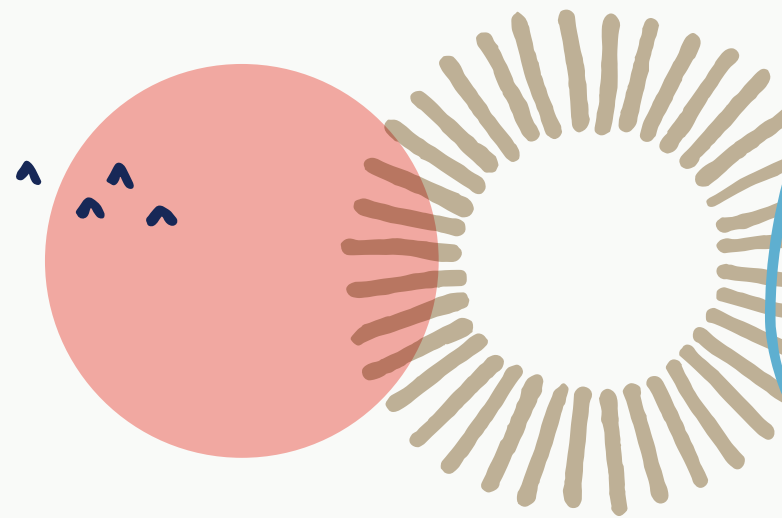


Neurodiversity and neurodivergence:

What do I need to know as an educator?



Neurodiversity means that everyone's brain works differently, and that's completely normal. It's a way of thinking that supports fairness and inclusion for people with different kinds of minds. These differences are respected just like differences in race, gender, or ability.



It's important to remember that neurodiversity includes *all* people – not just those who are neurodivergent.

Neurodivergent individuals include those with Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other conditions that affect how they think, learn, and behave.



Neurodivergent brains are wired with different strengths and challenges, often processing information, tasks, or social cues differently than neurotypical peers. They simply see and experience their environments in unique ways.

Things to consider as an educator

- Children who are neurodivergent can become more engaged with learning in an environment with structure and predictability, and that is scaffolded by visual supports and simplified adult-child interactions.
- Many children who are neurodivergent are very creative and can focus on things without any problems (hyperfocus is common in ADHD).
- Recognise and emphasise each person's individual strengths and talents, whilst also providing support for their differences and needs.
- Neurodivergence is not preventable, treatable or curable – no two profiles are the same. Cognitive differences between how neurodivergent people think, learn and behave are normal.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Does your team acknowledge that all neurodivergent children will do things differently from their neurotypical peers? How do you address the bias for neurotypical behaviour?

How you can support children who are neurodivergent

- Modify the environment and program to meet each child's needs, especially children who are neurodivergent, to enable full participation without requiring them to change their mannerisms.
- Consider implementing and utilising sensory items such as weighted blankets, textured material, water, stress balls, etc.
- Try strategies like visual schedule boards/steps for completing tasks, more time to complete tasks, and simplified adult-child interactions to support learning and participation.
- Support transitions by breaking activities or requests into smaller steps and give instructions one at a time. Ensure completion before adding the next step.
- Support transitions further by providing verbal, visual and auditory supports. This could look like implementing visual timers, clocks, sand timers, simplified language, transition items for the child to hold, etc.
- Build strong relationships with the child's family and allied health professionals to support consistent strategies across all environments.

Create a neurodivergent-friendly room

- **Set it up with intention:** Are there spaces for children to play and socialise in groups and individually?
- **Provide calm corners:** This can be set up with pillows, music, headphones, sensory items and earmuffs for children to retreat to.
- **Rethink visual clutter:** Are the walls covered with artwork or posters, or is there a lot of material or resources hanging from the ceiling?
- **Notice noise level:** Are educators and children minimising how loud they are talking? Is there constant loud music being played in the background? Can tables have tablecloths added to help reduce noise from resources?
- **Offer small groups:** Split the group among indoor/outdoor opportunities to minimise the busyness and any feelings of overwhelm.



Need help with something specific?
Reach out to your Inclusion Professional for tailored advice!

For more practical tips to support the learning and sensory needs of children at your service, check out our article, '[Supporting sensory needs in early learning and OSHC](#)' with Robyn Papworth in edition 17 of *Embrace*.



FIND OUT MORE:

Australian Institute of Family Studies 2022, [Supporting children with neurodiversity](#).

Raising Children 2024, [Neurodiversity and neurodivergence: A guide for families](#)