



Let's Learn Together

Neurodiversity



Let's Learn Together is a practical framework for engaging in complex topics. This booklet is yours to keep. Write in it, read it with family, pass it along to a friend. Make it yours.

Learn more about Let's Learn Together at wilmettelibrary.info/learntogether



Welcome

Human diversity includes variation in features, experiences, and perspectives. In recent years, research has led to new thinking about the variations in brain physiology itself, and how it contributes to each person's unique character. This idea that there are many valid and understood ways for brains to work is known as **neurodiversity**.

What does it mean to live in a neurodiverse world? Is everyone included in the idea of "neurodiversity?"

In these pages, we are going to explore what it means to be neurodiverse. We'll learn where the concept came from, how we benefit from understanding neurodiversity, and how you can continue to explore what neurodiversity means beyond the pages of this booklet.

Talking about neurodiversity fosters connections and disrupts stigmas. This booklet offers context and prompts to spark curiosity and promote dialogue. It is not the responsibility of neurodivergent community members to instruct or empathize in this work. Neurodivergent people deal with the repercussions of an ableist social and political system in ways both big and small.

If it seems like neurodiversity is on the rise, it's a good thing. It means we have a better understanding of the vast variability in human brains and are on the way to building a more inclusive society.

To begin this journey or to deepen your experience, Wilmette Public Library is here to provide resources and programs that support our neurodiverse community at every level.

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in the way human brains are wired. These variations affect how a person thinks, behaves, and experiences the world.

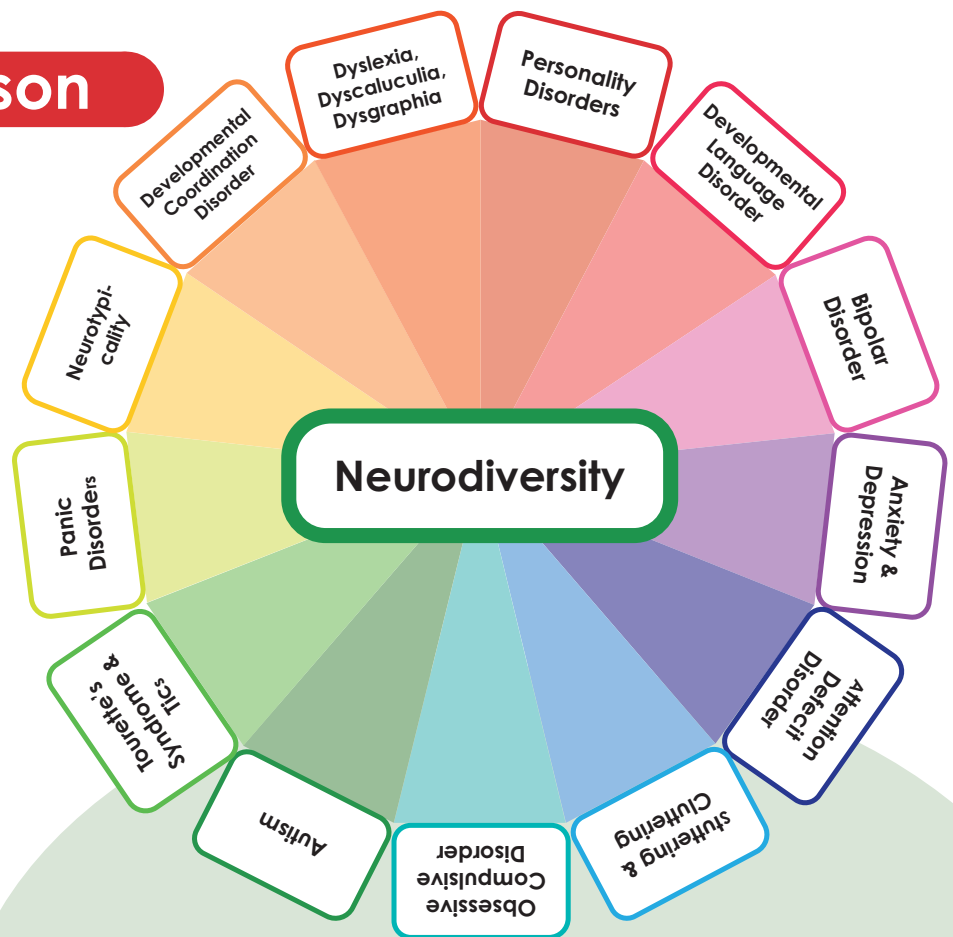
The term was coined by Australian sociologist Judy Singer in 1998 to describe the experiences of her family members at a time when autism, ADHD, and other neurodiverse conditions were clinically misunderstood and socially unaccepted.

Vocabulary Lesson

Neurotypical: Having a brain that is wired and functions according to the societal definition of normal.

Neurodivergent: Having a brain that is wired and functions differently than the societal definition of normal.

Neurodiverse: A group of people in which multiple neurological styles are represented. This could be a class, friend group, neighborhood, anything! What neurodiverse groups are you a part of?



This wheel demonstrates some of the conditions that make up the wide variation within neurodiversity. There is not a hierarchy or linear spectrum, rather an array of possibilities unique to each individual human.

Is neurodivergence a disability?

There is no clear-cut answer, though many neurodivergent communities advocate for the term disabled when describing their experience in an ableist world. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a person with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities. Some neurodivergent people identify as disabled, some do not. If you're not sure about a person's preferred terminology, just ask!

History of a Movement

The neurodiversity movement emerged in the 1990s to increase acceptance of all people while embracing neurological differences. Rooted in the social model of disability and historically led by autistic self-advocates, the neurodiversity movement states that there is no “normal” or “right” way of thinking, learning, and behaving.



