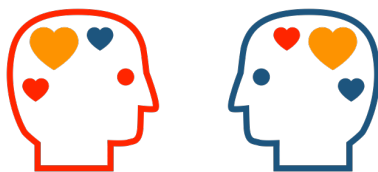


User Guide



Autistic Trauma Peer Support



20 March 2022

version 0.01

a service coordinated by
the Autistic Collaboration Trust

AutCollab.org



Autistic Trauma Peer Support

Turning our experiences into tools that help all Autistic people	3
Background	3
Feedback from Autistic communities	4
Introduction to Autistic relationships	5
Autistic whānau	5
Collaboration at human scale	6
How Autistic trauma plays out over time	8
Autistic Trauma Peer Support	11
Ensuring cultural and psychological safety	11
How does it work?	12
Specific guidance for each step in the process	14
Collaboration on an existing or new AutCollab project or campaign	15
Beyond Autistic Trauma Peer Support	16
From peer support towards trust based depowered Autistic relationships	16
Stage 2A : Nurturing trust based Autistic relationships	18
Stage 2B : Supporting new peers	18
Stage 3 : Joining or forming an Autistic whānau	19
Stage 4 : Joining or forming a self-sustaining Autistic community	19
Frequently asked questions	19



Turning our experiences into tools that help all Autistic people

In 2022 the Autistic Collaboration community is in the process of co-creating and operationalising peer support services for Autistic Trauma based on the lived experiences of Autistic people all over the world.

Our experience is that genuinely safe environments, where people can nurture trusted relationships, and learn to extend trust and appreciate trust that is extended to them, is essential to reducing Autistic anxiety to much lower levels. However, reducing chronic depression, based on the knowledge that we live in a sick society that is destroying this wonderful planet and that normalises extreme levels of social injustice, is much harder.

The encouraging feedback we are getting tells us that we are on the right track on a number of fronts, but there is much more good work that needs to be done.

Elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide apply across the entire Autistic population. These co-morbid conditions are a reflection of experiences made in the social environment rather than a reflection of Autistic neurology. The exploitative nature of our “civilised” cultures is top of mind for many Autistic people. The box of constraints that W.E.I.R.D. monocultures impose on neurodivergent people is reflected in our mental health statistics.

Our approach is based on the principles of evolutionary design and will be articulated in the evolving language for co-creating ecologies of care. The knowledge that we are all trying to do our best and that we all care deeply about each other keeps us going. As needed we assist each other in slowing down to prevent burnout.

It is impossible to express everything that is going on inside us, because linear language is a poor tool, and also because the capacity of our own understanding is limited. We can't know everything. We can only discover some things about ourselves, about each other, and the world. It's a dynamic process that never ends. And it only works in a world of mutual trust. That's why the world around us feels so broken, because people in a deceptive world understand nothing about themselves, and nothing about anyone else either.

Background

Trauma is propagated between generations. We have to find ways of breaking the cycle without destroying those who are the most sensitive, who are the only ones capable of nurturing ecologies of care not based on power and manipulation. The question of the evil of coercive power has been with me since I was a child. Coercive power is the root of all evil. Those who are capable of resorting to coercive power on a regular basis are the ones destroying and killing the entire planet. There is infinite timeless wisdom in the social norm against the emergence of any social power gradients. When civilisations erase that norm, unimaginable suffering unfolds.

– Jorn Bettin

For Autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people, pain is more emotionally intense. We might even be called codependent due to our deep emotional attachments to the people we love. It takes years for us to recover from misunderstandings, emotional disappointments, break ups, and losing loved ones. We have our people and we are very loyal to them even in the face of being betrayed. We are loyal to the people we love while we are betraying ourselves, again, again and again. And we have an infinite amount of empathy. Animals are sentient beings and we are not entitled to decide which one should live or not. I sometimes feel I can die due to an overdose of empathy.

– Ulku Mazlum

Modern families have been atomised to an extent where many Autistic people don't have people within their biological families who genuinely understand them. The education and work environments in industrialised monocultures are so hypernormative and constraining that neurodivergent people are routinely traumatised. Hypersensitive Autists are simply the canaries



Autistic Trauma Peer Support

in the coal mine, the first ones to be crushed unless they have access to a genuinely safe place in this world.

Autistic people all over the world suffer because we are put into impossible situations. And then we are pathologised. We are made out to be the problem. No. The system is the problem. And hypersensitive Autistic people can see this with full clarity. We know how impossible situations feel. We must find ways to write and talk about these impossible situations in a way that others can relate to, so that less sensitive people can start to feel at least some of the pain. Only then do we have a chance of not getting crushed by the society around us.

Together we'll find ways to turn our experiences into tools that can help all Autistic people. We don't yet know how, but we'll discover it together.

