




A RethinkEd National Webinar:

## Neurodiversity-Affirming Strategies to Support Learners

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### Presenter



**Emilia Nuñez**  
MEd, BCBA, LBA, IBA

### Objectives

- Define neurodiversity and neurodivergence
- Outline benefits of neurodiversity-affirming strategies in schools
- Learn eight practices to support neurodivergent learners

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## Agenda

Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence	Benefits for Students	Strategies to Support Neurodivergent Learners	Q&A with Expert Panel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitions of key terms</li> <li>• Insight from our guest speaker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss neurodiversity-affirming support</li> <li>• Focus on student strengths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion with UDL</li> <li>• Teach about differences</li> <li>• Presume competence</li> <li>• Trusting relationships</li> <li>• Self-advocacy</li> <li>• Autonomy &amp; Assent</li> <li>• Honor communication</li> <li>• Use inclusive language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to ask the panel follow-up questions</li> <li>• Provide feedback and suggestions for future webinars</li> </ul>

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## Neurodiversity

- **Neurodiversity** refers to the variation in brains from person to person
- Neurodiversity is natural
- The **neurodiversity paradigm** views all brain variation as normal and natural rather than as deficits



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## Neurodivergence

**Neurodivergent:** an umbrella term that describes variation in brains and folks with brain functioning variation

The **neurodiversity movement** is a social justice movement that seeks inclusion and equal rights for all neurodivergent folk.

### Examples of Neurodivergence

- ADHD
- Autism
- Cerebral Palsy
- Dementia
- Down Syndrome
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Parkinson's
- PTSD & CPTSD
- Tourette Syndrome

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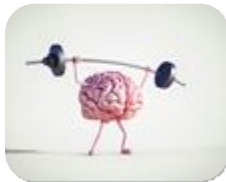
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## Neurodiversity-Affirming Support

- Providing support to **neurodivergent** individuals with the understanding that
  - neurodiversity is natural
  - an individual's differences are not deficits and don't require "fixing"
  - Focus on inclusivity, not conformity



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### Celebrate Student Differences & Strengths

- Neurodivergent students have many unique strengths
- Embrace these strengths and highlight them regularly
- Support students in loving their uniqueness and celebrating each other

Attention to detail • Great memory • Interest in letters, numbers, colors • Innovative problem-solving Reading early/ Hyperlexia • Strong rule adherence • Logic skills • Quick to learn new skills in areas of interest • Curious to dive deep on special interests • Thrive with routines • Honest • Acute sensory awareness • Observant • Direct communication style • Punctual • Prolonged focus • Creative and artistic skills • Unique sense of humor • Eagerness to share special interests with others

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### Reflect & Share

What are some strengths of your neurodivergent learners.

Are you leveraging these strengths into the learning space?

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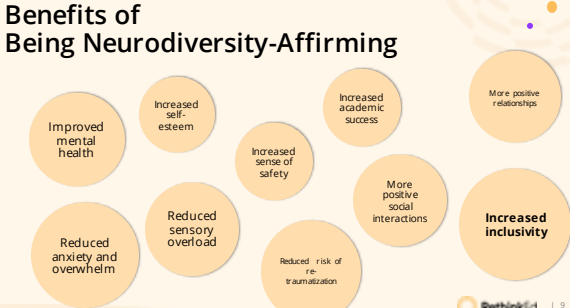
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### Benefits of Being Neurodiversity-Affirming



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### Some Key Practices Neurodiversity-Affirming Support

- Promote Inclusion with Universal Design for Learning
- Embrace & Teach about Differences
- Presume Competence
- Create Trusting & Supportive Relationships
- Promote Self-Advocacy
- Honor Assent & Autonomy
- Honor All Forms of Communication
- Use Anti-Ableist Language

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### Inclusive Environments

Promote Inclusion with UDL

- Inclusion is a culture. Inclusive describes an environment.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for education.
- Educators create inclusive and accessible environments. The onus is *not* on the student to include themselves.
- Accommodations are planned from the start to ensure that all students are included and receive an equitable education and school experience.

