

# MONOTROPISM

Implications for practice: "The biggest practical thing to take away from this is the importance of meeting the child, or adult, where they are."



- Fergus Murray  
<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-32/august-2019/me-and-monotropism-unified-theory-autism>

## monotropic interest system

Monotropism also suggests a reason for the sensory integration difficulties found in the accounts of autistic people, as they suggest there is a 'hyper-awareness' of phenomena within the attentional tunnel, but hypo-sensitivity to phenomena outside of it. Also, that an interest in the social world may not occur in the early years of life.

Milton, Damian (2012) So what exactly is autism? . Autism Education Trust, 15 pp. Online article. (KAR id:62698)

## What is monotropism?

Atypical strategies for the allocation of attention including social interactions, the use of language, and the shifting of the object of attention – a central core Autistic feature.

Murray, Dinah & Lesser, Mike & Lawson, Wendy. (2005). Attention, monotropism and the diagnostic criteria for autism. *Autism: the international journal of research and practice*. 9. 139–56. 10.1177/1362361305051398.



## A DIFFERENT COGNITIVE STYLE

"In a nutshell, monotropism is the tendency for our interests to pull us in more strongly than most people. It rests on a model of the mind as an 'interest system': we are all interested in many things, and our interests help direct our attention. Different interests are salient at different times. In a monotropic mind, fewer interests tend to be aroused at any time, and they attract more of our processing resources, making it harder to deal with things outside of our current attention tunnel."

- Fergus Murray (2018)  
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## GOOD THERAPY PRACTICES

- Work *with* interests and passions
- Avoid the ableist practice of pathologizing a person's focused interests; intense focus is indispensable in various fields such as science, math, technology, music
- Understand that it's extremely difficult, anxiety-producing, and even frustrating for a monotropic brain to shift focus when the person is in a flow state
- *Become part of* attention tunnels, rather than focused on pulling the person out of their flow states
- Help maintain a sense of safety, stability, and routine