

What does it mean to be Neurodiversity Affirming?



When looking for a therapist to support your or your child's needs, it's essential to find one who is neurodiversity-affirmative in their approach. Neurodiversity Affirming therapists create individualized care plans with clients and their families while supporting the child's strengths, unique abilities, and authenticity.

So, what can you expect from a Neurodiversity Affirming therapist or teacher?



We use a strengths based approach.

The strength-based approach refers to the focus on a child's strengths and abilities rather than their deficits. Therapy centered on gathering information about the powers a child possesses allows families and therapists to develop strategies that best support learning and growth collectively. Therapists utilizing this approach will enable children to identify their areas of interest as the foundations of therapy.



We presume competence.

Presuming competence means that we view all children as having the capacity to think, learn, and understand the world. Rather than assuming that an individual does not understand or is incapable of certain tasks, we believe that the individual requires individual supports and systems to help them succeed.

Perception of competence often goes hand-in-hand with access to AAC (Assistive and Augmentative Communication). As Neurodiversity Affirming therapists, we work to grant every child the tools they need to communicate, including devices that are not reliant on oral speech.

We respect bodily autonomy.

We practice complete respect for body autonomy. We do not participate in the physical manipulation of a client's body during therapy sessions without the client's consent. We utilize the "hand under hand" vs. "hand over hand" strategy when working on motor plans. This strategy allows children and adults to demonstrate their autonomy and remove their hand at their own will.

Our focus is on relationship-centered care.

According to The Institute for Patient and Family-Centered Care, the most successful therapy occurs when it is grounded on the mutually beneficial partnership among the individuals receiving care, their families, and their providers. We believe each party holds an equally valuable role in developing goals and outcomes for each client. We teach self advocacy.

Rather than educating children and how to behave in ways that fit into neurotypical "norms," therapy strategies are focused more on self advocacy skills. For many neurodivergent individuals, acting in a way that meets societal expectations increases anxiety and low self-esteem. Therefore, as neurodiversity affirming therapists, we work with children on identifying and communicating their support needs rather than teaching ways to "fit in."

We value emotional regulation over compliance.

Rather than focusing on gaining a child's compliance or adherence to therapy expectations, we work with children to regulate their emotions by providing environmental and emotional support throughout therapy. For example, if a child demonstrates significant resistance to a task, we seek to modify the activity rather than the resistance behaviors.

References

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