



Brain Matters

Different brains work differently

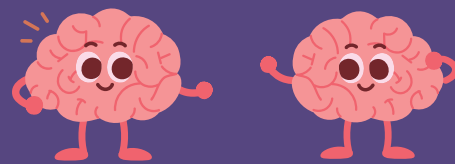
Welcome to the first edition of PEBB's **Brain Matters**. This is a two-part series to create awareness about neurodiversity.

What does neurodiversity mean?

Put simply, it means that different brains work differently.

Everyone is DIFFERENT

People **LOOK** different. **SOUND** different. **LIKE** different things and are **GOOD** at different things.



Also, people have **DIFFERENT BRAINS**

Source: @NeuroWild

You may be wondering...

Why are we talking about neurodiversity? Because it's estimated that up to 20% of the population is neurodivergent. Perhaps you're not personally neurodivergent, but it's likely that someone in your life is.

You asked. We listened.

Here's why PEBB wants to talk openly about neurodiversity:

1 We can address member feedback

We've heard from members who have struggled to get support. Finding resources can be challenging. They've even encountered financial burdens.

2 There are PEBB benefits and other resources that can help

Our goal is to help you learn more about neurodiversity and how to get help if you need it. This includes using your benefits and State resources, and finding ways to create a support network.

3 We support diversity

PEBB is committed to supporting diversity of all types. Awareness of neurodiversity helps us understand others better. This can remove barriers at work for individuals and supervisors. Understanding and awareness create a better workplace.

4 Neurodiversity creates a more productive work environment

Having diverse brains in the workforce improves how we serve our members.

PEBB can help!

We've heard questions like...

“How can I get help for my child with an eating disorder?”

“Where do I start to get an ADHD screening?”

“My child has dyslexia. What are the treatment options, and how do my benefits cover it?”

There are many resources to help answer these questions. The goal of this special, two-part newsletter series is to bring awareness to the concept of neurodiversity and support empowerment.

Part 1 Awareness

In this edition, learn about neurodiversity. Learn about the personal challenges and common misconceptions of being neurodivergent.

Part 2 Empowerment

The next edition includes a variety of resources to empower you and to support neurodiversity.

The roots of neurodiversity



In 1998, Australian sociologist Judy Singer noticed a similar hereditary condition in herself, her mother, and her daughter. After realizing that their brains worked differently from those of people outside the family, she came up with a term to define it. She combined these words:

Neurological + Diversity = Neurodiversity

The term was intended to promote equality and inclusion of different brains. While initially inspired by autism, the term has evolved to include much more today.

No brain is perfect

There is no such thing as a perfect brain. Each brain is unique and diverse.



Did you know?

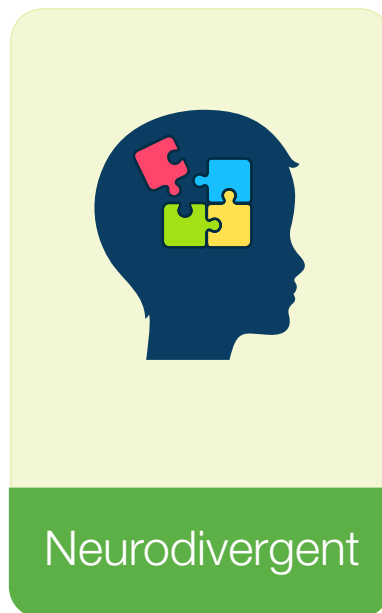
Actress Octavia Spencer has dyslexia.

“When I was six and starting to pick books for myself, that’s when I found out I wasn’t a great reader and that it had a name...dyslexia!”

It's time for some vocabulary



Refers to all people, no matter what brain type they have.



Refers to a person with a brain that “diverges” from what’s considered “typical.”



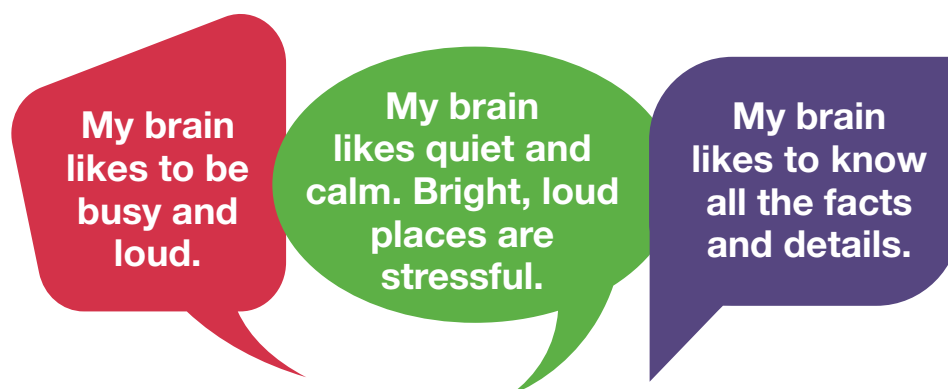
Refers to someone who has a “typical” brain.

