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## Introduction to Neurodiversity

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### About Inspire

Inspire Community Outreach Inc. is an incorporated non-profit social services charity providing evidence and culturally informed, family-centered education and programming, designed to meet the needs of those living with mental health issues and neurological/cognitive differences.

**Charity # 830697231RR0001**

Our **mission** at Inspire Community Outreach Inc. is to support the mental health of children, youth, and families.

Our **vision** is the development of a community that supports children, youth and families to recognize and celebrate their strengths and potential, and that puts them in touch with resources that benefit their overall well being.

### Connecting with us

Please see our website at [www.inspirecommunityoutreach.ca](http://www.inspirecommunityoutreach.ca) to see how we can help, or call 204-996-1547.

### Who is this made for?

This is for those caring for and/or living with neurodiversities. We see you and understand the unique challenges, as well as incredible strengths this entails. This manual is for anyone interested in learning more information about neurodiversity and autism.

**Important to know**

You may learn some things below that are unfamiliar or feel hard. We understand that it is important to have compassion for ourselves, especially when looking back to times where we didn't have the information we have today. We are all learning and won't come to a day where we have all the answers. We all do the best that we can with what we know, and the good news is that we will have opportunities to learn throughout our lives.

**Introduction to Neurodiversity****Defining Neurodiversity**

Neurodiversity understands that neurological differences are a “normal and natural variation in the human genome” (Robison, 2013). Specifically, we believe that we have

a responsibility to understand differences and celebrate diversity for individuals whose “neurological predispositions are not typical” (McGee, 2012).

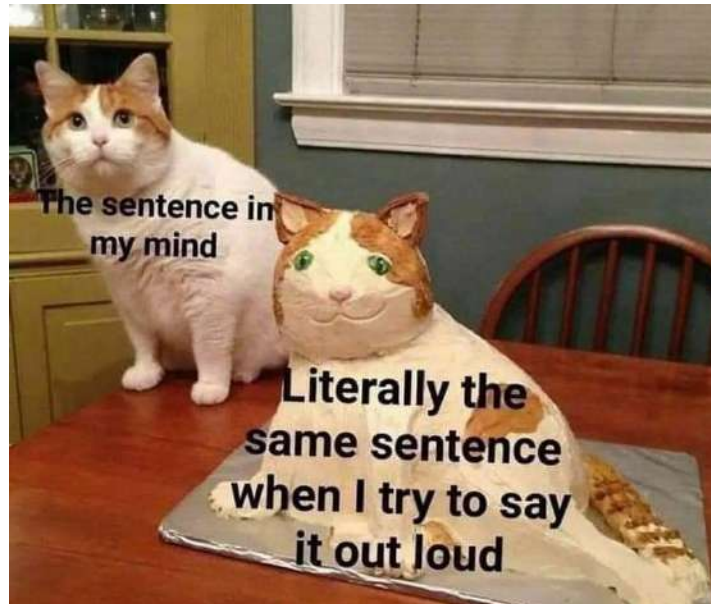
## Terms

*Exceptional-* An exceptional child is one who is different in both easy and hard ways, in comparison to the average child in mental, physical, emotional and social characteristics to an extent where special educational services are needed (Heward, 2012).

*Complex-* Combination of physical, intellectual, health, behavioural, emotional and welfare needs along a continuum of complexity which often challenges the social, educational and health structures available to support them (Whitehurst, 2010).

*Neurodiverse-* Diverse neurologies are normal variations within the human genome and include ADHD, Autism, and Dyslexia (Disabled World, 2020). Brain wiring that is different or atypical when compared to the average population (Eusebio, 2018).

*Neurocomplex-* Umbrella term includes neurodiversity, or the neurological differences we live with, as considered by neurologists, our personal experience as we live with differences, as well as the world’s reaction and treatment of us (Taylor, 2021).



## Strengths Neurodiversity

- *Dyslexia-* Good spatial knowledge. Many of the world’s top architects and designers have dyslexia. Business entrepreneurs- Thomas Edison & Steve Jobs

within

- *ADHD*- Energetic and successful at work, school, and sports. Studies show people with ADHD can become hyper focused and will complete an assignment until it's done.
- *Anxiety*- Built-in warning system. Although it can be frustrating, there also is a purpose to anxiety! Strong leadership and people who are anxious can consider all the possible outcomes.
- *Autism*- Concrete thinking: Math, computer, musical, artistic skills. Can think in a visual way.

