

# Neurodiversity-Affirming SLP Practices

Neurodiversity refers to variations in the human brain. A neurodiversity-affirming model of care describes these variations as expected differences, not deficits. Neurodiversity affirming practices refer to empowering and accepting neurodiverse individuals, rather than trying to change or “fix” them to fit neurotypical societal norms.

## Education

- Educating our Autistic children about neurodivergence, and showing them acceptance.
- Educating ourselves on different communication styles.
- Collaborating with other professionals, such as Occupational Therapists, to understand aspects outside of our scope, such as sensory differences.
- Listening to and consulting with Autistic individuals to learn about lived experiences.

## Language Matters

- When speaking about Autistic individuals, it's important to ask if identity-first or person-first language is preferred.
- Within report writing, we can report strengths before differences, and avoid describing behaviour as desirable/compliant or not.
- When creating goals, writing practical goals that consider the person's well-being and mental health come first.

## Accept all forms of communication

- Educate and learn about approaches that honour Autistic communication (e.g., validating echolalia responses).
- Providing and increasing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) access.
- Accepting and fostering a total communication approach (accepting gestures, spoken responses, AAC responses, body language responses, etc.)
- Respecting an individual's preferred communication style.

## Promote Self-Advocacy

- Teaching our Autistic children how to self-advocate, and creating therapy goals that foster independence and choice.
- Educating our Autistic children on self-identity, surrounding values, strengths, and communicative preferences.
- Giving Autistic children a safe place to express themselves and honouring their requests for sensory regulation, or stopping uncomfortable or disliked activities.

## Strength-Based Learning

- Therapy should be centered around building on an individual's strengths, their well-being, and their enjoyment.
- We can think about communicative success as a *shared responsibility* between the child and their communication partner.
- Adults should always presume competence in non-speaking people.
- Strength-based therapy shows better outcomes for motivation, confidence, and rapport.

## Follow Interests

- Following a child's interests and lead has been shown to sustain their attention longer, create a lower pressure interactive environment for the child, and increase communicative attempts.
- Following a child's interest or lead honours their perspective and preferences, and allows for stronger relationships with the play partner.

**References**  
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