

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.

Positive Niche Construction



- 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.

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

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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

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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 mache
- 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

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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):

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10 Reasons Why We Need Neurodiversity in Education

1. Higher Expectations Lead to Higher Achievement
2. To Replace a Deficit Paradigm with a Growth Paradigm
3. To Support the Inclusion Movement
4. To Align Brain Diversity with Other Diversity Programs in the Schools
5. To Give All Kids a Chance to Succeed in the 21st Century
6. To Serve as a Stimulus for Reform in Education
7. To Reduce Bullying in the Classroom
8. So We Can Hear the Voices of Those Who Can Change the World
9. To Have a Wide Diversity of Minds that Can Adapt to Whatever May Happen in the Future
10. So Our Kids Will Be Happier

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