

Strategies for Supporting Students with Neurodiversity

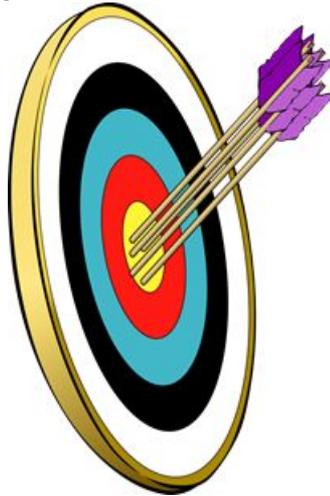
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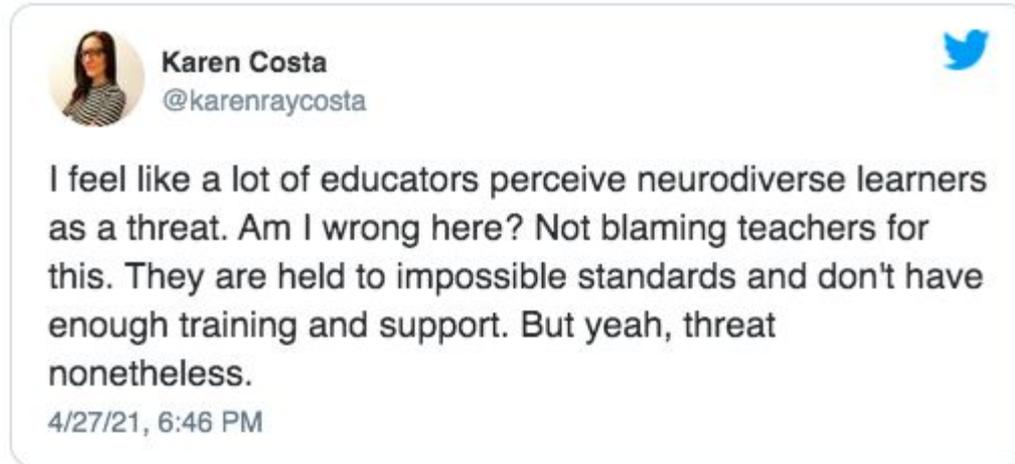
July 28th, 2021 Wisconsin Inclusion Institute

Outcomes

This forum will focus on neurodiversity (Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD and mental health challenges) and the similarities and differences in brain functioning for these individuals. We will discuss how brain functioning manifests in various behaviors, the impact of trauma, and focus on effective strategies for supporting individuals via case study examples and the sharing of resources.



Why Discuss Neurodiversity?



<https://twitter.com/karenraycosta/status/1387191328530894854>



Matt Johnson @mrjumd · 14h



Replying to [@karenraycosta](#)

I would say at least students to be managed.



Lauren Barr @Lauren_M_Barr · 13h



Replying to [@karenraycosta](#)

As a neuro divergent myself with a neurodivergent child, plus someone who studies this, it is a serious problem. I am curious to hear more about what led you to this.



SUSAN A KING @TheSusanKing · 12h



Replying to [@karenraycosta](#)

Sadly, yes.



What Is Neurodiversity?

- A viewpoint that brain differences are normal, rather than deficits. It is a concept where ***differences are recognized and respected as any other human variation.***
- The neurodiversity movement is a social justice movement that is based on a philosophy for embracing ***different ways of thinking and behaving as normal variations of being human.***
- A predictable set of differences in the way the brain functions or operates which impact all aspects of life to include school. ***Not bad, just different strengths, interests, gifts, talents, and passions.***
- If these differences are ***not supported they can cause shame, misunderstandings, and difficulties.***
- ***Teach proactively as if people learn differently*** - differentiate, accommodate, care, listen. UDL - Choice, ownership, buy-in, build on assets. No shame.

"NEURODIVERSITY

refers to how different brains learn differently. It describes the highly diverse ways in which students learn, think and process information." -Seth Perler



Neurodiversity Overview

Big 6 Areas of Impact

1. Social Communication
2. Flexibility
3. Resilience
4. Sensory
5. Self-regulation
6. Executive functioning



We will share considerations and strategies nested in this framework/areas of impact to support individuals who have experienced trauma, emotional behavioral disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and autism.

