

Learning from Reviews

Neurodiversity

Information for Practitioners

Context



- A learning theme identified in a local safeguarding review highlighted the need for professionals working directly with families to ensure that verbal and non-verbal behaviour cues are analysed to help understand why children may be displaying challenging behaviour.
- Over the next few slides, we have provided some information and links to resources for you to find out more.

What is Neurodiversity?

- Neurodiversity is a way of saying that human brains are different to each other. This is a biological fact. No two brains (or nervous systems) are the same.
- Neurodiversity includes every single human being. Like biodiversity describes all life on Earth, neurodiversity describes the diversity of all human brains.
- There is no single or 'official' definition of neurodiversity. To understand the word, it can be broken into two parts:
 - **Neuro:** refers to the nervous system, i.e. the brain, spinal cord and nerves
 - **Diversity:** refers to variations or differences within a group.

What is Neurodivergence?

Neurodivergence means having a 'neurocognitive' experience (to do with how information is processed by the brain) that 'diverges' from (is different to) what is considered typical.

Neurodivergent people experience and react to the world differently to 'neurotypical' people.

Who is neurodivergent?

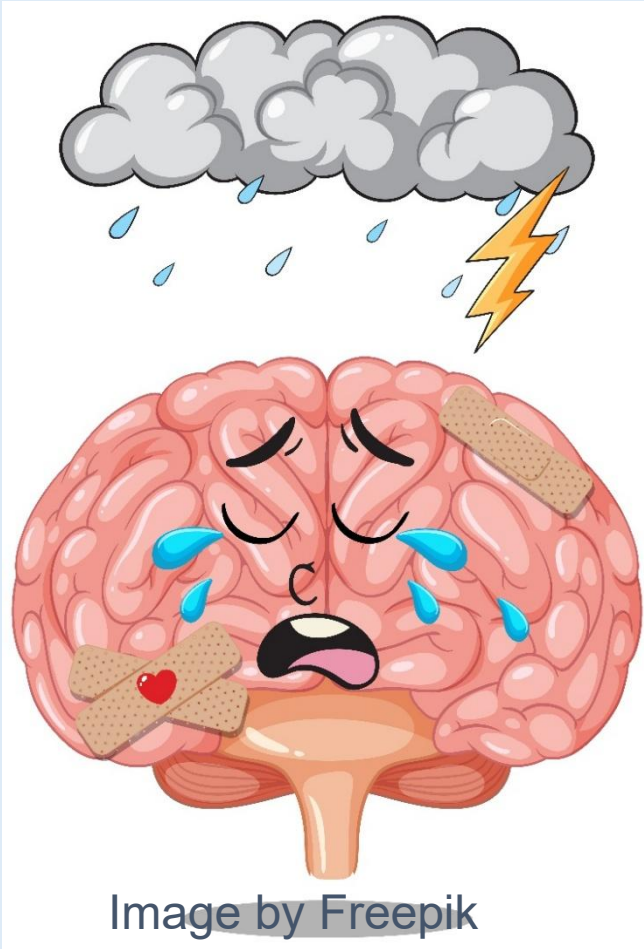
There is no agreed or 'official' list of who is considered neurodivergent. People have different views about which groups of people should be included. The neurodivergences most often talked about are:

- autism
- ADHD.

Some descriptions of neurodivergence also include:

- learning disabilities
- learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia)
- Tourette's syndrome
- epilepsy
- mental health problems (e.g. anxiety, depression, OCD, bipolar, schizophrenia, eating disorders)
- developmental conditions (e.g. developmental language disorder)
- brain injury.

Understanding the Link Between Trauma and Neurodiversity in Children



- Wigan Safeguarding Children's Partnership have a dedicated webpage to support professionals working with children and young people who may be neurodivergent and/or have experienced trauma.
- It brings together key insights, practical guidance, and reflective questions to help improve understanding and support and includes key considerations for practice.
- Access the webpage via this link: [Understanding the Links Between Trauma and Neurodiversity in Children](#)

Social Work Tools and Resources

There are some useful free resources on the Social Workers Toolbox website:

- What a Child's Behaviour Is Really Telling You Poster
- Communication Strips – A Visual Support Tool for Kids and Teens
- Neurodiversity
- Challenging behaviour



Swindon Resources/Services

Swindon Local Offer:

- Autism spectrum disorders
- SEND Local Offer - SOS! SEN
- SEND Local Offer - Additional Needs and Neurodiversity Youth Group
- **Step Swindon:** Home - Step Swindon
- **SIAS - SEND Information, Advice and Support:** [SEND Information, Advice and Support](#) free and accurate information, advice and support about SEND.
- **Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Together:** Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence - Your Health

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Resources

Recorded webinar:

- [Communicating Listening Beyond Words 151025](#)
- [Presentation slides – Part 1 A and B](#)
- [Presentation slides - Communicating Listening Beyond Words](#)
- [Visual aids to support communication](#)

“**Day in my life**” tools, written for the following children:

- [Day in my life – Unborn baby](#)
- [Day in my life – Baby](#)
- [Day in my life – Pre-school child](#)
- [Day in my life – Primary school aged child](#)
- [Day in my life – Adolescent](#)
- [Day in my life – Child with disabilities](#)
- This [guide](#) provides more information on how to use these tools.

