Needs vs. Wants

Both matter. They just ask different things of you.

A need is something you need in order to function and stay well. A want is something you'd like. Many neurodivergent adults learned to call their needs "wants" so they'd seem easier to be around. Telling them apart is the first step to protecting what you actually need.

	Needs	Wants
What it is	Something you need to function, stay well or feel safe	Something that would make life nicer or easier
If it's missing	You run down, shut down or struggle over time	You feel disappointed, then you adjust
Can it wait?	Not for long	Usually, yes
Can it flex?	The how can flex. The need stays.	Often swaps easily for something else
Example	Quiet time to recover after people	A whole free weekend with no plans

THE NEED TEST

- Without it, do I run down over time?
- Does my body or brain react when it's missing?
- Has it been true across many settings?
- Would I still need it if no one could see?

Two or more "yes" answers? Treat it as a need.

COMMON ND NEEDS OFTEN CALLED "WANTS"

- Quiet
- Recovery time
- Clear info
- Processing time
- Routine
- Movement
- Sensory tools
- Direct words

Where boundaries come in: a boundary is what you do to protect a need. "I need quiet after work" is the need. "I'll take 30 minutes alone before we talk" is the boundary.

Needs framing draws on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000, *American Psychologist*) and research on camouflaging in autistic adults (Hull et al., 2017).
For education, not diagnosis.

Sort Your Own

Write things you've asked for, or wished for, then sort them.

Don't overthink it. Put each item where it feels true today. If something keeps sliding between columns, run the need test on it.

My needs

My wants

Still not sure? Items I keep moving between columns:

One need from my list, and one boundary that could protect it:

If you're in crisis or thinking about ending your life, please reach out now: in the US, call or text **988**; elsewhere, contact your local emergency or crisis line.