Hearing Autistic Voices Through Inclusive Research Practices

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The Goal

To develop a research methodology for interviewing autistic youth which enables meaningful participation by eliminating barriers.
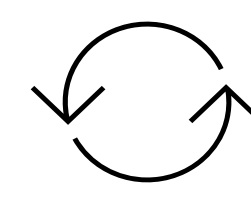
Answer my research questions:
How do autistic students in NS describe their experience of school inclusion?
What do they want their teachers to know?

The Problem
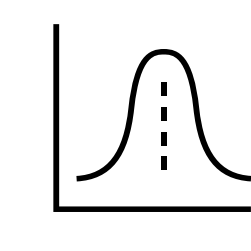
Representative? Research often excludes large portions of the autistic population, such as non-speaking people. (Courchesne et al., 2022; Milton, 2014; Nicholas et al., 2019; Roche et al., 2021)

Replicable? Many similar studies don't describe their methods fully, or at all. (Fayette & Bond, 2018; Jivraj et al., 2014; Tesfaye et al., 2019; Tyrrell & Woods, 2020)

Ecologically Valid? Few studies discuss having autistic people evaluate their design. (Fayette & Bond, 2017; Jivraj et al., 2014; Tesfaye et al., 2019; Tyrrell & Woods, 2020)
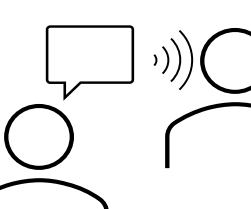
Accurate? Communication between autistic and non-autistic people is not always accurate. (Alkhaldi et al., 2019; Crompton et al., 2020; Milton, 2012, 2014)

The Solution

Universal Design: Interview designed to accommodate a wide range of needs; all tools provided to all participants.

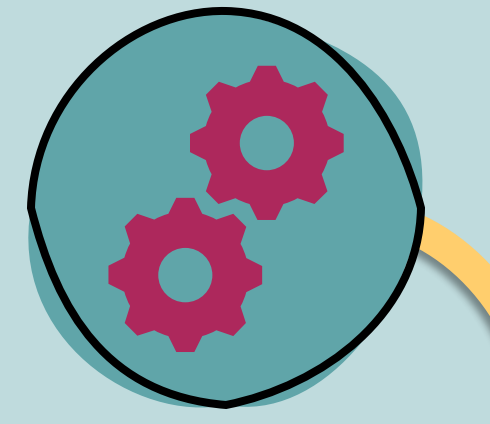**Describe Methods:** Provide full protocol in published work.

Autistic Involvement: Base protocol on those studies designed with autistic input. (Courchesne et al., 2022; Goodall, 2018, 2020)

Autistic Researcher: Facilitate accurate, autistic-to-autistic communication and promote feeling of safety. (Crompton et al., 2020; Milton, 2012, 2014)

Support Considerations

Processing (Goodall, 2020; Mayes, 2007; Thurman, 2016)
• Need for additional processing time
• Difficulty with open ended questions

Communication (Courchesne et al., 2022; Honeybourne, 2015; Tesfaye et al., 2019)
• Difficulty responding under pressure
• Need for different output modalities

Anxiety (Cashin & Yorke, 2018; Clark & Adams, 2020; Mauthner, 1997)
• Need for predictability
• Preference for structure

Meeting Participants' Needs
These needs intertwine.
Meeting one helps with others.
(Courchesne et al., 2022; Goodall, 2018, 2020)

An #ActuallyAutistic Project

Autistic-Approved Interview Materials

Inclusive Practices

Provide interview questions ahead of time.
• Allows additional processing time, reduces anxiety.

Honour and offer alternative communication.
• Recruiting flyer indicates *all communication accepted*.
• Interview materials allow alternatives to speech.

Follow autistic communication norms.
• Use concrete wording so questions non-ambiguous.
• Provide sample responses; further reduce ambiguity.

Use structured activities.
• "Jump start" thought process to support wordfinding.