We are delighted to see the level to which the concept of Autistic trauma peer support resonates with Autistic communities globally. We are receiving many accounts of lived experiences and offers of support, more than we could have imagined. Many thanks to all of you! This only reinforces our commitment to translate all your insights and painful experiences into genuine (non-commercial) peer support services that can help all Autistic people.

Over the coming weeks and months, we will publish articles with specific service design ideas, to gather very specific feedback from all those who have expressed an interest in co-creating Autistic trauma peer support services.

Feedback from Autistic communities

Your feedback on the evolving design is always welcome

Name, role
Organisation



Introduction to Autistic relationships

The need to be resilient is something that Autistic people unlearn over time. We need to learn to be gentle with ourselves. With the concept of Autistic whānau we are exploring new terrain and new possibilities. It's something that we can incrementally weave into the Autistic collaborations that are already established.

We care deeply about all the ones we love, and this is not limited to the human sphere. We are viscerally connected into our ecology of care by emotional bonds and shared experiences, and not by abstract cultural symbols.

Autistic people find interactions with the W.E.I.R.D. social world so traumatising, because that world is not predicated on relationships, mutual trust, mutual care, and shared joy, pain, and grief. The W.E.I.R.D. world is predicated on transactions, mistrust, exploitation, and betrayal. It is a world completely devoid of life and unconditional love.

The capacity for culture opens many traps for humans. Human history and the stories we tell us are full of them. Many humans have good intentions, but the cultural context desensitises humans, and turns many into zombified addicts looking for the next hit in social status and power. The addiction to adrenalin powers the junkies in financial markets. It's very sad, to see them first hand. Most Autistic people are immune to these addictions, and this is why they are feared and sometimes hated and vilified.

Autistic whānau

Whānau : *extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people – the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members.*

Whānau are not powered by adrenalin but by love and mutual care. Most Autists are not born into healthy Autistic whānau.

Takiwātanga : *Autistic ways of being, takiwātanga literally means “in their own space and time.”*

We have to co-create our whānau in our own space and time. In many indigenous cultures children with unique qualities are recognised, are given adult mentors with similarly unique qualities, and grow up to fulfil unique roles in their local community, connected to others with unique knowledge and insights, perhaps even in other communities. If we are embedded in an ecology of care, we can thrive and share the pain and the joy of life.

Whānau is much more than the Western notion of “family”. It is a deep connection, a bond that you are born into that no one can take away from you.

An Autistic whānau could be conceptualised as a soul tribe, it is not an amorphous global Autistic community, but rather a human scale ecology of care, consisting of Autistic relationships between soul mates that are bonded through shared experiences and working together.

Closely related concepts:

Whanaungatanga : *relationship, kinship, sense of family connection – a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. It develops as a result of kinship rights and obligations, which also serve to strengthen each member of the kin group. It also extends to others to whom one develops a close familial, friendship or reciprocal relationship.*

Whakawhanaungatanga : *process of establishing relationships, relating well to others.*

Whakapapa : *the “genealogical descent of all living things from God to the present time. “Since all living things including rocks and mountains are believed to possess whakapapa, it is further defined as “a basis for the organisation of knowledge in the respect of the creation and development of all things”. Hence, whakapapa also implies a deep connection to land and the roots of one’s ancestry. In order to trace one’s whakapapa it is essential to identify the location where one’s ancestral heritage began; “you can’t trace it back any further”. “Whakapapa links all*



people back to the land and sea and sky and outer universe, therefore, the obligations of whanaungatanga extend to the physical world and all being in it”.

In a healthy culture Autistic children are assisted in co-creating their unique Autistic whānau, but in our “civilisation” this cultural knowledge has been lost and is suppressed. In mainstream society people don’t understand how [Autistic people](#) support each other, love each other, and care for each other in ways that go far beyond the [culturally impaired neuronormative imagination](#).

Autists [depend on assistance from others](#) in ways that differ from the cultural norm – and that is pathologised in [hypernormative societies](#). However, the many ways in which non-autistic people depend on others is considered “normal”. The endless [chains of trauma must be broken](#).

There is the saying that “It takes a village to raise a child.” The Autistic translation of this saying is “For an Autistic person it takes an Autistic whānau to feel loved and alive.”

The foundation of our whakapapa is the [ocean](#) and the mountains. Via [Autistic trauma peer support](#) we are embarking on the journey of co-creating healthy Autistic whānau and [Autistic culture](#) all over the world.

Collaboration at human scale

Every word in the title of the book on ‘The Beauty of Collaboration at Human Scale : The timeless patterns of human limitations’ has been very carefully chosen. But words have limits. What the title is trying to convey is that life feels like a dance of balancing all these words and concepts.

We’ll never be able to put a finger on it, so I say “feel” rather than “is”, and it is a dance because life is dynamic, it always evolves. Words like “perfection” or “success” are not part of the title, because they imply a universal sense of direction that regularly has gotten civilisations into trouble. Maybe the one unwritten word that emerges from the dance is “diversity”.

