



MASG 2025 RECAP

February — RIGID THINKING & DEALING IN EXTREMES

We opened the year by looking at why autistic thinking often feels “all-or-nothing,” and how this can both help and hinder us. Many of us shared experiences of feeling safest when things are predictable, certain, or follow a clear rule. We explored how black-and-white thinking often develops as a protective response — a way to create order in a world that feels chaotic or inconsistent.

Together, we practised noticing when we were slipping into extremes (“always,” “never,” “everyone,” “no one”) and experimented with gentle flexibility: adding a “maybe,” allowing for exceptions, or slowing down before reacting. We also acknowledged that rigidity can be a *strength* — it can help us maintain strong values, consistency, fairness, and clarity. The focus was not to “get rid” of rigidity but to build awareness so we can choose when it serves us and when it restricts us.

Exercise: “Add One Maybe”

Think of one situation where your brain jumps to an absolute (e.g., “I always mess this up,” “No one listens to me”).

Write the sentence down, then rewrite it with *one small* softening word:

- “Sometimes...”
- “Maybe...”
- “Right now...”

Notice how it feels in your body (lighter? resistant? calmer?).

March — TRUSTING YOURSELF

March's session explored why so many autistic people struggle with self-trust, and how lifelong invalidation or misunderstanding can lead to chronic self-doubt. With guest speaker **Nina Krivoshev (@theneurospicpsych)**, we unpacked how feeling “observed” by others, masking, blocking stims, and internalising blame can weaken our belief that our perceptions are valid.

We discussed what trusting ourselves *actually feels like*: having a clear sense of right and wrong, feeling confident in our opinions, and experiencing peace when we honour our needs. Nina guided us through ways to build self-trust through small, repeated experiences—listening to our gut, noticing our internal “yes/no,” and recognising how often our instincts have been right. The session focused on replacing the belief that “I’m always the problem” with “My perspective is real, and I can rely on it.”

Exercise: “Yes/No Body Check”

Ask yourself a small question (e.g., “Do I want a warm drink?” “Do I want to stay home tonight?”).

Pause and notice the body cue for *yes* vs *no*.

This is not about choosing correctly — it’s about practising listening to yourself.

April — IMPOSTER SYNDROME

In April we explored the very common autistic experience of doubting your own diagnosis or legitimacy. Many shared moments of wondering if they were “autistic enough,” hesitating to ask for support, or feeling like others had it “harder” and therefore deserved accommodations more. We connected this directly to burnout cycles—how not asking for support often pushes us into overwhelm.

We discussed three practical prevention strategies:

1. **Special interest time** — grounding ourselves in autistic joy.
2. **Asking for support confidently** — reminding ourselves “I deserve support.”
3. **Learning more about autism** — building understanding and self-validation.

We closed by asking, “*Which of these can you try today?*” and acknowledged how normal it is for imposter feelings to come and go.

Exercise: “Evidence Bank”

Write down **3 moments** from the past month where your autistic traits helped you:

- Noticing something others missed
 - Understanding a pattern
 - Navigating a social moment
- Keep the list somewhere visible. It becomes your “proof file” for the next time the imposter voice shows up.
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May — STIMMING IN PUBLIC

May focused on stimming: what it means, why we do it, and how social environments influence our comfort with it. We shared stories about feeling “fake” in social situations, or feeling frozen or trapped when masking too hard. Many noted how stimming feels natural and freeing in the car with friends or at home with family, yet strangely risky in public spaces.

We explored different types of stims—breathing, movement, sensory seeking—and asked reflective questions about where we feel most safe and why. The session emphasised that stimming is communication, regulation, and self-care, not something to hide. Together, we looked at ways to increase public confidence gently: micro-stims, sensory tools, supportive social circles, and permission to meet our bodies' needs.

Exercise: “Micro-Stim Trial”

Choose *one* micro-stim you feel comfortable trying somewhere semi-public (e.g., tapping a finger, rubbing a texture, gentle movement).

Try it discreetly in a safe environment (car park, café corner, walking outside).

Notice what you needed to feel safe — a person, a space, an object.

