

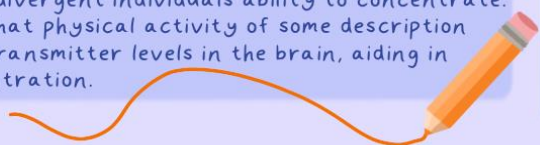


Firstly, what does it mean to be neurodivergent? Neurodiversity refers to the normal variation in human brain function regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental function. Neurodivergent disorders include autistic spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, anxiety disorders, depression and many others.



How to help a distressed neurodivergent student : There are several things you could do to support a student who appears to be distressed. First of all, discreetly check in on them if they appear to be having a hard time. Do not call them out in front of the class or speak loudly to them, instead perhaps quietly ask if you could have a word outside. There may be some days when a neurodivergent student is struggling more than on others days. On those days they will require your patience and understanding. If they appear to be struggling to concentrate then don't push them to work or get frustrated. They will be just as frustrated as you are. If they seem to be very tired, it might be worthwhile to let them rest their head on the desk for a while if possible. This can just allow them to recharge as social interaction can tire out neurodivergent individuals significantly more than neurotypicals which makes school a very exhausting and difficult environment.

Additionally, allowing them to fiddle with something or to doodle can also be helpful. I personally have found teachers who are patient and understanding with me needing to doodle very helpful. This doesn't mean that the student isn't listening, in fact being able to fiddle or doodle may actually increase a neurodivergent individuals ability to concentrate. Research shows that physical activity of some description increases neurotransmitter levels in the brain, aiding in focus and concentration.



How teachers should support Neurodivergent students

Teacher support can be very important for neurodivergent individuals as many struggle with concentration or understanding and need patience and support. Teachers can play a very important role in the lives of neurodivergent children and teens as a supportive teacher can make a world of difference to their attitude to learning and their self esteem. Many neurodivergent children will go undiagnosed and may not receive the support they need at home due to lack of understanding so the support of a teacher is incredibly valuable.

Fun fact : 1 in 7 people have a neurodivergent condition!

Summary :

- be patient
- don't ask them questions in front of the class
- listen to their needs
- don't instantly respond with frustration when they appear to be struggling to concentrate
- let them have some time out if they are overwhelmed
- understand not everything is visible at surface level
- let them know you can be a safe space for them

So, what should you do to support neurodivergent students? You've already made the first step by caring enough to read this article! Next, you should certainly do some research of your own if you're teaching a neurodivergent child or teenager. Each neurodivergent disorder is different and the support needed will differ. There are some common characteristics, however, which intersect and can affect every neurodivergent individual.

These are things like :

- Struggling with concentration
- Stimming
- Overstimulation
- Getting frustrated or emotional easily
- Often have either excess energy or are tired



What is stimming and what does it look like?

Stimming is something which can be experienced by anyone with a neurodivergent disorder. There is a stereotype that this is something only experienced by autistic people, but that is not true. Stimming behaviours are defined as repetitive actions or movements and they are often used as a method of expressing emotion or self soothing.

Common stimming behaviours you may see are :

- Rocking
- Flapping hands
- Bouncing legs
- Fiddling/drawing
- Banging head



Stimming can be positive or negative. Some stims indicate positive emotions and some indicate distress so it's always good to check up on a child discreetly if they appear to be stimming and stressed.

This article was written and made by me, Morgan McWilliam, and is based on my personal experiences as a neurodivergent student who has struggled significantly over the years and how some of my teachers have supported me throughout and how some could have done more to help me with my learning and mental health.