

Embracing Neurodiversity: Cultivating an Inclusive Workplace for Neurodivergent Staff



Presented by Renee Grassi

About Me



Renee Grassi (she/her/hers)

Chicagoland, IL*

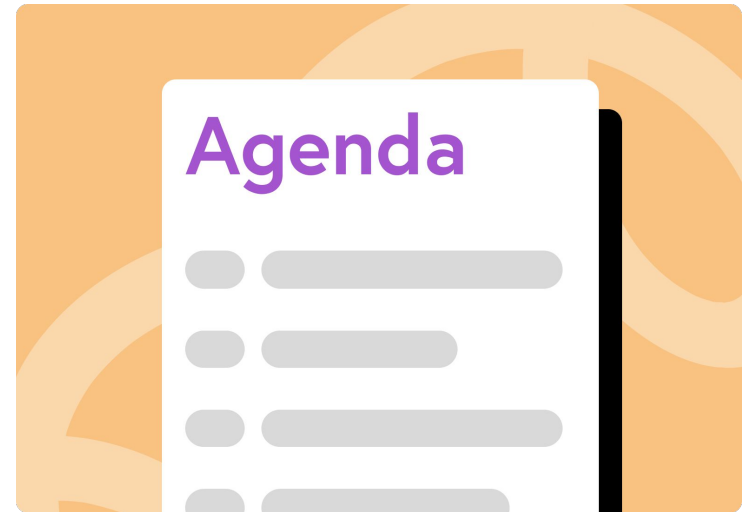
17+ years in public libraries

Neurodivergent librarian

*Located on the ancestral lands of Indigenous and Native tribes including the Council of the Three Fires--comprised of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations--the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sac, Fox, Kickapoo & Illinois Nations

Topics We'll Discuss

- Disability...Neurodiversity
- Neurodivergence in the Workplace
- Accessible Communication
- Providing Individual Support
- Strategies for Inclusion in Teams



<https://www.wildapricot.com/blog/conference-agenda>

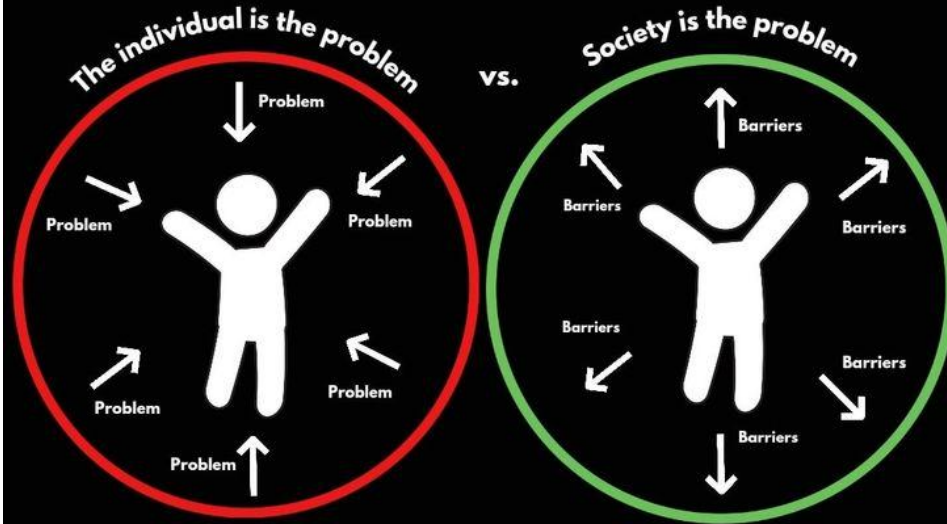
We need empathy now more than ever.



Disability...Neurodiversity



Changing The Disability Narritive: Medical Model vs. Social Model



The medical model looks at what is "wrong" with the person, and their weaknesses, not what the person NEEDS.

The social model does not focus on the challenges, instead, it gives equal attention to what the person can do and their strengths.

Disability is difference - not deficiency.

Judith Heumann, Civil Rights Leader and Activist
'Mother of the Disability Rights Movement'

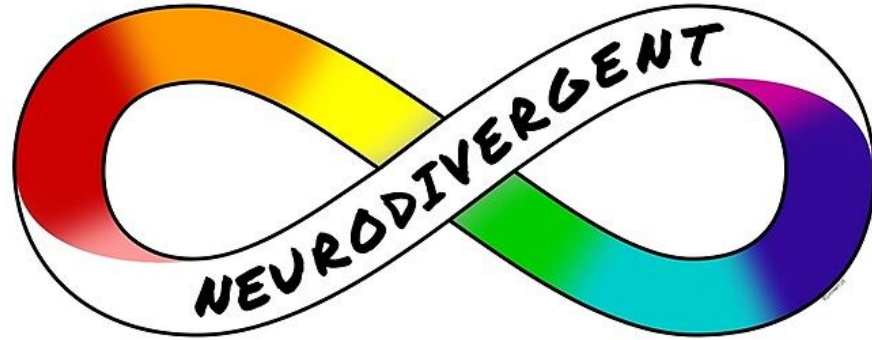




Disability is natural

Disability is not a monolith





Neurodiversity

The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population



Let's talk about neurodiversity.

"Neurodiverse (ND) and neurodiversity refer to the infinite variation in cognitive functioning that can lead to differences in thinking, attention, and memory."

-Creative Differences Handbook

There is no standard brain.

