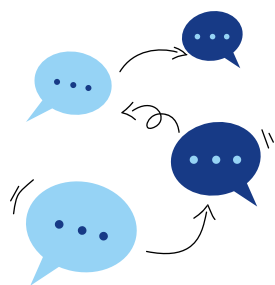


# A guide to neurodiversity

## Neurodivergence and neurotypical

Neurodiversity is a concept that all brains have natural variations, there are no defects or impairments. The term neurodivergent serves as an 'umbrella term' for alternative thinking styles such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Autism, and ADHD, among others. It is estimated that approximately 15-20% of the population possesses a neurological difference. Many of the difficulties faced by neurodivergent individuals are often rooted in the environments and systems they find themselves in, which are frequently designed by the majority, or neurotypical population.



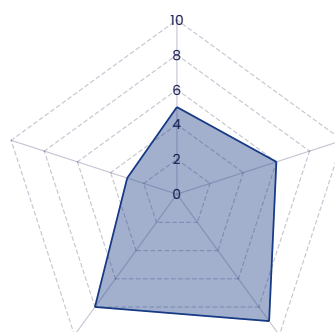
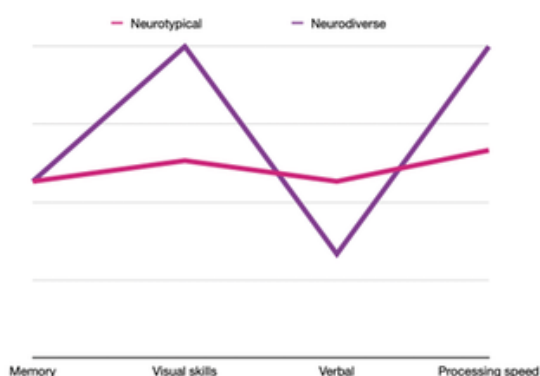
Considering that there is no such thing as a universally normal brain from a biological perspective, the term neurotypical can be understood as referring to individuals whose cognitive style falls within commonly accepted parameters, without being culturally defined as neurodivergent. It is a term most often used by neurodivergent people.

## Functioning and profiles

It is often said that neurodivergence is a spectrum, and you fall somewhere along the line of being 'more' or 'less'. For example, an autistic person can often be labelled as 'less autistic'/'high functioning', or 'more autistic'/'low functioning'.

However, this underplays the struggles that neurodivergent people face on a day to day basis, meaning that less help and understanding is provided when it is actually very much needed. Neurodivergence is often explained as a 'spiky profile'. If you plotted a graph to see a neurotypical persons abilities, you would see differences in their strengths and challenges, as we are all different. However, the neurodivergent person, has much bigger differences between their abilities they find easy, and the ones they find more challenging. The graph would look the line graph below.

The other graph helps to show visually how one spiky profile will look very different to the next. If we can support the person in the areas they find more challenging, their other strengths mean they can achieve amazing things.



# Embracing neurodivergence

Embracing neurodiversity and neurodivergent individuals is about accepting, including, celebrating and supporting everyone. It's vital for good mental health, wellbeing and the sense of self and identity. Embracing differences takes the pressure away, pressure that can be physically and mentally exhausting. Neurodivergent people bring many strengths, including creativity, innovative and analytical thinking, and expertise in areas of interest.



How to support a neurodivergent person in your unit:

- Educate yourself about ASD and access further support if needed
- Use an adjustment plan, communication passport, wellbeing passport and visual timetable to ensure fairness, and enable everyone to participate fully
- Acknowledge that neurodivergent people might do things differently from neurotypicals and make the most of their variety of skills, especially the ones they are proud of
- Encourage the use of aids like earbuds and fidget toys, and allow for uniform adjustments
- Talk about neurodiversity and differences within your unit to promote acceptance
- Be aware of the language you use, and check if you are unsure. For example, do they prefer to be 'autistic' or 'have autism'?
- Avoid assumptions - there can be many reasons someone will only eat certain foods, or are wearing headphones
- If you're ever unsure, please ask. The person in question or a trusted person may have ideas of ways they can be supported. It is also okay if they don't feel comfortable to answer this question

## Fairness, equity and equality

These three terms often get mixed up, but they each mean something slightly different, and understanding them can help you recognise how systems and people can be just or unjust.

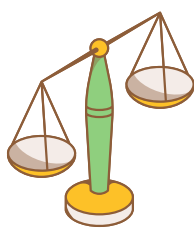
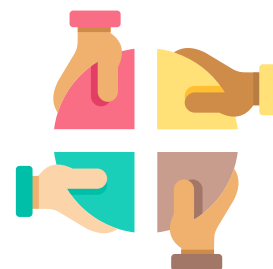


### Equity

Everyone gets what they need to succeed. This means giving more support to those who need it, and less to those who don't. That might mean giving extra time on tests for some students, or access to tutoring, or different resources based on individual needs. It's about recognising that not everyone starts in the same place – and adjusting things so everyone has a fair shot.

### Equality

Everyone gets the same thing. It's like giving every student the exact same amount of time to finish a test – no matter their needs or challenges. Sounds fair at first, right? But what if one person has a learning disability or speaks English as a second language? Giving everyone the same can actually leave some people behind.



### Fairness

Making sure things are just. Fairness is much more than treating everyone the same. It's about doing what's right, based on context. Sometimes that means different adjustment to achieve fairness overall.