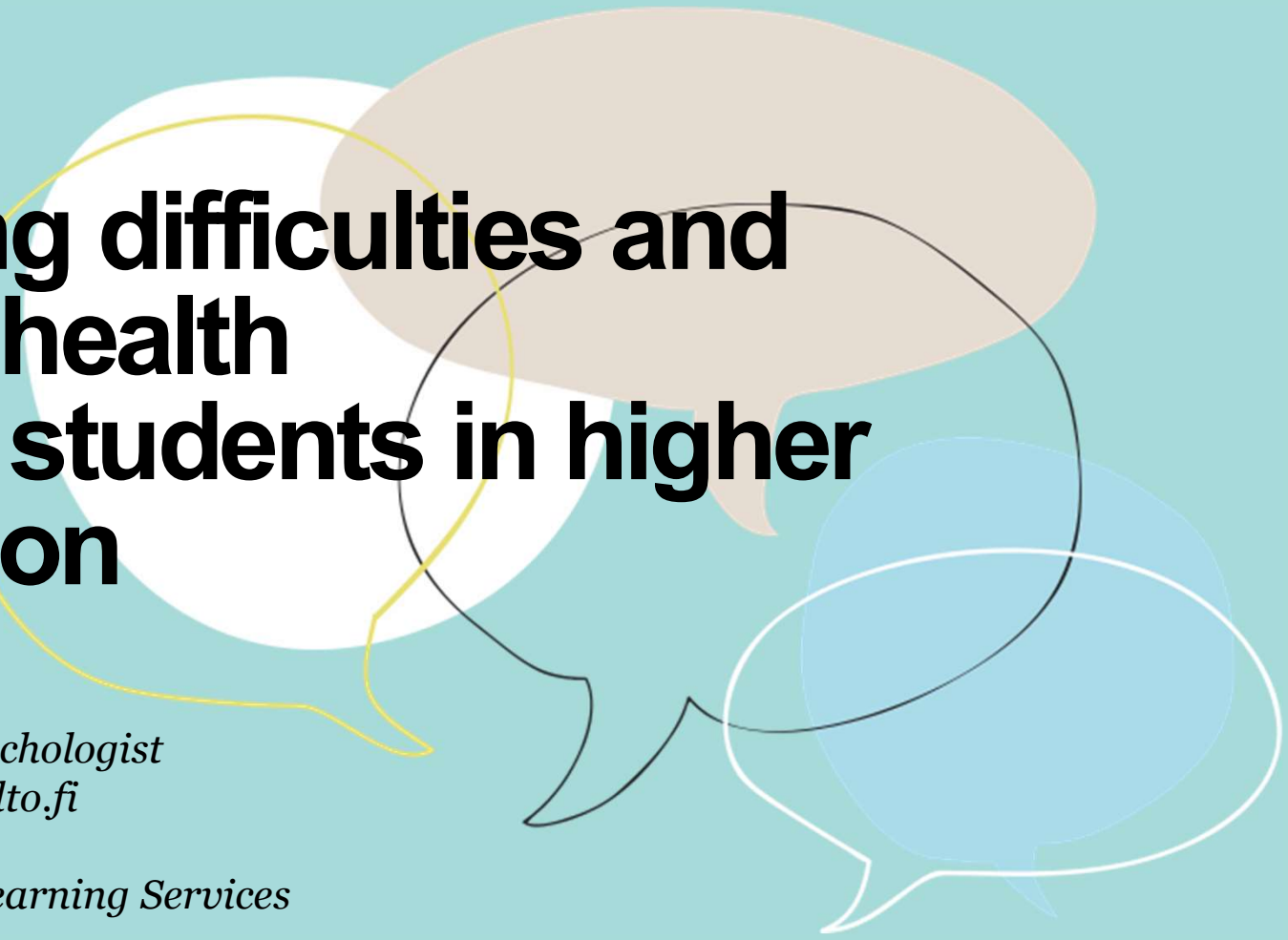


The logo consists of a large, bold, black letter 'A' followed by an exclamation point '!', positioned in the upper left corner of the slide.

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# Learning difficulties and mental health among students in higher education

The background features several overlapping speech bubbles in various colors: a large white one, a brown one, a light blue one, and a yellow one. The text is overlaid on these bubbles.