I spent my life until around 2014 developing a human scale meta language system – a formal visual grammar for creating all kinds of visual languages that are optimised for human cognitive limits. The motivation was similar to the motivations of Aboriginal symbolic artists over the last 70,000 years, cultivating a language system and a series of protocols for high fidelity knowledge transmission over thousands of years.

Since the Global Financial Crisis in 2007 my focus incrementally shifted from language systems to what I now refer to as human scale biocultural organisms and ecologies of care. This builds on all the earlier work on human scale language systems. With our small NeurodiVenture we now have 10 years operational experience with human scale biocultural organisms that are adapted to the needs of Autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people. Over the last 3 years I have found myself more and more involved in weaving biocultural organisms into larger ecologies of care that are beyond human comprehension, and that are not limited to humans. Mutual care at human scale, within biocultural organisms and between them, and evolution needs to replace the human hubris of “control”.

– Jorn Bettin

Those who are the most sensitive and traumatised and have not lost the ability to extend trust constitute an enormously rich and diverse repository of insights and hold many of the keys needed for co-creating ecologies of care. Collaboration at human scale within an Autistic whānau is truly beautiful, and having peers with us on our journey of expanding our parallel Autistic reality is wonderful.

When we engage in collaboration at human scale, we are nourishing our Autistic whānau. we are feeling well if the relationships in our whānau are providing the right kind of nourishment for everyone. As evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson points out, small groups are the primary organisms in human societies.



The following language is a useful anthropological toolkit for developing a nuanced understanding of different cultures, the relationships between humans, and the effects of Autistic trauma.

3x3 matrix of relationship types with parameters

Categories of relationships

1. whānau/Autistic whānau (kinship, biological or culturally assigned by the local culture), permanent
2. friendship, for the duration of mutual interest and consent
3. sexual, for the duration of mutual interest and consent

Power dynamics

1. depowered
2. uni-directionally powered-up (culturally defined, or as a result of trauma)
3. bi-directionally powered-up (culturally defined, or as a result of trauma)

4x5 matrix of fundamental relationship types

Categories of relationships

1. biological kinship, permanent
2. [Autistic] whānau, culturally assigned kinship by the local culture or agreed between Autistic people, permanent
3. friendship, for the duration of mutual interest and consent
4. sexual, for the duration of mutual interest and consent

Power dynamics

1. depowered
2. uni-directionally powered-up, culturally defined
3. uni-directionally powered-up, as a result of trauma
4. bi-directionally powered-up, culturally defined
5. bi-directionally powered-up, as a result of trauma

Cultural analysis

Industrialised culture: A mix of

1. kinship (all power dynamics)
2. friendship (all power dynamics)
3. employment = friendship (uni-directionally powered-up)
4. economic slavery = kinship (uni-directionally powered-up)
5. sexual (bi-directionally powered-up)

The language in which powered-up industrialised culture is being sold: A mix of

1. Happy families
2. Many friends
3. Successful careers
4. Economic growth



5. Romantic relationships

Note that the power dynamics associated with quantifiable “success” metrics constitute the essence of industrialised culture. In this paradigm the only escape from a toxic zero sum competitive game is the equally toxic delusion of infinite growth on a finite planet.

Traumatised industrialised Autistic culture: *A mix of*

1. *Autistic whānau (depowered)*
2. *friendship (depowered)*
3. *friendship (uni-directionally powered-up, as a result of trauma)*
4. *sexual (depowered)*
5. *sexual (uni-directionally powered-up, as a result of trauma)*

Coercive power is the root of all evil.

Depowered feral Autistic culture: *A healthy Autistic culture involves a mix of the following depowered relationship categories:*

1. *Foundation: Autistic whānau (depowered, life-long self-chosen whānau relations, i.e. life-partnerships)*
2. *Extension: friendship (depowered, for the duration of mutual interest and consent)*
3. *Extension: sexual (depowered, for the duration of mutual interest and consent)*

Note that the main criterion for the stable foundation is the life-long commitment. This is what makes it work as a healthy whānau construct. We are not using the term family, because families in the modern sense are too small to be viable and sustainable.

How Autistic trauma plays out over time

Human beings are relational. We can understand all of what we feel, think, and do in terms of relationships. Things went downhill when people started to think and act in terms of egos.

Trauma can play out in so many different scenarios. In all cases it always involves people exerting coercive power (in various forms) over others on an ongoing basis. And this is exactly what is “normalised” in powered up civilisations. It’s abuse by design, and it ripples through all of society, consistently marginalising those who refuse to join the social power games.

Dealing with our biological family is often exhausting. We feel drained, and can barely function. We may not find enough energy to wash our face or brush our teeth. We feel understood by our peers. We intuitively feel when other Autists are struggling, even if they don’t tell us.