Practice Briefs:

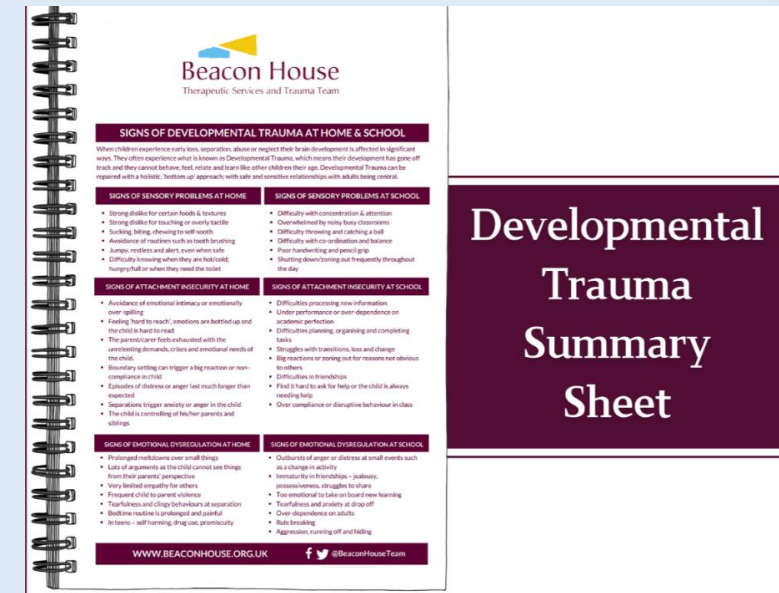
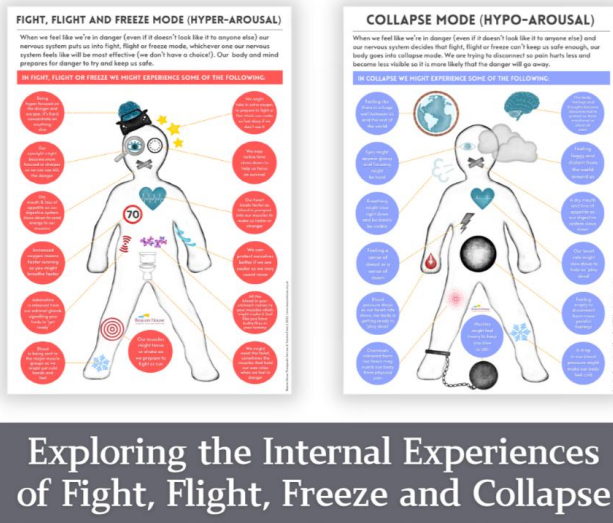
- [Capturing the voice of the child in records](#)
- [Trauma-informed practice learning from reviews](#)
- [Working with resistance or disguised compliance](#)

Webpage: [Professional curiosity](#)

SSP Training: [Working with resistant families](#)

Beacon House Resources

- Beacon House is a national specialist therapeutic service for young people, families and adults.
- They have a wide range of free resources so that knowledge about the healing of trauma and adversity.
- To view the resources available, click on this link: [Resources](#)



Primary School Survival Guide



What Survival Looks Like in Primary School

Information to support ACES, Trauma and Challenging Behaviour

Secondary School Survival Guide

What Survival Looks Like In Secondary School

© Mark Thorley & Helen Townsend



What Survival Looks Like in Secondary School

The survival guide documents are by inner world work and they provide free resources for carers and schools to support carers, teachers, and students.