Figure 3
Visual Rating Scales
Adapted to support visual processing. Items are printed on cards; cards can be placed directly on the scale.
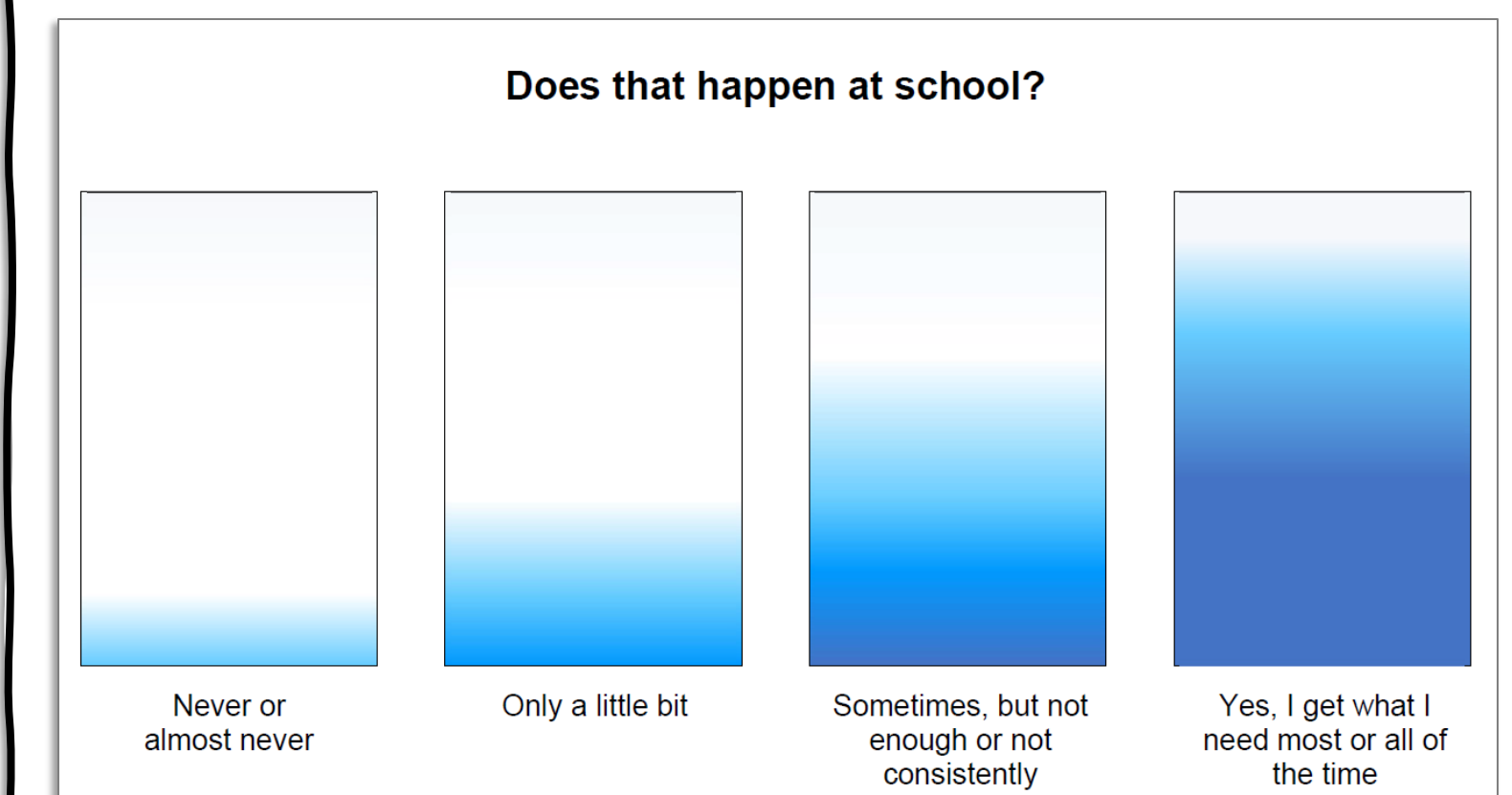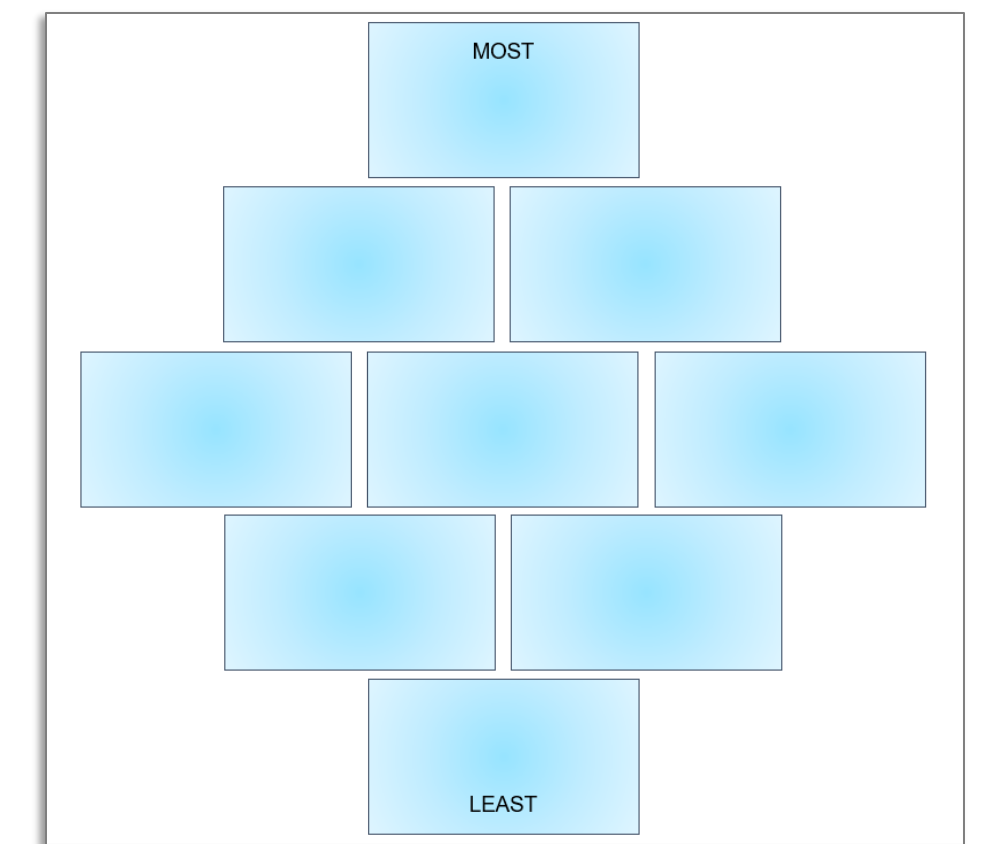
3a. Diamond Ranking *Participants rank items from least to most important contributors to the experience or construct in question.*