*Paula Sjöblom, psychologist*  
*Paula.sjoblom@aalto.fi*

*Aalto University Learning Services*

# Goals for our session

- **Get to know what are the most common learning difficulties among university students**
- **Think about mental health and have information about student mental health**
- **Some tools how to help and interact with students in these groups**
- **Think about how to set limits to how much I can do about these issues in my profession**



**A!**

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# Learning difficulties

The background features four overlapping speech bubbles. One is white with a yellow outline, one is beige with a black outline, one is blue with a white outline, and one is light blue with a black outline. They are arranged in a cluster, with the white bubble on the left and the blue bubbles on the right.

# Question

- **Have you met a student who has some sort of learning difficulty?**



# Typical learning difficulties among university students

- **Reading disorder - dyslexia**
- **Autism spectrum disorders (Asperger)**
- **ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**
- **Spatial learning disabilities or Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities = Hahmotushäiriöt**



# Spatial learning disabilities or Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities = Hahmotushäiriöt

- **General term that describes how the brain perceives visual and spatial information in an exceptional way.**
- **Hahmotushäiriö on yleistermi vaikeuksille, jotka johtuvat aivojen poikkeuksellisesta tavasta käsitellä visuaalista (näköhavaintoon liittyvää) ja spatiaalista (tilan ja tilasuhteiden tunnistamiseen) informaatiota.**



## **Mikä on hahmotushäiriö?**

**Hahmotushäiriö on yleistermi vaikeuksille, jotka johtuvat aivojen poikkeuksellisesta tavasta käsitellä visuaalista (näköhavaintoon liittyvää) ja spatiaalista (tilan ja tilasuhteiden tunnistamiseen) informaatiota.**

**Hahmotushäiriöt ilmenevät näönvaraisen tunnistamisen ja erottelun vaikeuksina tai avaruudellisen tilan, suhteiden ja liikkeen käsittelyn vaikeuksina.**

**Usein oirekuvaan kuuluu myös sosiaalisten tilanteiden hahmottamisvaikeuksia ja poikkeuksetta kasvavassa määrin oppimisvaikeuksia, joista tyypillisimpiä ovat vaikeudet matematiikan oppimisessa ja luetun ja kuvallisen materiaalin ymmärtämisessä.**

**Hahmotushäiriö voi näyttäytyä arjessa esimerkiksi:**

**motorisena kömpelyytenä ja tarkkaavuuden vaikeuksina.**

**koulussa vaikeuksina erityisesti matematiikassa, käsitöissä ja liikunnassa.**

**tilan hahmottamisen vaikeuksina (esim. vieraassa paikassa liikkuminen tai kartan lukeminen).**

**liikkeen, etäisyyksien ja nopeuden arvioinnissa.**

**asioiden tai osien välisten suhteiden hahmottamisen vaikeuksina.**

**Hahmotushäiriö voi liittyä esimerkiksi CP-oireyhtymään, ADHD:hen, kielellisiin erityisvaikeuksiin tai olla erilaisten oppimisvaikeuksien taustalla.**

**Lähde: Niilo Mäki instituutin materiaaleja**

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# Reading disorder - dyslexia

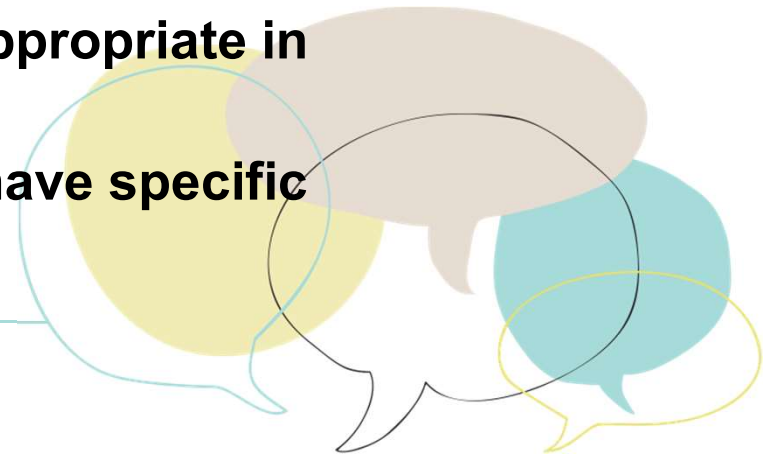
- Words or letters become mixed easily
- Reading takes more time and effort
- It might be more difficult to remember new things only through reading text
- It does not affect cognitive capacity
- Dyslexia rate in Finland about: 6-10% adults ([www.lukihäiriö.fi](http://www.lukihäiriö.fi), 9.10.2019)