-Thomas Armstrong, PhD,
author of "The Power of Neurodiversity"

DIVERSITY IS NATURAL NEURODIVERSITY* IS NATURAL



PLANT DIVERSITY



ANIMAL DIVERSITY

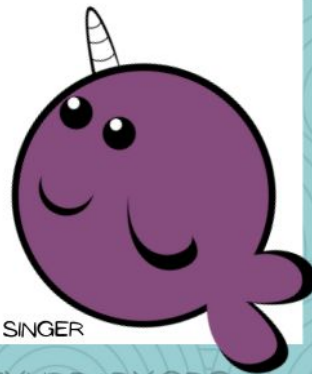


HUMAN DIVERSITY

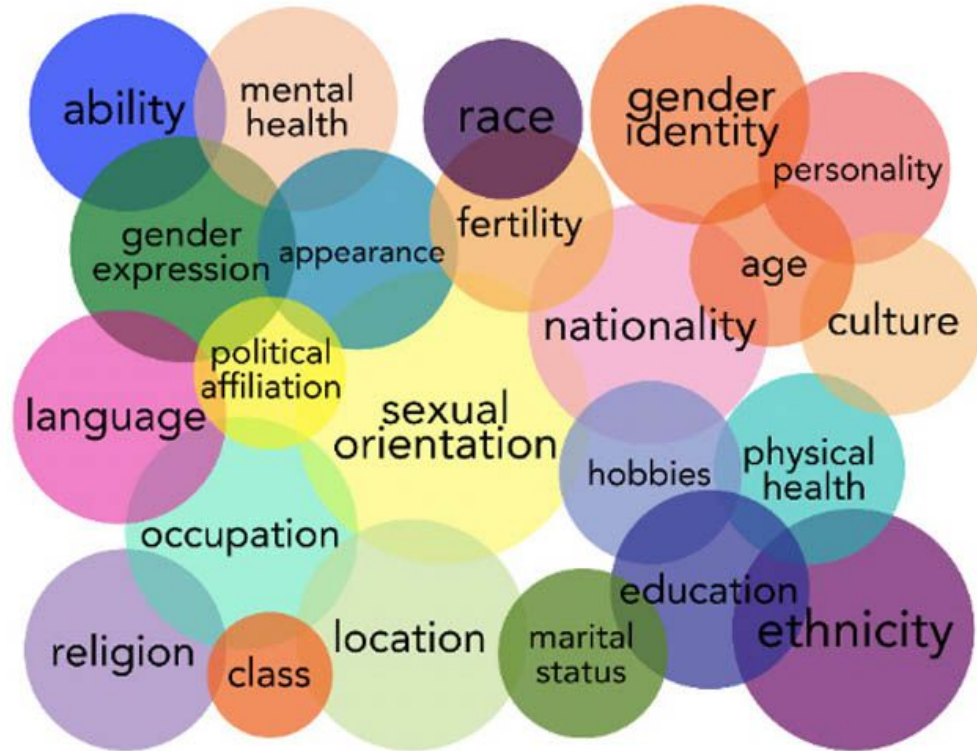


BRAIN DIVERSITY = NEURODIVERSITY!

*"NEURODIVERSITY" IS A WORD COINED BY AUTISTIC SCHOLAR JUDITH SINGER



Neurodiversity is an intersection



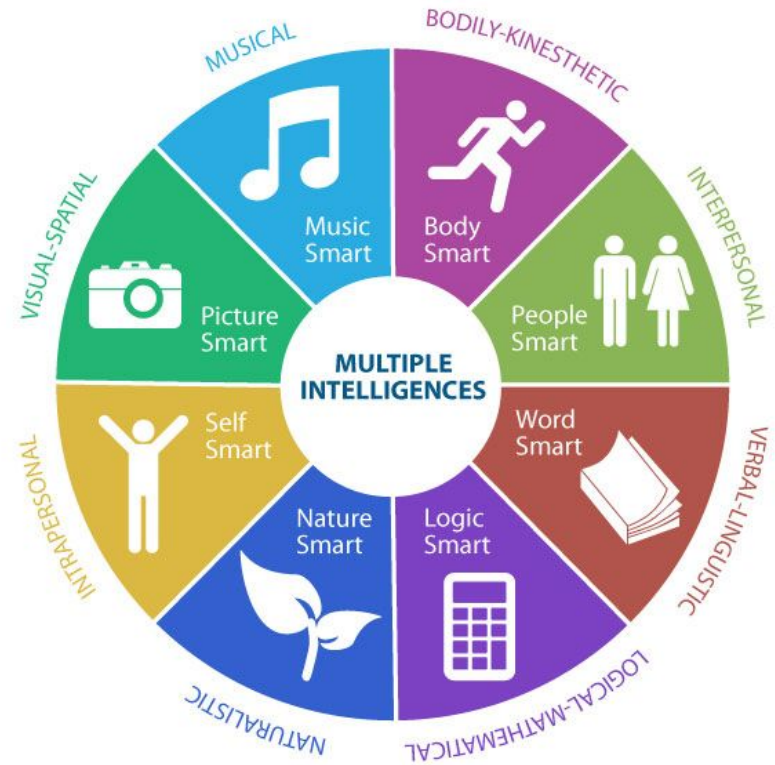
Neurodivergence in the Workplace



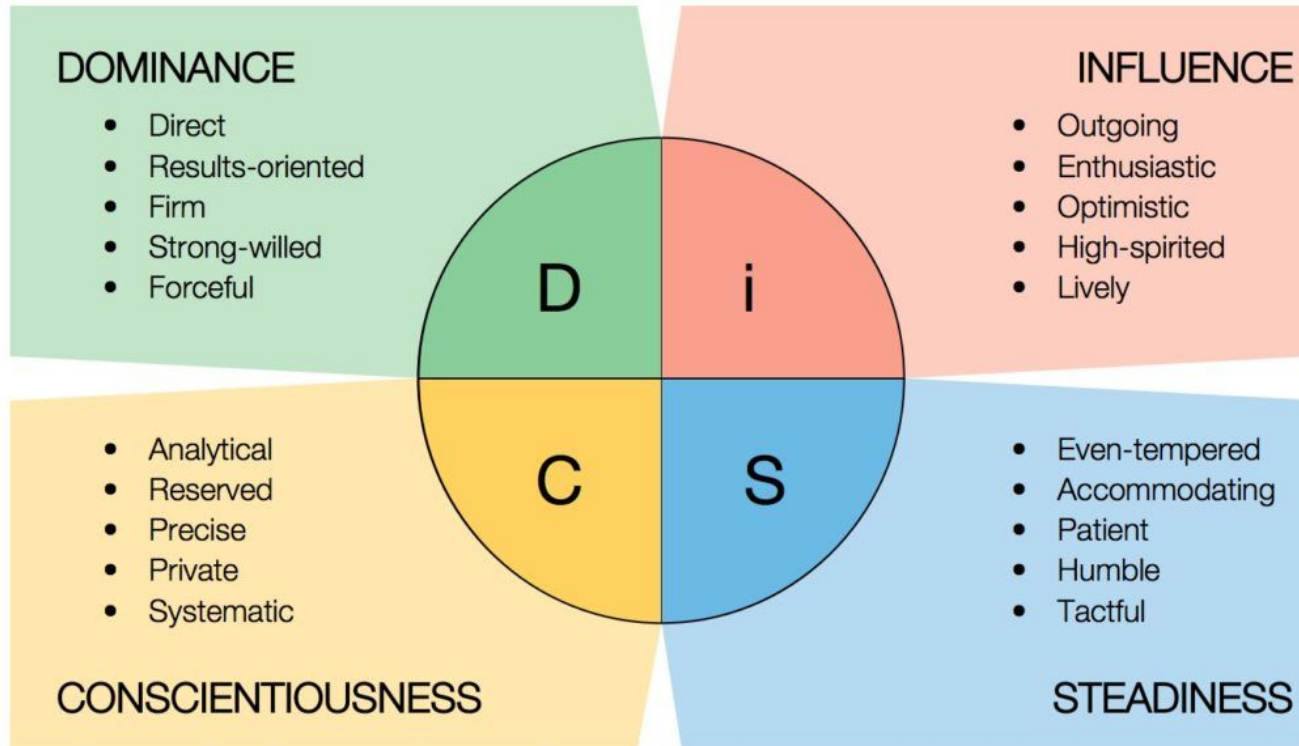
<https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2021/09/22/neurodiversity-is-an-untapped-pool-of-immense-potential/>