Labels are great, but not for people's brains

There has been a long history in the medical community of labeling people's brains as “normal” or “abnormal.” Nowadays, neurodiversity embraces the differences in all of our unique brains.

Everyone has a unique brain

It's important to know what kind of brain we have so we can take care of it properly.















Knowing our brain type helps us figure out the things we need to feel happy and safe.

Source: @NeuroWild

Making assumptions

Try not to make assumptions about—things are not always as they appear.

FICTION	FACT
 Neurodiversity is mainly about autism.	 Neurodiversity is the concept that all brains work differently. One way is not better than the other.
 Everyone has a little bit of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).	 For someone to be ADHD (or neurodivergent in general), the key is that they have persistent patterns. Things don't happen once in a while; they happen all the time. ADHD interferes with the ability to focus.
 It's obvious when someone is neurodivergent.	 Many neurodivergent individuals “mask” (or hide) their traits. They do this to blend in. It's a learned coping strategy.
 Neurodivergent people are less capable in the workplace.	 Neurodiversity brings unique talents and innovation to the workplace. These can include attention to detail, pattern recognition, and creative problem-solving.
 A neurodivergent diagnosis is an excuse that parents use because they can't control their kids.	 A neurodivergent brain doesn't work in the same way that a neurotypical brain does. For example, when you see a kid having a “meltdown,” they may be reacting to their surrounding environment. While it might not trigger some kids, that environment might overstimulate a neurodivergent child in a way that's not apparent to you.
 People with ADHD aren't motivated.	 People with ADHD might describe themselves as curiosity-driven, in a flow, or highly creative.

Condition-first vs. person-first language

The concept of neurodiversity is a relatively new topic. There is more than one way to talk about it. Different people prefer different language. Here are two examples:

Condition-first language:	Person-first language:
This is when you put the condition before the person, such as referring to someone as an “autistic woman.” Some prefer this language because it illustrates that their condition is an integral part of their identity.	This is when you put the person before their condition, such as referring to someone as “a woman with autism.” Some like this language because they don't want to be defined by their condition.

What's the bottom line? Be respectful of others and let them define themselves.

Did you know you have eight senses?

We're all familiar with the five outward senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. However, many people aren't aware of our three internal senses. Neurodiversity often shows up as an underperformance or overperformance of these senses.



Vestibular	Interoception	Proprioception
<p>This sense is your center for balance and movement. Located in the inner ear, it keeps you upright. For some people, it can cause nausea when they ride in the back seat of a car. For others, frequent rocking back and forth might provide comfort.</p>	<p>This sense sends signals from your internal organs, relaying messages like hunger, thirst, temperature shifts, and when it's time to go to the bathroom. When interoception isn't working correctly, it's difficult to self-regulate what your body needs.</p>	<p>Located in your muscles and joints, this sense is about body awareness and depth perception. It tells you how much force to use for everyday actions. Poor proprioception can cause you to walk into walls, bump into people, or not know how hard to pull when opening a door.</p>



What causes neurodivergence?

Some people are born neurodivergent. Others experience trauma, injuries, or later-developing genetic traits that cause it to show up later in life.

On her Instagram account, @Neurowild shares the following information about her later-in-life diagnoses:

Traits that led me to an Autism + ADHD diagnosis at age 33

Rehearsing things in my mind before saying them.

Conscious stress about eye contact and body language during interactions.

Copying the people I'm with. Different personalities for different people.

Cartoon-like facial expressions.

Feeling disconnected from most people, most of the time.

Watching/reading the same thing for 10 years.

Serial people-pleasing. Never disagreeing; confrontation makes me cry.

Hyperfocusing on drawing; forgetting to eat/drink.

Intense emotions that consume me for days at a time.

Handling life OK until: 3 kids, new school, new house, new job. Chaos > burnout > diagnosis.

Terrible executive functioning.

Constant stimming: humming, leg-tapping, rocking, throat-clearing.



Neurodiversity spotlights



“My Tourette’s makes easy things a lot harder.”

— Singer Billie Eilish

So many Grammy Awards

At the age of 14, artist **Billie Eilish** uploaded her first song to a music platform late one night. By morning, “Ocean Eyes” had gone viral. This pop sensation is the youngest person ever to win a Grammy for Album of the Year. Plus, she’s the youngest person to ever write and record a theme song for a James Bond movie.