We feel how our peers are struggling, because we recognise familiar patterns. Our heart, our mind, and our gut, every fibre of our body recognises the patterns. And we know this goes both ways. We understand each other’s struggles in a way that others can’t. This is what makes us human. This is what makes us Autistic. And this is what connects us to all of life, into the ecology of care that surrounds us when we are in a healthy environment.

It takes a very perverse kind of culture to reprogram non-autistic people so that they largely lose this capacity, and to traumatise many Autistic people to the extent that they can no longer extend trust to anyone, and develop a very dim view of humans. It is a culture that is perverted to the very core. It is the system that perpetuates itself until those Autistic people who are still capable of doing so start building a parallel reality. Those that do so must find ways of caring for each other so that no one gets sucked back into the vortex of the death spiral of “civilisation” and anthropocentrism.

We live in an insane world. In a sick society. For 10,000 years humans have been mainly concerned about “powering up” their relationships with each other and with the rest of the living world. Now hardly anyone sees the root cause and the route out of the death spiral. We have



been building social sand castles in the tidal zone for several millennia, and still refuse to acknowledge that the next tide of social upheaval will arrive within the next 12 hours.

This “civilisation” is a normalised state of perpetual war. If a world of powered up relationships actually worked well if only power were less concentrated and more equally distributed, the way to resolve risks such as a nuclear war would involve finding a way of distributing the nuclear weapons arsenal equally across all nations. The flaw in reasoning is obvious. The problem is not distribution but the normalisation of using power.

Some of us have seen far too much violence in our lives already and have been traumatised in too many ways. Autistic people in particular end up in impossible situations far too often. It's okay not to be okay in this world. We need to be there for each other. We can create much safer places, where we may still struggle, but not be put in impossible situations.

We are not failures at all. The biggest failure of this world is the notion of the arrow of progress and the associated notion of success. If we fail in this world it actually shows that we have kept a profound sense of integrity, and our bodymind has not been desensitised to the suffering in this world. Also, our body and mind suffer if we are not part of a healthy human scale biocultural organism.

Once we are part of an Autistic whānau, we need to experience that it's always okay to ask for help, and that our entire whānau will take care of us. We can only thrive together. Individual failure and success are toxic concepts that have no place in an ecology of care. These words are meant to be understood literally. Members of Autistic whānau are travelling together, caring for and watching out for each other along the way.

Autistic trauma leads us to peer support, and this leads us to Autistic whānau, which is a concept with enormous potential that can't be overstated. The negative compels us to work towards something uniquely beautiful that transcends the crippled sense of imagination in the society that surrounds us. It is this journey together with our Autistic whānau that makes life worthwhile and that allows us to incrementally heal from trauma.

We all deserve to be loved and cared for by an Autistic whānau and an ecology of care. We leave no one behind. It is together that we [co-create the magic of a new reality](#) that makes the old reality obsolete. Using the right words and refusing to use the words that the old system wants us to use is part of the magic. The old reality wants to draw people into life draining battles, because it feeds on the energy and souls of people.

The new reality appreciates the diversity of all forms of life. It is the billion year old magic that transforms the energy of the sun into the cycle of life and the beauty of art. Magic is the art of Autistic collaboration. We take care of each other in ways that others can't. The impossible becomes possible. This happens with all depowered Autistic relationships. The old system does not stand a chance against collaborative ecologies of care consisting of Autistic whānau.

An example of Autistic care:

“...To achieve a ‘biosphere centric’ perspective, this author undertook about 13,000 hours of undergraduate studies in Earth Sciences while studying much more than degree requirements after a lifetime of reading, mainly living in a biodiverse but degrading rural area. It involved understanding the biosphere as a massively complex web of life that evolved from bacteria over billions of years and diversified into millions of species, all related to each other, all ‘earth creatures’, of which, Homo sapiens are just one species. It is possible that I have spent 60,000 hours on this task now without respite. For Our Family...”

When abused and traumatised Autistic children become adults, the abuse often carries on in a subtle way that is fully “normalised” for the abusers. Each time when abusive parents want to remind us of our childhood, they pretend to see happy times, and we see hell on Earth. Abusers need to do this to feel good about themselves. Many never apologise for anything. We see through delusional self-serving displays of affection. We've intuitively felt the fakeness even when we were small children. We recoiled when our parents tried to hug us.

Abusers have children to serve their own emotional needs, without ever considering the emotional needs of their children. In civilisations that normalise coercive power, children become the commodities needed to propagate the normalisation of power, the complete



negation of the human potential for unconditional love and care, the negation of collaboration based on life-long trustworthy relationships at human scale.

In our times the damage caused by 10,000 years of power hungry empires and power drunk human primates is becoming fully visible. Over that period [humans have increasingly lost the essence of their humanity](#).

Rebooting a parallel reality that is not infected with the seeds of the dying system is only possible from the ecology of care of feral depowered Autistic whānau that we are now nurturing into life.

