

Embracing All Kinds of Minds

Neurodiversity refers to atypical differences in brain wiring and neurological states that affect processing information, perceiving, communicating, and cognition. This includes learning disabilities, ADHD, autism spectrum, epilepsy, and emotional and behavioral disorders.

Classroom strengths:

- ⇒ Can have superior skills in particular areas, such as engineering, writing, math, music, or programming
- ⇒ Can be strong at memorizing facts and information
- ⇒ Can have intense interests that drive learning
- ⇒ Can be an out-of-the-box thinker
- ⇒ Can have strong attention to detail
- ⇒ May have ability to maintain prolonged focus on topics of interest

Social strengths:

- ⇒ Friendships are usually formed through mutual interest areas or activities
- ⇒ Forms authentic friendships. No drama
- ⇒ Reliable and loyal friend
- ⇒ Often accepting of all people
- ⇒ Strong sense of social justice

Classroom challenges:

- ⇒ Difficulty with social situations like group projects
- ⇒ Attention deficits
- ⇒ Obsessive-compulsive tendencies
- ⇒ Organization, initiation, prioritization challenges
- ⇒ Difficulty with changes and transitions
- ⇒ Slower processing speed
- ⇒ Nebulous sense of time

Social and Sensory challenges:

- ⇒ Difficulty understanding non-verbal cues
- ⇒ Need to be taught social behavior intuitive to others
- ⇒ Trouble understanding what someone else is thinking or feeling (theory of mind)
- ⇒ Challenges with the use and understanding of language in a social context
- ⇒ Hypersensitivity to noise, smells, and lights
- ⇒ Difficulty or inability maintaining eye contact
- ⇒ Social and emotional immaturity

How to Accept, Include and Embrace

- ⇒ Thoughtful and intentional groupings for projects with explicit instructions on how to work in groups including how to divide up work.
- ⇒ Teacher coaching in classroom participation
- ⇒ As much as possible, assignments online and explicit
- ⇒ Minimize loud noises and strong scents (perfume-free classroom)
- ⇒ Establish a collaborative mindset with student
- ⇒ Tune in to social exclusion and cruelty and address it privately with perpetrators
- ⇒ Encourage personal expression via the arts (poetry, visual, musical)
- ⇒ Cultivate communities of collaboration and partnership both inside and outside of school

Additional Resources

Neurodiversity in the Classroom Strength-Based Strategies to Help Students With Special Needs Succeed in School and Life
Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

Marzano Art and Science of Teaching Framework

<http://www.marzanocenter.com/blog/article/classroom-neurodiversity-the-marzano-model-says-all-kids-can-learn1/>

Temple Grandin School

<http://templegrandinschool.org/?event=meeting-of-the-minds>

Ed Week

<http://www.edweek.org/tm/section/chat/2013/02/08/>

AANE (Asperger/ Autism Network)

http://www.aane.org/about_asperger_syndrome/asperger_fact_sheet.html