

The Parent Neurodiversity Handbook

Understanding your child and their needs



By Dominique Marcil

Introduction

Overview of Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the concept that brain differences are normal variations in the human population. These differences can affect learning, attention, mood, and social interactions.

Neurodivergent individuals may include those with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other neurological differences.

Goals of the Workbook

This workbook is designed to provide parents with practical strategies and tools to support themselves and their neurodivergent children. It aims to foster understanding, promote self-care, and empower parents to create a nurturing environment.

Personal Note

Dear Parents,

As a parent of a neurodivergent child, you embark on a unique journey filled with both challenges and rewards. This workbook is here to support you every step of the way. Remember, you are not alone, and your dedication makes a world of difference in your child's life.

Warm regards, Dominique Marcil and The Wonder Nook

Challenges Faced by Neurodivergent Children

Neurodivergent children often feel isolated and different from their peers, leading to questions like, "What's wrong with me?" and "Why am I so different?" They may face unique barriers in educational settings, including difficulty accessing the support they need.

Creating Inclusive Educational Environments

To help neurodivergent children thrive, educational environments must be inclusive and accommodating. Here are some key areas to focus on:

1. Analyze the Current Environment

- **Existing Supports:** Identify what supports and accommodations are currently available for neurodivergent students. Are they accessible and effective?
- **Intersectionality:** Consider how other factors (e.g., gender, race, socio-economic status) might affect a child's experience and access to support.

2. Redesign and Improve Supports

- **Individualized Learning Plans (IEPs):** Work with schools to create or improve IEPs tailored to your child's needs.
- **Exam Accommodations:** Ensure your child has necessary exam accommodations, such as extra time or a quiet room.
- **Assistive Technologies:** Utilize tools like text-to-speech software, noise-canceling headphones, and mind mapping software to aid learning.

- **Alternative Format Textbooks:** Request textbooks in formats that are easier for your child to use, such as audiobooks or digital text.
- **Educational Assistants and Tutors:** Ensure your child has access to additional support staff who understand neurodiversity.

3. Foster Safe and Inclusive Spaces

- **Sensory Refuge Spaces:** Advocate for quiet, dimmable rooms where your child can retreat if they feel overwhelmed.
- **Disability Cultural Centers:** Encourage schools to create spaces where neurodivergent students can gather and feel safe.
- **Single Point of Contact:** Establish a single, reliable contact person at the school who understands your child's needs and can coordinate support.

4. Educate and Collaborate

- **Faculty Education:** Ensure that teachers and staff receive training on neurodiversity and understand how to support neurodivergent students.
- **Student Collaboration:** Involve your child in decisions about their support and accommodations. Their input is vital for creating effective strategies.

5. Continuous Review and Improvement

- **Feedback and Adjustment:** Regularly review the effectiveness of accommodations and supports. Make adjustments as needed based on feedback from your child and their teachers.

Conclusion

By understanding and addressing the unique needs of neurodivergent children, we can create more inclusive and supportive educational environments. Collaboration between parents, schools, and the children themselves is key to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed.

How to Support your Child in Education

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodivergence is a term used to describe neurological differences, indicating that a neurodivergent brain is physically distinct from a neurotypical brain. These differences can manifest in various ways and are collectively referred to as neurodiversity. Recent studies estimate that 15-20% of the global population, or approximately 1.2 to 1.6 billion people, are neurodivergent. Neurodivergent conditions include:

1. ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder),
2. ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder),
3. Acquired Neurodiversity: Neurological differences that arise due to injury, illness, or other external factors.,
4. Mental Health Diagnoses: Conditions that impact mental health and cognitive function.,
5. Dyslexia: A learning disorder characterized by difficulties with reading.,
6. Dyscalculia: A learning disorder that affects mathematical abilities.,
7. Dyspraxia: A developmental coordination disorder affecting physical coordination., and
8. Tourette Syndrome: A neurological disorder characterized by repetitive, involuntary movements and vocalizations.

By acknowledging and supporting neurodiversity, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society that values the unique contributions of all individuals.

Module 01

Recognizing Environment Deficiencies for Neurodivergent People

1.A. What supports/accommodations are currently in place for neurodivergent employees?

1.A.1. What is the intersectionality between the institution and neurodiversity?

1.A.2. Are these supports accessible to neurodiverse employees?

1.A.3. If no, are there supports/accommodations in place for undiagnosed employees and/or employees who have been denied accommodations?

1.B. How is diversity included in the institution?

1.C. How is diversity viewed at the institution?

1.D. Is the institution educating the workforce and management about neurodiversity?

1.D.1. If so, how?

1.E. Are there neurodiverse safe spaces at the institution?

1.E.1. If so, are they accessible?

1.F. Are workspaces neurodiverse psychological safe spaces?

1.F.1. Are there optional ways for neurodiverse employees to consume information?

1.F.2. Are managers and colleagues educated on neurodiverse behaviors?

1.G. What are employees' opinions on the current supports offered by the institution?