# Autism spectrum (Asperger)

- **Abnormal functioning of the nervous system**
- **Difficulties in planning, executing and stopping an action**
- **Difficulties in perceiving relations between big picture and details (central coherence)**
- **Hard to interpret other people's communication**
- **Facial expressions and gestures inappropriate in the situation**
- **May be mathematically gifted / may have specific interests**



# ADHD and ADD

## - difficult to concentrate

### ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- Inattention, hyperactivity, impulse

### ADD

- Inattention disorder

- About 7 % of Finns

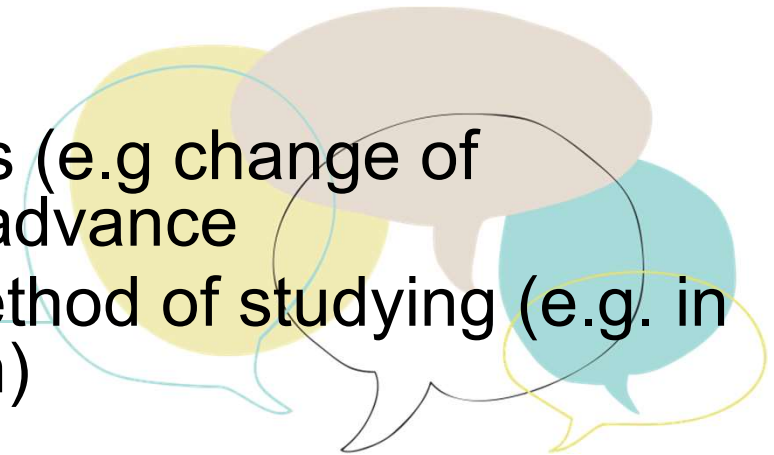


# How to help in the class room?

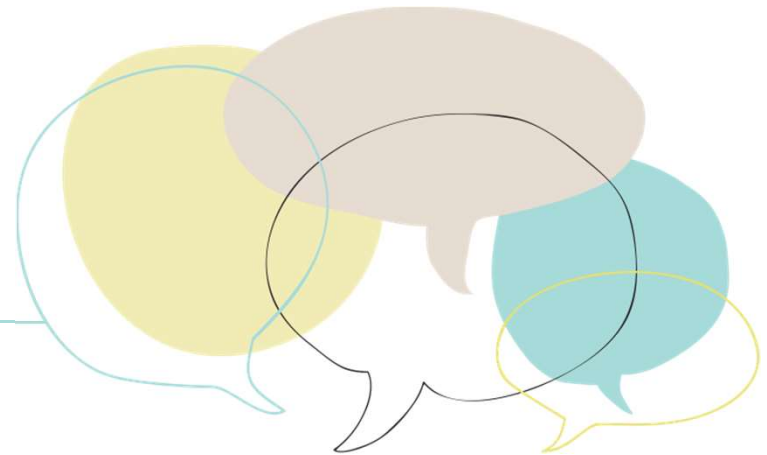
- Speak clearly and cover one topic at time
- Tell at first the structure or main points of the session
- Materials in advance if possible
- Minimize external distractions e.g. noise
- Clear instructions
- One (sub)task at time
- Keep some breaks
- Tell about all kind of changes (e.g change of schedules or rooms) well in advance
- Possibility to choose own method of studying (e.g. in groups, in pairs, on their own)

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- **What would you add to the previous slide if you think about your working environment?**
- **Write your thoughts in the chat**



