POPARD®

PROVINCIAL OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR AUTISM & RELATED DISORDERS

SUPPORTING

NEURODIVERSITY

IN

Schools

1. WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

"Neurodiversity" is a term that was coined by Australian sociologist, Judy Singer; first appearing in print in 1998. Neurodiversity is the concept that humans don't come in a one-size-fits-all neurologically "normal" package. Neurodiversity recognizes that all variations of human neurological function need to be respected as just another way of being, and that neurological differences like autism are the result of natural variations in the human genome. Neurodiversity is seen as a movement by many towards more equal treatment and more widespread acceptance for those on the autism spectrum, and with disabilities in general. The rainbow infinity sign is widely recognized as the symbol for neurodiversity (Singer, 1998).
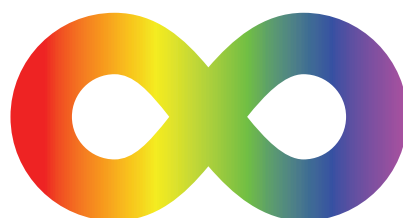
2. NEURODIVERSITY: THE ROLE OF EDUCATORS

○ Educators have an important role to play in making the benefits of neurodiversity more widely appreciated and in empowering different thinkers to contribute meaningfully in the school learning environment. Neurodiversity brings huge benefits to our learning communities when it is considered in the context of strengths, differences, and growth areas for all students. When educators acknowledge and teach from an inclusive perspective, all learners are supported to develop their unique strengths and capabilities.

3. HOW EDUCATORS CAN SUPPORT NEURODIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS

○ **Incorporate neurodivergent-friendly vocabulary into everyday classroom language**

● Avoid the term 'neurodiverse' being used as another way of saying "you're different from me, the neurotypical person." It is meant to mean "we are all different from each other". It should be used to celebrate human diversity.

Examples:
"All brains learn differently."
"Brains are constantly changing and growing."
"We all see things a bit differently."
"We all have different ways of making ourselves feel calm."
"We are not all good at the same things. We have different strengths and different stretches."

○ **Teach specific lessons about neurodiversity and inclusion to students of all ages**

● Bring the concept of different learners into your classroom so students can better understand their friends and peers.

Helpful resources:

Neurodiversity PowerPoints for Primary and Secondary
https://www.neurodiversityweek.com/powerpoint-presentations

Building Inclusive Classrooms With Your Neurodivergent Peers
https://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/sites/csesa.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/Peer-to-Peer%20Inclusive%20Classrooms%20with%20Neurodivergent%20Peers.pdf

Inclusive Picture Books (for Younger Students)
— "I'm Like You, You're Like Me" by Cindy Gainer (2013)
— "It's OK to be Different" by Sharon Purtill (2019)
— "Not Your Typical Dragon" by Dan Bar-el (2013)

Neurodiversity Comic Book (for Older Students)
https://www.neurodiversityweek.com/neurodiversity-comic-book

○ **Create learning environments that consider a wide range of preferences, accommodations, and support systems**

● Even with only a few neurodiverse students in your classroom, creating a safe and engaging learning environment will benefit all students.

Helpful tips:

Designing Learning for Autistic and Neurodiverse Students
http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/opentel/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Designing-learning-for-autistic-students-002-2.pdf

Universal and Essential Supports in BC Classrooms
https://blogsomemoore.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/universal-classroom-and-essential-supports-revised-aug2019.pdf

○ **Prevent bullying and address problems at the first signs**

● Inclusion and acceptance should be discussed with students of all ages before bullying is ever an issue. In instances where bullying has occurred, the focus should not only be on providing skills training for the victimized students. Rather, the focus should be on working to create inclusive environments for all.

Helpful resources:

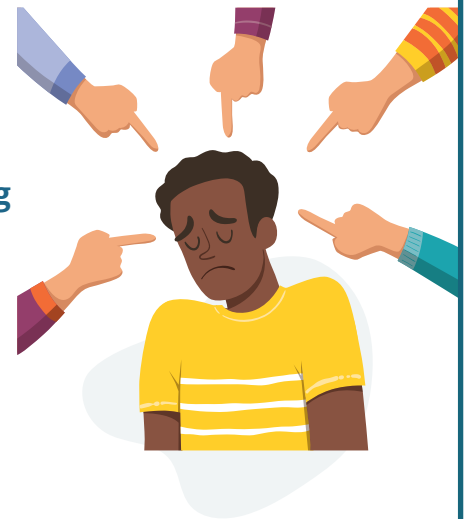ERASE Bullying, Embrace Kindness -
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase/bullying

PACER National Bullying Prevention Center -
https://www.pacer.org/bullying/classroom/

Open Parachute Resources -
https://courses.openparachuteschools.com/courses/ParentResources

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

VIDEO: What is Neurodiversity?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4stO8fTujE

CHECKLIST: Neurodiversity Strengths Checklist
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a88ab00f43b552a84c3b7c9/t/5fa1a911055a381f7a843429/1604430143083/5.+ND+SKILLS+CHECKLIST.pdf

POSTERS: Ed Wiley Autism Acceptance Lending Library – Neurodivergent Resources
https://neurodiversitylibrary.org/neurodivergent-narwhals/

BLOG: Neurodiversity in Education
https://www.learningscientists.org/blog/2021/6/25/digest-153

BLOG: Valuing Differences – Neurodiversity in the Classroom
https://kappanonline.org/rentenbach-prislovsky-gabriel-valuing-differences-neurodiversity-classroom/

BLOG: How to Create an Inclusive Learning Environment for Neurodiverse Students
https://blog.planbook.com/neurodiverse-students/

REFERENCES

Singer, J. (1998). *Odd people in: The birth of community amongst people on the autistic spectrum:* A personal exploration of a new social movement based on neurological diversity.
Unpublished thesis: Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, University of Technology, Sydney.