Eilish is open about the fact that she has Tourette syndrome. It’s a neurological condition characterized by involuntary physical movements or vocal outbursts known as tics.

“These are things you would never notice if you’re just having a conversation with me,” Eilish said. “But for me they’re very exhausting.”

People who aren’t aware of her condition sometimes don’t understand what’s happening. Eilish said, “The most common way that people react is they laugh because they think I’m trying to be funny, and I’m always left incredibly offended by that.”



The kid who could read and write by age two

Sebastian is a little boy who’s been diagnosed with autism and hyperlexia. Someone with hyperlexia has reading and writing skills unexpectedly advanced for their age.

By the time he was two, Sebastian could read and write 200 words. His parents would provide him with things like puzzles and YouTube videos. After that, Sebastian learned all on his own. His dad said, “When he started to spell words backward, I thought maybe he was an alien. And he picked up all these words so quickly. It was incredible.”

Sebastian’s parents share videos of their son’s talents on social media. They want to “show that there’s a whole community of kids who have hyperlexia.”

It all started with a hand-painted sign

Environmental activist **Greta Thunberg** began her crusade against climate change by protesting outside the Swedish parliament. Over time, millions of people around the world followed suit.



“Autism is my superpower!”

— Environmental activist
Greta Thunberg

Thunberg was soon invited to attend a United Nations (U.N.) climate summit. Instead of flying, she traveled on a solar-powered boat from England to New York. As part of her U.N. speech, Thunberg said, “The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.”

Just one year later, Thunberg was named TIME magazine’s “Person of the Year.”

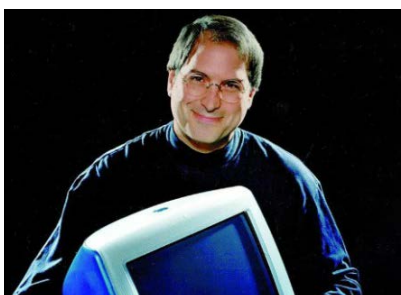
Thunberg attributes some of her success to the fact that she has Asperger’s syndrome.

“I have Asperger’s and that means I’m sometimes a bit different from the norm. And—given the right circumstances—being different is a superpower.”

Note: Asperger’s is one of many autism spectrum disorders. It’s sometimes referred to as high-functioning autism. People with Asperger’s are challenged with social skills, which makes it difficult for them to communicate and interact with other people.

A billion-dollar empire started in a garage

American businessman and inventor **Steve Jobs** was the cofounder of Apple, Inc.



“Dyslexia helped me see things differently.”

— Apple cofounder
Steve Jobs

His company created a home computer for the average person, something far smaller and less expensive than what was available at the time. His leadership was also instrumental in the creation of other revolutionary Apple products such as the iPod, iPhone, and iPad.

During a stint at Pixar, Jobs was one of the forces behind “Toy Story,” the first computer-generated animated feature.

Jobs was known for innovation. He didn’t focus on developing products to meet people’s needs. Instead, he used innovation to create solutions that anticipated their desires.

Jobs also had dyslexia. He once said, **“It made me feel that I was special because I could see things differently.”**

Film and TV picks with neurodivergent characters

To get a sense of some neurodivergent individuals' experiences, watch one of the following. But keep in mind: this is acting and not real life!



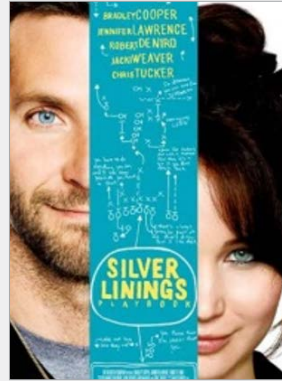
Everything Everywhere All at Once

"Evelyn" has ADHD.



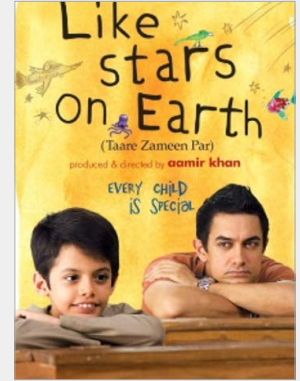
Atypical

"Sam" has autism.



Silver Linings Playbook

"Pat" has bipolar disorder.



Like Stars on Earth

"Ishaan" is neurodivergent.



Just be yourself

We've probably all been told "just be yourself" at one time or another. However, that can be a confusing message for those of us who are neurodivergent.

This point is beautifully illustrated in an excerpt from @neurodivergent_researcher:

Although many neurodivergent kids (and adults) are told things such as...

Stop talking, you talk too much, you laugh too loudly, look me in the eye, stop getting distracted, do not come and play with us...

And they are often asked things like...

Are you even listening to me?

Why can you not just behave?