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

The differentiation of human intelligence into specific types of intelligence, rather than defining intelligence as a single, general ability



DiSC® Workplace Styles

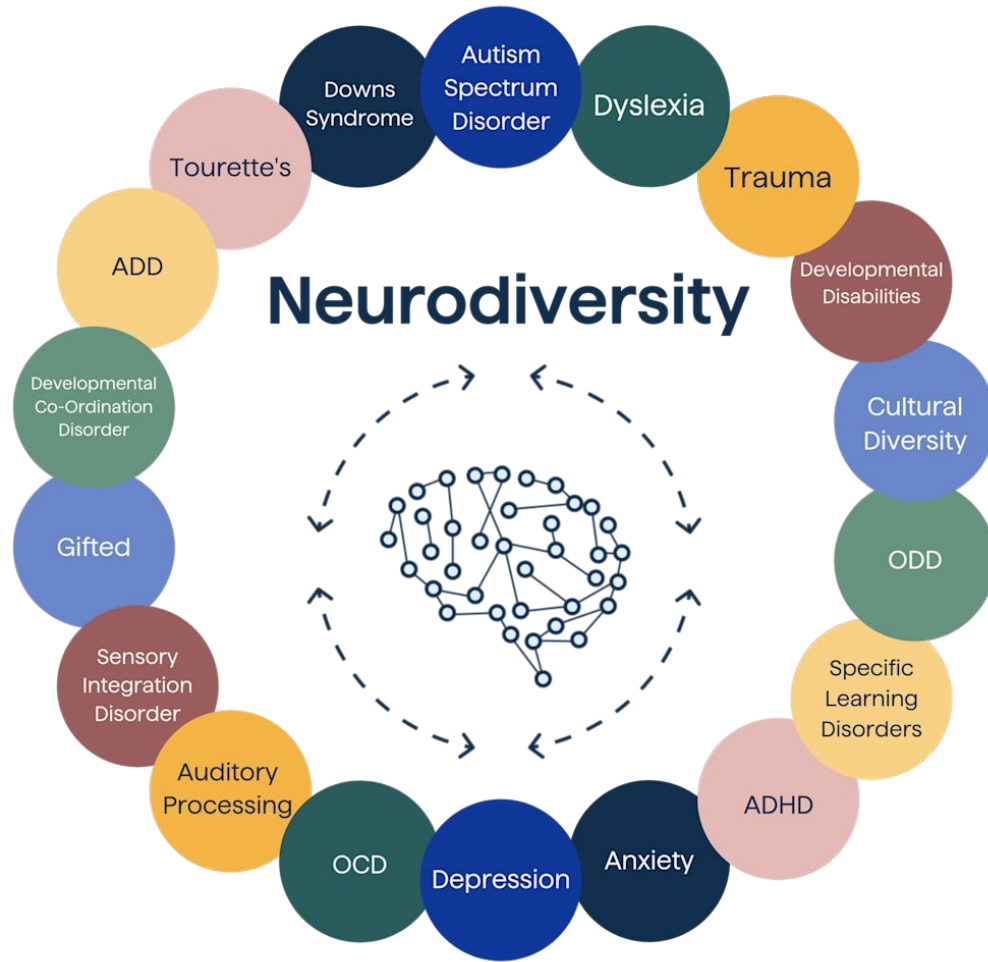


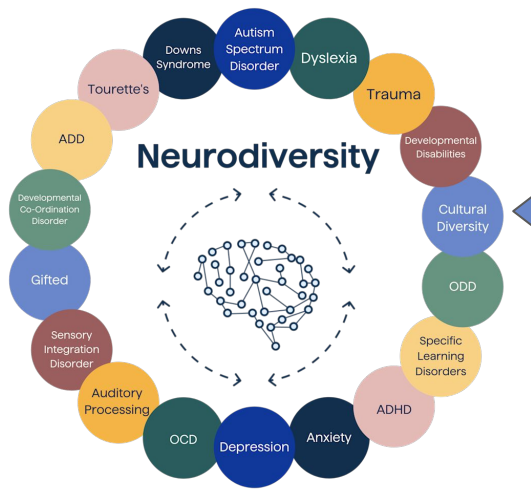
Learn more: <https://www.discprofile.com/what-is-disc>

Clifton® StrengthsFinder 2.0

EXECUTING	INFLUENCING	RELATIONSHIP BUILDING	STRATEGIC THINKING
<p>People with dominant Executing themes know how to make things happen.</p>	<p>People with dominant Influencing themes know how to take charge, speak up, and make sure the team is heard.</p>	<p>People with dominant Relationship Building themes have the ability to build strong relationships that can hold a team together and make the team greater than the sum of its parts.</p>	<p>People with dominant Strategic Thinking themes help teams consider what could be. They absorb and analyze information that can inform better decisions.</p>
<p>Achiever Arranger Belief Consistency Deliberative Discipline Focus Responsibility Restorative</p>	<p>Activator Command Communication Competition Maximizer Self-Assurance Significance Woo</p>	<p>Adaptability Connectedness Developer Empathy Harmony Includer Individualization Positivity Relator</p>	<p>Analytical Context Futuristic Ideation Input Intellection Learner Strategic</p>