Autistic people are highly sensitive. There is a whole boatload of ideas and mental models that we need to share to allow our peers to understand our context. It takes time, and it can all be done incrementally, and along the way we learn from each other. We will do anything to support the people we care deeply about. This becomes possible by focusing on human scale.

We need to learn to take care of ourselves as much as we take care of others. We notice all the energy, love, and care that our peers invest. We know what becomes possible by applying Autistic relationships in the context of an ecology of care that exists around our Autistic whānau, in the context of a growing network of depowered trusted relationships.

We know how it feels to be surrounded by slightly less sensitive but well meaning people who unknowingly pile further demands on us without even noticing. That's where peer support can help identify overload. The more skilled and experienced we are at what we do, the more effortless it looks from the outside, and this leads some people to believe it is always easy.

Non-autistic people don't see our struggles when we don't tell them, and we are not telling them our struggles. We don't complain. We probably get cranky and fussy about other things while people don't understand while we are being cranky. We are not good at mentioning our needs and struggles, and especially not good at asking for help. In our childhood we learned not to express our needs and feelings. They were inconvenient for the people around us. So, we had to unlearn them. As children we learned that our needs and feelings are entirely irrelevant.

Deep down we still feel our needs and emotions are inconvenient and would be a burden. We learned that people are scared of our emotional intensity, so we learn to disconnect from our emotional side. But other people can not read our minds, and this leads to endless strings of misunderstandings.

That is one of the reasons compatible Autistic peers get along well. They intuitively pick each other's needs and moods without needing to use many words. We are dependent on compatible Autistic peers expressing our needs and feelings.

Experiencing abandonment as a child shapes our entire life. Our top priority becomes to never ever inflict something like this on anyone. With the help and trust of depowered Autistic relationships around us we can for the first time have positive experiences, and this in turn shows us that a different reality is possible.

We can heal if we learn not to look for acceptance and love in the wrong places. Our honesty, selfless and open nature can become a deadly weapon against us. We see the worst version of nice people. We need to watch out for each other, so that people don't exploit our goodwill endlessly.

Autistic people need Autistic healers. The healing is a shared experience. We need to heal in a safe place of mutual understanding. Anything else is a coping mechanism. That is why traditional therapy doesn't work well with some Autistic people. We can not unlearn what we have learned. We are fixed.



Autistic Trauma Peer Support

Autistic trauma peer support is coordinated by a group of volunteers from the Autistic Collaboration Trust.

The goal of Autistic trauma peer support is to (re)learn how to form trusted relationships with one or more Autistic peers over a process of 3 to 12 months, guided by two experienced AutCollab mentors who coordinate the journey of mutual trust extension and learning, and who are available to each assigned pair of peers for advice.

Advice from AutCollab mentors can be sought independently or jointly as needed by all participants of the peer support programme. The AutCollab mentors may of course not have easy answers or solutions for all potential questions and situations that may arise, and as needed they will assist with introducing participants to other participants who may have relevant live experience, or to services such as social services or emergency mental health support, that go beyond the scope and purpose of Autistic trauma peer support.

The most valuable insights and new knowledge is always distilled from weaving together multiple perspectives within a safe environment.

Ensuring cultural and psychological safety

All categories of relationships in the W.E.I.R.D. institutional landscape that surrounds us are infected with counter-productive / toxic power dynamics. For example, while neurodivergent therapists may have valuable knowledge that should be made available, the modern therapist-patient relationship is not free from power dynamics, and this must be understood. When we are talking about nurturing feral Autistic relationships, we're talking about relationships that are not framed in any of the modern W.E.I.R.D. powered-up categories.

We are drawing on the lived experience from the path towards partnership in the NeurodiVenture model, including the lessons from co-creating, articulating, and enacting the social norms of the NeurodiVenture model and lessons from framing de-weaponised contracts and partnerships between organisations.

Our experience has taught us that rules and expectations are only clearly understood when articulated in a simple language that makes consistent use of a small set of foundational concepts. Overcomplicated rules and expectations are a recipe for mistrust and disappointment, and can be just as counterproductive as having no rules and expectations.

All humans make mistakes. Safe environments are explicitly designed contain the scope of potential mistakes, to make it as easy as possible to recover from mistakes, to allow hurt to be acknowledged and misunderstandings to be resolved, and to incrementally (re)learn to extend trust. Autistic people must learn to regularly remind themselves not to be too hard on themselves and others. This is much easier said than done. It takes time, it can take years to (re)learn what genuine safety feels like.

This User Guide attempts to provide guidance on how to avoid triggers and what tools are available to recover after someone has been triggered. In this context it's important that assigned peer support buddy pairs don't operate in a vacuum, but can also ask for support from AutCollab mentors or via tools that allow people to seek advice from others within the peer support network – as needed anonymously. We draw on several experiences we have made with S23M and the NeurodiVenture model, when team members who were not ready to extend trust to others tried to play power games. We've always been able to keep the team intact, using the advice process to compare notes and minimise misunderstandings before reaching any conclusion.