MOST / LEAST

Does that happen at school?
Never or almost never | Only a little bit | Sometimes, but not enough or not consistently | Yes, I get what I need most or all of the time
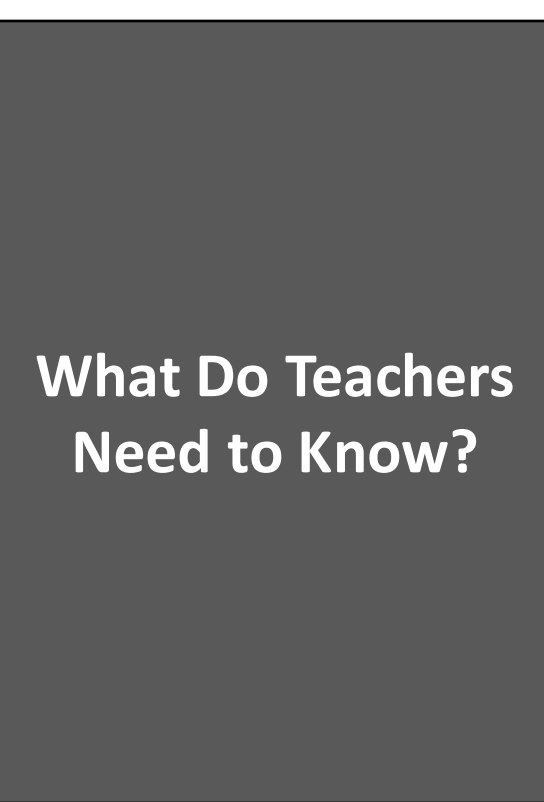
3b. Visual Likert Scale

Figure 1 Question Cards
(Courchesne et al., 2022)
At the beginning of the interview, the participant arranges the cards to determine the interview schedule.