# How to Support

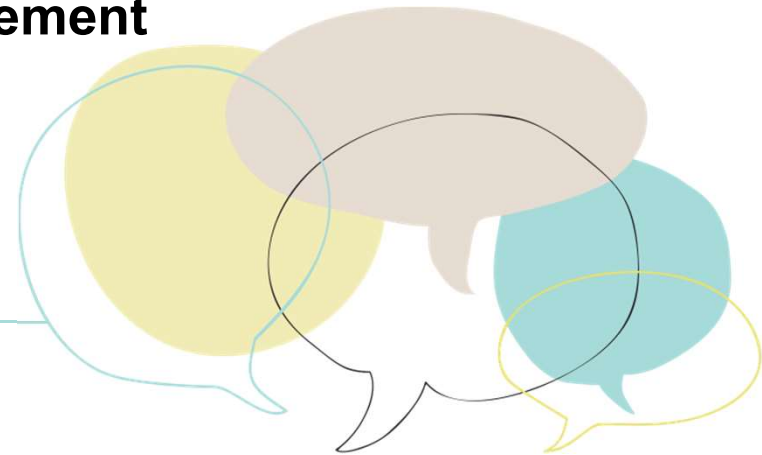
## Clear and structured instructions

- Same instructions in different places
- Instructions divided into smaller pieces
- Monitoring performance and intervening early on in case of problems



## Support and guidance with time management

- Setting goals
- Dividing goals into concrete tasks
- Using a calendar
- Monitoring goal achievement



**A!**

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**A!**

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# Mental health problems

The background features three overlapping speech bubbles. The top-left bubble is white with a yellow outline. The top-right bubble is beige with a black outline. The bottom-right bubble is light blue with a white outline. The text 'Mental health problems' is centered over the white bubble.

# Question

- **Imagine that after the first lesson there is a shy girl who is waiting for everybody else to leave the classroom. Then she mumbles that she suffers from panic disorder and sometimes she feels very uncomfortable in the class room.**
- **What would you do?**



# Mental health problems are the biggest health issue among students (FSHS)

- Students who have problems with mental health *need special care*.
- They are often gifted and get by, but their ability to study is *temporarily* compromised.
- Typical problems: depression, anxiety, panic disorder, eating disorders, addiction problems, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, crisis and traumas, sleeping problems

(FSHS = Finnish Student Health Service)

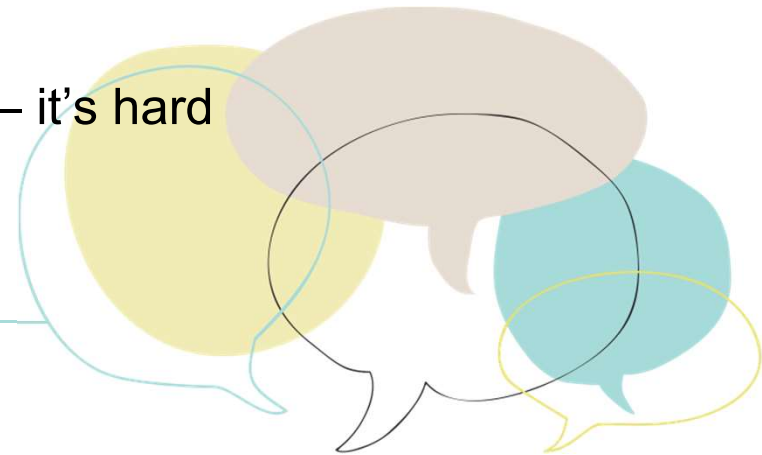




# Depression - What's going on?

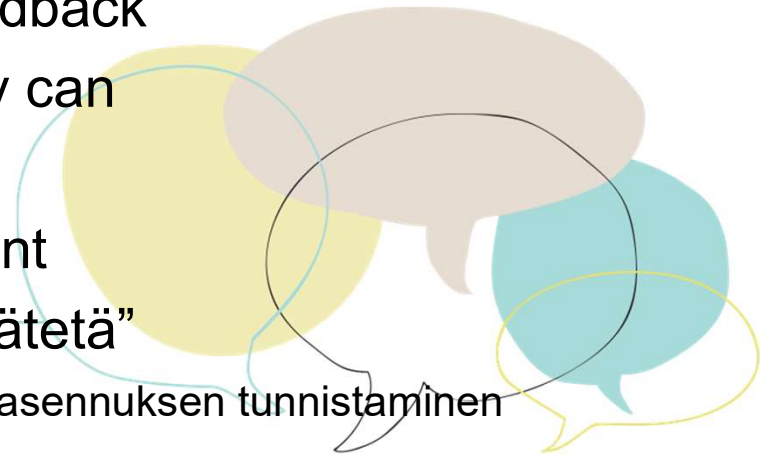
## Main symptoms:

- Depressed mood
- Inability to feel interested in things or to feel pleasure
- Inability to enjoy life
- Strength lessness, feeling tired, being less active
- There are different levels of depression: mild, moderate and severe
- In severe depression performance is low – it's hard to get out of bed