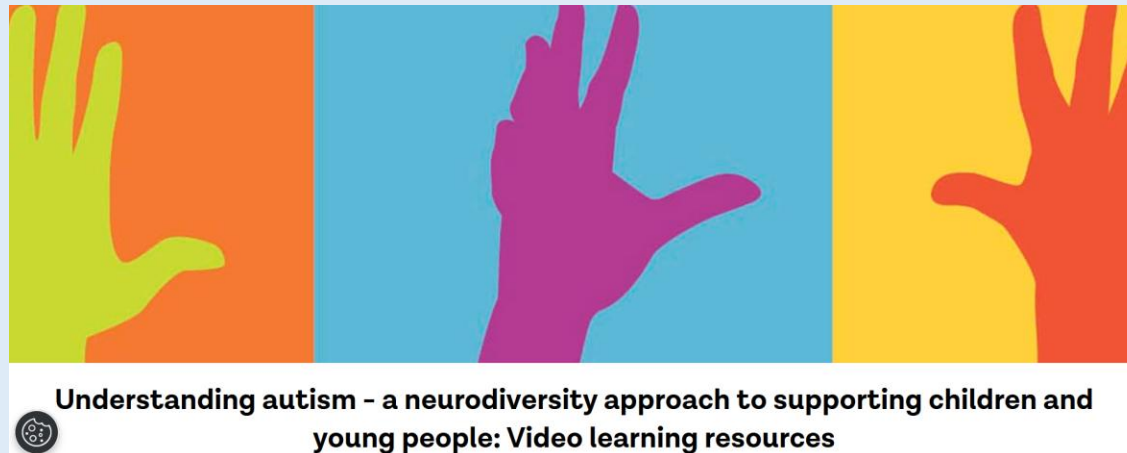
Access the resources on this webpage:

[Guides for Primary and Secondary - Help Children Live Better](#)

Additional information and resources can be found on [Help Children Live Better](#) website.

Research in Practice

- **Research in Practice:** Understanding autism - a neurodiversity approach to supporting children and young people: Video learning resources
- These short films explore the:
 - How concepts such as monotropism help us to understand autistic experiences.
 - Using a neurodiversity approach to ensure our practice and systems promote children and young people's own capacity to be authentically themselves.
 - Autistic masking and burnout.
 - Using the double empathy problem to myth bust the trope that autistic people lack empathy.
 - How we can change a person's environment, rather than asking them to change themselves.



Other Useful Resources

- **Mencap:** Challenging behaviour - Advice and Support
- **Social Care Wales:** Understanding challenging behaviour in children
- **NSPCC Learning:** How can we hear and facilitate the voice of the child? Practice points
- **The Effects of Psychological Trauma on Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: a Research Review.** Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 2(3), 287–299.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-015-0052-y>

Other Useful Resources

- **Ready to Relate:** Neurodivergence in parenting
- **National Autistic Society:** [Autism](#) and neurodiversity
- **Anna Freud:** Useful resources include:
 - A guide to neurodiversity in the early years
 - Self-Care Resources For Young People
 - Self-care for parents and carers
 - Resources For Professionals
- **The Brain Charity:** Neurodivergent, neurodiversity and neurotypical: a guide to the terms - Support for neurological conditions
- **The Neurodiversity Hub:** [Resources](#)
- [Cornwall's Neurodiversity Hub](#) may be useful for information/resources.

Neurodiversity and why physical, emotional or sexual abuse within a relationship may be difficult for neurodiverse people to identify

A survivor with a neurodivergence describes three ways in which physical, emotional or sexual abuse within a relationship may be difficult for neurodiverse people to identify. This includes dopamine seeking, gaslighting and intense connections.

You can read the full article on this webpage: [Neurodiversity and Abuse | Enhance the UK](#)

Dopamine Seeking

- When it comes to ADHD, we have lower levels of dopamine in our brains than neurotypical people. Dopamine is a hormone that controls many areas including memory and pleasure. When I form a new relationship, I crave the mental stimulation that I get from a new person.
- This, in the past, has made it very difficult to walk away from a relationship and risk losing that dopamine supply. It means that my brain can often gloss over the bad stuff to get to the good bits even if there are very few of them.
- Red flags at the start of a relationship can reveal a lot about what is to come. If you are getting serious warnings at the beginning then it can be really dangerous if your brain doesn't allow you to stop, process or leave. Abusers are often clever and can spot this. They may take your lack of acknowledgement as acceptance and may keep pushing the boundaries on what they can get away with.
- Dopamine seeking can also mean that we do not recognise red flags in sexual situations either. It can be difficult to recognise dangerous situations, stop or ask yourself if you truly consent. We may also say yes in order to for fear of losing the person we get this stimulation from.

Gaslighting

- When a person tries to get you to question their reality, memory or perceptions. It may be difficult for neurodivergent people to recognise when someone might be trying to change details, memories or events to control them.
- The reason for this may be that neurodivergent people can struggle with low self-esteem and be extra vulnerable as a result. We can often hear negative messages about ourselves while growing up which can have a lasting effect on our confidence levels as an adult.
- The immediate start of gaslighting in a relationship may feel more like hyper-acceptance from a partner which can become control over time. I struggle with my memory as a result of my ADHD, thanks to the lower dopamine levels, so it's easy for me to forget details. Partners could easily use this to change small details without my noticing. The memory issues are mostly harmless, although annoying when I lose my keys, but they can be dangerous if a person is repeatedly changing the narrative in their favour.
- As a neurodivergent person, I tend to overshare which can also provide a lot of information for people about me. While most partners take this as a way to get to know me, albeit, in a short space of time, some may store the information for use at another time. This is where the devil can use the details you have told them, and then forgotten you've told them, to make gaslighting seem even more real.