Why are you so weird?

Why would I want to be friends with you?

**Would you feel safe to be yourself...
If you were constantly criticized for everything you do?**

Resources to learn more

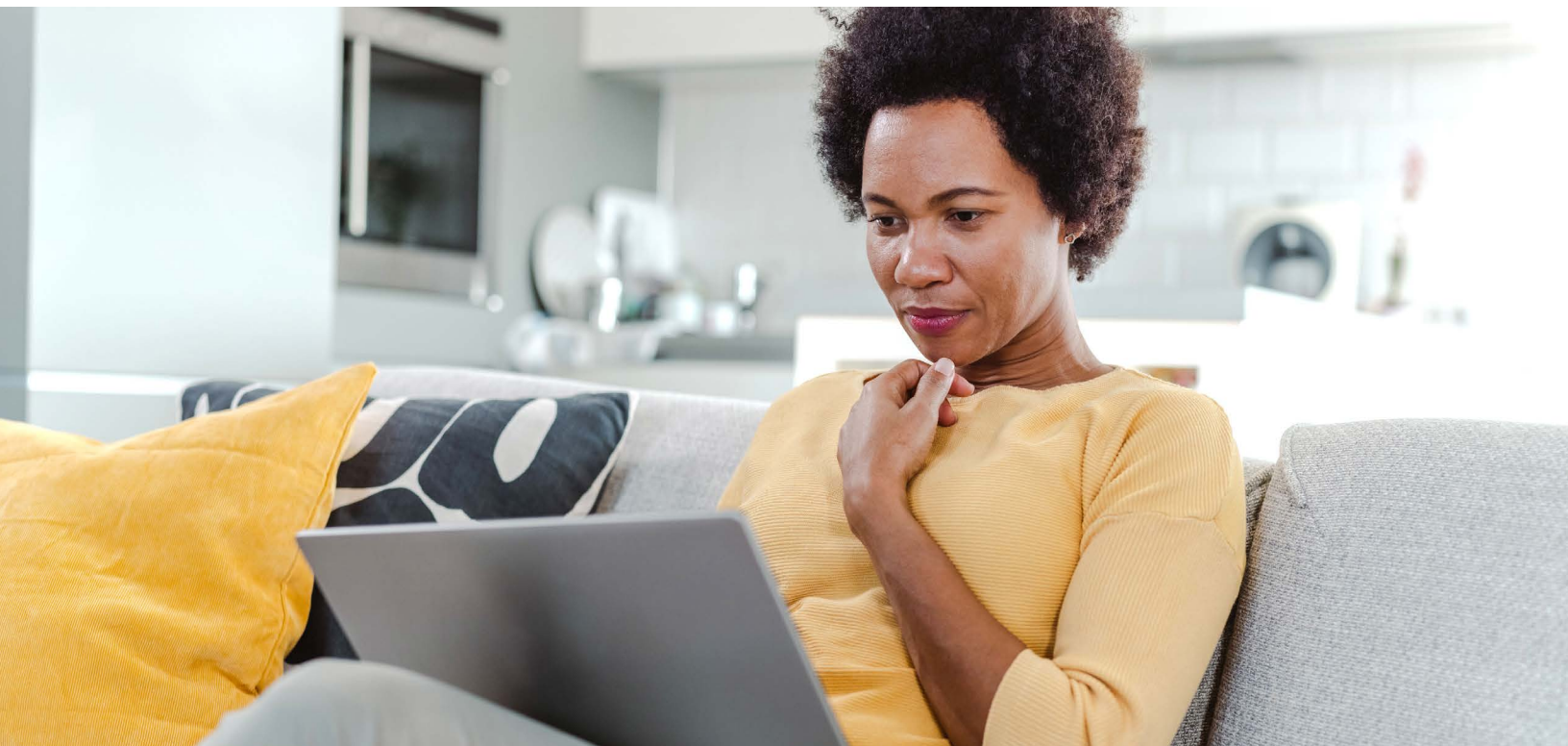
Want to learn more about neurodiversity? We created a robust [Neurodiversity Library](#) to help. It's full of resources, tips, and practical strategies for managing everyday neurodivergent living.

This library is for everyone! Whether you're neurodivergent or want to support someone who is—there are resources for you.

All brains work differently, which means they also process information differently. We've included many types of resources so you can learn the way that works best for your brain.

In the [Neurodiversity Library](#), you'll find:

- Local, State, and PEBB resources
- Websites
- Books
- YouTube sites
- Instagram accounts
- Apps
- Podcasts
- Online and in-person groups



A note about the resources

PEBB is sharing these resources with the intent of helping you get additional support and find connections with others who may share some of your concerns. The resources provided are not a substitute for professional care.

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