



# Neurodiversity in the Classroom

Strength-Based Strategies to Help  
Students With Special Needs Succeed  
in School and Life

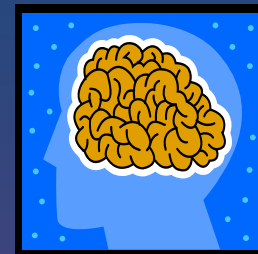
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# Neurodiversity



An idea which asserts that atypical (neurodivergent) neurological development is a normal human difference that is to be recognized and respected as any other human variation.

# 5 Types of Diversities



- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Learning Disabilities
- ADD/ADHD
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

# Niche Construction



- In Nature: Helping to ensure the thriving of an organism by directly modifying the environment in such a way that it enhances that organism's chances for survival.
- In Culture: Helping to ensure the thriving of a child by directly modifying the environment in such a way that it enhances that child's chances for success.

# Principles of Neurodiversity



- The Brain is a Rain Forest
- Cultural Values Dictate Disorders
- Success = Adapting to the Environment
- Success = Changing the Environment
- Niche Construction Modifies the Brain

# Positive Niche Construction



- Strength Awareness
- Positive Role Models
- Assistive Technologies/UDL
- Strength-Based Learning Strategies
- Enhanced Human Resource Network
- Affirmative Career Aspirations
- Positive Environmental Modifications

# Neurodiversity Strengths Checklist



## Personal Strengths

- ☐ Enjoys working independently
- ☐ Has a good sense of his/her personal strengths and weaknesses
- ☐ Learns from past mistakes
- ☐ Has persistence in carrying out assignments or activities
- ☐ Is courageous in dealing with adversity and/or the unknown
- ☐ Keeps a personal diary or journal
- ☐ Has a good sense of humor
- ☐ Possesses a sense of responsibility
- ☐ Has strong opinions about controversial topics
- ☐ Marches to the beat of a different drummer
- ☐ Handles stressful events well (e.g. is resilient)
- ☐ Has good character (e.g. honesty, integrity, fairness)
- ☐ Has the ability to set realistic goals for him/herself
- ☐ Has a sense of confidence or high self-esteem
- ☐ Has good self-discipline
- ☐ Has personal ambitions in life
- ☐ Displays good common sense
- ☐ Possesses personal vitality, vigor, or energy

## Communication Strengths

- ☐ Explains ideas or concepts well to others
- ☐ Asks good questions
- ☐ Is a good storyteller
- ☐ Is a good joke teller
- ☐ Has good listening skills
- ☐ Handles verbal feedback (especially negative feedback) well
- ☐ Has good articulation ability
- ☐ Is able to effectively use non-verbal cues to communicate with others
- ☐ Is persuasive in getting someone to do something
- ☐ Has good assertive skills without being pushy

## Emotional Strengths

- ☐ Is emotionally sensitive to perceiving the world around him/her
- ☐ Has an optimistic attitude toward life
- ☐ Can tell how he/she is feeling at any given moment
- ☐ Can easily pick up on the emotional state of another person
- ☐ Is able to handle strong internal feelings in a constructive manner
- ☐ Receives gut feelings about things

*From: Thomas Armstrong, Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Strength-Based Strategies to Help Students with Special Needs Succeed in School and Life. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2012.*

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# Neurodiversity Strengths Checklist



## Social Strengths

- ☐ Has leadership ability
- ☐ Has a good sense of empathy for others
- ☐ Enjoys socializing with others
- ☐ Is good at helping others
- ☐ Is kind or affectionate towards others
- ☐ Has at least one good friend
- ☐ Prefers working with others
- ☐ Likes to play board games and/or card games with others
- ☐ Has skill in refereeing disputes conflicts between classmates
- ☐ Is polite and has good manners
- ☐ Is able to work out his/her own conflicts with others
- ☐ Works well in groups
- ☐ Volunteers his/her time in some worthy cause
- ☐ Belongs to at least one club or social group (e.g. Scouts.)
- ☐ Has a good relationship with at least one family member
- ☐ Is friendly to others
- ☐ Is good at sharing with others
- ☐ Follows class rules
- ☐ Has a good relationship with at least one teacher in the school
- ☐ Has good personal hygiene
- ☐ Trusts others without being taken in
- ☐ Is liked by his peers

## Cognitive Strengths

- ☐ Has good organizational skills
- ☐ Has good study skills
- ☐ Is able to use cognitive strategies (e.g. self-talk) in solving problems
- ☐ Is able to pay close attention to details
- ☐ Has a good short-term and/or long-term memory
- ☐ Is able to think ahead
- ☐ Is able to become totally absorbed in an activity
- ☐ Can easily divide his attention between two or more activities

## Cultural Strengths

- ☐ Has traveled to other countries
- ☐ Speaks more than one language
- ☐ Is tolerant of others who have cultural, ethnic, or racial differences
- ☐ Has pride in his/her own cultural, ethnic, or racial background
- ☐ Likes to find out about historical events around the world
- ☐ Enjoys learning about different cultural traditions



# Neurodiversity Strengths Checklist



## Literacy Strengths

- ☐ Enjoys reading books
- ☐ Has good reading comprehension
- ☐ Enjoys doing word puzzles or playing word games
- ☐ Is a good writer in one or more genres (e.g. poetry, stories, reports, letters)
- ☐ Is a good speller
- ☐ Has a large vocabulary
- ☐ Enjoys listening to audio books or to someone telling a story or reading out loud

