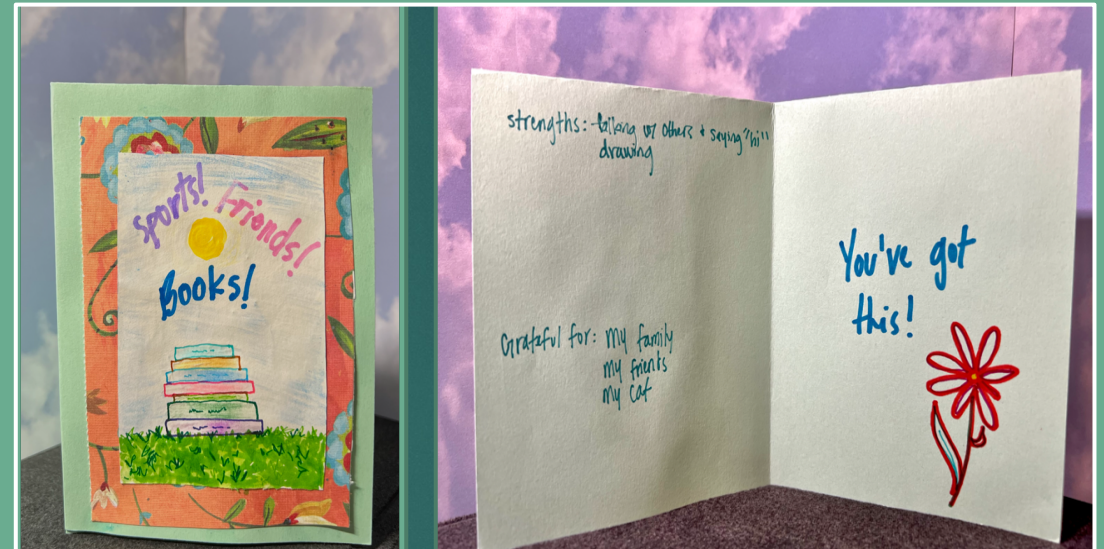
GROUP VII: Zentangles

- ❖ **Discussion:** Meditation, coping strategies that assist in the practice of patience, and the concept of “creative aimlessness” to enhance focus and relaxation.
- ❖ **Goals:**
 - ❖ Strengthen emotion regulation skills
 - ❖ Promote being in the present
 - ❖ Slowing impulsivity through tool mediation and material selection
- ❖ **Objective:** Introduce the zentangle as an activity following the discussion “how we wait” (evaluating current tolerance for patience and effective coping tools already used by group members). Creating patterns in a contained space can facilitate “creative aimlessness” (Malchiodi, 2014) while enhancing focus and relaxation. Opportunities for increasing social skills will be supported during discussion and sharing time.



GROUP VIII: Strengths-based Card for Self

- ❖ **Discussion:** Transitions & coping strategies for back-to-school; strengths
- ❖ **Goals:**
 - ❖ Increased emotion regulation by introducing proactive tool for regulation and teaching proactive coping techniques
 - ❖ Increased social skills through sharing and discussion
- ❖ **Objective:** Introduce the directive as a proactive tool for regulation and review proactive coping techniques to reduce anxiety.
 - ❖ Using future-focused and strengths-based approaches to positively identify one thing to look forward to or feel excited about, and identifying 3 strengths, participants are invited to create a card for themselves for back-to-school.



GROUP IX: Kindness Rocks & Virtual Walks

- ❖ **Discussion:** Kindness and Mindfulness
- ❖ **Goals:**
 - ❖ Promote emotional regulation
 - ❖ Facilitate social skills
 - ❖ Promote physical exercise and group cohesion
- ❖ **Objective:** 10-minute virtual walk as a group to promote group cohesion and physical activity as a tool for emotional regulation. During the walk, participants are encouraged to select two medium-sized rocks to bring back to the art space to paint and decorate with a kind message, one to share back with their community and one to keep for themselves.



GROUP X: Mountains and Valleys- Exploring Strengths

- ❖ **Discussion:** Strengths and weaknesses
- ❖ **Goals:**
 - ❖ Increase self-awareness and engage in self-reflection
 - ❖ Increased regulation through creative expression and material mediation
 - ❖ Increased motivation and self-esteem
 - ❖ Increased social skills through sharing and the concept of group universality
- ❖ **Objective:** Engage in self-reflection in a safe group setting for increased motivation, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. Represent strengths and weaknesses and explore how we might nourish some of our weaknesses into new strengths and accept others. Social skills may also be strengthened through sharing and discussion.



GROUP XI: Gratitude Trees

- ❖ **Discussion:** Gratitude & Mindfulness
- ❖ **Goals:**
 - ❖ Increase emotional regulation through the mindfulness technique of practicing gratitude.
 - ❖ Improve mood and focus through mindfulness techniques
 - ❖ Increase social skills through sharing and discussion of their image
- ❖ **Objective:** Participants are invited to create a gratitude tree using paper-tearing techniques to promote emotional regulation. In addition to practicing mindfulness through gratitude, the act of ripping and tearing paper can be soothing and promote regulation. Group members are encouraged to engage in discussion and sharing to promote social skills.