Module 01

Recognizing Environment Deficiencies for Neurodivergent People

Module 1's primary initiative is to understand current supports in place at workplaces, neurodiversity's connection to the employees, management, and administration, as well as to determine if the environment of the workplace promotes a psychologically safe space for neurodivergent individuals. This is done by asking questions such as 1.A.1, "What is the intersectionality between the institution and neurodiversity?" . By asking questions like these, the connections that people have with neurodiversity can be better understood, as aspects of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and other social issues can affect how others treat neurodivergent individuals or how they have or have not been educated on such topics . As a result, questions 1.A.2. and 1.A.3. can be better answered and understood. This is due to the intersectional barriers being broken down between people's inequalities and neurodiversity, allowing the relation between the two to be seen. For example, consider the issues of accessibility and diagnosis; until recently, studies of phenotypes of ASD have been done in relation to the male gender, leaving the female gender to be either misdiagnosed or their issues and needs being neglected . By understanding intersectional issues such as diagnosis and gender inaccessibility, questions 1.A.2 and 1.A.3. become better understood, thus making them prominent issues that must be addressed in order to redesign workplaces to be DEI spaces. Additionally, by understanding the institution's intersectionality with neurodivergence, it becomes easier to answer questions such as 1.B., 1.C., and 1.F. in meaningful ways. It is vital that hard judgment be used when reviewing the institution and answering these questions, as it severely impacts neurodivergent individuals to be part of neurotypical spaces that do not create room for their needs . By not having inclusive spaces for neurodivergent individuals, many are socially ostracized or bullied, which takes strong emotional tolls that increase depression, anxiety, and suicide in the neurodivergent population . In order to combat these outcomes and to create a more inclusive environment, questions such as 1.D., 1.E., 1.F., 1.F.2., and 1.G. can be reviewed and then addressed in the following module, "Redesign."

Module 02

Redesigning the Environment to Meet Neurodivergent Needs

Supports deemed proficient in module 1 will be tasked under 2.A. and left in place. In section 2.B recommended supports are to be cross checked with current supports, any supports not met or that are not proficient enough will be redesigned in 2.B

2.A. List proficient supports from module 1,

2.B. Recommended supports (Cross check with current available supports,

2.B.1. I.E.P. (Individualized Learning Plans)

2.B.2. Exam accommodations,

2.B.3. Assistive technologies,

2.B.3.1. Text-to-speech/ speech-to-text

2.B.3.2. Noise cancelling and or dampening devices,

2.B.3.3. Mind Mapping software,

2.B.3.4. Live caption and note taking devices,

2.B.3.5. transcription software

2.B.3.6. Productivity/ prioritizing software (e.g., Ayoya, isolator)

2.B.3.7. Performance assistance software (e.g., wordQ software helps predict text)

2.B.3.8. Literary technology (e.g., WizCom Pen helps with tough words and

vocabulary, learning ally helps with reading difficulties)

2.C. Alternative format texts/ Writings,

2.D. Accessible funding,

2.E. Educational assistant,

2.F. Workflow strategist,

2.G. Tutors,

2.H. Note Takers,

2.I. Body double (Person to work along side with to get work done, not there to help do work),

2.J. Into and out of post-secondary transition programs,

2.J.1 Provided transition programs 4-6 weeks before job begins that shows students their specific spot, and other vital institution locations as well as community locations.

2.J.2 Coexists with mentorship programs that other neurodiverse individuals in the community and or institution participate in order to mentor new students,

2.J.3. Transition out program provides students with unwritten

expectations of graduate school and employment,

2.J.3.1. offers career supports that addresses challenges neurodivergent people face, while partnering with external agencies and

programs if necessary to expand institutional capacities,

2.J.3.2. Partner with employers to develop customized job opportunities and programs for neurodivergent individuals, and

2.J.3.3. Ensure career supports aim to support neurodivergent individual own long-term and or short-term career goals

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2.K. Neurodiversity safe spaces,

2.K.1. Sensory refuge spaces (e.g., rooms that are dimmable, quiet, easy access, comfortable with a variety of seating, calming)

2.K.2. Disability cultural center/ club space (disability have a different primary mission and purpose than disability offices that focus on legal accommodations), and

2.L. Single Person Contact for neurodiverse students

2.M. Ask neurodiverse students what other accommodations they would like to see and how said accommodations would benefit them (this should be asked in an accessible way that allows quick and easy response, e.g., a short questionnaire, a drobox in the hallway, and or via social media.)

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Module 03

Educationing Participants in the Enviromentin the Enviroment

3.A. Provide campus wide neurodiversity and universal design training to faculty, staff, and students,

3.A.1. Prioritize education on neurodivergent behaviours and traits,

3.A.2. Educate faculty on how to provide their information in a variety of consumable ways,

3.A.3. Educate faculty on body language (e.g., fidgeting does not mean in attention),

3.A.4. Educate faculty on how to devise clear and consistent syllabus that allow neurodivergent minds to easily understand given information.

3.B. Ask neurodiverse students what they wish to have faculty, students, and community educated on.