The rainbow infinity is a symbol of the neurodiversity movement.

Disability can refer to cognitive impairments, but it can also describe social barriers.

What are some social expectations you notice in the classroom, workplace, public space?

What barriers might these expectations create for neurodivergent people?

The neurodiversity movement acknowledges that neurodivergence can be both a natural variation and a disability. Neurodivergent people are valuable members of society who deserve support and services to meet their needs. The movement promotes research and education. It also recognizes that a history of medical and social misunderstandings and maltreatment have caused suffering and prevented neurodivergent people from thriving.

Consider your unique brain

Human brains are not mass-produced machines, rather they are ecosystems unique to each individual person. Certain functions may be impaired, while others are enhanced. Neurodiversity describes variation in the way people:

- Process information
- Filter information
- Remember information
- Regulate their nervous system
- Respond to stimuli
- Move their bodies

And more!



All brains need certain things to feel safe, calm, and focused.



How do you learn best?



What depletes you?



What gives you energy?



Building a Neurodiverse-Affirming Community



What would a neurodiverse affirming world look like?

What improvements and accommodation would you like to see in your workplace? School? Library? Home?

Examples

School curriculum that includes neurodiversity and mental health education

Neurodiversity training in the workplace

Expanded social norms

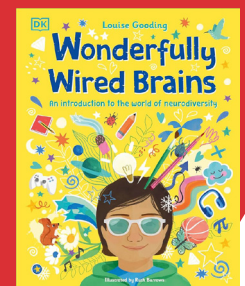
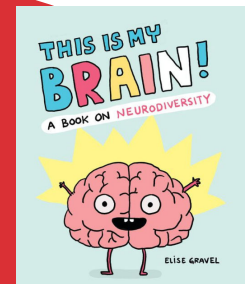
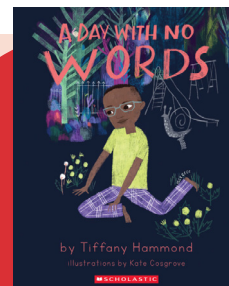
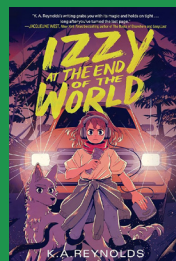
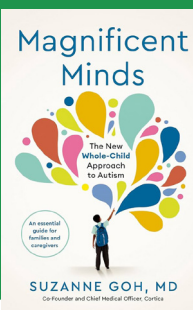
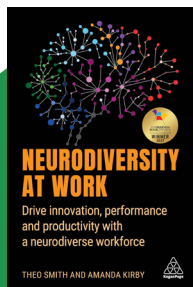
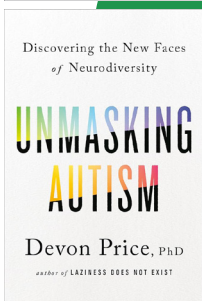
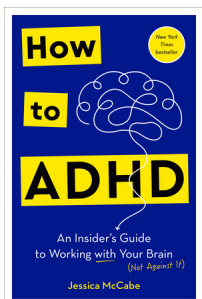
Neurodiversity is not tidy or easily categorized and our understanding of neurodiverse labels is constantly evolving. Whether a person is clinically diagnosed or not, there are many ways to learn more about the brain and to find community.



Exploring Neurodiversity

Whether you're curious about yourself or want to support others, you can explore neurodivergent networks and read or watch videos about peoples' experiences. Even if you don't find your fit in a particular community, you can learn more about a group that could use more understanding and support. You'll get a sense for the vast variety of human brains!

Books offer context and language for talking to kids about neurodiversity. When you're reading with a child, take time to ask questions about the story and illustrations. Listen to the child's observations and help make connections to their own experiences.



Look for authentic representation of neurodivergent experiences. At wilmettelibrary.info/llt, you can find online resources produced by neurodivergent communities, as well as the books featured on this page, and more.

Productive Vocabulary for Meaningful Dialogue



Ableism: prejudice or discrimination against disabled or neurodivergent people

Disability: a mental or physical impairment that limits a person's ability to do major life activities [per the Americans with Disabilities Act]

Executive functions: cognitive processes that help us plan, prioritize, and sustain effort toward long-term goals. Executive functions include attentional control, working memory, inhibition, and problem-solving, many of which are thought to originate in the brain's prefrontal cortex.

Intersectionality: The interconnectedness of categories, characteristics, and conditions that determine the complexity of social barriers and prejudices a person may face.

Medical Model of Disability: In this framework, a disabled person has something wrong with them that needs to be fixed. The medical and social services fields are solely responsible for addressing disabilities.

Neurodivergent: refers to having a brain that is wired and functions differently than the societal definition of normal.

Neurodiverse: refers to a group in which multiple neurological styles are represented. This could be a class, friend group, or staff.

Neurotype: refers to classes of differently wired brains.

Neurotypical: refers to having a brain that is wired and functions according to the societal definition of normal.

Social Model of Disability: In this framework, disability is the inability to participate fully in home and community life due to barriers set up by our society. It is the responsibility of institutions and individuals to remove barriers and create a more inclusive society. Medical intervention and supports play a role in enhancing a person's ability to participate in society rather than focusing on "curing" the deficit.

Stereotype: A fixed set of ideas about a person or group that assumes all members of that group are the same. Stereotypes can be based on what we see in the media or on the opinions of someone we know or trust.

Let's Learn Together is a set of programs and tools designed to provide a framework for discussing challenging topics and social issues. Through literature, activities, and expert presenters, you are invited to get curious about subjects relevant to our society, and uncover and challenge attitudes and biases.



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