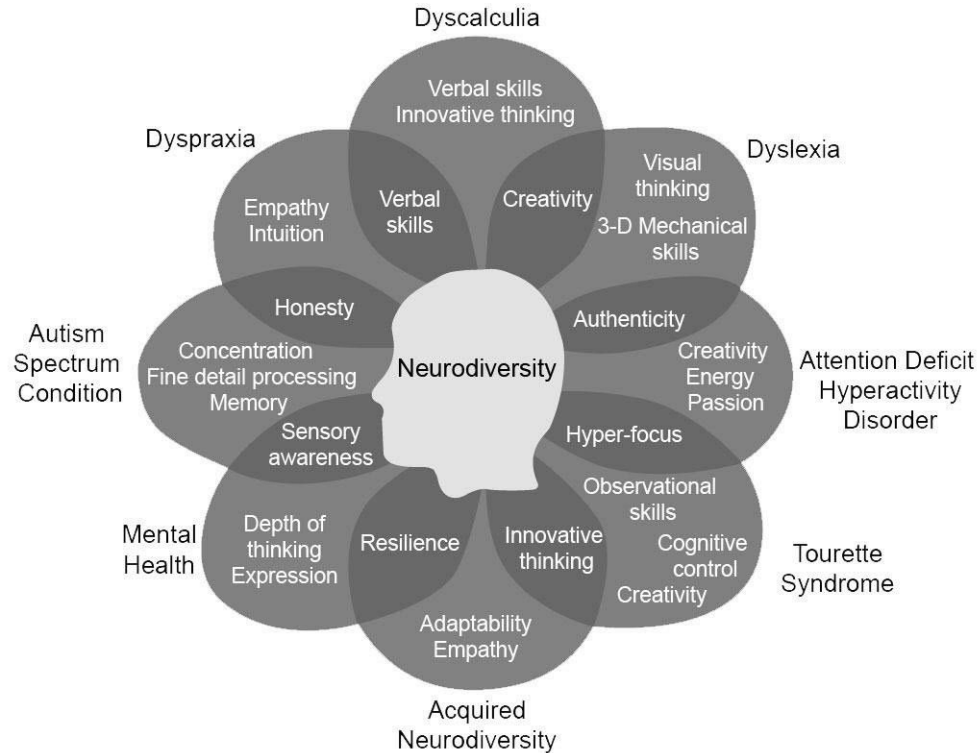
Learn more: <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/254033/strengthsfinder.aspx>





"Cultural diversity as neurodiversity" means that the various ways people from different cultures think, perceive & interact with the world can be viewed as a form of "neurodiversity" where different neurological patterns are considered a natural variation within the human population, rather than a deficit

Neurodiversity: A Strengths Approach



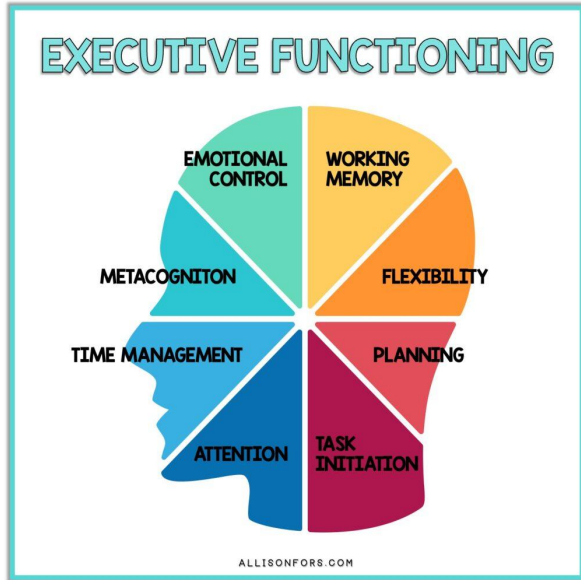
Additional Strengths & Benefits

- Creative problem-solving
- Pattern recognition
- Keen accuracy
- Ability to detect errors
- Highly empathetic
- Reliable and persistent
- Strong recall of information and facts
- In tune with their environment and surroundings
- Ability to excel at work that is routine or repetitive



<https://occupationaltherapy.com.au/what-is-neurodiversity/>


Differences in Neurodivergent Thinkers



Executive Functioning: set of mental processes that helps connect past experiences with present action; foundation for cognitive and social skills

Executive Functioning Differences

- Time Management
- Communication
- Information recall
- Generating ideas independently
- Multitasking



Neurodivergent people don't have executive functioning deficits because neurotypical people are not the benchmark for how people should function.

If there is no **benchmark** for how people should function, there cannot be **deficits**.

