

Making Decisions about Autism Support

Embracing neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the natural differences in the way different human brains work. People experience and interact with the world in different ways and these differences are not viewed as deficits. The idea of neurodiversity moves away from pathologising difference. Instead, it seeks to embrace and support brain differences.

What is neuro affirming support?

Support that believes in a rights and strengths-based approach to developmental differences. Any support offered will seek to affirm the person's neurodivergent identity, rather than try to fix or cure them.

Neurodiversity affirming support key principles.

- Value neurodiversity. Neurodevelopmental differences are natural and variable. The support and care given should be trauma informed and trauma responsive. Supporters should seek to respect individual experiences and perspectives. Supporters should try to understand autistic behavior rather than change or extinguish it.
- Inclusivity and accessibility. Try to be proactive in creating environments, systems and practices that are helpful for all neurotypes. This could involve understanding and respecting an autistic person's communication style and preference. It could also involve understanding and respecting their sensory needs.
- Use strengths-based approaches. Deliberately focus on an individual's strengths, interests, and capacities rather than their difficulties as viewed from neurotypical standards.

- Individualised support. Support should be personalised to the unique needs, preferences, and goals of the autistic individual. As well as being person centered in focus, it should also be person led.
- Autonomy and agency. Autistic people should be supported to make their own informed choices and supported in their right to self-advocate. Their own personal boundaries should be valued and their consent or lack of consent should be respected.
- Recognising and respecting intersectionality. The different identities (gender, race, sexuality, religion, disability, age etc.) of the individual should be understood and respected.
- All-inclusive wellbeing. Mental, physical, and social needs should be taken into account when designing and delivering support.
- Lived experience informed practice. Combining lived experience with research and clinical evidence, as well as individual differences, circumstances, choices, and values can create a fuller picture which can be helpful in deciding and delivering support.

Useful resources

<https://www.livedexperienceeducator.com/writings>

<https://therapistndc.org/neurodiversity-affirming-therapy/>

<https://learningforapurpose.com/neurodiversity-affirming-practices/>

A Therapists Guide to Neurodiversity Affirming Practice with Children and Young People by Raelene Dundon