

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a term that was first used by Australian Sociologist [Judy Singer](#) in 1998 that recognizes that everyone's brain develops in a unique way.

Neurodiversity is commonly used as an umbrella term to describe alternative thinking styles such as Dyslexia, DCD (Dyspraxia), Dyscalculia, ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and ADHD (Attention Deficient and Hyperactivity Disorder). Outside of given labels and diagnoses, the term neurodiversity is used to describe differences in how someone thinks, moves, processes information, understands and interacts with the world. These differences are thought to affect how an individual learns skills and reaches developmental milestones compared to **neurotypical** standards.

What is neurotypical?

The term **neurotypical** describes someone who thinks and processes information according to the societal norms and expectations established by their culture and setting.

Some characteristics that people associate with neurotypical development include:

- reaching developmental milestones at a similar time to other children (a specific age range,) such as learning to speak
- having social or organizational skills that are similar to someone's peers
- being able to tolerate certain sensory discomfort, such as loud noises, without much difficulty
- being able to adapt to changes in routines
- being able to focus in class or at work for prolonged periods
- having varied interests or hobbies typical for the person's age

What are some common differences that are considered to be neurodiverse?

Neurodivergence can mean different things to different people. Assigned labels and diagnoses include specific characteristics that may be perceived as a different way of thinking.

- ADHD (focus, attention, senses, executive functioning)
- Learning disabilities including dyslexia (reading), dysgraphia (writing), dyscalculia (numbers and math) and dyspraxia (movement and coordination)
- Autism (information processing and communication)
- Tourette's syndrome (involuntary movements)
- Synesthesia (senses)

How can I support someone who is neurodiverse?

Given that neurodiversity is a term intended to describe the way that each of us is unique, the best way to support someone who is neurodiverse is to get to know who they are, how they perceive the world, and what is important to them. Diagnoses and labels can help us understand, however neurodiversity is truly about seeing and accepting the person for who they are at the core of their humanity.

For example, getting to know them can include investigating the following areas:

- What is important for them, and what do they want to accomplish?
- If they want help, what kind of help are they looking for?
- What are their strengths and interests?
- How do they process sensory input?
- Which methods do they use in relation to language and communication?

Once you get to know the person better, together you can determine what types and how much support they need and want.

This might include modifying and/or adapting the environment to better support both the individual and the caregiver in meeting their needs in daily life.

Refer to the [Inclusion Fact Sheet](#) and the [General Disabilities Information Sheet](#) provided by DPSS for some specific ideas.

Where can clients and caregivers get more information?

Click on the links:

- [Neurodiversity Celebration Week](#)
 - [What is neurodiversity? \(video\)](#)
 - [Disability Programs Specialized Services](#)
 - [Uni-Diversity](#)
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- This fact sheet is based on the social model. It is for general information only and does not replace professional medical advice. If provided to clients and their family, it must be reviewed with them to ensure understanding and address any questions or concerns.
- Please keep in mind that a disability is only one part of a person. Identifying and fostering their strengths will be critical for supporting the person to reach their goals.
- For more information and/or support, please visit your local clinic/Community Miyupimaatisiun Centre (CMC) and ask to be connected with a case manager.