The neuro-affirming quick reference guide

Keep this guide handy on your fridge or in your child's play area for a quick reminder to prioritise connection over conformity.

OLD RESPONSE (The 'Fix-It' Focus)	THE NEURO-AFFIRMING SHIFT (The 'Connect' Focus)
STIMMIMG	
'Stop flapping/rocking. Sit still.' (Focus: Compliance)	'I see we need to move right now. That helps us calm down.' (Focus: Regulation & validation)
GOAL: Eliminate the stim.	**GOAL:** Understand the **function** (why it's happening) and ensure the stim is safe.
OLD ACTION: Blocking the behaviour or redirecting them immediately.	**NEW ACTION:** Observe *why* the stim is happening (boredom? overwhelm?) and provide appropriate **space or tools** (like a fidget or safe sensory space).
AUTISTIC PLAY (e.g., Lining up, spinning wheels, hyper-focus)	
'That toy isn't for lining up! Let's make it talk/share.' (Focus: Forced reciprocity)	'I see you've made a long, straight line of cars. Look at all the details!' (Focus: Validating deep interest)
GOAL: Force 'functional,' typical, or interactive play.	**GOAL:** Honour their unique way of **engaging and learning** through their interests.
OLD ACTION: Directing them to play a certain way.	**NEW ACTION:** Sit alongside them, **follow their lead**, and narrate their focus (e.g., 'fast,' 'smooth,' 'blue,' 'pattern').
COMMUNICATION (Gestalt Language Processing)	
'Don't repeat that movie line. Use your own words.' (Focus: Literal speech)	'That pile is too big! I can help you move it.' (Focus: Meaning/emotion behind the script)
GOAL: Demand original, word-by-word (analytic) language.	**GOAL: Affirm the emotional meaning** of the scripted phrase (gestalt).
OLD ACTION: Ignoring the script or demanding a different response.	**NEW ACTION:** Respond to the child's **intent or feeling**, and model slightly shorter/changed versions of their script (known as **mitigated gestalts**).

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