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Teaching for Every Brain Affirming Neurodiversity in Education

Neurodiversity means that brains work in many different ways. Some young people think, communicate & experience the world differently - this is just part of being human.

Common terms used to describe neurodivergence

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC): Affects the way a person communicates and processes information about the world around them.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): Affects a person's attention, level of activity and impulse control.

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD): Affects a person's ability to learn, use and understand language.

Why is a neurodiversity-affirming approach important?

- It helps every learner feel accepted and understood, not a problem to be 'fixed'.
- It celebrates strengths and interests instead of focusing only on challenges.
- It supports better mental health, engagement and learning outcomes.
- It provides the child and young person with sustainable strategies that can help them beyond school and throughout their life

Affirming practice shifts the questions from...

"What's wrong?" to "What does this learner need to thrive?"

"How do we stop this behaviour?" to "What are they trying to communicate?"





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What might this look like in class?

Focusing on strengths: Notice what captures a student's interest or engages them most and relate lesson content to those interests.

Adapting the environment: Offer quiet spaces, movement breaks, and clear routines to reduce overwhelm. Build these into classroom routines to avoid singling out or drawing attention to the neurodivergent student. Deep pressure and movement have beneficial effects on everyone not just neurodivergent people.

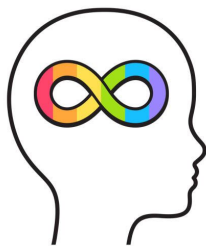
Giving advance warning of changes: Even changes that we might think are minor or insignificant can have a profound impact on a neurodivergent student. When you haven't been able to give advance warning make time to acknowledge the change with the student and check whether they need any extra support e.g. some time in a quiet space to reregulate.

Supporting communication differences: Allow extra time to respond, use visuals, or alternative ways to express ideas and show understanding.





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Promoting whole class regulation: Building identifying how students are feeling into the class routine and encouraging use of regulation strategies for all students. Model this yourself e.g. I'm feeling a bit stressed so I'm going to squeeze my stress ball. The Zones of Regulation have some helpful tools for whole class emotion monitoring and regulation.

Talking to the student: Find out what they find helpful/not helpful. Do this at a time when they're calm and regulated as communication is especially hard when someone is dysregulated. Developing a profile or support plan with them supports their self advocacy skills and gives you the confidence that your supporting them in a helpful way.

Finding time to debrief: If a student has been struggling or become dysregulated find time when they have re-regulated to discuss what happened and how it can be prevented in future. Tools like Talking Mats or Comic Strip Conversations can be useful in helping the student to think about what happened.