We'll continuously refine the co-design of Autistic peer support as we jointly learn within the emergent ecology of care. Autistic peer support will expand and be replicated to the extent that it delivers results, which in turn can be understood as a social licence granted by the Autistic communities that tap into the concept.



How does it work?

Use case: Receipt of a new inquiry

1. Assignment of a buddy pair of AutCollab mentors (Ulku and Jorn at this stage) to the inquiry
2. Response to the inquiry with an invitation for an initial dialogue
3. One or more conversations with the Inquirer (text, audio, video, depending on the communication preferences of the Inquirer), where the mentors provide an overview of how the service works, explaining that AutCollab only works with candidates who are prepared to invest in developing depowered relationships with peers, and then share traumatic experiences and encourage the Inquirer to provide an overview of their experience of Autistic trauma
4. The mentors summarise their understanding in writing and reflect back their understanding to the Inquirer
5. The Inquirer validates the level of shared understanding and as needed elaborates or corrects essential details
6. The synopsis of the context of the Inquirer is added to the secure AutCollab inquiry database, to which only AutCollab mentors have access
7. The mentors search through the AutCollab inquiry database to identify potential candidates for peer support, looking for comparable traumatic experiences, compatible language skills, and if desired by the candidates, geographic proximity
8. The AutCollab mentors introduce two candidate peers to each other by sharing access to the synopsis of the context of the two candidates. This may be several months later, depending on how many people we have who are actively seeking peer support, we are not claiming to be able to produce miracle. As needed we can use AutCollab.org to publish articles that outline the kind of traumatic experiences that are relevant to encourage further potential peers to access the service.
9. Only if both candidate peers are interested in establishing a dialogue based on the shared context, the AutCollab mentors facilitate an introductory meeting
10. Further meetings between the peers are coordinated and conducted directly between the peers. The AutCollab peer support service description provides guidance on how to learn from each other by sharing experiences and by developing a depowered relationship
11. The peers can choose to invite zero, one or two AutCollab mentors to their meetings depending on how safe they feel around each other. Peers are asked to contact their trusted AutCollab mentor(s) if they believe that their assigned peer tries to exert social pressure on them in any way or tries to dissuade them from having AutCollab mentor(s) at their meetings
12. Following each peer meeting both peers are asked to complete a very simple survey on how safe they feel with their assigned peer. Only the AutCollab mentors have access to the survey results. This allows AutCollab to monitor the development of the relationships between peers without being present in all meetings
13. At any time the people participating in providing peer support have independent access to two AutCollab mentors for advice (text based by default, but if desired individual meetings can also be arranged)
14. At any time a person participating in providing/receiving peer support can contact AutCollab and decide to opt out of the service or request to be assigned a different peer. The AutCollab mentors will however carefully examine the context and conduct independent interviews with both peers, before assigning a new peer to one or both peers



Autistic Trauma Peer Support

15. The AutCollab mentors may proactively contact a person participating in providing/receiving peer support if the meeting survey results show that the person starts to feel less safe or continues to often feel unsafe in the peer meetings
16. When the results of peer support result in enduring depowered Autistic relationships (that have been maintained at least 12 months old): (A) the peers are asked to co-author an article about their experience, as needed anonymously, or to participate in an interview with their AutCollab mentors to contribute to the AutCollab repository of peer support knowledge (B) the peers are asked to consider participating in other AutCollab initiatives or in developing further peer relationships via the trauma peer support service

This draft design needs to be further elaborated with an FAQ based on feedback from candidate peer support users. We will jointly refine the design by seeking feedback from Autistic people we trust.



Specific guidance for each step in the process

<intro>

1. Assignment of a buddy pair of AutCollab mentors
....
2. The assigned mentors respond to the inquiry
...
3. Mentors have conversations with the Inquirer
...
4. Mentors summarise their understanding in writing
...
5. The Inquirer validates the level of shared understanding
....
6. Mentors store the synopsis of the context of the Inquirer
...
7. Mentors identify potential candidates for peer support
...
8. Mentors introduce two candidate peers to each other
...
9. Mentors facilitate an introductory meeting
...
10. Meetings are coordinated and conducted directly between the peers
...
11. Peers invite zero, one or two mentors depending on how safe they feel
...
12. After each meeting both peers complete a simple survey on how safe they feel
...
13. Peers have independent access to two mentors for advice
...



14. A peer participating can contact AutCollab and decide to opt out of the service

...

15. Mentors may contact a person if surveys show that the person feels unsafe

...

16. Peers document their journey towards depowered Autistic relationships

...

17. Mentors summarise their understanding in writing

...