• Provide structure
• Gives autonomy
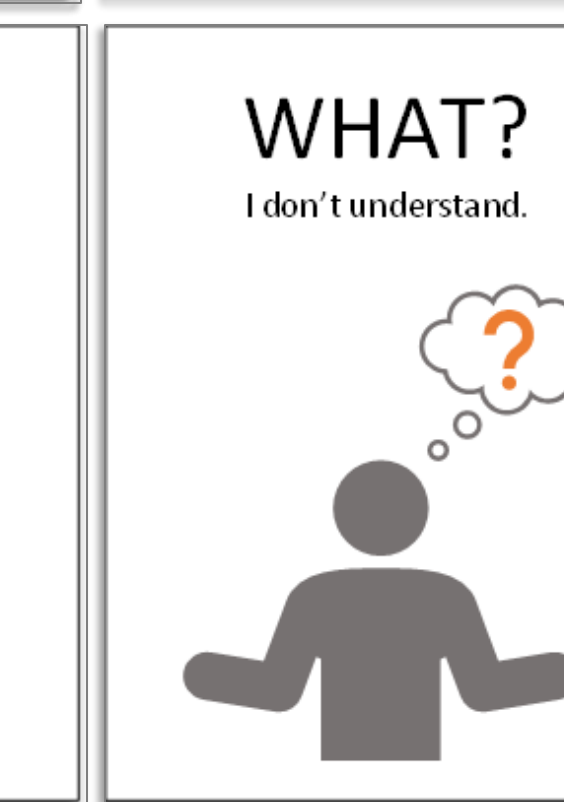• Create a visual schedule they can change and refer to as needed.

What Does Inclusion Mean at School?

