



Monotropism

Monotropism is common in autistic people and refers to the idea that an individual may focus attention on a small number of interests at a time. It is often described as an attention tunnel. Many neurotypical people are polytropic - meaning they can focus on multiple things at once.

When a monotropic person is hyper-focused on one thing, transitioning onto something else can be very difficult and may take more time. Monotropism can be described as a hook and flow state, as the person becomes hooked by the interest and their attention becomes all encompassing. This can create incredibly rich and intense experiences for a person. Autistic people can become dysregulated whenever they are forced into environments that distract or pull them from their flow state.

Monotropic people are intrinsically motivated, meaning they are driven by the feeling of satisfaction, enjoyment and passion that they experience during a flow state.

The hyper-focus of monotropism allows a person to see a task in much greater depth and complete it to a higher degree; however, this can make it hard to redirect the person's attention to something different, including starting and stopping tasks. It may also cause the person to miss out on interoceptive cues to go to the toilet, or to eat or drink, because they struggle to move away from their main focus.

It is important to understand monotropism so that we don't incorrectly label autistic people as ignorant, rude or deliberately not engaged. It is also important to note that there is no single monotropic experience for every autistic individual.

