



Glimmers

What are glimmers & how can you use them as an autistic trauma survivor?

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What is a glimmer?

The term “glimmers” was introduced by Deb Dana, a therapist and clinician known for translating Polyvagal Theory into accessible, practical tools.

She developed the concept as a contrast to “triggers.” Deb intended to shift people away from only tracking distress.

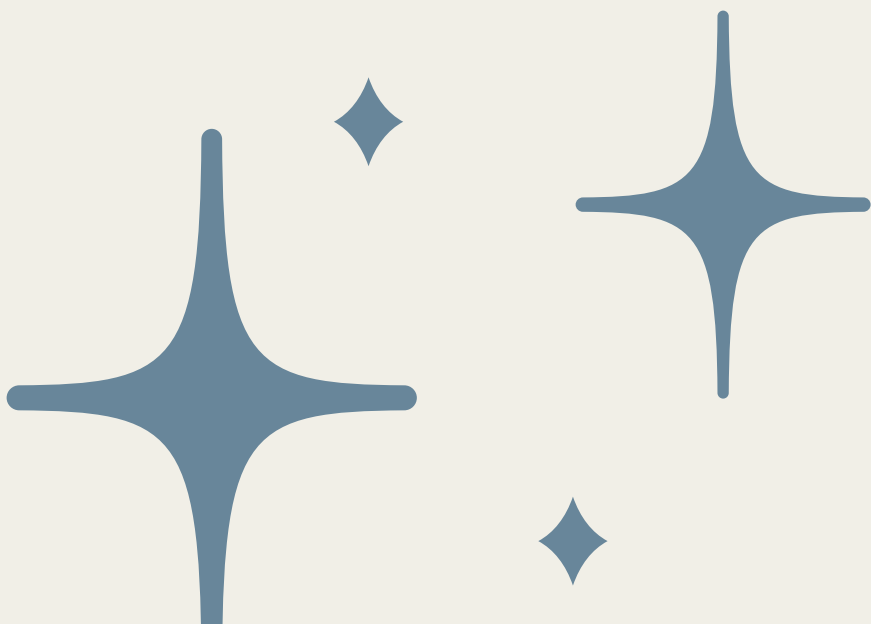
Glimmers are small moments that signal safety and connection to your nervous system. While triggers cue danger, glimmers cue safety.



Glimmers you might find helpful:

- A song that feels grounding
- A pet sitting close to you
- A sensory stim that centres you
- A moment of feeling understood
- A tight hug
- Feeling your feet in the grass or sand
- The sunlight on your face
- Running or jumping on the spot
- Listening to waves crash or birds sing
- Deep breathing

In the middle of heavy
things, glimmers are
the moments that
remind your body it is
not *all* danger



Why are glimmers often sensory for autistic people?

At a core level, it comes down to the fact that many (not all) autistic people experience and process the world through their bodies first.

Sensory processing is central to autistic experiences (Marco et al., 2011; Patil & Kaple, 2023).

This means: the nervous system may be more sensitive to input, or seek certain types of input more strongly, or process sensory information in a more intense or detailed way. Because of this, sensory experiences are not neutral; they are often felt deeply and immediately. So when something feels safe, that safety is often felt through the senses first.

Sensory safety can be more reliable than social safety for autistic folx.

For some autistic people, social interactions can be unpredictable or effortful. Especially when in meltdown, shutdown, or activated. Talking can feel overwhelming. But sensory experiences can be: more controllable, more predictable, and less demanding.

Glimmers might be safer for autistic people if they come from sensory experiences rather than social ones.

References:

- Marco, E. J., Hinkley, L. B. N., Hill, S. S., & Nagarajan, S. S. (2011). Sensory processing in autism: A review of neurophysiologic findings. *Paediatric Research*, 69(5 Pt 2), 48R–54R.
- Patil, O., & Kaple, M. (2023). Sensory processing differences in individuals with autism spectrum disorder: A narrative review of underlying mechanisms and sensory-based interventions. *Cureus*, 15(10), e48020.