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45th National Conference  
on Pediatric Health Care

121: Wired Differently:  
Managing Neurodiversity in  
Pediatric Primary Care

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National Association of  
Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

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Experts in pediatrics, Advocates for children.

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**Speaker Disclosure**

I have no disclosures or conflicts of interest.

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**Learning Objectives**

Explain what it means to be "Neurodivergent."

Differentiate between the terms "Neurodivergent," "Neurodiversity," and "Neurotypical".

Describe why care of the neurodivergent pediatric patient is important to incorporate into the pediatric primary care setting.

Adopt strategies and resources for providing quality care to neurodivergent children in the primary care setting.

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**Have you heard the term  
"Neurodivergent" used in practice  
lately?**

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What does it mean  
to be  
"Neurodivergent"?

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What other words come to mind  
when you hear the term  
"Neurodivergent"?

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### Definition and History of Neurodiversity

- The word **neurodiversity** refers to the diversity of ALL people.
- The neurodiversity movement emerged in the **1900's**.
- **Judy Singer**, Australian Sociologist
- Neurodiversity research and education is **increasingly important in how clinicians view and address certain disabilities and neurological conditions**.

Baumerr & Frueh, 2021, November 23).

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### Definition and History of "Neurodivergent"

- **Kassiane Asasumasu**, a multiply neurodivergent neurodiversity activist.
- Having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal."
- Meaning that the person's **brain functions, learns and processes information differently**.

(Boston University, N.D.)  
Boston University Neurodiversity Resources and Definitions

(Baumerr & Frueh, 2021; Broder-Fingert & Abate, 2022; Loo et al., 2021).

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### Neurodiversity Terms to Know

**Neurodiversity**  
Neurodiversity refers to the natural diversity of human minds. It is a biological fact that we are diverse in our minds just like we are diverse in our ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.  
Neurodiversity acknowledges the whole spectrum of neurodiversity from neurodivergent individuals to neurotypical individuals.

created by Jody Berger

**Neurotypical**  
Neurotypical refers to having a mind or functioning that falls within the society's standards of what is deemed "typical", "average" or "normal".  
Neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergent, someone who diverges, and it is not a negative word at all but a neutral word.

**Neurodivergent**  
Neurodivergent is an umbrella term for individuals who have a mind or brain that diverges from what is typical. It can be acquired or genetic, an innate part of you or not.  
Neurodivergence just means having a mind that functions differently to what is considered the norm including learning, processing, interpreting, feeling, etc.

created by Kristine Antonette

**Neurodiverse**  
Neurodiverse is a term to describe a group of individuals who represent the spectrum of neurodiversity which includes neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals.  
Remember, an individual cannot be neurodiverse. Individuals who aren't neurotypical would be neurodivergent.

**NEURODIVERGENT UMBRELLA\***

ADHD, DID & OSDD, BIPOLAR, ASPD, BPD, NPD, GAD, OCD, ABU/TBI, DYSLEXIA, CPTSD, TIC DISORDERS, DYSPRAXIA, HSP, SCHIZOPHRENIA, SENSORY PROCESSING, MISOPHONIA, HPD, PTSD, DYSCALCULIA, DOWN SYNDROME, DYSGRAPHIA, FASD, SYNESTHESIA

\*NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST    www.neurodivergentumbrella.com    @neurodivergentumbrella

(Wise, 2019)

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**What image or definition resonated with you the most, or helped the most with your understanding of neurodivergent terminology?**

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## Why is this important in the Pediatric Primary Care Setting?

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### Why is the topic of Neurodivergent pediatric patients important in primary care?

Rising Statistics demonstrate a need.

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Congruent with Mission and Vision of diversity, equity and inclusion at NAPNAP and AAP.

➔

Standard for quality pediatric care.

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## Rising Statistics Demonstrate a Need

About **1 in 44** children in the United States has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).  
(CDC, March 22, 2022)

9.8% of children ages 3–17-year-old are diagnosed with ADHD.

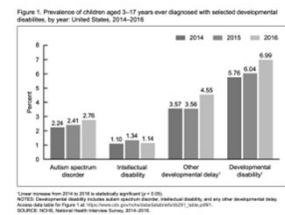
Boys (13%) are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls (6%).<sup>1</sup>

(CDC, 2022 August 9)

## Rising Statistics Demonstrate a Need

- It is estimated that **2-3% of children in the United States** are diagnosed with some form of Intellectual Disability (ID). (NICHD, 2021, November 9)
- The prevalence of children diagnosed with a developmental disability **increased from 5.76% to 6.99%** (Zablotsky et al., 2017).

The prevalence of children diagnosed with any developmental disability increased from 2014 to 2016.



## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Pediatric Primary Care

- NAPNAP **celebrates diversity** and **advocates** for safety of all children.
- Children deserve a community absent of discrimination, cognizant of **individuality and supportive of resilience development**.
- Mission, as an association, to **promote equity in child health** as experts in pediatrics.
- Justin Worsley NAPNAP Official Statement (NAPNAP, n.d.)



