

Parenting Exceptional Children

A strengths-based approach to raising autistic, ADHD and other neurodivergent children.

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Exceptional Children

Children who **think, communicate and experience** the world **differently.....**

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A Note on Language...

“Neurodivergent” or “Neurodiverse” or “Neurodistinct”

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Neurodivergent Diagnoses

- About 20% of all children are neurodivergent (ND).
- The majority do not have a formal diagnosis.
- Great overlap between ND conditions.
- Many ND children meet the criteria for more than one. For example, an estimated 50% to 70% of children with autism also meet the criteria for ADHD.
- ND children experience higher rates of physical health and mental health problems:

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Neurodivergent Conditions

ND children often have many other profiles and conditions

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A Neurodiversity Affirming, Strengths-Based Approach

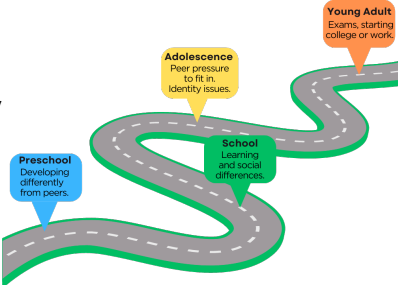
- A shift away from pathologising autism, adhd and other ND conditions.
- Neurodivergence comes with strengths as well as challenges.
- Many challenges for ND people caused by society and environment.
- Providing appropriate accomodations to ND people to meet their needs.
- Embracing neurodiversity as beneficial for humankind.

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The Parent Journey

Raising a neuro-distinct child can feel like a journey with many milestones...



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Understanding Your Child

As a parent, the most important thing you can do is to understand your child:

- Appreciate their strengths.
- Compassionately understand their needs.

Goal is to love, accept and compassionately understand your child ... so they understand, accept and love themselves.




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Double Empathy Challenge

It is more difficult to understand someone who feels and thinks differently to us.


- Neuro-distinct people can find it hard to understand neurotypical people and vice versa.
- Two neuro-distinct people can also find it hard to understand one another if 'distinctly' different.



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Appreciate your child's strengths


-	+	
Hyperactive/ always on go.	Great energy, drive and enthusiasm	
Overtalks and becomes obsessed with certain subjects	Has deep interests and passions/ becomes an expert in a subject	
Says wrong thing/ Rude and blunt	Direct and honest / does not tell lies	
'Too much'/ Loud'	High energy, fun, life and soul of party	
Impulsive	Takes risks/ tries new things	
Won't do what they are told	Independent, values autonomy, sets own boundaries	

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Question

Please share in chat

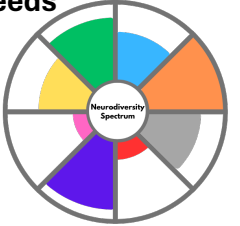
- What are your child's strengths?
- What are the strengths they have related to being ND?



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Understand your child's needs


ND children have a spectrum on needs
Most have a 'spikey profile'



- ▶ Communication and Social
- ▶ Executive Function
- ▶ Attention and Interests
- ▶ Impulsivity and Energy
- ▶ Sensory Differences
- ▶ Repetitions/Tics/Stims
- ▶ Emotional Processing
- ▶ Health and Physical

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Communication and Social

- How does your child **communicate** with you?
- How do they get on with others **socially**?
- Are they 'high energy/ impulsive' socially or 'reserved/ awkward'?

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Executive Function

- How does your child plan and organise themselves?
- How do they start and complete tasks?
- Are they a 'perfectionist' or 'disorganised'?

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Attention and Interests

- What subjects and activities capture your child's interest?
- What do they find hard to pay attention to?

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Health and Physical

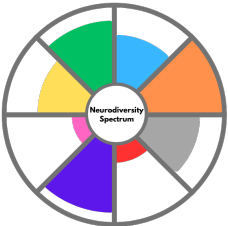
- Does your child have health and physical needs?
- What specific supports might they need for these?
- How do they manage stress? Do they experience burnout?

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A Spectrum of Needs

Most ND children have a 'spikey profile.'

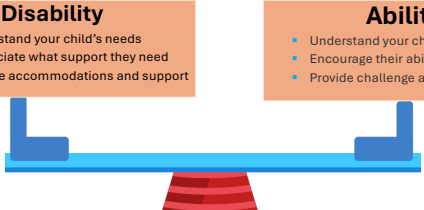


Communication and Social	Sensory Differences
Executive Function	Repetitions/Tics/Stims
Attention and Interests	Emotional Processing
Impulsivity and Energy	Health and Physical

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Parenting Getting the Balance Right



Disability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand your child's needs Appreciate what support they need Provide accommodations and support 	Ability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand your child's strengths Encourage their ability Provide challenge and opportunity
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Take a Break...


Think about all the different needs your child might have...

- Which of their needs are under-appreciated or not noticed?
- Which needs do you think they **need some support** with?