GROUP XII: Magical Helpers

- ❖ **Discussion:** Problem-solving
- ❖ **Goals:**
 - ❖ Strengthen emotional regulation
 - ❖ Reflect on strategies that have helped them solve a problem in the past as well as new strategies they might be open to trying
 - ❖ Strengthen social skills through sharing and discussion
- ❖ **Objective:** Create a magical helper that can help them solve a current problem, increase coping skills, assist with developing new problem-solving strategies and promote emotional regulation.



WARM-UP ACTIVITIES

- Mindful drawing
- Exercise related to reflection, meditation, and breathing
- Positive Self-talk
Hand-doodle

- Scribble drawing
- Sketch and Draw
- Animal tracks
- Emotion Clouds
- Warm-Up Yoga
Game

- Breathing Circles
- Favorite Song

APPENDIX B:

Instructional Sheets for Families

- Instructional sheet for air dry clay
- Instructional sheet for acrylic sprays

Things to know about “me” — Air-Dry Clay

- I am for creative expression, molding, and shaping. I am not for eating, hair, noses, or ears. :)
- Please wash your hands before using me so I stay clean.
- Without the baggie and a damp paper towel, I will dry out! Once I am dry, I cannot be shaped.
- I need a damp paper towel loosely wrapped around me, not super wet. If you want to work with me again later, I will need my damp paper towel and sealed plastic bag.
- My airtight bag and damp paper towel will help keep me moldable and workable so I can be reused
- After multiple uses, my texture might change
- I won't last forever in my baggie
- Once you have a finished piece and would like it to be permanent, leave the finished piece out and it will be “bone dry” in approximately one week (or less depending on the size of the project).

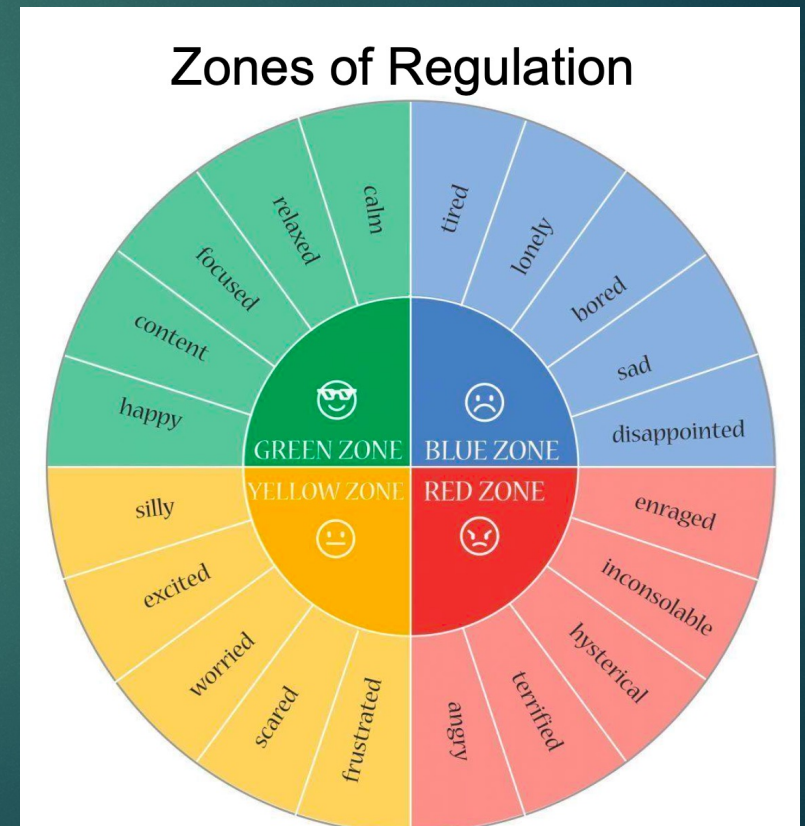
APPENDIX C: Yoga Warm-Up Stretches and Ice Breaker Questions

- ❖ Selected from a free resource by Down in Kinderville on Teacherspayteachers.com
 - ❖ Inform group members that if any of the stretches make them uncomfortable, they can modify it and tell us what it means
- ❖ Short-term yoga interventions can be beneficial for children with autism
 - ❖ Increasing patience of sitting, proximity of adults, and socialization (Radhakrishna, Nagarathna, & Nagendra, 2010)
 - ❖ Help to increase hippocampus cells, which may potentially aid in memory and reduce anxiety in school settings through increased material retention

Appendix D: Crisis Resource & ABA Visuals

In the event that there is concern for the welfare of a group member, invite them to stay after group to complete a brief screening tool to assess level of risk to inform next steps.

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/research/research-conducted-at-nimh/asq-toolkit-materials>



(Raising an Extraordinary Person, 2020).