Module 3's focus on education is designed to reduce stigma towards neurodiversity within the organization, including both employees and management. The training is designed to foster inclusive attitudes which, in turn, lead to a more accepting and understanding work environment. This section is especially important as many neurodivergent individuals have reported in various studies that they are less likely to disclose their diagnosis or self-diagnosis to colleagues or supervisors due to their environment's lack of knowledge about neurodivergence. Many neurodivergent employees have expressed that colleagues' and management's perceptions and understanding of neurodivergence have led to them being stereotyped, judged, bullied, and overall being treated differently after disclosing their diagnosis.

Module 04

Environment Review and I.E.O

Though in order to continue to promote a neurodivergent-friendly space focused on DEI, consistent revisions of the Reaching Diversity substructure must be made after the substructure's implementation into the corporate environment. Hence why I suggest using Module 4 as a recurring review system for the substructure.

Module 4: Review and I-E-O

4.A. Has data been collected determining what challenges are faced by neurodivergent employees?

4.B. Have effective and accessible strategies been determined and discussed openly with staff, including both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees?

4.C. Have effective strategies been designed to better represent and include neurodivergent employees?

4.D. Have training programs been created and openly discussed with both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees?

4.E. Has there been any implementation of new accommodations, supports, and/or education programs?

4.F. If so, have mechanisms such as remedial training and disciplinary processes been put in place to ensure that the programs are working effectively to address discriminatory behavior towards neurodivergent individuals?

Module 4.2: I-E-O – Input – Environment – Outcome

The IEO impact model provides a conceptual framework that grounds supports in

multi-institutional studies. This model is designed to gather employees' experiences prior to joining the organization and to gather data about their experiences during their tenure. The model was chosen to be a part of Module 4 as it is designed to account for the preintervention of the Reaching Diversity substructure implementation, as well as postintervention. The model also accounts for environmental variables of both participant groups, thus allowing for accurate information to be pulled that will thoroughly assess the substructure's effectiveness.

4.2.A. Input Variables

i. Demographics: Neurodivergent and neurotypical participants (sampling size is up to researcher discretion), individuals' experiences as neurodivergent persons with work, social, and mental health (same questionnaire should be given to all participants, neurotypical and neurodivergent).

ii. Quasi-pretest measures: Accounts for preintervention and postintervention measures from a supported group (neurodivergent and neurotypical groups with Reaching Diversity supports available) and a control group (neurodivergent and neurotypical participants without Reaching Diversity supports). This pretest-posttest group allocation is determined by participants rather than random allocation. Participants may request to join the supported group during the study. This can be accounted for as a positive variable in the study when determining the effectiveness of the Reaching Diversity substructure.

4.2.B. Environmental Variables

i. Questions for accommodated group: Used available accommodations (this can be surveyed out with check points for each available accommodation; employees select only ones they have used. Once selected, a question asking how the accommodation has helped them is requested).

ii. Questions for both groups: Workloads, job roles, performance metrics, home life, employee-to-employee interaction, employee-to-management interaction (questions can be surveyed out on a 1-5 scale, 1 being poor, 5 being good).

iii. Questions for unsupported group: How can your work experience be made easier? (this can be written, then cross-checked with 4.2.B.i. responses).

4.2.C. Outcome Measures

i. Reaching Diversity substructure implementation-related outcomes in 1-2 years (timeline up to researchers' discretion).

ii. 4.2.B.i. responses should be cross-checked with 4.2.B.iii. to determine which accommodations are the most successful and widely required by the employee base as a whole.

iii. The 4.2.A.i. questionnaires should be sent again (with minor changes in wording to ask about present experiences) near the end of the study for cross-examination, to determine the effectiveness of the Reaching Diversity substructure.

iv. 4.2.B.ii. questionnaire should be sent out again with 4.2.A.i. questionnaire to cross-examine the progress or decline of each employee's experience, both with and without supports given.

The final module of the Reaching Diversity substructure focuses on review and effectiveness to promote a continuous DEI environment for neurodivergent individuals. This is done in both the review and I-E-O portions of the module. The first portion of Module 4 ensures that a majority of, if not all, gaps in the organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion redesign are accounted for and met. This is followed by questions that ensure neurodivergent collaboration in the design and implementation of the Reaching Diversity substructure, giving voice to marginalized neurodivergent people. Once the review segment is complete and all participants are satisfied with the outcomes, the conceptual model can be used a year after the substructure's implementation.

The conceptual model in the second portion of Module 4 consists of an input-environment-outcome model that provides a conceptual framework for the effectiveness of the Reaching Diversity substructure specific to each organization. By using this model, re-

searchers can determine the preintervention quality of life for neurodivergent employees as well as the preintervention environment quality of the organization. This allows for the postintervention quality of life of neurodivergent employees and the organization to be determined. By using this model, it ensures that neurodivergent employees' needs are consistently met in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive way that promotes both their professional growth and their wellbeing.

By implementing the Reaching Diversity substructure into corporate environments, the barriers and challenges unique to the neurodivergent population are addressed, allowing for more participation from marginalized neurodivergent employees. In turn, the stigma, judgment, and misinformation about neurodivergence are lessened as the neurotypical space becomes less dominating. The creation of inclusive spaces allows for people to feel more connected to their communities and peers, making the professional experience an equitable journey for all.

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