

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

The word neurodiversity simply means that human beings have a wide variety of brains. Our brains experience, process, and understand the world and ourselves in different ways.

Neurodiversity is a fact: we know that this variety exists. When someone talks about the existence of neurodiversity, it doesn't include judgment: it isn't positive or negative. It just is.

When a person's brain and the way they process the world is not typical, we can call that person neurodivergent. Many different types of people are neurodivergent, including people who have different diagnoses, including:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Down Syndrome
- Dyscalculia (a math learning disability)
- Dysgraphia (a writing learning disability)
- Dyslexia (a reading learning disability)
- Dyspraxia (coordination challenges)
- Intellectual disabilities
- Mental health diagnoses
- Sensory Processing Disorder
- Tourette Syndrome

A person doesn't need a diagnosis to be neurodivergent. It is an identity more than a medical label. People use it to find community with each other and to understand themselves.

NEURODIVERSITY ADVOCACY

As more people became familiar with the idea of neurodiversity, some neurodivergent people wanted to go a step further than just recognizing that differences exist. They wanted people to know that **different doesn't mean bad**. This is how neurodiversity advocacy started.

Neurodiversity advocacy does include a value judgment: it says that different human brains are actually great. Diversity makes us better and we shouldn't try to get rid of it. Divergent brains are not broken. They are different, with different strengths and weaknesses. We should not try to get everyone to think or act the same. Instead, we should try to support the many different brains we have so that many different people can flourish.

Not everyone needs to act or live the same way. Success, happiness, and a good life may look different for different people. Neurodiversity advocacy says that people who are neurodivergent should get to find their own versions of success without trying to act or think like everyone else. That may be in school, at work, in relationships, and at home they do things differently, but that's ok.

Based on these ideas, neurodiversity advocates have worked to get civil rights and protections for neurodivergent people. They have also tried to make sure neurodivergent people are included in all parts of society, even when they act differently.

DEFINITIONS

- **Neurodivergent:** Someone whose brain/processing/thinking (neurology) is significantly different from what is typical. Society is not built with this person's neurology in mind.
- **Neurodiverse:** a group with a variety of neurotypes.
- **Neurotype:** The way someone's brain works (neurotypical, autistic, etc.)
- **Neuronormativity:** the ways that society expects someone to think, behave, and communicate. Neurotypicals generally act within neuronormative ways, but neurodivergent people struggle to.
- **Neurotypical:** Someone whose brain/processing/thinking (neurology) is within the typical range. This person can function within society without significant challenges from their neurology.