Social Communication

- Functional Diversification - communicating differently in different contexts - friend, teacher, stranger
- Sharing attention with someone else
- Best outcomes are for those students who can communicate well
- [Jill Kuzma Website](#)



<https://twitter.com/NerdyGirlAV/status/1386301139612667914>

Flexibility

- AKA “brain rigidity”
- Need to do things a certain way - down the hall on the certain side
- Not understanding humor or sarcasm - avoid using
- Influences everything
- Be explicit about teaching it - help them recognize



BEING A FLEXIBLE THINKER	
Flexible Thinking	Stuck Thinking
Thinking of Others Person	Just Me person
People feel good	People feel tense, frustrated, mad, or sad
We get things done	Situation is difficult, we don't get things done
Expected behavior	Unexpected behavior

- [Michelle Garcia Winner Website](https://www.socialthinking.com/online-training/on-demand/webinar-core-concept-flexible-thinking)

<https://www.socialthinking.com/online-training/on-demand/webinar-core-concept-flexible-thinking>

Resilience

- Not everyone experiences things in the same way - the way the brain handles it and deals with it - especially when it comes to trauma
- Ability to move through whatever comes at us in life
- Skills to do this must be developed
- [Community Resilience Initiative](#)
- https://twitter.com/Compass_Primary/status/1384945095942811658



Compass Primary @Compass_Primary · Apr 21

...

Here is Henry demonstrating our school value of **#Resilience** brilliantly. Over the Easter holidays Henry set himself a challenge of being able to ride his bike without Stabilisers, he practised and finally on the last day of the holidays his hard work paid off! Great work Henry



Sensory

- Self-determination is involved because I need to know what I need to do to regulate
- [Kelly Mahler](#) (Occupational Therapist)
- [Sensational Brain](#)
- <https://twitter.com/yennpurkis/status/959583391585779720>

↻ Kelly Mahler Retweeted



Yenn Purkis
@yennpurkis



[#Autism](#) [#Aspergers](#) [#Neurodiversity](#) [#Interoception](#)
meme for the day [@EmmaLGoodall](#) [@AutismSpectAust](#)
[@PosPartnerships](#) [@AspergersVic](#) [@aspergersgirls](#)

Interoception is the sense of being aware of sensations within your body. Autistic people often have large issues with this sense. So if you or someone you know isn't coping, a contributing factor may be that you - or they - are too hot or cold or hungry or thirsty or need the toilet but don't know it. Interoception is a skill you can learn.



Jeanette Purkis Autism Books and Other Things

Self-Regulation

- Sensory and Self-Regulation go hand in hand
- More regulation = higher functioning
- Co-regulation
- [Zones of Regulation](#)
- [Amy Laurent](#)
- <https://twitter.com/Ashleyoutloud/status/13798855078170630?s=20>



Social Thinking Retweeted



♥ B ♡ O ♡ Y ♡ MOM ♥ @Ashleyoutloud · Mar 14



My four year old was about to have a whole tantrum and my 6 year old helped him manage his breathing so he could calm down.... I'd say I'm doing freaking alright



Executive Functioning

- More than just a visual organizer/organizing
- It is about problem-solving and decision making
- Using the right skill at the right time
- Staying on-task and knowing when to end
- Knowing what is real/pretend
- [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org/)
- [Harvard Guide](https://www.harvard.edu/guides/executive-function/)



Jana O'Connor @sayitslp · Oct 24, 2019

10/ If a neurotypical person is going to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, they're gonna think about what a peanut butter and jelly sandwich looks like as a FIRST STEP. Practically instantaneously. What does done look like? Then they plan backwards from there.