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### Promoting Inclusion with UDL

**Engagement**

- Keep students motivated & interested
- Multiple means of participation

**Representation**

- Input for student
- Multiple means of access

**Expression**

- Output from student
- Multiple means of demonstrating skill and knowledge

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### Embrace & Teach about Differences

Embrace & Teach about Differences



Disability is not a bad word

Teach about disability from an embracing perspective

Discuss differences openly

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### Presuming Competence

Presume Competence

**Presume Competence**

**Assume Potential**

- Assume learners *can* participate and engage
- Find ways to support engagement

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### Fostering Supportive Relationships

Create Trusting & Supportive Relationships



Spend 1:1 time

Learn their interests

Laugh together

Share about yourself

Listen & Validate

Build and keep trust

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## Reflection



**One way I am already using these strategies is...**

- Promote inclusion and use UDL
- Embrace and discuss differences and disability
- Presume competence and assume potential
- Ensure trusting and supportive relationships

**I plan to focus on...**

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## Promote Self-Advocacy



Promote self-advocacy

- Self-advocacy is about taking care of yourself
- Support students with understanding
  - Their needs
  - Ways to get their needs met
- Reinforce their self-advocate behaviors

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## Ways to Support Self-Advocacy



 Model	Directly Teach 
 Reinforce	Follow-up 

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## Assent & Autonomy

Honor assent and autonomy

**Autonomy**  
Acting on one's own (with or without support and assistance)

**Assent**  
Expression of approval or agreement given by someone who is not legally able to give consent

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## Promoting Assent

Honor assent and autonomy

Allow multiple forms of assent

Create engaging and inclusive activities

Provide clear expectations

Ensure trust

Reinforce the choice, not the compliance

Ensure multiple means of engagement

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## Honor Assent Withdrawal

Honor assent and autonomy

- Honor the withdrawal of assent
- Respect space and boundaries
- Offer choices
- Reframe language

Offer Choice in Support



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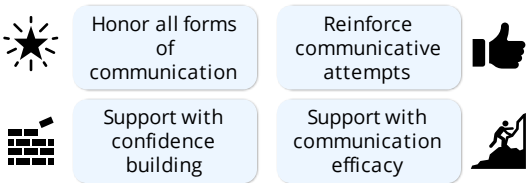
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## Honoring Communication

Honor All Forms of Communication

- Honor all forms of communication
- Reinforce communicative attempts
- Support with confidence building
- Support with communication efficacy



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## The Power of Language

Use anti-ableist language

- The language we use is powerful
- How we speak about others and to others can impact
  - How they view themselves
  - How they view the world around them



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## Language that Empowers

Use anti-ableist language

Use Language that...

- Is anti-ableist & inclusive
- Promotes & models embracing mindsets
- Places emphasis & value on inclusive practices

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## Reflection

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One way I am already using these strategies is...

Promote self-advocacy

Honor all forms of communication

Use inclusive and empowering language

Respect assent and embrace autonomy

I plan to focus on...

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## Q&A with our neurodiverse & expert panel

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**Emilia Nuñez**  
Neurodivergent Behavior Analyst



**Syntyche Jennings-Bechar**  
Neurodivergent BCaBA & IO Psychologist



**Marissa Ferguson**  
Clinical Behavior Analyst

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**We  Feedback** 

We would love and appreciate any feedback you have for us.

Please feel free to use the link in the chat to provide us with feedback for today's webinar.



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 **Together We Power Potential**

**Special thanks to our contributors & collaborators**

- Louis Chesney
- Stacie Burroughs
- Syntyche Jennings-Bechar
- Jon Aker
- Marissa Ferguson
- Christine Penington

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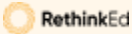
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 **Together We Power Potential**

Join us next month for the continuation of our webinar series on supporting neurodivergent students!

**November 15th at 1pm**

**Using Language to Empower Neurodivergent Students and Promote Allyship**

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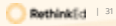
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