## **Understanding Brain Differences**

- Neuro-typical and neurodiverse brains each have gifts. The gifts of a neurodiverse brain must be balanced by things we are not good at.
- A complex brain has **variable development**.
- Multiple differences: Mental health, neurological and cognitive differences interact to create a more complex brain and sensitivities/differences.

## **Variable Development**

A neurologically diverse brain is not necessarily developing smoothly and evenly as typically-wired brains do. In regards to cognitive ability, many things have been said about who is and who isn't intelligent. As measured with standardized intelligence tests, our cognitive ability is considered to be stable over time in normal school-age children.

## **What Does This Mean?**

Children hit specific milestones at certain ages, whereas neurodiverse children more often have varied patterns of development within their developmental domains

Learning to balance the strengths and challenges associated with being wired differently  
Lightbulb moments - where people with neurodiversity make a developmental leap in a relatively short amount of time.

## **Some Challenges:**

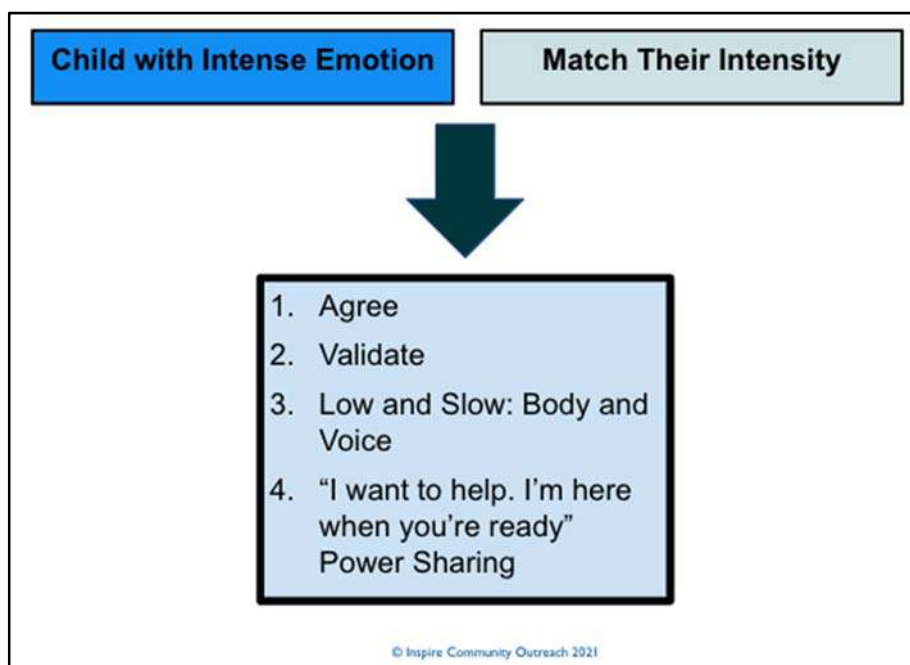
1. Expectations for children are often that of an adult: Self-regulating, using verbal communication. This part of their brain is not yet developed.
2. We tend to focus on the behaviours that frustrate or confuse us instead of the child's needs that are not being met.
3. Behaviour is information and an expression of a root cause. There is always a good reason even if the child or those around them don't understand it yet.

## **Supporting Those with Neurodiversities**

When we are calm and regulated we will be better able to help our child become calm and regulated. Our response is important.

## Helpful Responses

1. Low and Slow Technique
2. Agree, validate and provide choices (AVP)
  - a. First/then
  - b. Yes, when
3. Soothing ourselves to help soothe the child's nervous system
  - a. Curiosity
  - b. Knowledge/understanding