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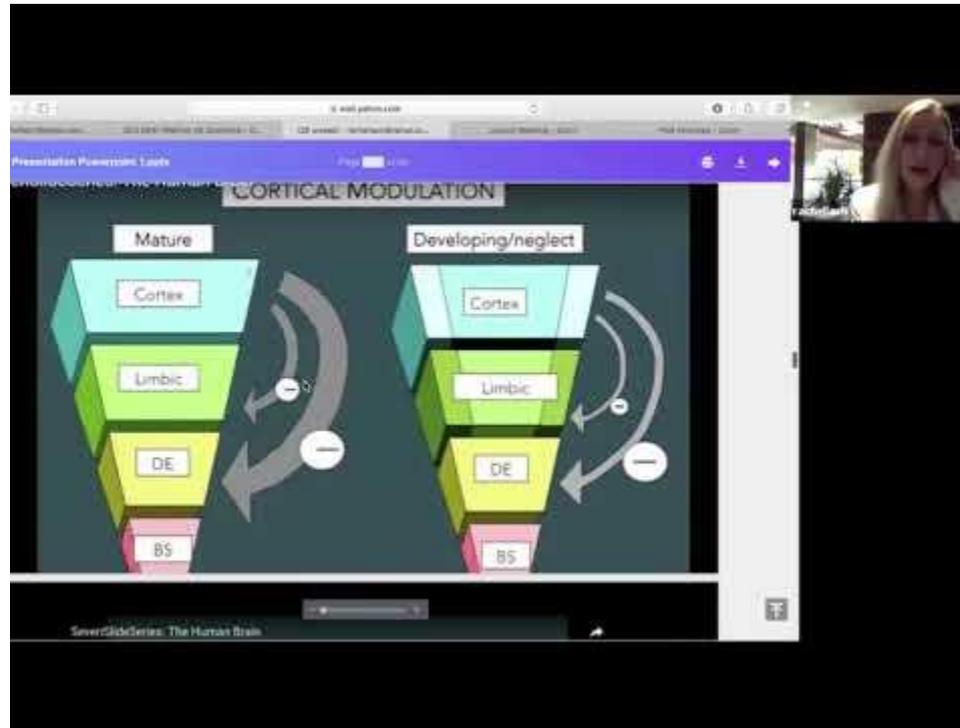
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<https://twitter.com/sayitslp/status/1187509389109780480>

Impact of Trauma

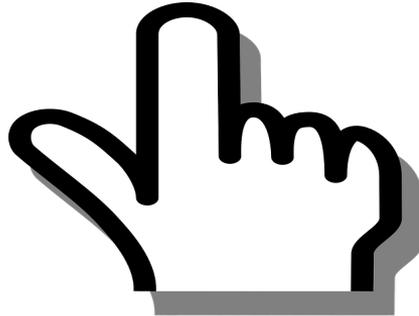
Impact of Trauma - Rachel Bougalis, MS LPCC



Take Home Points

All about self regulation - the brain is in charge and when it is impacted by trauma it impacts its ability to regulate...this makes things messy for students who may have comorbidities that include trauma along with mental illness, ADHD, ASD. etc.

- Our experiences are hard wired into our biology.
- Behavior, attitude, affect, capabilities MAY NOT BE “CHOICES”- They may be responses to toxic stress during development.
- The more regulated we are, the higher we are able to function.



Practical Application

- Co-regulation - Goal is for emotion identification and self regulation.
- Google classroom regulation strategies (.org or .edu websites)
- Empathy/ Be a relationship coach
- Circles!!!! To build relationships, reiterate trust, problem solve, repair harm, and to provide ongoing support. Includes student to student mentoring and promotes opportunities to fix mistakes.
- It starts with our mindset- What happened versus what's wrong with you.
- 5 positive prompts to 1 negative
- Short, positive interactions make a difference
- Avoid alienating or coercive methods
- [WI DPI Trauma](#)
- [Reclaiming Youth At Risk. Futures of Promise \(Brendtro et al., 2019\)](#)



Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD

- **Sensory:** 1. Allow the child to use a fidget 2. Provide a quiet space or earplugs for noise sensitivity 3. Tell the child ahead of time about a change in routine 4. Seat the child away from doors, windows, or buzzing lights
- **Self-regulation:** 1. Accurately Label Feelings 2. Behavior Interventions 3. ADHD Medication 4. Mindfulness Meditation
- **Executive functioning:** 1. Enforce Accountability 2. Write it Down 3. Make Time External 4. Offer Rewards 5. Make Learning Hands On 6. Stop to Refuel 7. Practice Pep Talks 8. Get Physical 9. Sip on Sugar (Yes, Really) 10. Show Compassion
- **Brad's Story:** A 12 year old with ADHD: 2:39
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2hLa5kDRCA>



Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD)

Who are we talking about?

