VME VOCATIONAL MENTORING EXCHANGE

2023 Mentor Training
Engaging and supporting Neurodiverse Young People

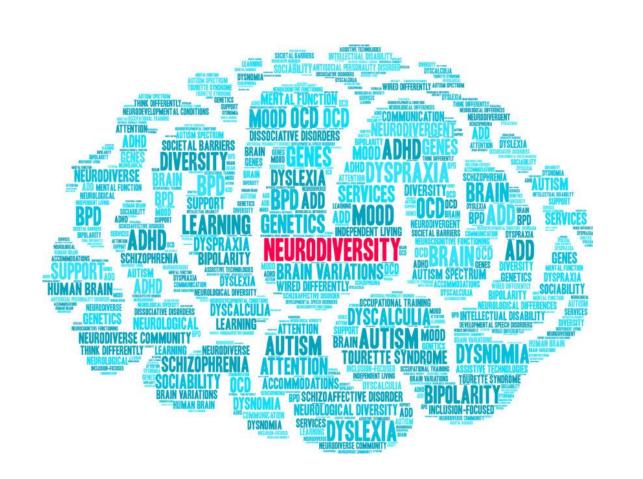# Training Overview

What is Neurodiversity?

An overview of the main conditions

Top tips for supporting neurodiverse young people

Why employ a neurodiverse person?

Additional resources

Strategies for engaging all young people

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What is Neurodiversity?

- A word used to explain the unique ways people's brains work.

- While everyone's brain develops similarly, no two brains function just alike.

- Being neurodivergent means having a brain that works differently from the average or "neurotypical" person.

- This may be differences in social preferences, ways of learning, ways of communicating and/or ways of perceiving the environment.

Source:
https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/23154-neurodivergent

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Did you know?

Many household names are open about their differences – which in many cases have inspired and fuelled their achievements …

- **Susan Boyle,** singer – **Asberger's**

- **Simone Biles,** Olympic gymnast – **ADHD**

- **Jamie Oliver,** TV chef and campaigner **Dyslexia**

- **Albert Einstein,** theoretical physicist – **Dyslexia**

- **Elton John,** singer/songwriter – **Epilepsy**

- **Billie Eilish,** singer – **Tourette's**

- **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,** composer – **Tourette's**

- **Daniel Radcliffe,** actor – **Dyspraxia**

- **Elon Musk,** tech billionaire – **Asperger's**

Neurodiverse people make up about 12% of Australians, but they are often underrepresented and misunderstood in the workplace.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *March 2023*

What conditions does Neurodiversity include?

- **Autism spectrum disorder** (this includes what was once known as **Asperger's syndrome**)

- **Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**

- **Down syndrome**

- **Dyscalculia** (difficulty with maths)

- **Dysgraphia (difficulty with writing)**

- **Dyslexia** (difficulty with reading)

- **Dyspraxia (difficulty with coordination)**

- **Intellectual disabilities**

- Mental health conditions like **bipolar disorder**, **obsessive-compulsive disorder** and more

- **Prader-Willi syndrome**

- **Sensory processing disorders**

- **Severe Behaviour Disorder (SBD)**

- Social anxiety (a specific type of **anxiety disorder**)

- **Tourette syndrome**

- **Williams syndrome**

Source: Cleveland Clinic

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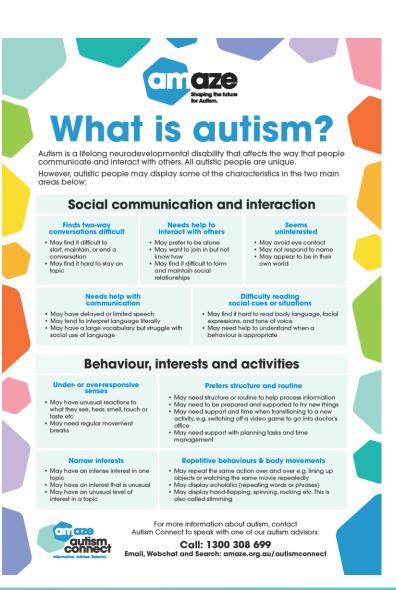
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability that affects the way that people communicate and interact with others. All autistic people are unique.

Around **1 in 100 Australians** is autistic.

Autistic people may have:
- challenges with communicating and interacting with others
- repetitive and different behaviours, moving their bodies in different ways
- strong interest in one topic or subject
- unusual reactions to what they see, hear, smell, touch or taste
- preferences for routines and dislike change.

