



NEURO-AFFIRMING CONSIDERATIONS

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TERMINOLOGY

Neurodiversity (noun): a biological fact; acknowledges all humans; people’s brains function on a spectrum across our species.

Neurodivergent (adjective): a person who experiences, processes, understands and responds to environments and other people in ways which differ from the dominant societal expectations. This can leave them at a disadvantage in the society they live in. Can be innate and genetic, or acquired.

ND-AFFIRMING LANGUAGE

- Acknowledges and nurtures the neurodivergent existence: strength-based, intersectional, values lived experiences, and promotes independence
- Grew within the ND paradigm
- Shift from a purely medical model but not minimising difficulties or ignoring need
- Acknowledges and supports individual choices



THINKING ABOUT DESCRIPTORS

- Individual choices; listen to communities and families
- Accuracy of descriptors: what do you see?
- What assumptions are being made about specific words?



ACTIVITY

Marianne is clumsy and careless. She needs to concentrate more as she doesn't follow instructions properly. Her writing is sloppy and we think she might be using her diagnosis of dyslexia as an excuse. She's year 5 now, she needs to understand that she needs to write when she's told or she won't cope in secondary school. She can be very rude when staff try to help her fix her difficulties.



DISCUSS IN GROUPS...

- Adjusting how rules look
- What supports some people, but not all
- Communication differences

All taking the pressure off the individual





INDIVIDUAL TARGETS

- Feel empowered to input
- Not teaching masking behaviours; looking for authenticity
- Approaches change – don't feel bad about previous work
- Combining function and aspiration
- Think about small steps towards big goals



EXAMPLES OF TARGET AREAS

- Refusal, dislike, disagreement
- Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) skills
- Problem solving skills – relevant to the individual
- Self-advocacy
- Emotions

All supporting independence and self-advocacy



BEYOND THE CHILD

- Thinking about societal & cultural expectations or biases
- What weight does the environment carry?
- Is there space for connection and joy?
- Are expectations made clear?
- Managing dysregulation in a trauma-informed way
- Ensuring behavioural policies are ND-affirming



CONCLUSIONS

- Keep the individual at the centre
- Be curious
- Think about a child's strengths
- Honour their lived experiences



FURTHER READING IDEAS

- <https://www.autismlevelup.com/>
- <https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/leans> - free programme to introduce concept of ND to school pupils
- ND professionals e.g. @neurowild_ , @neuroteachersuk, @neurodivergent_advocacy
- Sites by ND academics e.g. <https://neuroqueer.com/> , <https://monotropism.org/>
- Milton, D.E.M. (2012). "On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem'" Disability & Society. 27 (6): 883–887.