- 23% of Children have or have had a psychiatric disorder
 - 2015 Children's Mental Health Report
- Most Common in Children and Adolescents
 - ***Anxiety Disorders***
 - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
 - ***Depression***

EBD

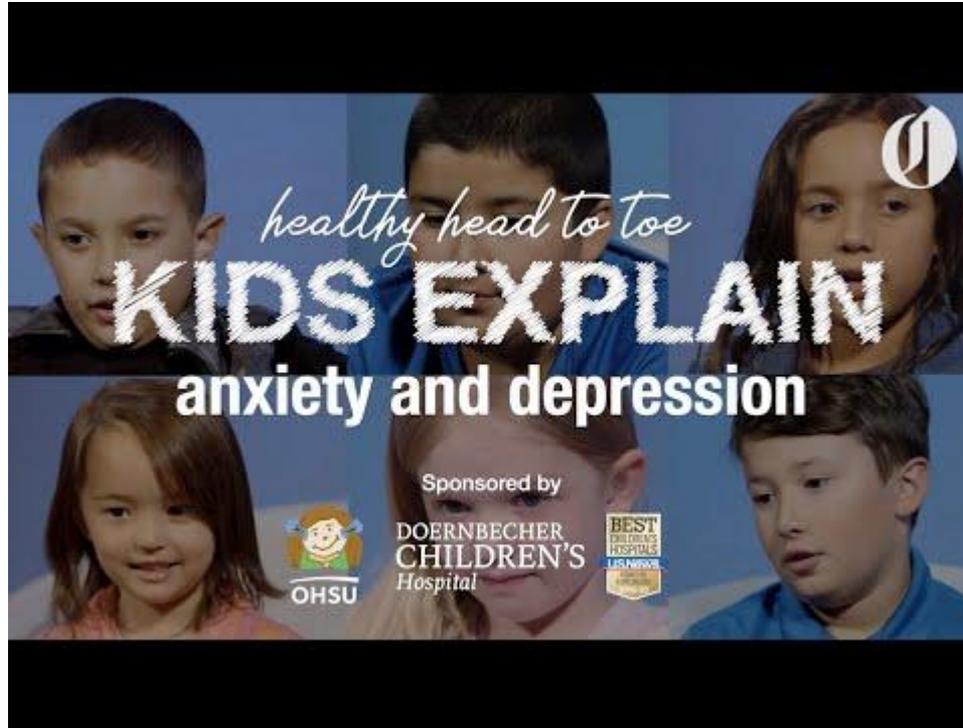
- **Social Communication:** Explicit teaching of social skills; social stories
- **Flexibility (aka brain rigidity):** Model and encourage positive thinking and gratitude; be proactive about changes to schedule/routine
- **Resilience:** Choice; First...then; incentives (fade over time)

EBD

- **Sensory:** Get moving (walk & talk); individual sports; arts & crafts; music; yoga
- **Self-regulation:** Deep breathing; Co-regulation; Zones; self-monitoring
- **Executive functioning:** Practice metacognition - think aloud/rehearse steps

*FBA/BIP process assists with designing interventions/supports

Advice from Kids



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ASD

- **Sensory:** 1. Consult with an Occupational Therapist for options to address the 5 senses needs (For hypo-sensitivities) 2. Provide visual supports for those who have difficulty processing spoken information 3. Sensory-stimulating toys (e.g. safe chewies and fidgets) 4. Opportunities for rocking, swinging and other sensory stimulating activities 5. Strong tasting and/or textured foods, cold beverages, etc
- **Self-regulation:** 1. Taking deep breaths 2. Counting to 20 3. Asking for help 4. Talking to a friend 5. Thinking of a compromise
- **Executive functioning:** 1. Homework log 2. Assignment checklists 3. Day planner 4. Post Classroom schedules 5. Allow enough time to provide instructions, repeat instructions, and offer individual assistance
- **Living with Autism: Jackson's Story-** 2:02

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYnZm8DEke4>



Case Studies

Elementary Case Study - Routines and Self-Regulation?: A Preference or a Necessity?

Herman: Herman is a second grade boy with autism who would get quite angry due to having limited communication skills. He had fantastic intellectual capabilities and would quickly get through academic tasks. From there, he would engage in free choice activities as a reward. This “first/then” sequence was used quite a bit. However, occasionally there were tasks that Herman absolutely refused to complete.