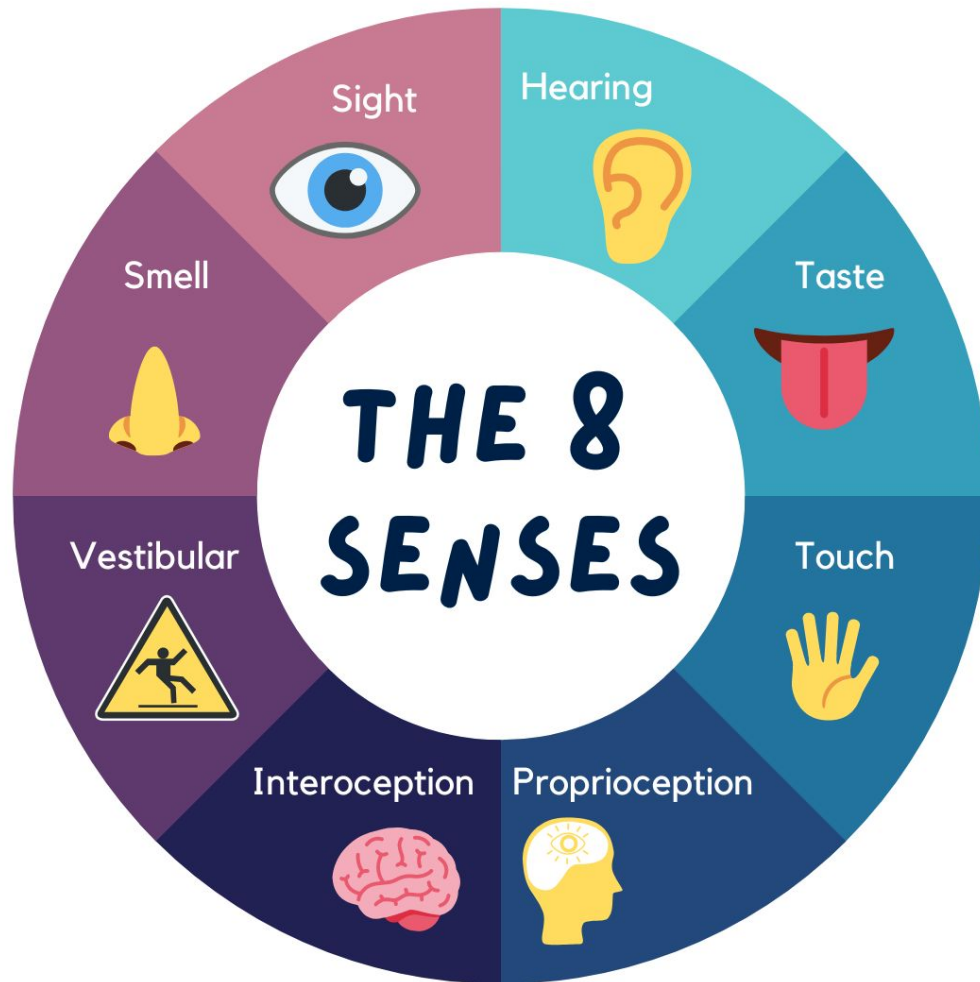
Special Interests: Prosocial or Antisocial



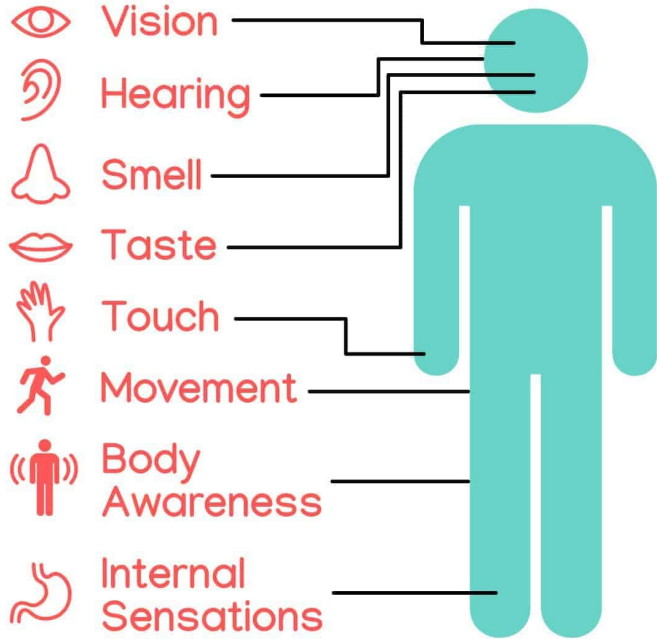
Sensory Processing



Processes of the brain that organize sensations from one's body and the environment, so the body can be used effectively within its environment



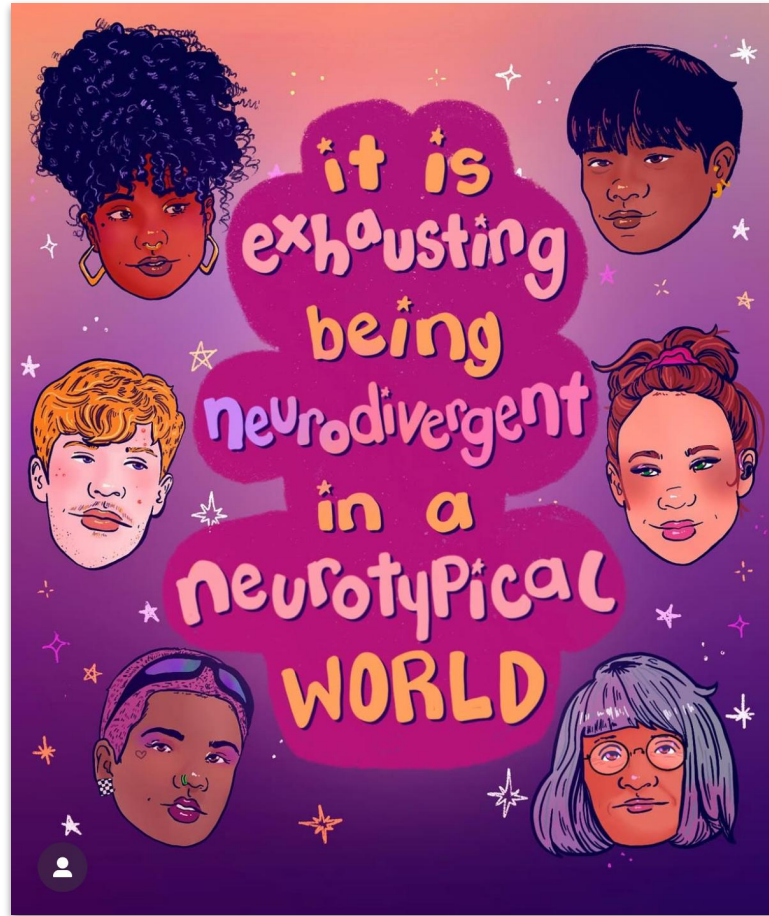
Differences in Sensory Processing



Hypersensitivity (too much)

Hyposensitive (not enough)

Sensory **Seeking** vs **Avoiding**



Artist credit: www.liberaljane.com

Accessible Communication

WORDS

words have
direct and
indirect impacts

MATTER

on the people
who hear or
read them

Person-first language



"I am a person with autism"

Identity-first language



"I am autistic"

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nicke-harrison_terminologtuesday-teamisg-disabled-activity-7219007928521891840-ATxO

Learn more: [askearn.org/page/people-first-language](https://www.askearn.org/page/people-first-language)

When greeting others

Avoid:

ladies gentlemen ma'am sir girls guys etc.

