

Understanding Neurodiversity

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There are **natural variations** in how the **brain develops** and **processes information**. When the variations cause **differences in how people experience life** in multiple settings, they are called **Neurodevelopmental Differences**. Each type of neurodevelopmental difference (i.e. Autism Spectrum, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Stuttering, Dyslexia, etc.) has a variety of common symptoms but may look different in every person.



People with **neurological differences** are called **Neurodivergent**. They may process environmental information differently. They may have higher or lower reactions to sensory information, may not understand or produce language in an expected way for their age, have different methods of communicating, have bigger or smaller emotional responses, respond impulsively without bad intentions, have difficulty with planning and organizing multi-step tasks, be forgetful, or have learning differences. These are **not developmental delays or them behaving “badly”**, but **differences in how their brain works**. Their challenges can improve with support, but their neurological differences remain throughout their lives.



Neurodiversity is the understanding that neurological differences are **natural variations**. The differences that are present should be **respected** and **accepted**. Others should look to **find strengths** in each person’s neurological differences. People should not be seen as disordered or needing a cure to “fix” them or make them “normal”. Their **challenges are acknowledged**; however, **environmental factors** should be considered when determining how to **provide support for them**. When providing support to neurodivergent people, focus should be on **encouraging well-being, acceptance of their identity, promoting adaptive behaviors, providing sensory support**, and **making changes** in others and the environment to **decrease their difficulties**. **Support tools** should be based on **their interests**; they should be supported if they engage in interests outside of their age-level or other expectation.



Many people believe that people on the autism spectrum have disordered social interaction skills. However, research has found that they have **different interests, values, and mindsets towards social interaction** than non-autistic people. The differences are **bi-directional** and may confuse autistic and non-autistic people during interaction. This is called the **Double Empathy Problem**. However, since most of society is built on the principles of non-autistic values, then autistic differences are seen as disordered, and autistic people are expected to change. Rarely are the non-autistic people expected to change or see things from the autistic perspective. **Neurodiversity** believes that **autistic traits are as valuable as non-autistic traits**. The burden to change should not be placed only on autistic people. Non-autistic people should modify their expectations to allow neurodivergent people to have accessibility and interaction without the burden of trying to be or appear non-autistic. (Although the **Double Empathy Problem** was based on autistic communication, the principles **may be applied to other neurodivergent people**.)