

Every Brain Belongs:



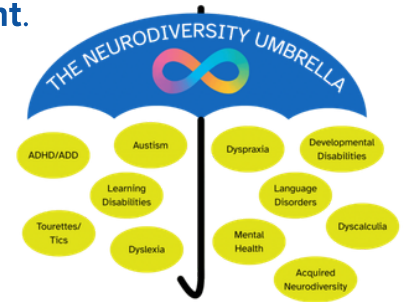
What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is the idea that there is no "right" way for a brain to function. Instead, differences in processing, learning, and interacting are natural variations of the human experience.

Approximately 15–20% of the population identifies as neurodivergent.

The "Neurodiversity Umbrella" encompasses several diagnoses, including:

- Autism and ADHD/ADD
- Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, and Learning Disabilities
- Tourette's and Tic Disorders
- Mental Health conditions and Acquired Neurodiversity



Understanding the Autism Spectrum

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life. It is a "spectrum" because it affects every individual differently and to varying degrees.

Common Signs: These may include repetitive movements, sensory sensitivities (getting upset by certain smells or sounds), avoiding eye contact, or unique communication patterns.

Unique Strengths: Many autistic individuals excel in visual skills, academics, and music. In fact, roughly 40% of those diagnosed have above-average intellectual abilities.



Pragmatic Language	Social Awareness	Monotropic Mindset	Information Processing	Sensory Processing	Repetitive Behaviors	Neuro-Motor Differences
Social communication including body language, eye contact, small talk, and turn-taking in conversation.	Ability to pick up on etiquette, social norms, taboos. Ability to form and maintain relationships.	Narrow but intense ability to focus, resulting in "obsessive" interests and difficulty task-switching.	Ability to assimilate and apply new information quickly or to adapt to new environments or situations.	Challenges interpreting sensory information, hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to stimuli.	Tendency to "stim" in response to varying emotions. Can be beneficial or harmful in nature.	Ability to control body movements. Ranges from clumsiness to complete loss of ability to move with intention.

Neurodiversity & Mental Health

Neurodivergence and mental health are deeply intertwined. For many years, neurodivergent traits were often shamed or "masked" to fit into a society that didn't understand them. This can lead to significant stress and secondary mental health challenges.

By shifting toward a **neurodiversity-affirming approach**, we focus on support rather than "cures". Recognizing these "windows of vulnerability" and the biological "roller coaster" of brain chemistry helps us provide better care for ourselves and our loved ones



Neurodiversity in Daily Life, Education & The Workplace



Accessibility as a Mental Health Tool

Creating an accessible world isn't just about physical ramps; it's about **sensory and cognitive support** that reduces anxiety and promotes focus. Many tools originally designed for neurodivergent accessibility now benefit the general public:

- **Weighted Blankets:** Originally designed as self-soothing tools for autistic individuals, they provide gentle pressure to reduce anxiety and evoke calm for many.
- **Fidgets:** These provide an outlet for nervous energy and help regulate attention and stress levels in various settings.
- **Noise-Canceling Headphones:** Beyond blocking distractions, these help calm the senses and increase focus at work, school, or home.
- **Digital Clarity:** Features like simple fonts, high-contrast colors, and closed captioning help everyone process information more deeply and with less strain.
- **Sensory Spaces:** Providing "quiet zones" helps prevent burnout and stress for everyone in high-pressure environments

Education: The IEP Advantage

For students on the spectrum, the **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is a legally binding document under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It ensures a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) by providing:

- **Tailored Goals:** Specifically addressing communication, social skills, and behavior.
- **Specialized Services:** Access to speech therapy, occupational therapy, or behavioral support.
- **Accommodations:** Vital changes like visual schedules, sensory breaks, low distraction testing environments, and extended testing time.
- **Transition Planning:** Preparing students for a successful life after high school.

The Workplace: Your Rights Under the ADA

Under the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**, neurodivergent adults have the right to reasonable accommodations to perform essential job functions.

- **Self-Advocacy:** You are not required to disclose a diagnosis during an interview. You can choose to advocate for accommodations, like a quiet workspace or written instructions, after you are hired.
- **Employer Support:** Inclusive practices statistically improve workplace productivity and morale.

How to Contribute to a More Supportive Community

- **Educate & Advocate:** Learn the signs of ASD and stand up if you see a neurodivergent individual being bullied or dismissed.
- **Practice Inclusion:** Invite neurodivergent peers to events. Even if they decline due to sensory needs, the act of inclusion fosters a sense of belonging.
- **Support Caregivers:** Recognize the unwavering dedication of parents and caregivers who navigate unique challenges daily.
- **Use Affirming Language:** Dignity begins with how we speak. We commend using neurodiversity-affirming language rooted in the **Social Model of Disability**.
 - This approach moves away from "deficit-based" framing (focusing on what someone can't do) toward respectful, community-led communication that honors individual autonomy and inclusion.