Consider using instead:

“Thanks, **friends**.
Have a great
night.”

“Good morning,
folks!”

“Hi, **everyone!**”

“And for **you?**”

“Can I get
you **all**
something?”

Why?

Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

Be mindful of language

Building Trust

- Be transparent and honest
- Get to know the person
- Support independence
- Presume competence
- Support disclosure on their terms
- Set boundaries, if needed



<https://www.dreamstime.com/disabled-people-wheelchair-elbow-bump-disabled-people-wheelchair-elbow-bump-office-image213650447>

What To Say

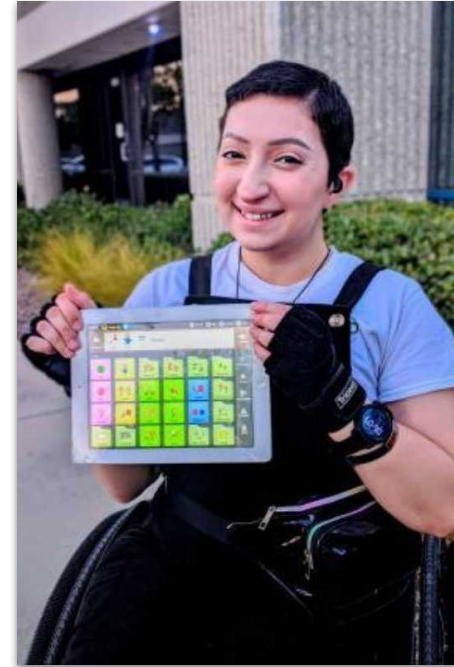
- Wait until offer of help is accepted
- Adjust your phrasing
- Provide choice
- Use positive language
- Speak in plain language and avoid jargon
- If you make a mistake, it's okay!
Apologize and do better next time



<https://stock.adobe.com/search?k=person+making+phone+call>

How to Say It

- Speak directly to individual
- Adjust your pace
- Try a different method
- Be patient and flexible
- Don't be too fearful of making a mistake that it prevents you from connecting with a colleague



What is Augmentative Alternative Communication?
<https://avazapp.com/blog/what-is-aac-a-detailed-view/>

Look & Listen

- Allow processing time
- Confirm hearing
- Ensure understanding
- Observe non-verbal cues
- Consider supporting de-escalation if needed



<https://www.msbexecutive.com/the-truth-about-listening/>

Developing Accessible Written Communication

- Combine pictures/symbols with text
- Use bullet points and headings
- Avoid long narratives
- Design with high color contrast
- Design ample whitespace to break up visual clutter
- In procedural documents, assess reading level of vocabulary



Photo credit: Dakota County Library, Minnesota

Providing Individual Support





I WONDER WHY.

THREE WORDS THAT CAN MAKE SPACE
IN YOUR HEART FOR EMPATHY.

I WONDER WHY THEY'RE REACTING THIS WAY.
I WONDER WHY THEY'RE FEELING THIS WAY.
I WONDER WHY I'M FEELING THIS WAY.

SOMETIMES A LITTLE CURIOSITY
IS ALL WE NEED TO RESPOND WITH
KINDNESS INSTEAD OF ANGER.

Lori Deschene / tinybuddha.com



Workplace accommodations I've made for neurodivergent staff:

- Relocated desk further away from public space to decrease noise distractions
- Purchased Loop ear plugs and noise cancelling headphones
- Developed a schedule of telecommuting 2 days per week for full time employee
- Hosted hybrid meetings so work-from home staff could attend
- Created text and visual instructions for counting money in change drawer
- Booked meeting room to provide space for staff whose desk is in public area
- Developed a map labeling names and locations of music genres to support shelving
- Developed a Return to Work plan with additional leave time after 12 week emergency leave was taken; scheduled weekly 1:1s during transition period
- Offered 1:1 job coaching from paid job coach
- Taught the Pomodoro technique
- Adjusted schedules and approved longer shifts for staff to take longer midday breaks
- Funded subscription based purchase of productivity app for their device
- Reduced workload and modified responsibilities; temporarily re-assigned work to others
- Delegated responsibilities short and long term; job restructuring

Learn about Reasonable Accommodations



EMPLOYERS INDIVIDUALS ADA LIBRARY A TO Z LISTS ACCOMMODATION SEARCH PUBLICATIONS & ARTICLES ABOUT JAN

EMPLOYEES' PRACTICAL GUIDE TO REQUESTING AND NEGOTIATING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION UNDER THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Home / Publications / Individuals

Review a summary of some of the most frequent issues that employees have regarding accommodations and ADA compliance. Learn more about JAN's practical ideas for resolving them.

Source: <https://askjan.org/publications/individuals/employee-guide.cfm>

Reasonable Accommodations in the Workplace



Information, Guidance and Training on the Americans with Disabilities Act:

<https://adata.org/factsheet/reasonable-accommodations-workplace>

Setting People Up for Success

- Establish concrete expectations
- Inquire about communication style
- Ask about areas of interest, support and learning needed
- Schedule regular 1:1 meetings
- Support disclosure on their terms and timeline
- Provide person-centered support
- Offer to provide a peer mentor



<https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/59619/leaders-follow-these-6-steps-to-build-trust-with-employees-improve-how-you-re-perceived>

Assessing the Work Environment

- Desk and furniture
 - Sit/Stand desk
 - Balance mat
 - Fidget chair
- Lighting
- Adaptive keyboards and mice
- Other supports
 - Fidgets
 - Noise Cancelling Headphones
 - “Calm” or “Amazing Marvin” apps
- Breaks and/or Work From Home Status
 - Frequency
 - Location
 - Length



<https://www.istockphoto.com/illustrations/desk-setup>

Offer User-Paced Training Videos

Don't forget to ensure accurate closed captions are available



- Research shows more online content accessed by CC users
- Make it a standard; don't require people to ask or disclose
- Supports Deaf and Hard of Hearing, English Language Learners, ADHD & other neurodiverse needs