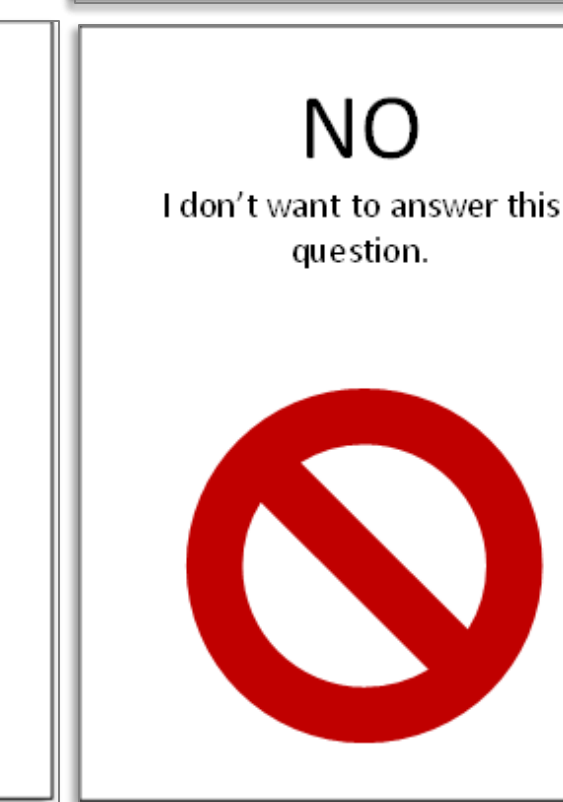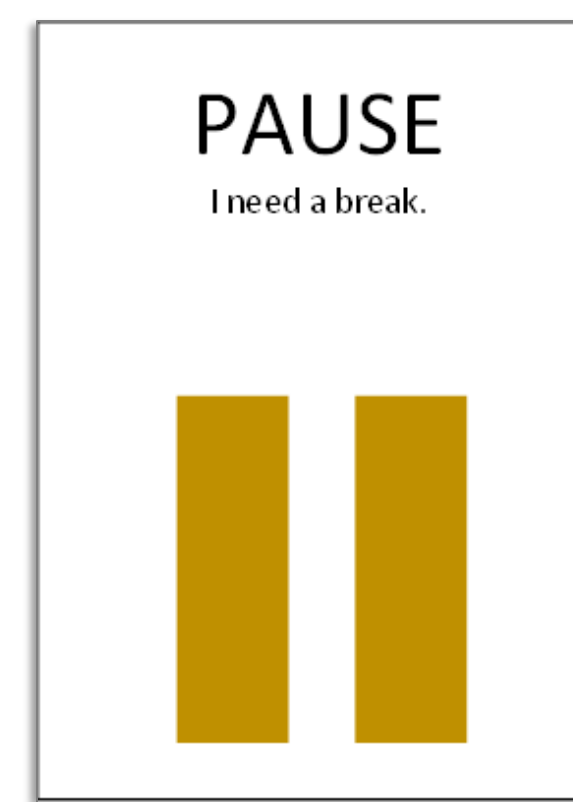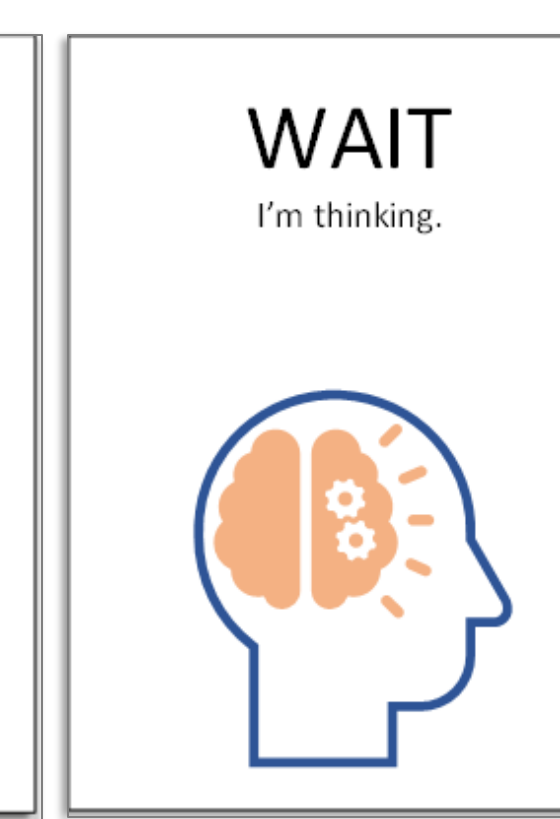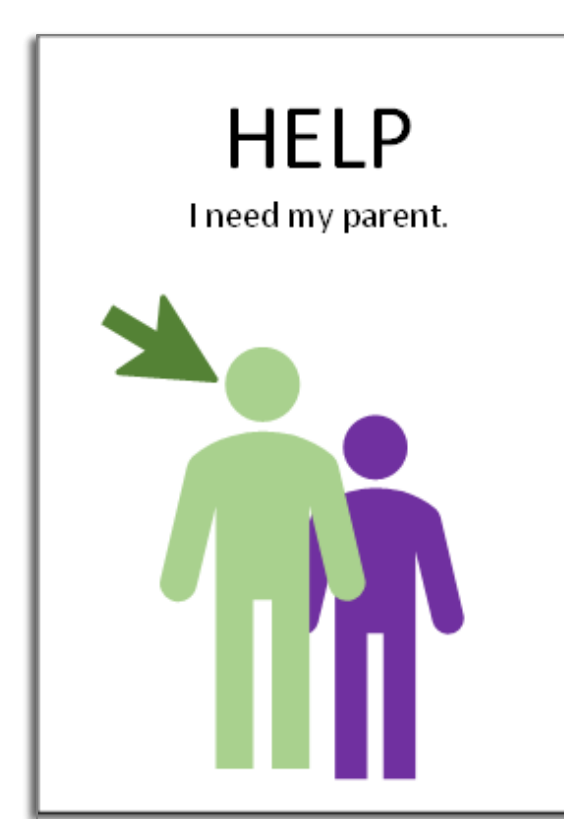What Creates Genuine Inclusion?

What Do Teachers Need to Know?

### Figure 2 Communication Cards (Courchesne et al., 2022; Goodall, 2020)
These cards support ongoing, meaningful engagement and provide an alternative way to communicate important needs. Some autistic people have intermittent speech abilities which may fluctuate with stress. (Zisk & Dalton, 2019)

• Provides a sense of safety
• Gives autonomy
• Reduce processing demands associated with language production; especially valuable during stressful moments.

HELP - I need my parent.
WAIT - I'm thinking.
PAUSE - I need a break.
STOP - I need to end the interview.
NO - I don't want to answer this question.
WHAT? - I don't understand.

