

Autism and Neurodiversity

Supporting Children and Families Through a Neurodiversity-Affirming Approach

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DEC RPs

- **A11.** Practitioners report assessment results so that they are understandable and useful to families.
- **F4.** Practitioners and the family work together to create outcomes or goals, develop individualized plans, and implement practices that address the family's priorities and concerns and the child's strengths and needs.
- **F5.** Practitioners support family functioning, promote family confidence and competence, and strengthen family-child relationships by acting in ways that recognize and build on family strengths and capacities.
- **INT1.** Practitioners promote the child's social-emotional development by observing, interpreting, and responding contingently to the range of the child's emotional expressions.

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 Where you provide Early Intervention Services?



● CENTRAL
 ● WEST CENTRAL
 ● SOUTHSIDE
 ● HAMPTON ROADS
 ● EASTERN
 ● SOUTHWEST
 ● NORTHERN
 ● VALLEY

 Type your name and job title in the chat!

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In this presentation, we will...



Use identity-first language




Capitalize “Autistic” and “Autism”



Not refer to Autism as ASD

This recognizes Autism as a culture, a community, and a lived experience.

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How familiar are you with the term **Neurodiversity**?

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How familiar are you with the term **Neurodiversity**?



Share words you associate with the term.

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Neurodiversity

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Neurodiversity


Individual differences in brain functioning regarded as normal variations within the human population

The concept that differences in brain functioning within the human population are normal and that brain functioning that is not neurotypical should not be stigmatized (Merriam-Webster, 2023)


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Neurotypical brains are the ones most people are used to.




Any brain that is NOT neurotypical is said to be neurodivergent




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There are many different types of neurodivergent brain.




Often, people are a mix of more than one neurotype.



This isn't even all of them.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Ckm80zBj6U>

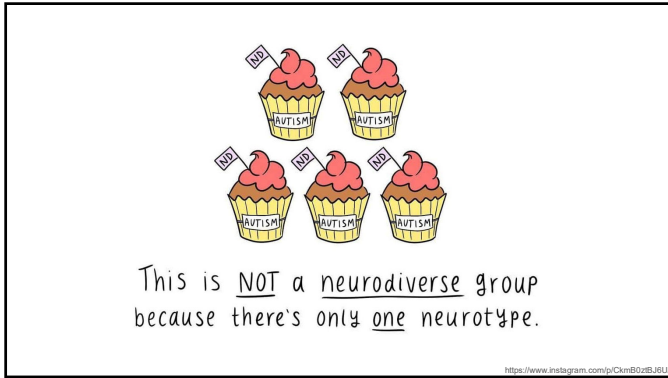
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This group is NEURODIVERSE.
It has more than one type of brain.
(including a neurotypical brain!)

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Ckm80zBj6U>

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The Neurodiversity Movement

- a response to autism advocacy in the early 1990s
- Jim Sinclair's essay "Don't Mourn For Us," is reflective of the start of the movement.
- Autism Network International was started in 1992, marking the beginning of Autistic cultural spaces and organizations for Autistic self-advocacy.

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What do you notice about the differences between these two symbols?

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Neurodiversity Affirming

“...to acknowledge that all neurotypes, even those who differ from the norm, are equal in value and valid in their right to exist. This means that we value an individual’s strengths and accommodate their challenges. It also means that we accept differences in communication, social interaction, behavior, and learning” (Dundon, 2024)

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Neurodiversity Terminology


Neurodiversity Model
The natural diversity of human brains

Neurodiversity Movement
The social justice movement


Neurodiversity Affirming
approach acknowledges that all neurotypes have unique strengths, interests, and support needs.

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Neurodiversity Terminology



Neurodivergent
A person whose brain differs from the statistical norm



Neurotypical
A person whose brain does not differ from the statistical norm



Neurodiverse
A group of people with different types of brains

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Stamp the Neurodiversity Affirming Statements?

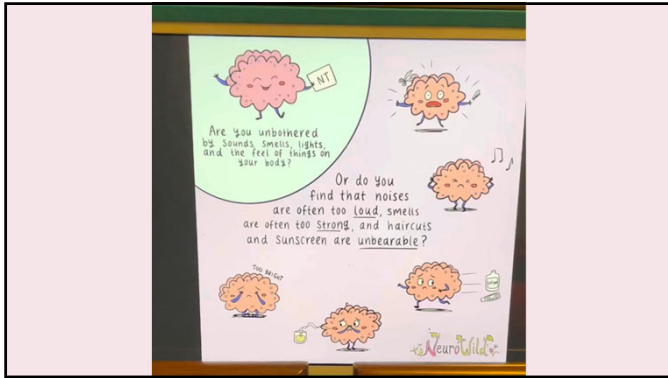
<p>Brady benefits from visual supports during transitions at preschool.</p>	<p>Sean has restricted interests and only wants to talk about letters and numbers.</p>
<p>Beth refuses to look her Mom in the eye when asking for a snack.</p>	<p>Nate prefers independent play, especially sorting his plastic dinosaurs by color.</p>

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Potential Positive Impact on EI Children & Families

- how parent's view Autism and disability in general
- parent understanding and acceptance
- future feelings of self-worth and opportunities for self-advocacy
- supports an individual's right to bodily autonomy

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Disability



Dismisses the very real challenges Autistic people and their families face every day




Embracing differences does not inherently dismiss disability.

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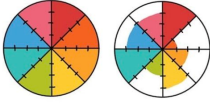
Autism Spectrum

The Autism Spectrum is NOT linear



less autistic very autistic

The Autism Spectrum looks more like:




- social differences
- interests
- repetitions
- sensory sensitivities
- emotional regulation
- perception
- executive functioning
- other

Terms like "high functioning", "low functioning" and "Asperger" are harmful and outdated.


Autism_sketches

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Representation



Not inclusive of individuals with very high support needs and their families



The philosophy behind the movement is inclusive of individuals of all levels of support needs.

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Identity Politics




Binaries such as "Neurodivergent" and "Neurotypical" are divisive.




Providing individuals with knowledge about their disability and understanding of their own strengths and challenges is powerful. Labels can be powerful and affirming.

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Race




A privileged approach



Listen, learn, and work to understand constraints due to systems and environments

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How familiar are you with the term **Ableism**?

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Disability, Ableism, & Neurodiversity


"Ableism, either subtly or directly, portrays individuals who are being defined by their disabilities as inherently inferior to nondisabled people" (Dunn, 2021)

Ableism greatly impacts the lives and mental health of the children and caregivers we see.



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Neurodiversity & Intersectionality

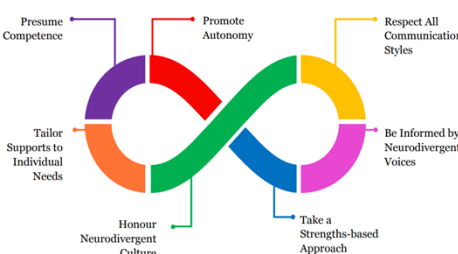


Compared to cisgender individuals, transgender and gender-diverse individuals have, on average, **higher rates of autism or other neurodevelopmental and psychiatric diagnoses**

According to the CDC, reports have consistently noted that **more white children are identified as Autistic than black or Hispanic children.**

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Neurodiversity Affirming Practice



Presume Competence

Promote Autonomy

Respect All Communication Styles

Be Informed by Neurodivergent Voices


Take a Strengths-based Approach

Honour Neurodivergent Culture

Tailor Supports to Individual Needs

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