Language **Reframes**

Pre-defined Outcomes

Our current education system is built upon standardised and predefined outcomes that idealise a single way of developing and demonstrating a skill or capacity. While these outcomes may represent many children, positioning a standardised outcome as the right or ideal way to develop, often within a fixed timeframe, results in the **exclusion** and **sidelining** of diverse developmental pathways and unique outcomes.

In England, for example, we measure all children against a Good Level of Development made up of Early Learning Goals that only describe typical and non-disabled development. From this, a range of neuronormative expectations emerges across developmental domains including how children socialise, communicate, play, regulate and learn. A child may be supported to reach an outcome, but this does not automatically mean it is developmentally meaningful or compatible. The child may achieve the outcome on paper, yet in doing so may have experienced undue stress, masked their natural traits or sacrificed part of their authentic way of being in order to fit in.

Quality of Life and Affirming Outcomes

At Diverse Pathways for Early Childhood, we do not reject the importance of outcomes. However, we do believe that any outcome or goal must be unique to the child, and should account for the quality of life on the journey to that outcome. This approach enables you to identify goals that may be ill-fitting or those that have not been personalised to the child's experiences.

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QoL and Affirming Outcomes

Traditional Expectation	Considerations
The child uses eye contact to show attention or engagement.	• Does eye contact feel uncomfortable, painful or effortful for the child. • Can the child show connection in ways that feel natural to them, such as looking sideways, sharing proximity, vocalising, using objects, or parallel presence. • Is the adult interpreting connection through a neuronormative lens. **Affirming outcome** • The child is supported to communicate and connect in the ways that are most comfortable and meaningful for them.
The child sits still and listens during carpet time.	• Does sitting still increase stress, dysregulation or discomfort. • Would movement, sensory tools or a different space support regulation and engagement. • Is group time necessary for this child or are there alternative ways to access learning. **Affirming outcome** • The child can engage with learning in a way that supports their regulation and sensory needs.

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Lineage Statement and **References**

Lineage and Reference Influences

TThis work draws on and is deeply indebted to a lineage of thinkers, practitioners, and pioneers who continue to reshape contemporary understandings of child development, neurodiversity, and inclusion.

- **Tricia Hersey** – founder of The Nap Ministry and author of Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto (2022), reframing rest as a portal to liberation.
- **Saundra Dalton-Smith** – physician and author of Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity (2017), articulating seven distinct types of rest.
- **Dr Amy Laurent and Dr Jacquelyn Fede** – co-founders of Autism Level Up, whose frameworks reimagine energy regulation, engagement, and everyday supports as accessible, affirming, and practical.
- **Sonny Jane Wise** – activist and author of We're All Neurodiverse (2022), whose work amplifies neurodiversity as identity, culture, and lived experience.
- **Warda Farah** – speech and language therapist, educator, and writer centring anti-racist, anti-ableist, and neurodiversity-affirming approaches to communication and education.
- **Dr Abi Miranda** – educational psychologist and researcher advancing inclusive, relational, and strengths-based practices in early childhood settings through an anti-racist lens.
- **Hailey R. Love** – researcher and advocate whose scholarship interrogates deficit-framed models of disability and calls for justice-oriented early childhood practice.
- **Liz Pemberton (The Black Nursery Manager)** – anti-racist trainer, consultant, and speaker amplifying equity, justice, and critical reflection in the early years sector.
- **Helen Edgar (Autistic Realms)** – writer, educator, and advocate whose reflections on autistic lived experience, relational safety, and sensory authenticity continue to inform more humane, neurodivergent-led understandings of development.
- **Ryan Boren (Stimpunks Foundation)** – activist, writer, and systems thinker whose work on human-centred design, access intimacy, and neurodiversity justice challenges exclusionary structures and offers radically affirmative alternatives.
- **Dr Sid Mohandas** – Montessori practitioner, author and childhood studies scholar whose work interrogates gender, power, and normativity in the early years. Sid has published widely in peer-reviewed journals and edited collections.

This lineage is partial and ever-evolving; I remain indebted to the wider communities of scholars, practitioners, activists, families, and children themselves whose insights, challenges, and lived experiences continue to shape and expand this work.

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