# How can I support a depressed student?

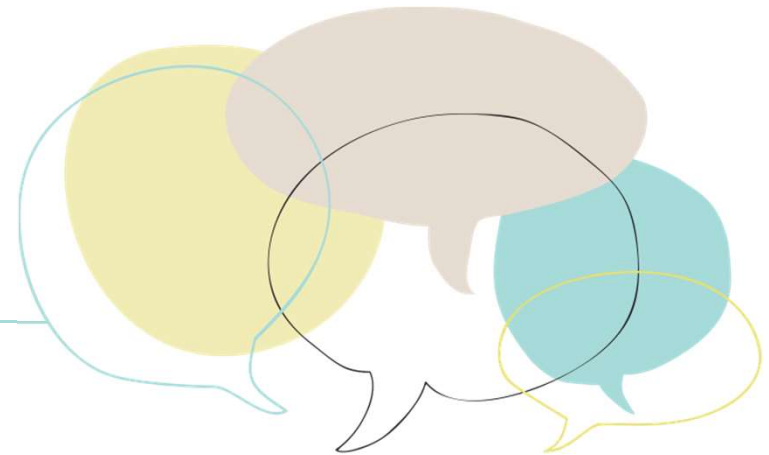
- Confidential, open, safe and more easygoing atmosphere
- Encountering students individually
- Encouraging and supporting students
- Being available, listening and supporting
- Unambiguity and predictability of teaching
- Positive, constructive and realistic feedback
- Emphasizing what the student already can
- Student-teacher cooperation
- Encouraging to support a fellow student
- “No man is left behind” = ”Kaveria-ei-jätetä”



# Stress related anxiety, exhaustion

## What is it?

- Prolonged stress or significant life changes can cause anxiety symptoms
- Prolonged study-related stress can lead into a burnout in studies
- Fatigue, cynicism, feeling of inadequacy



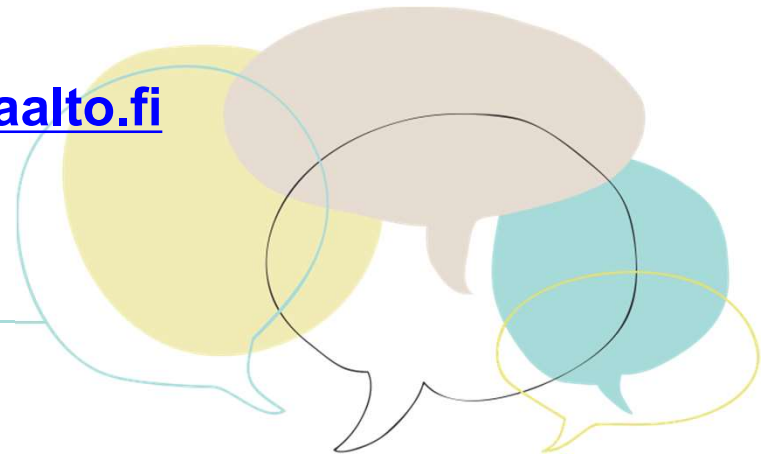
# Stress related anxiety, exhaustion - How can we help?

- Goals and demands must be in right proportion to student's strengths and to the support available
  - Supporting the development of studying skills
  - Guidance, conversation about goals
- Schedule that enables sufficient recovery (breaks, free days)
- Temporarily slower study pace



# If you get worried about a student

- **You can bring it up with the student**
  - *By asking "how are you?"*
  - *By bringing up your observations about the student's behaviour, e.g. "I've noticed that you've been absent for a long time", "I got worried when you said..."*
- **You can always contact psychologists at Aalto**  
[opintopsykologi@aalto.fi](mailto:opintopsykologi@aalto.fi)
- **You can consult me** [paula.sjoblom@aalto.fi](mailto:paula.sjoblom@aalto.fi)



# Aalto Psychologist's Services

## Individual meetings

- Topics e.g. motivation, study skills, self-regulation, stress control, well-being and study ability
- Requests for appointments via email: [opintopsykologi@aalto.fi](mailto:opintopsykologi@aalto.fi)
- 1-5 meetings (45 min), free of charge
- Confidential

## Workshops

- Small groups, 3-8 sessions
- Themes e.g. Mindfulness, Power of imperfection

**Study skills –website in Into**

**Self-study materials in MyCourses**

