

INFORMATION SHEET – IN PRAISE OF NEURODIVERSITY!

Society has always recognised that unusual people exist. The tropes of ‘mad scientist’ or ‘eccentric’ are cultural stereotypes. More recently scientists and doctors have come to understand a lot more about these types of people. As a consequence, educators have created better tools that help them engage more successfully with intelligent children who struggle at school for various reasons.

Although we are a long way from a full understanding of how our brains work, it has become clear that a number of labelled conditions such as ‘autism’, ‘ADHD’, ‘OCD’ or ‘dyslexia’ are to some extent interconnected or at least overlapping. It also seems likely that all are ‘spectrum’ conditions meaning that everybody sits somewhere along a continuum, albeit that few people are sufficiently far along for effects to be noticeable.

It’s possible that these conditions are simply different manifestations of the same underlying cause. Whatever the reason, taken together, these conditions have come to be called ‘neurodiversity’.

Society, and particularly education, has traditionally catered to the majority – the neurotypical – and, as such, neurodiversity of any sort has often been treated as some kind of disorder. However, this range of conditions has persisted in populations everywhere and many evolutionary biologists believe that neurodiversity is evolution’s way of reducing risk for the survival of the population (like an investor spreading risk by means of a range of assets). In other words, neurodiversity is a feature, not a bug.

Although neurodiverse people might have difficulty fitting into mainstream education, their different way of thinking is imaginative and creative and inspires them to challenge established ideas and ways of doing things. It is quite likely that neurodiverse people have been responsible for many of the major breakthroughs in science and technology behind society’s current level of sophistication.

Better understanding of neurodiversity has encouraged a social movement dedicated to challenging prevailing perceptions. Features of this movement are as follows:

1. **Social Model of Disability:** Neurodiversity advocates often align with the social model of disability, which suggests that disabilities are not just medical problems but also social issues. Barriers created by society, such as lack of accessibility and understanding, are seen as significant challenges for neurodivergent individuals.
2. **Valuing Differences:** The movement stresses the importance of valuing and leveraging the unique strengths and perspectives that neurodivergent individuals offer. For example, people with autism might have exceptional focus and attention to detail, while those with ADHD might be highly creative and energetic.
3. **Reducing Stigma:** By promoting a positive view of neurological differences, neurodiversity aims to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by neurodivergent individuals. This includes advocating for inclusive education, employment, and social environments.

4. **Support and Accommodations:** While neurodiversity advocates recognize the challenges that can come with neurological differences, they argue for appropriate support and accommodations rather than trying to "fix" or change neurodivergent individuals. Strategies include tailored learning, workplace adjustments, and sensory-friendly environments.
5. **Broader Impact:** The neurodiversity movement has influenced various fields, including education, employment, healthcare, and policy-making, promoting practices and policies to be more inclusive of neurodiverse people.