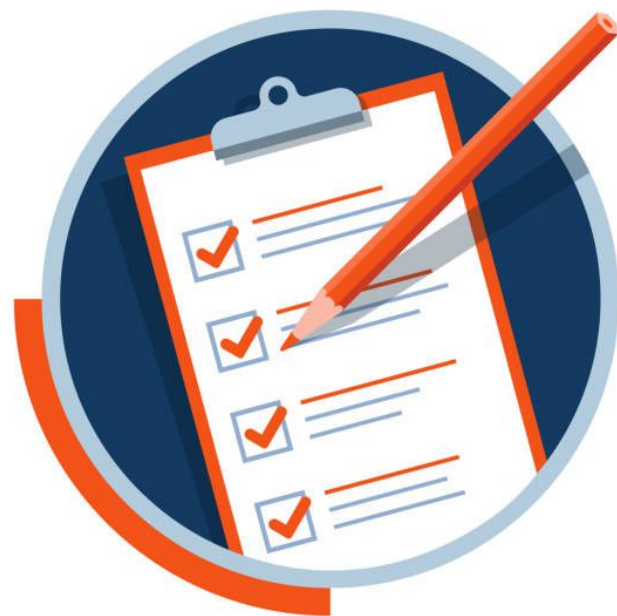


Strategies for Inclusion in Teams



Review & Update Personnel Policies

- Emergency Leave Policy and Procedures
- Telecommuting Policy and Procedures
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Anti-Harassment Policy
- Accommodations Policy



Offer Sensory Supports in Collaborative Work Spaces



Noise-canceling
Headphones



Mirror

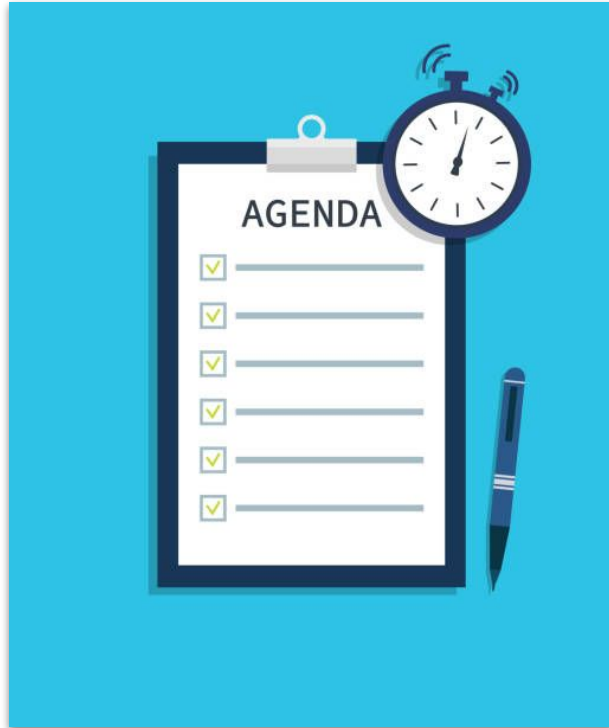


Single use ear plugs

Normalize Fidgets During Work



Provide Structure during Meetings

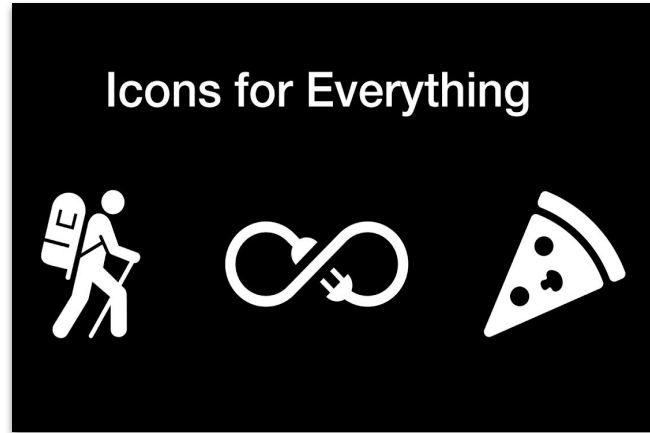


- Develop an agenda in advance
- Send it out ahead of meeting
- Announce changes, if any
- Add time estimates
- Set meeting norms
- Be flexible, but stay on target

Use Visuals



PowerPoint



NounProject.com



<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/corporate-business-flyer-design-handout-leaflet-2064505792>

Handouts

Take Breaks



10 min. Visual Timer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=ap-JvvU0xV4>

Add Movement

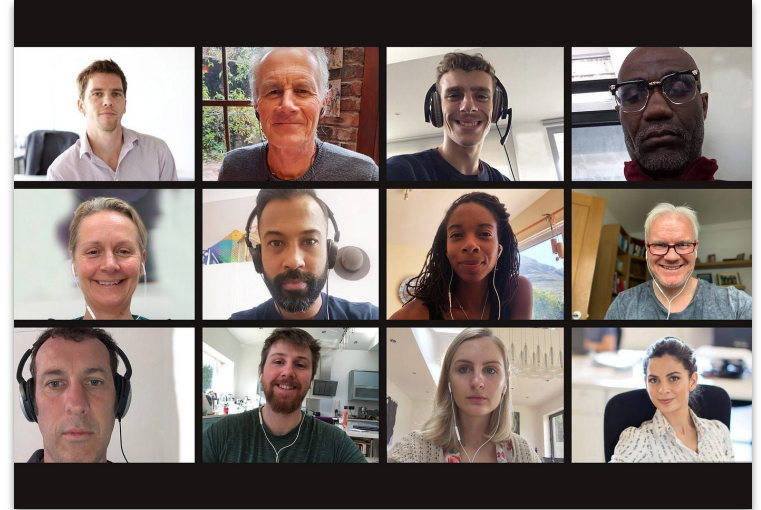


<https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/group-of-business-people-standing-in-hall-smiling-and-talking-together-gm530685719-530685719?searchscope=image%2Cfilm>

Find Alternative Spaces



<https://www.smartmeetings.com/tips-tools/141294/continued-importance-outdoor-meetings>



<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-weirdness-of-watching-yourself-on-zoom/>

