A PRINCIPLE-CENTERED APPROACH TO

Empowering Your ND Child

Awareness · Understanding · Inclusion & Integration

SESSION OVERVIEW

What is this session about?

What if the prevalent way we think about human cognitive and behavioral differences is fundamentally wrong? This session challenges you to shift your frame of mind — because neurodiversity isn't an exception to the human condition, it is the human condition.

Built around three interlocking principles, the session offers a practical framework for empowering neurodivergent children — and for understanding the neurodivergent people in every area of your life.

> **Awareness** Variations in brain function — autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others — are normal, not aberrant. One in five people have brains that work differently.
>
> **Understanding** Compassionate curiosity: the humility to acknowledge we don't know another person's journey, and the commitment to keep learning it.
>
> **Inclusion & Integration** Celebrate strengths, accept differences, and create the psychological safety and sense of belonging every human deserves.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What you will leave with

Neurodiversity is normal — and everywhere

- One in five people have brains that work differently, including people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other conditions. These are natural variations in human cognition, not aberrations.
- The bell curve of human traits has no wrong end. Difference is not deficit.

See your child whole

- A strengths-based approach doesn't ignore challenges — it approaches them from a place of acceptance and capability.
- Document your child's strengths, interests, sensory profile, learning style, and communication preferences. This is the foundation of every advocacy conversation you will ever have.
- Focused interests are tools, not distractions. Passion is not a detour — it is the road.

Replace judgment with compassionate curiosity

- Our lived experiences shape how we see others, but those lenses can prevent us from truly understanding someone.

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- Approach your child — and every neurodivergent person you encounter — with compassion for their journey and genuine curiosity about who they are.
- Stimming, sensory needs, and self-regulation behaviors are not problems to eliminate. They are communication and coping. Understanding them changes everything about how you respond.

Their social world is valid

- Autistic and neurodivergent children do socialize — their ways of connecting may look different, but they are just as real and meaningful.
- Forcing children to mask their authentic selves is exhausting and harmful. Psychological safety means your child can be who they are without fear of correction, shame, or rejection.

Build the advocate within

- You will not always be around to advocate for your child. The goal of every support, accommodation, and strategy is to hand the reins to them.
- Self-advocacy starts small and early. Every decision your child makes about their own needs builds that muscle.
- For high school students: IEP ownership should begin shifting to your teen. They should attend, understand, and eventually lead their own meetings.

TRY THIS

Practical actions you can take this week

Notice your lenses

Pay attention when you make quick judgments about your child's behavior. Ask yourself: Am I viewing this through my own expectations, or am I being curious about their perspective?

Be more explicit

Spell out what you mean rather than assuming others will read between the lines. Instead of an open-ended instruction, try a clear, specific one with context about what the finished result should look like.

Provide scaffolding

When assigning tasks, share how long something typically takes, what resources are available, and what the result should look like. Point toward a starting point when your child seems stuck.

Point out strengths explicitly

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When you notice your child's attention to detail, creative thinking, or dedication, name it out loud. Neurodivergent people often hear about what they're not good at. Consistently highlighting strengths helps them understand where they contribute most.

For high school parents: start the IEP handoff

Invite your teen to attend their next IEP meeting. Before the meeting, walk them through what will be discussed. Your role is shifting from author to coach.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to think

Inclusion is not a policy or a checkbox. It is a frame of mind we can all choose to adopt — at home, at school, and in our communities.

"What is one thing you will see differently about your child starting tonight?"

Think about a time when your child struggled — not because they lacked ability, but because the environment or approach didn't match how they experience the world. What was happening, and what might have helped?

What's one small change you could make this week to create more psychological safety at home?

Neurodivergent children deserve the same dignity, respect, and sense of belonging as everyone else. True inclusion happens when we actively work to understand and support each other's differences.

RESOURCES

Highly recommended reading

Accessible and comprehensive guides for understanding neurodiversity and autism:

Neurodiversity for Dummies (1st ed., 2024)
Marble, John, Chabria, Khushboo, & Jayaraman, Ranga. For Dummies/Wiley.

Autism for Dummies (1st ed., 2025)
Marble, John, Chabria, Khushboo, & Jayaraman, Ranga. For Dummies/Wiley.

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