## Logical Strengths

- ☐ Does well in science class
- ☐ Can estimate things easily
- ☐ Enjoys working with numbers and/or statistics
- ☐ Is good at solving math problems
- ☐ Has a chemistry set or other science kit that he/she works with at home
- ☐ Has an interest in astronomy, chemistry, physics, or biology
- ☐ Enjoys logical or number games or puzzles like Rubik's cube or Sudoku
- ☐ Can easily calculate numbers in his/her head

## Visual-Spatial Strengths

- ☐ Has an aptitude for fixing machines
- ☐ Likes to create three-dimensional structures with building materials
- ☐ Is good at doing jigsaw puzzles or other visual puzzles
- ☐ Is able to read maps well
- ☐ Reports being able to visualize images clearly
- ☐ Gets information more easily through pictures than words
- ☐ Is sensitive to the visual world around him/her

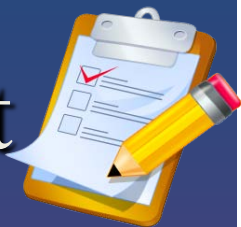
## Physical Strengths

- ☐ Has a good sense of balance
- ☐ Learns material best when moving around
- ☐ Likes to ride his/her bike, skateboard, and/or other self-powered personal vehicle
- ☐ Is good at playing team sports like baseball, soccer, basketball, or football
- ☐ Is good at playing individual sports like tennis, swimming, gymnastics, or golf
- ☐ Is in good physical health
- ☐ Likes to dance
- ☐ Is physically strong
- ☐ Is a fast runner or has other athletic abilities
- ☐ Likes to exercise (e.g. weights, aerobics, jogging, treadmill)
- ☐ Has good physical endurance
- ☐ Has good physical flexibility

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# Neurodiversity Strengths Checklist



## Dexterity Strengths

- ☐ Has a hobby building model cars, planes, ships or other similar projects
- ☐ Displays good handwriting
- ☐ Likes to juggle or do magic tricks
- ☐ Enjoys hand crafts like knitting, crocheting, embroidery, or needlepoint
- ☐ Likes to make things with his/her hands
- ☐ Has good tactile ability
- ☐ Enjoys arts and crafts like origami, collage, and/or paper maché
- ☐ Enjoys woodworking, carpentry, carving, and/or metal work
- ☐ Has good eye-hand coordination

## Nature Strengths

- ☐ Has good rapport with animals
- ☐ Is good at taking care of plants in the classroom or at home
- ☐ Is sensitive to weather patterns
- ☐ Takes care of a pet at home or at school
- ☐ Is concerned about the welfare of the planet (e.g. is ecologically-minded)
- ☐ Likes to go hiking and/or camping in nature
- ☐ Enjoys studying nature (e.g. insects, plants, birds, rocks, and/or animals)
- ☐ Likes to hunt or fish
- ☐ Has a good sense of direction

## Musical Strengths

- ☐ Is sensitive to the rhythms of music
- ☐ Enjoys playing a musical instrument
- ☐ Knows the music and lyrics of many songs
- ☐ Has a particular interest in one or more musical genres (e.g. rock, classical, jazz)
- ☐ Enjoys listening to music
- ☐ Has a good sense of hearing auditory acuity
- ☐ Has a good sense of pitch
- ☐ Has a good singing voice
- ☐ Makes up his/her own tunes or melodies with or without lyrics

## High Tech Strengths

- ☐ Likes to spend time using a computer, tablet, or smart phone
- ☐ Has a facility for playing video games
- ☐ Likes to surf the Internet
- ☐ Knows how to set up audio-visual or computer equipment
- ☐ Likes to text on the phone
- ☐ Enjoys social networking (e.g. blog, website, Facebook)
- ☐ Enjoys using a still camera or video camera to record events or express him/herself
- ☐ Has several his/her own favorite movies or TV shows that he/she likes to talk about
- ☐ Understands at least one computer language

# Neurodiversity Strengths Checklist



## Creative Strengths

- ☐ Expresses him/herself dramatically
- ☐ Has a good imagination
- ☐ Enjoys doodling, drawing, and/or painting
- ☐ Likes to act in plays and skits
- ☐ Works well with clay or other forms of sculpture
- ☐ Demonstrates creativity in one or more school assignments
- ☐ Possesses a love of beautiful things
- ☐ Has ideas for futuristic or fantastic projects
- ☐ Comes up with ideas that nobody else has thought of

## Spiritual Strengths

- ☐ Enjoys meditation, yoga, or some other form of contemplation
- ☐ Asks big life questions (e.g. what is the purpose of life?)
- ☐ Has a deep sense of wisdom
- ☐ Participates in religious or other spiritual events
- ☐ Has a philosophical attitude toward life
- ☐ Has a strong faith in something higher than him/herself

## Miscellaneous Strengths

- ☐ Likes collecting things (e.g. stamps, coins, buttons)
- ☐ Loves to cook
- ☐ Has a love of learning new things
- ☐ Is a good test taker
- ☐ Possesses a good memory for nighttime dreams
- ☐ Is curious about the world around him/her
- ☐ Has a good sense of time
- ☐ Manages money well
- ☐ Has good fashion sense in the clothes he/she wears
- ☐ Has good entrepreneurial skills (e.g. has started own business) started his/her own business

**Other Strengths** (write in other strengths not mentioned elsewhere in checklist):

# Enhancing Social Networks



- Repair Difficult Relationships
- Strengthen Weak Relationships
- Foster New Positive Relationships
- Engage Existing Positive Relationships

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