Support sitting and standing too

Break the Stigma of Mental Health

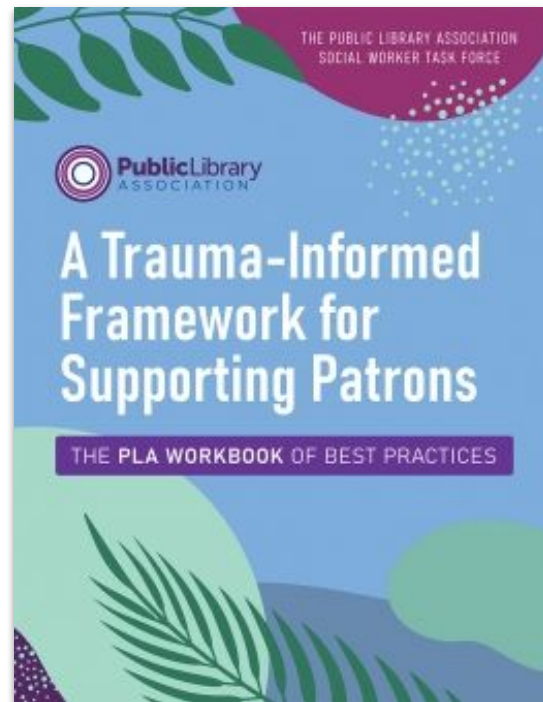
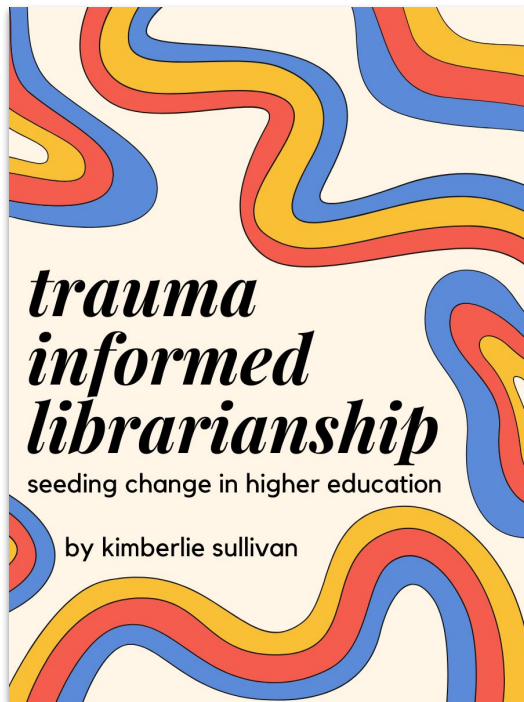


Provide Staff Training on Neurodiversity



<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-neurodiversity-202111232645>

Learn About Trauma-Informed Practice



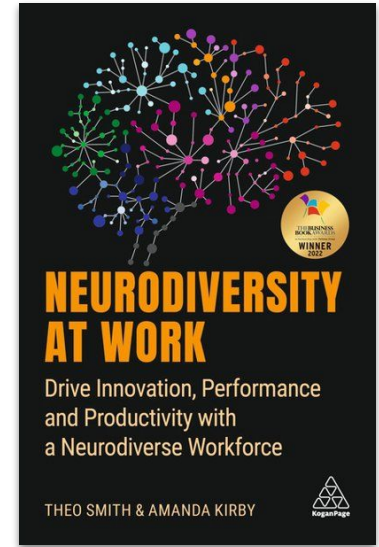
Share Resources

- Offer employer-paid subscriptions to Headspace or Calm Apps
- Provide an ergonomic assessments
- Support the purchase of assistive technologies for staff
- Create Awareness Month calendars for staff

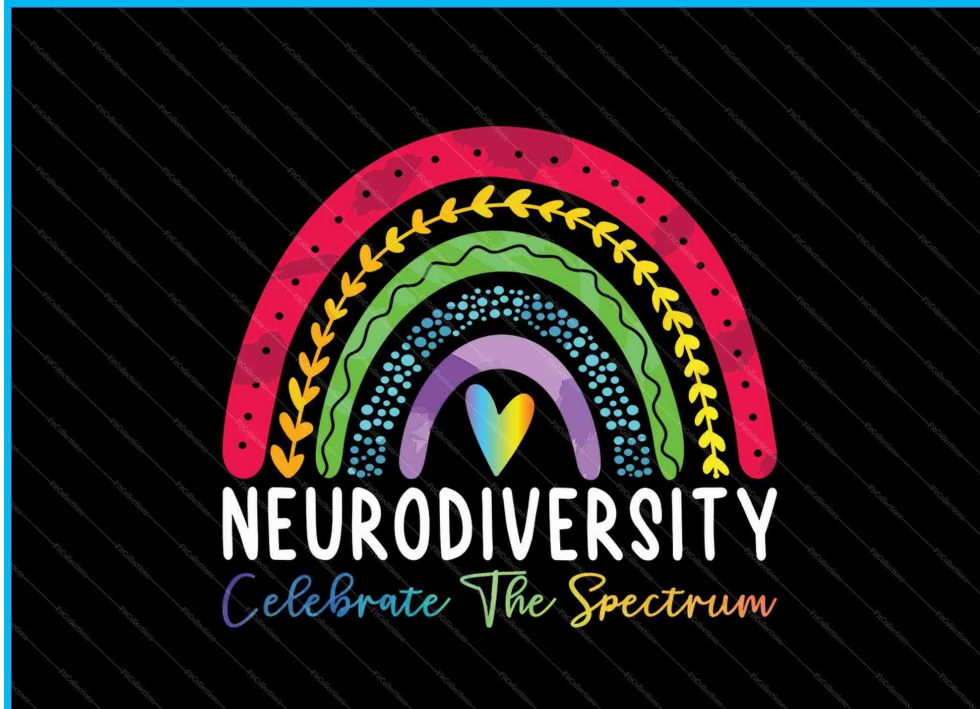


<https://www.istockphoto.com/vector/making-decision-concept-gm1415496763-463846108>

***“That’s the power of having a neurodiverse world.*”**



If we can crack the cognitive enigma code, we can truly and positively transform the world of work for the better, enable true inclusivity and all live and prosper in a world where we can have a sense of belonging.”



<https://creativeusart.com/products/neurodiversity-autism-spectrum-asd-adhd-rainbow-svg-png-files>

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www.reneegrassi.com