Source: https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/English_What-Is-Autism.pdf

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
Helpful Tips

1. Structure

Rules, schedules, timetables, checklists, task-based activities, and concise questioning can all help provide a structured environment that will aid decision making and enhance task focus.
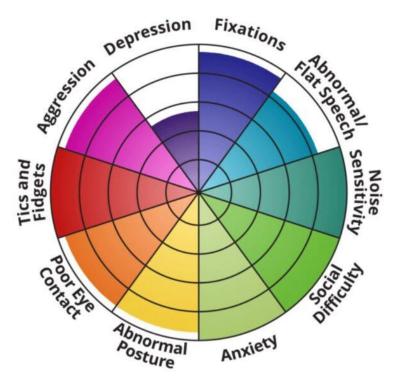
2. Meaningful communication

Sometimes words can be very difficult for an autistic person as they tend to be **visual thinkers**. If unsure, check that what you have communicated has been understood. Use Who, What, When, Where, and How to establish context.

3. Predictability

Introduce change in a clear and concrete manner and give constant reassurance. The person's ability to generalise skills from one environment to another may not be well developed, so don't assume a learned skill will be transferred.

Autism Spectrum:
It's a circle, not a line.

Depression, Fixations, Abnormal/Flat Speech, Noise Sensitivity, Social Difficulty, Anxiety, Abnormal Posture, Poor Eye Contact, Tics and Fidgets, Aggression

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Helpful Tips Cont'd

4. Manageability

It is important for Autistic people that **tasks are broken down into manageable steps with realistic goals**. Be aware that a persons' behaviour usually has a purpose, so look for the motivation, incentive, or reward that is available to them. Praise successful outcomes. Be mindful of the person's stress level.

5. Positive Support

Autistic people can have **low self-esteem**, so it's important they feel supported. It can be more effective to use a reward system for good behaviour, rather one for bad behaviour.

6. Mutual Trust

Autistic people **need to trust the people who are helping them interpret their environment.** Showing respect for the person and confidence in your ability can help them feel more comfortable in the environment.

Source: https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Creating-a-positive-environment-for-autistic-people.pdf2023FINAL.pdf

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

A complex neuro-developmental disorder which affects a person's ability to exert age-appropriate self-control.

Characterised by persistent patterns of inattentive, impulsive, and sometimes hyperactive behaviour, and is frequently accompanied by emotional regulation challenges.

An impaired ability to inhibit and regulate attention, behaviour and emotions; to reliably recall information in the moment; to plan and problem solve; to self-reflect and self-monitor; and to self-soothe.

See **ADHD Myth v Fact Factsheet**

Source: ADHD Australia https://www.adhdaustralia.org.au/about-adhd/

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
Continued

ADHD, previously known as ADD, affects around **one in twenty Australians,** which is **over 1.2 million people**

Around 1 in 20 Australian children have ADHD

Co-existing conditions include: Autism spectrum disorder, anxiety, depression, learning disabilities, obsessive compulsive disorder, sensory processing disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder.

ADHD, like ASD, is on a spectrum and everyone presents differently

3 types of ADHD – Inattentive, Hyperactive and Combination

Positives
- **Empathetic, energetic, spontaneous, creative, intuitive, imaginative, inventive, innovative, enthusiastic, can hyper focus on interests, adventurous**

Negatives
- Easily distracted, inattentive, forgetful, trouble listening, disorganised, talkative, difficult sleeping, day dreaming, hyperactive, poor time management, low frustration tolerance

Source: ADHD Australia   https://www.adhdaustralia.org.au/about-adhd/

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is an unexpected and persistent challenge with acquiring and using written language.

Individuals with dyslexia have trouble with reading and spelling despite having the ability to learn. Individuals with dyslexia can learn, they just learn in a different way.

Often these individuals, who have talented and productive minds, are said to have a language learning difference.

- **It is highly hereditary**
- **Estimated to affect approx. 10% of Australians**
- Difference in the way the brain processes
- Challenges in the development of phonological awareness

Dyslexia occurs on a continuum from mild to severe and no two are alike.

There is no cure for dyslexia since it is a brain-based difference but with intervention, there are now some great outcomes

Source: Australian Dyslexia Association *https://dyslexiaassociation.org.au/support/*

ada Australian Dyslexia Association

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Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is an <u>anxiety disorder</u> that affects two to three percent of the population (more than 500,000 Australians)

- It usually **begins in late childhood or early adolescence**.

- People with OCD experience **recurrent and persistent thoughts, images or impulses** that are **intrusive and unwanted** (obsessions).

