Deep focus, *by design.*

A neurodivergent-affirming look at monotropism — why some brains dive deep, why switching can be so hard, and why special interests matter.

THE IDEA

What is monotropism?

Monotropism is a theory of autistic attention, first described by Dinah Murray, Mike Lesser and Wenn Lawson (2005). It suggests that a monotropic mind gathers its attention into a **few deep channels** at a time, while a polytropic mind spreads it across **many shallower ones**. Neither is broken — they're different ways of tuning in. Many autistic people, and some ADHDers, say it fits their experience well.

POLYTROPIC

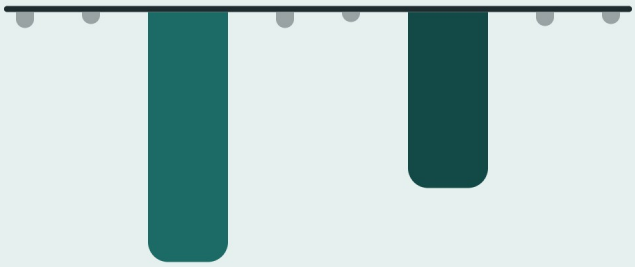
Attention spread across many shallow channels.



Easier to track lots at once; each thread gets a little.

MONOTROPIC

Attention pulled into a few deep tunnels.



Rich detail and flow inside the tunnel; less left over for the rest.

THE HIDDEN COST

Why switching costs so much



1

In the tunnel

Fully absorbed. Thoughts, plans and details are all loaded and flowing.

→



2

Pulled out

A sudden question or change. Everything loaded drops at once — it can feel jarring, even painful.

→



3

Rebuilding

Getting back in takes time and energy. That's the real cost of "just a quick interruption."

So: resisting a switch usually isn't stubbornness. It's protecting the work of building the tunnel.

Continued on back →

NOT "OBSESSIONS"

Special interests are...

Joy

A deep, reliable source of delight and meaning. Many autistic people describe it as feeling most like themselves.

Regulation

A calm, predictable place to land after overload. Diving in can help a busy nervous system settle.

Connection

A bridge to people who share the passion. Info-dumping can be a way of sharing love, not lecturing.

Skill-building

A path to real expertise — and sometimes to study, work or community roles built around it.

Making transitions gentler

For yourself, or for someone you support.

1. **Warn early.** "In ten minutes we'll stop."
2. **Leave a bookmark.** Note where you stopped to get back in faster.
3. **Find a pause point.** End of a chapter, not mid-sentence.
4. **Batch it.** Group interruptions instead of many small ones.
5. **Build a bridge.** A short, familiar ritual between one thing and the next.

YOUR TURN

My interests map

CURRENT INTERESTS	HOW THEY HELP ME	A WAY TO SHARE THEM

For education and community support, not diagnosis. For personal guidance, reach out to a neurodivergent-affirming professional.

Sources: Murray, Lesser & Lawson (2005), *Autism*.