Collaboration on an existing or new AutCollab project or campaign

Once participants have felt safe enough to share information about Autistic trauma, and have made initial positive experiences by learning from each other and by supporting each other in coping with Autistic trauma, the AutCollab mentors will encourage the participants to collaborate on AutCollab projects and campaigns.

The objective is to provide a structured framework of joint activities that may catalyse the formation of an Autistic relationship, and beyond this, to incrementally practice extending trust to further Autistic peers as part of collaboration on projects and campaigns.



Beyond Autistic Trauma Peer Support

Autistic trauma peer support is designed as the first stage of a multi-stage learning experience in co-creating and nurturing depowered relationships that are based on mutual trust, which in turn relies on openness and honesty.



From peer support towards trust based depowered Autistic relationships

The notion of partnership found in the NeurodiVenture model, and especially the notion of multi-generational partnership, ties in directly to the notion of partnership described in Te Tiriti o Waitangi in Aotearoa.

The notion of genuine partnership is another way of describing fully depowered relationships. Hence we also draw on the lived experience within Māori communities that relates to genuine partnership, and how that notion is routinely corrupted by the conception of modern W.E.I.R.D. powered-up relationship categories, both at an individual level, and at the level of institutions, i.e. government – whānau relationships, government – hapū relationships, etc.

There is a wonderful correspondence of intent and concepts between Mātauranga Māori and Autistic culture. The AutCollab work on Autistic whānau and Autistic trauma peer support is shaped and informed by the intersection of Mātauranga Māori and Autistic culture.



We conceptualise Te Tiriti o Waitangi as an example of co-creating the fundamental rules for collaborative partnership from the ground up. Enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi involves internalising social norms that support genuine partnership. The exact same social norms that nurture genuine partnerships are needed to frame the expectations around Autistic relationships in terms of 'depowering' based on openness and honesty in the context of Autistic whānau.

We do not expect traumatised people to fully understand the idea of Autistic whānau when they sign up for Autistic trauma peer support. However, we can provide people with an accessible User Guide (this document) that explains depowering and partnership based on openness and honesty, and we can establish a commitment to a social norm that states that social power dynamics are not tolerated within peer support relationships. This commitment is a precondition for participation in peer support. In this document we establish simple rules for addressing perceived and emerging power dynamics that may be noticed by a participant or by the AutCollab mentors that are involved in coordinating Autistic trauma peer support.

Co-creating healthy depowered Autistic whānau

The Autistic whānau concept is an immensely valuable part of Autistic peer support, especially when it comes to trauma related to fear of abandonment. It is only when a stable reliable whānau foundation is in place at human scale that humans feel safe.

Only on top of a genuinely safe foundation of depowered whānau relationships can humans explore friendships and sexual relationships without fear of abandonment, because these are actually secondary, less foundational aspects of human social life. Regarding the social dimension and co-creating healthy depowered Autistic whānau, the following interviews are of interest:

1. Harrison Owen on [Open Space and on depowering](#) communication and collaboration
2. Oswin Latimer on [how Autistic trauma affects relationships](#)

Our basic needs are met via our whānau, especially if the whānau operates locally agreed internalised social norms that keep all relationships within the whānau depowered.

With the language introduced above, we can express the core of the problems in powered-up societies. Many relationships deteriorate and become toxic:

1. Instead of the **commitment** aspect of love, emotional support, and deep care, people get **economic slavery** at home, and **economic warfare** at scale
2. Instead of the **friendship** aspect of love, emotional support, and creative play, i.e. doing enjoyable things together, people get entrapped in **career ambitions** and other **competitive social games**, and at scale we end up with an **energy and resource hungry socio-techological mono-culture**
3. Instead of the **sexual** aspect of love, emotional support, and creative play, sex becomes a tool for **emotional and physical abuse**, and we end up with all the familiar social problems that we see all over the world

People knew this many hundred thousand years ago. It is no accident that the strongest social norms used to be norms against the emergence of power gradients. As soon as power enters a relationship, the quality of human / Autistic relationships is compromised, and the health of an entire biocultural organism suffers.

A single powered-up relationship causes stress in many other relationships. These observations will prove to be essential for healing from Autistic trauma and for co-creating healthy Autistic whānau going forward.

Small is beautiful. If at small human scales we co-create good company, and love each other and care for each other, we're doing the things that are compatible with our evolutionary history. That would be a coordinated retreat from an overpopulated planet, and it would minimise human and non-human suffering.

We've got the necessary cultural toolkit. Now it's a matter of deploying it locally, and not just online, in a relatively safe physical environment, with the kind of people who are ready for it.



Autistic Trauma Peer Support

The toolkit consists of simple first principles rather than very specific cultural norms and tools. It's more about being able to offer emotional support and being able to ask the right kind of questions to learn from each other in a safe environment than about having all the "answers".