LIMITATIONS

Potential Bias

- ❖ Curriculum designed to be inclusive and measures to reduce bias were made, however developed under a Western lens and view of ASD

Frequency & Staffing

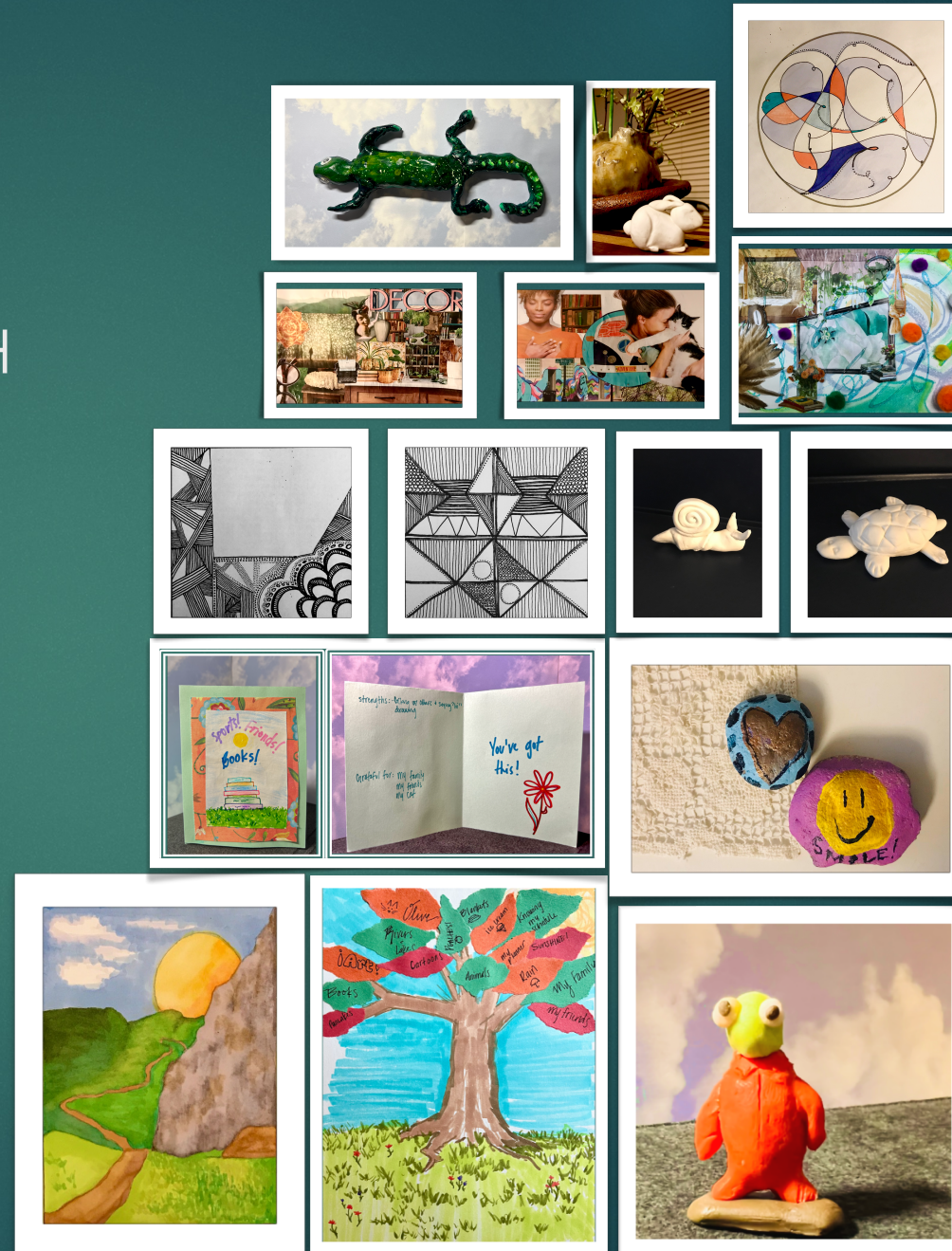
- ❖ Frequency may not be the most effective rate
- ❖ Lack of staff availability can lead to low attendance

Telehealth

- ❖ Potential security breaches, technical difficulties, and regulatory barriers (Shilpa & Pelkowski, 2021)
- ❖ Cost and tools
- ❖ Clients may not have access to the internet or technological devices to participate
- ❖ Still much research to be done
- ❖ Reduced control over providing a safe, therapeutic environment

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION OR RESEARCH

- ❖ There is a need for future research on the effectiveness of virtual art therapy groups for children diagnosed with a neurodevelopmental disorder(s) such as autism.



FINAL THOUGHTS

- ❖ Virtual group art therapy can be a valuable addition to traditional behavioral therapy services for strengthening social skills and emotional regulation
- ❖ My hope is that this curriculum may help provide a foundation for future research
- ❖ A higher frequency is recommended to enhance social skills and emotional regulation



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QUESTIONS?

Thank you for your time!