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Neurodiversity and the Family


Neuro-distinct children are much more likely to have neuro-distinct parents, siblings or extended family.



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Sensory Differences



- What sensory experiences does your child **like**?
- What sensory experiences do they find **distressing**?
- How do your **own sensory preferences** differ from your child's?

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How Many Senses Are There?

There are the five external senses:

- SMELL** (Nose)
- VISION** (Eye)
- HEARING** (Ear)
- TOUCH** (Hand)
- TASTE** (Tongue)

There are also three internal senses:

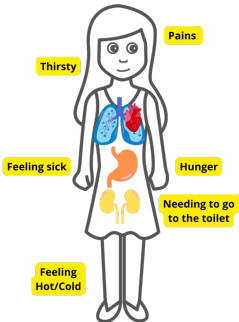
- VIBRATION** (Vestibular/Balance): This allows us to notice any change in position or movement of the head. It helps us maintain our balance.
- PROPRIOCEPTION** (Proprioceptive/Movement): This tells us where our body is in space. It allows us to judge what force and pressure is needed to carry out tasks.
- INTUITION** (Interoceptive/Internal Feelings): This allows us to feel what is happening inside our bodies (hunger, pain) and to notice our emotional states.

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Interoception: The most important sense?

Many neuro-distinct children are hyper- or hypo-sensitive to their **internal body states** e.g. temperature, hunger, pain.



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Tuning In To Your Child's Sensory World

- Julie finds **tags** and **seams** on clothes intensely irritating. Her parents cut them off.
- Peter sleeps better when he uses a **heavy blanket** and **night light**.
- Joe needs to keep his hands active when studying. Using a **fidget spinner** or a **squeeze ball** helps.
- Light touches make Aoife flinch. She prefers **deeper hugs**.
- Grace has a strong aversion to the **smells** in certain **food shops** and can feel sick.
- Going swimming is a nightmare for Dan. He hates being **damp** and **cold** in the changing room.

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Many Neuro-distinct Strengths Flow From Having a Unique Sensory World...

Robert is attuned to **sounds in nature** and can distinguish various bird calls.

Darragh loves cooking. He can discern **flavours and tastes**. It's a wonderful sensory experience for him.

Painting is Sarah's passion. Her **unique perception of colour** and texture allows her to really express herself.

Roisin enjoys herbal tea. She can distinguish between dozens of different types.


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Sensory Regulation

- Relaxing and rebalancing the sensory system, especially when **over-stimulated** or **agitated**.
- Energising the sensory system when you are **under-responsive** or **need to focus**.


Sensory regulation is:




Stimming – sensory habits e.g. pacing, hand rubbing, hair twirling.



Rest and relaxation or **exercise and movement**.



Engaging in passions and **special interests**.




Positive sensory experiences.

- What works for each person is different, find out what works for **your child**.

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Reflective Exercise




- What is your child's **favourite sensory experience** that they really enjoy?
- How does your child **self-regulate** when distressed?

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The Importance of Connection

Good parenting is primarily about establishing warm connected relationships and this is no different for neurodivergent children.



You want your child to feel:

- understood, affirmed** and **loved** by you.
- listened to** and that they can **communicate** with you about anything.
- that you are their **ally**, on their side and there for them no matter what.
- that you are a **safe** person for them.

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Blocks to Communication

ND children frequently experience blocks to connected relationships with their parents.

- > Sometimes, children are so stressed by sensory overload, school and outside world that this leads to challenging meltdowns at home.
- > Sometimes parent feels hurt by child's behaviour or get angry in response.
- > Sometimes, child communicates differently or has different passions to their parent.
- > Sometimes, parents feel their role is to correct their child's different behaviours which sets you up as a critical parent.

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Daily Moments

- What do you **enjoy doing most** with your children?
- When do you have the **best chats**?
- When do you **connect** most to your child?

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Creating a Connected Relationship

- Making sure you have **daily connecting times** when you enjoy each other's company.
- Learning to **pause** and reduce the times you communicate negatively to your children.
- Make it your priority to **connect**.
- Adjust your expectations. Let go of pressures and prioritise your **relationship**.



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Building Unique Connections



- **Join in an activity that your child really enjoys** - playing games, shopping, penalties, craft.
- **Take an interest in one of your child's passions** - video games, music, films, craft, sport.
- **Let your child teach you** - video games, a craft, dance, hairstyle.
- **Teach them something they want to learn** - cooking, magic trick, make-up, grow food, skim stones.
- **Learn something new together** - attend a course, watch videos, read books together or in parallel.
- **Go somewhere together** - visit a friend, relative, go for a meal, sporting event on a walk together.
- **Build rituals** - daily crosswords, bedtime reading, daily cycle.
- **Plan family projects that interest them** - design/repair/build/decorate together.
- **Go on a day-long adventure** - camp out, hike, fishing.

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