When in the “refusal mode,” Herman is a child that could make or break the entire environment and atmosphere in the special education room. His behaviors included high-pitched screaming, engaging in self-inflicted injuries, such as hitting his head against the wall, or seeking other students to push before dropping to the ground. Luckily, he had a very consistent yet firm paraprofessional that he worked with.

The underlying issue was that Herman could not effectively communicate his frustration, so the paraprofessional went to SLP sessions with Herman and worked closely with me to develop a picture exchange communication system. This system began working excellently for helping Herman understand his routine for the day and in offering certain choices for work well done. The experience of working with Herman helped the special educator understand the importance of offering choice (as a motivator) and the importance of establishing routine (via pictures) for students with autism spectrum disorder. The next aspect that needed to be addressed was a way for Herman to regulate his behaviors. As for many students with ASD, Herman displayed the need for gross motor sensory integration.

Herman would spend twenty minutes of his day (10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the afternoon) in a large swing that we had bolstered to the ceiling of the classroom. This decision was critical for Herman to have a successful day at school. His IEP team members also needed to adjust his schedule to be more varied in terms of fine and gross motor activity.

The last glimpse into autism, learned from Herman, had to do with a preference for certain foods. As a team, we had decided not to intervene or try to get him to eat the school-recommended food. Herman liked certain foods, and, as long as he had something for lunch, the school professionals were all right with that. Foods and textures were not a battle that we wanted to address with Herman.

High School Case Study: Perseverance Associated with Autism...or Inappropriate Obsession?

For many school professionals who worked with John, there was a picture of an impulsive obsession for food and a deep desire to have a girlfriend. John was focused academically, but had to have limits placed on the amount of food that he could consume; otherwise, he would eat too many sweets that would make him sick. There were also times, in conversations, where he needed to be told to slow, as he would get so excited about his topics. In addition, even when wanting to redirect a topic, the focus would come back to discussion of food.

His special educator noticed a change in John's behavior between his 10th and 11th grades. It should be noted that John was very close to his dad and his parents had just gone through a divorce. John's mother also had a new boyfriend. John, who was usually very pleasant, was beginning to display instances of rage and anxiety.

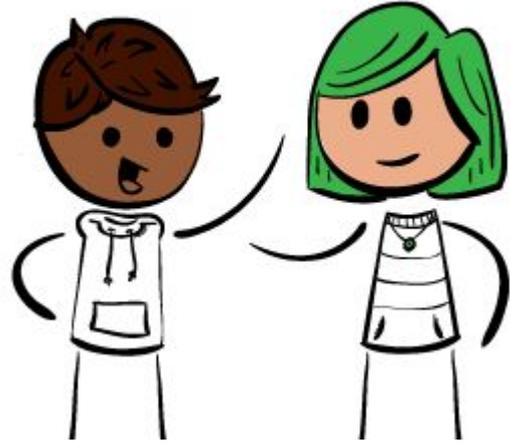
At one point, he got so angry that his mother mentioned his jumping out of a moving vehicle. It was after another incident, where John got inappropriately verbal and physically aggressive toward his younger sister, that his mother decided to take him to a mental health therapist.

In the school, John, all of a sudden, developed a fascination with a female student who was pregnant. He would follow her around and ask her if he could touch her baby. It was reported that John had a girl, who was a friend, who happened to ride his bus. One day, this female friend went to talk with John's special educator, stating that John had reached up her shirt and grabbed her breasts. The logic that he stated out loud was, "Well, you're a girl and you're my friend. So, I guess you won't mind if I touch these." This occurred while waiting in the bus lines after school. From these situations, the school team decided to really focus on conflict resolution and establishing healthy relationships, especially with the opposite sex.

More positively, John had the very important role of being involved as the school's varsity baseball team manager. He was also one of the school's biggest sports fans, and this was the perfect opportunity for him to release his need for excessive talk. During his senior year, John was crowned homecoming king, which marked a moment of acceptance by his peers. Lastly, it was the special educator's hope that John would bring his energy to the workplace or whatever goals he chose to pursue.



Question & Answer



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- [Autism Speaks](#)
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- [Sharma, M., & Zbacnik, A. \(2020\). *Educators for diverse classrooms: A case study approach to equity and inclusion in education*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishing.](#)
- [Very Well Mind](#)
- [We Are Teachers](#)
- [WI DPI Supporting Diverse Learners](#)

