

**UNDERSTANDING  
NEURODIVERSITY**

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## What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity describes differences in brain function from person to person that affect daily mental functions. There are natural variations in the way we think, perceive, experience, and process the world. This manifests in differences in learning, cognition, behavior, communication, and emotional expression.

### Neurotypical

This describes people who have standard or typical brain processing and behaviors. Neurotypical people were formerly considered “normal,” and people who weren’t neurotypical were treated as if they had disorders.

### Neurodivergent

A neurodivergent person has one or more ways in which their brain functions outside the “typical” way. For example, neurodivergent people may be diagnosed with autism, ADHD, OCD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, etc.

[Learn more about Neurodiversity here.](#)

## Creating Communities that Support Neurodiverse Children

We all have a role to play in creating a welcoming community that supports the difference in people. We need to be aware of what this means and the impact it can have on us as individuals and our community as a whole.

**Understanding Neurodiversity** - Becoming aware and accepting of these differences creates room for people who are neurodiverse to participate in social spaces just as they are.

**Expanding from inclusion to belonging** - Belonging goes one step further by ensuring that people feel valued and fully a part of their community.

**Openness and kindness can foster a meaningful connection** - Whether you’re a child or an adult, you can help through clear communication, awareness, openness, listening, and learning.

[Click here to learn about the role you can play to create a supportive community.](#)

## How to Show Support

There are many things people can do to be supportive of neurodivergent individuals. Some of the most important things you should keep in mind include:

**Listen.** People who are neurodivergent may feel misunderstood or left out. Be willing to listen to them. Let them know you hear them and respect them and their choices.

### Communicate in ways that help them.

Sometimes, people who are neurodivergent prefer written communication such as instant messaging, texting, or emails over a phone call or face-to-face conversation. Give them the time and tools they need to communicate.

**Avoid value-based labels.** Experts recommend against using the terms “high-functioning” and “low-functioning” to describe conditions like autism.

**No two neurodivergent people are the same.** The personalities and preferences of neurodivergent people can be widely different, even when they have the same underlying condition.

**Don't assume that anyone is incapable or unintelligent.** People who are neurodivergent often have conditions or preferences that make them stand out or appear different.

**Treat everyone with respect.** You can “normalize” and provide others with accommodations in a way that honors their dignity.

### A note from Cleveland Clinic:

*“Neurodiversity” is a word used to explain the unique ways people’s brains work. While everyone’s brain develops similarly, no two brains function just alike. Being neurodivergent means having a brain that works differently from the average or “neurotypical” person. This may be differences in social preferences, ways of learning, ways of communicating and/or ways of perceiving the environment. Because of this, a neurodivergent person has different struggles and unique strengths. People who are neurodivergent can benefit from education and programs that help them develop their strengths using them to their benefit to live happy, healthy lives.*

References:  
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/23154-neurodivergent>

## Building Community Consciousness



People who feel connected to a community are generally healthier and happier. That is because having strong support systems makes it easier to move through life's challenging moments. Feeling a sense of belonging is an integral component of wellbeing. Live Well Monthly Resources for Better Wellbeing Communities are typically comprised of people with shared interests and values. Most likely, your community includes your family, neighbors, and a few others you interact with frequently. As you consider your own community, ask yourself this question: How connected are you?

One study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that only about 30% of Americans know all or most of their neighbors, and a similar study found that more than half of residents living in Toronto, Canada only know a few of their neighbors.

Community consciousness, which is defined as a community's “level of awareness of its current social, economic, and environmental situations,” requires a willingness to branch out and become more aware of what is happening beyond your own family and inner circle. It requires acknowledging and accepting the diversity among members of your community, and it involves actively seeking common ground.

One way to expand your community consciousness is through volunteerism. Volunteering enables you to connect more deeply with others in your community. Having conversations with people outside your usual networks can expand your perspectives and give you more insight into the challenges that others face.

### References:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/how-urban-suburban-and-rural-residents-interact-with-their-neighbors>

<https://www.shsu.edu>