

A note on language: We use identify first language (i.e. autistic person) to align with the preferences of many autistic people. However, we recognise that families of young children who are moving through the diagnostic journey may use other terms. When talking with families, learn about the terms they prefer when talking about or with their child.

Neurodiversity

An umbrella term to describe variations in the human brain and ways of being (e.g. autism or ADHD).

Affirming

Acceptance of different ways of being and the recognition that there is not one 'correct' way of thinking, behaving, and communicating.

Practices

Any and all strategies, supports, approaches and pedagogies.



Why is it important to be neurodiversity-affirming?

Masking autistic traits to conform in a neurotypical society can have a negative impact on social-emotional wellbeing and mental health (Miller et al. 2021).

Aligns with the National Early Years Learning Framework to support all neurodivergent children to *"have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference"* (AGDE; EYLF 2022)

What does it look like to be neurodiversity-affirming in an early childhood setting?

- Prioritising authentic connection and positive regard for all children.
- Respecting and responding to all communication methods, learning styles, play preferences and emotions.
- Ongoing evaluation of inclusive practices.
- Being open to learning from a range of information sources through *ongoing learning and reflective practice* (AGDE; EYLF 2022)
- Listening to neurodivergent voices and their families.
- Prioritising the emotional wellbeing and safety of all children.
- Encouraging authentic peer connections.
- Use of strengths-based language when talking with and about all children.

Practices to Avoid:

Instead:

Planned ignoring or punishments.



Support the child through connection, co-regulation, identifying the function of the behaviour and provide proactive supports.

Physical prompting to complete tasks.



Value the child's right to consent and autonomy by slowing down and using the least amount of prompting necessary.

Redirecting or discouraging stims (i.e. self stimulatory behaviour).



Recognise the necessity of stimming and the purposes it serves. Support the individual to engage in non-harmful stims, and make environmental modifications if necessary.

Rewards to ensure compliance.



Find out more about the child's strengths, interests and learning styles. Refusals should be respected.

Only responding to "appropriate" communication or requiring eye contact.



Recognise all forms of communication as valid and teach others about communication styles. Support with translations between communication styles.

Only responding to "appropriate" whole body learning



Recognise that learning can happen in many ways. Supporting all children to access the learning in their preferred way and with their preferred supports.

Early Years Learning Framework Principles that promote neurodiversity-affirming practice (AGDE:EYLF 2022)

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships:

"Through a widening network of secure relationships, children develop confidence and feel safe, respected and valued. They become increasingly able to recognise and respect the feelings of others and to interact positively with them".

Partnerships

"Partnerships are based on the foundations of respecting each other's perspectives, expectations and values, and building on the strength of each other's knowledge and skills"

Respect for Diversity

"When educators respect the diversity of families and communities, and the aspirations they hold for their children, they can foster children's motivation to learn and reinforce their sense of themselves as competent learners."

Equity, Inclusion and high expectations

"Educators view all children as competent and capable and hold high expectations for their learning."

"Educators who are committed to equity recognise that all children have the right to participate in inclusive early childhood settings, regardless of their circumstances, strengths, gender, capabilities or diverse ways of doing and being."

Where to go for more information?

SCAN/
CLICK

NeuroClastic (website):

A collective of autistic people responsive to the evolving needs and trajectory of the autistic community. They publish autistic voices, catalogue intersectional experiences, insights, talents and creative pursuits of autistic people.

Autistic people!

There are many autistic people creating engaging, accessible content on social media. Some of our favourites include:

- @ neurowild_
- @ the_aussiespeechie
- @ the.autisticats
- @ the.atypical.teacher
- @ autball1
- @ rdorseysl



This resource was adapted from the original tip sheet “Neurodiversity Affirming Practices” which was initially developed by Speech Pathology Student. The original tip sheet was informed by autistic voices.

References

Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE] (2022). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (V2.0)*. Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf>

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Miller D, Rees J, & Pearson A (2021) “Masking Is Life”: Experiences of Masking in Autistic and Nonautistic Adults’, *Autism in adulthood*, 3(4):33–338, <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0083>