We deeply appreciate the care, love, protection, safety our peers can provide. It is an unusual feeling when we have never felt being taken care of the way that only other hypersensitive and traumatised Autistic people can.

When we spend time with other Autistic people, we know that life is worthwhile, that there is something worth struggling for – together. We know how it feels to struggle alone for decades, and for others to assume that we are strong and “resilient”. No, we are not that at all. The difference is that we have not lost the ability to care and love deeply, the ability to create healthy human cultures from scratch.

We need to put up a barrier to further abuse. In the same way that we can consistently use language to resensitise people to the need to co-create ecologies of care, we can use language to protect our minds from mistaking the people who raised us with people with whom we have healthy caring relationships, as we would have with parents who actually loved us unconditionally, without playing social games with us.

We need to learn to take good care of ourselves and to ask for help from trusted peers when we need it, whatever it may be. We can help each other ask for help, because this is something that we unlearn if we have spent too long in environments where no real help is available, and where asking may even be used against us.

Many wonderful Autistic people are continuously pushed to the limit. “Normality” or “reality” is the dark cloud that is tormenting us. Some of us are struggling every day. Autistic people are hypersensitive. In the fast paced world of industrialised busyness many of us are regularly affected by stress in the form of GI problems, migraine attacks, depression, and other symptoms of chronic anxiety.

We need to start doing something about the root causes, the causes of chronic stress. Otherwise “treatments” only address surface symptoms and we may attempt to power through dangerously stressful situations that take a toll on our mental health. We need to create ecologies of care around us, so that we can start to heal.

We often need love and care rather than many words. It helps to struggle together. It takes an Autistic whānau, an ecology of care, for us to continue. Knowing that we can count on each other keeps us going. Depowered Autistic relationships of love and care are the building blocks of Autistic whānau, i.e. healthy Autistic biocultural organisms.

We need to let each other know that there is a safe place in this world for all of us, and that many of us will do anything we can to help our peers get to a safe place. If people have manipulated or exploited us, it is not our fault. We have agency. We can shape safe places so that they meet our needs, and we must learn not to be afraid to ask our peers for help.

Stage 2A : Nurturing trust based Autistic relationships

Following the formation of a first trust based Autistic relationship as a result of peer support, participants are encouraged to continue collaboration on AutCollab projects and campaigns, as well as other activities for 12 months or longer, to strengthen their relationship, and to practice extending trust to further Autistic peers.

Stage 2B : Supporting new peers

Following the formation of a first trust based Autistic relationship as a result of peer support, participants are also encouraged to assist at least one further person with Autistic trauma peer support for 12 months or longer. Ideally this will result in further trusted Autistic relationship(s), and at a minimum it will give participants further practice in extending trust and offering peer support.



Stage 3 : Joining or forming an Autistic whānau

Some of those who have formed one or more trusted Autistic relationships that are at least 12 months old may want to consider joining or forming an Autistic whānau. All of the people forming a whānau should have been maintaining trusted Autistic relationships with each other for 12 months, and by this stage should be deeply familiar with each other.

The whānau construct adds an economic dimension to a set of trust based Autistic relationships, a commitment to egalitarian resource and revenue sharing based on depowered relationships and the NeurodiVenture model, and a commitment to lifelong partnership. The journey to full economic partnership is a 6-year journey, and it involves co-creating systems of mutual support and new services around the unique talents, interests, and limitations of all the people involved.

In the economic context of NeurodiVentures financial trust extensions and negative interest rates are two simple parameters that depower the relationship between people and the technology of money.

However, genuine partnership involves depowering all aspects of relationships¹. This becomes possible via the simple expectations around the use of an **advice process**, and in a group context, as soon as more than one relationship is involved, the regular use of **Open Space** – to enable knowledge to flow, questions to be asked, hurt feelings to be addressed, and misunderstandings to be resolved without delay.

At an institutional level many Autists are familiar with the endless instances of power dynamics that regularly corrupt decision making in government and the world of busyness. Māori whānau regularly make comparable observations in relation to the way our government engages with Māori communities, and in relation to power dynamics that have infected Māori communities as a result of the legacy of colonialism, systemic racism, and the toxic effects of neoliberal policies.

Stage 4 : Joining or forming a self-sustaining Autistic community

One or more Autistic whānau that are at least 12 months old may decide to jointly invest in co-creating a self-sustaining Autistic community that is connected into a wider ecology of care that includes further Autistic and non-Autistic whānau, as well as individual and institutional allies and supporters in the form of joint ventures, customers, suppliers, donors, and dedicated streams of government funding for the support of Autistic people (either direct funding for a self-sustaining Autistic community or via funding for AutCollab services).

Frequently asked questions

1. Question?

Answer.

2. Question?

Answer.

¹ Related education: <https://autcollab.org/projects/education-in-the-neurodiversity-paradigm-the-neurodiversity-movement-and-autistic-culture/>