## Passion for Quality Pediatric Care for ALL

*“Now is the time for pediatric clinicians to engage the neurodiverse community in research, to better understand their needs, and to develop models of care that directly address their well-being.”*

(Broder-Fingert & Abate, 2022). AAP Blog

- Respectful language and communication.
- Individualized Care Plans.
- Caring for the whole patient.
- Stronger partnerships with patients and families.
- Better Patient Outcomes.

**How do we provide  
quality care for  
neurodiverse patients  
in the primary care  
setting?**

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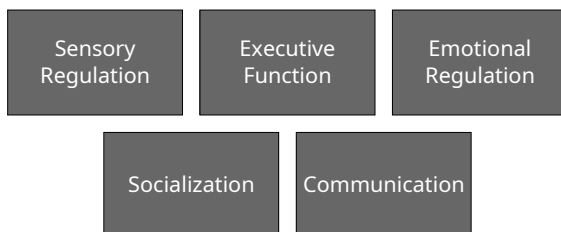


**What are some things your practice has implemented  
to ensure neurodiverse pediatric patients are  
receiving quality care?**

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### **Caring for Neurodivergent Children in Primary Care**



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### **Addressing Sensory Regulation**



- Interdisciplinary Teams
- Calm Space
- Sensory supports
- Visual Aids
- Sensory friendly patient rooms
- (Autism Spectrum, 2021; Baumer & Freuh, 2021; Thom et al., 2020)

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## Addressing Executive Functioning



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## Addressing Emotional Regulation

- Therapy/Counseling
- Involve the care givers
- Comfort Items
- Relaxation Techniques
- Calm Environment



(Prentiss, 2021; Richmond & Baicher, 2022)

<https://www.childrenshospitals.org/news/childrens-hospitals-today/2023/08/a-sensory-program-to-help-calm-patients-in-the-hospital>

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## Addressing Socialization

- Building Rapport and Trust
- Sharing in the patient's interests
- Ask before any physical contact
- Involve the Caregivers
- It can take time...Be Patient
- Encourage Social Interaction
- Support Groups
- Peer Groups

(Richmond and Baicher, 2022; Thom et al., 2020)



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## Partnership with Caregivers

- Consider Multidisciplinary needs.
- Connect to resources.
- Respectful communication.
- Individualized goals and plans.
- Shared decision making.
- Collaboration.
- "Neurodiversity-informed intervention programs"
- Peer Support/Support Groups



<https://www.td.org/insights/coaching-is-a-partnership>  
(Min Wong et al., 2022; Loo et al, 2021)

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## Addressing Communication with Patient and Family

Environment- Quiet, free from distraction.

Take your time. Slow down pacing for asking questions.

Use a clear communication style.

Avoid sarcasm, euphemisms, and implied messages.

Provide concise verbal and written instructions for tasks.

Break tasks down into small steps.

Non-Verbal Aids (I pad, cards, white board, etc.)

(Baumer & Freuh, 2021; Richmond & Baicher, 2022; Thom et al., 2020)

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## STEP IT UP: Improve Your Communication With Neurodivergent Patients

Autism Spectrum Disorders  
Tap & Baicher

**S** Simple and Direct Questions

- Ask one question at a time
- Use simple terms and avoid jargon

**T** Take Your Time

- Wait for an answer
- Allow an extra 10 minutes

**E** Explain to Enable Compliance

- Provide a step-by-step explanation of a task and how it benefits the patient

**P** Precise Language

- Avoid metaphors and euphemisms
- Say exactly what you mean and be descriptive

**I** Include Carers

- Consider the carer's opinion when making a diagnosis
- Ask for their help with procedures
- Ask for a reciprocal request

**T** Touch and Feel First

- Allow the patient to touch and feel the equipment before you use it on them
- Warn the patient about sensations

**U** Understand My Differences

- Neurodivergent parents experience and express pain differently
- Start by asking the parent to describe the problem

**P** Prepare a Low Sensory Environment

- Use a quiet place covered with 'hugable' stuff
- Keep your attention nearby
- Contact the hearing disability liaison nurse

(Richmond & Baicher, 2022)

### What Hurts Self-Identification Tool

#### What Hurts?

Autism Spectrum Disorders  
Tap & Baicher

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Listen.

Communicate in ways that help them.

Avoid value-based labels.

No two neurodivergent people are the same.

Don't assume that anyone is incapable or unintelligent.

Treat everyone with respect.

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/23154-neurodivergent>

(Cleveland Clinic, 2022)

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## Neurodiversity Affirming Practice

### Core Principles

intersectionality

respecting autonomy

validating differences

presuming competence

reframing expectations

promoting self-advocacy

rejecting neuronormativity

prioritising lived experience

nurturing positive self-identity

adapting systems and environments

honouring all forms of communication

(Pantazakos & Vanaken, 2023; Wise, 2023)

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## Resources and References

- [Kennedy Krieger Center for Autism and Related Diseases \(CARD\)](#)
- [Educators 4SC: Teaching about Neurodivergent Communities](#)
- [Neurodiversity Celebration Week](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics Tool Kits](#)

Please Scan for complete list of references:



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