Intense connections

- Abusers can be incredibly manipulative and able to exploit a vulnerability. One of the ways this can manifest is through love bombing.
- Love bombing can be excessive attention, admiration, and affection from someone often at the start of a relationship. If we, as neurodivergent people, have lower self-esteem and confidence, this can masquerade as acceptance.
- It can be difficult to leave if you believe that this is the only person who accepts you or is affectionate towards you. Often abusers can separate a person from friends or family through gaslighting or other methods so you may feel the connection more intensely because they are the only person you feel understands.
- As an ADHD person, I struggle to form boundaries with people where I can recognise where I need to safeguard myself. I have very intense friendships and relationships as a result. The intensity of the connection, lack of boundaries, pleasure and reward-seeking mean it is very difficult to walk away.
- When it comes to sexual abuse, we can often mistake intensity for acceptance. Neurodivergent people can be too trusting and struggle to read a situation or social cues. This can place us in difficult situations or around dangerous people with no idea how to get out. To be accepted, we may find ourselves saying yes to things we don't understand or want to take part in.

Additional Resources

- [The Link Between Neurodiversity & Domestic Abuse – 3SC](#)
- [Autistic Guide to Healthy Relationships - Durham University](#)
- Read the [Autistic Guide to Healthy Relationships - full version](#)
- Read the [Autistic Guide to Healthy Relationships - easy read version](#)
- <https://somersestdomesticabuse.org.uk/am-i-being-abused/neurodiverse-people-and-domestic-abuse/>

Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training

- The training is named after Oliver McGowan whose death shone a light on the need for health and social care staff to have better skills, knowledge and understanding of the needs for autistic people and people with a learning disability.
- 18-year-old Oliver had mild hemiplegia, focal partial epilepsy, a mild learning disability and was autistic. He died in November 2016 after he was given antipsychotic medication, even though he and his family warned it could be harmful. His death was determined to be “avoidable” by an independent review.
- The Health and Care Act 2022 introduced a requirement that all regulated CQC registered service providers must ensure their staff receive training on learning disability and autism that is appropriate to their role. The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism is the Government’s preferred and recommended training for health and social care staff to undertake.

Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training

You can find out more by clicking on the links below:

- [The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism \(youtube.com\)](#)
- [The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism | NHS England | Workforce, training and education \(hee.nhs.uk\)](#)
- [The Oliver McGowan Mandatory training on learning disability and autism | Local Government Association](#)

Additional Resources - Autism Training Videos

The majority of people involved in the videos are neurodivergent.

- Please click on the link below to view the recording. Best viewed in Microsoft Edge):
- [Sensory overwhelm leading to emotional distress 1 - YouTube](#) (Duration 21 minutes)
- [Masking autistic women present differently to autistic men - YouTube](#) (Duration 22 minutes)
- [Anxiety, depression, and suicide Alexithymia not recognising emotions inc titles –](#)
- [YouTube](#) (Duration 30 minutes)
- [Autistic communication and how to ask the right questions don't assume 3rd Cut – YouTube](#) (Duration 52 minutes)
- [Menopause 3rd Cut – YouTube](#) (Duration 6 minutes)
- [The importance of diagnosis understanding inc titles - YouTube](#) (understanding autism, including diagnosis, the risks, anxiety and how autism present in females). (Duration 38 minutes)

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Those Involved in the Autism Training Videos:

- **Dr Febin Basheer (General Practitioner) – Victoria Cross GP Practice, Swindon**
- **Mark Berry (Autistic professional)** – short interview about his medical experiences as an autistic older adult
- **Dr Judy Eaton – Consultant Clinical Psychologist**
- **Deborah Wortman - Psychotherapist**
- **Libby Hill - Consultant Specialist Speech and Language Therapist** – communication differences, and the best approaches to communicating with autistic patients
- **Dr Liz O’Nions (Post-doctoral research fellow, University College London)** – recent research into Autistic older adults
- **Cathie Long (Autistic professional & Independent Social Worker)** – post-diagnosis mid-life, “It’s not just a label”.
- **Laura Wyles** – Registered General Nurse
- **Dr Jessica Eccles** - Consultant Psychiatrist Sussex Neurodevelopmental Service and Clinical Senior Lecturer, Brighton & Sussex Medical School.
- **Sarah Carolan** -, Senior Commissioning Manager at NHS Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board - co-produced & edited the films and applied for the HEE funding.