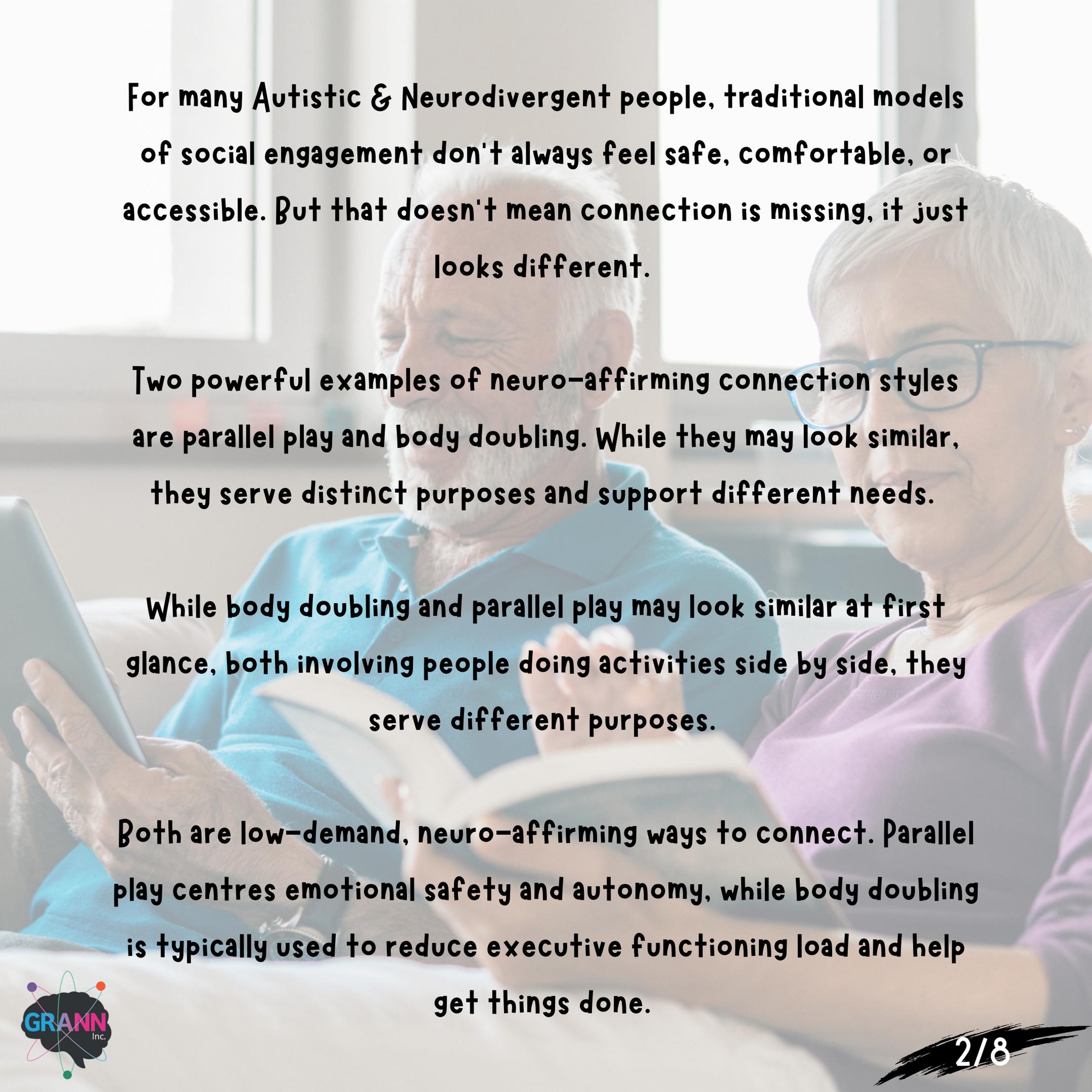


**Body Doubling and Parallel Play:  
What Are They  
&  
How Do They Provide Support**



An elderly man with a white beard and a blue shirt is sitting on the left, holding a tablet. An elderly woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a purple top, is sitting on the right, holding an open book. They are both looking down at their respective items. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor setting.

**For many Autistic & Neurodivergent people, traditional models of social engagement don't always feel safe, comfortable, or accessible. But that doesn't mean connection is missing, it just looks different.**

**Two powerful examples of neuro-affirming connection styles are parallel play and body doubling. While they may look similar, they serve distinct purposes and support different needs.**

**While body doubling and parallel play may look similar at first glance, both involving people doing activities side by side, they serve different purposes.**

**Both are low-demand, neuro-affirming ways to connect. Parallel play centres emotional safety and autonomy, while body doubling is typically used to reduce executive functioning load and help get things done.**

# Why They Both Matter for Autistic & Neurodivergent People

**Autistic & Neurodivergent people often experience:**

**Social burnout**

**Performance anxiety**

**Executive function challenges**

**Overwhelm in high-demand environments**

**Both parallel play and body doubling offer non-intrusive, validating ways to connect, support self-regulation, and build trust – without forcing neuronormative forms of interaction.**

**They're not "lesser" forms of connection – they're powerful, adaptive, and deeply human.**

# What Is Body Doubling?

Body doubling is a gentle, supportive strategy where someone works alongside you, either in person or virtually, while you focus on a task that may feel overwhelming, monotonous, or hard to start.

The other person doesn't need to help with the task itself; their calm presence and parallel focus can create just enough structure and connection to help you get going.

It's not about pressure or productivity.

It's about co-regulation, mutual presence, structure, and making space for tasks that might otherwise feel unreachable on your own.



# Why Does Body Doubling Work?

For many Autistic & Neurodivergent people, tasks that seem "simple" can become incredibly difficult without the right scaffolding (or transitions, processes and supports).

Research suggests that body doubling may support motivation and attention by engaging our dopamine systems, and it's not just about focus. The emotional experience of being seen, not judged, and gently held in a shared space can boost confidence and ease.

# Six Gentle Benefits of Body Doubling

 **Increased Motivation** – A calm presence helps you start and stick with tasks.

 **Improved Emotional Regulation** – You're not alone in the task; Your nervous system can co-regulate.

 **Reduced Isolation** – Connection, even silent, matters.

 **New Tools and Insights** – Watching others' strategies can inspire your own.

 **Built-in Accountability** – Having someone nearby can help you stay on track.

 **Creative Flow** – Body Doubling can spark ideas and shift energy.

Whether it's folding laundry, replying to emails, or finishing an assignment, body doubling can be a soft and powerful practice

for meeting your brain where it is, with compassion and community.

# What Is Parallel Play?

Parallel play refers to the experience of being alongside others while engaging in your own activity, without the expectation of direct interaction. It focuses on comfort, co-regulation, and shared presence, nurturing connection through relaxed coexistence, making it especially valuable for those who find traditional socialising overwhelming.

This form of connection is deeply meaningful for people of all ages, especially Autistic and Neurodivergent individuals.

# Why Does this Help?

**Reduces social pressure and performance anxiety.**

**Allows for connection through presence, not conversation.**

**Builds trust and comfort over time.**

**Validates that closeness doesn't require constant interaction.**

**Respects autonomy while still creating space for belonging.**

**Examples may include:**

**Two children drawing next to each other, each focused on their own picture.**

**Teens sitting on the couch – one reading, the other playing a game – both comfortable and co-existing. Adults in a shared space working on separate projects, not talking, just present.**