

Neuro-Diversity Affirming and Trauma Aware Practices
at
Adventures with Autism

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Introduction and Purpose

Neuro-Diversity Affirming

A neuro-diversity affirming environment is one in which all parties involved recognize that individuals have different needs and work together to create an environment in which neurodiversity is embraced and affirmed.

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network defines neurodiversity as “.. variation in neurocognitive functioning. It is an umbrella term that encompasses neurocognitive differences such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, Tourette’s syndrome, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, intellectual disability, and schizophrenia, as well as ‘normal’ neurocognitive functioning, or neurotypicality. Neurodivergent individuals are those whose brain functions differ from those who are neurologically typical or neurotypical¹.”

A place of employment with a neurodiverse affirming perspective is one in which employers, employees, volunteers, contractors and all others associated with a place of employment:

1. Modifies the physical environment of all workspaces to be inclusive to those with neurodiverse needs; including providing accommodations for the delivery of feedback, meetings, and materials; providing accommodations for sound sensitivity, vision and hearing processing needs, lighting accommodations, and other similar sensory and physical accommodations.
2. Utilizes a trauma affirming framework, layered with the neurodiverse framework to ensure access and inclusivity..
3. Constantly assesses the physical environment and culture to ensure neurodiversity affirming practices are informed by those from neurodiverse communities.
4. Provide comprehensive training on neurodiversity and ableism at an organizational level, at least once per quarter, to ensure congruence with the stated mission and values of the organization.
5. Engages in efforts to inform the local community about the need for a neurodiverse affirming framework at all places of employment and education.

¹ <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/position-statements/>
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Core Principles

Adventures with Autism has created core principles that guide our implementation of this framework.

Principle 1: Promote Acceptance & Affirming

Principle 2: Make accommodations readily accessible

Principle 3: Use Inclusive Design

We've summarized the five domains of inclusive design here:

1. ***Equitable use:*** The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
2. ***Flexibility in use:*** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
3. ***Simple and intuitive use:*** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level.
4. ***Perceptible information:*** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
5. ***Tolerance for error:*** The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions

Principle 4: Neurodiversity Affirming & Trauma affirming Management Style

Definitions

Neurodiversity: the diversity of human minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species.

Neurodiversity Paradigm: a specific perspective on neurodiversity – a perspective or approach that boils down to these fundamental principles:

- 1.) Neurodiversity is a natural and valuable form of human diversity.
- 2.) The idea that there is one “normal” or “healthy” type of brain or mind, or one “right” style of neurocognitive functioning, is a culturally constructed fiction, no more valid (and no more conducive to a healthy society or to the overall well-being of humanity) than the idea that there is one “normal” or “right” ethnicity, gender, or culture.
- 3.) The social dynamics that manifest in regard to neurodiversity are similar to the social dynamics that manifest in regard to other forms of human diversity (e.g., diversity of ethnicity, gender, or culture). These dynamics include the dynamics of social power inequalities, and also the dynamics by which diversity, when embraced, acts as a source of creative potential.

Neurodiversity Movement: a social justice movement that seeks civil rights, equality, respect, and full societal inclusion for the neurodivergent

Neurodivergent: sometimes abbreviated as **ND**, means having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of “normal.”

Neurotypical (NT): means having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of “normal.”

Neurominority: is a population of neurodivergent people about whom all of the following are true:

- 1.) They all share a similar form of neurodivergence.
- 2.) The form of neurodivergence they share is one of those forms that is largely innate and that is inseparable from who they are, constituting an intrinsic and pervasive factor in their psyches, personalities, and fundamental ways of relating to the world.

3.) The form of neurodivergence they share is one to which the neurotypical majority tends to respond with some degree of prejudice, misunderstanding, discrimination, and/or oppression (generally facilitated by classifying that form of neurodivergence as a medical pathology).

Organizational Goals and Policies

Goal #1: Adventures with Autism will provide neurodiverse accommodations at all company-wide and site-specific meetings; including a written and verbal statement at the beginning of each meeting that clarifies expectations and available accommodations; including the ability to stand, sit, change position, or engage in “fidget” activities during the presentation. Seating choices based on sound sensitivity, vision or hearing needs, and providing the presentation in a supplementary format that is appropriate for the specific training (printed notes, recording, etc).

Goal #2: Adventures with Autism will create and provide sensory-specific environmental accommodations that are readily accessible to all employees in common areas; including different types of headphones/earplugs, scented items, a variety of textured items, grounding activities/visuals.

Goal #3: Adventure with Autism will ensure that all written material is presented in Helvetica or Arial, or a dyslexic specific font, size 12-14, and is free of italics, underlining, and all caps. Important information and is available readily in different visual or auditory formats upon request

Goal #4: Adventures with Autism will ensure that all cleaning and scent-covering aerosols are mildly scented or unscented at all times.

Goal #5: Adventures with Autism supports the use of service animals, and will make all reasonable accommodations to allow employees to access this support during work hours.

Goal #6: Adventures with Autism supports the use of diverse communication methods, and will ensure that employees are able to communicate in their chosen method of communication

Specific Action items to be implemented in 2021

1. **Hiring Practices**

- a. Hiring practices will be analyzed to determine if any barriers exist for neurodiverse individuals, and specific recommendations for change will be made.
- b. All new staff will be provided with a “training binder” that will include the following:
 - Accommodations that are readily available
 - Accommodations that can be requested
 - Important Information

2. **Staff Training:**

- a. Neurodiversity Affirming training will be created and implemented by staff members or outside consultants from the neurodiverse community and provided to current staff on a quarterly basis.
- b. Onboarding materials will include information and training on neurodiversity and ableism for all new hires.
- c. All training materials and presentations will include a statement about, and a reminder of accommodations that are available for all staff as support during the training.
- d. Fidget activities that are available will be provided at each training and can be customized to add items that are requested. Cell phones are not an appropriate fidget
 - i. Fidget boxes will include coloring sheets, markers, and pencils; hard candies, rubber bands, and hair ties, legos,
- e. Presentations will be provided to employees on Slack, to allow them to visually engage with the presentation on their personal tablet.
- f. Upon request, employees can be provided with a print version of the presentation in “note-taking form”
- g. All presentations will be accompanied by guided notes and can be placed in the employee’s binder at their discretion
- h. Employees may also request to review the recording of the presentation after it has concluded
- i. Feel free to change positions/fidget/etc however, use the following guidelines:

- i. If you need gross motor movement (think standing or stretching) sit somewhere behind others or at the back of the room
- ii. If you need to take a break, let the presenters know at the beginning of training so that they can set the expectations for what that looks like.

3. **Environmental Modifications**

- a. Adventures with Autism will create and provide “accommodation kits” in all shared staff areas.
- b. Adventures with Autism will provide a variety of options in all bathroom areas for air fresheners and will post visual notices that allow staff to remove items that may be noxious to them.
- c. Adventures with Autism will post information regarding accommodations that are available for all staff in general areas, including the availability of different seating types, and similar readily available accommodation options.

4. **Management Interactions**

- a. Upon identifying the need for a meeting or chat with a staff member, the management member will do the following:
 - Communicates with the employee the following information
 - The topic of the conversation
 - A choice of meeting times
 - A choice of meeting location
 - A choice of what format documentation is provided to them during, before, or after the meeting.
 - A choice of who’s present (there always needs to be 2 people, but give as much flexibility as you can)
 - A choice of the length of the meeting (15 min, 30 minutes, or 45 minutes)
 - A choice over if formal follow up is needed (if appropriate)
- b. Prior to any meetings, employees can request documentation prior to the meeting, request who attends the meeting with them,

Trauma Aware Framework