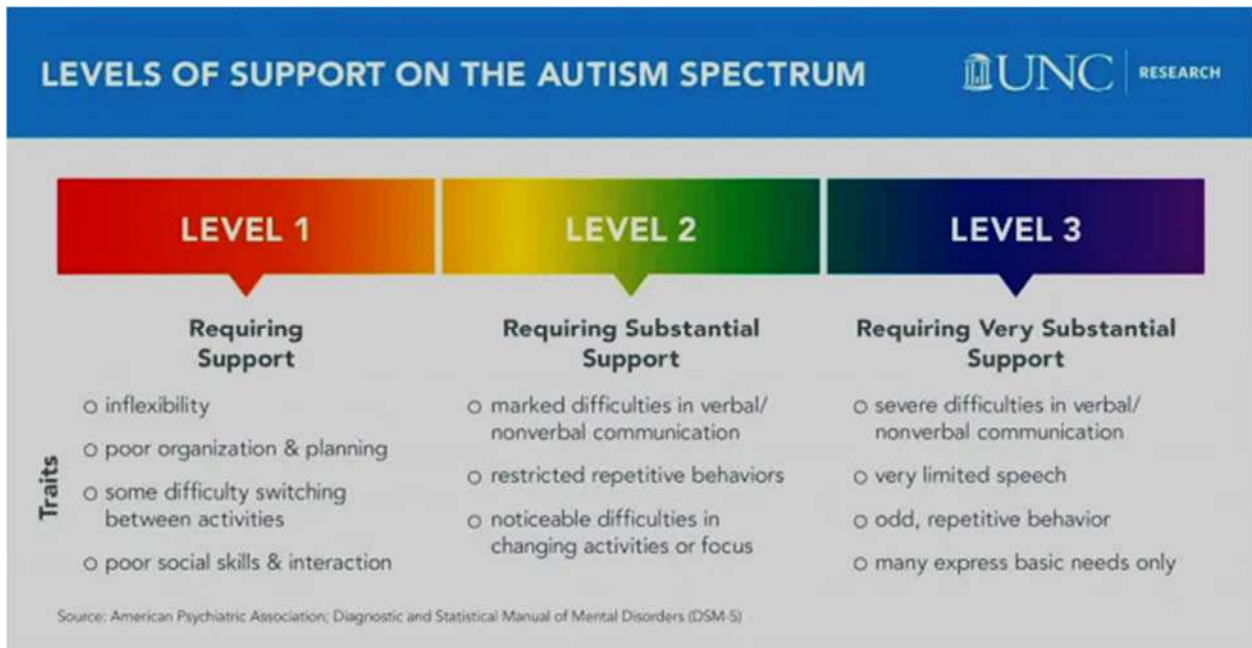
## Building on Positive Attachment

1. Let them see your delight in them
2. Be close by
3. Invite them to depend on you
4. Connect before directing
5. Decide for them
6. Be on their side

## Calming Activities

Make a list (visuals are great) of calming activities with the child. Examples include, a soft blanket, drawing, LEGO building, a walk outside, music, being near animals, etc.

# Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



## **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

### **Strengths:**

- Honest
- Persistent
- Pure emotions
- Innovative and think outside the box
- Do not put up with the status quo

### **Challenges:**

- Confusion
- Sensory sensitive
- Seeking belonging

### **Outsider's Experience:**

- Developmental challenges
- Understanding
- Intense

### **Connection**

Connection can be hard due to several factors

- Rejection sensitivity
- Misunderstandings are common: need for clarity versus “being difficult”
- Impatience on part of the listener
- Social or relational differences

We prefer to receive care in many ways, and often. Words and actions need to match.

Deep connection can be hard for the neurocomplex to get to, unless the person we are with offers and invites us; this tells us we are safe.

→ Careful: interpreting our actions as selfish, and that there is no good reason for how we feel (we are just being needy) can be a trigger.



## Further Reading/Resources

### Books for Caregivers

Hold On to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than Peers - Dr Gabor Mate  
Scattered Minds: The Origins and Healing of ADD - Dr Gabor Mate  
The Five Love Languages of Children - Dr. Gary Chapman and Dr. Ross Campbell  
Full Catastrophic Living – Jon Kabat Zinn  
A Path with heart – Jack Kornfield  
Peace is every step – Thich Nhat Hanh  
Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames - Thich Nhat Hanh  
When things fall apart: Heart advice for difficult times. – Pema Chodron  
How to talk so your kids will listen by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlich  
The Whole Brain Child - Dr. Daniel Siegel  
The Explosive Child - Dr. Ross Greene  
Differently Wired: Raising an Exceptional Child in a Conventional World - Deborah Reber  
Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism- Barry Prizant  
An Early Start for Your Child with Autism: Using Everyday Activities to Help Kids Connect, Communicate, and Learn - Sally Rogers  
Helping Your Child with Language-Based Learning Disabilities: Strategies to Succeed in School and Life with Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, ADHD, and Processing Disorders - Daniel Franklin  
Aspergirls: Empowering Females with Asperger Syndrome - Ruby Simone  
My Baby Rides the Short Bus: The Unabashedly Human Experience of Raising Kids with Special Needs - Denise Brodey  
The Out-of-sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder - Carol Kranowitz  
The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain - Thomas Armstrong  
The Real Experts: Reading for Parents of Autistic Children - Michelle Sutton  
Too Loud, Too Bright, Too Fast, Too Tight: What to Do If You Are Sensory Defensive in an Overstimulating World - Sharon Heller  
The Power of Arts: Creative Strategies for Exceptional Learners - S. Smith  
The Gift of ADHD: How to Transform Your Child's Problems into Strengths - Lara Honos-Webb  
Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Strength-based Strategies to Help Students with Special Needs Succeed in School and Life - Thomas Armstrong