June — ANGER OVER LATE DIAGNOSIS

June was a powerful session on grief, anger, and the emotional aftermath of receiving a diagnosis later in life. Many shared experiences of mourning the “lost years”—friendships that didn’t work, misunderstandings, harsh self-criticism, and opportunities that might have unfolded differently with earlier support.

We also held space for the complexity: some felt their diagnosis came at the perfect time, or that earlier identification might not have been helpful in their environment. The group recognised that both anger and gratitude can coexist. We discussed how naming the grief allows us to move forward with more compassion for our younger selves, and more clarity about our needs now.

Exercise: “Letter to Younger Me — One Sentence Only”

Write **one sentence** to your younger self.

It can be kind, grieving, validating, or angry.

No need for a whole letter — just one line is enough to acknowledge the part of you that wasn’t understood.

July — CULTIVATING YOUR SENSORY ENVIRONMENT

In July we shifted into practical sensory regulation. We talked about building sensory-friendly spaces at home—everything from creating blanket forts to setting up small “retreat corners” with lighting, textures, or predictable sensory tools. We explored how to bring these supports into the outside world: portable sensory kits, noise protection, clothing choices, and identifying safe spaces to withdraw to.

The theme of the session was empowerment: instead of enduring environments, we can shape them. We looked at how sensory self-knowledge helps us create spaces where we feel grounded, calm, and able to function authentically.

Exercise: “Five-Minute Sensory Check-In”

Spend five minutes adjusting your environment for comfort:

- Light
- Sound
- Temperature
- Texture
- Body position

The goal: create a mini-version of a sensory retreat wherever you are.

August — LEGAL RIGHTS AS AUTISTIC PEOPLE

This month we were joined by **Lucy Bull from Marrickville Legal Centre** for a detailed session on our rights in workplaces, healthcare, education, and community settings. We covered disability discrimination law, reasonable adjustments, documentation, advocacy, and how to navigate difficult or unsafe systems. The session emphasised that autistic people are entitled to safety, accessibility, and fair treatment—legally and ethically.

(The full session is available on our On-Demand library via the Zenly app.)

Exercise: “One Reasonable Adjustment”

Identify **one adjustment** that would make your day easier (e.g., emailing instead of calling, dimmer lights, written instructions).

Write down:

1. What it is
2. Why it helps
3. Who you’d ask (if relevant)

This builds self-advocacy muscle gently.

September — GULLIBILITY & TRUST WITH PROTECTION

September's session explored why autistic people are often described as "gullible"—and reframed it through a strengths-based lens. We defined gullibility as *trust without enough protection*, not stupidity or naivety. Many of us trust because we assume honesty, want to see the good in others, and don't carry the same built-in suspicion filters.

We explored past experiences of being taken advantage of, the feelings they brought up, and the protective hyper-vigilance that sometimes follows. Then we moved into skill-building: recognising red flags, slowing decisions down, using scripts ("I need time to think about that"), reality-checking with trusted people, and creating small boundary tools. We ended with self-compassion practices and the reminder: *"Being trusting is not being weak. I can learn to trust wisely."*

Exercise: "Red Flag Pause Phrase"

Practise saying (out loud or silently):

"I need time to think about that."

This one line creates space between trusting and protecting — without shutting down your openness.

November — COOL THINGS ABOUT BEING AUTISTIC

We ended the year celebrating autistic strengths—pattern recognition, creativity, honesty, deep focus, innovation, and more. Through reflection questions and personal stories, we explored how many autistic people grow up feeling “less than,” only to realise later that their brains work in powerful, valuable, unique ways.

We shared things we love about our own brains, practised reframing stereotypes (“too blunt” → “clear communicator,” “fixates” → “deep researcher”), and did one-on-one hyperfocus conversations to highlight how alive and fluent we become when talking about things we love. The core message:

1. Our traits can be reframed as strengths.
2. We can accept ourselves without shame or comparison.

Exercise: “My Brain Is Great Because...”

Write down **three things** you genuinely like about the way your brain works.

They can be tiny (e.g., “I notice details,” “I care deeply,” “I organise in patterns”).

Let them be simple and true — not perfect.