Figure 4 Alternative Activities
Providing options supports varying needs, preferences. (Courchesne et al., 2022)

4a. "Ideal Teacher." (Goodall, 2020)
Participants can draw, write, or speak to answer: *"What would you look for in a teacher for autistic students?"*
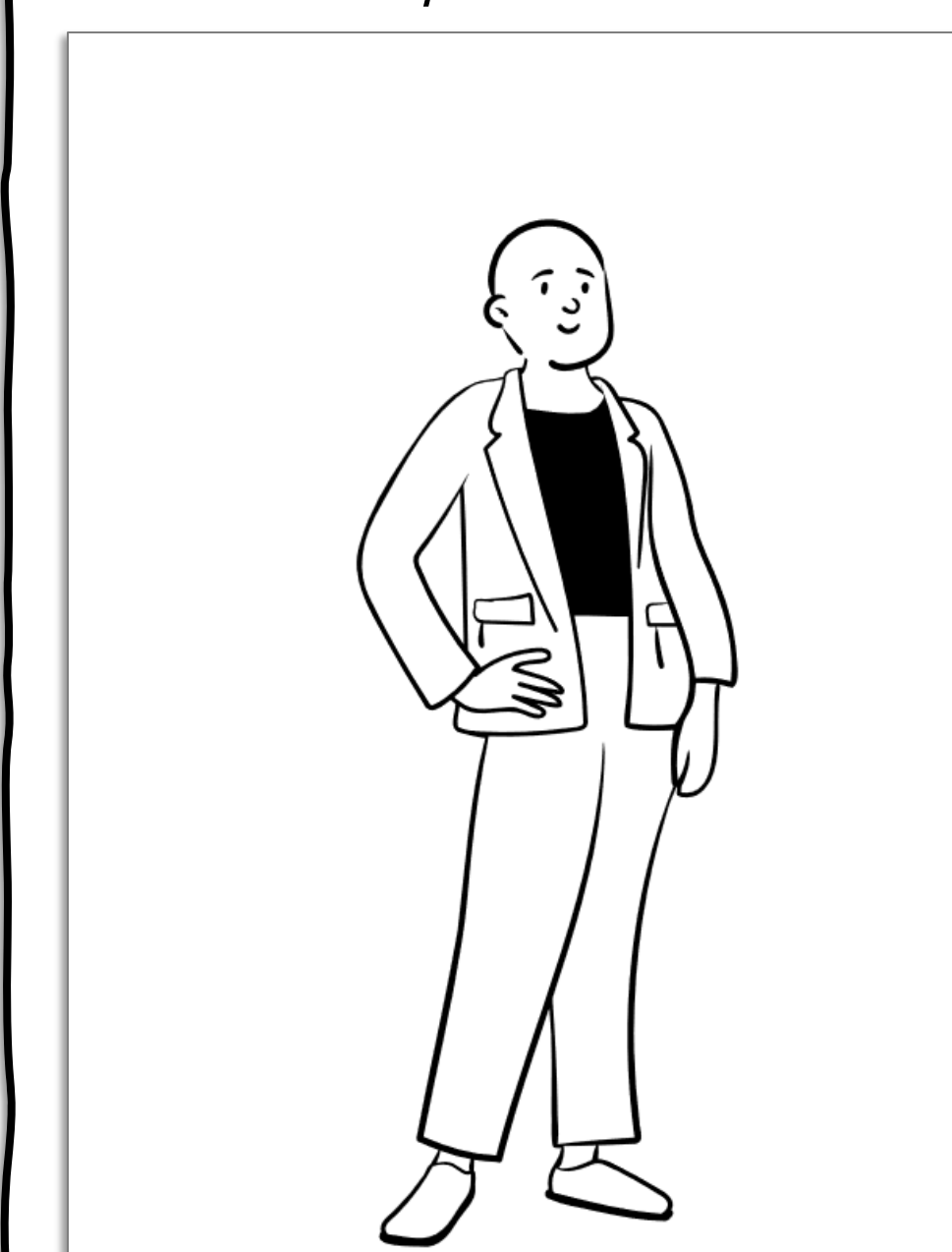
4b. Examples of images used as visual prompts to answer: *"What things are hard to cope with at school?"*

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