### Educational Resources

Autism 101 Online Course:

<https://www.autism-society.org/autism-101-online-course/>

Resilience Booster Tip Tool:

<https://www.apa.org/topics/parenting/tip-tool-brochure.pdf>

Mindfulness Exercises: <http://www.spring.org.uk/2014/04/mindfulness-meditation-8-quick-exercises-that-easily-fit-into-your-day.php>

The Art of Mindful Living Techniques:

<http://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/>

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) Digital Therapeutic Course:

<http://bemindful.co.uk/>

Anxiety Management-Calm Breathing Techniques: <http://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/how-teach-your-child-calm-breathing>

Guided Meditation for Children:

[www.annakaharris.com/mindfulness-for-children/](http://www.annakaharris.com/mindfulness-for-children/)

### **Books For Younger Children**

All Kinds of Minds, Inspire Community Outreach

Frog's Breathtaking Speech... Michael Chissick and Sarah Peacock

When Sophie Gets Angry- Really, Really Angry - Molly Bang

My Many Coloured Days - Dr Seuss

Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids - Carol McLeod

How Are You Peeling? Foods with Moods - Saxton Freymann

Visiting Feelings: Lauren Rubenstein

### **Mindfulness-Based Books for Children**

Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children - Thich Nhat Hanh

Ahn's Anger – Gail Silver

Moody Cow Meditates – Kerry Lee Mac Lean

What does it mean to be present – Rana DiOrio

No Ordinary Apple: A Story about Eating Mindfully – Sara Marlowe

A Boy and a Bear: The Children's Relaxation Book - Lori Lite (Ages 3-10)

Peaceful Piggy Meditation - Kerry Lee MacLean

### **Resources for All Children**

Mindfulness Exercises:

[www.youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises](http://www.youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises)

Mindfulness Techniques for Teens: <http://leftbrainbuddha.com/teaching-mindfulness-to-teens-5-ways-get-buy/>

Games to Help Build Self-Regulation in 3-5 Year Olds: <https://nurtureandthriveblog.com/my-favorite-games-for-self-regulation/>

Helping Children Learn How to Handle Big Emotions: <http://childhood101.com/2015/03/helping-children-manage-big-emotions/>

### **How Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Children's Learning Development**

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Persistent-Fear-and-Anxiety-Can-Affect-Young-Childrens-Learning-and-Development.pdf>

## **About Inspire Community Outreach**

Inspire Community Outreach (Inspire) is an incorporated non-profit social services charity providing evidence and culturally informed, family-centered education and programming,

designed to meet the needs of those living with mental health issues and neurological/cognitive differences.

At Inspire, we **support youth and families with unique challenges, while celebrating strength**. Programs are designed to meet the needs of those living with mental health issues or neurological/cognitive differences. Inspire's support is created by the community; from children who grew up with differences, families that include children with differences, and evidence from a clinical perspective.

**Compassion. Inclusion. Education.**

## About the Founder

**Angela Taylor** is our Founder and CEO. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Manitoba, with a major in Psychology and a minor in Sociology and a Post Bacc in Education, focusing on inclusion. She has her Master's in Disability Studies from the University of Manitoba and is currently completing her PhD in complex families and wraparound care. She is a Mental Health and Accessibility Expert with an eclectic therapeutic approach that includes attachment, cognitive behaviour therapy, positive psychology and CPS model (Collaborative & Proactive Solutions) supports.

### We'd love to hear from you!



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