- They also perform **repetitive and ritualistic actions** that are excessive, time-consuming and distressing (compulsions).

- **People with OCD are usually aware of the irrational and excessive nature of their obsessions and compulsions.**

- However, they feel **unable to control** their obsessions or resist their compulsions.

- Compulsions and obsessions may take up many hours of a person's day and can interfere with family and social relationships. They can also **have a negative effect on education and employment.**

- **Anxiety management techniques** can help a person to manage their own symptoms - relaxation training, slow breathing techniques, mindfulness meditation and hyperventilation control.

Source: <u>https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/obsessive-compulsive-disorder</u>

Top Tips for Supporting Neurodiverse young people

1. Neurodiverse young people don't always look at you all the time.

Reason: They often find looking and listening at the same time hard to do.

2. Give them time to answer any of your questions.

Reason: They have slower processing time. Sometimes it can take them up to a minute to formulate the answer

3. If they feel pressured, they will answer with stock standard answers.

Reason: They know it will get them out of trouble quickly. This may include: "I don't know", "yes", "maybe" and often this isn't their true answer!

4. They often don't "generalise" information between people and places.

Example: Homework for teacher 'x' is in the yellow basket but for teacher 'y' it's to be placed in the green basket.

Top Tips

Top Tips for Supporting Neurodiverse young people

5. **They find organisation of their school equipment very difficult.**

Tip: They are best with one folder with everything inside. Limit the number of pe[...] etc. Keep their stationary basic.

6. **Limit their choices and be very specific with choices.**

Reason: They find choices overwhelming and are often concerned with making wrong choice due to their difficulty with problem solving.

7. **Be as clear, concise and concrete as possible.**

Reason: Neurodiverse young people have difficulty with abstract thinking.

8. **Avoid verbal overload.**

Reason: They are visual learners and verbal information takes them longer to process and retain.

Top Tips

Top Tips for Supporting Neurodiverse young people

9. Neurodiverse young people are often literal.

Reason: They misinterpret your questions/comments .i.e. 'Could' or 'Would,' can be interpreted as an option. Words like "Stop" and "No" don't tell them what to do. If the time reads '10:56' and you tell them the time is 11 o'clock they will often correct you and tell you that it is 10:56.

10. Neurodiverse students often have sensory processing difficulties.

Reason: This is part of their diversity and different way of processing.

Source: 10 Tips to Embrace Neurodiversity (suelarkey.com.au)

Why employ a neurodiverse person?

- Managing difference may mean **rethinking how we do things**

- There are **clear benefits and competitive advantages** to having **employees who think differently**

- **Positive attributes** commonly associated with neurodivergent employees include creativity, innovation, lateral thinking, strategic analysis and the bringing of a 'different perspective' to business discussions, plans and solutions
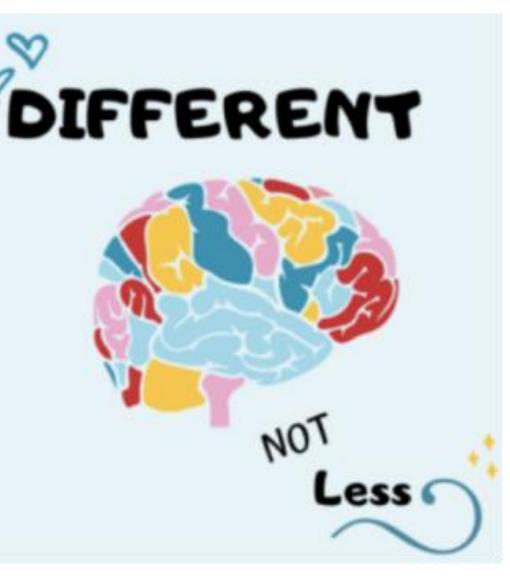
Source: Neurodiversity and your Workforce, Kate Lawson Sep 2021

Additional Resources

Difference between ADHD and/or Autism: Attention Regulation: The Difference Between ADHD and Autism (Explaining The Neurodiversity Rainbow) – YouTube

AMAZE – How to communicate effectively with Autistic people: https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/

Neurodiversity: different not lesser than, Diversity Council Australia, Chris Varney: https://www.dca.org.au/qa/neurodiversity-different-not-lesser-featuring-chris-varney

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Strategies for engaging all young people

- **Provide clear and explicit instructions.** No more than two instructions at a time.

- **Monitor and check** understanding

- **Provide structure and routine** as students then know what to expect and the framework to work within.

- **Model the tasks and the thinking**. Students will learn and understand if shown the task.

- **Use visual supports**.

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